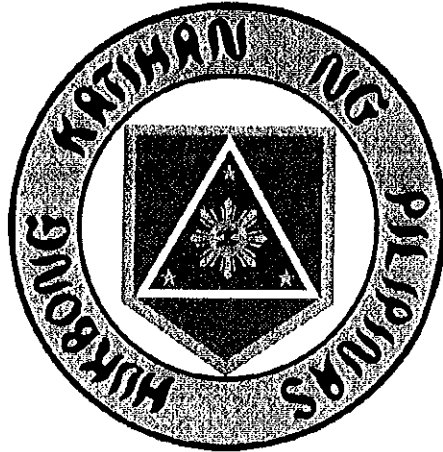


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INQUIRER

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MORE LAWMAKERS REJECT NARCOLIST PLAN

STORY BY MARLON RAMOS

The legislators urge charges against the alleged narcopoliticians instead, while the Comelec says publicly identifying those officials will not result in their disqualification from May's midterm elections.

M

FROM A1

By Marlon Ramos
@MRamosINQ

More lawmakers on Monday objected to Interior Secretary Eduardo Año's plan to publish President Duterte's list of narcopoliticians ahead of midterm elections in May, saying it would not guarantee that candidates suspected of involvement in the illegal drug trade would lose.

Año announced last week a plan to publish Mr. Duterte's so-called narcolist, the contents of which, he said, would be thoroughly vetted.

But the Commission on Human Rights objected to the plan on Sunday, reminding the government that suspects are presumed innocent until proven guilty.

Suspects can't be disqualified

The Commission on Elections (Comelec) on Monday said identifying the narcopoliticians would not automatically disqualify them from the elections.

Comelec spokesperson James Jimenez said only a final conviction from a judicial body

could make the Comelec declare the narcopoliticians unqualified to run.

"Since [the narcolist] is not a final conviction, it cannot be disqualifying," Jimenez said.

Publishing the narcolist is "negative campaigning," he said, but campaign rules do not prohibit the strategy.

Senate President Vicente Sotto III said on Monday that the Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG) should just directly speak with the politicians on the list and place them under investigation instead of disclosing their identities to the public.

"The media will surely pick it up and it will then have a basis for their exposure," Sotto said.

Legal action

As pointed out by Senators Panfilo Lacson and Richard Gordon on Sunday, Senate Minority Leader Franklin Drilon said on Monday that disclosing the contents of the list would only expose Año and other government officials to criminal and administrative suits.

"The DILG should just file cases against these candidates," said Drilon, a former justice secretary.

Sen. Sherwin Gatchalian al-

so expressed doubt that identifying candidates linked to drug syndicates would spell their political doom.

"Shaming them can only do so much," Gatchalian said in a text message.

"They have the money and local relationships that will ensure their victory. The best strategy is to remove them [from their present positions] legally through the proper courts," he said.

Reelectionist Sen. Aquilino "Koko" Pimentel III maintained that the Comelec cannot purge the official list of candidates of narcopoliticians "since they are all presumed innocent until proven guilty."

File charges

"If the government has included them in a list because the government is convinced, by evidence, of their involvement in the narcotics trade, then it is [the] government's duty now to file charges against them using the evidence which made them land [on] the said list," Pimentel said.

Agreeing with Jimenez, Pimentel said "[the] Comelec cannot prevent those on the narcolist from running ... because being on a list, even a narcolist, is

back his accusation and apologized to Espino, admitting that his subordinates who had produced the list were "negligent" in vetting its contents.

On Monday, Akbayan Rep. Tom Villarin called the narcolist a "virtual death warrant" for politicians not allied with the administration.

Gross violation of rights

Villarin said Año's plan to publish the list smacked of partisan politics and a "gross violation of human rights."

"The list is a virtual death warrant for politicians and their families who will not only be publicly humiliated but [also become targets] for political killings by death squads," Villarin said in a statement.

He said the list could be used to target the rivals of politicians endorsed by either Mr. Duterte or the President's daughter, Davao City Mayor Sara Duterte, who heads a coalition of administration candidates called Hugpong ng Pagbabago.

Mayor Duterte said on Monday that she saw nothing wrong in publishing the list.

She, however, added that the politicians on the list should be given opportunity to answer the accusations against them.

In January, Director General Aaron Aquino of the Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency (PDEA) said there were 83 politicians on the narcolist and most of them were running for reelection.

Aquino said he preferred bringing charges first against the politicians before disclosing their identities, but that he would release the narcolist if ordered by President Duterte.

Go to court

Malacañang said on Monday that it was up to the DILG and the PDEA to decide whether to publish the narcolist.

"Now the fear that it may destroy the presumption of innocence, to my mind there is a judicial remedy," presidential spokesperson Salvador Panelo told reporters.

"If you feel that you've been libeled, you can always go to the courts," he said.

General Oscar Albayalde, chief of the Philippine National Police, said he would support Mr. Duterte's decision should the President order the release of the narcolist. —WITH REPORTS FROM TINA G. SANTOS, DJ YAP, JAYMEET GAMIL, CHRISTINE O. AVENDAÑO AND JEANNETTE I. ANDRADE INQ

not a recognized legal ground for disqualifying candidates," he said.

Lacson earlier pointed out that it was "unjust and unfair" for politicians on the narcolist to be identified because some of them had been erroneously accused of involvement in the illegal drug trade, like what happened to Pangasinan Rep. Amado Espino Jr.

In 2016, Mr. Duterte openly accused Espino, a retired police general and former Pangasinan governor, of coddling drug syndicates in his province.

But the President later took

Hugpong-Otso debate unlikely, says Comelec

By SHEILA CRISOSTOMO

The Commission on Elections (Comelec) is cool to the proposal to organize a debate between the senatorial candidates of the administration's Hugpong ng Pagbabago (HNP) and the opposition Otso Diretso.

In an interview, Comelec spokesman James Jimenez yesterday said they might no longer be able to arrange a debate between the two parties due to time constraints.

"Not to pre-empt the Commission *en banc*, but we only have less than two months to go, so it's unlikely... As far as the time element is concerned, it's doubtful," he said.

Last week, five senatorial bets of Otso Diretso filed a formal request for the Comelec to organize a debate with their HNP rivals.

Jimenez said this would be discussed by the commission and "if the *en banc* rules on it one way or the other, then we will implement."

"(But) to be honest, organizing a debate is not an overnight job," he said.

The Otso Diretso candidates initially challenged HNP bets two weeks ago to a debate instead of complaining about mudslinging during campaign sorties. The invitation, however, was informal and was made during a forum attended by the media.

On Feb. 25, the opposition bets arrived at Plaza Miranda in Quiapo, Manila for a supposedly scheduled public debate, but not one of the 13 candidates from HNP showed up.

A day after the Hugpong snubbed the public debate with Otso Diretso, HNP

Turn to Page 2

Hugpong-Otso From Page 1

campaign manager and Davao City Mayor Sara Duterte-Carpio said she preferred a more organized debate to a "palengke-style" discourse. She also stressed that parties should first reach an agreement on the venue, time and rules of the debate.

Spirit of democracy

Contrary to the claim of Malacañang that the debate

being requested is a mere effort to gain publicity, human rights lawyer Otso Diretso coalition senatorial candidate Jose Manuel "Chel" Diokno maintained that having a debate is the spirit of democracy.

Diokno turned the tables on the administration candidates, who he said did nothing but put too many tarpaulins on the streets to advance

their political campaigns.

"Tungkulin ng oposisyon na kuwestiyunin, punahin at magbigay ng alternatibo sa pagpapatakbo sa pamahalaan. Huwag naman sanang balat-sibuyas ang ating pangulo - ito ang diwa ng demokrasya (It is the duty of the opposition to question, criticize and give alternatives to running the government - our President should not be so sensitive, this is the spirit of democracy)," Diokno said.

"Men are not compat-

ible with democracy. We can strengthen our leaders by pointing out what they are doing that is wrong," Diokno added, quoting his late father, former senator Jose "Pepe" Diokno.

Diokno stressed that talking about issues concerning the people is essential for a senator, whose main task is to craft laws. A senator's work, he said, is not measured by how big a campaign tarpaulin is.

- With Cecille Suerte
Felipe

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Page: *AS*

Palace: DFA's call to protest harassment of PH fishers

By Julie M. Aurelio
@JMAurelioINQ

Malacañang is leaving it to the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) to decide whether to lodge a diplomatic protest to stop Chinese vessels from driving away Filipinos from fishing grounds close to Philippine-occupied Pag-asa (Thitu) Island in the South China Sea.

Presidential spokesperson Salvador Panelo on Monday said the government had not verified the report of Kalayaan town Mayor Roberto del Mundo that the Chinese were denying Filipino fishermen access to three sandbars near Pag-asa.

The three sandbars are located between Pag-asa and Philippine-claimed but China-controlled Zamora Reef, known by its international name Subi.

Verification needed

"I will need to verify that from the secretary of national defense (Delfin Lorenzana)," Panelo said.

Asked if Malacañang would file a protest if Del Mundo's report was proved to be true, he said: "I will leave it to the secretary of foreign affairs (Teodoro Locsin Jr.). That's his turf."

But Panelo said it was "certainly not correct" to drive away Filipino fishermen from sand-

bars close to Pag-asa.

"[T]hat is our area. We, from the very start, said that's ours. And our fishermen have been doing that, our fishermen have been fishing there," he said.

"[N]obody has the right to drive our fishermen away. But we need to validate," he added.

Three sandbars

Del Mundo last week said that Chinese fishing vessels were preventing Filipinos from fishing off three sandbars close to Pag-asa.

He said the Chinese vessels' actions adversely affected the activities of Filipinos who used to fish near the sandbars.

"The presence of Chinese boats is now affecting our fishing activities. It wasn't that way before. When our fishermen are about to get near Sandbar 3—that is really our fishing ground—a Chinese vessel would immediately come up to us to ward us off so we can't come closer," Del Mundo said last week. *AS*

Asked if Malacañang considered the Chinese action as a cause for concern, Panelo said: "If the secretary of national defense says it should be a cause of concern, then it is a cause of concern. I haven't heard him say that." —WITH A REPORT FROM FRANCES MANGOSING INQ

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Phl hails US defense assurance

President Duterte has hailed the United States' assurance that it will defend the Philippines from attacks but expressed qualms about the processes that require approval of American lawmakers.

US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, who met with Duterte last week, said Washington would protect Manila if its forces are attacked in the disputed West Philippine Sea and South China Sea.

Pompeo noted that an armed attack on Philippine forces, aircraft or public vessels in the West Philippine Sea would trigger obligations under the Mutual Defense Treaty.

"America said, 'We will protect you. We will -- your backs are covered I'm sure.' I said, it's OK," Duterte said during a campaign sortie of the Partido Demokratiko Pilipino-Lakas ng Bayan last Sunday in Zamboanga City.

"But the problem here is they would invoke the (Mutual Defense Treaty) which was entered into by us, by our ancestors... But in America, it has to pass through Congress. Any declaration of war will pass Congress. You know how b***s*** America's Congress is," he added.

Duterte noted that US President Donald Trump is facing a budget stalemate because of a disagreement with law-

makers.

"They still do not have a budget. I almost experienced that. But our congressmen's approval of the budget was timely," he said.

"We were nearing the same situation as with America. They do not have a budget... We have similarities. America crafted our Constitution," he said.

The US government was forced to shut down because of disagreements over Trump's appeal for funding of a wall along the US-Mexico border to prevent the entry of illegal immigrants.

In a related development, Malacañang said it has to verify reports that Chinese ships drove away Filipino fishermen near Pag-asa Island in the West Philippine Sea.

If proven, such action by Chinese vessels are "certainly" not correct, presidential spokesman Salvador Panelo said.

"Our fishermen have been fishing there. So... nobody has the right to drive our fishermen away. But we'll have to validate that," he said.

'Rightly deserved assurance'

The US assurance that Washington will defend the Philippines against any attack in the South China Sea is one

of the most important statements made since the Mutual Defense Treaty was ratified in 1951, former foreign affairs secretary Albert del Rosario said.

"It behooves the Filipinos to finally be provided this 'specific' and 'rightly-deserved' assurance," Del Rosario, chairman of the independent think tank Stratbase ADR Institute (ADRI) Inc. said.

"As the South China Sea is part of the Pacific, any armed attack on Philippine forces, aircraft or public vessels in the South China Sea would trigger mutual defense obligations under Article 4 of our Mutual Defense Treaty," Pompeo said.

He noted that "China's island building and military activities in the South China Sea threaten sovereignty, security and economic livelihood as well as that of the United States."

Del Rosario, who served as ambassador to the US, said it was an "imperative for our disruptive northern neighbor to be forewarned of the significance of our mutual defense treaty alliance," referring to China that declared itself "a builder of world peace, contributor to global development and defender of international order" despite its militarization of the South China Sea.

— Alexis Romero, Pia Lee-Brago

STAY NEUTRAL

'Withdraw from MDT'

Corpuz said the Philippines can stay neutral by pulling out of its mutual defense agreement with the US

By Pat C. Santos

The Philippines should stay neutral and not get itself involved in case of a war between the China and the United States.

This was stated yesterday by retired Col. Victor Corpuz during the weekly Tapatan sa Aristocrat media forum.

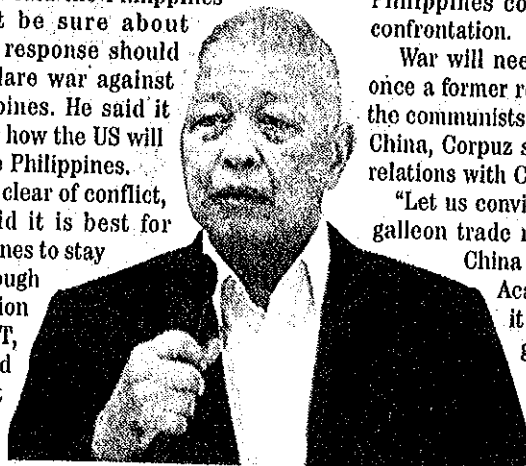
Corpuz, former chief of the Intelligence Service of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (ISAFP), said the Philippines can stay neutral by pulling out of its Mutual Defense Treaty (MDT) with the US.

Let us convince China to revive the old galleon trade route.

Corpuz views the move as a way out from being dragged into a war should a conflict between the superpower countries US and China arises over the West Philippine sea row.

He even said the Philippines could not be sure about America's response should China declare war against the Philippines. He said it is not clear how the US will support the Philippines.

To steer clear of conflict, Corpuz said it is best for the Philippines to stay neutral through the abrogation of the MDT, which he said could attract aggressive nations which the



CORPUZ

Philippines could not face in a military confrontation.

War will need money said Corpuz, also once a former rebel soldier who defected to the communists. Instead of waging war with China, Corpuz said the country can use its relations with China to its benefit.

"Let us convince China to revive the old galleon trade route where products from China will pass the Philippines to Acapulco, Mexico and expand it to the southern parts as a gateway to North and South America. Mindanao to the ASEAN, Australia and new Zealand – the belt and road program of China," Corpuz said.

Negros LGU execs surrender guns

By GILBERT BAYORAN

BACOLOD CITY -- At least 16 mayors in 32 towns and cities in Negros Occidental have surrendered 205 loose firearms in support of the campaign of the Philippine National Police for peaceful elections in May.

Brig. Gen. John Bulalacao, Western Visayas police director, witnessed the turnover of the guns at Camp Alfredo Montelibano Sr. in this city yesterday.

The guns include AK-47 and M16 assault rifles, shotguns as well as 9mm and .45-caliber pistols.

Local government units had procured the guns for issuance to their respective civil security units.

Bulalacao admitted that some local chief executives, used the guns for their private armed groups.

He said the recovery of loose firearms would ensure that these would not end up in the hands of private armed groups.

Bulalacao said around 10,000 unlicensed firearms in the province have been accounted for since July 24 last year.

Also yesterday, Col. Ro-

meo Baleros, officer-in-charge of the Negros Occidental Police office, and Col. Benedict Arevalo, 303rd Infantry Brigade commander, presented to Vice Gov. Eugenio Jose Lacson and Milagros Salud Villanueva, Commission on Elections provincial supervisor, the 27 guns turned over by New People's Army rebels, who surrendered over the weekend.

In Laguna, barangay councilman Richard Galit was arrested for illegal possession of firearms in San Pablo City yesterday.

Col. Eleazar Matta, Laguna police director, said a caliber .38 revolver and nine bullets were recovered when police raided the house of Galit in Barangay Concepcion.

Matta said he hopes the confiscation of loose firearms would reduce the number of election-related incidents.

-- With Non Alquitran

Phil, Japanese army chiefs meet

By MICHAEL PUNONGBAYAN

Japan Ground Self-Defense Force (JGSDF) chief Gen. Koji Yamazaki visited Army headquarters in Fort Bonifacio yesterday and paid a courtesy call on Army commander Lt. Gen. Macario Alberto.

The Army said the visit seeks to reinforce the strategic partnership between the Philippines and Japan.

The Philippines and Japan signed the Memorandum on Defense Cooperation and Exchanges in January 2015 to provide a framework for defense cooperation between the two defense ministries and their respective armed forces.

On June 8, 2015, the Army-JGSDF Terms of Reference were signed, strengthening the friendly relations and cooperation while promoting open discussion of subjects of mutual interest for both armies.

As a result, a joint working group was established as a platform for both armies to plan or develop bilateral engagements that will enhance capabilities, interoperability and promote discussions of topics which are of mutual interest or mutually beneficial.

"My visit implies that my country recognizes the Philippines as a significant strategic partner in East Asia. I'm very honored to be here to strengthen our bilateral relations," Yamazaki said.

"The Philippine Army is optimistic that the visit will boost bilateral cooperation between the two countries," Alberto said in response.

Rifles from US

Meanwhile, the Army has 80 new assault rifles given by the US government as military aid to help in various operations.

The Army had also purchased 44 mortar rounds from the US under the Foreign Military Sales Program.

Army spokesman Lt. Col. Ramon Zagala said the rifles and mortar rounds were officially delivered to and received at Fort Bonifacio last Sunday.

He said the 80 assault rifles are a grant from the US government to the Philippine Army under the Military Assistance Program.

Zagala said assault rifles are the primary direct fire weapons used by infantry troops participating in armed battles against the enemy, while mor-



Gen. Koji Yamazaki, chief of staff of Japan Ground Self-Defense Force, shakes hands with Lt. Gen. Macario Alberto, commanding general of the Philippine Army yesterday. AFP

tars are indirect fire weapons mainly used to support the infantry.

Army officials have expressed gratitude to the US government for giving the assault rifles that will improve the capabilities of frontline

troops.

Zagala said the purchase of mortars through the Army modernization fund upgrades the Army's weapons systems and capabilities to better perform its mission to secure the land.

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Japanese military official visits PH Army counterpart

JAPAN Ground Self Defense Force chief of staff, Gen. Koji Yamazaki, and his party formally called on Philippine Army commander, Lt. Gen. Macarog Alberto, at Fort Bonifacio, Taguig City Monday.

The purpose of the visit is to reinforce the two country's strategic partnership and exchange insights on mutual interests.

The Philippines and Japan signed the Memorandum on Defense Cooperation and Exchanges in January 2015.

The agreement is meant to provide a framework for defense cooperation between the two defense ministries and their respective armed forces.

On June 8, 2015, the Philippine Army-Japan Ground Self-Defense Force Terms of Reference was signed, strengthening the friendly relations and cooperation while promoting open discussion of subjects of mutual interest for both armies.

As a result, the PA-JGSDF Working Group was established as a platform for both armies to plan or develop bilateral engagements that will enhance capabilities, interoperability and promote discussions of topics which are of mutual interest or mutually beneficial.

Yamazaki started his military career in 1983 as an army engineer later holding various key positions in the engineer field of specialization of the JGSDF. He served as 9th Division commanding general in 2014 and Northern Army head in 2016 before assuming the position of JGSDF chief of staff in 2017.

The two army chiefs expressed both their nation's willingness to continue the exchange of information as both countries recognize each other's expertise particularly in humanitarian assistance and disaster response.

The JGSDF chief also recognized the PA's counterterrorism efforts dur-

ing the Marawi siege and the leadership decisions that helped resolve the crisis.

"My visit implies that my country recognizes the Philippines as a significant strategic partner in East Asia," Yamazaki said.

"I'm very honored to be here to strengthen our bilateral relations," he added.

For his part, Alberto said he is optimistic that the visit of the JGSDF chief will boost the bilateral cooperation between Japan and the Philippines.

"Both armies can learn from each other's experiences in terms of counterterrorism and humanitarian assistance and disaster response through the conduct of training exchanges. We will continue the cooperation with renewed vigor in order to better tackle the various security challenges that both our countries are facing," he added. PNA

05

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B3

Army chief, Japanese counterpart agree to bolster cooperation on security

BY VICTOR REYES

ARMY chief Lt. Gen. Macairog Alberto and his Japanese counterpart, Gen. Koji Yamazaki, yesterday agreed to bolster cooperation on security concerns, including the fight against terrorism.

"Both armies can learn from each other's experiences in terms of counter-terrorism and humanitarian assistance and disaster response through the conduct of training exchanges," Alberto said.

Yamazaki, the chief of staff of the Japan Ground Self-Defense Force, paid Alberto a visit at the Army headquarters in Fort Bonifacio yesterday morning.

"We will continue the cooperation with renewed vigor in order to better tackle the various security challenges that both our countries are facing," Alberto said.

The Army is in the forefront of the fight against various terrorist groups, including the Abu Sayyaf, Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom

Fighters, and the Maute Group which have pledged allegiance with the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria.

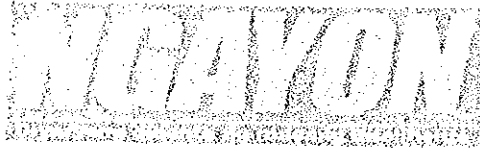
Alberto said he is optimistic that Yamazaki's visit to the country "will boost bi-lateral cooperation between the two countries."

Yamazaki arrived last Sunday for a four-day visit. Yamazaki, who started his military career as an Army engineer, assumed his current post in 2017 after serving as the commander of Japan's Northern Army.

"My visit implies that my coun-

try recognizes the Philippines as a significant strategic partner in East Asia. I'm very honored to be here to strengthen our bilateral relations," Yamazaki said.

Army spokesman Lt. Col. Ramon Zagala said Alberto and Yamazaki expressed the willingness of both nations "to continue the exchange of information as both countries recognize each other's expertise particularly in humanitarian assistance and disaster response." B3



Alyansang Japan-PH Army pinaigting

Pinaigting ng Philippine Army ang ugnayan nito sa counterpart mula sa Japanese Army matapos ang pagbisita ni Gen. Koji Yamazaki, Chief of Staff ng Japan Ground Self Defense Force (JGSDF) sa kanilang himpilan sa Fort Bonifacio, Taguig City kahapon.

"My visit implies that my country recognizes the Philippines as a significant strategic partner in East Asia," pahayag ni Yamazaki na sinamahan ng iba pang Japanese Army official sa nasabing courtesy call.

Ayon kay Philippine Army Spokesman Col. Ramon Zagala, ang PH Army at ang JGSDF ay lumagda sa terms of reference noong Hunyo 2015 kung saan

nagkasundo upang palakasin pa ang mutual issues at concerns, anin na buwan matapos na ang Tokyo at Manila ay pagtibayin ang Agreement on Defense Cooperation Exchanges.

Samantala, tumanggap naman ang PH Army ng 80 assault rifle at 44 mortar mula sa US na nais palakasin ang depensa ng kanilang kaalyadong puwersa.

Nabatid kay Zagala na ang nasabing grant mula sa US ay alinsunod sa Military Assistance Program habang ang mga mortar ay matapos naman ang US Foreign Military Sales Program (Joy Cantos)

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MANILA BULLETIN
THE NATION'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

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• Army receives assault rifles, mortars from US gov't

The Philippine Army (PA) received 80 assault rifles and 40 mortars from the United States government on Sunday. Army Spokesman Lt. Col. Ramon P. Zagala said the 80 assault rifles are a grant from the US government to the Philippine Army under the Military Assistance Program. Further, the Philippine Army, through its modernization program, also purchased on Sunday 40 mortars from the US government under the Foreign Military Sales Program. Zagala said assault rifles are the primary direct fire weapons used by our infantry troops participating in armed battles against the enemy, while mortars are indirect fire weapons mainly used to support the infantry. "The Philippine Army expresses its gratitude to the US government in granting the assault rifles that will greatly improve the fighting skills of our frontline troops," Zagala said. (Francis T. Wakefield) ✕

5 March 2019

The Manila Times

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Army gets rifles, mortars from US

THE Philippine Army has received assault rifles and mortars from the United States.

The 80 assault rifles were a grant by Washington under the Military Assistance Program, while the 44 mortars were purchased from the US government under the Foreign Military Sales Program, Lt. Col. Ramon Zagala, Army spokesman, said.

"The Philippine Army expresses its gratitude to the US government in granting the assault rifles that will greatly improve the fighting skills of our frontline troops," Zagala said.

The rifles and mortars arrived on Sunday. *AB*

The procurement of the firearms is part of the modernization program of the Philippine military. DEMPSEY REYES



Army gets weapons

The Philippine Army (PA) now has the procured rifles and mortars from the US government since Sunday.

The 80 assault rifles were a grant by the US government to the PA under the Military Assistance Program.

The 44 mortars, on the other hand, were purchased by the PA under its modernization program from the US government's Foreign Military Sales Program.

The PA has embarked on a three-phase modernization program starting from 2013 to 2028 under the Revised AFP Modernization Program covered by Republic Act 10349.

Lt. Col. Ramon Zagala, chief of Army Public Affairs, expressed the Army's gratitude to the US government in granting the assault rifles that will greatly improve the fighting capability of the frontline troops.

He also added that the procurement of mortars through the Army modernization fund will upgrade the weapons systems of the PA.

KMBulquerin

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Unity walk and peace covenant signing held in Iligan City

By **BONITA L. ERMAC**

ILIGAN CITY -- More than a thousand people joined the unity walk around the city, mostly candidates in the May mid-term elections and their supporters, and representatives from the Commission on Election (COMELEC), Philippine National Police (PNP), Armed forces of the Philippines (AFP), the religious sector, and the PNP City Advisory Council.

The Partido Federal ng Pilipinas, Partido Demokratiko ng Pilipinas-Lakas ng Bayan, Nacionalista party, One Iligan party, and Independent party positioned themselves in four different areas during the Unity Walk.

The walk converged at the city public plaza where a short program followed by the signing of a peace covenant of all stakeholders on Sunday.

Messages from the PNP, AFP, DILG and the Diocese of Iligan focused on the appeal to the electorate and candidates to work for free, credible, and peaceful elections.

"Let our election be free from fraud, intimidation, and violence," Apostolic administrator of the Diocese of Iligan Bishop Severo Caernare said.

"To elect our leaders is our sacred obligation to God, to our country and to our people. We must have a sincere (and) thorough discernment, praying for the light of the Holy spirit of the Almighty God to

guide us in our choosing," he said.

"We must choose our leaders according to the dictates of our conscience because in the human conscience God speaks," he stated.

The military's 2nd Mechanized Infantry (Magbalantay) brigade led by its commander colonel Ezra James P. Enriquez said they will remain neutral in the May 13 election.

"We are assuring everybody that your army will be non-partisan, apolitical during this May exercise," said Enriquez.

He enjoined the people to cooperate and coordinate with the Comelec and the PNP "so that the voice of the people will be heard here in Iligan City."

Magdalo? Make no mistake

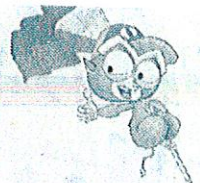
President Rodrigo Duterte warned against putting coup plotters in the Senate saying the Magdalo rebel group, now a partylist, brought nothing to the nation but mayhem.

Sen. Antonio Trillanes IV and Rep. Gary Alejano, who is now seeking a Senate seat, are Magdalo members.

"Don't make a mistake about the Magdalo. They held a revolt in Makati, Trillanes was shouting on top of his lungs, but when the police came, he

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Magdalo? Make no mistake



They held a revolt in Makati, Trillanes was shouting on top of his lungs but when the police came, he surrendered

From page 1

surrendered. They were accusing the administration of former President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo of a lot of things," Mr. Duterte said during the Partido Demokratiko Pilipino campaign rally in Zamboanga.

The President said the two prominent members of the group became members of Congress

but continued to show lack of respect.

Honorable he's not

"Trillanes has no manners. (Once he was talking to a former) Chief of Staff. Remember Angie Reyes, he was an extremely good person," Mr. Duterte said.

He asked before a Senate hearing, "Your honor, may I be allowed to talk so I can defend my honor?"

"Trillanes' reply was 'No, sit down. You have no honor.' He was a co-graduate at the PMA (Philippine Military Academy), he was even a Chief of Staff, a secretary of Energy and Trillanes subjected him to that?" the President said.

Remember Angie Reyes, he was an extremely good person.

"What are the achievements of Trillanes in the Senate? Nothing. He kept on accusing me of (millions of unexplained wealth and asked me to open my bank accounts). Son of a bitch, I will never allow it because I know he is trying to make a fool out of me," he said.

Mr. Duterte said there is a law

now being proposed in Congress for the opening of bank accounts of public officials. "I will go with this if all of us in government will do it. That's timely. I have already asked my accounts to be opened and exposed to all," he added.

Sinister schemes

"I will tell you how foolish this son of a bitch is in manufacturing scenarios. He added up everything. Every year, the entries were added. That is from the bank nearest my apartment when I was still a congressman," Mr. Duterte said.

The two prominent members of the group became members of Congress but continued to show lack of respect.

He even had the gall to pat

the Chief of Staff (Reyes) on his back and he was a PMAer who is the senior of Trillanes, "Pal, get a lawyer," he said. "Reyes was totally humiliated," he added.

What are the achievements of Trillanes in the Senate, nothing.

"What Trillanes tried to show was that he was brave, but people actually saw him as insane. Do you know who spent for your PMA schooling? The people, then you talk that way disrespecting even your compatriot," he added.

"Just wait for me after I finish my term. There would be nobody else around, I guarantee," Mr. Duterte told the senator.

CL

ACROSS THE COUNTRY

NPA rebel dead in Camarines Norte clash

A New People's Army (NPA) rebel was killed in an encounter with soldiers in Basud, Camarines Norte on Sunday.

Government troopers recovered a caliber .45 pistol, a caliber .30 rifle and a hand grenade at the scene in Barangay Tuaca.

The gunfight, which lasted for about five minutes, occurred while personnel of the First Camarines Norte Provincial Mobile Force Company were conducting security operations, reports reaching Camp Aguinaldo showed.

Maj. Gen. Fernando Trinidad, Joint Task Force Bicolandia commander, lauded residents for reporting to authorities the presence of rebels in the area.

— Michael Punongbayan

PNP warns ACT teachers of raps

By EMMANUEL TUPAS

Law enforcers will not hesitate to file charges and revoke the licenses of teachers belonging to the Alliance of Concerned Teachers (ACT) who are found supporting communist rebels, the Philippine National Police (PNP) warned.

PNP chief Gen. Oscar Albayalde yesterday issued the warning after the ACT filed a motion for reconsideration before the Court of Appeals (CA) on the dismissal of its petition seeking to declare the profiling of its members by the police as unconstitutional.

Albayalde revealed that they are in the process of gathering evidence against some members of the left-leaning teachers group with alleged links to the Communist Party of the Philippines, its political arm National Democratic Front and armed wing the New People's Army.

"If we will be able to get physical evidence on their

participation in rebellion we will not hesitate to file a case against them," Albayalde said at a news briefing at Camp Crame, Quezon City.

Aside from criminal cases, he said they will also ask the Professional Regulation Commission to revoke the licenses of teachers found to be in cahoots with communist rebels.

He accused the ACT of filing cases even without proof.

Albayalde said like lawyers and doctors, a teacher could also lose license, which is just a privilege that could be taken away if it is proven an educator is conniving with perceived enemies of the state.

Albayalde insisted that they are not profiling ACT members, adding what they are doing is part of intelligence efforts to protect the state and its citizens from communist rebels and other enemies.

He reminded ACT members that it was CPP founder Jose Maria Sison who said the

teachers' group is one of their front organizations.

ACT yesterday appealed the ruling of the Court of Appeals (CA) junking its petition to stop the move of the PNP to profile their members.

In a motion for reconsideration, the ACT asked the 11th Division of the appellate court to reverse its decision last month that dismissed outright the petition filed by ACT through national chair Joselyn Martinez and secretary general Raymond Basilio on a technicality.

The CA cited infirmities in the petition as ground for rejecting the petition, particularly the failure of petitioners to submit certified true copies of the assailed memoranda issued by the PNP's intelligence units.

It held that the petition failed to meet the requirement under Rule 65, Section 2 in relation to Rule 46, Section 3 of the Rules of Court.

Both rules require that "the

petition shall likewise be accompanied by a certified true copy of the judgment, order or resolution subject thereof, copies of all pleadings and documents relevant and pertinent thereto."

But ACT explained that they were not able to secure certified true copies of the memoranda precisely because the PNP itself publicly denied the existence of such order.

ACT told the CA that they made a request to PNP chief Albayalde for copies of the assailed memoranda but their request was ignored.

Assuming that there are procedural lapses in the main petition, ACT said the Supreme Court itself has relaxed procedural rules to serve substantial justice considering matters of life, liberty, honor or property, if there are compelling circumstances or if procedural lapses are not entirely attributable to the party.

4 - With Edu Punay

Students, teachers warned vs NPA recruitment

By FRANCIS T. WAKEFIELD

The Army's 7th Infantry (Kaugnay) Division has warned students and teachers against the recruitment efforts of the New People's Army (NPA) during the recent 1st Quarter Multi-Sector Advisory Board (MSAB) Meeting at the Central Luzon State University (CLSU) in Munoz, Nueva Ecija.

According to the 7th ID, it is necessary to stress the importance of being vigilant about the recruitment efforts of the NPAs, considering that the MSAB meeting is being held at a university.

During the meeting, Brigadier General Lenard T. Agustin, commander of the 7th ID, shared that one of CLSU's

former students, Kathleen "Katkat" Ramos, was recruited by the League of Filipino Students (LFS).

Katkat was a Veterinary Medicine student in CLSU when she was recruited by the student organization in 2002. Ramos later became a member of the NPA and was killed by her fellow rebel. Her remains were exhumed by the Army through the information provided by a former rebel after being she missing for three years.

On the other hand, the MSAB, along with their military counterpart, the Army Transformation Roadmap Technical Working Group (ATRTWG), updated the board on the status of ongoing and proposed projects.

Dr. Virginia G. Sacramento, chair-

person of MSAB, said she looks forward to seeing the suggested projects from last year to take shape this year. She is positive that with the help of the 7th ID and the MSAB's guidance and expertise, more of the unutilized resources of the 7th ID will finally be productive and help towards the development of the Camp, without compromising the environment.

Several MSAB projects are already generating resources for the 7th ID such as the Mushroom production and Tilapia raising projects. The Ecotourism in Fort Magsaysay has started catering to nearby schools interested in learning the history of 7ID and touring its camp base.

Agustin said the conduct of MSAB

meeting in CLSU is not a coincidence and might serve as a reminder to everyone to constantly warn the students, as well as members of the academe, on the consequences of joining left leaning organizations.

"All of the students and even teachers are vulnerable targets for NPA recruitment. I would like to tell everyone that if we want to see change in the

government, we should change ourselves first. Transformation happens within and not by joining rallies or left leaning organizations. There are proper ways to express our grievances to the government," he said.

Agustin also expressed his full support on the MSAB projects and suggested some project planning and implementation. J

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NPA rebel slain in Camarines Norte

An unidentified suspected member of the New People's Army (NPA) was killed in an encounter in Basud, Camarines Norte, on March 3, 2019.

A military report disclosed that elements of the 1st Camarines Norte Provincial Mobile Force Company were conducting security operations in Barangay Tuaca, Basud, in response to the information given by the civilians when they chanced upon 15 armed NPAs believed to be members of KSPN 1, Larangan 2, Komiteng Probinsya 1 of the Bicol Regional Party Committee. This triggered a shootout.

The firefight lasted for almost five minutes, with the terrorists scampering toward

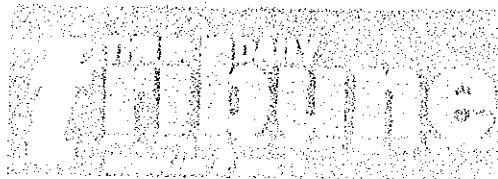
different directions and leaving behind their dead comrade.

Government troops seized from the scene of the encounter a .45 caliber pistol, a cal. 30 carbine rifle, and a hand grenade.

There was no reported casualty on the government side while pursuit operation is still on going.

In the official statement of Joint Task Force Bicolandia under Maj. Gen. Fernando T. Trinidad, the command lauded the cooperation of the civilian populace in the area and the prompt response of the police force that yielded positive result contributory to the ongoing anti-insurgency campaign in Bicol Region. (Francis T. Wakefield)

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NPA rebel killed

A New People's Army cadre was killed following an encounter with the military in Camarines Norte.

The 1st Camarines Norte Provincial Mobile Force Co. reported the rebel's death following a brief skirmish while it was on patrol in Tuaca, Basud.

The military claimed it faced off with about 15 armed rebels allegedly belonging to the KSPN 1, Larangan 2 of the Bicol Regional Party Committee.

The battle lasted for about five minutes before the rebels scattered towards different destinations. **Kathleen Mae Butquerin**

Kuwebang 'ospital' ng NPA, nakubkob

Nakubkob ng militar ang isang kuweba, na ginagawang ospital ng New People's Army (NPA) sa Buenavista, Agusan del Norte, kamakailan.

Ayon kay 23rd Infantry Battalion (IB) commander, Lt. Col. Francisco Molina, ng Philippine Army (PA), bago ito nakubkob ay nakaengkuwentro muna ng tropa ng pamahalaan ang grupo ng mga rebelde.

Matapos, aniya, ang ilang

minutong bakkaban ay umatras ang mga rebelde patungong Sitio Bulak, Barangay Lower Olave, ng naturang bayan.

Natagpuan sa kuweba ang dalawang Garand rifle at iba't ibang gamot na pang-opera.

Nakumpiska rin ang dalawang malalaking bomba sa paligid ng kuweba.

2 Fer Taboy

'TERRORISTS HAVE NO IDEOLOGY'

ABU SAYYAF ATROCITIES SPOOK FOREIGN INVESTORS-DUTERTE

By Julie M. Aurelio
@JMAurelioINQ

Foreign investors will avoid the Philippines if the Abu Sayyaf's atrocities are not stopped, President Duterte said.

In a speech on Sunday night, the President acknowledged the adverse impact of the Abu Sayyaf's activities on foreign investor confidence in the country.

But a dialogue with the terror group is out of the question, he said.

"With the Abu Sayyaf, we

will never have an understanding. I cannot, for the life of me, imagine me talking to them after all that they have done ... decapitating everyone. [Some of] my soldiers were Moro [but] they don't select their victims. They have no ideology except to kill and destroy," he said.

Productivity suffers

"If they are not stopped, everyone who wants to invest in the Philippines will never do that. So we cannot be productive," he added.

Mr. Duterte made the remarks during a campaign rally of the Partido Demokratiko Pilipino-Lakas ng Bayan in Zamboanga City on Sunday night.

Cathedral bombing

The President earlier ordered the military to use all its resources to crush the Abu Sayyaf after the Jan. 27 bombing of the Catholic cathedral in Jolo, Sulu province, that left more than 20 people dead and nearly a hundred others wounded.

But in an earlier visit to Is-

abela City, Basilan province, also on Sunday, Mr. Duterte said the military's planes and bombs would only be used if government troops were driven into a corner.

"We have so many fighter jets, we have a complete fleet, but you don't see them flying and dropping bombs every day," the President said.

"Only if the troops are cornered and can't find a way out, that's the only time that the helicopters will come to save lives," he added. INQ A3

Soldier slain in BIFF attack

MAGUINDANAO - Members of the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF) killed another soldier on Sunday, the fourth fatality since Thursday.

Cpl. Sahelbasar Alaja of the 90th Infantry Battalion was walking near a detachment of the Army's 6th Infantry Division (ID) in Barangay Semba, Datu Odin Sinsuat when BIFF men blocked his path and opened fire.

Alaja was declared dead on arrival in a hospital.

BIFF spokesman Abu Misry Mama yesterday admitted that their "hitmen" were behind the attack.

S/Sgt. Sergeant Lardera Verande of the 6th ID's intelligence unit and Pvt. Junard Estribor and Nellier John Pinto were killed in ambushes along Sinsuat Avenue in Cotabato City and Barangay Sambulawan in Datu Salibo, respectively, on Thursday.

The companion of Estribor and Pinto, Pvt. Muqtadir Salimpuna, was wounded and remains confined in a hospital.

Misry said the killings were perpetrated by the BIFF to avenge the deaths of their members in military operations in Maguindanao last week.

"Retaliations will continue," he said. -- John Unson

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Duterte on Otso bets: Diretso sa impiyerno

By ALEXIS ROMERO
and HELEN FLORES

Straight to hell -- that's where the senatorial candidates of the opposition Otso Diretso (Straight Eight) are headed, according to President Duterte.

Duterte said the opposition coalition is composed of candidates who have not done anything for the country but criticize.

"*Sinong ipalit mo diyan sa... 'yang Otso Diretso, papuntang impiyerno* (Otso Diretso is heading straight to hell)," the President

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said during a late night campaign rally of the ruling Partido Demokratiko Pilipino-Lakas ng Bayan in Zamboanga City on Sunday.

"Walang ginawa 'yang mga tao na yan puro criticize, hindi pa mawala" (Those people do nothing but criticize)," he added.

It was the first time Duterte attacked the Otso Diretso in a campaign sortie, questioning their competence and accomplishments.

He called former interior secretary Manuel Roxas II "hamburger" or arrogant and questioned his achievements.

"He occupied every Cabinet post. What did he do? Give me one of his achievements, even just one," Duterte said, referring to Roxas, who served as trade secretary during the administrations of former presidents Joseph Estrada and Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, and transportation and interior chief during the presidency of Benigno Aquino III.

Roxas shrugged off Duterte's criticisms against the opposition candidates and instead discussed his legislative agenda.

"I will continue to focus on job creation and increasing workers' pay and income of small and medium enterprises. I will also keep on monitoring the prices of goods and ensure the availability of cheaper medicine for our people," Roxas said when asked to comment on Duterte's tirades.

Vice President Leni Robredo defended the opposition senatorial candidates, saying they were chosen because of their good track record.

The other Otso Diretso candidates hit back at Duterte, saying he is using his position to campaign for his bets at the expense of the opposition.

Duterte said a vote for Magdalo Rep. Gary Alejano is a "mistake" as he belittled the former soldier's involvement in uprisings against Arroyo.

"Look at the Magdalo. They launched a revolt in Makati... When the police

came, they surrendered," Duterte said.

He said Sen. Bam Aquino is just a lookalike of his uncle, the late senator Benigno Aquino Jr.

"What significant thing have you done? What have you done that is really impressive? You just oppose. You just criticize," Duterte asked.

He called former Quezon representative Erin Tañada a leftist who supports the communist armed group New People's Army (NPA).

"Tañada is a leftist. You know who gives us headaches? They do. They do not admit they are NPA members but they are supporting the group. They serve as their lawyers," Duterte said.

He insinuated that election lawyer Romulo Macalintal only serves moneyed clients.

"Abugado ka lang kung may pera ka" (You are only a lawyer if you have money)," he said as he poked fun at the mannerisms of some opposition candidates and calling them names.

He ridiculed Chel Diokno's manner of talking and claimed that the senatorial bet is no match to his father former senator Jose Diokno.

Former solicitor-general Florin Hilbay, meanwhile, was described by the President as "turtle."

Robredo said the fact that the President mentioned each opposition bet showed that they are getting the awareness of the people.

"If they are not relevant, why would the President waste his time on them. It only means they have a big chance to win in the May 13 polls," Robredo said in an interview in Bocaue, Bulacan.

The Otso Diretso bets said it is the job of the opposition to oppose the wrong policies of the government.

"We still have democracy, right? Don't take criticisms personally," Hilbay said in a statement, addressing the President.

Diokno questioned the track record of the administration bets.

"I return the question to the President, what have your candidates done for the country except put up tarpaulins?" Diokno said.

— With Roel Pareño

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Duterte: Otso Diretso bound straight for hell

BY CATHERINE S. VALENTE

PRESIDENT Rodrigo Duterte has lashed out at Otso Diretso's candidates for the Senate, saying they would go straight to hell for their endless criticism of his administration.

►StraightA2

Duterte

Speaking at a rally of the Partido Demokratikong Pilipino-Lakas ng Bayan (PDP-Laban) in Zamboanga City on Sunday, Duterte said the opposition's candidates did nothing but to criticize him and his policies.

"*Sinong ipalit mo diyan sa 'Otso Diretso' papuntang impyerno* (Whom will you vote for in a place of that Eight Straight to hell)?" Duterte said, referring to the Otso Diretso slate, a line-up composed of Liberal Party (LP) bets and candidates of other groups critical of his administration.

"*Totoo lang, walang ginawa 'yang mga tao na 'yan puro criticize*, (To be honest, those people nothing but criticize)," he added.

Backed by Vice President Maria Leonor "Leni" Robredo, the opposition's eight-man ticket is composed of Sen. Paolo Benigno "Bam" Aquino 4th, Magdalo party-list Rep. Gary Alejano, former Interior secretary Manuel "Mar" Roxas 2nd, former Quezon congressman Brin Tañada, former Solicitor General Florin Hilbay, Marawi civic leader Samira Gutoc, human rights lawyer Jose Manuel "Chel" Diokno and election lawyer Romulo Macalintal.

The President also slammed the opposition slate for being supporters of communist rebels.

"*Erin Tañada? Left. And proud sila diyan sa* (they are proud of the) Left. They think that it's popular. *Kita mo kakapal ng mukha, nagawa pa ng ticket 'Otso Diretso'* (they have no shame, they even included him in the Otso Diretso ticket)," he said.

The President compared his party's Senate bet, his former political adviser Francis Tolentino, with Hilbay, who he said has no chance of winning against the former mayor of Tagaytay.

"*Sino diyan makakatalo kay Tolentino* (who among them can beat Tolentino) in terms of qualification? *Magsabi ka ng kandidato* (Mention those candidates), Macalintal, Hilbay, si Tañada?" he said.

Duterte also slammed Roxas,



ON CAMPAIGN MODE President Rodrigo Duterte makes a pitch for the administration's senatorial slate during the grand rally of the Partido Demokratikong Pilipino-Lakas ng Bayan at the Mayor Vitaliano Agan Coliseum in Zamboanga City. MALACANANG PHOTO

his defeated rival in the 2016 national elections, for his alleged arrogance.

"*Mar Roxas. Susmaryosep. Hambugero man ito* (Mar Roxas, my goodness. He's arrogant)... *sabi ko, tama ka na, Mar, yaya ka lang. Ewan ko kung gawain ninyong senador. Wala na ito. Napakita na niya. Kung 'yung kampanya ipinakita niya ang the best niya, hindi siya manalo kay Bong* (Enough, Mar. I don't know if you'll make him a senator. He's finished. If he showed his best in the past campaign, he wouldn't win against Bong)," the President said, obviously referring to his former top aide, Christopher Lawrence "Bong" Go.

Duterte also accused Roxas of political turncoatism, saying the latter has done nothing despite holding different Cabinet posts in previous administrations.

Roxas was Trade secretary during the Estrada administration. He topped the Senate race in 2004 under the ticket of then-President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo, and served as Transportation secretary and Interior secretary under then-President Benigno Aquino 3rd.

"*Nadaan man niya lahat 'yan.*

Tapos porma. Ano ang nagawa niya? Bigyan mo ako isa. Maski isa lang (He has held all those positions. All forms, but what did he accomplish? Give me one, even just one)," he said.

As for Bam Aquino, Duterte said he only had an uncanny resemblance to his uncle, late former senator Benigno "Ninoy" Aquino Jr.

"*Ano bang significant na nagawa mo* (What significant thing have you accomplished)? What have you done that is really impressive? *Puro kayo oposisyon, puro kayo saway* (All you do is oppose and rebuke)," he said.

The President also called out Alejano for his role in the unsuccessful mutinies led by then-Navy officer and now Sen. Antonio Trillanes 4th against the Arroyo administration.

He said Alejano, who once pushed for his impeachment, makes no sense in his statements.

The President also mocked Diokno's manner of speaking, saying he was nothing like his father, late former senator Jose "Pepe" Diokno.

Duterte, however, spared Gutoc, the only woman in the opposition slate, from his attacks, saying it

was his "rule" not to bad-mouth a woman.

"*Si Samira, babae man 'yan, ayaw ko magsalita diyan. Eh ganun 'yan ang rule eh pagka-babae kalaban mo*, you just shut up. Samira Ali Gutoc. So I have nothing to say to you, ma'am (Samira, she's a woman, I don't want to talk about her. That's the rule, if your enemy is a woman, you just shut up. Samira Ali Gutoc, so I have nothing to say to you, ma'am)," the President said.

Duterte then compared the opposition Senate slate with his party's candidates, claiming they pale in comparison and have not helped the Moros.

"*Maggunta 'yan doon sa Lanao. Ah wala, putulan ko ng ulo mga 'to. Walang kuwentang mga tao. Wala namang nagawa para sa aming mga Moro* (When they go to Lanao, I'll behead them. These worthless people. They have done nothing for us Moros)," he said.

It was the first time the President stepped up his attacks against the Otso Diretso candidates in a campaign rally.

In previous speeches, Duterte only warned voters against electing "useless" candidates or those who do nothing but criticize.

Rody takes a dig at Otso Diretso: Straight to hell

By Nat Mariano

PRESIDENT Rodrigo Duterte on Sunday slammed the opposition senatorial slate "Otso Diretso," saying they would all go straight to hell for their "lack of qualification."

As he continued to tour the country to campaign for his chosen candidates in the May midterm elections, Duterte took time to mock the capabilities of the opposition senatorial candidates.

"Who will you replace them with? The Otso Diretso that will directly go to hell?"

the President said in his speech, drawing laughter and applause from the crowd during a campaign rally of the ruling PDP-Laban party in Zamboanga City.

"Just to be honest, I'm not [impressed] with them. Those people did

Next page

Rody...

From A1

not do anything but criticize. They're all doubters," Duterte said.

Led by Vice President Leni Robredo, the opposition Otso Diretso senatorial slate is composed of Senator Bam Aquino, Magdalo party-list Rep. Gary

Alejano, former Quezon Rep. Erin Tañada, and former Interior Secretary Mar Roxas II.

Marawi civic leader Samira Gutoc, former Solicitor General Florin Hilbay, human rights lawyer Jose Manuel Diono, and election lawyer Romulo Macalintal completed the eight-man slate.

Duterte then hit each opposition candidate for supposedly being supporters

of the communist rebels and for their supposed "inexperience."

"Erin Tañada? Left. And they're proud of the left. They think that it's popular. Look, they even have the guts to create a ticket 'Otso Diretso,'" the President said.

"Macalintal is a lawyer. However, he's only a lawyer when he has the money."

Duterte also belittled the Senate bid of Hilbay.

Rody says he urged court to let Nur travel

President Duterte had asked the court to let Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) founder Nur Misuari, who is facing rebellion and graft charges, leave the country to attend conferences abroad.

Duterte said he assured "authorities" and the court that Misuari would return to the country to face his cases.

The MNLF founder traveled to the United Arab Emirates to attend the 46th session of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation's Council of Foreign Ministers. Misuari will also fly to Morocco to participate in the 14th session of the

Parliamentary Union of OIC member states.

"Now Misuari came to my office the other night because he wanted to go out. He was not allowed, he has cases," Duterte said during a campaign rally of the Partido Demokratiko Pilipino-Lakas ng Bayan last Sunday in Zamboanga City.

"I talked to the police, the military and the court to allow him. I was the one who guaranteed them that he would come back," he added.

Duterte said Misuari does not want to die in another country.

"Misuari, a true Tausug, would never allow that he be buried in a foreign land. I'm sure of that. That's why he will come back and help us build a nation," the President said.

Misuari has been charged with rebellion over the 2013 Zamboanga siege, which claimed the lives of more than 200 people. He is also facing graft and malversation charges over the supposed irregularities in the purchase of more than P77 million worth of "ghost" textbooks when he was still governor of the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao.

Duterte previously said he

does not meddle with the activities of state agencies.

'Persuasion, not interference'

Presidential spokesman Salvador Panelo claimed Duterte's move did not violate the principle of separation of powers of the independent branches of government. He said there is no problem with "persuasion" if it was done for "national interest."

"Perhaps he was referring to somebody who will relay the message to the courts. I don't see anything wrong with that," Panelo said at a press briefing

yesterday.

"After all, the three branches (of government) should help each other for the country. A branch cannot be inflexible if the consequence would be the destruction of our nation. But it's a different story if you impose your will on another branch. That's interference," he added.

Panelo said the courts would not allow themselves to be coerced or intimidated by anyone in the country. He claimed Duterte was not interfering with the work of the court but was merely explaining the important role Misuari plays in the peace efforts in

Mindanao.

"There are many ways of presenting your position -- you can express it verbally nationwide; you can express it privately to other people so it can reach the intended recipients. What is important -- it's his duty to preserve this country," Panelo said.

Earlier, Duterte admitted there were "rumblings" among MNLF members who felt they did not have enough representation in the Bangsamoro Transition Authority, the body that will govern the new Bangsamoro region until 2022.

— Alexis Romero

'Misuari will never abandon his country'

BY CATHERINE S. VALENTE

PRESIDENT Rodrigo Duterte has guaranteed that Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) founding Chairman Nur Misuari would return to the country, saying the latter would never abandon his homeland.

In his speech during a campaign rally in Zamboanga City on Sunday, Duterte admitted that he asked the court, the military and the police to allow Misuari to travel abroad and assured them he would not escape.

"Misuari came [to my office] the other night because he wanted to go, he was not allowed to go out *kasi may kaso siya* (because he has a case). *Kinausap ko ang pulis, pati military, pati ang korte na palabasin siya. Ako ang nag-* guarantee that he will come back (I talked to the police, the military and the

court to allow him to leave. I gave the guarantee that he will come back)," he said.

"Misuari, a true Tausug, would never allow that he be buried in a foreign land. *Sigurado ako diyan* (I am certain about that). That's why he will come back and help us build a nation," Duterte added.

Duterte's statement came after the Sandiganbayan granted Misuari's motion to travel abroad to participate in the 46th session of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) Council of Foreign Ministers in the United

Arab Emirates and the meeting of the Parliamentary Union of the OIC Member States in Morocco.

Misuari, who was charged with two counts each of graft and malversation, left the country on February 26. He is expected to return between March 17 and 20. He is also facing charges of rebellion and crimes against humanity over his role in the 2013 siege in Zamboanga City.

Duterte earlier said that he and the MNLF leader would craft a "new deal" when the latter comes back, in a bid to achieve long-lasting peace in besieged Mindanao.

Palace spokesman Salvador Panelo said there was "nothing wrong" with Duterte's move to ask the court to grant Misuari's request to go overseas.

Panelo noted that Duterte merely "persuaded" the court to allow Misuari's overseas trip, as the President believed that it would benefit the country, especially Mindanao.

"The President, as head of state, is mandated to preserve and protect the people. *Kung ang problema doon sa Mindanao ay nakasalalay sa isang tao kagaya ni Misuari na napakalaki ng impluwensiya at malaking grupo na maaaring magkaroon ng sigalot, tungkulin ni Presidente lahat ng kanyang makakaya*, persuasion, *na tulungan* (If the problem in Mindanao depends on one person like Misuari, who can influence and whose group is large and can cause discord, it's the President's duty to do his best, such as persuasion, to help Misuari)," he told reporters.

"*Kung yung pagbibigay ng laya temporarily kay Misuari ay makakatulong, palagay ko, tungkulin ng Presidente na ipaalam sa hukuman na makakatulong itong taong 'to* (If giving Misuari temporary freedom is necessary, perhaps, it's the President's right to tell the court that this man can help us)," Panelo said. **A2**

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Misuari gets free pass after Rody steps in

By Nat Mariano and
Macon Ramos-Araneta

 PRESIDENT Rodrigo Duterte had asked a court to allow Moro National Liberation Front leader Nur Misuari to travel abroad, despite pending graft cases against him.

"Misuari came to my office the other night because he wanted to go out, he was not allowed because he has a case. I talked to the police,
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Misuari...

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the military, and the court to allow him to leave. I guaranteed that he will come back," the President said during a campaign rally of the ruling PDP-Laban in Zamboanga City Sunday night.

On Feb. 25, Duterte held a 15-minute meeting with Misuari. A day afterward, the Sandiganbayan's Third Division granted Misuari's request to travel to attend several assemblies in the United Arab Emirates.

Presidential Spokesman Salvador Panelo said the President was not interfering in an independent branch of government, but merely using "his persuasive powers" to fulfill his mandate to protect and serve the people.

Panelo said the President merely sought to inform the court that Misuari plays a vital role in achieving peace in Mindanao.

"If the problem of Mindanao lies in the hands of a person like Misuari who has a large influential group that can create discord, then it's the duty of the President to use his persuasive powers to tell the courts to give him temporary freedom because Misuari will help achieve peace," Panelo said in a Palace press briefing.

He said this could not be seen as interference because the President did not order the court to grant the request.

"I don't think the courts will allow itself to be coerced or intimidated by any person," he added.

"What's important is that it's for the interest of the country. You don't meddle with the decisions of the judiciary. You just let them do their job, you provide them with information or inputs then let them evaluate. And I think given that consideration, they allowed Misuari to go out. But he will come back, without a doubt."

Misuari was allowed to travel to attend the 46th session of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation's (OIC) Council of Foreign Ministers in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates on March 1 and 2.

He will then stay in the UAE until March 11 and attend the 14th session of the Parliamentary Union of OIC Member States in Rabat, Morocco on March 13 and 14.

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Duterte: I guaranteed Misuari's return to PH

BY JOCELYN MONTEMAYOR

PRESIDENT Duterte on Sunday night said he has "guaranteed" the court that Moro National Liberation Front founding chairman Nur Misuari will return to the country if he is allowed to travel abroad to attend events of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation.

The President, during events in Basilan province and in Zamboanga City, said he made "arrangements" to have the court grant Misuari permission to travel.

Duterte and Misuari met on Monday last week in Malacañang. Misuari, with the permission of the Sandiganbayan, left the following day for Abu Dhabi to attend the 48th session of the Council of Foreign Ministers in Abu Dhabi, set March 1 and 2, and the 14th session of the member-states of the Parliamentary Union of the Office of Islamic Conference in Morocco on March 13 and 14.

Misuari has to secure permission from the court for travels abroad as he is facing a rebellion case for the 2013 attack in Zamboanga City by his followers. He also has a pending case before the Sandiganbayan for graft and malversation in connection

with an alleged "ghost textbooks" purchase worth P77.26 million when he was governor of the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao.

"Misuari came to me sa opisina ko the other night because he wanted to go out, he was not allowed, tapos may kaso siya. Kinausap ko ang police pati military pati ang korte na palabasin muna siya. Ako ang nag-guarantee that he will come back (Misuari came to my office the other night because he wanted to go out, he was not allowed, he has a case. I talked to the police, the military and the court to allow him to leave for now. I guaranteed that he will come back)," he said in Zamboanga City.

Duterte said he believes Misuari would return to the country because he is a Tausug who would not allow himself to be buried in a foreign land.

In Basilan, Duterte said Misuari would not abandon the country and would return to help him build the nation.

He said Misuari also said he would talk again with him on his return.

The President last week said there were "rumblings" in the MNLF following the ratification of the Bangsamoro Organic Law.

Chief Presidential Legal Counsel Salvador Panelo, in a briefing yesterday, said the President did not interfere with the work of the court. He also said the President may have exercised "persuasion" by sharing his opinion about Misuari and about their plans to talk again about rebuilding the country, especially Mindanao.

Panelo said Duterte, as the president of the country, is mandated to serve the people and if problem in Mindanao is dependent on one person like Misuari, it would be the President's task to help Misuari gain temporary freedom.

He added Misuari and the MNLF remain influential in Mindanao.

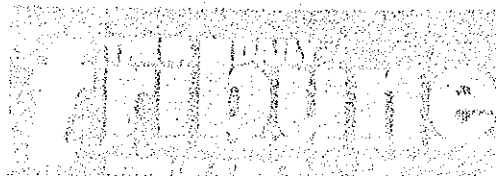
Senate minority leader Franklin Drilon said he sees nothing irregular about Duterte asking the court to allow Misuari to go out of the country.

Drilon said seeking court permission to travel abroad is part of the legal process for a person facing criminal charges.

"What is important is for the court to get a guarantee that Misuari will come back to face the charges," he said. B2

Sen. Gregorio Honasan said Duterte just exercised a presidential prerogative. — *With Raymond Africa*

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Allowing Misuari travel legal

By Mario J. Mallari
and Perseus Echemnada

Senators see nothing wrong with President Duterte seeking court permission to allow his friend, Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) founding Chairman Nur Misuari, to leave the country to attend international conferences.

Senate Minority Floor Leader Franklin Drilon said that seeking clearance on the part of those accused is part of the normal procedures of the court.

The case is before the regular courts and the fiscal is under the DoJ secretary, who in turn is under the President.

"Seeking court permission to leave the country is part of the legal process for one facing criminal charges. What is important is for the court to get a guarantee that Misuari will come back to face the charges," Drilon said.

Pressed if there was nothing irregular about Mr. Duterte's move, Drilon replied. 3

"No. The case is before the regular courts and the fiscal is under the DoJ (Department of Justice) secretary, who in turn is under the President."

Maranao leaders seek TFBM abolition

BY MASIDING NOOR YAHYA

MARAWI CITY: Maranao leaders are calling for the abolition of Task Force Bangon Marawi (TFBM) for its alleged failure to rebuild the city almost two years after it was devastated during the Marawi Siege.

Accusing the TFBM leadership of "incompetence," the Maranao leaders said they were pinning their hope on the newly established Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM) to rehabilitate Marawi City.

Sultan Hamidullah Atar of the Royal House of Marawi told *The Manila Times* that he agreed to the call for

the abolition of TFBM. "The TFBM-released video and statement that the economy of Marawi is booming and the people have already recovered is a big lie," he said.

In a media briefing, Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) Chairman Murad Ebrahim who also serves as interim BARMM chief minister for a three-year

period while the foundation is being laid for a new Bangsamoro Autonomous Region, said that the Bangsamoro Transition Authority (BTA) would use a significant portion of the leftover P32 million budget for ARMM this year, to hasten the rehabilitation and reconstruction of Marawi.

The National Housing Authority also attested that it has P2.1 billion for the reconstruction of Marawi's most affected areas (MAAs).

Saying that TFBM head Secretary Eduardo del Rosario should resign, Atar lamented, "All of us know that until now, the rehabilitation has not begun and 27,000 families from

Ground Zero are suffering so much,"

Former Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) vice governor Haroun Alrashid Lucman, Jr. earlier said it was lamentable that the TFBM is taking care of our lives but no Maranao is a member. "Most, if not all of its members have not even set foot in the devastated city," he added.

The Bangsamoro Consensus Group, composed of displaced Marawi professionals, said that instead of its oft-aired demand for the resignation of the Housing and Urban Development Coordinating Council (HUDCC) Secretary as TFBM head, the President Rodrigo Duterte should abolish the task

force and let the BTA take charge of rebuilding the city.

A Department of Public Works and Highways official, who is a member of the TFBM technical working group, earlier attributed the delay in reconstruction efforts to del Rosario's alleged "lack of technical know how."

Even House Speaker Gloria Macapagal Arroyo had lamented the delayed rehabilitation and created a special working committee to look into it and make recommendations.

Some sectors have also used social media to call for the abolition of TFBM.

"TFBM has a new identity! It

is a Task Force Bangon Marawi!!! All they say is falsehood aimed at deceiving Maranaos on the rehabilitation of Marawi and they spend billions of the country's taxpayers' money with no substantial proof to show how the money was spent," said Abdul Majeed Pangandaman in his FB account.

While others said, they no longer trusted TFBM, Ali Valak accused the TFBM of "destroying Lanao in connivance with some unscrupulous leaders."

The International Committee of the Red Cross said some 46,000 Marawi evacuees were still languishing in different shelter camps in Northern Mindanao. *AS*

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The Manila Times

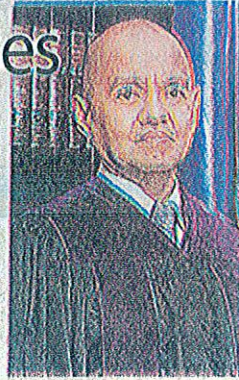
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Leonen unlikely to recuse self from BOL cases

SUPREME Court Associate Justice Mario Victor Leonen is unlikely to recuse himself from cases pending before the high court assailing the legality of the Bangsamoro Organic Law (BOL), according to a source from the tribunal.

The source said Leonen, the former government chief negotiator of the peace process with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front, is bent on handling the BOL cases. Leonen served as the chairman of the Government Negotiating Panel



Associate Justice
Mario Victor Leonen

► RecuseA2

■ RECUSE FROM A1

Leonen unlikely to recuse self from BOL cases

that sealed the Framework Agreement for the Bangsamoro (FAB).

The source added that Leonen would not inhibit himself since the FAB which he handled is different from the BOL.

The Supreme Court *en banc* is set to deliberate on the case on Tuesday. Leonen, as *ponente* of the case, will study

the petitions and submit his recommendations.

The Philippine Constitution Association (Philconsa) headed by Manuel Lazaro has asked Leonen to inhibit himself.

"It is an irrefragable fact that prior to his appointment to the Supreme Court as Associate Justice in November 2012, Justice Leonen was named in

July 2010 as the Philippine government's chief negotiator with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front which culminated to the Framework Agreement on the Bangsamoro — which was done and initiated on Oct. 12, 2012 in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia and signed in Manila on October 15, 2012," the group said in its motion for

inhibition.

The high court consolidated the petitions filed by Philconsa and the Province of Sulu, represented by its governor, Abdusakur Tan 2nd.

Philconsa asked the tribunal to issue a temporary restraining order to stop the implementation of the BOL.

JOMAR CANLAS

POSTSCRIPT

FEDERICO D. PASCUAL Jr.

Ask soldiers if they prefer US weapons

AS PRESIDENT Duterte and his foreign secretary do not seem to agree where to source military equipment for the armed forces, they might as well ask the end-user himself, the Filipino soldier, which firearms, aircraft, naval vessels, etc., he prefers.



After all, the soldier does the fighting, and dying, with the weapons issued to him to keep the peace and to defend the country from rebels, invaders and whatever evil elements are out there. Our troops should at least be asked.

The topic of weapons-sourcing cropped up Friday when Foreign Secretary Teddy Locsin Jr. opined after a talk with US State Secretary Mike Pompeo that enhancing the Philippines' self-defense capability is the "wisest" move that the US can take amid concerns over China's overarching moves in the region.

Locsin said on *Twitter*: "The wisest, most expeditious alternate to one or the other view is for the US to help re-arm our military (it prefers US weaponry as I kept telling the US) and enhance our self-defense capability; leaving the initial decision to fight to us in our best light."

Short on details, the secretary's opinion came out at variance with his President's position of not trusting the US, and his preferring to secure armaments from China, Russia and other suppliers on the left.

In this neck of the woods, sometimes the choice of supplier depends on who gives the biggest commission. But with Duterte claiming to have stopped corruption, we are supposedly back to opting for the best deal.

The basic idea of self-reliance, with the US helping re-arm and upgrade the capability of the armed forces, has been established in the 1951 Phl-US Mutual Defense Treaty whose Article II says:

"In order more effectively to achieve the objective of this Treaty, the Parties separately and jointly by self-help and mutual aid will maintain and develop their individual and collective capacity to resist armed attack."

American military gear is not given free, as in a Red Cross donation, but paid for on favorable terms. We understand that business aspect, because the big-ticket items could be expensive even if only refurbished.

Then, the materiel often comes with strings attached, such as the recipient's having to meet US standards on human rights. American taxpayers are very particular where public funds go. Whether the supplier is American, Chinese or Russian, there are always conditions.

Duterte's regime is under the microscope of civil libertarians abroad for alleged extrajudicial killings. The mayor is quite sensitive to accusations of EJKs under his watch, which may explain his disdain for "foreign meddling."

Unless he has in mind phasing-in entirely new weaponry (can he do it in three years?), Duterte's experimenting with Chinese and Russian armaments may be a bit late since most firearms of the troops are US-supplied, and Filipinos have gotten used to them.

Imagine having some 170,000 troops lugging assorted weapons, being transported on vehicles, vessels and aircraft of various makes. The stocking of non-interchangeable parts alone will be a nightmare, even for Filipinos famous for their adaptability.

The military is largely US-supplied, not only with hand-me-down weapon systems (e.g. the Hamilton class US Coast Guard cutters redesignated as "frigates" by our navy) but also new small weapons that were bought (e.g. the 50,000 or so M4s acquired from Remington of US). Donated Russian and Chinese weapons are on hand, but are not popular with the troops.

• Clear Intentions make for enduring ties

ALTHOUGH Pompeo had to rush back to Washington with only an "all is well" common statement for public consumption, we hope he also left a quiet commitment to open discussions soon on other substantive points, including about what could trigger an MDT reaction.

An amendment to the MDT, possibly in the form of an executive agreement, could be signed when President Duterte makes a state visit to Washington after the virtual referendum on his presidency in the May midterm elections.

The sparse (just 635 words, or only 2/3 of this *Postscript* column!) MDT speaks only of an external "armed attack" to prompt the two allies' scrambling to quickly repel the aggression by an outside force.

Sources familiar with the MDT talks (when we were covering what was then sometimes referred to as "Padre Faura") have told us that Communist China was the potential aggressor that the treaty negotiators had in mind.

Why should the Philippines and its ally wait for a naked armed attack before moving to stop the creeping aggression by an expansionist neighbor?

China's buildup and militarization of reefs and shoals within the Philippines Exclusive Economic Zone is an unfriendly act against a small neighbor. Such activities could disturb free navigation in the South China Sea, an area covered by the MDT.

Locsin said the lack of specificity in the treaty as to the trigger for reaction is an effective deterrent. He had a half-point there since an enemy that is kept guessing could be stymied enough not to proceed with his dire plans.

At the same time, however, restricting the trigger to an "armed attack" leaves a loophole that can embolden an enemy to engage in other stratagems – short of an outright shooting war – to wear out and eventually overwhelm its target.

That is exactly what is happening in the West Philippine Sea. Without firing a shot, China is able to seize, occupy, militarize and control strategic maritime areas of the Philippines – in full view of President Duterte, who has confessed being afraid of the consequences of objecting to China's activities.

As he is still waiting for the massive investments, loans and aid promised by Beijing, Duterte is hesitant, or is unwilling, to invoke the MDT and put an end to China's creeping aggression.

A big question mark is the US intention vis-à-vis China. That is another point that needs clarification in a review of the 67-year-old MDT. Clarity of mutual intentions and specificity of courses of action make for more enduring relations between friends and allies.

* * *

EDITORIAL

Pompeo's promise

As if to compensate for the failed denuclearization summit between US President Donald Trump and North Korean leader Kim Jong-un in Vietnam, US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo scored a coup of sorts during a stopover visit in Manila.

From Hanoi, Pompeo flew to Manila where he had a brief meeting with President Duterte on the night of Feb. 28, and with Foreign Secretary Teddy Locsin the following day. In a joint press conference with Locsin, the state secretary gave what amounted to the clearest assurance yet from the United States that it will fulfill its obligations under the Mutual Defense Treaty (MDT) with the Philippines amid Chinese aggression in the South China Sea.

"China's island-building and military activities in the South China Sea threaten your sovereignty, your security and therefore economic livelihood, as well as that of the United States," said Pompeo. "As the South China Sea is part of the Pacific, any armed attack on Philippine forces, aircraft or public vessels in the South China Sea will trigger mutual defense obligations under Article 4 of the Mutual Defense Treaty."

Officials were quick to hail such words as the most definitive statement yet on the extent to which the United States will come to the defense of its former colony and strategic ally in the Pacific in the face of bullying by China. Malacañang, for one, was exultant: This was "the first time that the US made a (clear) policy statement that any attack on the Philippines will trigger a US response," crowed presidential spokesperson Salvador Panelo.

The scene was a far cry from just over two years ago, when President Duterte made a dramatic announcement in Beijing, during bilateral talks with his Chinese counterpart, Xi Jinping, that "America has lost now," and that he was "separating" the Philippines from its longtime ally. ("I, in this venue, your honors... I announce my separation from the United States both in military—not in social—both in military but economic... I am separated from them, so I will be dependent on you [China] for all time.")

But, irony not being a strong suit in Malacañang, Duterte officials conveniently forgot all about that earlier declaration of "separation" as they reveled in Pompeo's soothing rhetoric. Locsin was all ebullience when he said: "We are very assured, we are very confident that the United States has, in the words of Secretary Pompeo and the words of President Trump to our President, 'We have your back.'" Panelo, just as giddy, added: "Oh, by just saying that 'we have your back,' that means 'we are behind you, we will support you.'"

But, in a break with their civilian colleagues, Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana and other security officials are not as convinced about the US resolve. Lorenzana—who had earlier called for a review of the treaty to evaluate if it was still relevant in the face of China's muscle-flexing in the region—insists that Washington should do more by clarifying "ambiguities" in the MDT, such as what it will do in cases of nonviolent aggression.

"We weren't attacked. Our islands were just grabbed. Where will that fall under [the treaty]?" asked Lorenzana. A good question—but one that Locsin would rather not have answers for at this time. The treaty's "vagueness" serves as a "deterrent," he said, and America's pledge of protection should be good enough for now, since "They will respond depending on the circumstances."

Is that position really wise? Mr. Duterte himself had once questioned the US commitment, pointing out that it did not stop China from building military installations and runways on contested reefs in the South China Sea. The US promise also comes at a time when the erratic Trump administration is being increasingly seen as an unreliable partner in international commitments, having successively pulled out of the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty with Russia, the Paris climate agreement, the United Nations Human Rights Council and the International Court of Justice, and the nuclear deal with Iran. It has even made noises about leaving Nato (North Atlantic Treaty Organization), the bedrock of the Western democratic alliance for over half a century now.

Just a few days after Pompeo's visit, Chinese fishing vessels once again reportedly drove away Filipino fishermen from sandbars near the Philippine-occupied Pag-asa island. How do such acts of Chinese aggression figure into the US-Philippine alliance? Lorenzana is right: As far as those waters and the Philippines' interests in them (and not only America's) are concerned, something much more than chummy rhetoric is needed.

FROM THE STANDS

DOMINI M. TORREVILLAS

Mayor Cynthia Guiani supports BOL

Cotabato City Mayor Frances Cynthia Guiani recognizes that the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM) won in the recent plebiscite, and she is now determined to assist and cooperate with the Bangsamoro Transition Commission toward the successful implementation of the Bangsamoro Organic Law (BOL) if she is reelected as mayor of Cotabato City. This is in accordance with her interest and desire to help in promoting speedy peace and development of the Moro region.

Cynthia, 54, is a lawyer, with a law degree from the University of Mindanao in Davao City. With a heavy workload, she finds time to attend to her three children's needs. A plus point is her husband, Umbra Sayad's supporting her advocacies; he works with the city's National Fire Academy.

"My father was a politician too before he became a judge," she said. "He was the leading councilor and he was loved by the people because he fought for their rights and was passionate about helping others."

It was her late brother, Japal Guiani, who first followed in their father's footsteps. He served three terms as mayor of Cotabato City. On seeking reelection for the third time, he asked his younger sister to be his running mate and seek the office of the vice mayor.

The brother-sister team was elected. Japal, however, died of a lingering illness two years ago. Cynthia was sworn in as Cotabato City mayor.

She continued her brother's programs as she also pushed her own. Her primary objective, she told me, was "to turn the city into one of the best places to live in." This means the city had to be safe and prosperous for her constituents. She said the crime rate needed to be lowered to attract more investors. In her two years in office, she managed to help reduce drastically the drug problem and crime rate. She created the "ronda" (Revitalized Operations and Neutralization of Drug Addiction) beat and insisted on the strict implementation of curfew for minors. As a result, moderate inward investments improved.

She also worked to increase the literacy rate of the city. She notes, "Aside from being child-friendly, Cotabato City has the highest literacy rate in Region 12. There are no out-of-school youths in our

city," she declares.

Prestigious business organizations judged Cotabato as one of the top three business-friendly cities in the country, and the Philippine National Police considers the city as the country's safest city. From a third class city, Cotabato is now basking in a first class status, and is considered as one of Mindanao's most important cities.

She told me her city has been judged No. 1 in the Competitiveness Index in Region 12, and No. 4 in Mindanao, the first being Davao, Cagayan de Oro, and Tagum City, and No. 17 out of a total of 1,700 cities.

With these accomplishments, it may seem there isn't anything else left to be done for the city. On the contrary, Mayor Guiani says there is still much to do. Hence she is running for reelection.

She is running under her own party, One Kutawato, a New People's Coalition party. She is not officially allied with President Duterte, but she is in favor of helping the administration succeed.

* * *

Capitol Christian Leadership celebrated its 51st anniversary Feb. 19 at Club Filipino with the theme, "Committed Righteous Leadership Towards a Godly Philippines."

CCL was founded by the evangelist Greg Tingson and well-known journalist Leon O. Ty (both deceased) to promote Christian faith, freedom and leadership.

Speakers at the anniversary celebration were Ruben T. Reyes who spoke on leadership, and Bangko Sentral Deputy Gov. Diwa Gunigundo, who dwelt on the challenges for the church to link generations. The CCL president, Dr. Leah Paquiz, presented her view on godly leadership in service.

Ruben Reyes is a former presiding justice of the Court of Appeals, and a retired Associate Justice of the Supreme Court. He is now vice president of the Judicial Council of the United Methodist Church worldwide, president of the Philippine National Prayer Breakfast Foundation, church lay leader of Central Church, Manila, and adviser of CCL and Kapihan sa Club Filipino. Since his retirement from the high court in 2007, he has fully devoted his life – "as payback time to serving God and fellowmen."

A portion of Justice Reyes' message calls on Christians to tell leaders of their wrongdoing, but doing it judiciously. He said,

"In democratic times like ours, one need not be timid, much less tolerant, to point out wrongdoing. On one hand, the quad-media – no longer tri-media – because of the social network – is seen by some observers as over critical of the administration. On the other hand, a few wonder if the President is given the correct information, let alone right advice, on critical developments and issues.

"Thus, when we deal with the President, we need to be tactful, honest but prudent. The opposite is futile – tactless. In judges' parlance, we have to be judicious or to exercise sound judgment.

"We ought not to be hesitant or afraid to tell the truth. But, sometimes as an exception, it is more effective if we do the critiquing tactfully, with a keen sense of what and how to say it that the persons concerned will see that we are sincere, we mean well, and have the interest of the nation at heart."

* * *

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Pompeo said nothing new

WHILE many analysts and observers view US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo's remarks on the South China Sea as a landmark of sorts, to my mind, America's top diplomat really didn't say anything that hadn't already been said before.

In a news conference after his meeting with Foreign Affairs Secretary Teodoro Locsin, Jr. last Friday, Pompeo said: "Any armed attack on any Philippine forces, aircraft or public vessels in the South China Sea will trigger mutual defense obligations under Article 4 of our mutual defense treaty."

Under Article 4 of the Mutual Defense Treaty (MDT), the United States commits to defend the Philippines (and vice-versa) in case of "an armed attack in the Pacific area..."

Elaborating on what "armed attack in the Pacific area" means, Article 5 of the treaty states that it includes "an armed attack on the metropolitan territory...or on the island territories under its jurisdiction in the Pacific Ocean, its armed forces, public vessels or aircraft in the Pacific."

Pompeo's remarks are the latest attempt to assuage the concerns of Philippine officials on the vague language of the 1951 MDT in light of the country's territorial disputes in the South China Sea. I say latest because as far back as 1999, the United States, in a diplomatic note by US Ambassador to the Philippines Thomas C. Hubbard to then Foreign Affairs Secretary Domingo Siazon Jr., reiterated the previous statement of (Clinton administration) Secretary of Defense William Cohen that the US considers the South China Sea to be part of the Pacific area, hence, covered by the mutual defense treaty.

The statement of Pompeo is a mere reassurance (for the nth time) by the US that it will come to the defense of the Philippines in case of an armed attack in the South China Sea. At best, Pompeo's remarks are the first open and public affirmation of what the US previously clarified in its 1999 diplomatic note to Philippines — that the coverage of the mutual defense treaty extends to the South China Sea. But as America's top diplomat was careful to point out, only in case of an armed attack on "Philippine forces, aircraft or public vessels," which is essentially same verbiage in the MDT.

And therein lies the controversy.

While the text of the MDT is subject to different interpretations, it is not clear whether the US defense commitment applies to Philippine-controlled territories in the South China Sea, considering that the Philippines did not control these territories at the time of the signing of the defense pact in 1951.

Not a few of our officials and politicians take the position that the US is obligated under the treaty to defend the Philippines in a conflict over the South China Sea dispute. The US, however, has not given any categorical declaration as to the applicability of the defense pact to the territorial row, leaving many Filipinos skeptical or anxious about America's commitment to defend the country in the event of hostilities with China over the disputed islands.

It is precisely this ambiguous security commitment that Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana wants clarified by a review of the treaty. Personally, I doubt that the US will accede to any changes in the MDT that will deviate from its neutral stance over sovereignty issues in the South China Sea.

It should be noted that the language of Article 5 of the mu-

tual defense treaty is not unique to the Philippines. The defense pacts of the US with Australia, New Zealand and the United States (the ANZUS treaty), which were negotiated around the same time as the US-Philippines alliance, contain identical language on geographic limits. Changing the geographic scope of the defense pact would not only mean inserting some waffling language to allow for some elbow room that could weaken America's obligations under the treaty. It would also mean opening up its other defense pacts to renegotiation, a scenario the US is unlikely to allow.

While America appears reluctant to invoke the treaty over the South China Sea disputes, it also does not publicly deny the applicability of the defense pact to a conflict in the area. In fact, the text of Article 5 provides enough leeway for the alliance to be activated in certain situations in case of a Sino-Philippine military conflict.

For decades, the US government has purposely avoided clarifying its security commitment with respect to the China Sea disputes, believing — as Kissinger once said — that "some ambiguity in other people's mind" is useful in that it does not embolden the Philippines and other claimants into escalating the dispute, or encourage China into thinking it was given a free hand in the area.

Given America's inclination to create "strategic ambiguity" over the applicability of the alliance to the South China Sea dispute, Secretary Locsin was right to forego the review of the defense deal. "In vagueness lies uncertainty — a deterrent. Specificity invites evasion and actions outside the MDT framework," Locsin explained.

Washington's repeated assurances that it would assist Manila in case of an armed aggression in the South China Sea is all that the country can expect and hope for. Whether we like it or not, America will not risk a confrontation with Beijing over Philippine fishing rights or to defend our country's claim to uninhabited rocks of little strategic importance to the US.

The only real concern of the US in the South China Sea is freedom of navigation. As Pompeo emphasized during his visit to Manila, the US wants to make sure that the South China Sea remains open to all kinds of navigation and that "China does not pose a threat" to closing down "these incredibly vital economic sea lanes."

Nevertheless, the assurance by the US that Philippine "armed forces, public vessels or aircraft" in the South China Sea are protected by the MDT serves as a valuable deterrent to China's annexation of Philippine-occupied islets and reefs. Although some quarters question the relevance of the treaty in view of unfolding geopolitical realities, I'm sure China also realizes it would be foolhardy to test America's security guarantee in the South China Sea.

Lorenzana should therefore stop making threats about scrapping the defense deal. We need it more than America does. And it's better to have an alliance deal than none at all. *AS*

What Lorenzana should do instead is to work on specific clarifications on the MDT that are necessary to meet present-day security challenges rather than pushing for the improbable overhaul of the defense pact.

The time for clarity is now!

I MUST confess I have no idea at all as to what kind of game plan or strategy President Rodrigo Roa Duterte aka Digong is playing with respect to the 1951 Mutual Defense Treaty (MDT) with the US in particular and to PFI-US relations in general.

But I believe the time for game plans, if indeed there is one, is over. Instead, the time for clarity is now! He cannot, should not, say one thing one day and another the next. We do not have the wherewithal to do that. We will wind up the ultimate loser in that kind of strategy.

I do not care if he himself or his minions tell me I have no business telling him what to do. But as a citizen who loves this country no less than he or anybody else does, I feel I have the right, nay the duty, to say what I believe he should do as the leader I supported and voted for back in 2016!

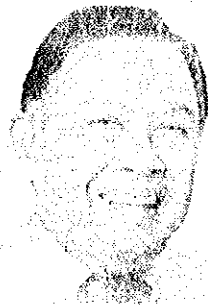
He should not keep making conflicting statements and allowing discordant voices from among his subordinates on the very crucial issue of defense relations with the United States.

On the MDT, Digong said recently: "Ayaw kong matali maski kanino, maski sa Amerikano. Kasi kung may magtali sa iyo, pwede ka na sabihan kung anong gusto nila."

Previously, on the issue of the presence of US troops in the country, he said: "I really hate it. I don't want it. We don't need it. The US should not treat the Philippines like a 'dog with a leash'."

Both statements are consistent with his vow to pursue an independent foreign policy as mandated by the Constitution.

But, alas, after US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo "expressed



CROSSHAIRS

REY O. ARCILLA

Digong cannot, should not, say one thing one day and another the next. We do not have the wherewithal to do that. We will wind up the ultimate loser in that kind of strategy.'

confidence in the strength of Philippines-US alliance," Digong "reaffirmed the strength" of that alliance.

Pompeo, a mere cabinet secretary, was accorded the unprecedented and undeserved honor of being received by no less than our head of state. In Villamor Air Base at that!

We know that breaching protocol is one of Digong's traits. But there are times when his advisers, particularly his foreign secretary, should tell him when such a breach attains greater meaning and significance. A head of state simply does not receive a mere cabinet member of a foreign country! That indicates a servile attitude and awe towards the country represented by Pompeo.

I could only surmise that maybe he was scheduled to fly to Davao that same night and since he would be there when Pompeo arrives, why not meet him?

But that's precisely the point I

am making. He didn't have to do that. Pompeo's counterpart was already there to receive him. If Digong wanted a message delivered to Pompeo, he could have just instructed the latter's counterpart to do it.

Or Pompeo could have easily gone to Malacañang or flown to Davao to make a courtesy call on him the following day! Whether or not that would have been inconvenient for Pompeo is not his problem.

But what I find most unsettling is that Digong seems to have taken Pompeo's words at face value, as does his foreign secretary, Teodoro "Tweeter" Locsin Jr. Such commitments that affect the nation's security and well-being should be reduced in writing!

'TWEETER' LOCSIN

Speaking of "Tweeter" Locsin, I am now convinced that he is not only insufferably arrogant and so

full of himself. He is also an insufferable "Amboy."

Asked if he is in favor of a review of the MDT, Locsin said no. He expressed confidence the US is committed to her obligations under the Treaty. How naïve! Isn't he aware that the US has declared herself "neutral" in the territorial disputes in the South China Sea/West Philippine Sea? Did Pompeo say that that posture has changed?

"We are very assured, we are very confident that the United States, as in the words of Secretary Pompeo and the words of President Trump to our President, 'we have your back,'" Locsin gushed.

"I believe in the old theory deterrence... in vagueness lie (sic) the best deterrence," he added.

That's bulls...! Vagueness means no assurance, period!

That is why I agree with Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana when he said "there is still a need to review" despite Pompeo's statement.

Interestingly, Lorenzana reportedly described Locsin's statement a "revelation" and as "the secretary's own point of view as a diplomat." Diplomat?!

He said he wants a review to make the MDT "attuned" with the current security situation in the region, precisely to iron out the vague provisions in it.

Incidentally, Locsin also made the ludicrous, if not brainless, claim that conflicting views within the administration on the review of the MDT do not show division but a "big brain." Again, that's bulls...!

On a matter of such crucial sig-

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See THE TIME ► Page B5

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THE TIME

nificance to the future and security of the nation, it is doubly important to show to the other party that there is unity of purpose on the part of the administration. Such dissension in the ranks will only give the other party the opportunity to exploit it to its advantage. Obviously, Locsin doesn't know that. As the cliché goes, in union there is strength.

Too, Locsin wants the US to re-arm our military. Doesn't he know that his Boss had already said in categorical terms his position on the matter? Hindi yata nagbabasa ng diariol

"I will not agree to buy (from the US). It doesn't look good. It does not sit well with the Filipinos that they will treat you that way and you just obey... If you buy from China or maybe Russia, you will be included in the embargo, you cannot trade with America," Digong said.

The P64 question is, where is

Digong in these conflicting statements of his two main advisers on the issue?

His spokesman Salvador Pangelos reportedly said Malacañang is pleased over the assurance by Pompeo that the US "has our back," after saying earlier that there is still need to review the MDT.

Was he instructed by Digong to change his earlier statement? If so, then it would appear that Digong is contradicting his own position that he does not want any alliance with anyone, be it the US, Russia or China which, in my view, would be the most beneficial to the country. Or is that still part of whatever his game plan is?

I believe Digong owes it to the Filipino people to now clearly, categorically, and finally state what his real position is on the MDT in particular, and on PHI-US relations in general, while time is still on his side.

I wish to reiterate at this point my oft-repeated view that the best

thing for the country is to abrogate the MDT and its adjuncts, the constitutionally infirm Visiting Forces Agreement (VFA) and the Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement (EDCA), for reasons I have already enumerated in past columns. (Check my Facebook link below.)

REMINDERS

This segment is intended to remind the Duterte administration of some of its yet unfulfilled promises and matters that need attention and/or follow-up action. More importantly, the people are entitled to know what's being done about them.

1. Digong's promise to rid the country of foreign troops. This, of course,

necessitates abrogating the MDT and the lopsided and constitutionally infirm VFA and the EDCA.

2. Reciprocal visa arrangements

with the US and other countries. What is "Tweeter" Locsin doing about this? Our embassy in Washington? No less than President Digong and former Speaker Pantaleon Alvarez advocated this.

3. The return of the Canadian waste. I wonder why "Tweeter" Locsin hasn't tweeted on this issue till now. He tweets on almost anything that strikes his fancy (pati ba naman taho-throwing by a Chinese national which he dismissed as trivial), but nothing on a very important and stinking matter like the Canadian garbage, especially after the South Korean government took back their waste.

Recently, 10 Canadian environmental groups urged Prime Minister Justin "Trashy" Trudeau in a letter to take back 103 containers of garbage illegally dumped on our shores more than five years ago which "is a violation of Canada's obligations under the UN Basel Convention on the Control

of Transboundary Movement of Hazardous Wastes and their Disposal."

Today is the 311th day of the twelfth year of the enforced disappearance of Jonas Burgos, son of the late press icon and founder of this newspaper, Joe Burgos.

After the acquittal of Major Harry Baliaga, Jr., the only person formally charged with Jonas' kidnapping, I guess what happens next is now up to Divine Providence.

In this regard, the government may or may not succeed in asking the UN Working Group on Enforced and Voluntary Disappearances in Bosnia and Herzegovina's capital of Sarajevo to delist from its records some 625 cases of involuntary disappearances in the country. As far as I am concerned, however, mention of Jonas' disappearance will stay in this space as long as I have it or until such time as his abductors are caught and punished.

From an internet friend:

A man flops down on a subway seat next to a priest. The man's tie is stained, his face is plastered with red lipstick, and a half-empty bottle of gin sticks out of his torn coat pocket.

He opens his newspaper and begins reading. After a few minutes, the disheveled guy turns to the priest and asks, "Say, Father, what causes arthritis?"

"It's caused by loose living, cheap women and too much alcohol!"

"Well, I'll be damned!" the drunk mutters, returning to his paper.

The priest thinks about what he has said, nudges the man and apologizes. "I'm very sorry. I shouldn't have been so unpleasant about it. Tell me, how long have you had arthritis?"

"I don't have it, Father. I was just reading here that the Pope does!"

<https://www.facebook.com/reynaldo.arcilla.9847>

Marcos feats the Aquinos ignored

This editorial is not intended to glorify ex-President Ferdinand Marcos. Its purpose is to show the duplicity of ex-President Benigno Aquino III when he spoke at the ceremony marking the 33rd anniversary of the so-called 1986 EDSA revolution, which ended the Marcos administration replacing it with the incompetent and vindictive regime of President Corazon Cojuangco Aquino.

“ Under Marcos, communist troublemakers like Jose Ma. Sison were kept in detention. Mrs. Aquino released Sison when she was president.

The crowd that joined Aquino III at the ceremony was so thin that the non-event ended in just a couple of hours.

Former President Fidel Ramos and ex-Sen. Juan Ponce Enrile, who were main players in that event, were absent. Even President Rodrigo Duterte ignored the activity.

Many students who welcome breaks from regular school days asked their parents why 25 February was even declared a non-working holiday.

The 1986 uprising led to the ouster of President Marcos from power. Well, it has been 33 years since that happened and, quite frankly, nobody gives a damn about that event anymore mainly because its sole objective of removing Marcos from office came and went.

There are also many who believe it is downright absurd to celebrate the replacement of the authoritarian government under Mr. Marcos with a

worse one under Mrs. Aquino.

Anyway, Aquino III told his supporters at the ceremony that the EDSA uprising must be remembered so that the dark years of the Marcos government will never return to haunt the land or words to that effect. That statement has got to be the most tongue-in-cheek remark this ex-President has said in recent times.

On account of the miserable failure of Mrs. Aquino to work for the best interests of the nation, Aquino III's speech only glorifies EDSA as the boulevard of broken dreams.

Actually, the 1986 EDSA uprising is better remembered by discussing the accomplishments of Marcos, which the Aquinos and their allies ignored or belittled.

Under Marcos, the Philippine passport was respected on sight. When the Aquinos were in power, our passport became identified with the thousands of Filipino overseas workers who sought employment abroad because the Aquinos could not provide them work at home.

Public housing under Marcos was not a problem, thanks mainly to the Ministry of Human Settlements. Squatters proliferated in Metropolitan Manila under both Aquinos.

Numerous public hospitals were constructed under Marcos like the Philippine Heart Center, Lung Center, Kidney Center and the Children's Hospital. The Philippine General Hospital got a big annex building. Not a

single public hospital was established during the administration of both Aquinos.

In accordance with the constitutionally mandated separation of Church and State, Marcos kept his distance from church leaders. Mrs. Aquino allowed Manila Archbishop Jaime Cardinal Sin to influence her decisions.

During the Marcos watch, the Department of Health (DoH) took care of the well-being of indigent Filipinos. Under Aquino III, the DoH got entangled in a controversy over deadly vaccinations.

Marcos ordered a land reform program for all arable land without any ifs and buts. Mrs. Aquino's Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program covered every parcel of arable land in the Philippines except her family's Hacienda Luisita.

Metropolitan Manila under Marcos was the tourist destination of choice in all of Southeast Asia.

During the

time of Aquino III, numerous nations issued advisories directing their nationals to avoid going to the Philippines for safety reasons.

Marcos allowed detained political opposition leader Benigno "Ninoy" Aquino Jr. to leave the Philippines to undergo triple-heart bypass surgery in the United States. Aquino III refused to let detained ex-President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo seek medical treatment abroad.

Under Marcos, communist troublemakers like Jose Ma. Sison were kept in detention. Mrs. Aquino released Sison when she was president. Today, Sison continues to create problems for the Philippines from his headquarters in The Netherlands.

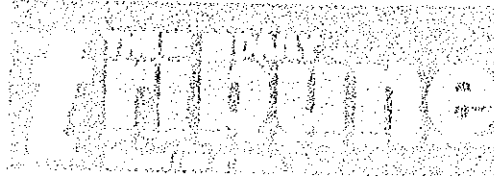
Marcos kept the separatist movement in Mindanao at bay. Aquino III almost succeeded in dismembering Mindanao by creating a sub-state in the island through his ill-conceived Bangsamoro Basic Law.

During his time, Marcos was the recognized boss of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations. As president, Aquino III comported himself like a stooge of Malaysia.

As commander-in-chief of the Armed Forces of the Philippines, Marcos made sure that casualties among military personnel were kept to a minimum. Under Aquino III, military personnel at Mamasapano in Maguindanao were recklessly allowed to be massacred by the enemy.

The list continues but this editorial has limited space so all this will have to do for now.





How to solve a problem like Leonen?

“It also should be stressed that Leonen was named by then President Noyon Aquino as chief government negotiator in the peace talks with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front.

Will he or won't he? If he still won't, he certainly should — recuse himself from the case filed in the Supreme Court by the Philippine Constitution Association (Philconsa) against SC Associate Justice Marvic Leonen, which seeks the High Court's declaration of the Bangsamoro Organic Law (BOL) as null and void.

Truth is Justice Leonen, who was earlier named the *ponente* in this case, should immediately have inhibited himself from this BOL constitutional challenge.

Delicadeza should have prompted Leonen to recuse himself from the case and the reasons for his inhibition are solid. However, *delicadeza* appears to be sorely lacking in Leonen and, apparently, even constitutionality in this case does not seem to matter to this justice, considering the fact that the government operates under a presidential system of government and the Bangsamoro government



FRONTLINE
Ninez Cacho-Olivares

operates under a parliamentary system, which is certainly at odds with the form and system of the way the present central government works.

As pointed out in the Philconsa petition, it said that “It is an irrefragable fact that prior to his appointment to the Supreme Court as

Associate Justice in November 2012, Justice Leonen was named in July 2010 as the Philippine government's chief negotiator with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), which culminated in the Framework Agreement on the Bangsamoro — which was done and initiated on 12 October 2012 in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia and signed in Manila on 15 October 2012.”

Also cited was the rule on disqualification of judges laid down in Rule 137, Section 1 of the Rules of Court.

Given this rule, Philconsa argued that Leonen was prohibited, not only by the Constitution “but by the Rules from taking part in any deliberations or proceedings... on the constitutionality of the RA (Republic Act) 110054 abolishing the ARMM, a creation of the 1987 Constitution and creating the BARMM (Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao), acting in excess of and/or with grave abuse of discretion, therefore, null and void.”

There are more constitutional problems, such as Congress, both the Senate and the House, illegally and unconstitutionally amending the 1987 Constitution through mere legislation. Yet Leonen, then the yellow President's appointed chief negotiator, then a dean in the University of the Philippines College of Law should have known at that time that amending the Charter through mere legislation is patently unconstitutional.

But Leonen was richly rewarded for his work as chief government peace negotiator, as Aquino quickly appointed him to the High Court, replacing then junior justice Ma. Lourdes Sereno, who was elevated to the SC as its chief justice but eventually ousted, replacing then Chief Justice Renato Corona, who was impeached and convicted as plotted by the vindictive yellow President through the



high crime of bribing the members of Congress with billions of public money — crimes for which Aquino and his Budget Chief Butch Abad should be tried and imprisoned.

It also should be stressed that Leonen was named by then President Noynoy Aquino as chief government negotiator in the peace talks with the MILF, which agreement was heartily endorsed by Leonen, despite the many constitutional flaws it had and which, at that time, was not received well by the Mindanaoans and also by non-Muslim Filipinos.

To recall, the peace agreement with the MILF at that time also called for a prime minister (now renamed chief minister to make it sound less odious) under a political framework.

There are more BOL provisions that can certainly be challenged before the SC, but as long as Leonen refuses to inhibit himself, there will be no credibility in his and the tribunal's ruling — especially if the BOL is upheld by the High Court.

Philconsa now seeks the recusal of Leonen from participating in the consideration of the case in consonance with the announcement of the court and his earlier acts from participating in the Philconsa vs Philippine Government charge.

Named respondents by Philconsa are Senate President Vicente "Tito" Sotto III, House Speaker Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo and Executive Secretary Salvador Medialdea of the Office of the President.

Philconsa seeks the High Court's issuance of a temporary restraining order against the implementation of the law, which creates the BARMM in place of the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao.

“As long as Leonen refuses to inhibit himself, there will be no credibility in his and the tribunal's ruling.”

The High Court has sat on this case for too long a time and so does Leonen who should have recused himself from the case immediately instead of waiting for Philconsa's demand for his inhibition.

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This is what *delicadeza* requires, especially as the SC already released a statement in 2015 that Leonen should voluntarily inhibit himself from all pending and future cases related to the Framework and Comprehensive Agreements on the Bangsamoro and the Bangsamoro Basic Law or the BOL.

Will Leonen recuse himself voluntarily or not? If not, then the High Court should, as a body, kick Leonen out from the case.

Arguing with losers

“How can the public trust any politician with a knack for fakery and publicity stunts for whom falsehoods are second nature?”

If a debate were organized between the candidates of Hugpong ng Pagbabago and the losing bets from the floundering Liberal Party (LP) led by a front-runner aptly labeled an incompetent, then the downsides for the latter might just be overwhelming.

From the perspective of the winning slate, with most of its candidates comfortably tucked among the Magic 12, a debate with losers would be unwise and a waste of time as it would effectively be granting unknowns visibility as well as credibility where none exist. More important is the fact that providing fora for politicians who have not only been inconsistent but have the propensity to brazenly lie does not augur well for anyone.

If the LP wants a debate then they should debate among themselves. There are quite a number of conflicting and negating issues among them where some have been either inconsistent or have on numerous occasions outrightly lied to the public. Their contradictions alone show how the diverse rainbow community they offer is in reality a collection of political hypocrites.

In the case of their front-runner who straddles the outer fringes of the Magic 12, the falsehoods, denials, contradictions and inconsistencies have long been revealed. It is to the credit of the LP that he's chosen to distance himself from their campaign routes. Recalling his campaign to contest Rodrigo Duterte, how can the public trust any politician with a knack for fakery and publicity stunts for whom falsehoods are second nature?

Allow us to analyze the positions of the LP candidates if only to

preview issues they might argue among themselves.

One former congressman, an avowed advocate of the Priority Development Assistance Fund, who's taken left-of-center and nationalist positions in the past might do well to engage his fellow candidate, a convicted coup plotter who not only took up arms against duly constituted authority and the Constitution but had likewise trashed Filipino sovereignty by aggressively advocating for the Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement (EDCA).

Visibly tainted with shades of treason, the EDCA surrenders sovereignty and places Filipinos at extreme risk by allowing a foreign military power to build and operate facilities on Philippine military bases, thus painting a large target inside our territory for any third-party adversary who might not even be our enemy.

Another LP candidate, the party's celebrity look-alike and Ninoy Aquino impersonator, who advocates for free collegiate education would do well to read and understand RA 1003, the Universal Access to Quality Tertiary Education Act, to show that his DNA might be a tad more developed than his cousin's.



BYSTANDER
Dean de la Paz

Moreover, since he voted against a hero's burial for a dictator and then supported an attempt to perpetuate an ousted Supreme Court appointee whose colleagues found to have dubious credentials, he would have a lot to answer for in a debate on values and principles.

Jose Manuel Diokno, an educator and human rights advocate, vows to run after criminals, rich or poor. His specific advocacy behooves asking what specific legislation might he author to ensure against corruption scandals such as the Metro Rail Transit-3 maintenance contract scam, the multibillion peso Mahindra contract, the Dengvaxia malversation and the missing and unaccounted “Yolanda” rehabilitation funds — all perpetrated under the LP.

What legislation might he write to ensure liars who deceived us to protect themselves and hide their guilt in the Zamboanga siege and the Mamasapano massacre are held accountable?

Finding answers to these questions pits Diokno against his party mates and their endorser Benigno Aquino III who faces quite a number of corruption cases that would be all for naught should the LP win and control the Senate. Given the LP's insidious ploy to escape accountability for criminality and corruption committed under the Aquino administration, these debate issues require answers.

Otherwise, as platforms cancel out and result in a zero sum, taken as a whole, the LP candidates effectively amount to nothing.

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ONLINE NEWS

05 MARCH 2019

JGSDF chief visits PH Army counterpart

By Priam Nepomuceno March 4, 2019, 2:22 pm

MANILA -- Japan Ground Self Defense Force (JGSDF) chief of staff, Gen. Koji Yamazaki, and his party formally paid a visit to Philippine Army (PA) commander, Lt. Gen. Macairog Alberto at Fort Bonifacio, Taguig City Monday.

The purpose of the visit is to reinforce the two country's strategic partnership and exchange insights on mutual interests.

The Philippines and Japan signed the Memorandum on Defense Cooperation and Exchanges in January 2015.

The agreement is meant to provide a framework for defense cooperation between the two defense ministries and their respective armed forces.

On June 8, 2015, the Philippine Army -- Japan Ground Self-Defense Force Terms of Reference was signed, strengthening the friendly relations and cooperation while promoting open discussion of subjects of mutual interest for both armies.

As a result, the PA-JGSDF Working Group was established as a platform for both armies to plan or develop bilateral engagements that will enhance capabilities, interoperability and promote discussions of topics which are of mutual interest or mutually beneficial.

Yamazaki started his military career in 1983 as an army engineer later holding various key positions in the engineer field of specialization of the JGSDF.

Before assuming the leadership of JGSDF on August 2017, Yamazaki served as the Commanding General of the Northern Army in July 2016, he was also the Vice Chief of Staff of the Joint Staff in 2015.

He led the 9th Division as its Commanding General on August 2014, and he also served as the Commanding General of the 4th Engineer Brigade in 2008.

The two army chiefs expressed both their nation's willingness to continue the exchange of information as both countries recognize each other's expertise particularly in humanitarian assistance and disaster response.

The JGSDF chief also recognized the PA's counter-terrorism efforts during the Marawi siege and the leadership decisions that helped resolve the crisis.

"My visit implies that my country recognizes the Philippines as a significant strategic partner in East Asia," Yamazaki said.

"I'm very honored to be here to strengthen our bilateral relations," he added.

For his part, Alberto said he is optimistic that the visit of the JGSDF chief will boost the bilateral cooperation between Japan and the Philippines.

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"Both armies can learn from each other's experiences in terms of counter-terrorism and humanitarian assistance and disaster response through the conduct of training exchanges. We will continue the cooperation with renewed vigor in order to better tackle the various security challenges that both our countries are facing," he added.

Also on Monday, Yamazaki also made a courtesy call on Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) chief-of-staff Gen. Benjamin Madrigal Jr. in Camp Aguinaldo.

During the visit, the maturity and development of AFP-JSDF military engagements have been emphasized, which includes the active service-to-service exchanges through the concluded Defense Cooperation Agreement.

The visit also reviewed all army-to-army engagements between the Philippine Army and JGSDF.

"The visit of the JGSDF Chief of Staff and the Defense Cooperation Agreement between AFP and JSDF encouraged more high-level or mid-level exchange visits in the future" Col. Noel Detoyato, AFP public affairs office chief, said in a separate statement.

Madrigal also expressed his appreciation on the donated spare parts and other excess military equipment from Japan to the Philippines, which greatly contributed to the advancement of AFP's capability.

During his three-day visit which will last until Wednesday, Yamazaki is also set to meet with Defense Undersecretary for Defense Policy Ricardo David Jr. **(PNA)**

www.pna.gov.ph

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PH Army gets mortars, assault rifles from US

By Priam Nepomuceno March 4, 2019, 1:45 pm

MANILA -- The 44 mortars acquired by the Philippine Army (PA) through the US military assistance program was formally delivered at the PA Headquarters in Fort Bonifacio Sunday.

This was bared by Army spokesperson, Lt. Col. Ramon Zagala in a statement Monday.

This is aside from the 80 assault rifles provided by the US government through the same assistance program.

Assault rifles are the primary direct fire weapons used by infantry units participating in armed battles against the enemy, while mortars are indirect fire weapons mainly used to support the infantry.

"The PA expresses its gratitude to the US government in granting the assault rifles that will greatly improve the fighting skills of our frontline troops," Zagala said. *(With reports from Darwin C. Pesco, OJT/PNA)*

www.pna.gov.ph

ROTC grads can help in clean-up drives

By Priam Nepomuceno March 4, 2019, 11:49 am

MANILA -- Aside from beefing up the number of troops and helping in disaster response missions, Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC) graduates can also help the government in its ongoing efforts to clean the country's vast coastal areas.

This was bared by Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) public affairs office chief Col. Noel Detoyato when asked Sunday on whether or not the ROTC can be tapped in the ongoing efforts to clean Manila Bay and other coastal areas.

"The ROTC, aside from the trainings to become citizen soldiers and prepare them for HADR (humanitarian assistance and disaster relief) duties, can set the example in caring for the environment by participating in clean-up drives both in coastal areas and forest reserves," Detoyato said in a message to the Philippine News Agency.

Earlier, Department of National Defense (DND) spokesperson Arsenio Andolong said the country is planning to have reservist units, which can be activated in a moment's notice if needed.

"It is this state of readiness that we would like to achieve through the revival of mandatory ROTC along with the instilling of discipline, patriotism and love of country in our current youth and the other generations to come," he said in a message to the Philippine News Agency.

Since ROTC graduates are part and parcel of the AFP's Reserve Force, along with the Ready and Standby Reserves, Andolong said the former can be directed to report to their respective reserve units, which may be tasked to do any or all of the following when a contingency arises:

- * Serve as a base for expansion of the regular force in the event of war, invasion or rebellion;
- * Assist the government in relief and rescue operations in the event of calamities or disasters;
- * Assist the government in socio-economic development and environmental concerns;
- * Assist in the operation and maintenance of essential government and private utilities (e.g. power, telecommunications, and water).

"When analysts profile and examine the military strength of adversary nations, they pay special attention to the quality and quantity of their reserve forces. Israel and Singapore, for instance, maintain a relatively small regular force to maintain the armed forces but they have a large and very capable number of reservists who can be activated in a moment's notice," the DND spokesperson stressed.

House Bill 8961 seeks to amend for the purpose Republic Act 7077 or the Citizen Armed Forces of the Philippines Reservist Act.

Under the proposed measure, ROTC training would apply to "all students in Grades 11 and 12 in all senior high schools in public and private educational institutions."

The bill also states that ROTC training shall be a requirement for graduation.

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As provided for, the following students may be exempted: those who are physically or psychologically unfit; those who have undergone or are undergoing similar military training; those who are chosen by their school to serve as the school's varsity players in sports competition; and those who may be exempted from training for valid reasons as approved by the DND, upon recommendation by an educational institution where the concerned student is enrolled.

The proposed measure also strictly prohibits the use of ROTC training for "political" objectives and for teaching and instilling a particular political ideology on students. House Bill 8961 also specifically bans hazing and other forms of physical or mental abuse. **(PNA)**

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Military willing to help victims of NPA atrocities

By Priam Nepomuceno March 4, 2019, 11:34 am

MANILA -- The Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) is more than willing to help individuals or groups victimized by New People's Army (NPA) atrocities.

Col. Noel Detoyato, AFP public affairs office chief, said the military is more than willing to help individuals or groups wanting to charge the communist rebels in court for the atrocities they suffered.

He issued this comment when asked what the AFP can do to make communist rebels liable for the crimes they have committed over the years.

"The AFP can assist those groups who wants to formally charge the CPP-NPA-NDF (Communist Party of the Philippines-New People's Army-National Democratic Front) with formal complaints in our local courts and by using the provisions of IHL (International Humanitarian Law) in the International Courts and the UN tribunal by providing them with records of incidents of violation of human rights and provisions of IHL," Detoyato said in a message to the Philippine News Agency Sunday.

Earlier, the AFP official said the NPA attacks and destruction of civilian targets highlights its aim of pressuring businesses to give in to their extortion plans.

The wanton attacks also highlighted the communist rebels' terroristic inclinations, he added.

"The burning spree of heavy equipment being perpetrated by the CPP-NPA (Communist Party of the Philippines-New People's Army) is meant to continue with their terrorism plans and to pressure the companies to give in to their extortion demands," Detoyato said.

The NPAs also target the equipment of construction companies because they are soft and undefended and destroying them will delay and prevent the government from bringing basic services to rural communities.

The NPA is listed as a terror organization by the United States and the European Union. *(PNA)*