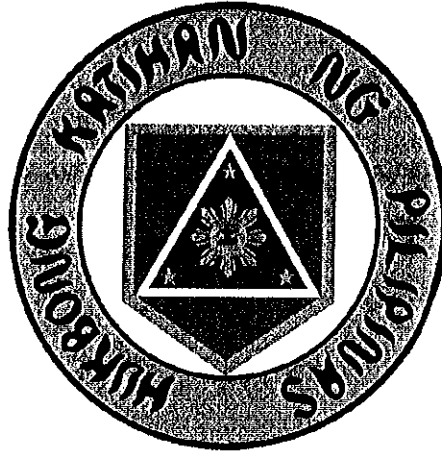


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## **NEWS CLIPPINGS**

**28 January 2019**

**Monday**

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

### 28 JANUARY 2019

Weather Forecast- <a href="http://pagasa.dost.gov.ph/weather/daily-weather-forecast">http://pagasa.dost.gov.ph/weather/daily-weather-forecast</a>		
Page Nr.	Title	Source
<b>NATIONAL NEWS</b>		
1-2	Sulu cathedral bombed; 20 killed	P Star-1
3-6	25 killed, 111 wounded in Jolo church blasts	PDI-A1
<b>AFP/ SECURITY RELATED NEWS</b>		
7-8	Battle for Manila Bay: Cleanup kicks off	P Star-12
9-10	Over 10 truckloads of trash collected as 'Battle for Manila Bay' begins	M Bulletin-4
11	#Battle for Manila Bay: 2 famous restos padlocked	M Standard-A1
12	'Gov't open to localized peace talks for Capiz'	P Star-13
13	NPAs attack construction site in Rizal	M Times-A7
14-15	Support Bangsamoro leaders, ARMM urged	P Star-6
16	Palace: Ratification BOL ushers a ray of hope	PDI-A4
17	Give new Bangsamoro region a chance-Andanar	M Bulletin-2
18	Second BOL plebiscite 'different'	M Times-A2
19-20	Enrile sees no end to disunity despite BARMM	M Standard
21	NCRPO on alert amid Sulu bombing	P Star-12
22-23	Palace vows no mercy for bombers	P Star-4
24-26	Twin blasts hit Jolo Cathedral; at least 20 dead	M Bulletin-1
27-29	Jolo Cathedral bombed; 20 killed, 81 wounded	M Times-A2
30-31	Jolo blasts: 20 dead, 81 hurt	M Standard-A7
32-33	20 dead, 111 wounded in Sulu cathedral blasts	Malaya-B3
34	No mercy for Jolo bombers-Palace	Tempo-2
35	Jolo Cathedral binomba: 20 patay, 81 sugatan	Balita-5
36	Hustisya sa Jolo bombing, ipinanawagan	Balita-5
37	'No mercy' sa mga nambomba sa Jolo Cathedral	Balita-2
38	Maute leader wounded in Lanao del Sur clashes	Malaya- B2
<b>EDITORIAL/OPINION/COMMENTARY</b>		
39	BARMM replaces ARMM	P Star-10
40	Momentum for peace	P Star-10
41	The President swings from left to right	PDI-A12
42	What's exactly at stake in the 2019 elections?	PDI-A13
43	'Building back better' a gender-fair BARMM	PDI-A13
44	Can David fix Goliath's mess?	M Bulletin-10
45	Making BARMM work	M Bulletin-8
46-48	We did it Mindanao, can we do the next one?	M Times-A5

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49	On the NPA's recruitment of children	M Times-A5
50-51	Road to peace	Malaya-B4
52-53	Who blinks first	M Standard-A4
54-55	Never again	M Standard-A5
<b>ONLINE NEWS</b>		
56-57	Gov't to determine if Jolo bombing linked to BOL: Esperon	<a href="http://www.pna.gov.ph">www.pna.gov.ph</a>

# Sulu cathedral bombed; 20 killed

*Over 80 wounded in Sunday mass*

By ROEL PAREÑO

**ZAMBOANGA CITY** – The Sunday morning mass was in progress when two explosions ripped through the Roman Catholic cathedral in Jolo, Sulu yesterday.

The blasts blew away the entrance to Our Lady of Mount Carmel Cathedral, and ripped through the main hall, shredding to pieces the pews and toppling other doors.

Initial reports said at least 20 people died and 81 were wounded, including 14 soldiers and two policemen.

The dead included 15 civilians, mostly churchgoers, and five soldiers, including a Coast Guard member, said Chief Supt. Graciano Mijares, police director for the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM).

The first bomb went off in or near the church, followed by a second blast outside the compound as government forces were responding to the attack, officials said.

Photos showed debris and bodies lying on a busy street outside the ca-

thedral, which has been hit by bombs in the past. Troops in armored carriers sealed off the main road leading to the church while vehicles transported the dead and wounded to hospital. Some casualties were evacuated by air to a military base here.

Fr. Jefferson Nadua, parish priest of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, described the incident as chaotic.

"Please see to it to bring justice to the victims," Nadua told Church-run *Radio Veritas*. "It's still chaotic here. Pray for us."

"We pray for safety of those who are wounded. We pray and hope that there are no casualties among our parishioners," the priest said.

Nadua said the mass was being celebrated at around 8:30 a.m. when the bomb went off inside the church

Turn to Page 3

## Sulu From Page 1

compound.

As troops responded to the incident, the second bomb exploded in the church's parking area, he said.

Joint Task Force Sulu commander Brig. Gen. Divino Pabayo said their initial investigation had revealed one of the bombs was rigged to a motorcycle in the church's parking area.

Pabayo also revealed security video footage in the area showed how the suspects brought the bomb at the site.

He identified the suspects as members of "Ajang-ajang," a group of sons of killed Abu Sayyaf extremists.

Pabayo also believed the bombing attack could be in retaliation for the killing of some of its members in one of the encounters in Sulu.

He said the motive could also be to create panic and fear among the people of Sulu to get attention.

"The motive could be to retaliate and get even," Western Mindanao Command spokesman Lt. Col. Gerry Besana said.

"At the same time, the Ajang-ajang group has no other intention but to sow terror in Sulu," he said.

### Diversiory tactic

Security officials led by Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana and Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) chief Gen. Benjamin Madrigal vowed to run after those behind the bombing attack.

"I have directed our troops to heighten their alert level, secure all places of worships and public places at once, and initiate pro-active security measures to thwart hostile plans," Lorenzana said.

Madrigal added the investigation would focus on the signature of the explosive device used to determine who are behind the attack.

"I call on the people for calm and sobriety as government security forces address this recent attack on the peaceful Joloanos," Madrigal said.

Philippine National Police (PNP) chief Director General Oscar Albayalde vowed to hold accountable the perpetrators of the "dastardly attack on the civilians who were peacefully attending church services."

Although no one has immediately claimed responsibility for the attack, Albayalde said they are looking into the possible involvement of the Abu Sayyaf and other threat groups in the explosion.

The Abu Sayyaf are still holding at least five hostages – a Dutch national, two Malaysians, an Indonesian and a Filipino – in their jungle bases mostly near Patikul town, not far from Jolo.

Government forces have pressed on sporadic offensives to crush the militants, including those in Jolo. A few thousand Catholics live mostly in the capital of Jolo.

Yesterday's bombing attack was not the first, officials said.

In March 27, 2006, a bomb explosion rocked the church-organized Sulu Consumers Cooperative Building, killing five people and wounding 15 others. The incident was blamed on the Abu Sayyaf.

On July 7, 2009, an improvised explosive device exploded in front of a shop across the cathedral, killing at least six people and injuring 40 others.

Two grenade attacks occurred in 2010, and another in 2012, but no one was hurt.

The church was also attacked in August 2013 when an unidentified man threw a grenade, leaving at least one injured.

There are also reports that yesterday's bombing attack may be a diversionary move by extremists after troops recently carried out an offensive that killed a number of Islamic State-linked Maute group of militants in an encampment in the hinterlands of Lanao del Sur.

The area is near Marawi City, the Islamic city that was besieged for five months by hundreds of Maute, including foreign fighters, in 2017. Troops quelled the insurrection, which left more 1,100 mostly militants dead and the heartland

of the mosque-studded city in ruins.

The Maute group, which is also in alliance with the Abu Sayyaf, led the siege of Marawi City in 2017.

Lorenzana said this possibility is also being considered by investigators focusing on uncovering the group behind the bombing.

He said military forces are on the trail of Maute leader Owayda Benito Marohamsar or Abu Dar in Lanao del Sur.

"We will consider all possibilities," Lorenzana said. – With AP, Michael Punongbayan, Emmanuel Tupas, Edith Regalado, Ben Serrano, Edu Punay

# 25 KILLED, 111 WOUNDED IN JOLO CHURCH BLASTS

STORY BY THE INQUIRER STAFF

Malacañang vows to 'pursue to the ends of the earth' the perpetrators of the attack as probers look into terrorism and opposition to a new Moro autonomous region as possible motives.

A8

## FROM A1

By the Inquirer Staff  
@Team\_Inquirer

Malacañang on Sunday vowed to "pursue to the ends of the earth" the perpetrators of twin bombings in Jolo, Sulu province, that killed 25 people and injured 111 others nearly a week after the nation's Muslim minority voted to approve a law giving them greater control of war-torn Mindanao.

The first bomb tore through the Cathedral of Our Lady of Mount Carmel around 8:28 a.m. on Sunday as Mass was being celebrated, followed by the second bomb, which went off in the parking lot of the church as security forces were responding.

Pictures on social media showed debris and bodies lying on a busy street outside the cathedral, which had been hit by bombs in the past.

Troops in armored carriers sealed off the main road leading to the church while vehicles were transporting the dead and wounded to the hospital.

Some casualties were evacuated by air to nearby Zamboanga City.

## Soldiers among fatalities

Citing a police report, Jolo Mayor Kherkar Tan said 25 people were killed in the attack and 81 were wounded.

Police later reported 111 wounded.

Among the wounded were 90 civilians, 17 soldiers, two policemen and two coast guards.

Malacañang condemned the attack as "an act of terrorism and murder" and vowed no mercy for the perpetrators.

"We will pursue to the ends of the earth the ruthless perpetrators behind this dastardly crime until every killer is brought to justice and put behind bars. The law will give them no mercy," presidential spokesperson Salvador Panelo said in a statement.

He said "the enemies of the state boldly challenged the government's capability to secure the safety of citizens in that region. The (Armed Forces of the Philippines) will rise to the challenge and crush these godless criminals."

There was no immediate claim of responsibility.

## BOI plebiscite

Sunday's attack came nearly a week after minority Muslims endorsed a new and bigger au-

onomous region in Mindanao in hopes of ending nearly five decades of a separatist rebellion that had left more than 120,000 people dead.

Although most of the Muslim areas voted to approve the Bangsamoro Organic Law (BOL), the charter of the bigger and more powerful Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM), Sulu, rejected it.

The rejection, however, will not allow Sulu to be excluded from the BARMM because under the law, the dominant ARMM vote prevails.

The province is home to a faction of the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) led by Nur Misuari that opposed the peace agreement signed with the government in 2014 by its rival, the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), the key force in the Mindanao secessionist war.

#### Jolo attack plan

But Sulu is also home to the Abu Sayyaf bandit group, black-listed by the US and Philippine governments as a terrorist organization because of years of bombings, kidnappings and beheadings of foreign captives.

Octavio Dinampo, a peace advocate and professor at Mindanao State University, said on Sunday the Abu Sayyaf could have carried out the attack in retaliation for losses suffered in clashes with government forces.

Dinampo, a victim of Abu Sayyaf kidnapping in 2008, said military intelligence intercepted



**DAMAGED** A military vehicle was damaged in the second bomb that blew up outside the church.

plans five months ago for an Abu Sayyaf attack in downtown Jolo.

He said the military then closed the street along which the cathedral was located but reopened it after about 20 days following public complaints.

"Now we have this very brutal and grisly attack inside a church. This is an act of reprisal and plain and simple terrorism to sow fear among civilians," Dinampo said.

The Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines (CBCP) condemned the attack as "an act of terrorism."

"We condole with the families of the several soldiers and civilians who were killed by the explosions. We also express our sympathies with those who were wounded and extend our solidarity with the rest of the churchgoers inside the cathedral and the rest of the church community in the Apostolic Vicariate of Jolo," Archbishop Ro-

mulo Valles, the CBCP president, said in a statement.

Witnesses said the first blast inside the cathedral sent churchgoers, some of them wounded, to stampede out of the main door.

Army troops and police posted outside were rushing in when the second bomb went off about a minute later in the parking lot near the main entrance, causing more deaths and injuries.

The military was checking a report that the second bomb might have been placed in the utility box of a parked motorcycle.

#### Full force of the law

The initial explosion scattered the wooden pews in the nave and blasted window glass panels. The second bomb hurled human parts and debris across the square fronting the cathedral.

"I have directed our troops



to heighten their alert level, secure all places of worship and public places at once, and initiate proactive security measures to thwart hostile plans," Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana said in a statement.

"We will use the full force of the law to bring to justice the perpetrators behind this incident," Lorenzana said.

Von Al Haq, spokesperson for the Bangsamoro Islamic Armed Forces, the armed wing of the MILF, condemned the bombing as "a terrible act of terrorism."

Al Haq appealed for calm and said the MILF would do its own investigation.

Security officials were looking "at different threat groups" and could not say immediately whether the attack had something to do with last week's plebiscite, the chief of the Philippine National Police said in a radio interview.

#### **Lamitan bombing**

PNP Director General Oscar Albayalde said investigators were looking at possible Abu Sayyaf responsibility, including links to the vehicle bomb that went off near a military checkpoint in Lamitan City on July 31 last year that killed 11 people, including militiamen and their relatives.

That explosion was attributed to the Abu Sayyaf faction led by the bandit Furuji Indama, and the driver of the bomb-rigged van was reported to be a Moroccan.

"[Sunday's attack] is possibly related to the Lamitan bombing because, based on intelligence

information gathered by our ground forces, the threat coming from [Indama's] group is high," Albayalde said.

ARMM Gov. Mujiv Hataman condemned the attack.

"This bomb attack was done in a place of peace and worship, and it comes at a time when we are preparing for another stage of the peace process in Mindanao," Hataman said.

"Human lives are irreplaceable," he added, calling on Jolo residents to cooperate with the authorities to find the perpetrators of this "atrocious."

#### **'Pray for us'**

Fr. Jefferson Nadua, the parish priest of Mount Carmel, appealed for prayers and called for justice.

"We pray for the safety of those who are wounded and we pray that there'll be no more casualties among our parishioners who were attending Mass when the incident happened. Pray for us," Nadua said on Church-run Radio Veritas.

He called on the authorities to find the perpetrators and bring them to justice.

Jolo Mayor Tan was angry over the security breach.

"We have been reporting to the military and the police about bomb threats and I cannot understand why a highly secured place like the cathedral could be bombed by the Abu Sayyaf. The cathedral is surrounded by security forces," Tan said. —REPORTS FROM JULIE M.

AURELIO, JULIE ALIPALA, BONG SARMIENTO, EDWIN FERNANDEZ, JEANNETTE I. ANDRADE, TINA G. SANTOS, AP AND AFP INQ



### WHAT WENT BEFORE

In June 2006, a grenade exploded inside the compound of the Cathedral of Our Lady of Mt. Carmel in Jolo, Sulu province, slightly damaging the Vicariate Social Development Foundation building.

A month later, a grenade was thrown into the compound and the explosion wounded one person. Police said the grenade was lobbed by one of two men riding tandem on a motorcycle and landed on a pile of bamboo at the parking area located 10 meters from the cathedral.

In July 2009, a bomb exploded 50 meters from the cathedral. A man and a woman, both in their 60s, were killed and 27 others were wounded. Four jeepneys passing by the cathedral were damaged.

In December 2009, a man sus-

pected of being an Abu Sayyaf bandit threw a grenade into the cathedral's compound. A soldier detailed to the cathedral security was slightly wounded.

In January 2010, a grenade was thrown into the compound shortly before the start of Sunday morning services. No one was hurt in the 5:40 a.m. blast but the explosion shattered some glass windows of the cathedral.

In May 2010, a grenade was thrown at the cathedral but it landed outside the compound. Authorities said the blast caused no injuries to anyone.

In August 2013, two people were slightly wounded when a grenade exploded in front of the cathedral. —INQUIRER RESEARCH SOURCES: INQUIRER ARCHIVES

# Battle for Manila Bay: Cleanup kicks off

By HELEN FLORES  
and REY GALUPO

At least 5,000 volunteers and government officials participated yesterday in a so-called solidarity walk from the Quirino Grandstand to Manila's Baywalk as the Duterte administration started the rehabilitation of Manila Bay.

Environment Secretary Roy Cimatu and Interior Secretary Eduardo Año led the activity dubbed "Battle for Manila Bay" at around 7 a.m.

They were joined by Tourism Secretary Bernadette Romulo-Puyat, Public Works Secretary Mark Villar, acting Information and Communications Technology Secretary Eliseo Rio Jr. and Metropolitan Manila Development Authority Chairman Danilo Lim.

Simultaneous cleanup activities were held in Las Piñas and Navotas cities as well as towns in Bulacan, Bataan and Pampanga.

The rehabilitation program was in compliance with a Supreme Court continuing writ of mandamus, ordering government agencies and local governments to clean up the polluted bay.

## Closure orders

The Laguna Lake Development Authority (LLDA) issued a cease and

desist order on two restaurants and a water treatment facility classified as sources of "pollutive wastewater" in the bay.

The LLDA cut off water supply at the Aristocrat restaurant along Roxas Boulevard, Gloria Maris restaurant within the Cultural Center of the Philippines complex and one of the water treatment facilities of the Esplanade in Pasay City.

Cimatu and Año served the closure orders against the establishments.

The LLDA is an attached agency of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR), which was tasked to lead the Manila Bay cleanup.

LLDA general manager Jaime Medina said the establishments have been discharging pollutants in the bay.

Medina said the owners of the establishments could lose their mayor's permit and environmental compliance certificate should they fail to correct their violations.

The establishments were ordered to pay penalties of up to P200,000 for violating the Philippine Clean Water Act.

Around P47 billion will be allocated for the bay's cleanup, according to the DENR.

The budget will also be used for the relocation of some 300,000 infor-

mal settler families living near the bay, the agency said.

The DENR has closed down 42 establishments in Bulacan and Bataan for polluting the river system that leads to Manila Bay.

At least 11 truckloads of garbage were collected by the MMDA along the bay yesterday.

Villar promised to procure trash skimmers to be used in cleaning the bay.

Año ordered local governments within the Manila Bay to mount weekly cleanups or face sanctions.

### **AFP, PNP join bay rehab**

The military and police joined other workers from the government and private sector in efforts to rehabilitate the polluted Manila Bay.

A contingent composed of soldiers, airmen, sailors and Marines led by Armed Forces of the Philippines chief Gen. Benjamin Madrigal Jr. participated in the activity, AFP spokesman Brig. Gen. Edgard Arevalo said.

Arevalo said 700 troops from the Army, Air Force, Navy and the AFP General Headquarters took part in the event.

Philippine National Police (PNP) chief Director General Oscar Albayalde also joined the launching of the Manila Bay cleanup.

Chief Superintendent Benigno Durana Jr., Police Community Relations Group director, said some 1,500 policemen took part in the activity.

Armed with sacks and sticks, Albayalde and other police officials cleaned the shores of Manila Bay.

Other officials who attended the event were National Capital Region Police Office chief Director Guillermo Eleazar and Manila Police District director Chief Superintendent Vicente Danao Jr.

A lawmaker yesterday called on the government to compel Maynilad Water Services Inc. and Manila Water to provide sewage treatment facilities while the bay is undergoing rehabilitation.

"President Duterte can use his executive powers to require the water concessionaires to provide sewage treatment plants," Buhay party-list Rep. Lito Atienza said.

The Pambansang Lakas ng Kilusang Mamamalakaya ng Pilipinas called for a moratorium on all reclamation projects in Manilay Bay.

The group said the government should stop projects that would further pollute the bay.

- With Michael Punongbayan, Emmanuel Tupas, Delon Porcalla, Ramon Efren Lazaro, Ghio Ong, Romina Cabrera

28

January 2019

**MANILA BULLETIN**  
THE NATION'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

Page: 4

## Over 10 truckloads of trash collected as 'Battle for Manila Bay' begins

By **ELLALYN DE VERA-RUIZ, ERMA R. EDERA, ANALOU DE VERA, and JEL SANTOS**

Over 10 truckloads of garbage were collected during the kick-off yesterday of the Manila Bay Rehabilitation project

dubbed by Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) Secretary Roy Cimatu as the "Battle for Manila

Bay."

The Metropolitan Manila Development Authority (MMDA) said 45.59 tons or 11 truckloads of garbage were collected by participants to the



# Over 10 truckloads...

clean up drive.

The rehabilitation brought together more than 5,000 participants, mostly personnel from the DENR and 12 other government agencies tasked by the Supreme Court to clean up and rehabilitate Manila Bay in 2008.

The activity began with a solidarity walk from the Quirino Grandstand to the baywalk area. Cimatú led the pledge of commitment by all stakeholders and declared the start of the Manila Bay rehabilitation.

Cimatú said that he was deeply impressed with the number of people who joined the walk.

"This is one battle that will be won not with force or arms, but with the firm resolve to bring Manila Bay back to his life. With commitment and determination of every Filipino to do his share in this rehabilitation effort, we have already won the battle for the Manila Bay," he said.

Simultaneous cleanup activities were also held in Pampanga, Bataan, Navotas, Las Piñas, Cavite and Bulacan, which have estuaries that flow into the capital's bay.

Cimatú was joined by Tourism Secretary Bernadette Romulo Puyat, Public Works Secretary Mark Villar, Acting Information and Communications Technology Secretary Eliseo Rio Jr., and MMDA Chairman Danilo Lim.

The Laguna Lake Development Authority (LLDA) also handed out cease-and-desist orders to at least three establishments - Aristocrat Restaurant on Roxas Boulevard, Gloria Maris Restaurant at the CCP Complex, and Esplanade (San Miguel Bay The Bay) due to environmental violations.

LLDA General Manager Jaime Medina said that these establishments "discharge untreated water to esteros, rivers, and other tributaries that flow

into Manila Bay."

Medina said that these establishments can still operate but they will have no water source and they cannot discharge wastewater. The facilities for wastewater discharge will be closed, not necessarily the establishment, he added.

The DENR issued notices of violations against several establishments which it found to be non-compliant with effluent standards under Republic Act 9275 or the Philippine Clean Water Act of 2004 and may pay fines up to P200,000 per day.

"We cannot afford to prolong this cleanup activity because this has long been neglected. Ang pinakamahirap sa rehab ay ang pag-sustain nito. Manila Bay is not a lost cause," Cimatú said.

He also said that he will order informal settlers living in waterways to leave and ask them if they want to go home to their provinces.

The DENR earlier said that at least P47 billion will be allotted for the cleanup.

Department of the Interior and Local Government Secretary Eduardo Año said that it took 10 years for the government agencies to finally rehabilitate the Manila Bay after the Supreme Court issued a mandamus to clean up and save the bay.

The rehabilitation effort, dubbed as the "Battle for Manila Bay," reinforces a Supreme Court continuing mandamus, which directs 13 government agencies and local governments to rehabilitate the bay.

## Boracay model

Tourism Secretary Bernadette Romulo-Puyat said that they will be following the cleanup efforts in Boracay Island for the rehabilitation of the Manila Bay.

"Today, we are here to cleanup and

rehabilitate Manila Bay and restore it to its former glory as a historic water landmark," Romulo-Puyat said.

"The DOT will work on the following successful Boracay model or policy of no compliance to DILG (Department of Interior and Local Government) and DENR (Department of Environment and Natural Resources), no DOT accreditation thus, no opening for business," said Puyat.

"Together we will make Manila bay a revered and inclusive tourism destination once again, a spot where you can view the best, most breathtaking sunset while relaxing on a clean sea breeze, and a place that can benefit from an influx of tourists to become a source of livelihood for nearby communities," she said.

## Final Battle

Interior Secretary Año said that they will monitor all establishments surrounding the bay if they follow environmental laws.

"I would also like to remind establishments in Manila Bay to diligently do your corporate social responsibility and help address the worsening problem of the bay. Revisit your waste management protocols and institute reforms if necessary," he added.

"I understand now why the President ordered us to fix Boracay because that is the prelude to the final battle which is to save Manila bay," he said.

A contingent of some 700 soldiers, airmen, sailors, and marines including trucks and engineering equipment led by Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) Chief of Staff General Benjamin Madrigal Jr. participated in the Manila Bayanihan Para Sa Kalinisan kick off ceremony on Sunday as part of its commitment towards environmental security.

## Gigantic septic tank

BUHAY Party-List Rep. Lito Atienza is calling for appropriate action from water utilities Manila Water Co. Inc. and Maynilad Water Services Inc. even as he called the famous Manila Bay a "gigantic

septic tank."

According to him, the "Battle for Manila Bay" is lost unless the two water concessionaires are compelled to address the matter.

"If the administration is really determined to clean up and renew the bay once and for all, then Malacañang should move

to compel the two private water concessionaires in Metro Manila to deliver the sewage treatment facilities that they were supposed to build and operate a long time ago," said Atienza, who is also a former Secretary of Environment and Natural Resources. (With reports from Ellson Quismorio and Francis T. Wakefield)

## #Battle for Manila Bay: 2 famous restos padlocked

By Rio N. Araja

THE government on Sunday closed down two famous restaurants—the Aristocrat on Roxas Boulevard and Gloria Maris near the Folk Arts Theater—for dumping wastewater into Manila Bay on the first day of a massive five-year clean-up of the country's most polluted body of water.

The Department of Environment and Natural Resources, through the Laguna Lake Development Authority, also issued a cease-and-desist order on a waste water treatment facility of The Esplanade in Pasay City for the same violation.

Notices of violation were also issued to commercial establishments such as the Prime Holdings, Sea Residences, Lolo Taba and Lola Pato Restaurant, and Aliw Inn.

Next page

## #Battle...

From A1

The rehabilitation effort—dubbed The Battle for Manila Bay—began with more than 5,000 employees from 13 government agencies and volunteers to clean up the bay.

Environment Secretary Roy Cima led other Cabinet secretaries in a unity walk from the Quirino Grandstand to the Baywalk area.

Those who joined the solidarity walk were Interior and Local Government Secretary Eduardo Año, Public Works and Highways Secretary Mark Villar, Philippine National Police chief Oscar Albayalde, Metropolitan Manila Development Authority chairman Danilo Lim, Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana, Environment Undersecretary Benny Antiporda and Presidential Commission on Urban Poor chairman Alvin Feliciano.

In Bacoor, Cavite, thousands of local government officials, employees and volunteers joined in the cleanup drive.

At 7 a.m., Cavite Gov. Jesus Crispin Remulla and Mayor Lani Mercado Revilla led the launching at the Barangay Zapote V multi-purpose plaza and rallied Caviteños to clean up the heavily-polluted Zapote River, the riverbanks of which are home to hundreds of squatters.

"These are our collective efforts and our commitment together with 23 cities and town mayors and barangays here

in Cavite to bring back the beauty of Manila Bay through the help of every Caviteño," Remulla said.

Revilla said Bacoor City supports the program of President Rodrigo Duterte and the DENR for weekly cleanups, and said the city has already begun the relocation of thousands of families living in danger zones in coastal barangays, some of whom lived in houses on stilts on the river.

"From these clean-up operations, we need to record how many tons of garbage that we have collected in our respective areas and this would be until December this year," said Eloisa Rozul, Department of the Interior and Local Government officer-in-charge for Cavite.

In General Trias City, Mayor Antonio Ferrer, together with City Environmental and Natural Resources Office (CENRO) personnel and 33 village chiefs, participated in cleanup activities along the Ilang-Ilang River and the Rio Grande River in Barangay Manggahan-San Francisco area and the Tanza River in Barangays San Juan 1 and 2 and Tejero.

Noveleta town local officials, employees and volunteers showed up for the clean-up drive in the Ilang-Ilang River and the shorelines in Barangays San Rafael III and San Rafael IV, as early as 6 a.m.

Cavite Police Provincial Director Senior Supt. William Segun also led hundreds of police personnel who are deployed in the seven cities and 16 towns to participate in the cleanup campaign.

Cavite Provincial Environmental and Natural Resources Office personnel and members of the Bureau of Jail Management and Penology, Bureau of Fire Protection and 74 village officials and residents also joined the Manila Bay cleanup effort.

The event was held in compliance with the Cima's order to intensify the information and awareness campaign, and to enforce the law on waste management.

Buhay party-list Rep. Lito Atienza, however, said the Battle for Manila Bay is lost as long as Metro Manila continues to use the bay as a gigantic septic tank.

"Up to now, everybody is in denial of the fact that pretty much all of Metro Manila's raw and untreated domestic wastewater, mainly fecal sewage, still gets flushed down the toilet that is Manila Bay," he said.

The official findings from the joint inspection with LLDA last January 16, 2019 is an isolated case involving only one of our tenants, the SM Group said in a statement.

The matter was immediately corrected and we are now compliant, it said. "We will immediately meet with the LLDA and discuss the corrective measures already implemented."

On the other notices of violation served, we will comply within the 5 day grace period given to respond with the corrective actions already taken.

The SM group is in full support of the Manila Bay Rehabilitation program, the statement read. With PNA

## 'Gov't open to localized peace talks for Capiz'

CAPIZ – The government is open to holding localized peace talks to solve the insurgency problem in this province, according to former special assistant to the President and senatorial aspirant Christopher "Bong" Go.

Go issued the statement in an interview on Friday with *Straight to the Point*, a program aired over *dyVR RMN Capiz*.

Go was reacting to information he received that Capiz has its own issues involving communist rebels.

"We are currently conducting localized peace talks and the

government is focusing on this and ready to talk (with the rebels) in local levels," Go said.

He said he is hoping the national peace talks with the rebels would resume, noting he and President Duterte do not like Filipinos killing each other.



## NPA's attack construction site in Rizal

**CAMP GEN. CAPINPIN, Tanay, Rizal:** The communist New Peoples' Army (NPA) attacked workers of the Pacific Summit Construction Group Inc. (PSCGI) in Barangay Maragondon, Real, Quezon and burned its heavy equipment.

Brig. Gen Arnulfo Burgos, 202nd Infantry Brigade (202IB) commander, said the civilian workers sleeping at the construction barracks in Sitio Pandarawan late on Thursday night were awakened and rounded up by about 10 armed rebels who, then, set fire to the firm's office and heavy equipment.

"We were sleeping when an armed group suddenly entered. They pointed guns at us and ordered us to drop down the floor. There were women with them. I, then, saw our office and trucks burning. We were so scared and traumatized," one of the workers told the police.

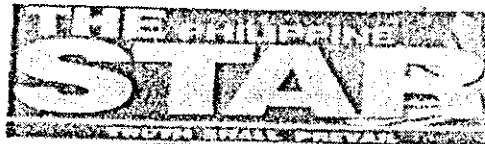
The firm's project manager said three dump trucks, two backhoes, a generator set, one transit mixer, one loader, an L300 van and one unserviceable Strada pick-up used for a mini dam construction were burned.

Burgos said the rebels "were 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."

Meanwhile, troops of the 1st Infantry Battalion under the 202IB recovered an NPA arms cache with one M653 and one Bushmaster in Barangay Bacao, Taysan, Batangas on Friday.

Maj. Gen Rhoderick Parayno, commander of the Philippine Army's 2nd Infantry (Jungle Fighter) Division, said the arms recovery was another major setback for the NPA in Batangas which is now on the verge of collapse.

ROSELLE R. AQUINO



# Support Bangsamoro leaders, ARMM urged

By ALEXIS ROMERO

Malacañang has urged residents of the Autonomous

Region in Muslim Mindanao to support the leaders of the soon-to-be-formed Bangsamoro region as it expressed hope that the ratification of the Bangsamoro Organic Law (BOL) would bring peace in southern Philippines.

The BOL, which will create a new Bangsamoro region with greater political and economic powers, was ratified after an

overwhelming majority of ARMM residents voted in favor of the measure in the plebiscite held last Jan. 21.

More than 1.5 million ARMM residents voted "yes" to BOL ratification while only close to 199,000 voted "no."

The "yes" votes also won in Cotabato City and in Basilan province, except Isabela City. The "no" votes won in Sulu

but the result is not expected to have an effect because ARMM provinces are taken as one geographical unit.

Presidential spokesman Salvador Panelo said critics of the BOL should respect the decision of the majority by cooperating with the leaders of the new Bangsamoro autonomous region.

He said all stakeholders must unite to craft an autonomous government that would be responsive to the needs of the Bangsamoro people and other citizens within the region.

"The sovereign voice of the participating voters in the just concluded plebiscite has spoken, ushering a ray of hope to that war weary, poverty stricken, long neglected and much heralded promised land of the '50s. The Bangsamoro Organic Law has been officially ratified, it behooves the discordant voices to yield to the rule of the majority," Pan-

elo said in a statement.

"We urge the people in the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao to give their new leaders their support and cooperation but at the same we implore them to be vigilant and assertive of their rights. We also call on the mandated leaders to be fealty to their oaths of office," he added.

Panelo noted that the BARMM would be in place as soon as President Duterte constitutes the 80-member Bangsamoro Transition Authority that would oversee the interim government.

He said the the creation of the BARMM would push through unless the Supreme Court rules in favor of petitions questioning the constitutionality of the BOL.

"The ruling, however, remains in the realm of imponderables. We can not be waylaid in

Turn to Page 9

## Support From Page 6

the meanwhile in the race to peace and progress," the spokesman said.

Panelo said Duterte is hopeful that the ratification of BOL would "commence the process of correcting the historical injustices committed against the Bangsamoro people."

"The quest to lasting peace in that region saw not only the bloody encounters among the Muslim combatants but spawned more conflicts as well, giving birth to more armed groups and violent hostilities to the sufferance of the Bangsamoro people and the Christian inhabitants," Panelo said.

"To the credit of the Muslim warriors, they made way to another thrust for the elusive peace as they participated in a democratic process weighing in their collective voice," he added.

Panelo said the Duterte administration was looking forward to another orderly plebiscite in Lanao del Norte and North Cotabato

on Feb. 6.

"We await with enthusiasm a favorable result," he said.

The Feb. 6 plebiscite will be held in Lanao del Norte except Iligan City and the towns of Aleosan, Carmen, Kabacan, Midsayap, Pikit, Pigkayawan and Tulu-nan in North Cotabato.

The BARMM has been allocated P62 billion this year, Senate Majority Leader Juan Miguel Zubiri said yesterday. — With Jose Rodel Clapano, Paolo Romero

# Palace: Ratified BOL ushers a ray of hope

By Julie M. Aurelio  
@JMAurelioINQ

Malacañang is optimistic that next month's referendum for the Bangsamoro Organic Law (BOL) will yield positive results, following the BOL's ratification on Friday.

Presidential spokesperson Salvador Panelo said the ratification of the BOL ushered "a ray of hope" to the "war-weary, poverty-stricken, long-neglected and much-heralded promised land" of Mindanao.

In a statement, Panelo noted that "the sovereign voice of the participating voters in the just concluded plebiscite had spoken."

## Rule of the majority

"The BOL has been officially ratified, it behooves the discordant voices to yield to the rule of the majority," Panelo said.

"We look forward to another orderly plebiscite in the provinces of Lanao del Norte and North Cotabato on Feb. 6 even as we await with enthusiasm a favorable result," he said.

Presidential Communications Secretary Martin Andanar, for his part, said people must believe in the BOL's potential to usher peace in Mindanao.

"We really need to be optimistic about the entire situation. There are those critical ones who say this has happened before with the Autonomous Region in Muslim

Mindanao (ARMM), and that others have tried but failed," he said over the state-run Radyo Pilipinas.

"But if that is our attitude, nothing will happen to our country," he said.

He noted that the results of the plebiscite should be respected and that "the voice of the majority is the voice of God."

"We must be really positive, we must look forward so that there will be long-term, life-long peace," Andanar added.

Andanar stressed that the plebiscite for the BOL's ratification went through the democratic process.

"It's a democratic process wherein the electorate voted. They've voted for what they want. The yes votes were overwhelming, so it was ratified," he added.

On Friday night, the Commission on Elections announced that the BOL was deemed ratified after 1,540,017 residents voted for ratification while 198,750 rejected the BOL in a referendum on Jan. 21.

## Second plebiscite

The Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM) will cover the five existing provinces of the ARMM and Cotabato City.

There will be a second round of the plebiscite on Feb. 6 to determine if the BARMM will be expanded to cover six towns

in Lanao del Norte and 39 barangays in North Cotabato.

Republic Act No. 11054, or the BOL, was signed by President Duterte in July last year, as part of the government's peace pact with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front.

## Correct injustices

The President said the BOL was seen to correct the historical injustices against the Bangsamoro people, as the law would create a Bangsamoro government with fiscal autonomy.

Following the ratification of the BOL, the Palace said the BARMM would be created as soon as Mr. Duterte constituted the Bangsamoro Transition Authority (BTA).

The 80-member BTA will oversee the interim government of the BARMM, unless the Supreme Court rules in favor of a petition questioning the constitutionality of the BOL.

The Palace said the President was optimistic that the "ratification of the BOL would commence the process of correcting the historical injustices committed against the Bangsamoro people."

"It is in this light that all the stakeholders must join their hands in unity and harmony to craft an autonomous government that will be responsive to the needs of the Bangsamoro people and other citizens within the jurisdiction of BARMM," Panelo said. INQ

# Give new Bangsamoro region a chance — Andanar

By GENALYN D. KABILING

**T**he envisioned Bangsamoro autonomous region should be given a chance to work following a democratic plebiscite in the proposed territories, according to a Palace official.

Presidential Communications Secretary Martin Andanar said the plebiscite on the ratification of the Bangsamoro Organic Law has shown the true will of the people which should be respected.

"The voice of the majority is the voice of God," Andanar said over government radio Saturday.

"We really need to be optimistic about the entire situation. Maraming of course mga critical - mayroong magsasabi na nangyari na 'yan at nag-ARMM na, marami nang sumubok di-yan wala pa ring nangyari. But if that is our attitude, walang mangyayari po sa ating bayan [We really need to be optimistic about the entire situation. There are many critics doubting it, saying we did it with ARMM (Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao), that many tried but nothing happened. But if that is our attitude, nothing will happen to our country]," he added.

The Commission on Elec-

tions (Comelec) recently announced the ratification of the Republic Act (RA) No. 11054 also known as Organic Law for the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao based on the majority of votes cast in the ARMM.

Based on the canvassing of votes in ARMM, 1,540,017 of the 1.9 million voters in the region voted "Yes" for the BOL ratification while 198,750 voted "No" during the January 21 plebiscite.

A second plebiscite on the BOL ratification will be held in Lanao del Norte and several towns in North Cotabato on February 6.

Andanar said the ratification of the BOL went through the democratic process.

"It's a democratic process wherein the electorate voted. They've voted for what they want," he said.

"Overwhelming naman ang sumagot na 'oo' kaya ito'y ratified na. So therefore, the voice of the majority is the voice of God, hindi ho ba? So ngayon, ang ating hinihintay na lamang ay itong ikalawang botohan sa February 6 (There was an overwhelming 'Yes' vote so it is now ratified. Therefore the voice of the majority is the voice of God, right? At present, let's wait for the second plebiscite on February 6)," he added. ✓

COMELEC:

# Second BOL plebiscite 'different'

BY WILLIAM B. DEPASUPIL

**T**HE second plebiscite that will be held next month would decide on the inclusion of several areas in the soon-to-be established Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (Barmm), according to the Commission on Elections (Comelec).

Comelec spokesman James Jimenez made the clarification over the weekend, saying the second plebiscite scheduled on February 6 would only be for areas that submitted petitions for voluntary inclusion in the Barmm.

"This is different. In February, it's only an inclusion question, whether a certain area wants to join [the Barmm] or not," Jimenez added.

The February 6 plebiscite covers Lanao del Norte, except Ili-

gan City; the municipalities of Baloi, Monai, Nunungan, Pantar, Taguillowan and Pangkal; and the towns of Aleosan, Carmen, Kabacan, Midsayap, Pikit and Pigkawayan, including Tolanan, all in North Cotabato.

The January 21 plebiscite was for the ratification of Republic Act (RA) 11054 or the "Organic Law for the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao" by voters of the five provinces comprising the

existing Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) voting as one, and for the inclusion of Cotabato City and Isabela City and for Basilan province if it wanted Isabela City to be part of Barmm.

The Commission on Elections *en banc*, sitting as the National Plebiscite Board of Canvassers (NPBC), proclaimed RA 11054 as deemed ratified after garnering majority of the votes cast in the ARMM.

The NPBC also proclaimed Cota-

bato City to be part of the Barmm, while Isabela City was proclaimed as not part of the Barmm.

With the ratification of the Barmm, the existing ARMM is technically abolished.

The Barmm's territorial jurisdiction covers the whole ARMM, including Cotabato City, and the rest of the areas that will favor their inclusion to the new autonomous region after the February 6 plebiscite. *AK*

## Enrile sees no end to disunity despite BARMM

By Macon Ramos-Araneta

AS TWIN explosions claimed the lives of 20 people in a church in Jolo, Sulu on Sunday, former senator Juan Ponce Enrile warned that the creation of a new autonomous region would not completely address the disunity and conflict in Mindanao.

"Knowing the problem of the area, knowing the dynamics of the problem of Islam around the world and even in Mindanao, I have my own pessimism

that the solution might not be enough," Enrile said at a press forum.

He said the Bangsamoro Organic Law (BOL) and the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM) would not be effective because there is no "complete unity" among the followers of the Islamic faith.

"There is an endemic latent disunity in the area and that may heighten because there are other forces

Next page

### Enrile...

From A1

operating in the area that may impinge on the peace and order of Mindanao," Enrile said.

"I will always assume that in any society there are always unhappy people that can create a problem for any sitting government," he added.

Enrile said he supported the ratification of the BOL but expressed reservations about its chances for success.

"The mere fact that the law was passed by Congress does not solve the problem. It has to be tested on the ground whether it will work or not. And I hope that it will work although I have my reservations," he said.

At the same forum, Senator Aquilino Pimentel III described the BOL as a "pivotal and historic milestone" in the quest for peace in Mindanao, but said the mission of the government goes beyond the ratification of the law.

"We know from recent history that laying the groundwork for peace must be followed by a sustained effort at keeping the peace," he said.

He said the law's proper implementation "is one of the keys to unlocking the economic potential of the region, and a critical step to fulfilling the promise of Mindanao, which has been held back by decades of armed conflict."

"Regional peace and stability and complementary national measures like the Ease of Doing Business Law will fuel economic development and attract the investments Mindanao needs," he said.



Pimentel noted that the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) was the country's fifth fastest growing region in 2017, with a growth rate of 7.3 percent in that year.

"The country is benefiting from its seventh consecutive year of sustained economic growth. Spurring development in Mindanao will serve to ensure that this upward trajectory continues," he said.

The Commission on Election's declared that the BOL had been ratified with 1,540,017 residents voting in favor of ratification and only 198,750 voting against it.

The new region will be composed of the five provinces currently comprising the ARMM, as well as Cotabato City.

A second round of the plebiscite on Feb. 6 will determine whether the BARMM would still be expanded.

Senators expressed outrage at the bombing of a Catholic church in Jolo, Sulu, Sunday.

Senator Francis Pangilinan expressed hope that the violence would not derail efforts at peace following the ratification of the BOL.

## NCRPO on alert amid Sulu bombing

The National Capital Region Police Office (NCRPO) was placed on heightened alert following an explosion in Sulu yesterday.

NCRPO chief Director Guillermo Eleazar ordered tight security at airports, seaports, vital government and private installations as well as places of convergence.

"We should intensify checkpoint operations at entry and exit points of Metro Manila to prevent terrorists from sneaking in bombs," Eleazar said.

Police and military officials have yet to identify those behind the bombing of the cathedral in Jolo, Sulu.

Eleazar ordered the NCRPO intelligence division to coordinate with other government intelligence agencies in monitoring "persons who are out to carry out bombing attacks in Metro Manila."

"So far, we have not monitored any group out to conduct bombing runs in the metropolis, but we are prepared for the worst case scenario," he said. "We don't want to be caught with our pants down."

The NCRPO asked the public to report suspicious-looking individuals or baggage to the nearest police station. — Non Alquitran

# Palace vows no mercy for bombers

By ALEXIS ROMERO

The "godless criminals" who bombed the Jolo cathedral in Sulu would be crushed and pursued "to the ends of the Earth," Malacañang vowed yesterday.

Presidential spokesman Salvador Panelo said the Duterte administration condemned "in the strongest possible terms" the bombing, which he called "an act of terrorism."

"We will pursue to the ends of the

Earth the ruthless perpetrators behind this dastardly crime until every killer is brought to justice and put behind bars. The law will give them no mercy," Panelo said in a statement.

Panelo said authorities are looking into the bombing, which was perpetrated just days after Sulu rejected the Bangsamoro Organic Law (BOL).

Several foreign governments have welcomed the ratification of the BOL. They worry, however, that small numbers

of Islamic State-linked militants from the Middle East and Southeast Asia could forge an alliance with homegrown insurgents and turn Mindanao into a breeding ground for extremists.

Australian Ambassador Steve Robinson, British Ambassador Daniel Pruce and the European Union expressed their condolences and sympathies to the families of those killed in the twin blasts.

"My thoughts are with those who lost

Turn to Page 4

## Palace From Page 1

their loved ones and those affected by the attack in #Sulu," Robinson said on Twitter.

"I reaffirm Australia's strong condemnation of all acts of terror," he said.

The EU delegation to the Philippines conveyed its condolences and sympathies to the families of the victims of the bombing.

"I express my solidarity with the

Filipino people during these trying times," EU Ambassador Franz Jessen said in a statement.

"Filipinos have always been resilient, steadfast, and collaborative and I am certain that these values will see them through in this sad situation," he said.

The Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines (CBCP) condemned the bombing, noting the attack came following the ratification of the BOL.

"We condemn this act of terrorism that has taken place only a few days after the

Turn to Page 8

## Palace From Page 4

plebiscite on the Bangsamoro Organic Law," CBCP president and Davao Archbishop Romulo Valles said.

"As we begin a new phase in the peace process with the creation of the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARRM), we ask our Christian brethren to join hands with all peace-loving Muslim and Indigenous

People communities in the advocacy against violent extremism," he appealed.

### Deadly links

Philippine National Police chief Director General Oscar Albayalde said it is premature to say if yesterday's bombing attacks were related to the Jan. 21 plebiscite of BOL.

Security officials were

looking "at different threat groups and they still can't say if this has something to do with the just concluded plebiscite," Albayalde told ABS-CBN.

Albayalde noted Sulu rejected the ratification of the BOL, which could have included the province in the expanded Muslim Autonomous Region.

The province is home to the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF), a rival of the Moro Islamic Liberation (MILF) that will lead the new Bangsamoro autonomous region under the BOL.

Sulu is also where smaller militant cells like the Abu Sayyaf operate.

National Security Adviser Hermogenes Esperon Jr. also said it remains unclear whether the bombings were related to the ratification of

the BOL.

"We have yet to establish if the two explosions are related to the all-important BOL," Esperon said in a statement.

"The BOL ends the secessionist narrative. The BOL signifies the end of war for secession. It stands for peace in Mindanao. The perpetrators are mass murderers. They are extremist criminals," he added.

While officials are not sure whether the explosions have something to do with the BOL, Esperon said the government would not allow the perpetrators of the bombings to "spoil the preference of the people for peace."

"Security forces have tightened up the systems to secure Sulu and the rest of BARMM. Peace must prevail

over war," Esperon added.

Presidential Communications Secretary Martin Andanar said the bombings may be related to the BOL plebiscite.

"There are elements trying to derail the Bangsamoro Organic Law," Andanar told radio station dzMM.

"While (the BOL) lost narrowly in Sulu, the government is not losing hope and the government will find the criminals behind these (bombings)," he added.

Andanar revealed security officials have identified the suspects based on security video footage. He declined to elaborate.

"There's a chance, there's a possibility (that the bombings are related to BOL). We are looking at all angles... Criminals are behind these bombings. They do not have an ideology," he added.

Andanar said security agencies, the social welfare department, and the Office of the President would take care of the needs of the families of the victims.

Lawmakers condemned the bombing and called on the authorities to immediately hunt and apprehend the attackers.

"We should all condemn those responsible for bombing the cathedral in Jolo. Targeting the innocent and the helpless is the highest form of cowardice," Senate President Vicente Sotto III said in a statement.

Senate Majority Leader Juan Miguel Zubiri believed that those "who took part in this dastardly act just wants to taint the victory achieved by the Bangsamoro people in their ratification of the BOL."

Sen. Joseph Victor Ejercito described the attack as "an act of cowardice and desperation that has no place nor support from peace-loving Filipinos in Mindanao and the rest of our country."

Sen. Sonny Angara said he was outraged that the bombings occurred.

Sen. Francis Pangilinan also linked the incident to the plebiscite for the BOL, and served as a challenge for the government to show what martial law in Mindanao can do to address these attacks.

Sen. Nancy Binay urged authorities to dig deeper in to the incident as it came when Mindanao remains under martial law.

"It is quite saddening that while there are initiatives to finally end the conflict to have permanent peace, there are also those who continue to terrorize and find ways to derail and impair the gains for peace," Binay said.

Sen. Paolo Benigno Aquino IV called for calm and sobriety as the government is amid efforts to put in place a new Bangsamoro autonomous region. — With Pia Lee-Brago, Paolo Romero, Edu Punay, John Unson

# Twin blasts hit Jolo Cathedral; at least 20 dead

## Palace vows no mercy; troops on heightened alert

By AARON RECUENGO, MARTIN SADONGDONG, FRANCIS WAKEFIELD,  
ZEA CAPISTRANO, NONOYE E. LACSON, and ARGYLL CYRUS B. GEUCOS



At least 20 people died, including five soldiers, while 81 others were wounded after two improvised explosive devices

(IEDs) ripped through the Jolo Cathedral in Sulu while a Sunday morning mass was ongoing, police officials said.

►4

# Twin blasts hit

Senior Insp. Jemar delos Santos, spokesman of the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM), said the two bombs went off at one minute interval — the first exploded inside the church while the other one near the entrance.

"The two explosions occurred while mass was being officiated. There were a lot of people wounded," Delos Santos told the Manila Bulletin in a phone interview.

Malacañang vowed that no mercy will be shown to those behind the two explosions.

"We condemn in the strongest possible terms the bomb explosions that occurred inside and outside the Mt. Carmel Cathedral in Jolo this Sunday morning which left many soldiers and civilians dead and scores wounded," presidential spokesman Salvador Panelo said.

He said the government will not rest until the perpetrators who boldly challenged the state are put behind bars.

Defense Secretary Delfin N. Lorenzana said the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) immediately secured the explosion area and transported the casualties to the nearest medical facilities, including the air evacuation of some victims to Zamboanga City for further medical treatment and evaluation.

"I have directed our troops to heighten their alert level, secure all places of worships and public places at once, and initiate pro-active security measures to thwart hostile plans," Lorenzana said.

The explosions occurred while security forces in Mindanao are on alert due to the recent plebiscite for the Bangsamoro Organic Law. Sulu has rejected the BOL based on the canvassing results.

The bombs went off at around 8:30 a.m. yesterday, and police are expected to focus on the investigation based on the statements of the survivors who might have noticed the persons who planted the IEDs.

Chief Supt. Graciano Mijares, ARMM regional director, said that he had ordered his men to further intensify the security in Sulu and other areas to prevent a repeat of the incident in any part of the region.

Mijares said they could not yet pinpoint the group or persons responsible for the attack since their focus now is to attend to the victims and secure the blast site and other possible targets.

Based on the police data, five soldiers were among those killed while 14 other Army troopers were wounded. Another fatality was reportedly a member of the Philippine Coast Guard.

At least two policemen and two Coast Guard personnel were also wounded. The rest of the casualties are civilians.

"The soldiers were there because they were securing the area because of security concerns," said Director General Oscar Albayalde, chief of the Philippine National Police (PNP).

The soldiers and policemen were

hit in the explosion near the Cathedral entrance where security forces are present to secure the area.

The entire Mindanao remains under Martial Law.

Albayalde said that they will conduct a thorough investigation and intelligence build-up in order to identify and arrest those responsible for the attack.

Mijares, for his part, said they will look into the possibility of lapses in securing the area.

As of press time yesterday, no group had claimed responsibility for the attack.

The Philippine Coast Guard confirmed that three of its K-9 personnel were among those killed and wounded in the two explosions that hit Mt. Carmel Cathedral in Jolo, Sulu.

PCG spokesman Captain Armand Balilo said that Second Seaman Jaypee Galicha was found dead at the blast site while PO3 Joeman Sanson and PO3 Paolo Isolona were wounded.

"We extend our sympathy to the families of the victims and we will ensure that all possible assistance to the families will be given," said Senior Supt. Bernard Banac, newly-installed PNP spokesperson. "We assure the bereaved family and their relatives that we will ensure that justice will be served in the soonest time possible," he added.

Banac also appealed to the people of Sulu and other nearby towns to remain calm and vigilant.

## 'We will crush them'

"We will pursue to the ends of the earth the ruthless perpetrators behind this dastardly crime until every killer is brought to justice and put behind bars. The law will give them no mercy," Panelo said.

National Security Adviser Hermogenes Esperon Jr. said they have yet to determine whether the explosion is related to the ratification of the BOL.

Esperon assured that the government will not allow the "mass murderers" behind the explosion to destroy the peace that the BOL signifies.

"The perpetrators are mass murderers. They are extremist criminals. We will not allow them to spoil the preference of the people for peace," he said.

"Security forces have tightened up the systems to secure Sulu and the rest of BARMM. Peace must prevail over war," he added.

The deadly twin bombings in Jolo, Sulu might be connected with the recent plebiscite result in favor of the ratification of the Bangsamoro Organic Law. Presidential Communications Secretary Martin Andanar said on Sunday, claiming that some groups were probably trying to derail the implementation of the law creating the Bangsamoro autonomous region.

Local residents living near the explosion site promptly tagged the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) as responsible for the attack.

Former Sulu Gov. Abdusakur Tan

said "we condemn the barbaric act of certain individuals or group in the Jolo cathedral this morning. They just want to sow terror and we should never give in to their inhuman and insane act."

## Outrage

Senators on Sunday expressed outrage and deep concern over the bombing in Jolo, Sulu.

"I am deeply concerned and saddened by the twin explosions that rocked the Jolo Cathedral in Sulu this morning. But most of all, I am outraged that the bombings had reportedly killed innocent individuals. This senseless act of violence must be condemned at the very least," Sen. Sonny Angara said.

Sen. Maria Lourdes "Nancy" Binay said she is one with the people of Mindanao and the whole nation in condemning the bombing incident.

"I urge the authorities to look deeply at the reason why the bombings happened, especially considering the whole island of Mindanao is presently under martial law," Binay said.

Sen. Francis "Kiko" Pangilinan said: "Let us not be distracted and defeated by warmongers and violent elements in our midst. An immediate arrest and prosecution of the perpetrators will give justice to the victims and send a strong message that this government will not allow the rule of violence to triumph. This incident is also a challenge for the government to show what martial law in Mindanao can do to address these attacks."

Anak-Mindanao (AMIN) Party-List Rep. Amihilda Sangcopan strongly condemned Sunday the bombing of a cathedral in Jolo, Sulu, calling it a "cowardly and selfish act."

#### **'Pray for us'**

Fr. Jefferson C. Nadua of the Our Lady of Mount Carmel Cathedral in Jolo, Sulu, is appealing for prayers for the victims of the twin blasts.

"We pray for safety of those who are wounded," he told church-run Radyo Veritas. "We pray and hope that there are no casualties among our parishioners."

He also expressed hope that justice will be given to the victims.

#### **EU solidarity**

The European Union Delegation to the Philippines on Sunday expressed its solidarity with the Filipino people following the twin blast that rocked a cathedral in Jolo, Sulu, leaving at least 27 dead and 77 wounded.

In a statement, the EU Ambassador to the Philippines Franz Jessen conveyed his deepest condolences and sympathies to the families of those who were killed and injured in the blast.

"I express my solidarity with the Filipino people during these trying times," said Jessen.

He added that "Filipinos have always been resilient, steadfast, and collaborative and I am certain that these values will see them through in this sad situation." (With reports from Hannah L. Torregoza, Leslie Ann G. Aquino, Ellson Quismorio, Raymund F. Antonio and Roy C. Mabasa)



28

January 2019

The Manila Times

Page:

A2

MILITARY BLAMES ABU SAYYAF

# Jolo Cathedral bombed; 20 killed, 81 wounded

BY DEMPSEY REYES

**J**OLO, Sulu: 20 people were killed and 81 injured in two blasts that targeted Sunday Mass at the Catholic cathedral of Jolo in Sulu, a hotbed of Islamist extremists.

The first bomb exploded at about 8 a.m. inside Our Lady of Mount Carmel Cathedral as the liturgy was underway, killing most of the 15 civilian fatalities whose bodies were strewn across the ground.

The door, pews and glass windows of the cathedral were blown off.

A second improvised explosive device (IED), left in the utility box of a motorcycle in the parking area outside the church, went off as soldiers responded to the scene, a military report said.

Of the fatalities, five were soldiers. Fourteen military

➤ Bombed A2

27

men were wounded, along with two policemen and 65 civilians.

The army said it airlifted some of the wounded to the nearby city of Zamboanga for medical treatment.

Authorities immediately pointed to the notorious Abu Sayyaf kidnap-for-ransom group as responsible for the blasts.

"When you talk about terrorism in Sulu, the primary suspect is always the [Abu Sayyaf] but we are not discounting the possibility that there are other perpetrators," Lt. Col. Gerry Besana, spokesman of the military's Western Mindanao Command, told Agence France-Presse (AFP).

Palace spokesman Salvador Panelo condemned the incident as an "act of terrorism and murder."

"We will pursue to the ends of the earth the ruthless perpetrators behind this dastardly crime until every killer is brought to justice and put behind bars. The law will give them no mercy," he said in a statement.

The bombings happened despite an extended martial rule in the whole of southern Philippines, and the attacks only showed how poor the security was in the capital of Sulu.

Dr. Fahra'tan Omar, chief of the Jolo Public Hospital, identified some of the fatalities as Romulo Reyes, 58, and wife Daisy, 53; Dolores Samiento Tan, 72; Fe Non, 84; Cecilia Sanches, 42; Juliet Jaime, 50; Cecilia dela Cruz, 61; Reynaldo Pescadera Sr. 74; Alba Perpetua, 40; Bibing Perpetua, 40; and Ridzmar Mukadik, 19.

## Peace spoilers?

The twin blasts came six days after the plebiscite on the Bangsamoro Organic Law (BOL), which residents of the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) voted overwhelmingly to approve.

Sulu, one of the five ARMM provinces, however, voted "no" to the BOL, which will replace the ARMM with a new Bangsamoro autonomous region (BARMM) with greater powers and more financial resources as part of a 2014 peace deal with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front.

The governor of Sulu, Abdusakur "Toto" Tan 2nd, prefers a separate region for the natives of Sulu, the Tausugs, and had petitioned the Supreme Court to declare the BOL unconstitutional.

In the Sulu BOL plebiscite, 163,526 voted "no," while the "yes" votes reached 137,630.

Despite Sulu's vote, the province is legally required to join Bangsamoro region because voters from across the existing

ARMM region voted in favor of it on the whole.

Sunday's bombing also came after a New Year's Eve blast in Cotabato City that killed two people and wounded 35 others.

Cotabato City last week voted to be included in the new autonomous region.

The timing of Sunday's bombs raised questions on whether the attack was meant to derail the peace process, which did not include hardline Islamist factions.

Mujiv Hataman, ARMM governor, said the blasts highlighted the urgency of implementing the peace deal.

"Terrorists want to make their presence known. I hope the [law] is implemented well so it could be a solution to stop the spread of terrorism," Hataman told AFP.

Governor Tan condemned the blasts. "We are strongly condemning this evil act and we are doing our best to help those injured. Our authorities are on top of the situation," he said.

A Cotabato City-based member of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate that ministers in Jolo, Fr. Bliseo Mercado Jr., said: "Why has the war gone down to barbarity? Bombing sacred places and places of worship? Can the leadership not stop it?"

Alih Sakaluran Aiyub of the National Ulama Council of the Philippines said the bombing of

the Jolo Cathedral should be condemned by everyone.

## No connection yet

Armed Forces chief Gen. Benjamin Madrigal said that the twin explosions' connection to the BOL referendum had yet to be established.

"We still cannot determine if this has something to do with the BOL and whoever the perpetrator is," he told reporters in a phone interview.

"We will look in the signature of the IED [to determine who are responsible], what kind of IED was used, if it is the same as with the terrorists and of course, if there is an influence from other groups," Madrigal added.

National Security Adviser Hermogenes Esperon Jr. said he was hoping the BOL would bring peace to Mindanao, even after the explosions.

"We have yet to establish if the two explosions are related to the... BOL. The BOL ends the secessionist narrative. The BOL signifies the end of war for secession. It stands for peace in Mindanao," Esperon said in a separate statement.

"We will not allow them (those responsible for the blast) to spoil the preference of the people for peace. Security forces have tightened up the systems to secure Sulu and the rest of Barmm," he added.

Defense Secretary Delfin Lo-

renzana ordered military forces to heighten security in places of worship and other public places across Sulu province.

The incident also came days after the encounter of military forces in Lanao del Sur with Islamic State-inspired Maute group under Owayda Benito Marohombsar alias Abu Dai, who fled. Three terrorists were killed and three soldiers wounded.

Previous attacks on churches were largely blamed by the authorities to the Abu Sayyaf, a small but the most notorious among rebel groups operating in the troubled region.

In December 2010, Abu Sayyaf militants bombed another church inside the police base in Jolo and killed at least six worshippers.

The militants scaled the church wall undetected under cover of darkness, planted the bomb and waited the next morning before detonating the powerful explosive during Mass.

Two people were also killed and 17 others wounded when militants detonated a huge bomb planted outside the cathedral in July 2009. A second bomb was found near the church and has been disarmed by Filipino and US troops helping the military fight terrorism.

**WITH AL JACINTO IN  
PAGADIAN CITY, JULMUNIR  
I. JANNARAL IN COTABATO  
CITY, FRANCIS EARL CUETO  
IN MANILA, AFP AND AP**

# Jolo blasts: 20 dead, 81 hurt

## *Twin explosions shatter Church amid Sunday mass*

By Francisco Tuyay

**T**WENTY people were killed and 81 others were wounded after two bombs went off one after the other at the Our Lady of Mt. Carmel Cathedral while Catholics heard Sunday mass, a week after Jolo province rejected the ratification of the Bangsamoro Organic Law (BOL).

Investigators said the first blast went off in the main hall of the church at about 8:15 a.m., sending churchgoers rushing out in a panic.

Shortly afterward, as soldiers and police responded, a second blast went off near the main entrance, killing more people.

The explosions were so powerful that some bodies were blown to pieces. Inside the church, wooden pews and windows were shattered and bodies were strewn across the ground.

The second bomb was placed in the utility box of a parked motorcycle outside of the church, just a few meters of the main entrance, initial reports said.

The fatalities included 15 civilians and five army troopers. Some 81 were wounded, among them 14 military personnel, two policemen and 65 civilians, all brought to the Zamboanga City General Hospital. Soldiers were airlifted to Camp Teodulfo Bautista Station Hospital in Jolo, Sulu, said Chief Supt. Graciano Mijares, regional director of the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (ARMM).

Additional troops were deployed, including some in armored carriers, in key areas and urban centers.

Authorities initially blamed terrorists such as the Abu Sayyaf Group for the attack, but did not discount other groups. *Next page*

## Jolo...

From A1

A week before the blast, the military had locked down portions of the road network leading to populated urban centers in a bid prevent any infiltration by terrorists.

National Security Adviser Hermogenes Esperon condemned the attack, calling the perpetrators "mass murderers."

"We will not allow them to spoil the preference of the people for peace. Security forces have tightened [security in] Sulu and the rest of the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao," he said.

He said they have yet to establish if the blasts were related to the recently concluded plebiscite to ratify the BOL, the law that would give Muslim Mindanao greater autonomy and the linchpin in efforts to bring peace to the region.

Unlike the rest of the ARMM, Sulu province, including Jolo, had voted against the BOL.

Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana ordered a heightened alert and tighter security in all places of worship and in other public areas, and vowed that the bombers would be brought to justice.

President Rodrigo Duterte's spokesman condemned the incident as an "act of terrorism and murder."

"We will pursue to the ends of the earth the ruthless perpetrators behind this dastardly crime until every killer is brought to justice and put behind bars. The law will give them no mercy," Salvador Panelo said in a statement.

Authorities said the notorious Abu Sayyaf kidnap-for-ransom group could be behind the blasts.

"When you talk about terrorism in Sulu, the primary suspect is always the (Abu Sayyaf) but we are not discounting

the possibility that there are other perpetrators," regional military spokesman Lt. Col. Gerry Besana said.

Jolo is a base of the Abu Sayyaf, which is blamed for deadly bombings, including an attack on a ferry in Manila Bay in 2004 that claimed 116 lives in the country's deadliest terror assault.

The Abu Sayyaf is a loose network of militants formed in the 1990s with seed money from Osama bin Laden's Al-Qaeda network, and has earned millions of dollars from banditry and kidnappings-for-ransom, often targeting foreigners.

It is among armed groups based in the strife-torn region of Mindanao, some of whose members have pledged allegiance to the Islamic State group.

Jolo also lies in the proposed Bangsamoro Muslim-majority autonomous region, which local voters overwhelmingly approved last week.

Despite Sulu's vote, the province is legally required to join Bangsamoro because voters from across the current autonomous region voted in favor of it on the whole.

Sunday's bombing comes after a New Year's eve blast in the city of Cotabato killed two people and wounded 35 others.

Cotabato last week voted to be included in the new autonomous region.

The timing of Sunday's bombs raised questions on whether the attack was meant to derail the peace process.

Mujiv Hataman, governor of the current autonomous region in Muslim Mindanao, said the blasts highlighted the urgency of implementing the BOL.

"Terrorists want to make their presence known. I hope the (law) is implemented well so it could be a solution to stop the spread of terrorism," Hataman said.

The Palace said the authorities are wasting no time to identify the group behind the attack.

"Authorities are now investigating

these brazen attacks, which includes identifying the group behind the blast," Panelo said.

"We condole with the families of the victims that perished in this tragedy even as we attend to the injured and give succor to their families," he added.

Senate President Vicente Sotto III said the bomb targeting the innocent and the helpless was "the highest form of cowardice."

Senator Juan Miguel Zubiri also condemned the attack in Sulu.

"Clearly those who took part in this dastardly act just want to taint the victory achieved by the Bangsamoro people in their ratification of the BOL," he said.

Anak Mindanao Rep. Amihilda Sangcopan described the attack as "alarming" and asked why such an attack was carried out even under martial law.

Muntinlupa City Rep. Ruffy Biazon said the attack was an affront to the people of Sulu and Mindanao, and a direct challenge to the government efforts to achieve peace in the south.

"Targeting a place of worship on a day of worship not only ensured that there would be a big number of casualties but [would have] psychological, social and even religious impact as well," he said.

The Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines (CBCP) condemned the attack and called for religious tolerance.

"As we begin a new phase in the peace process with the creation of the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao, we ask our Christian brethren to join hands with all peace-loving Muslim and Indigenous People communities in the advocacy against violent extremism," the CBCP said in a statement. "May all our religions of peace guide us in our quest for a brighter future for the peoples of Mindanao." With Nat Mariano, Macon Ramos-Araneta, Rio N. Araya, AFP, PNA

# 20 dead, 111 wounded in Sulu cathedral blasts

BY VICTOR REYES

TWENTY persons, including five soldiers, died yesterday in Sulu while 111 others were wounded after two improvised bombs exploded at the Our Lady of Mt. Carmel Cathedral in Jolo town.

The police casualty figure was as of 6 p.m. yesterday and after clarifications were issued by police authorities.

The military figures were 18 dead and 83 wounded as of 2 p.m.

There was no immediate claim of responsibility but the police and the military suspect the bombings were the work of Abu Sayyaf, a bandit and terror group operating mainly in Sulu and Basilan.

The first bomb exploded at 8:28 a.m. inside the cathedral while mass was ongoing, said Col. Gerry Besana, spokesman of the military's Western Mindanao Command based in Zamboanga City.

The second went off about a minute later in front of the church,

killing five soldiers who were among security forces racing to the scene in response to the first explosion.

Besana said the bomb was planted on a parked motorcycle.

Besana also said the Abu Sayyaf group is the "usual primary suspect" but "we do not discount the possibility that there other perpetrators."

He said post-blast investigations are establishing the "bomb signature."

The explosions occurred six days after a plebiscite was held for the ratification of the Bangsamoro Organic Law. The "no" vote won in Sulu, giving rise to speculations that BOL advocates were behind the attack.

The BOI ratification will pave the way for the creation of the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) that will replace the ARMM. The Com-

See 20 DEAD ► Page B3

## 20 DEAD

mission on Elections announced the ratification of the BOL last January 25.

Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana said he has directed the military to "heighten their alert level, secure all places of worships and public places at once, and initiate pro-active security measure to thwart hostile plans."

"While we encourage the public to be more vigilant and to be cooperative with the authorities in reporting any security related concerns, we also urge everyone to remain calm and avoid spreading panic in our respective communities to deny terrorism any victory," he also said.

### CASUALTY FIGURES

Chief Supt. Graciano Mijares, chief of the Autonomous Regional Police Office, initially said 27 died and 77 others were injured in the attack. This was later clarified by his spokesman, Senior Insp. Jemar delos Santos, who said there were 19 fatalities (13 civilians, a member of the Coast Guard, and five soldiers) and 79 wounded (63 civilians, 14 soldiers and two policemen).

Delos Santos said the error was due to "miscommunication with hospitals."

In a later report, Mijares said 20 died (14 civilians, five soldiers, and a Coast Guard member) and 81 (63 civilians, 14 soldiers and two Coast Guard members) were wounded in the blasts as of 2 p.m.

In a message as of 5:30 p.m., Delos Santos said there were 20 dead and 81 injured.

The ARMM police, in a 6 p.m. update, said there were 20 dead and

111 injured.

Besana said the military's casualty count was 18 dead (12 civilians, five soldiers, and a Coast Guard member) and 83 wounded (65 civilians, 16 soldiers, and two Coast Guard members) also as of 2 p.m.

Besana said the five soldiers who died were among the scores of soldiers who were providing perimeter security. They were hit in the second explosion while responding to the first blast.

### ANGLES, SUSPECTS

PNP chief Oscar Albayalde said investigators are looking at various angles.

"We are looking at various threat groups in the area and they cannot yet say if this has something to do with the plebiscite or not," he said.

Albayalde said the Abu Sayyaf is among the suspects.

The group is blamed for bombings, kidnappings and beheadings of hostages in Sulu.

Besana said while probers are looking into the explosions in relation to the BOL plebiscite, he sought to downplay this.

"It may not be logical because majority in Sulu voted 'no.' Advocates of the BOL are advocating peace so it's illogical to, if they will carry out the bombings," he said.

AFP chief Gen Benjamin Madrigal Jr. said he has instructed forces in Mindanao, including Central Mindanao, to be on "full alert" but added "we need the full vigilance of everybody, inform us when you see suspicious people (in your area)."

Communications Secretary Martin Andanar, in an interview with radio dzMM, said law enforcement and security officials have CCTV footage that helped identify the

possible perpetrators.

Andanar and National Security Adviser Hermogenes Esperon Jr. said probers are determining whether the blasts are linked to the BOL.

Esperon, in a statement, said: "The explosion comes after the success of the plebiscite for the BOL. While the BOL lost narrowly in Sulu, it won 1:7 in the whole region, with Cotabato City even voting for inclusion in Bangsamoro ARMM. We have yet to establish if the two explosions are related to the all-important BOL. The BOL ends the secessionist narrative. The BOL signifies the end of war for secession. It stands for peace in Mindanao," Esperon said in a statement.

He called the perpetrators "mass murderers" and "extremist criminals," adding government will not allow these people to "spoil the preference of the people for peace."

Sulu was one of the areas which rejected the BOL but the province will remain a part of the BARMM because it is already part of ARMM.

Chief Presidential Legal Counsel Salvador Panelo, concurrent presidential spokesman, assured the victims government would attend to their needs.

He also said: "We condemn in the strongest possible term the bomb explosions... We will pursue to the ends of the earth the ruthless perpetrators behind this dastardly crime until every killer is brought to justice and put behind bars. The law will give them no mercy," he said.

The referendum came amid concerns about the presence of extremists in the Philippines and the possibility that foreign radicals will join those of Indonesia

and Malaysia in gravitating to Mindanao to capitalize on porous borders, jungles and mountains, and an abundance of arms.

The Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines said it condemns "this act of terrorism that has taken place only a few days after the plebiscite on the Bangsamoro Organic Law."

In a statement released during the ongoing plenary assembly in Manila, the CBCP also said it condoles with the families of the fatalities.

Fr. Romeo S. Sanicel, OMI, apostolic administrator of Jolo, was at the three-day plenary meet that started last Saturday but he left early yesterday to return to Jolo.

### LAPSES

Mijares said authorities are looking into "possible lapses" on the part of soldiers and policemen in the area. He noted that the entire Mindanao is under martial law.

Mijares said authorities cut off communication signals after the explosions but these were later restored. "Cell sites were shut down as part of the clearing operations, to prevent additional explosions from happening," he said.

Madrigal said he is not expecting any similar attack.

He appealed for calm and sobriety as he said security forces are addressing the bombings.

Maj. Gen. Cirilito Sobejana, commander of the Army's 6th Infantry Division in Maguindanao, said, "We will further intensify our intelligence efforts and initiate pro-active security measures to thwart hostile plans." — *With Jocelyn Montemayor, Gerard Naval and Reuters*



# No mercy for Jolo bombers – Palace

By ARGYLL GEDUCOS

Malacañang said that no mercy will be shown to those behind the two explosions that rocked Jolo, Sulu yesterday.

Presidential spokesperson Salvador Panelo said that Malacañang condemns the terrorist act which took place just days after the province rejected the ratification of the Bangsamoro Organic Law.

"We condemn in the strongest possible term the bomb explosions that occurred inside and outside the Mount Carmel Cathedral in Jolo this Sunday morning which left

many soldiers and civilians dead and scores injured," Panelo said.

According to the Palace official, the government will not rest until the perpetrators who boldly challenged the State are put behind bars.

"By their act of terrorism and murder of soldiers and civilians, the enemies of the State have boldly challenged the capability of the government to secure the safety of the citizenry in that region. The Armed Forces of the Philippines will rise to the challenge and crush these godless criminals," Panelo said. "We will pursue to the ends of

the earth the ruthless perpetrators behind this dastardly crime until every killer is brought to justice and put behind bars. The law will give them no mercy," he added.

According to Panelo, authorities are now investigating the brazen attacks, which include identifying the group behind the blast that occurred while Mindanao is placed under martial rule.

He extended condolences to the families of the victims that perished in the tragedy even as the government attend to the injured and give assistance to their families.

National Security Adviser Her-

mogenes Esperon Jr. said that they have yet to determine if the explosion really is related to the ratification of the BOL.

"I have to add that the explosion comes after the success of the plebiscite for the BOL. While the BOL lost narrowly in Sulu, it won 1:7 in the whole region, with Cotabato City even voting for inclusion in Bangsamoro ARMM," Esperon said. "We have yet to establish if the explosion are related to the all-important BOL. The BOL ends the secessionist narrative. The BOL signifies the end of war for secession. It stands for

peace in Mindanao," he added.

Esperon assured that the government will not allow the "mass murderers" behind the explosion to destroy the peace that the BOL signifies.

"The perpetrators are mass murderers. They are extremist criminals. We will not allow them to spoil the preference of the people for peace," he said. "Security forces have tightened up the systems to secure Sulu and the rest of the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao. Peace must prevail over war," he added.

## Jolo Cathedral binomba: 20 patay, 81 sugatan

NI MARTIN A. SADONGDONG

Dalawangpung indibiduwal ang namatay at 81 ang sugatan matapos ang magkasunod na pagsabog sa gitna ng misa sa Jolo Cathedral sa Jolo, Sulu kahapon ng umaga, ilang araw matapos ang ratipkasyon ng Bangsamoro Organic Law (BOL) na inayawan ng probinsiya.

Sa inisyal na police report mula sa Regional Field Unit of the Criminal Investigation and Detection Group (CIDG-RFU 9), dalawang improvised explosive devices (IEDs) ang sumabog sa Jolo Cathedral, bandang 8:28 ng umaga.

Sa ulat, sa 20 nasawi, lima sa mga ito ay miyembro ng Philippine Army habang 15 ay sibilyan. Sa 81 sugatan, 65 ang sibilyan at 14 ang sundalo at dalawang police personnel.

Kinondena ni PNP chief, Director General Oscar Albayalde ang insidente at ipinag-utos ang masusing imbestigasyon.

"The Chief PNP has already ordered for the conduct of a thorough investigation on this incident to ensure the immediate arrest of the suspects," pahayag ni Senior Supt. Bernard Banac, tagapagsalita ng PNP.

"We extend our sympathy to the families of the victims and we will ensure that all possible assistance to the families will be given," aniya.

"We assure the bereaved family and their relatives that we will ensure that justice will be served in the soonest time possible," dagdag niya.

Umapela rin si Banac sa mga tao sa Sulu at iba kalapit na lugar na manatiling kalmado at alerto.

Ayon kay Albayalde, sa loob at labas ng Jolo Cathedral naganap ang pagsabog.

"Sa may Jolo Cathedral nangyari itong dalawang explosions, isa sa loob at isa labas. May

pagitan na more or less na isang minuto itong pagsabog na ito," ani Albayalde.

Patuloy na inaalam ang motibo sa insidente.

Cayunman, naganap ang insidente matapos na ratipikahan ang BOL. Itong biyernes ng gabi, na inayawan ng Sulu sa pagtatalag ng bagong Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM).

Ayon sa Commission on Elections (Comelec), hindi inaprubahan ng Sulu ang BOL sa botong 163,526 na "No" kumpara sa 137,630 "Yes."

"Wala pa po talaga silang napi-pinpoint na anggulo. Tinitingnan po yung iba't ibang threat groups doon sa lugar na 'yon at hindi pa rin naman nila masabi kung ito ay may kinalaman sa katatapos na plebisito o wala," pahayag ni Albayalde.

## Hustisya sa Jolo bombing, ipinanawagan

5

Panalangin at hustisya ang panawagan ng kura paroko ng Jolo Cathedral malapos ang dalawang magkasunod na pagsabog sa lugar, kahapon.

Unapela si Father Jefferson C. Nadua, ng Our Lady of Mount Carmel Cathedral, ng dasal partikular para sa mga biktima ng pagsabog.

"We pray for safety of those who are wounded," pahayag niya sa Radyo Veritas.

"We pray and hope that there are no casualties among our parishioners," dagdag pa ni Nadua.

Umaasa rin ang kura paroko ng agarang

hustisya para sa mga biktima ng pagsabog.

Samantala, maring kinondena ni Anak-Mindanao (AMIN) Party-List Rep. Amihilda Sangcopan ang insidente, na tinawag niyang "cowardly and selfish act."

"Lubhang nakakalungkot at nakakabahala ang ganitong pangyayari," ani Sangcopan.

Nanawagan din ang AMIN sa PNP na magsagawa ng malaya, bukas at masusing imbestigasyon hinggil sa pagsabog at ang kinalaman dito ng ilang armadong grupo sa lugar.

"Ignorance of the law excuses no one. The law should be applied equally to all during the investigation. Our people deserve to be fully informed, not misinformed just to serve the whims of some," ani Sangcopan.

"We send our fervent prayers for the families of the victims. May they find the strength they need during this unfortunate time. We urge the authorities to give these people and their families the justice they truly deserve," aniya.

**Leslie Ann G. Aquino  
at Elson A. Quismorio**

## TINIYAK NG MALACAÑANG 'No mercy' sa mga nambomba sa Jolo Cathedral

NI Argyll Cyrus B. Geducos

Simiguro ng Malacañang na hindi nito palalampasin ang mga nasa likod ng magkasunod na pambobomba sa Jolo Cathedral sa Sulu, na ikinasawi ng 27 katao, at ikinasugat ng 77 iba pa.

Ipinahayag ito kahapon ni Presidential Spokesperson Salvador Panelo, kasunod ng mga ulat na dalawang improvised explosive devices (IED) ang sumabog sa Jolo Cathedral, sa kasagsagan ng misa, pasado 8:00 ng umaga kahapon.

Sa kanyang pahayag, sinabi ni Panelo na kinokondena ng Malacañang ang nasabing pag-atake, na naganap ilang araw matapos na tanggihan ng lalawigan ang ratipikasyon ng Bangsamoro Organic Law (BOL) sa plebisito nitong Lunes.

"We condemn in the strongest possible term the bomb explosions that occurred inside and outside the Mt.

Carmel Cathedral in Jolo this Sunday morning which left many soldiers and civilians dead and scores injured," sabi ni Panelo.

Ariya, hindi titigil ang pamahalaan hanggang hindi nakukulang ang mga may kagagawan ng insidente.

"By their act of terrorism and murder of soldiers and civilians, the enemies of the state have boldly challenged the capability of the government to secure the safety of the citizenry in that region. The Armed Forces of the Philippines will rise to the challenge and crush these godless criminals," pahayag ni Panelo.

"We will pursue to the ends of the earth the ruthless perpetrators behind this dastardly crime until every killer is brought to justice and put behind bars. The law will give them no mercy," dagdag niya.

# Maute leader wounded in Lanao del Sur clashes

BY VICTOR REYES

MAUTE group leader Abu Dar was reported injured in last Thursday's clashes with government troops in Sultan Dumalondong town in Lanao del Sur, the military said yesterday.

Dar, whose real name is Owayda Benito Marohombsar, was reportedly hit in the right leg, but managed to escape from the operating troops, said Col. Romco Brawner,

commander of the Army's 103rd Brigade.

"Our latest information showed five were killed on their side and eight were wounded, including Abu Dar. He was hit in the right leg... We have consistent reports that he was hit," Brawner said.

Soldiers assaulted a camp of the terror group in Barangay Sumalindao, Sultan Dumalondong on Thursday morning and seized it on Friday morning.

Brawner said the military is validating reports from captured Maute men that five of their comrades were killed in the fighting.

"We're trying to recover the bodies," Brawner said, adding the Maute members who were captured last Friday are going to show the troops where the bodies are.

Three soldiers who were wounded in the clashes are recuperating.

Brawner said troops recovered personal belongings and foodstuff

during clearing operations at the overrun camp.

The troops caught up with the fleeing terrorists on Saturday, he said, adding no one was reported killed or injured in the firefight.

Pursuit operations are ongoing, Brawner said.

The Maute group attacked Marawi City in May 2017. The conflict that lasted for about five months saw the death of several key Maute leaders.

## AS A MATTER OF FACT

SARA SOLIVEN DE GUZMAN

### BARMM replaces ARMM

Malacñang declared January 21 as a special non-working holiday in the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao, Cotabato City, and Isabela City in Basilan for the plebiscite that will ratify the Bangsamoro Organic Law.

Last Friday, after an audit group re-tabulated the certificates of canvass (COCs) in Cotabato which proved that there was no discrepancy in the votes for 'yes' and 'no' in the city, the Comelec convening as the National Plebiscite Board of Canvassers (NPBOC) ratified the Bangsamoro Organic Law (BOL) and consequently abolished the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM).

Well, we all know that this is a very sensitive issue not only for the Muslim and Christian groups living in the area but also for many Filipinos. Change always brings apprehensions, doubts, worries to people but let us remember that it is inevitable.

The centuries of struggle brought about by colonialism and destabilization of a region which was predominantly Muslim created hundred year wars, strife and great depression.

My friend Ayesha Merdeka, a Muslim scholar reflected on the events that have taken place in her land and this is what she wrote: *Mulling over the resounding YES vote of Cotabato City and desolate NO of Sulu in the recent plebiscite had me thinking about the 44 years of peace negotiation between the Philippine Government and the Bangsamoro Army, both MNLF and MILF. To me it's a continuum. Otherwise, we fall folly to the trick they do of pulling the 498 years plight of the Muslims in this archipelago called the Bangsamoro Cause to mere organizations and personalities when both the MNLF and MILF Bangsamoro Army is but part of a long line of mujahideen, freedom fighters in the 498 years struggle of the Muslim communities in this archipelago against foreign invaders and colonialism.*

Our dilemma as a people began in 1521 when the Spanish fleet headed by Captain Magellan called the natives they fought with in their chronicles with Pigafetta in the fore as "Moro" after the Muslim Moors who ruled Spain for 800 years (c700-1492) upon observing the ways of the natives to be Muslims that began with hearing adhan, the call of prayers, and alarm as well on their entry to Philippine waters.

In the 333-year rule of the Spanish Colonial Government in the archipelago they called their policy of annihilation and subjugation of Muslims as "Mindanao War" that was carried forth by the American Colonial Government and resurrected by President Marcos after the 1968 Jabitah Massacre that led to the inception of the Moro National Liberation Front. The Mindanao War in the 1970s on the Bangsamoro was at its highest intensity in 1974 with massacres all over and burning of masjids and Muslim villages everywhere in Mindanao which began the peace negotiation in 1974 and culminated in the signing of the 1976 RP-MNLF Tripoli Agreement. But Nur Misuari refused to come home and an internal conflict between him and Hashim Salamat led to a split and the creation of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front in 1977.



Abul Khayr Alonto, the leading MNLF officer leading the defense of the Bangsamoro as Misuari and Salamat were in exile abroad, unable to resolve the conflict came down from the hills in 1978 and worked for autonomy to be institutionalized in the country as the mechanism to implement the Tripoli Agreement. President Marcos issued PD 1618 in 1979 creating the 10 provinces and 6 cities of the first Autonomous Governments of Regions IX and XII. Misuari remained in exile asserting the belligerent status of the Bangsamoro. Salamat as MILF Chairman continued on the struggle in the battlefields while Alonto pursued the struggle in Philippine politics.

The 1986 EDSA Revolution and the 1987 Philippine Constitution reduced the area of the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao to 4 provinces and 2 cities in the plebiscite called under President Corazon Aquino. In between presidents, all out war on the Bangsamoro were called until President Noynoy Aquino signed the 2013 GPH-MILF Framework on the Bangsamoro (FAB) in which the Philippine Government recognized and declared the Bangsamoro as the First Nation in the Philippines prompting Alonto to jubilantly state in international media, "the Bangsamoro is finally back home."

The 2014 GPH-MILF Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro (CAB) followed suit from whence the first Bangsamoro Transition Commission (BTC) culled the diluted Bangsamoro Basic Law (BBL) they passed to the two houses of Philippine Congress that was in turn mangled by the Sen. Bong Marcos sponsored BBL that was killed on the floors of Philippine Congress in 2016 which was the basis of the 2nd constituted BTC to formulate the double killed Bangsamoro Organic Law (BOL) ratified in 2018 and which the plebiscite affirmed this month. Forty-four years of peace negotiation brings us to BARMM.

Salamat passed away a few years back. May Allah Swt grant him janatul firdaus. Ameen but MILF leadership will rule BARMM. With Alonto at the helm of the Mindanao Development Authority and a member of the Duterte Philippine Cabinet in relentless pursuit of creating new institutions and frontiers for the Bangsamoro and Mindanao, Zubiri's suggestion of Misuari as Wali of the BARMM puts all Bangsamoro Army living personalities at the forefront of governance. It puts to focus the 498 years Bangsamoro Cause too that perchance under the first Mindanaoan President, Mayor Rodrigo Roa Duterte, will finally see its culmination as we build a One Bangsamoro, One Mindanao together as One Philippine Nation for the first time. Maybe. Only this time, that maybe is good.

The BOL serves as a conclusion of a peace deal signed between the past administrations and the MILF. It builds upon the gains of previous Moro peace agreements since the 1970s. If you can still remember, former president Benigno Aquino III had wanted to see the passing of the law before his term would end. But the approval was derailed due to the Mamasapano massacre in 2015, believed to be linked to the passage of P-Noy's version of the BBL. Now, I am glad it did not happen. There are allegations that the P-Noy version could have led us to secession and dismemberment of the republic.

Today, the new Bangsamoro Organic Law makes more sense. The Constitutional issues have been cleaned out in the Senate. I feel calmer about it because it doesn't divide the country as the first draft seemed to have tones of. Instead this new organic law promotes unity and more important peace amongst the people in Mindanao and the rest of the nation. But there is a historical truth here that we must one day understand. *Abangan!*

The region should be off to a good start. Of course fine tuning is expected as the days go by. But the most crucial challenge now is on how the people will protect the Bangsamoro Cause. How the leaders will use the new power bestowed on them? Will the MNLF and MILF become one? Will they work hard to protect their region or allow abuse to take over?

## Momentum for peace

Following its enactment, the **EDITORIAL** of the autonomous region, ratified the Bangsamoro Organic Law has overcome its first major hurdle: the plebiscite. The second phase of the vote on Feb. 6 will determine which areas want to be included in the proposed Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao, which will replace the ARMM. BOL in a vote that

the mayor and her supporters are contesting.

Even if several additional barangays vote for inclusion in the BARMM on Feb. 6, another hurdle for the BOL is the pending constitutional challenge before the Supreme Court.

The Moro Islamic Liberation Front, which is expected to attain political power under the BARMM, must continue confidence-building measures to reassure the public about its sincerity in opting for peace. As adverse public reaction indicated, posting armed MILF men near polling centers is not a good idea.

Regardless of the judicial outcome, the ratification of the BOL is a significant step in trying to resolve a long-running conflict through peaceful means. With the continuing efforts of all stakeholders, this momentum for peace can be sustained. 10

40



# The President swings from left to right

**P**resident Duterte has swung from left to right in less than two years of his term, just like a pendulum.

Upon assuming the presidency, Mr. Duterte appointed personalities identified with leftist organizations to high positions in his administration. These include former Kilusang Magbubukid ng Pilipinas chair Rafael Mariano as secretary of the Department of Agrarian Reform, former University of the Philippines professor Judy Taguiwalo as secretary of the Department of Social Welfare and Development, and former Gabriela party-list representative Liza Maza as head of the National Anti-Poverty Commission.

The President also appointed former Kabataan party-list representative Terry Rido as chair of the Presidential Commission for the Urban Poor, and former Anakpawis party-list representative Joel Maglunsod as undersecretary of the Department of Labor and Employment.

The appointments must have been made because of the Left's support that helped Mr. Duterte win in the 2016 presidential election. The capacity of the Left to deliver command votes has been demonstrated by its consistent ability to elect multiple party-list representatives in Congress.

The appointments must have also been made because Mr. Duterte has had links with the Left in his two decades as Davao City mayor, and the Left considered him an ally for many years. Mr. Duterte even admitted that he is "the president belonging to the Left" early in his administration. He also claimed that he is the "idol" of the New People's Army (NPA) and that the Reds "will die for me."



## FLEA MARKET OF IDEAS

JOEL RUIZ BUTUYAN

The appointments must have also been made because Mr. Duterte was hankering to sign a peace agreement that would put an end to the communist rebellion. The President facilitated the release of political prisoners including NPA ranking leaders Benito and Wilma Tiamzon, in furtherance of this objective.

But, in less than two years, the President has reversed course. He has shifted to the extreme Right, citing as reason the alleged refusal of the Left to sign a peace agreement, and their purported continuing attacks against government military forces.

Mr. Duterte didn't lift a finger to help Mariano and Taguiwalo hurdle confirmation in the Commission on Appointments, leaving legislators free reign to reject them. He unceremoniously dismissed Rido and Maglunsod. Maza was forced to resign after she was harassed with trumped-up criminal charges.

The President began packing his administration with former military and police

officers. The Inquirer has listed 59 retired military generals, police directors, admirals and colonels who have been appointed to the Cabinet and other agencies, including government-owned corporations. All Armed Forces of the Philippines chiefs of staff who had served in the Duterte administration were awarded with civilian government posts upon their retirement.

The President also signed a proclamation designating the Communist Party of the Philippines and the NPA as terrorist organizations. He declared an all-out war policy against the NPA, even as he instructed the Armed Forces to "flatten the hills" and bomb communities where communist rebels are operating.

There has been on-and-off resumption of peace talks, but judging by the rhetoric and actions from both sides, Mr. Duterte will not clinch the legacy of being the leader who ended Asia's longest-running communist rebellion.

What is the scorecard between the President and the Left? For the President, he has reached the pinnacle of power, aided in no small part by his alliance with the Left. For the Left, it has gained a resurgence in its ranks aided in no small part by the President's draconian approach to the communist rebellion and his bloody solution to the war on drugs.

The irony in any insurgency campaign is that the rebel ranks multiply when the government resorts to an intensified military approach instead of strengthening economic solutions. As it was during the Marcos dictatorship, it will be so under Mr. Duterte's reign as well. *MR*

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## What's exactly at stake in the 2019 elections?

**P**resident Duterte is now in cruise mode. He has weathered the rice shortage crisis and inflation spike in the last quarter of 2018 to attain a new equilibrium. This equilibrium means he can continue to be his misogynistic, coarse self, with no danger to his political capital.

He has created the perfect escape routine. If the people are shocked when he speaks, then it must be a joke. This same convenient detachment works with the Cabinet as well. It allows Cabinet members the relative autonomy to choose to obey him. As the Spanish authorities in the Philippines said in regard to the King of Spain's orders, "*Obedezco pero no cumplo*" (I obey but I do not comply). This is Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana's formula, which has been adopted by Speaker Gloria Macapagal Arroyo. This curious situation has allowed Mr. Duterte to continue being a jester, but prevents him from causing short-term damage to the government's standing before the public.

The opposition missed the opportunity to exploit the rice crisis, inflation and "Dutertic" excesses in the last quarter of 2018. Instead of weakening Mr. Duterte, the President is now poised to consolidate his power with the midterm elections. He is out to show the world he continues to enjoy the support of the Filipino people by winning through proxies this referendum on his administration. Nothing could be more blatant in-your-face symbolism than getting his key proxies—Bong Go, Bato dela Rosa, Francis Tolentino and Imee Marcos—into the Senate. Mr. Duterte controls the money, the influence and the Office of the President.

The Senate is a plum for Mr. Duterte. It is the last bastion of the opposition's reced-



### ON THE MOVE

SEGUNDO ECLAR ROMERO

ing embers. With the Senate in his grasp, there is nothing to stop the President from achieving what else he wants to achieve. The key policy package for delivering unpleasant surprises will likely be the federalism project. With a pliant Senate, a constitutional assembly looks very likely. A tamed Senate will also have other uses for Mr. Duterte, such as slapping down the long arm of the International Criminal Court. The economy will likely be outwardly stable in the short run, and there will be no reason to want to change Mr. Duterte.

The opposition has out-positioned itself. Curiously, it now seems like Vice President Leni Robredo is to Mr. Duterte what Noli de Castro was to Arroyo—no compelling alternative, no matter how reprehensible the Duterte administration has become.

The prolonged leave of absence that Mar Roxas took did not help the opposition position strategically for the midterm elections at all. While he did return, he did not do it with an overwhelming comeback strategy—say, a formidable silent organization that has been crafted, guerrilla-style, or a

social media operation that puts Cambridge Analytica to shame. Instead, he made his debut by making a lame offer to help Mr. Duterte, but was promptly rejected.

Roxas as an economist is not what the people need. As far as Roxas is concerned, he does not have to introduce himself anew to the people. Being an "ekonomista" is not the best peg or role he could play in the current state of the game. His handle should be as a defiant fiscalizer, an opponent of abuse, a defender of democracy. He should compete with Sonny Trillanes for Rodrigo Duterte's ire.

But this is not how the midterm electoral battle has been defined, and that definition has depended largely on how the opposition has fashioned itself. Mr. Duterte has been true to himself—titillating his audiences with his obscene language, becoming a bit more gross as time goes on. He has not danced around—he has exactly stayed put.

It looks almost funny that the semblance of opposition against Mr. Duterte has been provided by Arroyo and her cohorts in the House of Representatives, with Rolando Andaya as the most visible hatchet man. Andaya has been recently flicked by the Palace, forcing Arroyo to sound much more conciliatory and loyal to Mr. Duterte.

If the opposition misses the midterm elections as an opportunity to push back Mr. Duterte, the next opportunity would be in 2022. Meantime, if Mr. Duterte wins the Senate, the presidential election in 2022 is a domino that could fall easily into Mr. Duterte's hands. And that in turn will decide what kind of Philippines we will be.

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76

## 'Building back better' a gender-fair BARMM

**B**uilding back better" is associated with participatory and innovative approaches in rehabilitation and reconstruction of communities massively destroyed by natural disasters or violent armed conflicts.

The concept was promoted in a book, "Building Back Better—Delivering people-centered housing reconstruction at scale," published in 2010 by Practical Action Publishing Ltd in the United Kingdom. Authors of articles in the book argue that people-centered rehabilitation and reconstruction can reduce vulnerabilities of communities and promote their resilience. Designs for reconstruction of both tangible and intangible social assets based on people's skills and their ideas of how they chart their own development in the future, can lead to "better" structures, both physical and social.

Disasters and violent conflicts transform erstwhile vibrant and cohesive communities into sordid images of helplessness and discord, almost duplicating those of wastelands and squalid milieus. But such contexts provide golden opportunities to "reconstruct" societies better: not to go back to old ways of building structures and instead innovating on building designs to make housing and other vital infrastructures resilient to typhoons and earthquakes.

In the social realm, this means deconstructing traditional power relations to identify elements that can nurture inclusion and social harmony, thus creating environments favorable for making, keeping and building inclusive, durable peace.

Such process includes breaking down old gender power relations and replacing them with a new policy regime that



**KRIS-CROSSING MINDANAO**  
RUFACAGOCO-GUIAM

allows for more gender-fair and gender-equitable relations in society. Women should transcend being mere voters—they should be provided meaningful platforms for asserting voice and agency. Working collaboratively with their male counterparts, women can shape public policies and make crucial decisions toward making governance more inclusive and equitable for all.

Improving regional governance through changes in gender power relations is most crucial now, as the creation of the new Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM) looms large. Last week, the Bangsamoro Organic Law (BOL) was deemed ratified with the preponderance of "Yes" to BOL votes.

Starting in 2016, UN Women Philippines, in collaboration with several women organizations in the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao, conducted a series of workshops to build capacities of grassroots women leaders and enable them to

participate actively in regional governance in the Bangsamoro Juridical Entity, as it was known then. In these workshops, women leaders learned basic skills in communications and advocacy work that enabled them to do the needed spadework among non-Bangsamoro and diaspora communities in different parts of the country in preparation for a forthcoming new Bangsamoro government.

Then as now, women in the Bangsamoro have persistently worked to create the needed changes in the envisioned new regional structure. Such zeal should be put to good use in creating a more inclusive, equitable and gender-fair BARMM.

What the UN Women, its civil society partners and other members of the international donor community have started should be sustained to create a "better" governance structure in the BARMM.

"Women hold half the sky," says an ancient Chinese proverb. Neglecting half the sky is tantamount to going back to old ways of structuring society along patriarchy, of rigid binaries of male and female roles, of sex discrimination and of traditional feudalistic, rent-seeking politics.

More importantly, we want to see that a built-back-better, gender-fair BARMM will set an example to all male officials of the country, especially the national leadership, in changing mindsets about how women should be treated or regarded. Women should not be the subjects of rape jokes, of misogynistic remarks, and of chilling directives like ordering soldiers to shoot the vaginas of female New People's Army rebels.

113

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## BELOW THE LINE

## Can David fix Goliath's mess?



By JOSE ABETO ZAIDE

**A**BONE-in-the-throat for the Duterte administration in the New Year 2019 is what to do with the Hanjin Heavy Industries and Construction Philippines (HHICP).

Off to a great start, it put the Philippines on the map with the world's 4th largest shipyard. Until, like the old song goes, it went Puff, the Magic Dragon! Dream project turned nightmare: HHICP, the biggest foreign investor at Subic Bay Freeport Zone, became the biggest corporate bankruptcy to hit the Philippines since Dewey Dee. On January 8, 2019, it filed for voluntary rehabilitation with the RTC because it could no longer service its debt — \$412 million owed to a consortium of Philippine banks, (on top of another \$900 million owed to suppliers and other creditors in South Korea, its home base). Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas (BSP) had to stem repercussion from the Hanjin fiasco.

Whistling in the dark, BSP said, "the loan exposure represents only 0.24% of total loans of the banking system and 2.49% of the foreign currency loans of foreign currency deposit units (FCDU)." How much we can recover from the assets of this epic bankruptcy, only the bankers know the unexpurgated truth.

BTW, another casualty of this debacle are thousands of Pinoys who lost their jobs. At the peak of operation, Hanjin employed more than 30,000 highly skilled personnel. It is down to 3,000, soon to downsize to only 300 to operate its ship repair facility. Hanjin promised to throw small bones — one-month pay for every year of service.

There are solutions proffered, from the sublime to a band aid.

- Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana said government can take minority stake in the HHICP and bid out the majority stake to interested parties. The Philippine Navy is building up its fleet with 26 vessels in the next 10 years. Devoutly to be wished; but a long and future thing.

- Our taipans have been approached; but most are landlubbers and predictably did not respond to the challenge.

- The Chinese try not to show too much eagerness. Secretary Salvador Panelo sees no problem with a Chinese firm with proven track record taking over the debt-saddled Hanjin Philippines. (But a former Navy official sees prudence as the better part of valor: Do you let the fox inside the poultry?)

- Japan, which has an extensive auxiliary maritime fleet, may find it congruent to beef up our maritime presence. Norway, which signs on Filipino seafarers, would also be a logical partner.

Neither to panic nor bury head in the sand, because a frantic solution may only lead us throwing good money after bad.

Oscar Violago, a man of impossible dreams, sees in our predicament, an opportunity — to upgrade Philippine bottoms! Filipinos are natural seafarers; but, with the exception of the Fabrelle Group of Companies which has over 100 deep-sea fishing vessels, our ships are small and hug the shore. In contrast, our neighbor Taiwan has about 2,000 deep-sea fishing vessels. If President Duterte were to commit to the HHICP, a national program to

upgrade our fishing fleet, our deep-sea fishermen would be pulling in bountiful harvests.

Violago points to the example of our pineapple industry, which for many years left the field to pineapple multinationals Del Monte and Dole. It took a local consortium to provide technical know-how to grow the pineapple extensively and turn our subsistence farmers into extensive landholding producers.

Perhaps, thanks to our typhoon mentality, it takes a crisis for us to have the gumption to get up and go, or for our leaders to muster the courage to turn adversity to advantage.

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**POSTSCRIPT.** Last Saturday evening, January 26, cognoscenti and dilettantes were treated to Dr. Raul Sunico performing four Sergei Rachmaninoff piano concertos with the Philippine Philharmonic Orchestra under conductors Yoshikazu Fukumura and Herminigildo Ranera at the Cultural Center of the Philippines. Sunico is one rara avis with prodigious memory who plays without notes. Unlike the Bard who never repeats, Sunico said in his wry self-effacing tenor, "I had done this before [four Rachmaninoff concertos] in September, 2003, also at the CCP with the PPO under Ranera. That time, my Juilliard School alma mater wrote to congratulate me for the performance. Perhaps nobody had done that before. Now, 15 years later, I don't know if somebody has lost his mind to commit it again." 12

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28

January 2019

# MANILA BULLETIN

THE NATION'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

Page: 8

## BUSINESS BEAT

# Making BARMM work



By MELITO SALAZAR JR.

**I** BELIEVE the yes votes in the plebiscite under the Bangsamoro Organic Law (BOL) would have included more if the voters overcame their fear of the future based on the experience of the past. They had seen how the autonomy of the past allowed local leaders to abuse their authority over the control of funds so that instead of spending for infrastructure and social services, the money ended up in the boutique shops of Makati. With national control units like the Commission on Audit allegedly afraid to do their jobs and with the alleged backing of then President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo, the local leaders like the Ampatuans had free rein over their territories. This should not be allowed to happen in the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM).

Traditional leaders with integrity and character are needed. Those who fought for the rights of the disadvantaged and sacrificed carrying on the struggle should occupy positions of leadership. Young men and

women who labored with communities to empower them and improve their living conditions should be the bedrock of power and leadership. A succession plan and program should ensure a strong foundation for the future. Assistance from international and national organizations are most needed.

These leaders can transform the island of promise into a thriving paradise for those who work with industry and competence. I first set foot in Mindanao in the early '60s and saw not an underdeveloped territory but a land of rich resources for those willing to toil and invest. Today as I see the centers of trade, business, and industry dotting Mindanao, those hardy entrepreneurs and their families are reaping the harvest of their efforts. They are also providing jobs to tens of thousands of Filipinos who, with their earnings, have a better life and send their children to school. They can serve not just as models. They should become the mentors of a new generation of entrepreneurs.

Business and industry needs a facilitative environment. The danger lies in the new local leaders flexing their muscles,

crippling the entrepreneurial spirit with laws, ordinances and regulations. When I was BOI governor, I pushed for extension units in the Mindanao autonomous region. Many told me it could not be done, citing no investments for the past years. My retort was if we had set up those extension units, there would be registered investments. And there were, so I extended the concept when I became the BOI managing head. Empowerment brings results. BARMM could become the model of the implementation of the "Ease

of Doing Business" law. What a great opportunity to start with a clean slate and even become a model for other areas.

All that we need is to believe in the peoples of BARMM and deal with them as partners in the march to peace, progress, and prosperity of the Philippines. Together we will populate every part of the archipelago with hubs of development. Together we will be successful.

48

We did it in Mindanao,  
can we do the next one?

ON Jan. 21, 2019, close to two million Filipinos ratified the Organic Law creating the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region



FIRST THINGS FIRST  
**FRANCISCO S. TATAD**

in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM), thereby ending more than 40 years of struggle for regional autonomy, waged through six Philippine presidencies, first by the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) under Chairman Nur Misuari, and finally by the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) under Chairman Hashim Salamat, succeeded by Murad Ebrahim.

► Tatad **AS**

BARMM formally replaces the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) created in 1989 under the 1976 Tripoli Agreement between the Marcos government and the MILF through the facilities of Libyan strongman Muammar Gadhafi and the Organization of the Islamic Cooperation (OIC).

Four of the five provinces under ARMM — Maguindanao, Lanao Sur, Basilan, and Tawi-Tawi — voted overwhelmingly for inclusion; Sulu alone voted for exclusion (163,526 votes against, 137,630 votes in favor). Likewise, the city of Isabela in Basilan also opted out (19,032 yes; 22,441 no). But under the law, if majority of ARMM votes for inclusion, the entire region becomes part of BARMM. The most significant inclusion is that of Cotabato City, the capital city of Maguindanao, which twice before had opted out of the autonomy.

A second plebiscite will be held on February 6 to ascertain the votes of six towns in Lanao del Norte and 67 barangays in North Cotabato. Many expect the results of the January 21 plebiscite to have a significant effect on the next plebiscite. But regardless of how these areas vote, BARMM is already the recognized autonomous entity.

## Massive cheating?

There are two flies in the ointment though. The feisty Mayor Cynthia Guiani Sayadi of Cotabato City has vowed to contest the results of the voting in her city (36,682, yes; 24,994, no) because of alleged massive cheating, and former Sulu governor Abdusakur Tan has announced questioning before the Supreme Court the constitutionality of BOL as such, and the rule which says no member of ARMM may opt out of BARMM, if the majority votes for inclusion. Sulu is the home province of Nur Misuari, founding chair of the MNLF; evidently it has strong political attachment to ARMM, where Misuari gave birth to the MNLF, and later ran unopposed as ARMM governor in 1996.

Tan's fundamental objection to BOL is one shared by some constitutional scholars—whether

a presidential system in which the executive and legislative functions are separate and distinct, can create a regional government in which these two functions are fused. Tan's petition could block President Rodrigo Duterte's expected next move, namely to appoint a Chief Minister for BARMM and the 80 members of the Bangsamoro Transition Authority. This could happen if the Supreme Court issues a temporary restraining order on these appointments, prior to ruling on the merits of the petition.

## From Tripoli onward

BARMM has come a long way. After Marcos declared martial law in 1972 and confiscated all unlicensed weapons in the hands of the citizens, the Muslims, led by Misuari, Abul Khayr Alonto and others, organized the MNLF and rose in revolt. Among other things, this revolt threatened the supply of oil from the oil-producing Arab countries, which supported the MNLF. Marcos reached out to the OIC to prevent the Arab oil producers from squeezing off the oil supply to the Philippines; in 1976, he sent a delegation to Libya to ask Col. Gadhafi to exert his influence on Misuari and convince him to talk peace. The delegation was headed by the First Lady, Mrs. Imelda Marcos, assisted by high-ranking defense officials.

Gadhafi's intervention resulted in the Tripoli Agreement of Dec. 23, 1976, signed by Misuari for the MNLF and Undersecretary Carmelo Barbero for the Philippine government, and providing for the establishment of an autonomous government in Muslim Mindanao. Although eight of the 13 Mindanao provinces are predominantly Christian, Misuari (supported by Gadhafi) insisted on including all 13 provinces in the proposed autonomous region, holding the agreement hostage to this specific demand. Marcos ultimately yielded to the "take it or leave it" ultimatum, after getting the other side to agree "to submit the question of autonomy to the constitutional processes of the Philippines."

Marcos created two auto-

nous regions instead of one, with 10 component provinces instead of 13. The MNLF protested this as an improper implementation of the agreement, and the collapse of peace talks and resumption of hostilities soon followed. The MNLF itself began to splinter; in 1977, a group headed by Hashim Salamat broke away from Misuari and called itself the MILF. Hashim and 57 other officers moved their headquarters to Cairo and later to Lahore in Pakistan in 1980.

## Reviving Misuari

The reverses suffered by Misuari drove the MNLF commander to self-exile in Damascus during the final years of Marcos. But after Marcos fell in 1986, Cory Aquino rehabilitated Misuari; she asked her local government secretary Aquilino "Nene" Pimentel Jr., and her brother-in-law the late Agapito "Butz" Aquino to bring back Misuari to the Philippines.

Misuari came home, set up his court in Jolo, where Cory Aquino came like a subject bearing tribute. Her defense secretary Juan Ponce Enrile and AFP Chief of Staff Fidel V. Ramos were virtually frisked by Misuari's aides. The meeting earned Cory humiliating photos and headlines. In 1987, Cory entered the Jeddah Accord with the MNLF; the agreement covered the whole of Mindanao, not just the 13 provinces. In 1989, an act establishing ARMM was passed. The MNLF boycotted the plebiscite, and only four provinces—Lanao Sur, Maguindanao, Sulu and Tawi-Tawi—voted for inclusion.

In 1996, Fidel V. Ramos negotiated the Final Peace Agreement with the MNLF in Jakarta. It created the Southern Philippines Council for Peace and Development, among other things, and enabled qualified MNLF members to join the Armed Forces of the Philippines and the Philippine National Police. It also allowed Misuari to run as ARMM governor, unopposed. That same year, the MILF became the more dominant Moro armed group and began talking with the Ramos government.



## All-out war

In September 2000, Erap Estrada ordered an all-out "war" on the Abu Sayyaf and the MILF. On Sept. 14, US Defense Secretary William Cohen came to Malacanang bearing a letter from US President Bill Clinton asking Erap to withhold his military offensive which might endanger an American national who had fallen into the hands of the MILF. Estrada said it was too late to recall the order, as a result of which the military overran the whole of Salamat's Camp Abubakar.

Gloria Macapagal Arroyo moved quickly to reverse Estrada's policy by signing a Memorandum of Agreement on Ancestral Domain with the MILF. But before it could be signed in Kuala Lumpur in the presence of important foreign dignitaries, it was declared unconstitutional by the Supreme Court.

When B. S. Aquino 3rd came to power, one of his first acts was to meet Murad in Tokyo in 2012 where he signed a Framework Agreement on the creation of the Bangsamoro political entity, to replace ARMM, which he described as a "failed experiment."

## What SC and Comelec can do

It is to be hoped that the legal issues that have been raised on the January 21 plebiscite, however serious they turn out to be, will not result in the resurgence of political violence or armed conflict. The Commission on Elections and the Supreme Court need to assure the public that whatever controversies have been raised would be fairly and expeditiously resolved, without partisan considerations or undue delays.

One way of ensuring this is by acting swiftly on the petitions that have been filed on the plebiscite itself, and on all other long pending cases that have to do with elections. If something like Bongbong Marcos' 2016 vice-presidential electoral protest has not moved and is not moving after three years, what could possibly lead us to believe Sakur Tan's urgent petition before the

Supreme Court or Mayor Cynthia Gulan Sayadi's complaint before the Comelec will at all move?

## The senatorial run

More to the point, on Thursday, the Comelec announced that out of 200 individuals who had filed certificates of candidacy for senator, 63 would be "allowed" to run as bona fide candidates. This doesn't mean to say the 137 others had failed to meet the constitutional requirements, namely, that one be a natural-born citizen, at least 35 years of age, able to read and write, a registered voter and a resident of the Philippines for not less than two years immediately preceding the day of the election. They may all have complied with the constitutional requirements, but failed to meet the additional requirements imposed by the Comelec. Which means the Comelec has amended the Constitution, on its own, and the Supreme Court doesn't give a hoot about it.

Among those "allowed to run" are one sitting senator from Mindanao, and another former senator associated with a big business and media empire who are, by law, no longer qualified to run for senator in this election. These are former Senate President Aquilino "Koko" Pimentel 3rd, and former senator Segio Osmena 3rd. Whether or not they can still run is no longer subject to judicial determination; the law that prohibits them from running is crystal-clear, and the facts of the case are subject to judicial notice.

## Poor Koko

First, Pimentel. By June 30, he will have completed his second term as senator. Article VI, Sec. 4, second paragraph of the Constitution says: "No senator shall serve for more than two consecutive terms. Voluntary renunciation of the office for any length of time shall not be considered as an interruption in the continuity of his service for the full term for which he was elected." Therefore he cannot run for a third term.

However, Pimentel insists on exempting himself from

the ("two-consecutive terms") term limit, saying the first four years of his first term was eaten up by Sen. Juan Miguel Zubiri, who was declared the No. 12th senatorial winner in 2007 prior to his electoral protest. Pimentel wants to count years—12 years—while the Constitution talks of "two consecutive terms." In all electoral protests, what is counted is the "term" of office, not the number of years served or unserved. So, whether Pimentel got to serve two years or two days only after Zubiri conceded his defeat is of no moment; as far as the law is concerned, he won the term and served its last two years.

Unless Pimentel, rather than Zubiri, ultimately won their 2007 contest, he would have had no legal basis for serving as senator even for a day after Zubiri quit. As far as the law is concerned, he would have served two consecutive terms at the end of his current term. Now, if Pimentel believes the State owes him an unserved four years as a senator, he will probably have to run for an abbreviated term of four years, rather than six. It is an absurdity beyond all absurdities. As a former senator, I am deeply pained by it. The Senate is not an unimportant office, but it cannot be worth the loss of a person's self-respect.

## Serge Osmeña

For Serge Osmena, the law is no less clear. A candidate who fails to file the required statement of contributions and expenses (SOCE) on time forfeits the privilege of running again for public office. The Comelec itself says this. Serge has failed to file his SOCE twice—in 2013 and in 2016. Under the law, he is no longer eligible to run. I am not saying Koko and Serge should be barred from appealing their cases, especially if they are convinced they have meritorious grounds. But neither the Supreme Court nor the Comelec should bear the burden of proving the law is just in each case. The two gentlemen should bear the burden of proving they have a case in their favor.

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## On the NPA's recruitment of children

THE Philippines is a land of contradictions. While 2019 has been declared the Year of the Youth by the Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines, Congress is pushing for the lowering of the minimum age of criminal responsibility from the current 15 years to nine.

The move to make minors as young as nine years old criminally responsible has earned strong condemnation from especially organizations working for the welfare of children. Children who grow up in an environment of neglect, poverty, desperation, violence, abuse and exploitation do not choose to commit crime. If they seem mature to the law it is because they never had a childhood.

Is this really the best that we—civilized society—have to offer our children? Then it's no wonder that the Communist Party of the Philippines through its myriad of above-ground and underground organizations continues to appeal to the young and the idealistic.

Recently, national media reported that 18-year-old Rizza Divine Camingawan, a freshman student in legal management at the University of Santo Tomas, had gone missing after she joined an immersion with farmers in Quezon province before Christmas.

But Ms Camingawan is not missing. She is where she has chosen to be. She joined Anakbayan during her high school years at UST, and later the



### RESURGENCE

MARIT  
STINUS-  
CABUGON

League of Filipino Students-UST chapter. She wore a sash with the words "*Imperyalismo Ibagsak*" over her red gown for her pre-debut photo shoot.

The LFS-UST Chapter in a statement on Twitter clarified that the 18-year-old freshman's immersion among farmers is part of the orientation of "national democratic organizations" such as the LFS. The purpose of the immersion is for privileged youth to learn about the real situation in the Philippines: the poverty and injustices experienced by the marginalized sectors.

The LFS-organized immersion is not sanctioned by UST. However, as pointed out by LFS in the same statement, the "Bakwit School Program" of UST is another excellent opportunity for the university's students to learn about the socio-economic realities confronting millions of Filipinos. Every year coinciding with the anniversary of the 1972 Martial Law proclamation, the national democratic movement organizes Lakbayan. Hundreds of lumad and peasants are brought to Metro Manila from as far away as Mindanao to participate in rallies, a networking blitz, and press conferences. In recent years, the focus of the

Lakbayan has been on lumad communities. Lumad youth, including minors, are presented as victims of militarization, a militarization that they say forced them to stop schooling and evacuate to Metro Manila.

UST, among other universities, serves as a "Bakwit School," providing shelter and education for the lumad children during their prolonged stay in Manila. These youths are students of the *Salugpongan Ta' Tanu Igkanugon* community learning centers and center for lumad advocacy networking and services, Mindanao-based schools that the military has long accused of being recruitment centers for the New People's Army.

The UST last year formally adopted one of about 26 Department of Education-accredited *Salugpongan* schools in Compostela Valley province. The university will provide comprehensive support to the *Salugpongan* high school in New Visayas, Maco. Will this collaboration result in UST-sanctioned immersion by its students with institutions associated with the CPP?

In Guihulngan City, Negros Oriental, minors are also being recruited into the communist movement. More than 100, some of whom were high school students, joined the Dec. 18, 2018 celebration of the CPP's 50th anniversary in Brgy. Trinidad. These youths are reportedly members of Kabataang Makabayan, the underground equivalent of Anakbayan, and

recruited in the community.

Schoolteachers were unaware of the participation by their students in CPP-NPA activity. But after the Christmas break, many students didn't show up for classes. The police and the Army announced that 106 students were "missing" after the NPA warned that the students who joined the CPP anniversary might suffer the same fate as suspected NPA rebels who were killed or arrested by the police during Oplan Sauron, the December 27 counter-insurgency operation.

Officials from the local high school told me that the absence of some students could indeed be a result of the warning by the NPA, but others were absent—not missing—because of fear of violence. While Brgy. Trinidad has its peace and order problems, the barangay folk were unaccustomed to the level of violence brought by Oplan Sauron. However, the majority of the supposedly missing students are already back in school. *AL*

The difference between the children in remote Trinidad and Ms Camingawan is that the former are already "immersed" in the real world of underdevelopment and government neglect. They are easy targets for NPA recruitment because much of the NPA's propaganda reflects reality. In the short term, the recruitment and indoctrination by the NPA must be stopped and countered. But the real challenge for us is to change the reality of poverty and neglect into one of opportunity and care.



## Road to peace

**I**NSTEAD of achieving peace, as President Duterte had promised it would, the Bangsamoro Organic Law, which was passed by Congress, signed and sealed by the President, and ratified in the just-concluded plebiscite by the majority of Muslim residents of the old Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao, Isabela City and Cotabato City, seems battling the headwinds.

Yesterday, two powerful bomb blasts occurred inside and outside the Our Lady of Mt. Carmel Cathedral in Jolo, Sulu, killing at least 27 persons and wounding some 77 other civilians, soldiers, and policemen.

Among the fatalities were 11 troopers who were deployed at the Catholic church, it being a Sunday and parishioners were flocking to the Cathedral for church services. In fact, a mass was being celebrated when the first bomb exploded, followed by another at the church's parking lot, this second blast obviously timed to target the soldiers, cops and rescuers who were rushing to help victims of the first bomb blast. This accounts for seven military fatalities in the attack.

**'The bomb blasts were directed at the government of President Duterte, although it is the civilian population that suffers. The President wants peace, but at what price?'**

This kind of operation has the hallmarks of a well-planned military operation, and just like in Mamasapano and Marawi, our government security forces along with our civilian population, were poor victims of failure of intelligence.

Our security forces are once again caught unprepared, unable to anticipate the military-level revenge of those who thought that they were disenfranchised, those who witnessed how massive vote-buying, alleged MILF intimidation of voters, herding of flying voters some of whom were minors and other plebiscite offenses were tolerated by the administration. Despite martial law in Mindanao, these bomb attacks are still the norm, pitting one group of Muslims against another, and endangering the general population, many of whom are Christians or non-Muslims.

Cotabato City itself was attacked by armed men using explosives days before the plebiscite on Jan. 21, a clear foreboding of things to come. The city mayor, Cynthia Sayadi, personally arrested vote buyers and flying voters with fake IDs and cash, with the Comelec unable to control even the problem of intimidation of its teacher-members of the Board of Election Inspectors.

Former Sen. Juan Ponce Enrile aired a timely observation at a media forum last week, saying the Bangsamoro Organic Law (BOL) might not fully solve the conflict in Mindanao.

The veteran senator said he sees no complete unity among the members of the Islamic faith, and that disunity may still continue despite the establishment of the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM).

Enrile's observation is not just his personal pessimism; it is based on his knowledge of the dynamics of the problems of Islam around the world and in Mindanao, where the faith is practiced by a sizable number of residents.

The bomb blasts were directed at the government of President Duterte, although it is the civilian population that suffers. The President wants peace, but at what price? *Def*

## Who blinks first



THAT photograph of Venezuela's Nicolas Maduro on the balcony of the presidential palace reminds me eerily of another photo in the Philippines taken on February 25, 1986.

President Ferdinand Marcos and his family were on one of the balconies of Malacanang, facing a crowd of loyalists after taking his oath of office as the "duly elected president" after a critical "snap" election for president and vice-president that he was pressured by the Americans to call some three months before.

The loyalist crowd chanted "Marcos pa rin!" while somewhere else in the metropolis, at the Club Filipino in San Juan, a few hundreds proclaimed Cory Aquino and Doy Laurel the president and vice-president of the Republic. Outside the elite club, thousands gathered to express their support.

By nightfall, Marcos was airlifted out of Malacanang and into Clark Air Base, then an American military base, and from there to Hawaii where he lived in exile until his death hastened by lupus erythymatosus.

Venezuela's Maduro, heir to another leftist strongman, Hugo Chavez, has proclaimed himself the "re-elected" president of this oil-rich country since gone penurious and hardly livable with thousand-percent inflation amid a shortage of basics.

But America and several Latin American neighbors dispute Maduro's legitimacy and have proclaimed opposition leader Juan Guaido as "interim" president.

The déjà vu between Marcos and Maduro is not that much of a déjà vu, however.

Maduro is digging in, with the military, as of this writing, not yet abandoning him. Their generals, after all, were well taken care of. It's the

people who are not.

And while America in the Philippines had its bases yet in 1986 with its influence bordering on interventionism, decades of Chavez and Maduro in Venezuela have largely crippled American influence in this oil and gas rich country.

How will POTUS Donald deal with Maduro? He cannot send a senator with a message to "cut clean" to a virtual dictator who has cut all diplomatic ties with the US of A. Maduro's foreign minister has denounced the US before the United Nations as having initiated a "coup" against his sovereign state.

Will POTUS send plane loads of Marines, or even bomb the hell out of the Venezuelan capital?

Who blinks first?

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*"It looks like a lose-lose situation for US President Donald Trump."*

In the case of Trump's firewall against Mexico and the rest of Central America, Speaker Nancy Pelosi refused to be cowed by the President's harrumphs and tweets.

So to break the longest budget impasse in American history, Trump blinked and accepted a temporary fix. Federal employees, after all, had suffered enough—five weeks of no salaries.

But Trump's blinking had its downside. His white, isolationist, some regard as racist electoral constituency now labels him a "wimp", the kind of derision once attached only to the previous Republican president, George W. Bush, the Junior—not the respected Senior who died recently.

# Who...

From AA

Well, you can't win them all. But in the case of Donald Trump, it looks like a lose-lose situation as the Year of the Pig enters.

\*\*\*

Despite accusations by Mayor Sayadi of Cotabato City that many of her constituents had been coerced or intimidated and unable to vote "No," the Bangsamoro Organic Law has been overwhelmingly ratified except in Isabela City.

What the previous Congress under President Benigno Aquino III failed to pass after the Mamasapano carnage—whose third anniversary we commemorated with continuing grief over the wasted lives of 44 SAF commandos—has now come to fruition under the leadership of Rodrigo Duterte.

We can only hope and pray that this would be the beginning of lasting peace

in Mindanao and the entire country. Stability and order in Muslim Mindanao is the key to its own economic prosperity, with its resources largely undeveloped.

It is one big step towards alleviating the poverty of the poorest region in the country. With economic development and poverty alleviation come true justice and true democratic order.

\*\*\*

I received this in my mail from Doc Willie Ong, who is running for the Senate, and I will excerpt some of it:

"For my campaign I have decided not to ask for any monetary donations. Yes, we have seen how the system works and I don't want to be caught in a deadly trap.

"My goal is not just to win but to win cleanly...we must fix our BROKEN system of elections if there is to be hope for our country...it is no wonder our country is in this sorry state.

"People will say (that) you cannot win without spending lots of money. Then so be it. Nothing is impossible with God. At least I have kept my

conscience and soul intact, and I have fought the good fight".

Doc Willie has joined the 2019 Senate race to dedicate himself for the "millions of sick and poor Filipinos" and to "bring (focus) on health back to the people".

He ends with an appeal for readers to spread the word. "No donations are needed."

Amen to that. Doc Willie Ong, whom I do not even follow in his quite amazing free medical and health advice over social media, has earned my vote.

Our political system and our electoral system both suck.

I have devoted several previous columns on this declaration about our broken system, our democracy that is all form and little substance, and I wish to God that our President in the remainder of his term does come around to revising our present Constitution.

Even without setting up a federal government, just fixing a "party-less" idiocy and making public office truly a public trust instead of a

28

January 2019

Standard  
TODAY

Page:

A5

## Never again



CROSSROADS

JONATHAN  
DE LA CRUZ

WHAT a sad and tragic day. Just as the dawn of a possible lasting peace in Muslim Mindanao seemed to be at hand with the ratification of the Bangsamoro Organic Law (BOL) by an overwhelming majority of voters in the area of autonomy, a bombing incident ripped through the heart of Jolo. As of last count, no less than 23 have been confirmed dead, 15 of whom were members of the military. The rest were civilians hearing mass at St. Mary's Cathedral.

That this happened even as Mindanao is under martial law speaks well of the state of affairs in the country's second-biggest island. It also puts into question the standing of our intelligence operatives whose efficiency and resourcefulness will now be put into question. How did this happen at all,

considering that this was the same place of worship which was the site of another tragic bombing years ago. L a x i t y ?

“What happened in Jolo should not stomp us into submission.”

Complacency? Inefficiency? We will have to ask our security forces to give plausible answers as we proceed with the investigation and inject a sense of safety and normalcy not only in the area but in others in the region of martial law.

How this bombing incident will now affect the peace in that benighted land and with it the transition into the new Bangsamoro Autonomous Region has yet to be cleared. But there is no question that this tragic incident will definitely be high up in the calculation of concerned officials who will now have to determine who and what prompted the group to mount this heinous crime. There are a number of theories at this time – from politics to terrorism – and even just a warning to those who voted against the ratification of the BOL.

Whatever the outcome of the probe which is now under way, one thing is clear: the peace which was expected after the BOL ratification will be like those in the aftermath of previous exercises towards full-blown autonomy – an uneasy, not an enduring peace – which for all intents and purposes does not bode well for this latest experiment in pursuit of the doable and sustainable autonomy that the country has

Jy

been hungering for for years.

In any event, we and not just the residents of the area of autonomy or even Mindanao should all be working to ensure that we proceed with all deliberate haste in putting the structures of autonomy in place. This incident should not stomp us into submission. But in moving on we should at the very least pledge that incidents like this will never happen again. "Never Again" should now be the main battle cry of all those who care for peace as the foundation for progress and development in that benighted region. And specially we should vow never again will civilians and, of course, our soldiers be injected into harm's way as what happened in Jolo yesterday.

In that same breath, we join in President Duterte's "Never Again" vow as he declared January 25 a national day of remembrance. It was on that day four years ago when 44 brave young men belonging

to the elite  
PNP Special  
Action  
Force (SAF)  
gave up  
their lives  
in pursuit  
of Southeast  
Asia's most  
wanted  
terrorist,

the Malaysian  
Marwan. That should be the nation's vow as well. We are very much aware of the sacrifices of our security forces as they try their very best to keep the peace in the region. Never again should they suffer the same fate as the SAF 44.

As the President himself noted in declaring January 25 a day of remembrance: "Never again will we allow a recurrence of such tragic event. Those in authority must learn from the mistakes of the past otherwise those valorous men in uniform would have died in vain."

Indeed, as we commemorated the bravery of the SAF 44 and grieve with the death of the 15 soldiers who just died in that Jolo bombing, the least that we can do is expedite the release of benefits due them. We should not let their families suffer anymore than losing their loved ones with all the bureaucratic goobledygook which usually accompany the issuance of benefits to the men in uniform. But more than the immediate release of benefits is to bring to justice those who perpetrated the heinous crimes. Never again should we let those who did these grievous deeds go unpunished. Justice delayed is justice denied. Never again should we let these brave men die in vain.

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## **ONLINE NEWS**

### **28 JANUARY 2019**

## **Gov't to determine if Jolo bombing linked to BOL: Esperon**

By Azer Parrocha January 27, 2019, 8:52 pm

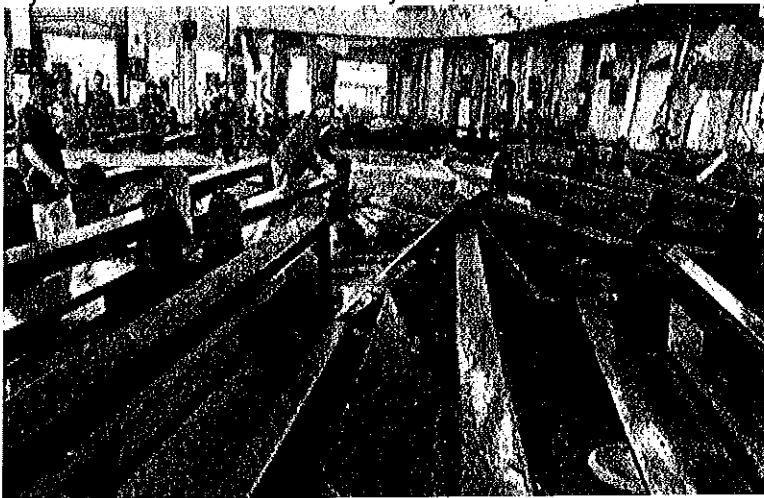


Photo from United Kabalikat Civicom-Jolo chapter

**MANILA** -- National Security Adviser Hermogenes Esperon Jr. on Sunday said that the government is still trying to determine if the twin explosions in Jolo, Sulu is related to the recently ratified Bangsamoro Organic Law (BOL).

"We have yet to establish if the two explosions are related to the all-important BOL," Esperon told reporters in a message.

Esperon emphasized that the explosions took place after the plebiscite on the ratification of the law seeking to create a Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM).

"I have to add that the explosion comes after the success of the plebiscite for the BOL," Esperon said.

He, meanwhile, described the suspects as "mass murderers", stressing that the BOL is meant to end the secessionist narrative.

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

"The BOL signifies the end of war for secession. It stands for peace in Mindanao," Esperon said.

"The perpetrators are mass murderers. They are extremist criminals. We will not allow them to spoil the preference of the people for peace," he added, stressing that peace must prevail over war.

Esperon assured that security forces have tightened up the systems to secure Sulu and the rest of the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao.

The bombing, which took place inside and outside a Roman Catholic church in Jolo, Sulu, left at least 20 people dead and several others wounded.

Malacañang earlier condemned the attack and expressed sympathies to the families of the victims.

Presidential Spokesperson Salvador Panelo vowed of government action to identify and punish the group behind the blast. **(PNA)**

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