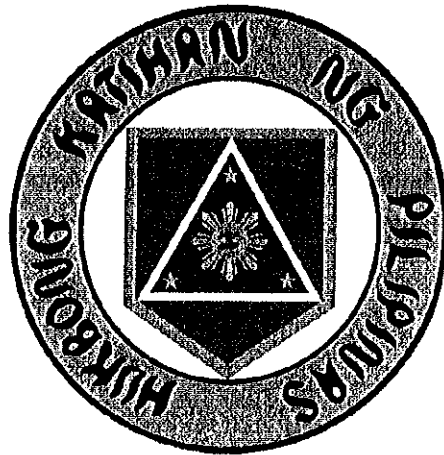


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Thursday



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DPWH CHIEF BANS MORE CONTRACTORS

STORY BY JOVIC YEE

Villar says the department's top two contractors and 12 others have been blacklisted for not meeting deadlines in implementing infrastructure projects. 'We have no tolerance for those wasting people's money and time,' he says.

A7

FROM A1

By Jovic Yee
@jovicyeelNQ

"Do not delay" should have been the motto of at least 14 contractors implementing government infrastructure projects.

Public Works Secretary Mark Villar said on Wednesday that his department had "blacklisted" the contractors for failing to meet the scheduled timelines of projects awarded to them.

At the Meet Inquirer Multimedia forum, Villar pointed out that the Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH) was strict on deadline compliance because it wanted all projects, even those started by previous administrations, to be completed by the end of President Duterte's term in 2022.

"All these projects used the people's money. What matters to us is to finish it. I don't care if people say we started it or not. Our commitment is to finish all the projects," he said.

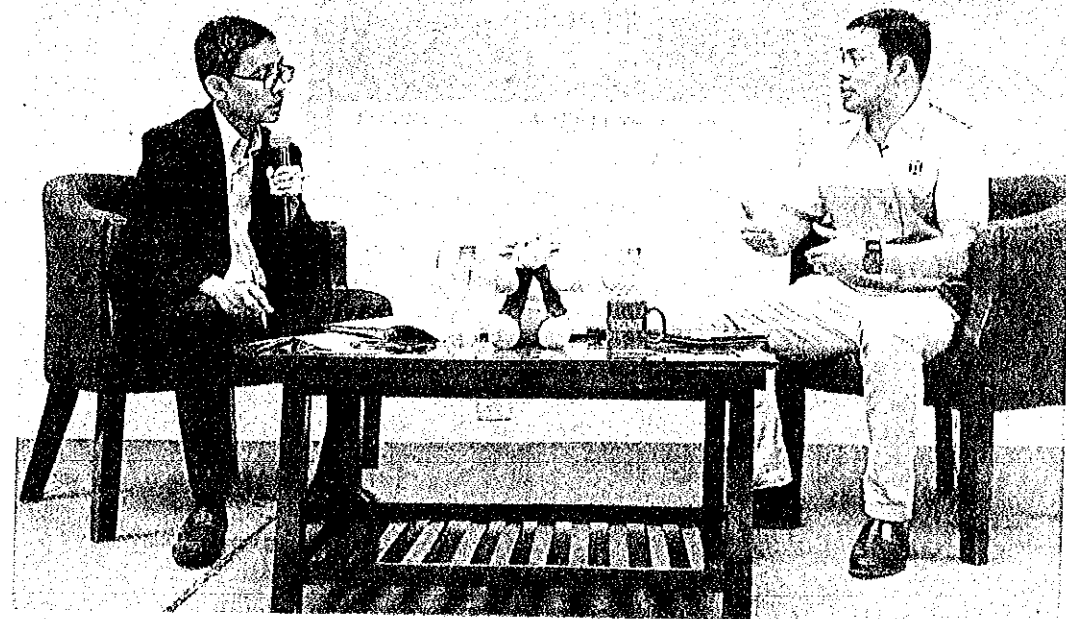
Villar said the ongoing purge of delinquent contractors was meant to ensure that government infrastructure projects were completed on time so that taxpayers could benefit from them.

The DPWH has been able to better monitor and analyze over the last few months the progress of project implementation through the Project and Contract Management Application (PCMA) system, according to Villar.

Real-time updates

The system provides the DPWH with "real-time updates" from the ground.

Once a contractor reached a 15-percent slippage rate, or delay in the project timeline, the DPWH would ask it to provide a



CORRUPTION ISSUES Public Works Secretary Mark Villar says he has adopted a new system to deal with corruption, which has long plagued the agency, during the Meet Inquirer Multimedia forum held on Wednesday at the Inquirer's main office in Makati City. Inquirer editor TJ Burgonio served as forum moderator. —LYN RILLON

catch-up plan that it must strictly follow.

If the contractor fails to follow through, its contract with the DPWH is canceled and blacklisting procedures follow.

Once a contractor is blacklisted, the DPWH will bid out the project to other contractors.

"It's meant to pressure them to finish a project at a faster pace," Villar said.

Top two contractors

Of the 14 banned contractors, two were DPWH top contractors—RC Tagala Construction and Syndtite Construction Corp.

RC Tagala's blacklisting stemmed from "violations of the terms and conditions" stated in its contract for the construction of Labo Bridge in Labo, Camarines Norte.

It has been banned from bid-

ding for any DPWH project since August last year. The ban is for one year.

The ban against Syndtite was due to its more than 15-percent slippage rate in a flood control project at Barangay Dugayung in Amulung town, Cagayan province.

Its blacklisting took effect in September last year.

Other blacklisted contractors were:

- Tribu Design and Construction for the delay in constructing the road slope protection structure for the Cabatuan-New Lucena-Banga Bante Road in Iloilo

- Roma Construction and Development Corp., for violating the terms of its contract in building two two-story six-classroom school buildings in Del Carmen, Surigao del Norte

- R. Semilla Construction

and Marketing for failing to meet its obligations in the repair and rehabilitation of multipurpose buildings in Burgos, Surigao del Norte

- MR Vargas Construction
- Tektwin Marketing Corp.
- AA Masong Construction
- JTA Builders
- Edison Development and Construction

- AD Taccad Surveying Services

- Enrique Flores Jr.
- Leodegario Guerra

RU Aquino Construction and Development Corp. was blacklisted in April for violations in the construction of flood control system at Barangay Malabaga in La Paz, Abra.

Villar lifted the ban two months later after granting its appeal, following the recommendation of the undersecretary for regional operations that

the contract be restored.

More than 400 projects

In July last year, Villar said suspension proceedings were going on for 43 contractors involved in more than 400 government projects nationwide.

He noted, on Wednesday that 29 other contractors were still under investigation.

Because of the new system, Villar said the DPWH was able to better deal with corruption, which had long plagued the agency.

He said the DPWH was also able to improve its obligation and disbursement rate by 93 percent and 80 percent, respectively, levels "never achieved" in the agency's history.

"Corruption is a function of discretion. The more you have systems, controls, the more you minimize corruption," Villar said.

Credentials

Villar has also ordered an investigation of contractors supposedly exaggerating credentials to land government contracts.

At the recent hearing on alleged irregularities in flood control projects in Sorsogon province, Camarines Sur Rep. Rolando Andaya Jr. said Bulacan-based contractor CT Leoncio Construction, which cornered billions of government contracts, only had a single backhoe for its projects.

"If found to be true that they are being dishonest about their capability, they will be blacklisted," Villar said.

"That's why I'm telling them that if you're not capable [to complete a government project], do not join anymore in the bidding [process] because this administration will not think twice," he added.

"We have no tolerance for those wasting the people's money and time." INQ

Mayor hospitalized; gun in Batocabe slay found

By EMMANUEL TUPAS

Mayor Carlwyn Baldo of Daraga, Albay, the principal suspect in the killing of Ako Bicol congressman Rodel Batocabe and his police escort last December, was rushed to hospital late Tuesday, just hours after he was arrested.

Officials claimed Baldo was suffering from hyperventilation brought by asthma. Police earlier arrested the mayor for illegal possession of firearms and explosives, after Albay prosecutors moved slowly in indicting Baldo for the twin murders and securing a warrant for his arrest.

This developed as police recovered the alleged murder weapon, a .45 caliber pistol, in a fishpond in Barangay Busay in Ligao City, Albay yesterday.

The firearm fitted the description given by Christopher Naval, one of the suspects, police said.

Naval said the pistol was used by Henry Yuson, one of two gunmen who had surrendered to the police.

Yuson had admitted using the gun and throwing it into a river.

Police recovered parts of a .45 pistol and two magazines from a septic tank in Pili, Camarines Sur on Jan. 10.

Investigators said the gun parts were found at the house owned by Rolando Aromado, one of the two gunmen who killed Batocabe and SPO1 Orlando Diaz on Dec. 22, 2018.

Baldo has been consistently tagged as the one who ordered the

Turn to Page 2

Mayor From Page 1

assassination of his potential political rival.

All the six suspects who had surrendered gave separate statements, consistently pointing to Baldo as their principal.

Although Baldo denied the allegations and has yet to be indicted for the murders, police pinned the mayor down on charges of illegal possession of firearms and ammunition.

Operatives of the regional Criminal In-

vestigation and Detection Group (CIDG) raided Baldo's residence in Barangay Tagas on Tuesday and recovered two .45 caliber pistols with eight bullets and ammunition for an M203 grenade launcher and a rifle.

The CIDG said the ammunition for a grenade launcher is considered an explosive.

The regional police earlier confiscated Baldo's three firearms, a 12-gauge shotgun and two .45 automatics.

Baldo failed to turn over a rifle that was issued to him, which he claimed has been missing since last year.

Philippine National Police (PNP) chief Director General Oscar Albayalde gave assurance that no special treatment would be given to Baldo at the hospital.

Albayalde said they will deliberate whether Baldo should be confined in one of their own medical facilities. Even if not in a detention cell, there is no chance for the local official to escape, he said.

"He is heavily guarded," he said.

Albayalde earlier told a forum that they have yet to receive the P30-million reward that Batocabe's colleagues at the House of Representatives collected for the solution of the murder.

What they received, according to the PNP chief, is the P20 million promised by President Duterte.

Albayalde made the statement before the lawmakers fulfilled their promise to turn over a total of P13 million in bounty.

Speaker Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo turned over P8 million to the PNP with Negros Occidental Rep. Albee Benitez and Leyte Rep. Yedda Marie Romualdez turning over the rest of the cash reward.

The bounty was turned over to Albayalde in formal ceremonies at the PNP headquarters yesterday.

Benitez said they were able to raise a total of P13 million from 197 congressmen who pitched in at least P30,000. There were varying amounts of contribution, the highest of which was the Speaker's at P100,000.

On top of the P20 million that the President gave, there were also other pledges like the P15 million pledge of

Batocabe's Ako Bicol party-list, aside from the P2 million of the provincial government of Albay.

Ako Bicol's second nominee, Rep. Alfredo Garbin Jr., said the P15 million will be given in tranches because they have to ensure that the suspects will not retract their testimonies, up to the time the judge will find them guilty of double murder.

Albayalde, for his part, clarified the cash reward will not go to the policemen but to Emmanuel Judavar, the government's prime witness in the murder and Baldo's former associate.

Judavar was initially a party of the plot to kill Batocabe but backed out over disagreements with Baldo.

Three of the six alleged participants in the murder could also receive cash rewards after they applied to become witnesses in the Department of Justice's Witness Protection Program.

Albayalde did not disclose who among the six have applied. He clarified the PNP will not receive any of the cash incentives offered for the resolution of Batocabe's murder.

Meanwhile, the Commission on Elections in Bicol urged the PNP and the Armed Forces of the Philippines to monitor the political situation in Daraga following the arrest of Baldo.

Comelec-Bicol director Maria Juana Valesa said the police and the military should provide them situational reports in Daraga.

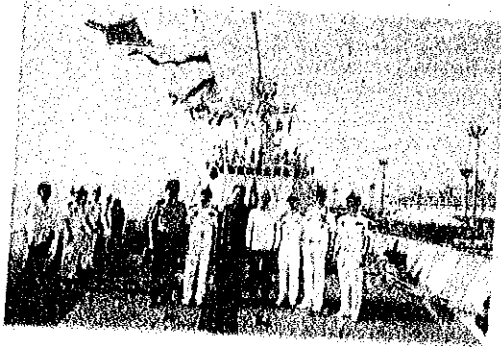
The town has been placed under Comelec control after Baldo was implicated in the killing of Batocabe, his rival in the mayoralty race in the local elections in May.

Valesa said the Department of the Interior and Local Government should also decide who will succeed Baldo should he be temporarily or permanently incapacitated to perform his duties following his arrest.

"We will only intervene should the sitting elective officials of Daraga be already obviously using their position to influence the conduct of election activities there," Valesa said.

- With Delon Porcalla, Cet Dematera

Philippine Secretary of National Defense visits Chinese navy ship in Manila



On January 17, 2019, the Escort Task Group 539 (ETG539) of the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) Navy, composed of the missile frigates Wuhu and Handan and the replenishment ship Dongpinghu, arrived in Manila to conduct a five-day good-will visit to the Republic of the Philippines:

And on the morning of Jan. 20, 2019, Delfin Negrillo Lorenzana, Secretary of National Defense of the Philippines, accompanied by Vice Admiral Robert Arugay Empedrad, Flag Officer-in-Command of the Philippine Navy, visited the missile frigate Wuhu. He was greeted by Chinese Ambassador Zhao Jianhua, Rear Admiral Xu Haihua and Rear Admiral Du Naihua, and Commanders of the task group at Pier 15 of Manila South Harbor. During the visit, he also inspected the honor guards of ETG 539 on board the missile frigate Wuhu.

Lorenzana toured the ship and received a briefing about the PLA Navy and the escort missions of ETG 539 in the Gulf of Aden and the waters off Somalia headed by Rear Admiral Xu Haihua and Rear Admiral Du Naihua.

Lorenzana warmly welcomed the visit of ETG 539 and expressed his sincere thanks for their hospitality. He said that military relations between the two countries is an important part of the overall relationship between China and the Philippines. He also expressed his support to the continuous friendly exchanges and cooperation between the two navies, which include high-level visits, personnel exchanges and mutual ship visits.

ASEAN FMs welcome improving cooperation with China on South China Sea issue

CHIANG MAI, Thailand, Jan. 18 (Xinhua) — Foreign ministers of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) welcomed the continued improving cooperation with China on the South China Sea issue, Thai Foreign Minister Don Pramudwinai said.

The ministers made the remarks during the ASEAN Foreign Ministers' Retreat, the first ASEAN foreign ministers' gathering this year, which was held in the northern Thai province of Chiang Mai on Jan. 17-18.

Don, also chairman of the retreat, said in a statement that the foreign ministers were encouraged by the progress of the substantive negotiations toward the early conclusion of an effective Code of Conduct in the South China Sea (COC) on a mutually agreed timeline.

Underscoring the importance of the full and effective implementation of the 2002 Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea (DOC) in its entirety, the foreign ministers emphasized the need to maintain an environment conducive to the COC negotiations, according to Don.

He also said the foreign ministers noted that ASEAN member states and China have agreed on a Single Draft COC Negotiating Text and have been looking forward to the completion of the first reading of the text by 2019, as announced at the 21st ASEAN-China Summit in Singapore in November 2018.

In a press conference held after the retreat, Don added



that the ASEAN foreign ministers "welcomed practical measures that could reduce tension, the risk of accidents, misunderstanding and miscalculation. We stressed the significance of undertaking confidence building and preventive measures to enhance trust amongst parties."

The retreat was also the first gathering of the ASEAN foreign ministers under Thailand's chairmanship this year. The foreign ministers had discussions on ASEAN's priorities for 2019, as well as deep exchanges on regional and international development.

**'NO SPECIAL SKILLS'
NOY: DU30 ADMIN
SHOULD BE WARY
OF BIG NUMBER OF
CHINESE WORKERS**

Former President Benigno Aquino III said the Duterte administration should be concerned about the entry of too many Chinese workers into the country.

At the launch on Tuesday of a book by De La Salle University professor Alfredo Robles Jr. on the Philippines' arbitral victory over China in the South China Sea dispute, Aquino was asked to comment on President Duterte's decision to shelve the arbitral award in exchange for more loans and investments from China.

"Many businessmen I've talked to observed that there are so many Chinese nationals working here," Aquino said.

Construction industry

He said many of these Chinese workers were in the construction industry, not in lines of work that required special skills.

"So how many thousands [of Chinese workers] are here who are taking jobs that should be for Filipinos," Aquino said.

Aquino also voiced concern over Mr. Duterte's decision to enter into "strategic, comprehensive cooperation" with China.

"How do you have a strategic partnership with a country that is perceived to be the primary threat to your interest?" he said. --DONA Z.

PAZZIBUGAN INQ

High court seeks DND report on martial law

BY JOMAR CANLAS

THE Supreme Court has ordered the Office of the Solicitor General (OSG) to submit the monthly report provided by the Department of National Defense (DND) to Congress on the implementation of martial law.

The high court gave the OSG until Friday, January 25, to file the report.

The tribunal said it would assess if the "sensitive and confidential matters" contained in the DND report should be

discussed and deliberated upon in an executive session.

The court earlier ordered Malacañang and Congress to answer the four petitions assailing the third extension of

martial law in Mindanao. Oral arguments were rescheduled to January 29 from January 22 and 23.

The petitions were filed by opposition lawmakers led by Rep. Edcel Lagman, the group of former Commission on Elections chairman Christian Monsod, party-list Bayan Muna, and a Lumad group.

The high court has ordered the consolidation of the cases.

In their petition, Monsod and his group argued that martial law should be lifted since "the present factual situation no longer calls for an extension of

martial law and the suspension of the privilege of the writ of *habeas corpus*."

Bayan Muna, meanwhile, urged the Supreme Court to "consider the impact on human rights" in deciding whether to uphold the extension of martial law.

President Rodrigo Duterte declared martial law in the region after the Islamic State-linked Maute group attacked Marawi City on May 23, 2017 in a bid to establish a caliphate in the South. A3

The President had asked Congress to extend martial law twice, up to Dec. 31, 2018 and again up to Dec. 31, 2019.

High court seeks detailed report on Mindanao ML

THE Supreme Court has ordered the government to submit the detailed report of the Department of National Defense regarding the implementation of martial law in Mindanao, which involves confidential matters.

The high court gave its order even as teachers, students and supporters of the indigenous group Lumad on Wednesday asked it to reject the implementation of President Rodrigo Duterte's Proclamation 216 extending martial law and the suspension of the privilege of the writ of habeas corpus in Mindanao until the end of 2019.

The petitioners through the Free legal Assistance Group led by human rights lawyer Jose Manuel Diokno, also asked the high court to direct the police and the military to cease and desist from continuing with their alleged militarization of the areas where lumad schools are located, the forcible closure of lumad schools and the harassment of teachers and students.

They argued that the extension of martial law and the suspension of the privilege of the writ of habeas corpus had resulted in the continuing harassment of Lumad schools.

In a notice dated Jan. 22, the high court said the government's submission must be made in 15 sealed copies and in the manner consistent with the prevailing government security requirements for confidential or classified information.

"Acting on the compliance dated January 21, 2019, submitted by the Office of the Solicitor General (OSG) to the Court and in view of the OSG's undertaking, the Court hereby directs the OSG to submit no later than 12 noon on Friday, January 25, 2019, the Department of National Defense's Monthly/Periodic Reports addressed to the Congress on the implementation of Martial Law from January 1, 2018 to December 31, 2018 which involve highly sensitive and confidential matters affecting the security of the State," the resolution says.

The Court said the "Members of the Court will make a preliminary assessment whether or not the said reports may only be appropriately discussed and deliberated upon in an executive session."

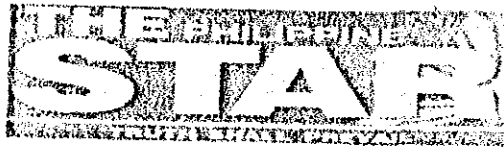
The high court is set to hear in oral arguments on Jan. 29 the consolidated petitions filed by opposition lawmakers led by Albay Rep. Edcel Lagman, the party-list lawmakers led by Bayan Muna Rep. Carlos Isagani Zarate and the group led by former Comelec chairman Christian Monsod questioning the legality of the third extension of martial law in Mindanao.

On Wednesday, a similar petition was filed before the high court by three lumad teachers and a student from Mindanao.

The previous petitions said the government failed to justify the reason for the re-extension, adding that this failure mocked the 1987 Constitution which says martial law can only be proclaimed if an actual rebellion or invasion exists. *12*

But Solicitor General Jose Calida argued that the factual bases to extend the duration of martial law in Mindanao under Proclamation 216 for another year or until December this year still existed, contrary to the allegations of the petitioners.

Calida said rebellion still persisted in Mindanao, and as such public safety required the extension. **Rey E. Requejo**



Lumads join call vs martial law extension in Mindanao

Indigenous or *lumad* teachers and students have filed a fourth petition before the Supreme Court (SC) to strike down the third extension of martial law in Mindanao.

The group led by *lumad* teacher Jeany Rose Hayahay asked the high tribunal to declare Proclamation 216 extending martial law until December this year as unconstitutional.

The petitioners are represented by Chel Diokno, Pablito Sanidad, Arno Sanidad and Theodore Te of the Free Legal Assistance Group and Integrated Bar of the Philippines national president Abdicel dan Elijah Fajardo.

The petition of the group of *lumads* is the first from Mindanao.

Albay first district Rep. Edcel Lagman, members of the Makabayan bloc of lawmakers led by Bayan Muna party-list Rep. Carlos Isagani Zarate and the group of former Commission on Elections chairman Christian Monsod filed the first three petitions.

"The President's own report indicates that the situation has improved, not worsened... rendering absent or insufficient any factual bases for the extension of... martial law," the 13-page petition read.

The group said the proclamation grants powers that are "overbroad and undefined, effectively suspending and curtailing other rights and guarantees under the 1987 Constitution."

Martial law should be stopped as it "resulted in an environment of continued impunity directed against *lumad* schools, which have been harassed, intimidated and red tagged," it added.

The SC is set to hold oral arguments on the case next week.

Solicitor General Jose Calida filed the comment for the executive branch and sought the dismissal of the petition filed by Lagman's group.

Calida said rebellion, a key requirement for the declaration of martial law under the Constitution, persists in Mindanao.

- Edu Punay

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MANILA BULLETIN

THE NATION'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

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Army condemns NPA attack in Quezon

By FRANCIS WAKEFIELD

The commander of the Army's 202nd Brigade Wednesday condemned the New Peoples' Army (NPA) for attacking a construction site in Quezon on Monday.

Brig. Gen. Arnulfo Marcelo B. Burgos made the remark after communist rebels attacked workers of the Pacific Summit Construction Group Inc. (PSCGI) in Sitio Pandarawan, Barangay Maragondon, Real town.

Burgos said the workers who were sleeping were rounded up by about 10 insurgents at around 11:30 p.m. Then, the rebels burned the heavy equipment at the site.

According to one of the construction workers present during the incident, they were asleep when the armed men arrived and, at gunpoint ordered them to drop to the ground.

"The NPAs are desperate. They are hard up in complying with their leader's order to go on offensive. They can only do that to civilians, threaten and hurt them. Their desire is to frighten the people and hopefully, force contractors to pay extortion money to them,"

Burgos said.

Lt. Col. Melencio Ragudo, head of the 80th IB, said troops together with the local police were pursuing the rebel group.

Major General Rhoderick M. Parayno, the Commander of the Philippine Army's 2nd Infantry Division based in Tanay, Rizal, said that the communists are pure terrorists.

"In this case, they have looted civilians who have nothing to do with their cause. They have hurt them, and they have burned construction equipment and homes of civilians. They have no respect to International Humanitarian Law," Parayno said.

According to the project manager, two to three dump trucks, two back-hoes, one generator set, one transit mixer, one loader, one L300 Van, and one unserviceable Strada pick-up used for mini dam construction were burned.

Checkpoints were set up in the area.

Meanwhile, troops of the 1st Infantry Battalion under 202nd Infantry Brigade discovered an NPA arms cache of two rifles, one M653 and one Bushmaster in Barangay Bacao, Taysan, Batangas

on Tuesday.

Recent NPA surrenderers revealed the location of the cache.

No need for communism for PH to have good land reform program - Duterte

Communist ideology is not needed to implement a genuine land reform program in the country, President Duterte said Tuesday.

"To date, I have distributed something like 6,000 titles. You do not have

to be a communist to have a good, true blue land reform program," Duterte said in a speech at the Annual Assembly of Provincial Union of Leaders against Illegality (PULI) in Lucena City, Quezon.

►9

No need for communism... ◀1

The President said the communist ideology is "over and done with" as countries all over the world are adopting democracy.

"Iyan sinasabi ko sa komunista eh (that's what I'm telling communists). You have jeopardized, caused sorrow and misery to the country fighting for a lost cause. Wala na 'yang ideolohiya ng komunista (The communist ideology is no longer there). It's over and done with," he said.

Duterte said communists will never gain control of the Philippines.

"Mga tao magpakamatay at pumatay ng kapwa nila Pilipino na walang kasalanan. Basta na lang patayin kasi

hindi magbigay ng taxation. Susunugin 'yung hindi iyo (Filipinos die and kill innocent countrymen just because they cannot give tax. Communists commit arson.) And for what? For 52 years. Baka akala ninyo makuha ninyo ang gobyerno (Maybe you're thinking you can get control of the government). Not in a million years. Hindi nga ninyo mahawakan isang barangay (You can't even gain control of one village)," he said.

Duterte urged members of the rebel group Communist Party of the Philippines - New People's Army (CPP-NPA) to surrender and return to the government's fold and promised them liveli-

hood programs if they do so.

"Mag-surrender kayo (You surrender). I will guarantee you, I will build a house for you here. Maghanap ako. Kaagad, magpagawa ako sa NHA [National Housing Authority] (I'll find a place and immediately ask the NHA to build houses). Then I will pay you tapos magtayo ako dito ng TESDA [Technical Education and Skills Development Authority] (and order a TESDA center to be established)," he said.

The CPP-NPA, in previous reports, has been allegedly tagged in cases of extortion, mass murder, and violation of indigenous people's rights.

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

AFP: NPA prowls on students

Albayalde said Rizza's case somewhat validated their long-held belief that some students are being used by communist rebels to advance their cause.

By Bobby Ricohermoso

The Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) is investigating reports that communist rebels are allegedly using the regular immersion activities of university students in far-flung provinces in indoctrinating and recruiting them into their fold.

Col. Noel Detoyato, AFP public affairs office chief, said the communists actually have been on the prowl in various learning institutions for the longest time, looking for students whom

they can recruit.

"That has been happening since time immemorial. The CPP-NPA-NDF recruiters look at students as a rich source of cadres and they have long been active in recruiting them," Detoyato said.

To address the situation, Detoyato said they are actively coordinating with school officials, parent-teacher organizations and other stakeholders and conducting lectures and symposia to expose the Reds' scheme.

To recall, the issue came into a head after the parents of University of Santo

Tomas coed, Rizza Divine Camingawan, 18, went missing after a supposed immersion with farmers last December.

Philippine National Police (PNP) Director General Oscar Albayalde vowed to help find the victim after learning what happened to her.

"We want to help the relatives of this student so talk to us and we will help you search for your daughter," Albayalde said.

Detoyato also offered to help find the missing legal management student.

Albayalde said Rizza's case somewhat validated their long-held belief that some students are being used by communist rebels to advance their cause.

"This is what we have been saying before that we have recovered IDs of

students during encounters with communist rebels," he said.

"Some of them are 22, 23 years old who were supposed to be in school but became casualties of this ongoing war against rebellion," Albayalde added.

The girl's father, Roland, initially asked for help from the public but later declared that his daughter was already home.

But his wife, Luisa, subsequently clarified that their daughter was not yet with them.

The mother said she would sometimes exchange messages with Rizza Divine but was not sure whether it was really her daughter she was talking to.

Kidnap, robbery suspects shot dead

A suspected kidnap gang member was killed in an alleged encounter with government forces in Sirawai town, Zamboanga del Norte on Tuesday night.

Police said Jul Hassan of the Jamilon Tukanan gang and his cohorts fired at soldiers of the 42nd Infantry Battalion and personnel of the Zamboanga del Norte police patrolling Barangay Sipakit.

A .45-caliber pistol, a .38-caliber revolver, a grenade and a cell phone were reportedly recovered from the fatality.

In Bulacan, a man accused of robbing a certain Roberto Garcia in Barangay Sapang Putol in San Ildefonso was gunned down by responding law enforcers at around 1:30 a.m. yesterday.

Police said the companions of the fatalities managed to escape.

- Roel Pareño, Ramon Efren Lazaro

Kidnap gang member killed in Zambo clash

ZAMBOANGA CITY: Security forces killed a member of a kidnapping group in a firefight in Zamboanga del Norte's Sirawai town in southern Philippines, officials said on Wednesday.

Army Capt. Clint Antipala, a spokesman for the 1st Infantry Division, said policemen and soldiers were patrolling the village of Sipakit when they ran into a group of bandits and a firefight ensued.

He said Jul Hassan was killed in the running gunbattle, but the other gunmen escaped. Hassan was a member of the Jamilon Tukalan Group, blamed by authorities for the spate of kidnappings for ransom and extortion activities in the province.

Antipala said a report by Lt. Col. Danilo Ambe, commander of the 42nd Infantry Battalion, said security forces also recovered a .45-caliber pistol, a .38-caliber revolver and one fragmentation grenade, including a cell phone.

He said there were no police or

military casualties.

Maj. Gen. Roseller Murillo, the division commander, praised the troops for the killing of Hassan and said, "Our campaign against armed groups together with police will be relentless in order to minimize the atrocities and attain a just and lasting peace in our area."

Last week, soldiers also clashed with bandits in the neighboring town of Sibuco and one infantryman was killed. Troops were serving arrest warrants on criminal gang leader, Basiran Ahil Mudja, when fighting erupted.

The group fought with security forces for about 15 minutes then the gunmen escaped. A7

Mudja has two warrants of arrest for murder and attempted murder in the province, which is also a stronghold of the rebel group Moro Islamic Liberation Front and bandits. It was unknown if the gunmen belong to the same group or not. **AL JACINTO**

Marawi City rehab needs more funds

TASK Force Bangon Marawi (TFBM) is seeking an additional P8.5 billion for the rehabilitation of Marawi City since the P3.5 billion allocated for Marawi in the proposed 2019 budget will not be enough.

Ricardo Jalad, administrator of the Office of Civil Defense (OCD) and TFBM, is a total of P12 billion would be needed to rehabilitate the Islamic city. This on top of assistance from foreign countries and the P5 billion sourced from the Yolanda budget.

"That need cropped up after our initial review of the proposed projects from various implementing agencies," he said in a text message to reporters.

Jalad said the request for additional funding was a result of their two-day consultation.

"A potential funding shortage may occur in the implementation of projects in Marawi," he said.

Asked about the status of foreign aid, Jalad replied that the OCD only has P36.9 million in donated funds at hand.

In 2017, Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana listed down the countries that donated funds for Marawi City, including Australia, the United States, the European Union, Japan, Thailand and China.

Australia donated P1 billion; the US, P730 million; Japan, P100 million; Thailand, P100 million; China, P85 million; and the European Union, P45 million.

The Department of Finance last year announced that the Philippines received P35.1 billion worth of pledges for the rehabilitation of Marawi City from several nations including the above mentioned countries, Spain and Germany.

In September 2017, Lorenzana also disclosed that Budget Secretary Benjamin Diokno allocated P5 billion of the P7.5 billion of Yolanda funds for Marawi.

Last Saturday, Gen. Benjamin Madrigal Jr., Armed Forces chief of staff, went to the main battle area of Marawi City along with members of the media from Manila.

The houses and establishments there had not been rehabilitated but were only marked with spray paint to determine the owners of the houses.

DEMPSEY REYES

PLEBISCITE VOTE COUNT

MONEY POLITICS BLAMED FOR LOSS OF BOL IN SULU

**By Germelina Lacorte
and Julie Alipala**
@inqmindanao

DAVAO CITY—A peace advocate and educator on Wednesday blamed money politics for the defeat of the Bangsamoro Organic Law (BOL) in Sulu province.

The charter of the proposed Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM) lost the plebiscite held on Monday for its ratification, with 163,526 voters rejecting and 137,630 approving it.

Udtog Tago, chair of the Provincial Plebiscite Board of Canvassers, said Sulu, which has 19 towns, had a voting population of 375,137.

He said 301,196 people voted, a turnout of 80.3 percent.

But Octavio Dinampo, a pro-

fessor at Mindanao State University, said he saw only a few people at polling stations in Jolo, the provincial capital, during the plebiscite.

"Jolo is the window to the other towns of Sulu," Dinampo said. "When all is well in Jolo, it means all is well in the other towns."

Fight among politicians

As late as 11 a.m. on Monday, he said, only a few people were at the polling centers in Jolo.

Dinampo said there were reports that violence would erupt at the polls during the vote.

"Most people decided to stay at home," Dinampo said.

A power outage interrupted the counting of the votes for 25 minutes on Monday night, he said.

Dinampo blamed it all on politicians who opposed the

BOL and used their money to get people to vote against it.

"They want to show that Jolo is a country within a country, that what the provincial government wants is also what the people want," he said.

Temogen Tulawie, chair of the human rights group Sulu Bawgbug and a political arch-enemy of former Sulu Gov. Abdusakur Tan, said the plebiscite was a fight among the political clans of the province, especially between Tan and Vice Gov. Ben Loong, an ally of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) who is running for governor in the midterm elections in May.

"Sakur Tan was very aggressive in campaigning for [a no vote and he used] intimidation and money," Tulawie said.

He said the BOL overwhelm-

ingly won the vote in Parang town, a bailiwick of the Loongs, and in most of the towns whose leaders were allies of the MILF.

The MILF, which has signed a peace agreement with the government, led the campaign for ratification of the BOL, which would establish the BARMM through which the Muslims would have greater control of Mindanao.

P2M for 8 villages

Dinampo said there were reports that eight villages in Jolo got P2 million each in exchange for no votes.

He said voters got P40 to P300 for voting against the BOL.

But the defeat of the BOL in Sulu will not matter, he said, as the province is part of the Autonomous Region in Muslim

Mindanao (ARMM), which the BARMM will replace and whose vote is counted as one.

"Sulu's no vote could only be considered if the ARMM as a whole voted no. But since the ARMM voted yes, Sulu's no vote is an exercise in futility," Dinampo said.

"They cannot opt out because the counting covers the entire region since Sulu is part of the ARMM," said lawyer Frances Arabe, head of the Commission on Elections special monitoring team in the Basilan-Sulu-Tawi-Tawi area.

Panglima Estino Mayor Benzar Estino said the no votes prevailed because strong political parties were able to control their allied mayors and that "money changed hands."

"We've learned that people

who voted no were given P500," Estino said.

Something's not right

He said the returns from the towns that delivered the most no votes came in late for canvassing.

"In fact, the nearest town to Jolo was the last to be counted and canvassed Definitely something is not right there," Estino said.

The towns that voted for the BOL were Panglima Tahil, Talipao, Indanan, Luuk, Parang, Tongkil and Panglima Estino.

In Tongkil, no one voted against the BOL.

The towns that voted against the law were Panamao, Pata, Maimbung, Omar, Tapul, Kalingalang Caluang, Patikul, Pandami, Lugus, Siasi, Pangutaran and Jolo. INQ *AY*

Sulu, Isabela City vote down BOL

BY AL JACINTO

ZAMBOANGA CITY: The capital of Basilan province, Isabela City, has joined Sulu province in rejecting the Bangsamoro Organic Law or BOL.

As a result, Isabela City, which is not part of the soon-to-be abolished Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM), will not join the

➤ **Vote down A2**

BANGSAMORO PLEBISCITE

Lanao del Sur (local canvassing)	Yes - 503,420	No - 9,735
Magulindanao (local canvassing)	Yes - 599,581	No - 9,096
Basilan (partial and unofficial)	Yes - 146,898	No - 6,486
Sulu (local canvassing)	Yes - 137,630	No - 163,526
Tawi-Tawi (partial and unofficial)	Yes - 151,788	No - 10,307

ARMM Total	Yes - 1,539,317	No - 199,150
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Cotabato City (local canvassing)	Yes - 36,682	No - 29,994
Isabela City (partial and unofficial)	Yes - 19,630	No - 22,441

Source: AFP Western Mindanao Command

VOTE DOWN FROM A1

Sulu

Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao or Barmm.

An autonomous entity with greater powers and control over natural resources, the Barmm replace the ARMM, as part of a 2014 peace deal with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF).

The entire ARMM voted on Monday on whether or not to ratify the BOL, passed by Congress last year, with the "yes" vote leading overwhelmingly in four out of five provinces.

Apprehension over the expected MILF dominance in the future Bangsamoro government fueled the "no" vote, which won handily in Isabela City and Sulu province.

Unlike Isabela City, however, Sulu has no choice but become part of the Barmm because it is already part of the existing autonomous region, which voted as a whole in the January 21 plebiscite.

The governor of Sulu, Abdusakur "Toto" Tan 2nd, has a pending petition before the Supreme Court to declare the BOL unconstitutional.

The "yes" vote, however, won a major victory in Cotabato City, which is part of the ARMM province of Maguindanao but not part of the autonomous region. Cotabato

City will, thus, be part of the Barmm and serve as its capital.

Cotabato City's "yes" votes totaled 36,682 while the "no" votes got 29,994.

Another plebiscite will be held on February 6, with residents in Lanao del Norte deciding whether six towns will be part of the Barmm. Residents in North Cotabato will also vote on the inclusion of 67 villages in the new autonomous region.

Isabela City Vice Mayor Cherrylyn Akbar and Jann Akbar, a strong advocate for the establishment of a federal government, spearheaded the "NO to BOL" campaign in the city.

Wednesday's final plebiscite tally showed Isabela with 22,441 voting for "no" to BOL and 19,630 voting "yes."

"We are so happy and the voice of the people is heard loud and clear. We rejected the BOL," Akbar said after receiving news of the results of the referendum.

Although Isabela rejected BOL, municipalities in the province voted for the ratification of the organic law.

"What's important here is that Isabela will never be a part of the so-called Bangsamoro autonomous region," Akbar said.

Sulu rejected the BOL, with 163,526 residents voting "no" and 137,630 for its ratification. A total of 301,196 registered voters participated during the plebiscite held on Monday.

"It (BOL) will not prosper in Sulu. We do not want to be part of the Bangsam-

oro region. We are Tausugs, we are Bangsa Sug. Our people have spoken and they should respect our stand," said former governor Sakur Tan, the spokesman and special envoy of the Royal Council of the Sulu Sultanate.

Tan said the Tausugs wanted out of the autonomous region and be part again of the Zamboanga Peninsula or Region 9.

The ARMM is composed of Basilan, Sulu, Tawi-Tawi, Maguindanao and Lanao del Sur provinces.

Lanao del Sur saw 513,155 registered voters cast their votes. Of the number, a total of 503,420 "yes" votes were recorded while "no" got 9,735, according to local canvassers.

Maguindanao overwhelmingly voted "yes," with 599,581 votes. "No" votes totaled 9,096. A total of 608,846 residents voted on Monday.

In the partial and unofficial count relayed by the Western Mindanao Command, the province of Tawi-Tawi got 151,788 "yes" votes and 10,307 "no" votes, while Basilan recorded 146,898 "yes" and 6,486 "no."

In Manila, the Comelec en banc, sitting as the National Plebiscite Board of Canvassers (NPBC), moved for the second time the start of its official canvassing as it had yet to receive certificates of canvass (CoCs).

The NPBC will reconvene at 2 p.m. on Thursday.

Discrepancies were noted in the figures that appeared on the CoCs of Sulu and Cotabato City.

The CoC from Sulu indicated that there were 137,630 "yes" votes and 163,526 "no" votes, or a total of 301,156. The total did not tally with the 301,196 who voted, or a difference of 40 votes.

The CoC from Cotabato City showed a disparity of 22,649 votes. The CoC indicated that of the 71,963 registered voters, 39,027 voted. But the total number of "yes" and "no" votes was only 61,676.

Jimenez explained that there was "clerical" error in the CoCs from Cotabato City and Sulu, adding that they would be corrected during the national canvassing.

Cotabato City Mayor Cynthia Guiani-Sayadi, in a radio interview, said the city would file a protest against the results of the plebiscite, claiming there was massive disenfranchisement of voters.

Malacañang on Wednesday urged those against the inclusion of Cotabato City in the Bangsamoro region to honor the result.

"All the major players, pro and con, must now come together and work together for the success of the common aspiration of the Bangsamoro people, which is to have a progressive and peaceful Mindanao," spokesman Salvador Panelo said.

**WITH DEMPSEY REYES,
WILLIAM B. DEPASUPIL AND
RALPH U. VILLANUEVA**

Palace celebrates BOL ratification

**BY GERARD NAVAL
and JOCELYN MONTEMAYOR.**

THE canvassing of votes in the plebiscite for the ratification of the Bangsamoro Organic Law (BOL) has just begun, but this early, Malacañang is celebrating a Yes victory.

Presidential spokesman and Chief Presidential Legal Counsel Salvador Panelo said Malacañang is pleased with the initial results of the unofficial tally of the local Board of Canvassers of

the Commission on Elections (Comelec) where the "yes" vote had prevailed.

"The sovereign people have spoken, those who are against the BOL must yield to the rule of the majority. All the major players, pro and con, must now come together and work together for the success of the common aspiration of the Bangsamoro people, which is to have a progressive and peaceful Mindanao," he said.

The unofficial count showed

the Yes votes dominating the plebiscite in Cotabato City, Basilan province, Maguindanao and Lanao del Sur.

The Comelec in Manila will hold the official count.

In Manila, only the certificate of canvass (COC) of Cotabato City has reached the Comelec main office.

The canvass was completed but it didn't go without controversy.

This after a "discrepancy"

See PALACE > Page B3

• FROM PAGE B1 •

PALACE

in the figures was noted in the number of registered voters and in the number of those who actually voted as written in the COC.

The Cotabato City COC declared that there were 71,963 registered voters and 39,027 actual voters.

The COC said the "Yes" votes numbered 36,682 and the "No" votes 24,994.

The Comelec dismissed the discrepancies as "clerical errors."

"Upon verification with the Project of Precincts, it would appear that a clerical error has been made," assured Comelec spokesman James Jimenez in a statement.

Jimenez tweeted on Saturday night that Cotabato City has 113,751 registered voters and 61,676 actual voters.

Jimenez's 61,676 actual voters matched the sum of the "Yes" and "No" votes written in the COC.

"Such an error can be raised and corrected during the national

canvass, without affecting the outcome of the plebiscite," he said.

The Cotabato City COC is still up for canvassing by the National Plebiscite Board of Canvassers (NPBOC) in Manila.

The NPBOC reset its scheduled reconvening from Wednesday to Thursday as there is no more COC to canvass, according to its Comelec Secretary Atty. Consuelo Diola.

"We wish to announce that we will resume session tomorrow at 2 p.m.," Diola she said.

Panelo acknowledged the complaints and continued opposition of some groups to BOL, including those of Cotabato City Mayor Cynthia Guian Sayadi, who disputed the results of the unofficial count in her city and claimed that there were some irregularities in the conduct of the plebiscite.

"As in all elections and plebiscites, there will be claims of irregularity, fraud and intimidation," he said, assuring the public that the full extent of the law would be meted against those who are

proven to have caused discord in the plebiscite.

He added that, despite the discordant voices, the more important thing is the voice of the people would prevail.

Malacañang also declared February 6 as a special non-working day in parts of Mindanao to enable voters to join the second day of the plebiscite for the ratification of the BOL and exercise their right to vote.

Executive Secretary Salvador Medialdea, on Jan. 21, signed Proclamation 656 which declares a special non-working day the province of Lanao del Norte except Iligan City; and in the municipalities of Aleosan, Carmen, Kabacan, Mid-sayap, Pikit, Pigkawayan and Tulu-nan - all in the province of North Cotabato, where the plebiscite will be held in two weeks.

Last January 21, the first day of plebiscite was held in the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM), Isabela City in Basilan and Cotabato City.

Marawi mayor pleads for BOL 'fighting chance'

MARAWI City Mayor Majul Gandamra on Wednesday said the Bangsamoro Organic Law "must be given a fighting chance by all of us" in Mindanao even as the early returns indicate a victory for the "Yes" side in the referendum.

This developed as the city government announced that the conduct of the plebiscite in Marawi last Monday to ratify the BOL was "a peaceful and successful one."

"Marawi City is one with the rest of the Bangsamoro in the ratification of the RA [Republic Act] 11054, and fervently hopes that the BOL and the BARRM [Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao] will effect a lasting peace and healing in Mindanao after decades of conflict and inequity, and this has been demonstrated by the overwhelming 'Yes' response of the city's constituents," Gandamra said.

"As someone who has lived all his life in this area, I have unfortunately seen how history damaged the Bangsamoro. I have seen how its ramifications have resulted in many tragedies here on this land, one of which just happened only close to two years ago, in Marawi," the mayor noted.

Ayunan G. Guntig 84

Bangsamoro region to spur growth—Neda

THE National Economic and Development Authority said the creation of the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region will spur growth in the region and contribute to the expansion of the national economy.

The first part of the plebiscite in Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao, Cotabato City and Isabela City took place on Jan. 21. It will be followed by another plebiscite on Feb. 6 in Lanao del Norte, except Iligan City, and North Cotabato, as well as local government units that petitioned for inclusion.

Economic Planning Secretary Ernesto Pernia said Wednesday the ratification of the Bangsamoro Organic Law through a plebiscite and the creation of BAR would increase investments in the region.

"Given that the BOL provides a lot of opportunities to increase the budget for BAR, we expect to see more programs and infrastructure projects in the region," Pernia said.

An estimated P70 billion for the fiscal year of 2019 alone will be provided by the national government as an assistance to the region.

Pernia said the planned major infrastructure projects in the region would cost P22.15 billion in 2019. **Julito G. Rada**

PALACE PLEASED

BANGSAMORO AUTONOMY LAW GETS COTABATO CITY APPROVAL

By Tina G. Santos
@santostinaINQ

Malacañang is glad that Cotabato City voted to approve the Bangsamoro Organic Law (BOL), although more votes appeared to have been cast than there are voters there.

The Commission on Elections (Comelec) has blamed the "conflicting data" on "clerical error" in the preparation of the certificate of canvass.

The document, which arrived at Comelec headquarters in Manila on Wednesday afternoon, stated that there were 39,027 voters in Cotabato City, 22,649 lower than the 61,676

votes cast during Monday's plebiscite for the ratification of the BOL.

Of the total number of votes cast, 36,682 were for ratification and 24,994 for rejection.

'People have spoken'

The BOL won by 11,688, pleasing Malacañang.

Cotabato City officials opposed the BOL, but President Duterte himself traveled to the city days before the vote to pitch for the charter of the proposed Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao.

"The sovereign people have spoken. Those who are against

the BOL must yield to the rule of the majority," presidential spokesperson Salvador Panelo said on Wednesday.

James Jimenez, spokesperson for the Comelec, explained the discrepancy between the number of votes cast and the total number of voters in Cotabato City.

He said the certificate of canvass apparently misstated the number of voters in the city, which was actually 113,751.

Error will be corrected

Verification with the Project of Precincts, he said, showed the "clerical error."

"Rest assured that [the] error can be raised and corrected during the national canvass without affecting the outcome of the plebiscite," Jimenez told reporters.

He said the National Plebiscite Board of Canvassers would decide whether to penalize the three election officers who signed the certificate of canvass.

Jimenez refused to comment on the allegations of Cotabato City Mayor Cynthia Guiani-Sayadi about the results of the plebiscite pending the filing of a complaint with the Comelec.

Sayadi, who led the cam-

paign against the BOL in the city, had reportedly threatened to question the results, claiming that members of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front harassed

schoolteachers who manned the polling centers and voters during the plebiscite. —WITH A REPORT FROM CHRISTINE O. AVENDAÑO INQ A4

Isabela votes no; Cotabato mayor decries cheating

By ROEL PAREÑO

ZAMBOANGA CITY - Residents of Isabela City in Basilan province rejected the Bangsamoro Organic Law (BOL), effectively expressing their refusal to join the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM).

At the official and final canvassing of plebiscite votes yesterday afternoon at the Sangguniang Panlungsod hall, the board of canvassers noted that 22,441 voted "no" while 19,032 voted "yes".

Meanwhile, Cotabato City Mayor Cynthia Guiani-Sayadi told reporters that she has enlisted lawyers to contest the plebiscite results on the grounds of fraud and other irregularities.

Sayadi complained of discrepancies in the vote tally and said the issues must be resolved by the Commission on Elections (Comelec).

She claimed that many voters were harassed and forced by groups to vote in favor of the BOL.

In Isabela city, Basilan, the canvassing was hotly con-

tested and delayed for two days, with supporters from both sides closely watching the proceedings after the voting concluded on Jan. 21.

It was the third time that Isabela, the former capital of Basilan since the province's creation, rejected being part of the autonomous region - first was when the province opted not to be part of the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) in 1989 and second in 2001, a month after Isabela was granted city status when it opted out from the expanded ARMM while the rest of Basilan joined.

Vice Mayor Cherrylyn Akbar expressed her gratitude for respecting the decision to not be part of the BARMM.

Akbar maintained that Isabela, which is under the administrative jurisdiction of Zamboanga peninsula, will depend largely on the national government.

"We are not having worries that Isabela city will be left behind considering that we are part of the Republic of the Philippines and (we have) a President who is very sup-

portive of our undertakings," Akbar said.

But Akbar said Isabela's position may change once they see "good development in the BARMM."

"If we can see that BARMM is really good then maybe if there will be another plebiscite and there is no problem if they will accept us in the BARMM. Right now there are still doubts and what we want is (for the mind and hearts of the people to be respected)," Akbar added.

Canvassing deferred

The Comelec, convening as the National Plebiscite Board of Canvassers (NPBOC), has deferred the canvassing of the ballots for the BOL to tomorrow.

Consuelo Diola, NPBOC secretary, said they reset the canvassing because the board had not received any ballots as of 1:30 p.m. yesterday.

The NPBOC received the first certificate of canvass from Cotabato at around 4:48 p.m. delivered by the city's acting election officer Romel Rama.

In a phone interview, Com-

clec spokesman James Jiménez reported that Cotabato posted the lowest voter turnout at 54.22 percent. For provinces, Sulu was the lowest at 80.2 percent.

Although the canvassing of plebiscite votes in Cotabato has been completed, the Comelec noted discrepancy in the data yesterday.

Jimenez said the discrepancy was noted in the "statistics for the number of registered voters of Cotabato and the number of voters who actually voted in the city."

But Jimenez assured the public that "such error can be raised and corrected during the national canvass without affecting the outcome of the plebiscite, either in Cotabato city alone or throughout the entire plebiscite area."

The Comelec will hold another referendum on Feb. 6 in 28 barangays in Lanao del Norte if the "yes" vote wins in the Jan. 21 plebiscite.

Malacañang has declared Feb. 6 a non-working holiday in Lanao del Norte and parts of North Cotabato.

The declaration covers Lanao del Norte except Iligan

city and the towns of Aleosan, Carmen, Kabacan, Midsayap, Pikit, Pigkayawan and Tuluhan in North Cotabato.

Malacañang also called for the results of the plebiscite in Cotabato to be upheld.

Presidential spokesman Salvador Panelo said the public must yield to the rule of the majority.

"Consistent with the position of the President for the ratification of the BOL, we are pleased that the 'yes' vote has prevailed in Cotabato city, based on the complete but unofficial tally of the Comelec," Panelo said.

A least 3,209 police personnel will be deployed in Lanao del Norte and North Cotabato on Feb. 6.

Philippine National Police (PNP) chief Director General Oscar Albayalde said they will be closely watching the two provinces, especially Lanao del Norte, which is considered a critical area in the midterm elections in May.

Transition

The BARMM that will soon be constituted has been allocated P62 billion this year,

Senate Majority Leader Juan Miguel Zubiri said yesterday.

For his part, Sen. Aquilino Pimentel III commended the Comelec and the PNP for the peaceful conduct of the BOL plebiscite.

Outgoing ARMM Gov. Mujiv Hataman has assured the public of the smooth transition of ARMM to BARMM if the BOL is ratified.

Hataman added that he would be meeting with officials of the Bangsamoro Transition Authority.

Maguindanao Rep. Sandra Sema will sponsor a bill next week naming Cotabato City as the seat of BARMM.

In a text message yesterday, Moro Islamic Liberation Front chairman Al Haj Murad Ebrahim said he was grateful to the voters for the ratification of the BOL.

Maguindanao Gov. Esmael Mangudadatu maintained that not a single untoward incident was recorded in the province on Monday. - With John Unson, Sheila Crisostomo, Alexis Romero, Edith Regalado, Emmanuel Tupas, Christina Mendez, Paolo Romero, Cecille Suerte Felipe 4

Cotabato City, Lanao Sur vote 'Yes'

It did not reflect true will of
Cotabato City people – Mayor Siyadi

By **ARMANDO B. FENEQUITO JR.** and **PNA**

Cotabato City and Lanao del Sur voted to ratify the Bangsamoro Organic Law (BOL) and may soon become part of the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM)

On Tuesday night, the Commission on Elections-Cotabato City (Comelec-

Cotabato City) announced that the "Yes" votes for the inclusion of the city in the BARMM was 36,682, while 24,994 voted "No."

A total of 61,676 people cast their votes out of the 113,751 registered voters in the city.

As soon as the canvassing officials declared the completion of counting for the plebiscite on the ►6

Cotabato City, Lanao...

41

BOL, voters who campaigned for "Yes to BOL" celebrated with an impromptu motorcade around major city streets.

The victorious pro-BOL chanted "Allahu Akbar!" (God is Great) as they roamed around the city.

Lanao del Sur likewise voted to ratify BOL, the Comelec said.

Based on the final tally released by the Provincial Plebiscite Board of Canvassers (PPBC), a total of 503,420 voted "Yes" while 9,735 voters were against being included in the BARMM under the BOL.

In Marawi City alone, 58,688 voted "Yes," while only 112 voted "No."

'Not the will of Cotabato City'

Cotabato City Mayor Frances Cynthia Guiani-Siyadi, however, is set to file a protest on the result of the plebiscite.

Siyadi said the votes being canvassed are not the real voice of the people of the city since many of them did not vote due to fear and harassment.

"It did not reflect the true will of the people of Cotabato City. What were those outsiders doing inside Cotabato City? Is it not that reactionary forces are prohibited under the Omnibus Election Code?" she asked.

She said teachers who were supposed to serve as members of the plebiscite committee did not show up for election duty because of the threats.

Siyadi added that the grenade blast at the Rasalan residence and another one found in Rojas High School were meant to scare the voters.

She claimed that thousands of Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) supporters allegedly blocked city voters from voting in some areas.

Siyadi said there were also massive disenfranchisement which added to the statistical improbability in those areas where the "MILF outsiders dominated."

"The military and the PNP were not in control. We have lots of irregularities to mention," she said.

"Those who voted 'No' were harassed. Where will they go? Who can

protect them?" Siyadi asked.

The mayor said her lawyer friends are now preparing the documents and will possibly submit them before the holding of next BOL plebiscite on February 6.

Discrepancy

A discrepancy, however, was noticed in Cotabato City as the certificate of canvass showed that only 39,027 actually voted in 373 precincts (an updated certificate of canvass puts the total number of polling precincts to 374).

But when tallied, the "Yes" and "No" votes recorded a total of 61,676 votes, or a difference of 22,649 votes against the number of actual voters.

Lawyer Rommel Rama, acting city Comelec officer, said the discrepancies were computer-generated and that they are still conducting further validation. He did not elaborate.

Comelec spokesman James Jimenez said this was a mere "clerical error" which can be corrected in the national canvass.

"Upon verification with the Project of Precincts, it would appear that a clerical error has been made," he said in a statement.

"Such an error can be raised and corrected during the national canvass, without affecting the outcome of the plebiscite, either in Cotabato City alone, or throughout the entire plebiscite area," added Jimenez.

Earlier, the poll official tweeted that Cotabato City has 113,751 registered voters and 61,676 actual voters.

But based on the Cotabato City COC, there were 71,963 registered voters and 39,027 actual voters.

Lawyer Ray Sumalipao, Comelec-ARMM director, said the poll body will officially announce the plebiscite results in Manila in the coming days, probably after February 6.

Another plebiscite is scheduled on February 6 in six towns in Lanao del Norte and in 67 villages in North Cotabato - 39 original villages listed in BOL and 28 other villages that petitioned for inclusion and approved by the poll body. (With a report from Leslie Ann G. Aquino)

24 January 2019



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Cotabato joins Bangsamoro

By Kristina Maralit

Cotabato City has voted to become part of the Bangsamoro region with the "Yes" vote prevailing in the province based on

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Cotabato joins Bangsamoro

We saw how the historic democratic exercise works in the areas covered by the plebiscite

From page 1

the complete but still unofficial count of the Commission on Elections on the Bangsamoro Organic Law (BOL) plebiscite prevailed in Cotabato City, according to Comelec.

It has previously twice expressed opposition to joining the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) in 1989 and 2001.

Presidential spokesman Salvador Panelo said the result of the plebiscite "must be upheld despite discordant voices" and urged those against the BOL to "yield to the rule of the majority."

"All the major players, pro and con, must now come together and work together for the success of the common aspiration of the Bangsamoro people, which is to have a progressive and peaceful Mindanao," Panelo said in a statement.

He likewise gave assurances that those who attempted to discredit the

voting will not go unpunished by the government while ensuring the decision of the people will stand.

Thumbs up

Presidential Adviser on Peace Process Carlito Galvez Jr. praised the successful conduct of the political exercise.

"On Monday, we saw how the historic democratic exercise works in the areas covered by the plebiscite," Galvez said.

"I congratulate the men and women of AFP, Philippine National Police and the Comelec, as well as the public-school teachers and civil society groups for guarding the sanctity of the ballot and for ensuring the safety of the voters," he added.

He also asks everyone to respect and wait for the outcome of the results.

Meanwhile, Maj. Gen. Cirilito Sobejana said the overall plebiscite in Maguindanao province and Cotabato City was generally peaceful.

"The positive outcome is attributed to the close coordination and synchronized efforts between the security forces and the Commission on Elections together with the concerned stakeholders," he added.

"As in all elections and plebiscites, there will be claims of irregularity, fraud and intimidation. If they do not affect the credibility of the elections and alter the result thereof, while those responsible for the undemocratic methods will be prosecuted to the full extent of the law, the result of the plebiscite must be upheld," Panelo said.

Meanwhile, with one of two BOL plebiscites done, Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) leader Ebrahim Murad said the next challenge they have to address is "the struggle against ourselves."

Murad optimistic

From being revolutionaries, the MILF will now be making the transition to being involved in governance — a gargantuan task since most of them have never served in government.

Still, Murad remains optimistic that they will defy the odds and finally be instruments of bringing lasting peace and progress in Mindanao.

Meanwhile, the next plebiscite is slated on 6 February which will cover Lanao del Norte (except Iligan City) and six towns in North Cotabato.

Malacañang yesterday has issued Proclamation 656 declaring the said date as a special non-working day to give residents in the aforementioned areas the "opportunity to actively and fully participate in the plebiscite and exercise their right to vote."

With Elmer N. Manuel,
Maya M. Padillo



**By Nat Mariano
and Nash Maulana**

GROUPS that oppose the ratification of the Bangsamoro Organic Law must yield to the decision of the majority, the Palace said Wednesday as the "yes" votes prevailed in Cotabato City.

"Consistent with the position of the President for the ratification of the BOL, we are pleased that the 'yes' vote has prevailed in Cotabato City," Presidential Spokesman Salvador Panelo said, citing a complete but unofficial Commission on Elections tally.

At the library of the Shariff Kabunsuan Cultural Center in Cotabato City, the Plebiscite Board of Canvassers of Cotabato City terminated its canvass at 9:55

p.m., with a final tally of 36,682 "yes" votes and 24,994 "no votes" with a total 61,676 votes cast.

The total votes cast constitute a majority of 59.57 percent of the city's voting population.

Panelo said the people have voted "yes" to join the proposed Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao and called on those who opposed it to abide by the majority decision.

"All the major players, pro and con, must now come together and work together for the success of the common aspiration of the Bangsamoro people, which is to have a progressive and peaceful Mindanao," he said.

The Palace official also addressed the

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Cotabato...

From A1

possible emergence of claims of irregularity over the plebiscite.

"As in all elections and plebiscites, there will be claims of irregularity, fraud, and intimidation," he said.

"If they do not affect the credibility of the elections and alter the result thereof, while those responsible for the undemocratic methods will be prosecuted to the full extent of the law, the result of the plebiscite must be upheld despite discordant voices," Pancelo added.

Communist Party of the Philippines founding chairman Jose Ma. Sison said President Rodrigo Duterte has allowed "cheaters to produce glaring discrepancies."

"A total of 39,027 people voted in Cotabato City but the total number of 'votes cast' is 61,676 in order to make the 'yes' votes win," Sison said in a Facebook post.

He said the winner should be the 24,994 'no' votes out of 39,027, but the alleged cheaters fabricated

21,622 to add to 15,020 'yes' votes to produce the false winning figure of 36,682 'yes' votes.

"This is Duterte-style electioneering which is applied in the BOL plebiscite and which is likely to be applied in the May 2019 elections if held," he added.

Based on the Comelec final tally on Tuesday evening, a majority of Cotabato City's voters opted to be included in the new political entity BARMM.

According to the City Board of Canvassers, the "yes" had 36,682 votes (59 percent) favoring the inclusion of the city to the new political entity while

"no" recorded 24,994 votes (41 percent).

The figures were based on unofficial results of canvassing at the Shariff Kabunsuan Cultural Complex, the provisional seat of the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao.

Comelec-ARMM director Ray Sumalipao said the poll body will officially announce the plebiscite results in Manila in the coming days before the second plebiscite on Feb. 6.

Voters residing in Lanao del Norte, except in Iligan City and six North Cotabato municipalities, will vote on then on the BOL.

Meanwhile, unofficial results showed residents of Sulu were not in favor of the BOL.

Based on Sulu's Certificate of Canvass signed by the Comelec Provincial Plebiscite Board of Canvassers, the "yes" votes totaled 137,630 as against 163,526 "no" votes.

Sulu is composed of 19 cities and municipalities and has 375,137 registered voters.

Senator Aquilino Pimentel III said the successful holding of a plebiscite marked another milestone on the road to peace.

Pimentel, president of the ruling Partido Demokratiko Pilipino-Lakas ng Bayan (PDP-Laban), noted that the plebiscite is one of the legal challenges that needs to be hurdled to activate the BOL.

He said he was confident the second plebiscite on Feb. 6 would be even more successful and peaceful.

A survey conducted by the Social Weather Stations showed that nearly eight in 10 Muslims support the BOL.

With Macon Ramos-Araneta

Cotabato votes 'yes'

By KEITH BACONGCO

COTABATO CITY – This city of 300,000 people will now serve as the official seat of the incoming Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM) after the "yes" votes won in the recently-concluded plebiscite.

A total of 37,682 voted for Cotabato City's inclusion to the BARMM as opposed to 11,688 who

voted "no".

Since the establishment of the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) in 1989, the city, which administratively belongs to Region 12, has been ARMM's "provisional seat" of government.

Moro National Liberation Front chairman Nur Misuari sought for the inclusion of this city to the ARMM but failed twice in 1989 and 2001 plebiscites. In 2001, Republic Act

9054 was passed for the expansion of ARMM and plebiscite was held in 11 provinces and 14 cities.

Only Basilan and Marawi City opted to join the expanded ARMM.

"A victory of the people," said Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) Implementing Chair Mohagher Iqbal, "hard earned, but indeed very sweet success."

Iqbal attributed the growth of the city being the regional center of the ARMM. Had it not for the struggle MILF, the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF), and the Bangsamoro people that led to the establishment of the ARMM, Iqbal said the city would not be what it is today.

After the 'Yes' vote won in Cotabato City, lawyer Benedicto Bacani, executive director of the Institute for Autonomy and Governance based at the Notre Dame University of Cotabato City, said "Cotabato City will journey in uncharted waters."

"Being part of the Bangsamoro region which is by itself a new experiment, the impact of this new arrangement to Cotabato City would depend on how the BTA performs and how its relations with the Bangsamoro government will evolve," Bacani said.

Bacani added that supporters will face a common challenge of "preserving the gains Cotabato City has achieved and continuing its trajectory of economic and stability under the Bangsamoro." (With reports from Zea C. Capistrano)



SCENE in a market in Cotabato City which voted to be included in the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM). (Keith Bacongco)

letters

Stop scapegoating the Tsinoy

I am saddened that someone of Manong Frankie Sionil Jose's stature could misunderstand the Tsinoy and the role, influence and impact of the Tsinoy in all aspects of Philippine life. I don't doubt Jose's love of our country but he's been misinformed and misguided about our intense love and loyalty to the Philippines and equally intense pride in our ethnic Chinese heritage. We are Tsinoy or Tsinong Pinoy, Chinese Filipinos whose blood may be Chinese but whose roots grow deep in Philippine soil and whose bonds are with the Filipino people.

Even a quick breeze through history books would have shown how the Philippine economy came to a standstill during Spanish times after disastrous events like massacres and mass expulsions of Chinese. Spanish authorities had to entice the early Chinese back because of the services they provided and the needs they met.

During the American occupation, the Chinese Exclusion Law was applied to our country. Only merchants and sons of merchants were allowed entry. Thus, among Southeast Asian countries, the

Philippines was unique in not having a Tsinoy blue collar working class. But the enterprising Chinese opened sari-sari stores all over the country, from the remotest mountains to the farthest islets, making life easier for the Filipino clients whom they served.

After the darkest period of the Japanese occupation, it was the Chinese who, without waiting for reparations, started rebuilding their businesses, without which the Philippine economy's recovery would have been much much slower.

It was in the immediate post-war era that saw the Yutivo patriarch going door to door in his *kariton*, piled with small hardware items, offering simple repairs to houses. He had the hammers, nails, small pieces of corrugated iron sheets, wood and plywood he needed for the repairs. Through sheer hard work, sacrifices and sweat, Yutivo saved and saved and saved and became the first distributor of General Motors in the Philippines.

It was also in the post-war era that saw the late Tatang Henry Sy opening up his tiny ShoeMart in Carriedo early in the

morning and closing it late in the evening. His contemporaries recount the usual sight of Sy in his faded t-shirt stacking the boxes of shoes, serving the customers himself when necessary. There were no Sundays and holidays off for him to help his wife Fely take care of their young children. In fact, before the kids were even tall enough to reach the sales counters, they were already working in the store during vacations.

And who hasn't heard of John Gokongwei and his trusted bicycle plying his wares all over Cebu to support his mother and siblings when his dad died?

Mr. Jose, you are a fiction writer. What I shared with you are not fiction but true stories of heartbreak, sweat and tears behind every pillar that spelled the success of our Tsinoy businessmen.

True, they "exploited" every opportunity provided by the Philippines in order to earn money to support their families. And for each successful opportunity they "exploited," thousands (now millions) of Filipino families benefited in terms of downstream businesses and employment.

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Stop... From page 11

Without the Chinese-Filipinos who didn't pull out their capital during the dark days of the Marcos dictatorship, our economic growth would have been much slower. Without the enterprising Tsinoys who went into small-scale manufacturing when the retail trade was closed to them by virtue of the 1954 retail trade law, Philippine industrialization would not have grown as fast. Textile vendors in the Divisoria-Ilaya area pooled resources to build the first textile mills. Small enterprise shoe sellers, T-shirt and candy vendors pooled resources to build the shoe, T-shirt, candies and confectioneries factories. Yes, the retail trade nationalization was a crisis, but the Tsinoys again "exploited" the opportunities provided by that crisis and their action moved Philippine industrialization forward much faster.

Those, Mr. Jose, are the true stories behind the success of the Tsinoy businesses. What they earned, they plowed back into the Philippine economy. They provided employment for Filipinos, otherwise, we would have double the eight million overseas Filipino workers we have now.

Why begrudge, denigrate and punish the Tsinoys for their success and the wealth produced by that success? Why be inhospitable to excellence? Other countries boost their economic achievers up. But here you want to put them down? You know who will suffer most if this happens.

It is a figment of your imagination to conclude that the Chinese Filipinos now control 80 percent of Philippine businesses. The Tsinoys are mostly in the visible buy and sell businesses and that perhaps is the source of the myth behind the Tsinoys' economic

dominance. The Philippine government and the established old Filipino families and new Filipino players still own the bigger share of the Philippine economic pie. However, you should not begrudge the Tsinoys their share of the economic pie. When their share grows, it is the Philippine pie that grows bigger and it is the Philippines and Filipinos who benefit from this bigger pie.

The Tsinoys have not been silent on the South China Sea issue. We recognize that there is a dispute and we stand with Filipinos in laying claim to our sovereignty over the disputed islands. But, unlike the hawks in our midst, we will not support war mongering and threats of going to war with China. No matter how great an improvement our defenses have, we still are not equipped to go to war with anybody - China, the United States or any other country. We have learned well the wars of our fathers and know that war is never an answer to any political dispute.

It is irrational and downright insensitive and dangerous to bring up the Vietnam boat-people crisis and foment mistrust and violence. Envy, stereotypes, misguided threats and scapegoating have no place in civilized discourse.

Our brother Filipinos have learned to accept their Tsinoy brothers as integral and inseparable parts of Philippine society.

There is no sense to make us Tsinoys the collateral damage in the South China Sea disputes or for that matter in the proxy supremacy positioning between China and the United States. We stand with the Filipinos as we have been one family in ancient times and even more so in modern times. We only have one ship and we sink and swim with that one ship to which we all have a duty to keep afloat. --
TERESITA ANGSEE, Founding President, Kaisa Para Sa Kaunlaran and Executive Trustee, Kaisa Heritage Center

FIRST PERSON

ALEX MAGNO

Minors

From somewhere in the deepest recesses of the House of Representatives, a bill proposing to lower the age of criminal liability to only nine has emerged. It passed swiftly committee deliberations and will now be brought to plenary.



The bill, understandably, invited widespread outrage.

Lowering the age of criminal liability, its proponents argue, will help protect children from criminal gangs who exploit children to evade criminal accountability. There have been reports that gangs use children to pull off crimes because they are immune from criminal liability.

Those reports, as far as we know, are anecdotal rather than scientific. There is not enough data to demonstrate a crime surge involving minors has happened since the age of criminal liability was raised to 15 a few years ago.

There is also no scientific evidence to demonstrate that bringing down the age of criminal liability to nine will cure the problem. The causality between a higher age of criminal liability and the alleged increase in the involvement of children in the commission of crimes has not been established.

I paid close attention to the principal proponent of the bill as he argued his case during a television interview. He enumerated those countries with even lower ages of criminal accountability. But he failed to establish the causalities that would make this legislative "solution" convincing.

At the most basic, he failed to convince us there is a real problem this bill addresses. We have yet to be convinced there has been a surge in the involvement of children in serious crimes. No data has been presented.

In this day and age, we have come to expect science to guide policy. There is no science in this bill — only gut feel and anecdotal evidence. Our legislators should be able to do better than that.

This bill is as unsupported by scientific evidence as that earlier bill proposing the restoration of the death penalty for certain crimes. The hurdle scientific evidence must pass in this case if that restoring the death penalty will discourage criminality. All the existing evidence tells us that it is the certainty of arrest and prosecution — not the gravity of punishment — that deters crime.

That bill passed the House largely because of former Speaker Pantaleon Alvarez's capacity for hustling and intimidation. He removed key allies from committee posts because they did not agree with him. That, we now know, was pointless squandering of political capital.

The death penalty bill was dead on arrival at the Senate – and Alvarez was so easily ousted from his post.

The same fate likely awaits this bill lowering the age of criminal liability. Driven by nothing more than political whim, it is unlikely the senators will be hospitable to it.

Cotabato

The only suspense in last Monday's plebiscite on the Bangsamoro Organic Law (BOL) was how Cotabato City would vote.

The city voted convincingly against joining the ARMM when a plebiscite on the matter was held many years ago. A bustling center of commerce in Western Mindanao with a large non-Muslim population, the city felt joining an Islamic autonomous region would not be to their best interest.

Over the past few weeks, we saw the feisty lady mayor of this holdout city campaign bravely against joining the Bangsamoro entity. Her city has become the major battleground for the BOL campaign.

The MILF, for its part, was not ready to give up on the city. They mounted their own campaign for a Yes vote. In the days before the plebiscite, the MILF is said to have moved a thousand armed fighters to the vicinity of Cotabato City to help convince its voters to support the BOL. As the last year ended, a deadly bomb blast rocked the city and spread fear among its residents.

For the supporters of the BOL, it was terribly important for Cotabato City to be part of the new autonomous entity. It was the most obvious choice to be the seat of the Bangsamoro entity. Marawi City, the other possible choice, remains devastated and situating the capital there will be less effective in ensuring the Maguindanaons will be fully supportive of political enterprise. Cotabato, for its part, is firmly within the Maguindanaon homeland.

So important was it to win in Cotabato City that BOL supporters held their final political rally there. President Rodrigo Duterte no less made an appearance in that rally. He invested the prestige of his office in winning Cotabato City into the fold.

That investment, it appears, was not in vain. It appears Cotabato City will be part of the new political entity and, almost certainly, its capital. The bastion has yielded.

The feisty Mayor Cynthia Guiani Sayadi has not yielded easily, however. She claims the MILF used intimidation to win the vote. That is partly true, although it was not the determinant factor.

It is now the task of the MILF, the new political lords of a new political entity, to assuage the fears of Cotabato City residents. No one wants to see the business enterprises responsible for this city's robust economy pull up their stakes and move away because of uncertainty.

Reassuring words are not enough. The MILF must demonstrate its capacity for mature and adept governance. This is what the city and the rest of the region needs as it moves on its experimental course toward what hopefully will be a more beneficial future.

The ARMM, because of inferior governance, made autonomy a bad word. The MILF now has the chance to redeem it.

EDITORIAL

Saved for now

The Presidential Commission on Good Government (PCGG) can heave a sigh of relief for now. It has just secured a new lease on life, after lawmakers thwarted moves to abolish the agency tasked with recovering the estimated \$10-billion loot amassed by the late dictator Ferdinand Marcos, his family and cronies.

In a sign of the sea change that has swept over the country's politics, the push to dissolve the PCGG emanated from the Duterte administration itself, mounted by representatives led by former speaker Pantaleon Alvarez and staunchly supported by Solicitor General Jose Calida, who, not incidentally, was one of the leaders of the Alyansang Duterte-Bongbong that campaigned for the Duterte-Ferdinand Marcos Jr. tandem during the 2016 elections. The blatant conflict of interest never bothered Calida or the House of Representatives, which approved a measure effectively abolishing the PCGG and transferring its powers and mandate to Calida's office—the fox made to guard the hen house, so to speak.

But on Monday, Senate justice committee chair Sen. Richard Gordon announced that the Senate version of the bill meant to strengthen the Office of the Solicitor General was what prevailed in the bicameral committee; that bill spares the PCGG from the chopping block, along with the Office of the Government Corporate Counsel. Despite its uneven, controversial record over the past 32 years, the agency created under Executive Order No. 1 of former president Corazon Aquino “has been able to attain its mandate,” explained Gordon.

The PCGG has had enormous difficulty prosecuting the thicket of suits it has lodged against the Marcoses; the cases filed in 1991 over the “William Saunders” and “Jane Ryan” Swiss accounts, for instance, were only resolved in November 2018, with Imelda Marcos found guilty by the Sandiganbayan after a grueling 27 years.

So far, the agency estimates it has been able to recover about P171 billion in public funds and assets from the late dictator's family and their associates. Critical wins since 1986 include the recovery of some \$658 million in Swiss deposits, of which P35 billion was remitted to the Bureau of Treasury in 2004. Of that, P10 billion was eventually set aside as compensation for hundreds of victims of human rights abuses during martial law.

In 2014, the PCGG recovered the remaining \$29 million that formed part of the Marcos Swiss bank deposits lodged in two accounts in Singapore. Since 1986, the PCGG has also privatized some P47 billion worth of prime local real estate, plus other choice properties abroad, accumulated by Marcos and his cohorts.

Part of the fabled art and jewelry hoard of Imelda has also been retrieved: the Hawaii collection—jewelry found in the Marcoses' luggage when they arrived at Honolulu International Airport on Feb. 25, 1986, after fleeing the People Power Revolution; the 60-piece Roumeliotis collection seized from a Greek national at Manila International Airport as he was about to leave the country in March 1986; the Malacañang collection, left behind when its former overstaying tenants were driven out of the Palace; and 105 pieces of recovered artworks, including El Greco's “The Coronation of the Virgin,” that have generated \$17.344 million in sales for the Philippine government. However, 196 pieces of art are still said to be missing.

The PCGG remains locked in over 200 legal battles on various fronts, while also battling charges of corruption and inefficiency—for taking too long in building cases (that are often less than airtight), and itself becoming a breeding ground for the wrongdoing it seeks to eradicate. Indeed, former PCGG chair Camilo Sabio was sentenced in 2017 to up to 20 years' imprisonment after the Sandiganbayan found him guilty of two counts of graft.

Now that it lives to fight another day, the PCGG would do well to work much harder and, just as important, to clean house. Under a markedly friendlier dispensation, the late dictator's heirs are taking every opportunity to urge the Filipino people to “move on,” without so much as a whisper of acknowledgment of the abuse, misconduct and plunder attached to their name. They and their acolytes are determined to twist or bury that record altogether, reinvent history and discredit official reminders of that indefensible time, such as the state-backed work of making the Marcoses accountable for their thievery. The Senate's vote of confidence in the PCGG's continuing usefulness should prod the agency to redouble its efforts toward fulfilling that important mandate.

METRO CORNER

Questions on BOL



By ERIK ESPINA

THE disturbing ad of Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Bin Mohamad's tarpaulin in Cotabato City supporting the ratification of the Bangsamoro Organic Law passage, is another of many historical, political, etc., validations of the umbilical cord connecting the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) to Putra Jaya. MNLF Chair Nur Misuari was once upon a time ideologically blind-sided by Kuala Lumpur (for their Sabah interests) when he, with a group of acolytes, were trained and funded in Palau Pangkor (West of Peninsular Malaysia) to be later re-implanted back to Southern Mindanao to initiate a secessionist war to amputate the territory of the Philippines. Like a broken record, the unchallenged and romanticized propaganda is for "Righting historical wrongs", and perfect claims, "Their territory and their people were never subjugated by foreign colonials,

and never part of the 1897 Filipino Revolution."

Said issues, have been addressed in previous columns. Why to this day, my generation, and other legitimately elected governments, must carry the burden for such generational grumble, when we had no control and fault over the issues they raise? The greater mistake is a class empowerment of a synthetic identity of "Moro" under the tutelage of the MILF, when many in Southern Mindanao prefer to be recognized as Filipinos, if not Tausogs, Iranons, Badjaos, Maranaos, Lumads, etc.

Truth to say, the BOL is an MILF buffet, as they will be majority in the Bangsamoro Transition Commission appointment. Excluded in the BOL negotiations were MNLF Chair Nur Misuari (recognized by the Org. Islamic Conf.), royal houses, and Lumads. As this column is written, Comelec announced results will be known in three days. I pray the distressing events reported in media

will not predictably result in a region notorious as chattel for votes, mindful of Comelec Commissioner Regalado Maambong's finding in late 1980s, "Not just a failure of elections, but the absence of actual

elections" in the area. And under Smartmatic? In my last conversation with Misuari, he called Malaysia, a "neo-colonialist," and advocates for Sabah's return. Paging MILF!



LETTERS

Send comments to opinion@manilatimes.net or write to the Opinion Editor,
The Manila Times, 2/F Sitto Grande,
409 A. Soriano Avenue, Intramuros, Manila 1002

NDF-BICOL ON BATOCABE ASSASSINATION AND COMMUNIST 'EXTORTION'

THE NDF Information Office Bicol would like to provide the public with clarifications with regard to the letter from Ms Melanie Naag, a public schoolteacher from Daraga, Albay ("Bicolanos mourn Rep. Rodol Batocabe," *The Manila Times*, Jan. 16, 2018).

First of all, the CPP-NPA-NDF Bicol, once again, categorically denies any hand in the assassination of Rep. Batocabe. It maintains its position that this was a move planned by top-rank officials from the AFP-PNP, CIA agents and Duterte himself as they grow increasingly desperate to impose a nationwide martial law and further US-Duterte's neoliberal and fascist rule.

Regarding the issue of alleged extortion, NDF-Bicol reiterates that state-concocted claims that the NPA requires electoral candidates to pay for so-called "permit-to-win" is nothing more than a desperate move to tarnish the revolutionary movement's prestige, and is sheer hypocrisy when it is the AFP-PNP and paramilitary forces who will serve as Duterte's principal instruments in manipulating the midterm elections.

The revolutionary forces maintain their fundamental criticism of the rottenness of the reactionary elections as they mire the masses in a cycle of reformism and bait them with false hopes. On the other hand, the movement respects the people's exercise of suffrage. Thus, candidates who wish to campaign within revolutionary areas are required to follow policies promulgated by the revolutionary authorities to ensure peace and order, avoid dirty electoral practices such as vote-buying and smear campaigns and uphold the interests of the masses in the area. Permits to campaign are issued on the agreement to uphold the above policies with negotiated reasonable access fees and material items for production and other social welfare benefits for the masses.

NDF-Bicol encourages Ms Naag to study and analyze the present conditions and problems that ail the country. As a teacher, she must be made aware of the issues that threaten the security and the lives of her fellow educators. At present, the US-Duterte regime has unleashed an anticommunist witch-hunt against teachers, students, lawyers, journalists, human rights advocates, religious and other sectors whom they consider as "legitimate" targets of their all-out war.

The revolutionary movement in Bicol calls on Ms Naag and all concerned Daragueños to expose the true masterminds and real murderers behind Rep. Batocabe's slay case. Stand firm for the interests of the people and fight all reactionary efforts to undermine the ever-growing mass movement. Ms Naag and all her fellow Daragueños must unite to fight this regime's fascist and terrorist attacks against the people.

Ka Ma Roja Banua
Spokesperson, NDF-Bicol

No alternative truth

“The incident haunted Noynoy without end and his reaction was to dump on the lap of the SAF the botched mission and thus free him from culpability.”

A frantic effort to deflect public outrage as a result of the 25 January 2015 Mamasapano tragedy that resulted in the death of 44 young policemen led former President Noynoy Aquino and his spin doctors to coin the phrase “alternative truth.”

The alibi only served to further enrage the public who was seeking an intelligent explanation on the massacre.

Noynoy initially called the incident a misencounter following the line of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF). He failed to attend the ceremony when the bodies of the slain commandos were brought home. He opposed the giving of any distinction to the Fallen 44 and he even sought the removal of a mural depicting the slain policemen.

Noynoy, instead, made a spirited defense of the MILF. Not one member of the MILF has been charged over the incident as then Justice Secretary Leila de Lima on apparent orders from Noynoy failed to make good with her vow to prosecute more than 100 rebels involved in the carnage.

It is only now under President Rody Duterte that the cases are making headway.

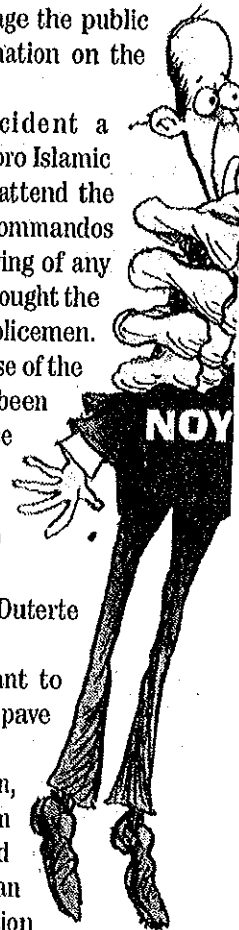
The alternative truth was also meant to isolate Mar Roxas from the incident and pave the way for his presidential run.

Roxas, based on the Palace script then, was supposedly taken out of the loop from the botched Operation Exodus that resulted in the killing of Malaysian terrorist Marwan at the great cost of losing the 44 Special Action Force (SAF) commandos.

Many doubted the alternative truth of a misencounter and Roxas being left out in the execution of Oplan Exodus. Roxas, after all, has been called Noynoy’s alter ego and who could not have missed out on something as big as the operations to capture an international terrorist.

That more than 300 SAF commandos and some American specialists were included in Oplan Exodus against Marwan who was the American government’s top terror target in Asia.

The US involvement in Oplan Exodus included training of the SAF commandos for the mission.



The twisting of facts started immediately after the disaster struck as Noynoy initially claimed it was an operation that had SAF Commander Getulio Napeñas as solely responsible for it.

He would later admit to the participation of his trusted general former Philippine National Police (PNP) chief Alan Purisima in directing the operation despite his being under suspension by the Ombudsman.

The alternative truth was also lifted from the MILF playbook in that it was Marwan's men who killed him and not the commandos.

The incident haunted Noynoy without end and his reaction was to dump on the lap of the SAF the botched mission and thus free him from culpability.

The operation went awry after the police units were pounced upon by Muslim rebels, including elements of the MILF.

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When the firefight started, reinforcements did not arrive and the SAF commandos were easily routed by their enemies which later turned out as coming from diverse groups that included private armies of politicians in the area.

At that time, according to the recounting in an *L.A. Times* report from an interview with an American commander involved in the mission, the US forces guided the commandos through drones in an effort to get them to safety.

The response, however, from the command post was too slow and even static as investigations conducted by the Senate and the PNP Board of Inquiry indicated.

“It was a bungled operation and it has had major fallout,” David Maxwell, a retired Army colonel who commanded the US special operations force in the Philippines in 2006 and 2007, said.

Noynoy in some accounts intervened personally in the operations, ordering reinforcements to the beleaguered commando units to “stand down,” resulting in the massacre of members of the elite police unit.

Noynoy's alternative truth was clearly meant to twist the truth with the objectives of clearing both Noynoy and Roxas who will have the straight path mantra as a major campaign cry.

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ONLINE NEWS

24 JANUARY 2019

AFP probes Reds 'immersion' activities

By Priam Nepomuceno January 23, 2019, 11:56 am

MANILA -- The Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) is now investigating reports that communist rebels are allegedly recruiting college students and taking them into jungles for so-called immersion activities.

Col. Noel Detoyato, AFP public affairs office chief, made this response Wednesday when asked if the military is aware of such activities by the Communist Party of the Philippines-New People's Army-National Democratic Front (CPP-NPA-NDF) in the campuses.

"That has been happening since time immemorial. The CPP-NPA-NDF recruiters look at students as a rich source of cadres and they have long been active in recruiting them," Detoyato said in a message to the Philippine News Agency.

The NPA, the armed wing of the CPP, is listed as a terrorist organization in the United States and European Union.

To suppress this, Detoyato bared that AFP field units are actively coordinating with school authorities, parents and students in face-to-face dialogues and symposiums to expose these tricks of the communist rebels.

He added the real goal of the rebels is to deceive students into joining them through holding rallies in the cities, immersion in the rural communities and eventually recruiting them to join the armed group.

"We are not only investigating this, we are taking part in the prevention of this. DepEd (Department of Education), the PNP (Philippine National Police) and LGUs (local government units) also have efforts in the prevention of this CPP-NPA-NDF modus operandi of recruitment and exploitation of students," the AFP official added. **(PNA)**

www.pna.gov.ph

Troops to be more concentrated in 2nd BOL poll areas

By Priam Nepomuceno January 23, 2019, 4:31 pm

MANILA -- Since the second Bangsamoro Organic Law (BOL) plebiscite will be held in a smaller area compared to the first plebiscite, it would be easier to concentrate the troops.

This was bared by Col. Noel Detoyato, Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) public affairs office chief, when asked Wednesday if there are changes in the military's overall plan to secure the second BOL polls next month.

"The area for (the) February 6 (polls) is smaller, and it's scattered, especially in (North) Cotabato towns where only barangays will be voting. Security operations and deployment will be adjusted accordingly to address the prevailing security needs in the specified areas," Detoyato said in a message to the Philippine News Agency (PNA).

On Monday, the Commission on Elections (Comelec) conducted the plebiscite for the ratification of the BOL, which seeks to create the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao.

The provinces included are Basilan, Lanao del Sur, Maguindanao, Sulu, and Tawi-Tawi; as well as Cotabato City; and Isabela City.

The February 6 BOL plebiscite will be in the province of Lanao del Norte, except Iligan City; the municipalities of Aleosan, Carmen, Kabacan, Midsayap, Pikit, and Pigkawayan, and 28 barangays in the province of North Cotabato.

"Since it (area) will be relatively smaller, concentration of troops will be higher. AFP troops are pre-deployed so there will be minimal movement to secure the plebiscite on February 6," Detoyato added.

The military allocated more than 10,000 troops and support units to help secure the BOL plebiscites, along with the Philippine National Police. **(PNA)**

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