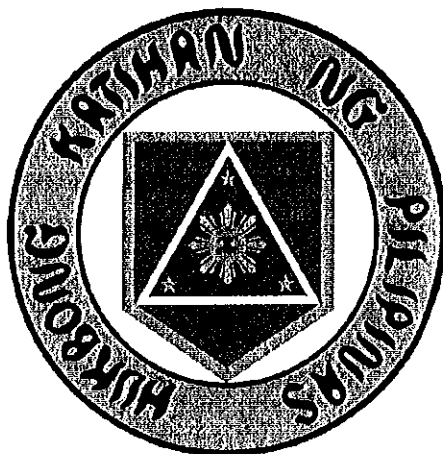


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## **NEWS CLIPPINGS**

**17 January 2019**

**Thursday**

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# Rody open to gov't takeover of Hanjin

By PAOLO ROMERO

Concerned about saving thousands of Filipino jobs, President Duterte is open to a government takeover of the Subic Bay shipbuilding facilities of the bankrupt Hanjin Heavy Industries and Construction Philippines, Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana said yesterday.

He revealed Duterte's position during the plenary deliberations on the proposed P183-billion budget for the Department of National Defense, in reaction to Senate Majority Leader Juan Miguel Zubiri's calling the Hanjin debacle a "golden opportunity" for the DND to operate the South Korean giant's shipbuilding facilities and save thousands of jobs.

While expressing sympathy for Hanjin over its financial woes, Lorenzana said he found interesting Navy chief Vice Adm. Robert Empedrad's idea of government taking over and managing the company's shipyard so the country can build its own vessels.

"I brought this idea to the President last night and he is very receptive to the idea," Lorenzana told senators.

Hanjin, the biggest foreign investor in the Subic Bay Freeport, declared bankruptcy last Jan. 8. The firm owes about \$430 million to five of the country's biggest banks, Rizal Commercial Banking Corp., Land Bank of the Philippines, Metropolitan Bank and Trust Corp., Bank of the Philippine Islands and Banco de Oro Universal Bank.

Turn to Page 6

## Rody

From Page 1

The defense chief said the matter was also discussed with Finance Secretary Carlos Dominguez III, who expressed concern over how local banks would be able to recoup their investments in Hanjin.

Zubiri suggested the government take a majority stake in a private minority directly involved in the operations of the shipyard.

Sen. Panfilo Lacson suggested that a portion of the P75-billion alleged insertion in the proposed P3.757-trillion national budget this year be realigned to pay off the debts and later bid out a stake with private partners.

"What if the Philippine government will just take over Hanjin and bid out to possible partners, private entities? This will mean potential income for the government," said Lacson, who also moved to have the Senate constitute itself into a committee of the whole to discuss the issue while tackling the DND's budget.

He maintained that Hanjin's plight would have far-reaching implications for Filipinos, ranging from security to economic and even social concerns.

In his proposal, Lacson said the Philippine government would continue

to have income while the Philippine Navy may have a new facility.

He added appropriate agencies can hold consultations with the National Economic and Development Authority regarding partnerships between the government and a private entity.

But while the President and some of his officials are open to a government takeover of Hanjin's Subic shipbuilding facilities, Budget Secretary Benjamin Diokno said the plan has to be thoroughly studied, as it would involve a "major shift" in the role of government.

"The role of government is to provide defense, national security and peace and order.

It is not the role (of the government) to do the direct production of whatever they use," Diokno said on the sidelines of the commissioning of two new fast patrol boats acquired from France for the Philippine Coast Guard (PCG). The commissioning was held at the PCG headquarters on Roxas Boulevard.

"Can you imagine the military producing their own ships? That is a major decision, we have to discuss it," he added. "I want to see the complete proposal."

"That is still a suggestion," Diokno said, referring to Lorenzana's plan. "We have to go over the financials... I want to see the complete proposal."

— With Evelyn Macairan

# DRUGSTORES ORDERED: GIVE VAT EXEMPTIONS

STORY BY CHRISTINE O. AVENDAÑO

The Bureau of Internal Revenue urges consumers to get a refund from pharmacies that do not give them value-added tax exemption for medicines to treat diabetes, hypertension or high cholesterol. The exemption started on Jan. 1. **A2**

**FROM A1**

By Christine O. Avendaño  
@10avendanoINQ

Some pharmacies are not complying with the law requiring all drugstores starting Jan. 1 to exempt from the 12-percent value-added tax (VAT) the sale of medicines for diabetes, hypertension and high cholesterol to people aged below 60 years old.

Seniors are already enjoying the VAT exemption.

The drugstores are unable to comply with the law because they have not reconfigured their cash register system to reflect the reduced prices, Deputy Commissioner Marissa Cabreros of the Bureau of Internal Revenue (BIR) said on Wednesday.

"We are reminding the retailers it's not a matter of changing the functionality of your system. They should extend the VAT exemption already [in effect] as early as Jan. 1," Cabreros said at a briefing in Malacañang.

She said the Tax Reform for Acceleration and Inclusion

(TRAIN) Act, which called for the VAT exemption for diabetes, hypertension and high cholesterol medicines, had been enforced for a year now and all retailers and manufacturers were notified about it.

## Manual receipts

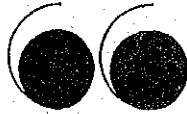
Cabreros said if the cash registers of these small drugstores could not print the proper receipts, they should issue "manual" receipts that clearly indi-

cate on its face the phrase "VAT-exempt."

"So the reason that our cash register could not come up with VAT-exempt receipts should not be accepted," the BIR official said. "They should provide manual receipts."

She said these small drugstores violating the law faced a fine of P1,000, or a jail term of up to six months or both.

Cabreros said consumers who were not given VAT ex-



We are reminding the retailers  
it's not a matter of changing the  
functionality of your system.  
They should extend the VAT  
exemption already [in effect]  
as early as Jan. 1

**Marissa Cabreros**  
Deputy BIR Commissioner



emptions for the medicines should report the violation via [ecomplaint@bir.gov.ph](mailto:ecomplaint@bir.gov.ph).

She said the BIR received general questions from the public about the new VAT exemptions but no one had given the names of the drugstores violating the law.

#### **Get refund**

Cabreros encouraged consumers to get a refund from the drugstores.

Under the BIR's Revenue Regulation 25-2018, the VAT exemption applies only to the sale by manufacturers, distributors, wholesalers and retailers of drugs prescribed for the treatment or prevention of diabetes, high cholesterol and hypertension, but not to their importation.

The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) came up on Jan. 9 with a list of VAT-exempt drugs that the Department of Health had posted on its website.

Other drugs not on the FDA list are still subject to VAT.

Health Undersecretary Eric Domingo said government wanted more people to gain access to medicines to cut the number of cases of noncommunicable diseases (NCDs) and reduce deaths from diabetes, hypertension and high cholesterol.

Diabetes and hypertension each accounted for 5.7 percent of deaths in 2016 in the country, or 33,295 and 33,452, respectively, according to the Philippine Statistics Authority.

Domingo joined Cabreros and FDA Director General

Charade Puno in reminding the public to demand an official receipt from drugstores whenever they buy the medicines.

Puno said FDA inspectors could check with drugstores and retailers if they were implementing the new VAT exemptions.

#### **More diabetics**

Domingo said the new VAT exemptions would benefit the "increasing number of people who are hypertensive, diabetic and have high cholesterol who are not senior citizens yet."

He said the prevalence of diabetes, hypertension and high cholesterol was now hitting people aged 30 to 40 years old.

Domingo said 7 million Filipinos were suffering from diabetes and the same number from hypertension. He noted that less than half of the people suffering from these ailments were not seniors.

The health undersecretary said there was a strong clamor to also exempt from VAT medicines for cancer, which he noted would need a new tax law. INQ

# 3 Chinese ships in Manila for goodwill visit

By JAIME LAUDE

Three Chinese warships will be arriving in Manila today for a four-day goodwill visit.

Chinese frigates *Wu Hu* and *Han Dan*, along with supply ship *Dong Ping Hu*, will be dropping anchor at Pier 15 in South Harbor at around 9 a.m. today.

It will be the first official port call by the People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) in the country since President

Duterte's pivot to China.

Navy spokesman Capt. Jonathan Zata said the visiting Chinese warships will be accorded the traditional welcome ceremony as well port briefing for their personnel upon arrival in Manila.

The arrival of Chinese military ships shows the Philippine government has moved past the issue of constant harassments of Filipino fishermen by the Chinese in disputed waters.

Claiming almost the entire South China Sea as integral

part of its maritime and territorial domain since ancient times, China has bolstered its presence in the region by building naval and air bases on three of seven man-made islets in the disputed Spratlys archipelago.

Published satellite photos released by US-based Center for Strategic and International Studies showed an increase in the presence of Chinese fishing boats in the contested region, specifically at Zamora (Subi) Reef and Panganiban

(Mischief) Reef.

National and regional security observers said most of these Chinese fishing boats are in fact spy ships being used by Chinese maritime militia.

The two reefs, along with Kagitingan (Johnson South) Reef, all located inside the country's Kalayaan Island Group, are now China's highly fortified military naval and air bases.

On the other hand, recently released survey said China is the least among countries that Filipi-

nos trust, with the US and Japan as the countries they could most depend on.

Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana said he was not surprised with the survey results, saying this was due to the country's "long association and relationship with the USA."

"A lot of Filipinos studied there, a lot worked there and a lot have relatives there. Compared to other countries, USA has the most number of Filipino migrants," he said.

Lorenzana meanwhile said

the government will build a fishermen's shelter in Pag-asa Island, a fifth class municipality of Palawan, and also the second biggest island in the disputed region next to Taiwan's occupied Itu Aba.

The construction of the shelter was among the improvement projects eyed in Pag-asa Island, which include the current construction of a beaching ramp for Navy ships to dock and unload construction materials for the repair of Rancudo Air Field.



## Off-campus activities part of UP education - exec

Taking part in out-of-school activities is part of the education of University of the Philippines students, an official said on Tuesday.

UP Diliman chancellor Michael Tan expressed concern over the recent allegations of the Philippine National Police (PNP) that students of the university engage in communist activities when they take part in some out-of-school activities.

"We recognize that our students' education must go beyond the narrow confines of our classrooms or campuses. Whatever academic degree they might be pursuing, our students need to explore and appreciate the world outside of UP and to develop their competencies linked to social realities," Tan said.

"This is why red-baiting tactics always alarm us. Besides causing distress to students and their parents, we worry about how the red baiting impact soldiers and police, especially in rural areas," he added.

Tan noted instances of harassment of UP students

conducting fieldworks last year, including threats made against researchers from the Institute of Biology in Isabela and the harassment of a doctorate linguistics student in Zamboanga Sibugay.

"The two incidents show the dangers of red scare tactics, where the military or police might be emboldened to harass, threaten or even harm students, researchers or faculty," he said.

"We will continue to encourage and support out-of-classroom learning activities, while taking more precautions, including obtaining prior clearances from local government officials. We also continue to coordinate with the police and the military but ask that they exert more due diligence with their men and women in the field, especially in remote areas," he added.

Citing information from alleged rebel surrenderees, the PNP on Monday claimed that students of UP and the Polytechnic University of the Philippines were brought to Laguna for immersion activities and then forced by rebels to join them.

Tan said faculty members need to submit a comprehensive description of the intended activity, with details on faculty supervision, where the students will be, who the students are, waivers and even a certificate of physical fitness when appropriate.

- Janvic Mateo

# Andaya: DBM becomes super bidding body under Diokno

By JESS DIAZ

The Department of Budget and Management (DBM) has "morphed into a super bidding body" under Secretary Benjamin Diokno in violation of the Procurement Law, House of Representatives Majority Leader Rolando Andaya Jr. said yesterday.

He said DBM Procurement Service chief Bingle Gutierrez on Tuesday told the House inquiry on "questionable budget practices" and the multibillion-

peso flood control scam under the Duterte administration that the DBM "is conducting bidding for more than P198 billion worth of government contracts."

Amid the budget impasse, Diokno said yesterday President Duterte would call for a special session of Congress if the appropriations program for this year is not passed before the May elections.

"If they don't pass the budget, we'll call them to a special session again and again and

again so that will take time away from their campaign," Diokno said at his regular press briefing.

On Tuesday, Gutierrez said the contracts include those for "big-ticket infrastructure projects that form part of the Build Build Build program, such as airport, railways and mass transport systems, and even military hardware like helicopters."

He said that out of the P198-billion contracts, the bulk or P168.3 billion represented projects under the Department of Transportation (DOT).

He added that the law limits the task of the procurement service to procuring "commonly used supplies for government such as envelopes, folders, ball pens, pencils, inks, computers and other office equipment that are cheaper to buy by bulk."

Andaya stressed that Gutierrez's testimony belies Diokno's claim that the DBM does not meddle in bidding processes and in project implementation.

"Is the DBM better in bidding airports and the (Metro Manila) subway project than the experts of the DOT? Are they better in scrutinizing the technical specifications of helicopters and military hardware than the Department of National Defense?" he asked.

He said Diokno should explain why the DBM has taken over bidding processes that should be conducted by other agencies.

"We have not given them the authority to conduct bidding for big-ticket government projects, the budgets of which were lodged in other departments," he said.

A day after Andaya's Tues-

day hearing, Camarines Sur colleague Rep. Luis Raymund Villafuerte reiterated his call for the House leader to resign.

He said the resumption of the inquiry "is yet another compelling reason for him to quit right away as majority floor leader, so he could no longer use his premier position to hold hostage the congressional passage of the proposed 2019 budget, the delay of which puts at great risk the full and swift implementation this year of President Duterte's growth and development agenda."

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

referring to Minority Leader Danilo Suarez.

He claimed that Andaya is pursuing his probe "against the wishes of a majority of our peers in the ruling coalition who want a speedy congressional approval of the 2019 budget in support of President Duterte's vision for high and inclusive growth."

Villafuerte represents Camarines Sur's second district, while Andaya is first district representative. They are political enemies, with the House leader running for governor in the May elections against the incumbent, Villafuerte's son Luis Miguel.

Speaker Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo earlier said the President had made no effort to stop Andaya's inquiry despite Villafuerte's criticism. — With Cecille Suerte Felipe, Mary Grace Padin 2

# PREVENTING POLITICAL ATTACKS

## COTABATO CITY, DARAGA NOW UNDER COMELEC CONTROL

The Commission on Elections (Comelec) on Tuesday placed Cotabato City and Daraga town in Albay province under its control until the end of the election period due to incidents of violence in these areas last month.

A bomb was set off in front of South Seas Mall in Cotabato City on Dec. 31, 2018, killing two and wounding 34 others.

On Dec. 22, Ako Bicol Rep. Rodel Batocabe and his police escort, SPO1 Orlando Diaz, were gunned down during a Christmas gift-giving activity in Daraga on Dec. 22.

Police earlier said the murder could be politically motivated as Batocabe was set to challenge the reelection bid of Daraga Mayor Carlwyn Baldo, the suspected brains of the assassination, in the May 13 elections.

### Direct control

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."

The Comelec will supervise all national and local officials and employees, as well as police and military personnel who are required by law to perform duties related to the conduct of elections, in areas under its control.

### Public safety

The poll body set the election period from Jan. 13 until June 12.

Romeo Serrano, Comelec assistant regional director in Bicol and provincial election supervisor in Albay, said the commission en banc issued the resolution on the recommendation of Comelec Bicol.

The Comelec said placing Daraga under its control would ensure the safety of the public in the May elections. —REPORTS FROM TINA G. SANTOS AND MAR S. ARGUELLES INQ



# Takeover of Hanjin: Du30 'very receptive'

By Leila B. Salaverria  
@LeilasINQ

President Duterte is "very receptive" to the idea of taking over the facilities of the bankrupt Hanjin Heavy Industries and Construction Corp. Philippines so that the Philippine Navy could boost its shipbuilding capacity, according to Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana.

Lorenzana told senators on Wednesday that the government could team up with a private entity to manage the shipyard.

Hanjin, the local shipbuilding unit of a Korean conglomerate, declared bankruptcy this month.

Its local debts amount to more than \$400 million.

"While we sympathize with the financial woes of Hanjin, we are excited by this development because we see the possibility of having our own shipbuilding capacity in the Philippines, especially large ships like what's being built in the Hanjin shipyard in Subic," Lorenzana said.

## 20 ships

The Navy needed 20 more ships in the next five years, he added.

Vice Adm. Robert Empe-



PAST LIFE The Hanjin shipbuilding facility during its heyday.  
—CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

drad had broached the idea, which Lorenzana said he relayed to Mr. Duterte.

"This is really very perfect for us," Lorenzana said.

"We are actually ordering ships from abroad. If we take this over, we can build our own ships here," he added.

The Philippine Coast Guard also needed a lot of ships, he noted.

He said the government could be a minority owner in Hanjin, while its private partner

could be the majority owner.

Finance Secretary Carlos Dominguez III was also thinking of how local banks could recoup its investments in Hanjin, which amounted to \$430 million, Lorenzana added.

## Senators' backing

Senators Juan Miguel Zubiri and Panfilo Lacson supported the idea.

Lacson said the government could use deleted budget insertions. INQ



# Gov't takeover of Hanjin eyed

## Lorenzana says shipyard's woes present opportunity for PH to build ships for Navy

By VANNE ELAINE TERRAZOLA and CHINO S. LEYCO

**T**he government is mulling the takeover of the collapsed Hanjin Heavy Industries and Construction Corp. in partnership with private companies so the country's naval forces would no longer need to acquire ships abroad.

Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana revealed this plan during the Senate's plenary deliberation Wednesday on the Department of National Defense's (DND) outlay in the P3.757-trillion proposed national budget for 2019.

But Finance Secretary Carlos G. Dominguez III said the proposal for the government to buy-out Hanjin shipyard is very preliminary. He said Lorenzana's idea of a government takeover of the Hanjin shipyard in Subic Bay "was [just] mentioned briefly" in a recent meeting.

Dominguez further clarified that there was "no formal request" yet to initialize any plans to acquire the \$1.2-billion shipyard owned by the Korean shipbuilder Hanjin.

►4

# Gov't takeover of Hanjin... ◀1

Asked about his initial assessment about Lorenzana's proposal, Dominguez responded, "I don't have enough information to form an opinion."

In the wake of Hanjin's financial woes, the Senate has convened itself into a Committee of the Whole to be able to take up its bankruptcy and directly ask Lorenzana questions.

Lorenzana said Philippine Navy (PN) flag officer-in-command Vice Admiral Robert Empedrad initially raised the idea of managing the operation of the South Korean shipbuilder after it filed for rehabilitation due to financial losses.

"While we sympathize with Hanjin for its financial woes, we are excited with this opportunity because we see the possibility of having our own shipbuilding capacity in the Philippines," Lorenzana told senators.

The DND chief said he relayed the proposal to President Duterte, who was "very receptive to the idea."

Lorenzana said the opportunity was "perfect" since the PN is in need of more ships.

The challenge for the government, however, would be to engage private companies and local banks to invest in Hanjin, Lorenzana said.

Hanjin has an outstanding debt of \$412 million with local banks, on top of another \$900 million from lenders in South Korea.

Senator Richard J. Gordon, a former mayor of Olongapo City which is adjacent to Subic, said the Philippines has the capability to operate Hanjin.

He thus strongly suggested that President Duterte put up a package of the country's Taipans, get advice from the military, and link up with Korean investors to form a company.

Asked whether the country has the money, Gordon replied: "Yes. We can tighten our belts if need be."

He said the government could use proceeds from the Tax Reform for Acceleration and Inclusion (TRAIN) Law, Sin Tax law, or from the P75 billion deleted from the budget of the Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH).

Senator Panfilo Lacson said the P75-billion alleged insertion in the DPWH's budget may be tapped to pay for Hanjin's \$412-million debt. This way, the government may acquire ownership of the company's shipyard in Subic, Zambales.

Lacson, as vice chair of the Senate Finance Committee, sponsors the

DND's proposed budget for this year.

"What if the Philippine government will just take over Hanjin and bid out to possible partners, private entities? This will mean potential income for the government," Lacson said.

He said the government takeover would be better than allowing a foreign company to continue the shipbuilder's operations.

He said the issue hounding Hanjin has far-reaching implications on Filipinos, ranging from security to economic and even social concerns.

But Empedrad, in the plenary debates, admitted that the PN is not capable of managing all of Hanjin's operations.

The government has interest in Hanjin as state-run Land Bank of the Philippines is one of the five lenders which were defaulted by the shipbuilder.

Dominguez and LandBank President Alex V. Buenaventura had earlier admitted that the collapse of Hanjin would hurt the portfolio of Land Bank after it lent \$85 million to the shipbuilder.

Hanjin filed last week for a voluntary rehabilitation due to ballooning financial obligations to several local and foreign banks.

Dominguez, who is also Land Bank's ex-officio chairman, said Hanjin's "dif-

ficult problem" has to be resolved by the five banks exposed to this largest corporate default.

"It's a problem and we have to address it [but] there are assets to be had. This is a difficult problem but will be walked through by the banks," Dominguez said.

Asked about the impact of Hanjin's bankruptcy on Land Bank's financial portfolio, Dominguez said "it's going to hurt, but it's not going to end up hampering them."

As of September last year, Land Bank's total assets stood at P1.771 trillion, making it the country's third largest lender.

Last Friday, the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas (BSP) assured that the local banking system is strong enough to weather the \$412-million default by Hanjin on local lenders.

According to the central bank, the defaulted loan is only equivalent to 0.2 percent of the banking system's total portfolio.

"But you know these are early days, the banks have agreed to work together, and to see how we can move forward here. The real importance here is what the prospects for the industry are," Dominguez said.

Buenaventura, meanwhile, said that Land Bank could recover its \$85-million loan to Hanjin, citing the shipbuilder's

assets are more than enough to pay off the defaulted financing.

"The good news is that we can recover the assets - the shipyard is worth \$1.2 billion. The total exposure of the creditors is less than \$400 million," Buenaventura told reporters. "Down the road, we hope to recover our exposure."

Buenaventura also believes that Hanjin could still attract new potential investors.

Meanwhile, Senate Majority Leader Juan Miguel Zubiri supported the plan of partnering with private companies to co-manage and save Hanjin.

Zubiri stressed the impact of the company's bankruptcy to employment, especially as thousands of skilled workers are in danger of losing their jobs.

Hanjin once employed more than 30,000 personnel at the peak of demand. It currently has some 3,000 employees but may soon trim down the figure to only 300, to continue operations of its ship repair facility.

The Senate leader said acquiring ownership of Hanjin would be beneficial to the country since it would also generate income.

But Zubiri maintained that the government should have a hand over majority of Hanjin's operations should the plan push through. (With a report from Mario B. Casayuran)

## Duterte open to gov't taking over Hanjin—DND

A WIN-WIN solution.

Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana said on Wednesday that President Rodrigo Duterte is open to the possibility of government taking over the management of the embattled Hanjin facility in Subic, which senators said would be a win-win solution for the debt-riddled company.

The defense chief said that a government takeover would be viable since the defense department can use Hanjin's shipbuilding capacity for the country's Navy and Coast Guard.

Lorenzana made the statement in response to the suggestion raised by some senators that government take control of the South Korean shipyard during the deliberations on the proposed 2019 budget of the Department of National Defense. A3

The takeover was first proposed by Majority Leader Juan Miguel Zubiri, who said that it would be a "golden opportunity" for the DND to use the Hanjin facility for its exclusive use.

Lorenzana agreed, saying that while he sympathizes with the financial woes of Hanjin, they are elated by the possibility of the Philippines having its own ship building capability.



## Navy mulls Hanjin rehab

By Mario J. Mallari

The moribund Hanjin Heavy Industries and Construction Philippines (HHIC-Phil) will likely have the Philippine Navy as its white knight after President Duterte indicated his openness to a possible

takeover.

Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana bared the government's option for Hanjin during yesterday's budget deliberations of the Department of National Defense (DND) at the Senate.

**Turn to page 2**



# Navy mulls Hanjin rehab

Navy Flag Officer in Command Empedrad: "Why not take over Hanjin and give it to the Navy to manage?"

**From page 1**

According to Lorenzana, Navy Flag Officer in Command Vice Admiral Roberto Empedrad brought up the idea and he (Lorenzana) relayed it to the President.

"Navy Flag Officer in Command Empedrad mentioned to me, 'Why not take over Hanjin and give it to the Navy to manage? And so, I brought this idea to the President last night and he is very receptive to the idea,' Lorenzana told senators.

"While we sympathize with the financial woes of Hanjin, we are excited with this development because we see the possibility of having our own shipbuilding capacity in the Philippines, especially large ships, like what is being built by Hanjin's shipyard in Subic," he said.

## **Senators back idea**

Empedrad expressed the Navy's readiness to take a portion of the operations of Hanjin, if ever.

Currently, the Armed Forces of the Philippines is busy implementing a long-term modernization program by acquiring frigates and fighter jets from foreign countries.

In the pipeline are two brand new frigates from South Korea.

This early, the idea already won the support of some senators, namely, Senate Majority Leader Juan Miguel Zubiri and Senators Richard Gordon and Panfilo Lacson.

"The Philippines has the capability... We can do it," declared Gordon, raising the possibility of a government joint venture.

Lacson said the government can take over the facility using the P75 billion floating fund in the proposed 2019 budget.

"What if the Philippine government will just take over Hanjin and bid out to possible

partners, private entities? This will mean potential income for the government," Lacson said.

For his part, Zubiri said, "We fully support the initiative of Senator Lacson."

Hanjin Philippines filed last week a petition before the Regional Trial Court in Olongapo City for voluntary rehabilitation under Republic Act 10142 or the law providing for the rehabilitation or liquidation of financially-distressed enterprises and individuals.

Hanjin officials revealed to the Subic Bay Metropolitan Authority (SBMA) that the company has around \$400 million in outstanding loans from local banks on top of \$900 million in debts owed to South Korea lenders.

## **Econ managers consulted**

Lorenzana had said economic managers are looking into "a local company's acquisition and operate it to support our Navy modernization."

However, he said dealing with the matter is still up to the country's economic team.

"Yes, that was the suggestion I made to (Finance) Secretary (Sonny) Dominguez. It (is) up to them to decide, but that is the ideal setup," the Defense chief bared.

Earlier, he had said the DND would monitor those who had 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.

According to SBMA, 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."

# Gov't eyes takeover of Hanjin

By VANNE ELAINE TERRAZOLA

The government is mulling a partnership with private companies to take over the embattled Hanjin Heavy Industries and Construction Corp. Philippines so that the country's naval forces would no longer need to acquire ships abroad.

Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana revealed this plan during the Senate plenary deliberation yesterday on the Department of National Defense's allocation in the P3.757-trillion proposed national budget for 2019.

The Senate convened itself into a Committee of the Whole to be able to take up the bankruptcy of Hanjin and directly ask Lorenzana questions.

Lorenzana said Philippine Navy Flag-Officer-In-Command Vice Admiral Robert Empedrad initially raised the idea of managing the operations of the South Korean shipbuilder as it filed for rehabilitation due to financial losses.

"While we sympathize with Hanjin for its financial woes, we are excited with this opportunity because we see the possibility of having our own ship-building capacity in the Philippines," Lorenzana told senators.

The DND chief said he relayed the proposal to President Duterte who was "very receptive to the idea."

Lorenzana said the opportunity was "perfect" since the PN is in need of more ships.

The challenge for the government,

however, would be to engage private companies and local banks to invest in Hanjin, Lorenzana said.

Hanjin has an outstanding debt of some \$400 million with local banks on top of another \$900 million from lenders in South Korea.

Sen. Panfilo "Ping" M. Lacson said the P75-billion alleged insertion on the Department of Public Works and Highways budget may be tapped to pay for Hanjin's \$400-million debt. This way, the government may acquire ownership of the company's shipyard in Subic, Zambales.

Lacson, as vice chairperson of the Senate Finance Committee, sponsors the DND's proposed budget for this year.

"What if the Philippine government

will just take over Hanjin and bid out to possible partners, private entities? This will mean potential income for the government," Lacson said.

He said the government takeover would be better than allowing a foreign company to continue the shipbuilder's operations.

Lacson said the issue hounding Hanjin has far-reaching implications on Filipinos, ranging from security to economic and even social concerns.

But Empedrad, in the plenary debates, admitted that the PN is not capable of managing all of Hanjin's operations.

Senate Majority Leader Juan Miguel F. Zubiri likewise supported the government plan to partner with private companies to co-manage and

save Hanjin.

Zubiri stressed the impact of the company's bankruptcy to employment, especially as thousands of skilled workers are in danger of losing their jobs.

Hanjin once employed more than 30,000 personnel at the peak of demand. It currently has some 3,000 employees but may soon trim down the figure to only 300, to continue operations of its ship repair facility.

The Senate leader said acquiring ownership of Hanjin would be beneficial to the country since it would also generate income.

But Zubiri maintained that the government should have a hand over majority of Hanjin's operations should the plan push through. 10

## Hanjin, planong i-take over ng gobyerno

Pinag-iisipan ng pamahalaan ang pagkuha ng mga pribadong kumpanyang magt-take over sa Hanjin Heavy Industries and Construction Corp. Philippines (HHICCP), upang hindi na bibili pa ng mga barko sa ibang bansa ang Philippine Navy (PN).

Ito ang ipinahayag kahapon ni Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana sa plenary deliberation ng Senado kaugnay ng hinihinging pondo ng Department of National Defense (DND) para sa taong ito. Sa pagpupulong ng mataas na kapulungan, tinalakay ang pagkakabangkarote ng HHICCP kung

saan direktang tinanong si Lorenzana sa usapin.

Aminado si Lorenzana na iminungkahi ni Philippine Navy (PN) flag officer-in-command Vice Admiral Robert Empedrad ang ideya sa pangangasiwa sa operasyon ng nasabing South Korean shipbuilder, na naghain ng kanilang rehabilitasyon bunsod na rin ng pagkalugi nito.

"While we sympathize with Hanjin for its financial woes, we are excited with this opportunity because we see the possibility of having our own shipbuilding capacity in the Philippines," paliwanag ni Lorenzana.

**Vanne Elaine Terrazola**

# Zero incident for 2 Panay festivities eyed

By TARA YAP

**I**LOILO CITY—Police in Western Visayas have set a zero-incident target for the Ati-Atihan and Dinagyang festivals.

Supt. Joem Malong, spokesman of regional police, said they have adopted a Major Event Security Framework (MESF) for the two festivals in Panay Island that honor the Sto. Niño or the Holy Child Jesus.

The Ati-Atihan, considered as the country's "Mother of All Festivals," will have its highlight this weekend in Kalibo, Aklan.

The climax of the Dinagyang in Iloilo City will be on Jan. 26-27.

Chief Supt. John Bulalacao, regional police director, said the police will coordinate closely with other law enforcement agencies such as the Philippine Army, Philippine Navy, Philippine Coast Guard (PCG), and Philippine Drug Enforcement Agencies in securing the celebrations.

The law enforcement agencies are backed by force multipliers such as barangay tanods, criminology students, cadets of the Reserve Officers Training Corps (ROTC) and rescue groups such as the local chapters of Philippine Red Cross.

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● **'KaPALAYapaan'**

CAMP DATU LIPUS MAKAPANDONG, Awa New Leyte, Prosperidad, Agusan del Sur - The "KaPALAYapaan" project, a part of the Peace and Development Program (PDP) of the Army's 36th Infantry (Valor) Battalion, continues to be implemented in Surigao del Sur, First Lt. Jonald D. Romorosa, Civil Military Operation (CMO) officer of the 36th IB, told The Manila Bulletin on Wednesday. "KaPALAYapaan", which is being closely supervised by 36th IB commander Lt. Col. Xerxes A. Trinidad, is currently focusing on the needs of the farmers in far-flung communities, the 36th IB CMO officer said. Just last January 12, members of Bio-Organic Farming Lindoy (BFL) chapter received rice seedlings from 36th IB, he said. The BFL members of Barangay Lindoy, Tago town received 21 packs of 3.2 variety seedlings and two sacks of 160 variety seedlings which can accommodate 9.1 hectares of farm land, he said. (Mike U. Crismundo)

SINCE START OF ELECTION PERIOD:

# 5 people dead, 83 violators arrested

BY ROY D.R. NARRA

**F**IVE people have been killed and 83 others arrested by police authorities since the election period began on January 13, according to the Philippine National Police (PNP).

All of the fatalities died in checkpoint operations in Central Luzon, Chief Supt. Benigno Durana, PNP spokesman, said.

A report obtained by *The Manila Times* from the Police Regional Office-3 showed that two men on a motorcycle were killed in a

checkpoint operation on January 13 in San Jose Del Monte, Bulacan.

A man suspected to have stolen a motorcycle was killed on the same day in San Antonio, Nueva Ecija when he ignored orders to slow down.

Two others were killed on Janu-

ary 14 in San Leonardo, Nueva Ecija for the same offense.

"They evaded checkpoint operations and they decided to shoot it out with our law enforcers rather than peaceably yield to the rule of law and judicial processes of the land so obviously, these are criminals," Durana said.

Meanwhile, 83 people were arrested for violating the election gun ban. Police authorities seized 82 firearms.

The PNP and the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) have conducted 565 joint checkpoint

operations since the start of the election period.

PNP chief Oscar Albayalde asked the public to cooperate and not run away from checkpoints.

On Wednesday, Interior Secretary Eduardo Año directed the PNP to beef up its measures to prevent violence during the elections season.

Año said the PNP should be "several steps ahead of criminal elements."

He issued the order weeks after the killing of AKO Bicol party-list representative and Daraga, Albay

mayoral candidate Rodel Batocabe.

"The PNP should take offensive and preventive measures. We should be several steps ahead of those who resort to violence to win an election. We should monitor and be ready to prevent any elements that can trigger chaos," Año said.

"The PNP should intensify police interventions, operations, and police visibility. Before the campaign starts, we must show the police force is always on alert so that those criminal elements would think twice," he added.

Besides Batocabe, former may-

or Joelito Talaid of Kadingilan, Bukidnon was also gunned down in December last year.

Año also urged candidates to be extra careful and stay vigilant in protecting themselves.

"The police cannot secure every single candidate or citizen every single moment of the day. It's also their responsibility to protect themselves and their family," he said.

Albayalde earlier told candidates to coordinate with the police, saying additional security could be provided to candidates facing death threats. *AN*

## Congress comment on ML sought

By Atvin Murcia

The Supreme Court en banc has asked Congress to comment on the petition and prayer for temporary restraining order (TRO) on the third extension of Martial Law in Mindanao before the scheduled oral arguments on the case.

"The Court without giving due course to the petition, among others, impleaded Congress as respondent and required it to comment on the petition and prayer for TRO within a non-extendible period of five calendar days from notice, on or before 21 January 2019," the SC said. <sup>v</sup> tr

However, the Court dispensed with the preliminary conference on the case earlier scheduled for 17 January 2019.

Oral arguments according to the SC will proceed as scheduled on 22 January 2019, 2 p.m. at the New Session Hall of the New Supreme Court Building with the respondents presenting their case first.

Apart from the comment, the court also required the respondents to submit on or before 21 January 2019 all documents and evidence which may be relevant to the case.

Earlier, opposition lawmakers have asked the Supreme Court to invalidate the third extension of martial law in Mindanao because it violates the Constitution.

Rep. Edcel Lagman led the filing of a petition assailing the constitutionality of the decision of Congress to grant President Rodrigo Duterte's request for military rule in the South until 31 December 2019.

The petitioners argued that "rebellion does not exist and persist in Mindanao," and "public safety is not imperiled," contrary to the administration's claims.

Likewise, they insisted that Proclamation 216, which declared martial law in Mindanao in May 2017, cannot be extended because it has accomplished its purpose of ending the Marawi siege.

## Senators explore uses of P75B budget 'insertion'

BY RAYMOND AFRICA

THE Senate yesterday approved a P480-billion budget for 2019 for the Department of Public Works and Highways, deleting the P75 billion that was inserted in its annual funding during the preparation of the National Expenditure Program (NEP).

The DPWH budget was first tackled last Monday, but senators suspended its passage and resumed discussions on Wednesday afternoon.

Before the budget was passed, Sen. Panfilo Lacson said portions of the deleted P75-billion "inserted" budget in the DPWH can be used for slope protection of highways in the Cordillera region, which are often hit by landslides when it rains.

Lacson said slope protection is needed for roads in the BLISTT (Baguio, La Trinidad, Itogon, Sablan, Tuba, and Tublay) area, which become impassable when landslides occur.

Lacson pointed out that DPWH must consult with the Mines and Geosciences Bureau and other agencies, and make sure its computations are not bloated.

"We will not allow bloated estimates similar to that in Nueva Ecija, where the DPWH spent P44,000 per square meter for slope protection when civil engineers calculate the cost to be just P28,000 per square meter," he said.

During the resumption of sessions last Monday, Lacson questioned the "insertion" of P75 billion in the DPWH's proposed budget for 2019.

He said while the Development Budget Coordination Committee set a P480-billion budget ceiling for the DPWH during the preparation of the 2019 budget, P75 billion was added to the amount.

Senate finance committee chairwoman Loren Legarda said the P75-billion addition was not the initiative of the DPWH, even as DPWH Secretary Mark Villar said he was initially not aware of the P75-billion "insertion."

"There is a budget, but no list of projects to implement. How

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## SENATORS

do you implement something you did not plan?" Lacson said during his interpellation last Monday.

Senate minority leader Franklin Drilon has another proposal: use the money to buy dredging equipment instead of allowing contractors to dredge silted rivers.

Drilon said this way, government can save money by allowing DPWH workers do the job using its own equipment.

### TAKE OVER HANJIN

Lacson also proposed the use of part of the insertion to fund government's take over of Hanjin Heavy Industries and Construction shipyard in Subic, Zambales, instead of letting foreign firms from doing so.

Lacson moved that the Senate constitute itself into a Committee of the Whole to discuss the matter as the Senate deliberated on the proposed budget of the Department of National Defense, which was later passed.

Lacson said a foreign company's takeover of Hanjin "has far-reaching implications on Filipinos, ranging from security to economic and even social concerns."

Under Lacson's proposal, the Philippine government, once it takes over the shipyard, can have continuous income while the Philippine Navy may have a new shipbuilding facility.

Senate majority leader Juan Miguel Zubiri said the Senate supports Lacson's proposal.

Before the Defense Department's budget was approved, Secretary Delfin Lorenzana said President Duterte was "very receptive" to the idea of a government takeover of the Korean shipyard, saying the Philippine Navy and the Philippine Coast Guard can use the facility to build ships.

Lorenzana said the Navy has to build at least five ships in the next five years.

Hanjin Philippines last week filed a petition before the Regional Trial Court in Olongapo City for voluntary rehabilitation under

Republic Act 10142 or the law providing for the rehabilitation or liquidation of financially distressed enterprises and individuals.

Hanjin Philippines officials disclosed to Subic Bay authorities that the company has incurred some \$400 million in outstanding loans from Philippine banks aside from \$900 million from South Korean lenders.

Two Chinese shipbuilding companies have expressed interest to takeover the shipyard.

Former Navy chief Alexander Pama said once Chinese firms take control of Hanjin shipyard, the Chinese will have unlimited access to one of the country's most strategic geographical naval and maritime asset.

Subic Bay is the location of a former US military base selected by the Americans for its strategic location - some 260 kilometers from Scarborough shoal which is the subject of a territorial dispute between the Philippines and China.

ABS-CBN reported that senators also agreed to use the P75-billion insertion for the health department's needs.

## 'Foreign terrorists continue training of local recruits'

By EDU PUNAY

Foreign terrorists continue to enter the country to train local recruits.

The government revealed this as it justified the legality of the third extension of martial law in Mindanao before the Supreme Court (SC).

Solicitor General Jose Calida told the SC in a 50-page comment filed Tuesday that the entry of at least four foreign terrorists last year was among the factual bases for the extension of Proclamation No. 216 for another year or until December 2019.

"There is also a 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," Calida bared.

He said there are four identified foreign terrorist fighters and 60 others on the military's watchlist, but did not name them in the pleading.

Citing the official report from the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP), Calida further revealed that there is "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 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 activi-

ties 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 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, six members of the Maguid group with 10 firearms and 85 members of the Turaifie group with 20 firearms. The total barangays affected are 204," Calida revealed.

Apart from the terrorist groups, Calida also cited the insurgency waged by the CPP-NPA and their attacks in Mindanao last year.

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

With these data, Calida told the SC that the extension of martial law for another year is necessary to provide public safety in Mindanao.

He asked the high court to junk the petition filed by opposition lawmaker led by Albay Rep. Edcel Lagman earlier this month seeking to void the third extension of martial law.

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### **Militiaman wounded in clash with NPA rebels**

ILIGAN CITY – A member of the Citizens Auxiliary Force Geographical Unit was wounded in an encounter with an undetermined number of New People's Army rebels in this city on Tuesday.

Mayor Celso Regencia said around 100 families evacuated their homes in Sitio Ampucao, Barangay Mainit for fear of being caught in the crossfire.

The clash occurred when police officers and militiamen were dispatched in the area to check the reported presence of armed men. – Lino de la Cruz

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● **2 NPAs surrender**

Two members of the Communist New People's Army Terrorist Group (CNTG) in Sultan Kudarat surrendered to government troops in the town of Senator Ninoy Aquino over the weekend. Lt. Col. Harold M Cabunoc, the Commanding Officer of the Army's 33rd Infantry (Makabayan) Battalion, presented the former rebels to Lt. Col. Jorge Garcia, the Commanding Officer of the Marine Battalion Landing Team 2 (MBLT2), during the flag raising ceremony that was held at the Makabayan Battalion's headquarters in the agricultural town located in the boundary with Buluan town, Maguindanao. Ka Jongle, 35, one of the surrenderors, said that he and his colleague realized the futility of their cause when they surrendered. (Francis T. Wakefield)

# 'Red-baiting' of students, faculty alarms UP

By MERLINA HERNANDO-MALIPOT

The University of the Philippines (UP) has expressed alarm over the continued "red-baiting" of its students and faculty by the military and police.

UP Diliman Chancellor Michael Tan noted that "once again" the UP, together with the Polytechnic University of the Philippines (PUP), "has been the target of red-baiting that can only cause anxiety among parents and students while encouraging the military and the police to harass UP faculty and students."

"This is why red-baiting tactics always alarm us," Tan said on allegations that UP students are being forced to join the New People's Army (NPA). Aside from causing distress to students and their parents, "we worry about how the red-baiting impact on soldiers and police, especially in rural areas."

Citing earlier reports of the police that UP and PUP students "were brought to Laguna for immersion activities and forced to join" the group. "I want to emphasize that in UP Diliman, any out of classroom

activity -- from visits or museums to OJT (on-the-job training) to immersion activities (usually part of the mandatory National Service Training Program) and field research -- have to be cleared with our Office of Field Activities."

Tan added that faculty members "need to submit a comprehensive description of the intended activity" with the details on faculty supervision, "where the students will be, who the students are, waivers (for minors) and even a certificate of physical fitness when appropriate."

The "many requirements" of the Office for Field Activities, Tan explained, "come out of recognition of our heavy responsibility, as administrators, to assure the safety and well-being of our students and faculty, in and out of the classroom."

Tan also noted that the UP also recognizes that "our students' education must go beyond the narrow confines of our classrooms or campuses." Thus, "whatever academic degree they might be pursuing, our students need to explore and appreciate the world outside of UP and to develop their competencies linked to social realities."

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**Troops encounter  
Reds in Iligan City**

ILIGAN CITY - Troops belonging to the 51st Infantry battalion encountered at 30 Communist rebels in sitio Bukana barangay Mainit, Tuesday morning January 15. According to the military, the group's movement had earlier been monitored that led the troops into engaging the rebels in a firefight for almost 45 minutes. "This is a deliberate operations actually, we've been watching out for them for several days already... the fact na na-encounter natin sila, ma-realize nila na wala silang pagtataguan dito", said Brig. Gen. Thomas R. Sedano, Jr., Second Mechanized Infantry (Magbalabtay) Brigade commander. According to him, the New People's Army (NPA) was known to pass by this city whenever it had to operate in Bukidnon. (Bonita L. Ermac)

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## Communist rebels yield in Abra

By FRANCIS T. WAKEFIELD

Nine members of Milisyang Bayan (MB) and a Communist New People's Army Terrorist Group (CNTG) member voluntarily surrendered to the military in Abra on Tuesday.

A military report disclosed that the 10 turned themselves in to members of the Army's 24th Infantry (Wildcat) Battalion at its Headquarters in Barangay Tagudtod, Lagangilang, Abra, at about 2 p.m. Tuesday.

The surrenderees turned in three M16 rifles with one magazine and one M14 rifle with one magazine to the 24IB.

The MB personalities claimed to have had enough of being used by the CNTG as a buffer against government forces. They also said that the endless extortion activities of the CNTGs in their barangays have only led to further suffering and poverty.

The CNTG, on the other hand, has been lying-low for some time and has long realized that her comrades are fighting for a useless cause and they are only being made puppets by their power-hungry leaders.

She has also been looking for the perfect opportunity to surrender to the Army.

The peaceful surrender was made possible through the efforts of the 24th IB and the locals of Tubo. The

surrenderees will be assisted to avail the Enhanced Comprehensive Local Integration Program (ECLIP), where they will be given financial aid and livelihood trainings in preparation to their re-integration to the mainstream society.

Major General Felimon T. Santos, Jr., the Commander of the 7th Infantry (Kaugnay) Division, thanked the people of Tubo for trusting the Army. He said that the people's cooperation is the key towards lasting peace.

Santos, at the same time, called on other CNTs to surrender and give the government a chance to give them better lives.

Brigadier General Henry A. Robinson, the Commander of the 702nd Infantry (Defender) Brigade, commended the Wildcats Troopers for the successful conduct of their Community Support Program (CSP) which is very instrumental to the surrender of the former rebels.

Lieutenant Colonel Jearie P. Faminial, the Commander of the 24th IB, assured the residents of Abra that the Army will always be ready to extend assistance and work with the communities to achieve peace and development in the province.

However, they will not tolerate those who terrorize the people and will do everything in their power to stop them. X

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## Aides slam door on Reds 'dealer'

By Kristina Maralit and Elmer N. Manuel

None of the close aides of President Rodrigo Duterte is ready to believe former Philippine Coconut Authority (PCA) chief Avelino "Billy" Andal's claim of him being deputized by the President to lead

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# Aides slam door on Reds 'dealer'

From page 1

backchannel talks with communist leader Jose Maria Sison.

Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana, Office of the Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process (OPAPP) Secretary Carlito Galvez, presidential spokesman Salvador Panelo and former Special Assistant to the President Christopher Lawrence "Bong" Go all dismissed Andal's assertion.

"I have no instruction to Andal about back channeling," Go quoted Mr. Duterte as saying.

Lorenzana even branded Andal's statement as "fake news."

"The President says he never ordered him to do so," Lorenzana said.

Andal, who is currently a member of the Movie and Television Review and Classification Board, in a phone interview with Palace media, announced being tasked by Mr. Duterte to initiate efforts to talk to Sison over the stalled peace negotiations.

A former activist and political detainee, he bared he has already "sent feelers" to his connections from the revolutionary movement who he said were "very happy" with the latest development.

**I have no instruction to Andal about back channeling.**

The said order was supposedly given last week when Andal and the President chanced upon each other at an event.

## Not from OPAPP

"It's not true. Mr. Andal is not connected with OPAPP (Office of the Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process) and previously engaged in any peace negotiations. He does not have authority to do so," Galvez told reporters in a separate interview.

At a Palace briefing, Panelo, meanwhile, also denied having any knowledge of Andal's "appointment."

"I do not have any information on that. If that's what the President told him, good. The President has always been open to the revival of the peace talks because he doesn't want Filipinos killing each other," Panelo said.

The CPP and its armed unit, the New People's Army (NPA), have been in an armed conflict with the



government stretching 50 years, the longest-running insurgency in Asia.

Peace negotiations between the administration and the Left hit a brick wall in July 2017 after Mr. Duterte ordered their suspension following what he said as the communists' continuing attacks on government forces and civilians.

## Time not right

"The peace talks with the communists have been canceled in 2017. He was not tasked to do backchannel talks based on my discussion with President Duterte at a command conference," Galvez said.

The OPAPP secretary was referring to Proclamation 360 issued by Mr. Duterte in November 2017 which states that the peace negotiations between the government and the communists were terminated "despite the best efforts of the administration."

"The communists failed to show sincerity and commitment in pursuing genuine and meaningful peace negotiations as they engaged in acts of violence and hostilities, endangering the lives and properties of innocent people," the proclamation noted.

"I have talked with Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana and National Security Adviser (NSA) Hermogenes Esperon and we did not get any information on backchannel talks," he added.

"At this moment, we feel that is not the time for the resumption of peace talks because the Communist Party of the Philippines-New People's Army-National Democratic Front of the Philippines (CPP-NPA-NDFP) is not sincere in the peace process," Galvez said.

## Insistent Andal

Andal still insisted that he got the President's imprimatur.

"The presentation was wrong. That's why the understanding would also be wrong," Andal said in an online interview.

"In our conversation on peace talks, we talked about the backchannel. So Duterte told me to backchannel," he explained. "But I never told anybody about it because it was informal. But I took it seriously in my private capacity because I have full trust and belief in the President's sincerity in having peace in the Motherland."

He also revealed to media that he already sent "feelers" to the communist rebels, who, according to him, were "extremely glad" of the President's move.

# Indonesian hostage rescued in Sulu

By ROEL PAREÑO

**ZAMBOANGA CITY** – An Indonesian man held captive by Abu Sayyaf bandits for four months was rescued by government troopers on Tuesday.

Samsul Saguni was recovered by soldiers of the 41st Infantry Battalion before 4 p.m., according to Lt. Col. Gerry Besana, Western Mindanao Command (Westmincom) spokesman and civil military operations chief.

Besana declined to mention the area where Saguni was recovered, citing ongoing pursuit operations for Saguni's captors.

He said Saguni was rescued through the efforts of former Sulu governor

Abdusakur Tan.

The victim was brought to the headquarters of the Joint Task Force Sulu and 11th Army Division led by Brig. Gen. Divino Rey Pabayo and underwent medical checkup in a military hospital.

There was no word if ransom or monetary consideration was given in exchange for the release of the victim.

A video was recently posted showing Saguni appealing for help as his captors

demanded P20 million.

Besana said the victim was brought to the headquarters of Westmincom in this city for debriefing.

Saguni and his compatriot Usman Yunos were seized from a Malaysian fishing vessel in the waters off Semporna in Sabah last Sept. 11.

Yunos was rescued in the jungles of Panamao town after he escaped from his captors last Dec. 6.

Five foreigners and three Filipinos remain in the hands of the Abu Sayyaf.

The military vowed relentless operations to ensure the recovery of the remaining hostages and the neutralization of their kidnappers.

**Gov' troops  
clash with BIFF**

Government soldiers clashed with Islamic State (IS) followers at a village of Shariff Saydona town in Maguindanao province. Maj. Gen. Cirilito Sobejana, head of the Army's 6th Infantry Division, said soldiers recovered four rifles and materials for making bombs at the clash site.

—EDWIN O. FERNANDEZ 17

## ACROSS THE COUNTRY

### Soldiers kill 4 BIFF men in Maguindanao

MAGUINDANAO – Four members of the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF) were killed in an encounter with soldiers in Saidona Mustapha town on Tuesday.

Barangay elders and local officials identified the fatalities as Akmad Sindi, Raguiab Bansao, Ameruddin Bunao and Gamino Orai.

A certain Gadoh and an alias Tasil were reportedly wounded in the clash.

Reports reaching Camp Siongco in Datu Odin Sinsuat showed that the bandits carried the bodies of their comrades as they escaped.

The military said the gunfight erupted when the BIFF men fired at personnel of the 40th Infantry Battalion who were patrolling Barangay Inaladan.

Soldiers recovered four rifles from the fatalities and improvised explosive devices along the bandits' escape route.

– John Unson

#### **4 BIFF utas sa encounter**

**KIDAPAWAN CITY** - Apat na mga miyembro ng Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters o BIFF ang napaslang matapos na makaengkuwentro ang tropa ng militar sa Barangay Inaladan, Saidona Mustapha, Maguindanao, Martes ng madaling-araw.

Batay sa ulat, nagsimula ang engkuwentro matapos na magpapatok ng armas ang BIFF sa mga tropa ng 40th Infantry Battalion ng Philippine Army na nagpapatrolya sa lugar. Bagama't kaunti lamang ang bilang ng mga sundalo, walang nalagas sa kanilang hanay habang napatay nila ang apat na rebelde na kinilalang sina Akmad Sindi, Ragulab Bansao, Ameruddin Bunao at Gamino Oral.

Dalawa pa sa mga BIFF ang nasugatan na kinilalang sa pangalang Gadoh at Tasil.

Nakuha sa pinangyarihan ng engkuwentro ang tatlong 7.62 caliber M14 rifles at 5.56 caliber AR18 rifle na ginamit ng mga rebelde. (*Rhoderick Beñez*)

**NEWS BRIEFS**

**Indonesian held hostage  
by Abus rescued**

An Indonesian captive of Abu Sayyaf, a homegrown terror group, was rescued on Jan. 15, more than four months after he and a companion were kidnapped. Col. Gerry Besana said the rescued captive, Juragan Kapal Samsul Saguni, was brought to the house of Abdusakur Tan, former Sulu governor, in Maimbung, Sulu, around 4:30 p.m. on Tuesday. Saguni and a companion, Usman Yunos, were aboard a Malaysian trawler off Sabah on Sept. 11 last year, when they were taken by Abu Sayyaf. Yunos was rescued by Marines and police on Dec. 6 last year.

—JULIE ALIPALA

# Indonesian held hostage by ASG in Sulu rescued

By FRANCIS T. WAKEFIELD

**A**n Indonesian, who had been held hostage by the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) for four months, was rescued in Sulu on Tuesday, the military Wednesday disclosed.

Indonesian hostage Juragan Kapal Samsul Saguni was rescued through the efforts of former Sulu Governor Abdul Sakur Tan and soldiers of the Army's 41st Infantry Battalion, Fifth Infantry Division and the 11th Infantry Division.

Saguni was brought to the residence of Tan in Poblacion, Maimbung, Sulu at 4:30 p.m. Tuesday.

On September 11, 2018, Abu Sayyaf militants kidnapped Saguni and Usman Yunos, who were aboard a Malaysian

fishing/trawler vessel, in waters off Semporna, Sabah.

Yunos, 35, was rescued by troops of the Marine Battalion Landing Team 3, Philippine Marine Ready Force Sulu and the Sulu Provincial Police Office on December 6, 2018.

Soldiers of the Joint Task Force Sulu facilitated the custodial debriefing of Saguni at the Joint Task Force (JTF) Sulu headquarters in Barangay Bus-bus, Jolo, Sulu.

The victim underwent a medical check-up at Kuta Heneral Teodulfo Bautista Hospital in Barangay Bus-bus.

According to JTF Sulu Commander Brig. Gen. Divino Rey Pabayo, Jr., the medical results showed that the victim was healthy.

Saguni was then brought to the

headquarters of the Western Mindanao Command (WesMinCom) on Wednesday where he was debriefed and underwent medical check-up.

Pabayo said the Abu Sayyaf was still holding five foreigners and three Filipinos as hostages in the hinterlands of Sulu.

Western Mindanao Command Chief Lieutenant General Arnel Dela Vega, said JTF Sulu remains committed in rescuing captives of the Abu Sayyaf and in ending the terrorist group's kidnap and ransom ploys.

He said this will be done through the consistent conduct of counter operations against the militants and through the strengthened cooperation with the local government and the people of Sulu to encourage the capitulations of the rest of the Abu Sayyaf militants. |

# Indonesian rescued from Sayyaf rebels

BY DEMPSEY REYES

**G**OVERNMENT troops in Sulu rescued an Indonesian on Tuesday afternoon from Abu Sayyaf terrorists who had been holding him for four months, the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) said on Wednesday.

Lt. Col. Gerry Besana, AFP Western Mindanao Command (WestMinCom) spokesman, said Indonesian hostage Juragan Kapal Samsul Saguni was brought to the residence of Sulu Gov. Abdul Sakur Tan in Maimbung, Sulu at 4:30 p.m.

The Abu Sayyaf bandits abducted Saguni and Usman Yunos, who were on board a Malaysian fishing vessel in waters off Semporna, Sabah on Sept. 11, 2018.

The Philippine Marine Corps and local police in Sulu rescued Yunos on

December 6.

Besana said soldiers under Joint Task Force Sulu were conducting custodial debriefing as of press time at military headquarters in Jolo, Sulu.

Saguni also underwent a medical check-up at Kuta General Teodulfo Bautista Hospital in Barangay Bus-bus in Jolo, Besana said.

Brig. Gen. Divino Rey Pabayo Jr., Task Force Sulu commander, said the medical results showed that the victim was physically healthy.

Pabayo added that Abu Sayyaf rebels were still holding five foreigners and three Filipinos captive.



## Military rescues Indonesian hostaged by Abu Sayyaf for 4 months

AN INDONESIAN held captive by Abu Sayyaf bandits was rescued by government security forces on Tuesday in Sulu, the military said Wednesday.

In a statement, the Armed Forces' Western Mindanao Command (Wesmincom), identified the rescued hostage as Juragan Kapal Samsul Saguni who was held captive for four months.

The military said the victim was rescued through the efforts of former Sulu

Governor Abdul Sakur Tan and soldiers of the 41st Infantry Battalion, and the 5th Infantry Division and 11th Infantry Division of the Philippine Army.

He was immediately brought to the residence of Tan in Poblacion, Maimbung, Sulu around 4:30 p.m. Tuesday.

Soldiers from the Joint Task Force Sulu, for their part, facilitated the custodial debriefing of Saguni at the JTF Sulu headquarters in Barangay Bus-

bus, Jolo, Sulu.

The victim also underwent a medical check at Kuta Heneral Teodulfo Bautista Hospital in Barangay Bus-bus and his medical results showed he was physically healthy, according to Brig. Gen. Divino Rey Pabayo Jr.

Saguni, however, will still be brought to the headquarters of the Western Mindanao Command for debriefing.

"Our Joint Task Force Sulu is com-

mitted in rescuing captives of the Abu Sayyaf and in ending the terrorist group's kidnap and ransom ploys through the consistent conduct of counter operations against the militants and through the strengthened cooperation with the local government and the people of Sulu to encourage the capitulations of the rest of the Abu Sayyaf militants," said Lt. Gen. Arnel dela Vega, Wesmincom commander.

## Abu Sayyaf frees Indonesian captive

BY VICTOR REYES

MEMBERS of the bandit group Abu Sayyaf on Tuesday released in Sulu an Indonesian they kidnapped in Sabah, Malaysia about four months ago.

The release of Juragan Kapal Samsul Saguni was made through the efforts of former Sulu Gov. Abdusakur Tan, said Col. Gerry Besana, spokesman of the military's Western Mindanao Command based in Zamboanga City.

Saguni's release brought to eight, including five foreigners, kidnap victims still being held by the Abu Sayyaf in Sulu.

Besana said Saguni was brought to Tan's resi-

dence in Barangay Poblacion, Maimbung town at around 4:30 p.m. Tuesday and later turned over to the military's Joint Task Force Sulu.

Saguni underwent medical checkup at a military hospital in Jolo town. Results of the check-up showed Saguni "physically healthy," said Besana.

Saguni and fellow Indonesian Usman Yunos were seized by the Abu Sayyaf on September 11 last year while aboard a Malaysian trawler off Semporna in Sabah, Yung was released by the group last December 3.

Lt. Gen. Arnel dela Vega, Wesmincom commander, said the military continues to secure the freedom of the remaining kidnap victims.

### ***Indonesian hostage, pinalaya na ng Sayyaf***

Matapos ang apat na buwang pagkakabihag, pinalaya na ng mga bandidong Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) ang Indonesian national na hinostage sa kagubatan ng Sulu nitong Martes ng hapon.

Kinilala ni Col. Gerry Besana, spokesman ng AFP-Western Mindanao ang pinalayang hostage na si Juragan Kapal Samsul Saguni.

Si Saguni ay inihatid ng

emisaryo ng ASG sa bahay ni dating Sulu Governor Abdusakur Tan sa Poblacion, Maimbung, Sulu dakong alas-4:30 ng hapon at mula rito ay sinundo ng tropa ng 41st Infantry Battalion at ng 11th Infantry Division (ID), kapwa ng Philippine Army.

Sinabi ni Besana na si Saguni at kasamahang tripulanteng si Usman Yunos, pawang ng Malaysian fish-1 ing trawler/vessel ay bini-

hag ng ASG sa karagatan ng Semporna, Sabah, Malaysia noong Setyembre 11, 2018 saka sila dinala sa gubat at inilipat-lipat ng taguan ng mga kidnaper sa Sulu.

Si Yunos, 35-anyos ay nasagip ng mga elemento ng Marine Battalion Landing Team (MBLT) 3-Philippine Marine Ready Force Sulu at Sulu Provincial Police Office noong Disyembre 6, 2018. *(Joy Cantos)*

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### **New Solcom chief named**

An Army officer, who discovered a training camp of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front in Iligan City four years ago, has been designated Southern Luzon Command (Solcom) chief.

Maj. Gen. Gilbert Gapay, concurrent commander of the Mechanized Division, assumed the post in ceremonies held at the Solcom headquarters on Tuesday.

Gapay replaced Lt. Gen. Danilo Pamonag who reached the mandatory age of retirement. — Jaime Laude

## Even non-Muslims campaigning for BOL — MILF

By JOHN UNSON

MAGUINDANAO — The Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) is elated with how non-Muslims are campaigning for an electoral mandate for the Bangsamoro Organic Law (BOL).

MILF's top leader Hadji Murad Ebrahim said among the endorsers of the BOL is Mindanao Catholic leader Orlando Cardinal Quevedo, who has persistently been asserting that it will correct the "historical injustice" that the Moro people are ranting about.

Ebrahim said Quevedo, along with Lamitan City Mayor Rose Furigay and her husband Vice Mayor Roderick Furigay and Mayor Ramon Piang of Upi town in Maguindanao are campaigning for the ratification of the BOL.

He said their efforts to campaign for the BOL are a big boost to the peace process in Mindanao.

Ebrahim said Maguindanao Gov. Esmael Mangudadatu and his siblings had organized a rally to show the support of provincial

and municipal officials for the BOL.

According to Ebrahim, North Cotabato Gov. Emmylou Taliño-Mendoza has also pledged to support BOL.

Agriculture Secretary Emmanuel Piñol, who hails from North Cotabato, announced last week that he is calling for the ratification of the BOL.

"To all of them the MILF shall be forever grateful," Ebrahim said.

The Foundation for Economic Freedom (FEF), an association of economists, former government officials and members of the business community, has expressed support for the conduct of the plebiscite to ratify BOL.

FEF said the ratification of the BOL will greatly contribute to attaining lasting peace in the region.

In Basilan, Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) Gov. Mujiv Hataman appealed to Church leaders not to use the pulpit to pass wrong information about the BOL.

— With Jess Diaz, Czeriza Valencia, Roel Pareño, Lino dela Cruz, Sheila Crisostomo



# AFP, MILF ready to stop Bangsamoro poll spoilers

Gov't taps 2,500 soldiers, 400 cops to secure voters during Jan. 21 plebiscite

By Bong S. Sarmiento  
@inquirermindanao

SHARIFF AGUAK, MAGUINDANAO—Aside from Cotabato City, the military and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) have identified four towns in Maguindanao province where trouble could arise during the Jan. 21 plebiscite to ratify the Bangsamoro Organic Law (BOL).

Maj. Arvin Encinas, spokesperson for the Army's 6th Infantry Division, said on Wednesday that the Armed Forces of the Philippines had intensified security patrol in the so-called "SPMS box" to prevent the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF) from sabotaging the plebiscite.

SPMS refers to Shariff Aguak, Pagatin (in Shariff Saydona Mustapha), Mamasapano and Salibo (Datu Salibo), where the Islamic State-inspired BIFF elements are known to operate.

The military has deployed five battalions, or around 2,500 soldiers, from the 603rd Infantry Brigade to Cotabato City, which has been placed under the control of the Commission on Elections (Comelec), Encinas said.

The police earlier sent 400 policemen to Cotabato. Encinas said an additional battalion of



**SAYING NO** Streamers opposing the Bangsamoro Organic Law are seen in Cotabato City, where voters twice rejected their inclusion in the autonomous region in Muslim Mindanao.

the elite police Special Action Forces would also be deployed.

## Cotabato blast

On New Year's Eve, a bomb explosion killed two people and wounded 34 others in Cotabato City, where local officials were opposed to its inclusion to the future Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM).

The BARMM will replace the 28-year-old Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) once the BOL is ratified.

All areas under the ARMM

and Cotabato City and Isabela City in Basilan province will vote on Jan. 21. Cotabato City, where the offices of ARMM are based, had twice rejected inclusion in the autonomous Muslim region.

## BIFF movement

The Comelec also set a plebiscite 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.

Encinas said security measures in Cotabato City, which is surrounded by Maguindanao

towns, have already been strengthened as the plebiscite draws near.

Owing to intensified security patrol, troops on Tuesday encountered an undetermined number of BIFF elements at Barangay Inaladan in Shariff Saydona Mustapha town, he said.

Encinas said soldiers recovered three M14 rifles, an Armalite rifle and an antipersonnel land mine.

Von Al Haq, spokesperson for the Bangsamoro Islamic Armed Forces (BIAF), the MILF's armed wing, said they were also closely watching the movements of the BIFF in the SPMS box and other areas of Maguindanao.

He said the BIAF was wary the BIFF faction of Esmael Abdulmalik alias Abu Turaibe would spoil the conduct of the plebiscite in the Liguasan Marsh area.

Two other BIFF factions under Imam Mohiden Minimbang alias Ustadz Karianan and Esmael Abubakar alias Commander Bungos sent feelers they will not sabotage the plebiscite, Al Haq told the Inquirer.

"Nevertheless, the MILF-BIAF is on standby and ready to assist the military should they need help in securing the plebiscite especially in remote areas," he said. **INQ**

JEFFREY MAITEM



## MILF vows to help achieve peaceful BOL plebiscite and respect results

By BEN R. ROSARIO

ILIGAN CITY, Lanao del Norte – The Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) has pledged to contribute to peace and order and respect the results of the January 21 and February 6 plebiscite on the Bangsamoro Organic Law (BOL) in this province where a "No"

vote is being vigorously campaigned for by local leaders.

Lanao del Norte Rep. Khalid Dimaporo revealed that the MILF's position was made known after his father, Rep. Abdullah Dimaporo, and MILF Commander Bravo, promised a peaceful plebiscite during a meeting set by the Office of Presidential Adviser on ►5

## MILF vows to help...

◀1

the Peace Process headed by Secretary Carlito Galvez Jr.

The young Dimaporo lauded the OPAPP "for enforcing the commitments to peace and observance with election laws" as the plebiscite seeking to ratify the BOL approaches.

Galvez said Bravo and the elder Dimaporo met at Camp Bilal earlier this week.

"Both men have agreed to set aside their differences in preparation for the peaceful conduct of the upcoming plebiscites for the Bangsamoro Organic Law (BOL) scheduled on January 21 and February 6, 2019," Galvez said.

The younger Dimaporo stressed the MILF's commitment to respect the results of the plebiscite in Lanao del Norte, as the campaign for a "No" vote for the inclusion of six Lanao del Norte municipalities in the new Bangsamoro juridical entity gains ground.

"It is reassuring to know that as we campaign hard for the 'NO' vote to win, Secretary Galvez continues to shepherd the MILF's commitment to peace, and that Commander Bravo will respect the results of the plebiscite, even if it will not be in his favor," Rep. Khalid said.

The young solon said the Dimaporo-Bravo meeting was timely as it happened amidst increased tension in Lanao del Norte.

He noted that local officials have reported that armed MILF members have resorted to "community immersion," or house-to-house campaigning, to counter the strong campaign of Lanao del Norte Governor Imelda Quibranza-Dimaporo

for a "No" vote to the inclusion of the six municipalities and the further division of the province.

These complaints from local officials have prompted the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP), the Philippine National Police (PNP), and the Commission on Elections (Comelec) to take steps at strictly enforcing election rules to ensure a peaceful plebiscite on January 21, 2019 and February 6, 2019.

The February 6 poll exercise will be for voters in Lanao del Norte, except Iligan City, and North Cotabato municipalities of Aleosan, Carmen, Kabacan, Midsayap, Pigcawayan, and Pikit.

Galvez said the AFP and PNP will deploy at least 10,000 security personnel to ensure peace and order during the plebiscite dates.

Dimaporo warned gun holders that the AFP and PNP will strictly enforce the gun ban, especially the bearing of firearms while campaigning.

"Battalion commanders have informed us that the MILF are prohibited to campaign in uniform and must strictly adhere to the total gun ban. Any of their members caught in violation will be dealt with accordingly by police and military troops," Dimaporo said.

Col. Alex Aduca, Deputy Brigade Commander of the 2nd Mechanized Brigade and Col. Ronel Manalo, Commander of the 5th Mechanized Battalion said that "MILF members are required to coordinate their movements with the AFP and carry identification when campaigning in Lanao del Norte."

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## MILF vows peaceful BOL plebiscite

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province where a "no" vote is being vigorously campaigned by local leaders.

Lanao del Norte Rep. Khalid Dimaporo revealed that the MILF's position was made known after his father, Rep. Abdullah

Dimaporo, and MILF Commander Bravo promised a peaceful plebiscite during a meeting set by the Office of Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process headed by Secretary Carlito Galvez Jr.

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Galvez said Bravo and the elder Dimaporo met in Camp Bilal earlier this week.

"Both men have agreed to set aside their differences in preparation for the peaceful conduct of the upcoming plebiscites for the Bangsamoro Organic Law scheduled on Jan. 21 and Feb. 6, 2019," Galvez said.

The younger Dimaporo stressed the MILF's commitment to respect the results of the plebiscite in Lanao del Norte as the campaign for a no vote for the inclusion of six Lanao del Norte municipalities in the new Bangsamoro juridical entity gains ground. (Ben R. Rosario)

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# Plebiscite to become choice between food, guns

By **ALI G. MACABALANG**

**BULUAN, Maguindanao** – It's going to be a choice "between foods and guns" for the Moro people when they troop to the poll precincts and decided on whether or not to approve Republic Act (RA) 11054 or the Bangsamoro Organic Law (BOL).

And for Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) Chairman Hadji Murad Ebrahim, the Moro people's "proclivity for guns" will take the backseat when the fate of the BOL is decided in a plebiscite to be held January 21 and February 6.

Due to oppression and injustices in the past, stretching to as far back as the colonization eras, many Moro people have practiced "collecting and preferring guns over other matters including wives," Murad noted.

"But these people will be compelled to disarm and start peaceful life to earn for their families' stable

foods, education, health and other necessities when their communities are characterized by responsive governance," he said.

BOL seeks the replacement of the 29-year old Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) by a geopolitical entity – the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM) – guaranteed by Congress and Malacañang of more autonomy and subsidies to end decades of armed conflict that had taken some 200,000 lives already.

"Insha-Allah (God willing), we are more certain now of the ratification of BOL," the Ebrahim told a press conference at the newly-completed provincial capitol building here Tuesday morning before addressing a huge crowd of supporters in nearby Buluan gym.

Ebrahim, more fondly called Hadji Murad or Amiril mujahideen (leader of freedom fighters), admitted at the rally that some MILF leaders were intrigued in the earlier filing of candidacy for ARMM governor by former Buluan town Mayor Ibrahim "Jhong" Mangudadatu because of the "decisive" voting population in Maguindanao.

The Jan. 21 plebiscite will cover ARMM areas, namely the provinces of Maguindanao, Lanao del Sur, Basilan, Sulu and Tawi-Tawi, and cities of Marawi and Lamitan as well as the cities of Cotabato and Isabela (in Basilan), while the Feb. 6 referendum will be held in Lanao del Norte and North Cotabato provinces as well as other local geopolitical units with approved petitions for inclusion in BARMM.

## BOL supporters hail holiday declaration, PRRD's presence in huge Friday rally

BULUAN, Maguindanao - Supporters of the Bangsamoro Organic Law (BOL) ratification took turns here on Tuesday in praising reports that President Rodrigo Duterte has declared January 21, the day of the plebiscite, as non-working special holiday; as well as his scheduled visit to Cotabato City on Friday to push for "yes" votes in the electoral process.

Maguindanao Gov. Esmael Mangudadatu and Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) Chairman Hadji Murad Ebrahim interrupted their campaign speeches at their Tuesday's grand here

to tell over 15,000 people that Duterte has declared January 21 as special non-working holiday to provide voters ample time in deciding the fate of Republic Act (RA) 11054.

"I just received official information that our beloved President issued Proclamation 464 declaring Monday, January 21 as holiday," Mangudadatu announced that drew resounding chants of "Allahu Akbar" (God is Great) among the audience.

The proclamation, signed for the President by Executive Secretary Salvador Medialdea, declared the holiday in

the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) and the cities of Cotabato and Isabela (in Basilan) where the January 21 plebiscite will be conducted.

Government workers in the ARMM agencies and Cotabato City present at the rally here said the holidays relieved them of earlier worries on how they could get to polling centers on a work day.

Ebrahim and other key officials of the MILF, and the Office of the President Adviser on Peace Process (OPAPP) were led at Tuesday's rally by Assistant Secretary Dickson Hermoso. He said the presence of President Duterte in Cotabato City on January 18 will be a "big boost" to the campaign for BOL ratification.

Presidential Spokesperson Salvador Panelo announced on Tuesday that the Chief Executive will lead the campaign on Friday, January 18, at the ARMM compound in Cotabato City.

"The President supports BOL. That's what he said in the Cabinet. He said he will campaign for it," Panelo said in his announcement. (Ali Macabalang)

## Foreign affairs: Passports and China's power

HERE we go again: On cue, the Senate will conduct



REPUBLIC SERVICE  
RICARDO SALUDO

hearings on the passport controversy.

SaludoA5

### SALUDO FROM A1

To reduce grandstanding and obfuscation somewhat, our esteemed senators, the media, and thinking Filipinos should focus on five questions:

First and most urgent: What possible or actual inconvenience or damage could the government and the citizenry suffer? That includes especially the proliferation and misuse of fake passports, identity theft and fraud against citizens, and loss of state possession and control over passport data and documentation.

Second: What steps can or will be taken to address these potential or actual problems, and when will these measures be in place?

Most important for both national security and citizen protection is to make sure all passport data is under exclusive possession and secure control and protection by the government. Period.

Private entities can be given temporary access to data and documents, with stringent safeguards and close monitoring, but the state must own and hold the personal materials and information provided by passport applicants and holders. This is a must.

Third: Did the 2013 change in passport production contractor result in greater advantage and convenience for the government and the citizenry, or did it lead to

disadvantage, inconvenience, and real or potential damage?

Fourth: Was the change in passport contractor done according to relevant laws and the policies, processes, and provisions agreed by government entities authorized to provide the service?

Fifth: If the 2013 change in passport contractor hurt the government or the public, or violated laws or policies, what will be done to remedy the problems, seek redress and restitution, and hold culpable officials and entities accountable?

While the Senate, media and public may find making accusations and urging sanctions most sensational, top priority should be finding and implementing solutions, as Foreign Affairs Secretary Teodoro Locsin Jr. has rightly prioritized. Don't let finger-pointing delay or detract from making sure Filipinos aren't hurt or inconvenienced.

### Beijing readies for conflict in Asia

Turning to China, the Pentagon just put out a new report on the People's Liberation Army (PLA). Released by the United States Department of Defense two days ago, "China Military Power: Modernizing a Force to

Fight and Win" is available at the Defense Intelligence Agency website: < [http://www.dia.mil/Portals/27/Documents/News/Military%20Power%20Publications/China\\_Military\\_Power\\_FINAL\\_5MB\\_20190103.pdf](http://www.dia.mil/Portals/27/Documents/News/Military%20Power%20Publications/China_Military_Power_FINAL_5MB_20190103.pdf)>.

While we have no space to cover all major issues and information in the report, certain highlights must be considered now, especially at this time when regional security concerns demand attention amid rising China-US confrontation in East Asian waters.

Plus: regional security arrangements are being crafted or reviewed, including the proposed Code of Conduct in the South China Sea, being negotiated by Beijing and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, and the US-Philippines Mutual Defense Treaty (MDT), which some quarters want the government to review.

Here then are the key developments in China's military, which deserve significant weight in regional security policies and initiatives.

First, the report lists "Beijing's primary threat perceptions" shaping its defense policies and thrusts: "longstanding concerns regarding Taiwan independence, Uighur and Tibetan separatism, and perceived challenges to China's control of disputed areas in the East and

South China Seas."

The Chinese do not see any proximate threat of a global war, but there could be local or regional conflicts, especially maritime confrontations: "In 2015, China's leaders adjusted guidance on the type of war the [People's Liberation Army] should be prepared to fight by directing the PLA to be capable of fighting and winning 'informatized local wars,' with an emphasis on 'maritime military struggle'."

Furthermore, "Chinese military strategy documents also emphasize the growing importance of offensive air operations, long-distance mobility operations, and space and cyber operations." No wonder, the Pentagon report lists "long-range precision strike, information warfare" as core PLA strengths, with "maritime power projection" as a developing strength.

Plainly, China aims to get ready for high-tech conflicts with naval and air forces.

With this new war scenario, besides enhancing the information technology capabilities, the PLA is building up naval, air and missile forces, and instituting joint commands — "a cultural shift within the PLA away from its traditional ground-force-centric, inward-facing model to one that lays the foundation for co-equal, professional services capable of

joint operations across the globe."

On the emerging regional security landscape, "China also believes that US military presence and US-led security architecture in Asia seeks to constrain China's rise and interfere with China's sovereignty, particularly in a Taiwan conflict scenario and in the East and South China Seas."

With this wary perspective, Beijing would see restrictive intent in major American military deployment in Asia, like the announced plan to move 60 percent of US Navy assets to the region, or greater rotations of US forces in the Philippines, plus access to several military bases, under the 2014 Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement. President Rodrigo Duterte has deferred full EDCA implementation.

While seeking to boost its capability to wage local and regional conflicts, "Beijing has implemented an approach to external engagement that seeks to enhance China's reach and power through activities calculated to fall below the threshold of alarming the international community about China's rise or provoking the United States, its allies and partners."

In short, pressure and confrontation, but as much as possible, no shooting: "China's expansion

of disputed features and construction in the Spratly Islands using large-scale land reclamation demonstrates China's capacity — and a shift in willingness to exercise that capacity short of military conflict—to strengthen China's control over disputed areas, enhance its presence, and challenge other claimants."

So, assuming Washington read Beijing's military thinking and planning correctly, what does all this mean for regional security arrangements, especially the Code of Conduct and the US-Philippine defense alliance?

The good news is, China isn't keen on war, which would almost surely stampede all of Asia under Uncle Sam's security umbrella and open the region to the Quadrilateral Alliance of America, Australia, India and Japan.

That said, China will likely balk at a Code of Conduct that restricts its force deployment in its surrounding seas. The PLA would also target neighboring forces that would likely join the US in a conflict with China, as the Philippine military might, under the MDT. That includes missile and even cyber attacks — both fast-growing PLA capabilities.

Plainly, it would be far better to have China as a friend than a foe.

## A waste of talent



**DUTY CALLS**  
**FLORENCIO FIANZA**

LAST week, I was with my family having dinner at the Baguio Country Club when a dozen gentlemen belonging to the Philippine Military Academy class of 1985 walked past our table. Since some of them worked with me while I was still in the active service, there were of course, the obligatory greetings. It seems that they were here in Baguio because one of their members will be retiring next month and will be accorded the customary parade and review given to all PMA graduates before they are finally put to pasture.

The one retiring is Chief Supt. Arnold Gunacao, formerly the PNP Highway Patrol director but who is currently assigned with the Directorate of Integrated Police Operations. To the uninitiated, this is a position created for people who cannot be given any line assignments like for instance a Regional Director. On paper, the position looks impressive because it is supposed to oversee the operations of three Police Regions.

In actual fact, however, it is a paper tiger. Those who are assigned to DIPO are mostly those who happen to be senior to the appointed Chief PNP.

The practice that has developed in the PNP is that if an officer who is appointed as the Chief PNP happens to belong to a junior class like what happened to Bato de la Rosa and Oscar Albayalde, both members of the PMA class of 1986, officers belonging to the classes of 1984 and 1985 can expect radical changes in their assignments.

Why? Because the members of the class of 1986—now considered the ruling class—will now be occupying most, if not all, the important and critical positions. It does not happen to all seniors, but certainly to the majority of those officers who graduated earlier. In the class of 1985 for instance, Chief Supt. Rolly Nana who was my junior officer when I was provincial

commander of La Union, is the current regional director of the Cordillera Administrative Region. But most have been replaced and moved to DIPO.

Given that the police and military already retire very early, it is not only a waste of talent but government resources as well to pasture of these officers a lot earlier than their actual retirement. The worst that can happen to an officer is to be given a "nothing" assignment in the twilight of one's career.

*"Police leaders should leave the organization in a better shape than when they came to it."*

One of those officers having dinner was Chief Supt. Eric Velasquez, who stopped by our table to exchange pleasantries. He too is assigned to DIPO. This officer is a lawyer and since there are not too many lawyer officers in the PNP, his expertise is certainly being wasted. This situation exists primarily because of the traditional upper class system practiced in the PMA. This is a situation wherein once an underclass, one is perpetually that even if the junior graduate eventually outranks an individual who graduated ahead of him.

Up to about 1986, most if not all those appointed as Chiefs of Constabulary came from a pool of officers who basically joined the service at the same time. The appointment of a Chief of Constabulary junior to others started when then President Cory Aquino designated General Cesar Nazareno who belonged to the class of 1961, as Chief, PC/INP over senior graduates of the PMA. This was followed by the appointment of General Recaredo Sarmiento over graduates four years senior to him. Then the practice became routine.

It is now 2019, and the upper class

system is still alive and well. One would think that due to the frequency of the practice of juniors being appointed over senior graduates, that there would have been some kind of acceptance on the part of both sides to adjust to the realities of the situation. But it is not so.

Not being a graduate of the PMA, I do not think I can provide a satisfactory answer to this unhealthy practice. But I think it is time to accept this phenomena of junior graduates being appointed over their seniors and adjust accordingly for the sake of the service. If the Armed Forces have been able to adjust smoothly, there should be no reason why the PNP cannot also do it. The AFP was able to put in place regulations and policies which the leadership is enforcing uniformly and consistently. It may be harder in the PNP but there is no choice if it wants to reform.

There used to be a practice to give senior retiring officers what was called preferential assignments. This practice was to give them the opportunity to retire with honor and dignity. Unfortunately, this practice is now dead and gone. Retiring officers can now wake up one morning to find out that they have been retired without any ceremony. It is sad, what has happened to the good traditions of the service. The camaraderie, the esprit de corps—they are now things of the past. What remains are groupings of officers banding together to take care of their interests first instead of the interests of the whole organization.

The PNP has had a long and distinguished history. It is now 118 years old going back to Aug. 8, 1901 when Brig. Gen. Henry T. Allen organized the Philippine Constabulary. Older still if we include the Guardia Civil during the Spanish colonial period. The ideal thing to happen is for every generation of Police leaders to make it their solemn duty to endeavour to leave the PNP in a better shape than when they found it, not worse. This means a more dedicated, competent and professional police organization that we can all be proud of.

# All the Philippines is our land

**"Why should the Moros be given a government only their leaders can govern, when we already have duly constituted governments via democratic elections?"**

Bangsamoro Transition Commission chair Ghazali Jaafar recently aired his sentiments, saying political leaders in Mindanao must sacrifice their own interests in order to end decades of strife in the restive South.

This plea comes amid tensions flaring ahead of the scheduled plebiscite for the creation of a new Bangsamoro government and territory.

Jaafar was quoted as saying over an ANC TV interview that he does not know why they (Mindanao political leaders) cannot sacrifice their political interests for the general interest of our people, adding the Bangsamoro people received "overwhelming support" from the public for the Bangsamoro Organic Law (BOL) that grants greater fiscal and political power in a new autonomous region in Mindanao.

Close to three million people are expected to take part in the historic 21 January plebiscite to ratify the BOL, created in 2014 as part of a peace deal between the government and the Philippines' largest Muslim separatist group, the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF).

"The Bangsamoro issue is all about the legitimate desire of the Bangsamoro people to have a government that they can govern... a government which guarantees the rights of every citizen in that area, and a government that will bring in peace with dignity and justice," Jaafar said.

This is pure bullsh\*t. Why should the Moros be given a government only their leaders can govern, when we already have duly constituted governments via democratic elections? Why should that not be enough for the Muslims who are



**FRONTLINE**  
Ninez Cacho-Olivares

and Metro Manila fought the colonizers and shed blood and finally obtained their independence and our land back. The ancestral lands are all ours, as Filipinos. It should also be asked of Jaafar and his Bangsamoro group that they, the supposed MILF leaders, sacrifice their interests in order to end decades of strife in Mindanao, especially since the MILF and its former partner, the BIFF and, yes, the other Muslim terrorists, local and foreign, have always engaged in violence, the killings, the illegal armed groups that caused the decades of strife in the south.

**"What this means is that the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region has not been constitutionally ordained by Filipinos."**

as Filipinos, and it is almost certain, that, as time goes by, with the MILF leaders in power and position, and with their territory, the MILF, as yet another armed force that now will probably be granted its own territory and governmental power,

and should be known as Filipinos?

Should the Visayans then also have their own government and territory and be funded by the entire Filipino taxpayers? Should Manila and Luzon also have their own governments and territory and damn the Constitution and the Republic?

Hey Jaafar, our Filipino forefathers from Mindanao, Visayas, Luzon

will not rest at merely being an autonomous region, but an independent nation and country that will demand and fight for independence.

Independence has always been their aim and it will not only be just the autonomous region that will be theirs — should the plebiscite be clean — but definitely, the MILF "government" and its leaders will want the entire Mindanao as their claimed "ancestral land," and the Philippines will have been stripped of its legitimate territory, leaving only Luzon and the Visayas, which was never what the 1987 Constitution has ordained for the Filipino people. What has been ordained and ratified by the Filipino people is the creation of just the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) and the Cordillera Administrative Region (CAR).

What this means is that the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region (BAR) has not been constitutionally ordained by Filipinos. That in turn means that a constitutional provision cannot be amended by a mere congressional law establishing the creation of the BAR to replace that which constitutionally exists as the ARMM.

The plebiscite that is to be voted upon — and unconstitutionally, too — will merely have the participation of some residents in the area that has been carved out for the probable BAR. The entire Filipino electorate has been barred by that BAR law from participating in the plebiscite, despite the fact that it was the entire Filipino electorate that ratified the 1987 Constitution that carried the ARMM and CAR provisions.

The reason that the electorate from Metro Manila, Luzon and the Visayas has been excluded is due to the fact that those from these areas would bring about a resounding "No" vote for the creation of the BAR.

If one thinks this is the only problem, one should have another big think.

The BAR law mandates a pure parliamentary government for the Bangsamoro people, headed by a chief minister (who otherwise would serve as prime minister), which puts the Moro chief minister virtually on equal footing with the President of the Philippines style-wise. That's the first step of these armed Muslim rebels, who will not even give up their arms, to assert independence from the existing government and get tens of billions from all Filipino taxpayers to boot!

The Moro leaders should be the ones sacrificing instead of their asking Filipinos to sacrifice to stave off strife in Mindanao.

These Moro armed rebels have killed too many of our soldiers and policemen and massacred them and have even stolen our land!

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# No specific threat, but AFP mulls high alert for BOL plebiscite

By Priam Nepomuceno

**MANILA** -- While it has yet to detect any security threat for the January 21 Bangsamoro Organic Law (BOL) plebiscite, Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) public affairs office chief Col. Noel Detoyato on Wednesday said they are not letting their guard down.

He made this statement when asked on whether or not the AFP has monitored threats for next week's polls.

"So far, *na-defuse na natin ang* (we have defused the) tension, *kaya* (so) we don't foresee any major threat in the coming plebiscite. Nevertheless, we are still not letting our guard down and we will ensure the protection of the voters so that they can express themselves," Detoyato said in a message to the Philippine News Agency.

The military is deploying around 10,000 troops 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 OPPAP (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 BOL plebiscite is slated for January 21 and February 6 while the mid-term elections will be in May.

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

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## Gapay new Solcom chief, vice Pamonag

Malaya Business Insight

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 Pamonag, 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 Pamonag, who previously served as commander of the Army's Special Operations Command.

Pamonag 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 Pamonag for his dedicated service and for his tireless work in defending our country against any threat," Madrigal said.