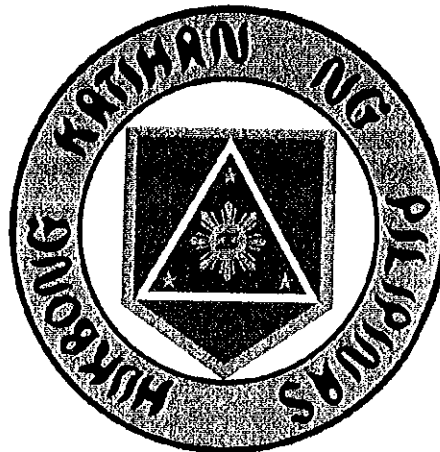


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Friday

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Phil, Malaysia press freedom of navigation

Duterte thanks Malaysia for supporting peace process

By EDITH REGALADO and CHRISTINA MENDEZ

President Duterte and visiting Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad emphasized yesterday the importance of freedom of navigation and overflight in the South China Sea in maintaining peace and progress in the region, which is grappling with territorial disputes as well as China's muscle-flexing.

Emerging from an expanded bilateral meeting at the Aguinaldo State Dining Room, Duterte said he and the 93-year-old Malaysian leader also committed to observe the "rule of law" and international rules in handling disputes.

Mahathir began his three-day state visit to the Philippines on Wednesday.

"We emphasized the importance of maintaining and promoting peace, security, stability, safety and freedom of navigation and flight over the South China Sea, as well as the peaceful settlement of

disputes," Duterte said, reading from a joint statement with Mahathir at the start of the state banquet.

"We affirmed our commitment to collaborate in regional and multilateral platforms, particularly within ASEAN to advance the rule of law in Southeast Asia and beyond," Duterte said. "This is, without resort to the threat or use of force, in accordance with the universally recognized principles of international law."

The Philippines and Malaysia are

Turn to Page 6

Phl, Malaysia From Page 1

among the claimants in the South China Sea, along with China, Taiwan, Indonesia and Vietnam.

Duterte's and Mahathir's discussing regional security came in the wake of US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo's assurance of US help in case the Philippines is attacked by a foreign country.

Earlier in the day, Mahathir urged China to define its so-called "ownership" in the South China Sea so that other claimants can start efforts to develop the area.

The other day, Chinese Ambassador Zhao Jianhua also voiced his country's commitment to peace and stability in the region. He batted for the need to work on a Code of Conduct among China and ASEAN countries in relation to the South China Sea.

After his meeting with Duterte, Mahathir revealed Malaysia is upbeat about the creation of a new Bangsamoro region in Mindanao—a development that he hopes would lead to more robust economic cooperation.

He stressed Malaysia would continue to help the Philippines develop Mindanao, where many areas are still scarred by decades of armed conflict.

"Given the vast economic potential of this area, I believe with the establishment of the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao or BARMM, we have to boost economic ties between both countries. I therefore assured Mr. President of Malaysia's desire to continue to be of help in the development of Mindanao," Mahathir said.

"I congratulated President Duterte on the success of the ratification of the Bangsamoro Organic Law and the appointment of members to the Bangsamoro Transition Authority (BTA). I look forward to the smooth transition of the ARMM (Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao) through the interim government of the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao," he added.

The creation of BARMM is stipulated in the Bangsamoro Organic Law ratified by Mindanao voters in two plebiscites held this year. BOL is the product of the landmark peace agreement signed by the government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) in 2014.

The new region will replace the ARMM and will have greater share in national government revenues. The BTA, which has 80 members, assumed leadership over BARMM last Feb. 26 and will serve as its interim regional government until June 30, 2022.

Mahathir regarded his visit as further bolstering the "high level of friendship" with the Philippines.

"Malaysia expects to be friendly with the Philippines all the time and also we expect that we can extend any help that we may be able to extend to resolve some of the problems faced in the south of the Philippines island—in Mindanao," the prime minister said.

"We know that such insurgencies only weaken nations—only peace brings about wealth and prosperity," Mahathir said, referring to the decades-long

conflict in Mindanao.

"As long as there is resort to conflicts and war, there will be no development. And because there will be no development in a certain area, there will be disparities between different areas. And this, of course, stands in the way of good governance as well as development of the country," Mahathir said.

He said he is glad that the "prolonged struggle has ended with peace and now the people of Mindanao have cause to celebrate as much as the people in the rest of the Philippines.

"The achievement of something that was nearly impossible before. Now there is peace in Mindanao and there is a form of relationship between the different parts of the Philippines which augurs well for the development and growth of the Philippines," Mahathir said.

Increasing trade

Duterte and Mahathir also discussed bilateral trade, which the Malaysian leader described as "increasing" but "largely in favor of Malaysia."

The Philippines is Malaysia's 15th largest trading partner globally and its fourth largest trading partner among members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).

"I believe there is still room for improvement and from my meeting with Mr. President, we would encourage private sectors from both countries to explore opportunities of collaboration and venture in new cooperation and investments," Mahathir said.

"The President and I strongly believe that trade and investment between the two countries could be further strengthened in the coming years," he added.

Mahathir said one of the main priority areas where cooperation can be strengthened is enhancing connectivity.

He said Malaysia and the Philippines have been actively involved in the Brunei Darussalam-Indonesia-Malaysia-Philippines East ASEAN Growth Area and could use the regional cooperation as a platform to assist the Mindanao Development Authority.

Mahathir said he and Duterte also talked about developments in tourism, health, education and private sector investments. He said he was looking forward to the crafting and signing of a memorandum of understanding on cooperation in health.

"I highlighted that Malaysia has been a favorite healthcare destination for the Philippines. The number of patients from the Philippines seeking treat-

ment in Malaysia has been increasing over the years," the Malaysian leader said.

The two leaders also stressed the importance of education, including programs for teachers and students in Madrasahs, especially in Mindanao.

Mahathir said Malaysia is also committed to taking necessary steps to address terrorism and violent extremism through the Trilateral Cooperation Agreement. Under the agreement, the Philippines, Indonesia and Malaysia will conduct unilateral maritime and air patrols to combat common threats.

The President, on the other hand, expressed his gratitude to Mahathir for the valuable opportunity to renew and reaffirm valued relations that must continue to grow in strength in the coming years.

"With the Philippines and Malaysia staying on track as part of the growth engines of Asia and the world, broadening our engagement across many fields will be crucial for the continued benefit of our nations and people," Duterte said.

The President said he looks forward to further discussions with Malaysia on matters of mutual interest and concern.

"It is my hope that we will continue to open up new areas of cooperation, more meaningful partnership," Duterte said.

"I am keen to listen to and reflect upon the Prime Minister's thoughts and development between the Philippines and Malaysia as well as in the region," Duterte said.

"Indeed, there is much to look forward to as we write a new chapter of cooperation between the Philippines and Malaysia," he said.

At the end of his speech, Duterte said the "Philippines' destiny is in ASEAN and in Asia. Asia's destiny is in Asia."

- With Alexis Romero

INQUIRER

MAHATHIR WARNS PH VS INFLUX OF FOREIGNERS

The 93-year-old Malaysian leader says the Philippines may have to decide whether allowing large numbers of foreign workers to come into the country alongside foreign investments was good or bad for Filipinos. **A8**

FROM A1

Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad on Thursday warned the Philippines against letting in foreigners who could "disturb the political equations" after President Duterte's Beijing pivot sparked an influx of Chinese workers.

At least 200,000 Chinese have flocked to Manila since Mr. Duterte's 2016 election, many of them employed by online gaming companies that cater to Chinese players, a Senate inquiry was told late last year.

This has touched off concerns, with some Filipino politicians alleging it drives up property prices, takes away jobs from locals and even affects tax revenues.

A proposal to require foreigners planning to work in the Philippines to first obtain an employment visa before they arrive in the country was made during an interagency meeting last week among representatives of the Department of Labor and Employment, Department of Finance, Bureau of Internal Revenue, Department of Justice, and the Bureau of Immigration, according to Labor Secretary Silvestre Bello III.

Mahathir, who has suspended several of his nation's major projects with China, warned against allowing the surge of foreigners during an official visit to the Philippines.

"Foreign direct investment should not involve bringing huge numbers of foreigners to live in the country because that might



BOOSTING TIES President Duterte on Thursday welcomed Malaysia's Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad to Malacañang where they held talks on strengthening bilateral relations and renewed their commitment to promote regional peace and stability and freedom of navigation and overflight over the disputed South China Sea. —JOAN BONDOC

disturb the political equations in the country," he told ABS-CBN television in an interview.

Rethinking policy

"If huge numbers of any foreigners (come) to live and stay in the country or to even influence the economy of a country, then you have to do some rethinking as to whether it is good or bad, or the limits that you have to impose on them," he said.

The Malaysian leader did not mention this warning in a statement he made after meeting with the President at Malacañang.

The two leaders, however, renewed their countries' com-

mitment to promote peace and safe passage through the disputed South China Sea and to cooperate in regional and multilateral platforms to advance the rule of law in Southeast Asia.

"We emphasized the importance of maintaining and promoting peace, security, stability, safety and freedom of navigation and overflight over the South China Sea, as well as the peaceful settlement of disputes," Mr. Duterte said in a statement.

Sea claims

The Philippines, Malaysia, Vietnam, Brunei, China and Taiwan have overlapping claims in

the South China Sea. China claims nearly all of the disputed waters.

Mr. Duterte said promoting peace and security in one of the world's busiest sea-lanes would be done "without resort to the threat or use of force, in accordance with the universally recognized principles of international law."

In his own remarks, the 93-year-old Malaysian leader said he and Mr. Duterte "exchanged views on a number of regional and international issues of mutual interests, such as the South China Sea and cooperation within Association of Southeast

Asian Nations (Asean)."

During the Asean summit in Singapore in 2018, the Philippines was designated as the country coordinator of the dialogue between China and the regional bloc.

Mr. Duterte has warmly embraced China despite Manila's long-standing maritime row with Beijing.

Open to navigation

Commenting on the sea dispute on Thursday, Mahathir said in the TV interview that there should be no impediment to vessels using the strategic waterway, through which trillions of dollars in global trade pass each year.

"The most important thing is that the South China Sea in particular must be open to navigation," he said.

Mahathir has taken a cautious approach to relations with China, saying he would discuss "unfair" terms of deals signed by his predecessor, Najib Razak.

Mr. Duterte's pursuit of closer ties between China and the Philippines, a traditional ally of the United States, has prompted a surge of Chinese workers.

Last year, legislators said around 200,000 Chinese were working in the country, and vowed to introduce protection for Filipinos.

Work visas for foreigners

Finance Secretary Carlos Dominguez III had also said he would ensure that foreigners working in the nation's offshore gaming industry paid taxes.

Last month, Mr. Duterte said Chinese workers should be allowed to continue staying in the country as Beijing also hosted hundreds of thousands of Filipinos. Most of them are domestic workers in Hong Kong.

Bello told reporters on Wednesday the Philippines might soon adopt a new policy requiring foreign workers to obtain a work visa before entering the country.

He said this was meant to address concerns over the influx of undocumented foreign workers.

"We agreed that before an alien can come in, they should already get a working visa from his place of origin," he said, referring to the consensus during the interagency meeting last Friday.

Memorandum

Bello said a memorandum containing more details of this policy would be issued soon.

"We need to be certain that the work they (foreigners) will do here cannot be done by a Filipino," he said. "This way, we can already control the entry of foreign workers."

Bello said this would be the first time Philippine authorities would make a work visa a requirement for the entry of foreigners planning to work here.

Right now, he said, "anybody can come here as a tourist and then apply for a special working permit."

"We will no longer allow that," he said. —REPORTS FROM AFP, JULIE M. AURELIO AND TINA G. SANTOS INQ

INQUIRER

China: We won't attack; worry about other side

By Christine O. Avendaño
@10avendanoINQ

Chinese Ambassador Zhao Jianhua on Wednesday said that China will not launch any attack in the disputed South China Sea and that the region should worry about "the other side" possibly doing so.

Zhao did not name "the other side" but he was apparently referring to the United States

which had been calling out China for its continued aggression in the disputed seas.

'Use your imagination'

"Use your imagination," Zhao told reporters, when pressed who he was referring to as "the other side." Zhao was in Malacañang for ceremonies for the first anniversary of the Presidential Anti-Corruption Commission presided over by President Duterte.

The Chinese ambassador made the remarks when asked if Beijing should be concerned about US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo's statement in Manila last week that the United States will come to the aid of the Philippines in the event of an armed attack on its vessels or aircraft in the South China Sea.

Pompeo's statement was viewed as a way of warning to China, which had been occupy-

ing and building structures in the disputed sea.

Not China policy

"We are concerned more—it's about the peace and stability in the South China Sea. Everybody, every country will suffer if peace and stability become something to the opposite, that it's chaos or conflict," Zhao said.

He said it was "in the common interest of all countries, including

China, the United States and Asean countries, that we keep the peace and stability there and we keep the freedom of navigation in the whole South China Sea open."

Asked whether there should be worry about attacks in the South China Sea, Zhao said: "Well, we are worried about possible attacks from the other side. We don't worry about China attacking anybody because it is not our policy." INQ A2

China downplays US commitment to defend Phl

By CHRISTINA MENDEZ

Beijing downplayed Wednesday night the renewed commitment of the US government to come to the aid of the Philippines if the latter is attacked in the South China Sea.

Chinese Ambassador Zhao Jianhua said the region should be more concerned about other countries that are destabilizing peace and stability in the region than about China initiating any move.

"Maybe, you would expect the Chinese side to be very concerned about these remarks. We are concerned more (if) it's about the peace

and stability in the South China Sea. Everybody, every country, will suffer if peace and stability becomes something to the opposite, that it's chaos or conflict," the Chinese ambassador said in a chance interview at Malacañang last night.

"So I think it is in the common interest of all countries, including China, including the United States and ASEAN countries, that we keep the peace and stability there and we keep the freedom of navigation in the whole South China Sea open," he added.

Zhao was asked for reaction on the assurance US Secretary of State Mike Pom-

peo gave last week to President Duterte that the US would defend the Philippines against any imminent attack in the South China Sea as this is covered by the Mutual Defense Treaty between the Philippines and the US.

"Well, we are worried about possible attacks from the other side. We don't worry about China attacking anybody because it is not our policy," he said.

When pressed if he is referring to the US, Zhao said: "The other side, use your imagination."

In the same interview, Zhao said the embassy is still going to verify reports that

Chinese vessels are driving away Filipino fishermen at Pag-asa Island.

"I took note of the media report but whether it is authentic or not, it is something that is subject to clarification. I read in the newspaper also that your Secretary of National Defense has already denied, there is no such thing that happened in that area," he added.

The embassy is working with the Department of Foreign Affairs regarding the reports.

Zhao gave assurance that "we are checking and we are in close coordination with DFA and we will be checking whether it is true or not, but rest as-

sured China is committed to peacefully settle the disputes we have and we are working very well in managing our differences."

He also said that China is committed to work on the Code of Conduct between China and ASEAN countries to ensure stability in the South China Sea and the rest of the region.

"In the meantime, we are working on the COC, Code of Conduct, and the Filipino side is the country coordinator for China-ASEAN relationship so we are hoping that we can make further progress in our joint efforts to maintain peace and stability in the South China Sea," he added.

Wrong time to review MDT

Meanwhile, former foreign secretary Albert del Rosario said the Mutual Defense Treaty (MDT) may be reviewed and improved but it is the wrong time to undertake an official review as China is seen to exert both external force and internal influence to achieve results for its sole benefit.

He said there is no need to review the MDT "given this official assurance that the US will defend the Philippines against any attack in the South China Sea," referring to Pompeo's statement that US obligations under the MDT are "real."

- With Pia Lee-Brago

Mahathir told PH claim to Sabah exists

By Julie M. Aurelio
@JMAurelioINQ

Malacañang has contested the statement of visiting Malaysia Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad that the Philippines has "no claim" to Sabah.

Presidential spokesperson Salvador Panelo maintained that Manila has a claim on resource-rich Sabah, which was annexed to Malaysia in the 1960s.

"The position of the President is we have a claim," Panelo said at a press briefing.

"It's true that we have a claim. That has been a bone of contention ever since the time of President Marcos," he said.

Not on agenda

The Palace issued the statement hours before Mahathir was to hold talks with President Duterte in Malacañang on Thursday afternoon.

Panelo said Sabah was not on the agenda of the meeting between the two leaders.

Earlier, Mahathir said Malaysia considered the Philippines to have no claim on Sabah.

Mr. Duterte had said he would pursue the country's claim to Sabah, which is rich in minerals and gas deposits.

Sabah was annexed to Malaysia when it declared independence from the United Kingdom in 1963.

Diplomatic relations between Manila and Kuala Lumpur continued even after the Philippines first asserted its claim to Sabah in the 1960s under then President Diosdado Macapagal.

Standoff

In 2013, followers of Sulu Sultan Jamalul Kiram III went to Sabah from Tawi-Tawi and occupied a village in Lahad Datu town to assert the clan's ancestral claim on Sabah.

This led to a standoff with Malaysian security forces, ending in the deaths of 56 militants and 10 Malaysian security forces.

The sultanate's heirs receive a nominal yearly compensation package from Malaysia under a long-standing deal for possession of Sabah.

INQ

11

Duterte, Mahathir renew security, economic cooperation

By **ARGYLL B. GEDUCOS**
and **GENALYN D. KABILING**

President Duterte and Malaysia Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad

renewed both country's commitment to work together to strengthen peace and stability in the South East Asian region and discussed extensive economic cooperation.

In a joint press conference following their bilateral meeting, Duterte called Malaysia the Philippines' partner for progress and brother for peace.

President Duterte said he and Ma-

hathir resolved to ramp up cooperation to address security issues, particularly on terrorism, piracy, and transnational crimes, including the fight against the illegal drug trade.

"I was happy to share with the Prime Minister the great strides we have achieved toward securing just and lasting peace in Mindanao," he said. **►6**

Duterte, Mahathir...

Mahathir lauded President Duterte for his efforts to attain peace in Mindanao, saying the Philippines may have many islands but remains "one nation."

"We are very gratified to be congratulating you on the peace that has been achieved in Southern Philippines," the visiting Malaysian leader said at the start of the expanded bilateral meeting at the Palace.

"This is a problem that has lasted, I think, from the Spanish period. But it has taken centuries even for proper conclusion to be achieved. And the conclusion there must be sought of course is that of achieving peace in the nation of the Philippines," he added.

Duterte noted how Malaysia played a prominent role in achieving the historic Bangsamoro Organic Law. Malaysia is the third-party facilitator for the government's peace negotiations with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF).

"The road leading to the historic transition to the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region was paved in large part by the support of our international partners. Malaysia occupies a prominent role in this roster of friends," Duterte said.

Mahathir lauded the Bangsamoro Organic Law, saying that the newly established Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM) will help boost economic ties between the two countries. He said he is also hoping for the smooth transition of the ARMM to the BARMM.

"I, therefore, assured Mr. President of Malaysia's desire to continue to be of help in the development of Mindanao," he added.

Regional concerns

Meanwhile, both leaders also emphasized the importance of maintaining and promoting peace, security, stability, safety and freedom of navigation and overflight over the South China Sea, as well as the peaceful settlement of disputes.

The two also discussed the efforts for peace being exerted by both North and South Korea.

Mahathir said he and Duterte also talked about security matters and renewed Malaysia's commitment to address terrorism.

"Malaysia is committed to take the necessary steps to address the serious issue of terrorism and violent extrem-

ism through the Trilateral Cooperation Agreement," he said.

"Under this framework, Malaysia and the Philippines together with Indonesia have agreed to undertake unilateral maritime and air patrols to tackle the growing security challenges," he added.

Trade cooperation

Meanwhile, both leaders said that further expansion of economic cooperation serves both countries' mutual interests as that of ASEAN.

"Conscious of [the] synergy and dynamism of our private sectors, our governments have agreed to further enhance trade, investment and infrastructure development," Duterte said.

Duterte then thanked Mahathir for Malaysia's robust support for the "Build, Build, Build" infrastructure program. This includes Malaysian companies' active role in the development of the sustainable and smart metropolis of Clark Green City.

He also thanked the Malaysian Prime Minister for their unrelenting support for development in the south, noting that Mindanao's progress is the key for the Philippines and the Brunei Darussalam-Indonesia-Malaysia-Philippines East ASEAN Growth Area (BIMP-EAGA) sub-region.

Mahathir warns Duterte vs influx of alien workers

MALAYSIAN Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad on Thursday warned the Philippines against letting in foreigners who could "disturb the political equations" as President Rodrigo Duterte's Beijing pivot has sparked an influx of Chinese workers.

At least 200,000 Chinese have flocked to Manila since Duterte's 2016 election, many of them employed by online gaming firms that cater to Chinese players, a Senate inquiry was told late last year.

This has touched off

Next page



Mahathir...

From A1

concern, with some Filipino politicians alleging it drives up property prices, takes away jobs from locals and even affects tax revenues.

Mahathir, who has suspended several of his nation's major projects with China, warned during an official visit to the Philippines against allowing a surge of foreigners.

"Foreign direct investment should not involve bringing huge numbers of foreigners to live in the country because that might disturb the political equations in the country," Mahathir told ABS-CBN television in an interview.

"If huge numbers of any foreigners [come] to live and stay in the country or to even influence the economy of a country, then you have to do some rethinking as to whether it is good or bad, or the limits that you have to impose on them," Mahathir said.

Mahathir, 93, is in the Philippines for the first time since his shock election victory last year.

The Malaysian leader has taken a cautious approach to relations with China, saying he would discuss "unfair" terms of deals signed by his predecessor, Najib Razak.

Duterte's pursuit of closer ties with China for the Philippines—a traditional ally of the United States—has prompted a surge of Chinese worker arrivals.

Last year legislators said around 200,000 Chinese were working in the country, and vowed to introduce protection for Filipinos.

Finance Secretary Carlos Dominguez had also said he would ensure that foreign-

ers working in the nation's offshore gaming industry paid taxes.

However, Duterte last month said Chinese workers should be allowed to continue staying in the country as Beijing also hosted hundreds of thousands of Filipinos. Most of them are domestic workers in Hong Kong.

Duterte has warmly embraced China despite his nation's long-standing maritime row with Beijing over the South China Sea.

Beijing asserts sovereignty over almost all of the resource-rich sea, with competing claims from the Philippines, Malaysia, Brunei, Taiwan and Vietnam.

Commenting on the sea dispute on Thursday, Mahathir said there should be no impediment to vessels using the strategic waterway, through which trillions of dollars in global trade pass through each year.

"The most important thing is that the South China Sea in particular must be open to navigation," he said.

On Thursday, the Labor department urged skilled workers to consider local employment in the construction industry and support the government in the full blast implementation of the Build Build Build Program rather than applying for jobs abroad.

"Construction workers are badly needed here in our country that's why we are slowing down the deployment to address the manpower shortage in the local construction industry and support implementation of the infrastructure program of the President," Labor Secretary Silvestre Bello III said.

The Labor chief said that around 800,000 to one million skilled workers in the field of construction, architecture, and engineering are needed up to 2022 to address labor shortage with country's construction boom. **AFP**

d March 2015 B1

Duterte, Mahathir talk drugs, disputes

BY JOCELYN MONTEMAYOR

PRESIDENT Duterte and Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohammad yesterday reaffirmed the commitment of the two countries in maintaining and promoting peace, security, and stability in the region, especially in the South China Sea.

The two leaders, in a joint statement issued after their expanded bilateral meeting at Malacanang, also stressed the importance of pursuing peaceful settlement of disputes and agreed to ramp up cooperation to address security issues, particularly on terrorism, piracy and transnational crimes, including the fight against the illegal drug trade.

The Philippines and Malaysia are among the countries with overlapping claims in parts of the South China Sea. The two countries also have overlapping claims over Sabah/Borneo.

"We emphasized the importance of maintaining and promoting peace, security, stability, safety and freedom of navigation and overflight

over the South China Sea, as well as the peaceful settlement of disputes. This is, without resort to the threat or use of force, in accordance with the universally recognized principles of international law," Duterte said.

The President said the Philippines and Malaysia had vowed to further collaborate within the Asean "to advance the rule of law in Southeast Asia and beyond."

Apart from the Philippines and Malaysia, other claimants in parts or almost all of the South China Sea are Brunei, Vietnam, China and Taiwan.

Mahathir said apart from the South China Sea issue, they also talked of other security matters like Malaysia's commitment to take necessary steps to address the serious issue of terrorism and violent extremism through the Trilateral Cooperation Agreement.

"Under this framework, Malaysia and the Philippines together with Indonesia have agreed to undertake unilateral maritime and air patrols to tackle the growing security challenges," he said.

Duterte said they also discussed the Philippines and Malaysia's hope for peace and stability in the Korean Peninsula.

The President, who led the country, in welcoming and thanking the Malaysian leader for his two-day official visit, said Mahathir's trip to the country is an affirmation of the friendship between Manila and Kuala Lumpur and a demonstration of Malaysia's strong resolve to be the Philippines partner for progress and

See DUTERTE ► Page B3

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DUTERTE

a brother for peace.

"Our discussions today augur well for other countries and for ours. As we reviewed the milestones achieved in further strengthening our bilateral relations, we also charted new paths for collaborative work... We resolved to address security issues. We touched on our extensive economic cooperation. We shared the view that its further expansion serves our mutual interests as that of Asean and our region," Duterte said.

He said an intensified two-way trade and investments between the Philippines and Malaysia is needed to sustain progress and prosperity, and he is thankful to Malaysia for its robust support in the Build Build Build program and in the development of the Clark Green City.

Duterte said he also talked to Mahathir about the achievements towards securing just and lasting peace in Mindanao. Malaysia was the third party facilitator in the peace talks between the Philippine government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF).

He said the road leading to the

historic transition to the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region was paved in large part by the support of our international partners and he assured that the "good work will have to continue."

Mahathir said Malaysia is looking forward to the smooth transition from the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao to the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao.

He said the establishment of the BARMM will boost economic ties between Manila and Kuala Lumpur. Malaysia hopes "to continue to be of help in the development of Mindanao."

"I congratulated President Duterte on the success of the ratification of the Bangsamoro Organic Law and the appointment of members into the Bangsamoro Transition Authority. I look forward to the smooth transition of the ARMM through the interim government of the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region for Muslim Mindanao," he said.

Both Duterte and Mahathir said discussions also include talks about more endeavors between the two countries in the future; strengthening of current cooperation in health, tourism, education,

and trade; and the sustaining of the Brunei-Indonesia-Malaysia-Philippines East Asian Growth Area.

"I believe there is still room for improvement and from my meeting with Mr. President, we would encourage private sectors from both countries to explore opportunities of collaboration and venture in new cooperation and investments," the Prime Minister said adding that he also looks forward to the finalization and the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding in the field of health soon.

Mahathir, who arrived Wednesday, was accorded formal honors in Malacañang where he was also welcomed by students from the Fernando Ma. Guerrero elementary School.

A state banquet hosted by Duterte and his partner Honeylet Avancena was also held in Malacañang.

Prior to his visit to Malacañang, Mahathir attended a wreath laying ceremony at the Rizal Park with Manila Mayor and former president Joseph Estrada. He also received Senate President Vicente Sotto III and Speaker Gloria Arroyo.

China committed to work with ASEAN on Code of Conduct – Ambassador Zhao

By GENALYN D. KABILING

China is committed to work with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) in crafting the code of conduct in the South China Sea to keep peace and stability in the region, Chinese Ambassador to the Philippines Zhao Jianhua said on Wednesday.

The ambassador affirmed China's resolve to settle the disputes through peaceful means, hoping there will be "further progress" in maintaining regional peace.

"Rest assured China is committed to peacefully settle the disputes we have and we are working very well in managing our differences," Zhao said

in an interview with reporters at the Palace.

"In the meantime, we are working on the COC, Code of Conduct, and the Filipino side is the country coordinator for China-ASEAN relationship so we are hoping that we can make further progress in our joint efforts to maintain peace and stability in

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China committed to...

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the South China Sea," he added.

China claims almost the entire South China Sea, stepping up reclamation works in the area in recent years. Four ASEAN members – the Philippines, Brunei, Malaysia, and Vietnam, also have claims in the area.

In 2017, ASEAN and China agreed on the framework of the long-mooted code of conduct to prevent the escalation of tension in the disputed waterway. The negotiations for the final COC have started in a bid to fully implement the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea signed back in 2002.

Meantime, Zhao said they would verify reports that Chinese vessels were driving away Filipino fishermen near Pag-asa Island.

"Whether it is authentic or not, it is something subject to clarification. I read in the newspaper also that your Secretary of National Defense has already denied the there was no such thing that happened in that area," he said.

"We are checking and we are in close coordination with DFA and we will be checking whether it is true or not," he added.

Envoy: China committed to Code of Conduct in SCS

China is committed to work with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations in crafting the Code of Conduct in the South China Sea to keep peace and stability in the region, Chinese Ambassador to the Philippines Zhao Jianhua said last Wednesday.

The ambassador affirmed China's resolve to settling the disputes through peaceful means, hoping there will be "further progress" in maintaining regional peace.

"Rest assured China is committed to peacefully settle the disputes we have and we are working very well in managing our differences," Zhao said.

"In the meantime, we are working on the CoC, Code of Conduct, and the Filipino side is the country coordinator for China-ASEAN relationship so we are hoping that we can make further progress in our joint efforts to maintain peace and stability in the South China Sea," he added.

China claims almost the entire South China Sea, stepping up reclamation works in the area in re-

cent years. Four ASEAN members, the Philippines, Brunei, Malaysia, and Vietnam, also have claims in the area.

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PH, Malaysia vow to maintain peace

BY CATHERINE S. VALENTE

THE Philippines and Malaysia pledged to work to maintain peace and security in the region, as both countries reaffirmed the importance of peaceful settlement of disputes with China without resorting to threat or use of force.

In his joint statement with Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad, President Rodrigo Duterte said the Philippines and Malaysia vowed to collaborate to achieve shared aspirations of peace, progress and security in the region.

"We emphasized the importance of maintaining and pro-

moting peace, security, stability, safety and freedom of navigation and overflight over the South China Sea (West Philippine Sea), as well as the peaceful settlement of disputes. This is, without resort to the threat or use of force, in accordance with the universally recognized principles of international law,"

he said.

He noted that Mahathir's visit reaffirmed "the friendship between our two peoples and nations, and demonstrates your strong resolve as our partner for progress and a brother for peace."

"Our discussions today augur well for other countries and for ours. As we reviewed the mile-

stones achieved in further strengthening our bilateral relations, we also charted new paths [for] collaborative work," Duterte said.

"We resolved to ramp up cooperation to address security issues, particularly on terrorism, piracy and transnational crimes, including the fight against the illegal drug trade," he added. A2

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The Manila Times

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China will not launch any attack — envoy

BY CATHERINE S. VALENTE

CHINESE Ambassador to the Philippines Zhao Jianhua has given assurances that Beijing will not launch any attack in the South China Sea (West Philippine Sea) because China is committed to maintain peace and stability in the region.

"We are worried about possible attacks from the other side. We don't worry about China attacking anybody because it is not our policy," he told reporters on the sidelines of the Presidential Anti-Corruption Commission's first an-

niversary celebration in Malacañang on Wednesday night.

Asked to identify the other side, the ambassador said: "Use your imagination."

US Secretary of State Michael Pompeo

➤ Attack A2

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■ ATTACK FROM A1

China will not

earlier pledged that Washington would defend and protect the Philippines in case any of its vessels or military aircraft are attacked in disputed territory.

Pompeo, who met with President Rodrigo Duterte in Manila last week, claimed that such US action would be triggered under its obligations in the mutual defense treaty signed with the Philippines.

Duterte welcomed the pronouncement of support, but expressed qualms about the process.

"America said, 'We will protect you. Your backs are covered.' I said,

it's okay. 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 said during a campaign sortie of the Partido Demokratiko Pilipino-Lakas ng Bayan on Sunday in Zamboanga City.

Zhao said China was more concerned on safeguarding peace, stability and freedom of navigation in the South China Sea.

"Maybe you would expect the Chinese side to be very concerned about these remarks. We are concerned more, it's about the peace and stability in the South China Sea," he said.

He warned that every country would suffer if peace and stability turns into "chaos or conflict."

"I think it is in the common interest of all countries, including China, the United States and Asean (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) countries, that we keep the peace and stability there and we keep the freedom of navigation in the whole South China Sea open," Zhao added.

The ambassador said Chinese officials were verifying reports that Chinese fishing vessels were driving away Filipino fishers from

sandbars near the Pag-asa island.

"We are checking and we are in close coordination with DFA (Department of Foreign Affairs) and we will be checking whether it is true or not but rest assured China is committed to peacefully settle the disputes we have. We are working very well in managing very well our differences," he said. "I took note of the media report, but whether it is authentic or not it is something subject to clarification."

Zhao stressed China was working on the Code of Conduct for the disputed waterway to help maintain peace and stability in the area.

"We are hoping that we can make further progress in our joint efforts to maintain peace and stability in the South China Sea," he said.

Duterte slates Vietnam visit

PRESIDENT Rodrigo Duterte may visit Vietnam later this year or in 2020 on the invitation of Vietnam's Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Pham Binh Minh, Malacañang said Thursday.

The Vietnamese official paid a courtesy call on Duterte at the presidential palace and conveyed Hanoi's invitation for him to make another visit.

Duterte first visited Vietnam in September 2016 and had a meeting with the late Vietnamese President Tran Dai Quang, which resulted in an agreement to strengthen cooperation on trade, promote peace and freedom of navigation in the South China Sea, ensure the safety and security of fishermen from both countries, and to solve amicably the unexpected incidents at sea.

A year later, Duterte traveled to Danang to attend the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation summit.

"Deputy Prime Minister Minh also congratulated the President for the developments in the Philippines as well as the country's pivotal role in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations," the Palace said in a statement.

Also during that day, Duterte received Bahrain's First Deputy President of the Supreme Council for Youth Sports Sheikh Khalid bin Hamad Al Khalifa.

Sheikh Khalid's visit to the Philippines signified an "improvement on the level of bilateral relations between the Philippines and the Kingdom of Bahrain."

"If you remember, I said that we stand by you and we will be with you in case you need us," Duterte told Sheikh Khalid during the meeting.

"And again, let me reiterate our deep sense of camaraderie with our people. Also for the humane treatment given to our citizens. Thank you very much," A2

Sheikh Khalid is a son of Bahrain's King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa. Vito Barcelo

China, tiniyak ang payapang solusyon sa WPS

Nina GENALYN D. KABILING at FRANCIS T. WAKEFIELD

Nangangako ang China na makipagtutungan sa Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) sa pagbalangkas ng code of conduct sa West Philippines Sea/South China Sea upang mapanatili ang kapayapaan at katatagan sa rehiyon, sinabi ni Chinese Ambassador to the Philippines Zhao Jianhua nitong Miyerkules.

"Rest assured China is committed to peacefully settle the disputes we have and we are working very well in managing our differences," ani Zhao sa panayam ng mga mamamahayag sa Palasyo.

"In the meantime, we are working

on the COC, Code of Conduct, and the Filipino side is the country coordinator for China-ASEAN relationship so we are hoping that we can make further progress in our joint efforts to maintain peace and stability in the South China Sea," idinugtong niya.

Sinabi rin ni Zhao na beberipikahin nila ang mga ulat na itinatayo ng mga barkong Chinese ang mga mangingisdang Pinoy malapit sa Pagasa Island sa Palawan.

"We will be checking whether it is true or not," aniya.

Sinabi ng Armed Forces of the Philippines-Western Command (AFP-

WesCom) na 15 bangkang Pinoy ang nangingisda sa bisinidad ng Pagasa Island simula Enero 15, 2018 hanggang Marso 5, 2019, batay sa listahan na kanilang natanggap.

Inilabas ang listahan ilang araw matapos magpahayag si Kalayaan Mayor Roberto del Mundo na hinaharang ng mga barkong Chinese ang mga mangingisdang Pinoy sa pagpasok sa sandbars malapit sa Pagasa Island.

"We have not received any reports pona meron ganun," ani Captain Sherry P. Tindog, chief ng Public Affairs Office ng WesCom, sa isang panayam.

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AFP: ROTC cadets to undergo weapons training

The proposed Reserve Officers Training Corps program will include handling firearms in the event ROTC cadets are called to active duty, the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) said yesterday.

In the past, trainees used wooden rifles and those who were able to handle real firearms were required to pay for the bullets used during live fire exercises.

"Basic weapons training on AFP-issued firearms will be conducted for ROTC cadets. From small arms like the M16 and the M-1991 caliber .45 pistol to the 105mm howitzers, depending on the unit that handles the school department of citizens' military training," said Col. Noel Detoyato, AFP Public Affairs Office chief.

Prior to operating these weapons, the cadets will be taught to assemble and disassemble these firearms, he added.

Detoyato said the cadets will also be trained in disaster response.

Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana, in pushing for the return of mandatory ROTC training for all able-bodied students in public and private schools through House Bill 8961, said the matter is crucial to values formation of the country's youths.

House Bill 8961 is an act amending Republic Act 7077 mandating the institutionalization, development, training, organization and administration of basic ROTC training in Grades 11 and 12 in public and private education institutions.

The ROTC program was abolished years ago following the death of Mark Wilson Chua, a cadet at the University of Sto. Tomas, reportedly at the hands of his Army trainers.

- Jaime Laude

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New Naval Forces Western Mindanao chief named

ZAMBOANGA CITY -- Navy chief Vice Admiral Rene Empedrad appointed yesterday a new commander of the Naval Forces Western Mindanao (NFWM).

Rear Admiral Erick Kagadan replaced Vice Admiral Rene Medina, who was designated commander of the Western Command based in Palawan.

Medina led the NFWM in the campaign against Abu

Sayyaf bandits, resulting in the killing of its leader Isnilon Hapilon.

Empedrad ordered Kagadan to sustain the operations of the NFWM in securing the southern border against piracy and kidnappings.

— Roel Pareño

Radical change needed to end corruption in gov't – Duterte

A radical change overnight will be needed to put an end to corruption in government, President Duterte declared on Wednesday amid his exasperation over dishonest dealings in the bureaucracy.

Speaking at the 1st anniversary rites of the Presidential Anti-Corruption

Commission in Malacañang Wednesday, the President lamented that "so many billions are lost every day" due to corruption.

"The way the bureaucracy is set up, it is really conducive to or for corruption to thrive. Ganun ang

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Radical change needed... ◀1

Pilipinas," Duterte said in his remarks. "You would need a radical change overnight if you want corruption to stop," he added.

Duterte admitted that he was exasperated with corruption in the bureaucracy that prompted him to offer his resignation twice in the past few months.

He also issued a stern warning to government workers not to get involved in graft and corruption.

"Now, for being like (Adolf) Hitler, ah I have said kasi sinabi ko na sa inyo, 'huwag.' Sinabi ko na sa lahat sa gobyerno, 'huwag.' Kaya kung pumasok ka diyan, I'm sorry. It is your headache not mine," he said.

He said he offered to step down when he learned about two alleged irregular government transactions – the Nayong Pilipino lease deal with a casino developer, and the ghost delivery of medicines in the military hospital – in one day. The government officials allegedly involved in the alleged anomalous transactions have already been fired by the President.

Duterte told a group of military and police officials that he was "very sad" to learn about the irregular transactions especially the deal involving medicines intended for soldiers.

"In my exasperation, I said you know I am really very tired, I think my mindset

now cannot absorb so much of this. And so I said I would like to offer to you my resignation," he said.

He told the security officials to stand up if they want another president but no one did. "I let it pass and well I said I hope next time this will not happen," he added.

Apart from weeding out officials with suspected involvement in corruption, the President pointed out he has directed authorities to reduce red tape in government transactions and ensure swift delivery of service.

Citing an example, he said he ordered the Department of Agrarian Reform (DAR) to streamline procedures on land use conversion after learning some applications were delayed for two years.

He remembered the day he walked

out from a Cabinet meeting and threatened to resign out of frustration with the tedious procedures on land conversion presented by Agrarian Reform Secretary John Castriciones. He complained that such clearance process practically included all government departments, except the Department of Foreign Affairs.

"With those requirements you will ensure corruption and it would come naturally and automatic," he said, adding such long list of clearances would take the applicant two to three years to complete.

Duterte recalled that he refused to listen to the DAR presentation any longer and left the room. "Sinabi ko sa kanila, 'I want to resign and I feel useless in this god*** building. Kung ganun lang

nanan huwag na ninyo akong idamay," he added.

He bewailed that Filipinos transacting with government have been compelled to pay bribes just to hasten the processing of their application or permit.

"The problem is every table in offices, I don't want to mention any, if you follow up on a clearance or certification from this office, they simply sit on it. They ask the person to come back and forth until a fixer would whisper, 'Just pay for it.' That's the way of life of the Filipino," he said in Filipino.

As the government fights corruption, the President urged the public to do its part and report any irregularity to his office. He said he was prepared to receive corruption complaint any time of the day. (Genalyn D. Kabilig)

Joma: ACT not communist front

By JOSE RODEL CLAPANO

Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) founding chairman Jose Ma. Sison has denied that the Alliance of Concerned Teachers (ACT) is a front organization of the CPP.

In a statement posted on the National Democratic Front website on Wednesday, Sison said

he did not identify the teachers' group as a front of the communist movement, contrary to the claim of Philippine National Police chief Gen. Oscar Albayalde.

"Albayalde is a big liar. I never identified or enumerated any legal organization as a front or façade of the CPP. The language is entirely that of the un-intelligent witch-hunting

police dogs like Albayalde," Sison said. "I have always respected organizations adhering to the line of national independence and democracy as democratic formations independent of the CPP," he added.

He said the alleged witch hunting being conducted by the police and military against democratic organizations was meant to intimidate critics of the government.

Sison said the Duterte administration wants to discredit the opposition.

"The witch hunt against ACT and other movements is part of the scheme of the government to intimidate and discredit the opposition to ensure that the administration candidates would win in the midterm elections," he said.

Government forces closing in on NPA lairs

By MIKE U. CRISMUNDO

CAMP JAIME FERRER, Bislig City -- Government forces are penetrating and closing in on the lairs of communist terrorists.

Capt. Regie H. Go of the Public Affairs Office (PAO) officer of the Army's Northeastern and Northern Mindanao 4th Infantry (Diamond) Division (4th ID) cited the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) Community Support Programs (CSPs), backed by intensified security operations against known armed terrorists in the provinces of Agusan and Surigao provinces that forced over 300 former Communist New People's Army Terrorists (CNTs) to abandon their hideouts in the Diwata mountains and surrender to the government.

Combined efforts of the military, local government units, and national and local government agencies effectively dismantled the CNTs' former strongholds.

Go said six heavily armed CNTs - two commanding officers, one political guide, one medic, one team leader and one squad member recently surrendered to the military in Agusan del Sur.

He said the rebel returnees were members of Guerilla Front 3 (GF 3) of the CPP-NPA Southern Mindanao Regional Committee (SMRC), the terror unit which has been mainly responsible for all atrocities in the area such as arsons, murders, and extortions.

"The CNTs peacefully surrendered to 75th Infantry (Marauder) Battalion (75th IB), 4th ID last March 3, 2019, Capt. Go said.

They brought with them assorted firearms, ammunition and explosives including one AK47 rifle, one M16A1 rifle, two Cal. 45 pistol, two Cal. 38 pistol, two hand grenades, two improvised pipe bombs, five blasting caps, five meters detonating cord, four magazines of AK47 with 97 rounds of 7.62mm ammunition, five short steel magazines of M16A1 with 126 rounds of 5.56mm ammunition and two bandoliers.

"We just want to go back to our families and live a normal and peaceful life. Life has not been easy for us in the mountains but it was more difficult for the families that we have left behind," one of the rebel commanders said, adding that "they suffer more than we do because we cannot provide for them (their respective families)."

"The firearms and weapons that we brought down with us have become our tool for aggression and oppression against our very own neighbors and we just do not want to be part of the senseless violence anymore," he added.

Brig. Gen. Andres Centino, commanding general of the Army's 401st Infantry (Unity) Brigade said the surrender of CPP-NPAs in the areas was believed to demoralize the remaining leadership of the CPP-NPA in the region.

"Demoralization among CNT members is at all-time high due to the influx of surrenderees. The CPP-NPA has no one to blame but itself. People have already gotten weary of senseless violence," Brig. Gen. Centino said.

10 more NPA members yield in Central Mindanao

By **ALI G. MACABALANG**

COTABATO CITY - Ten more members of the New People's Army (NPA) yielded on March 5 to the military, bringing to 15 the number of the communist front in Central Mindanao that laid down arms in less than two weeks, the Army's 6th Infantry Division (6ID) announced Wednesday.

Cesar Marcos Manguda alias "Commander Amina and Alas" of the NPA's Cherry Platoon, GF73 and nine followers surrendered to Lt. Oliver Baylon, head of the 1st Marine Battalion Landing Team-7, and were later presented to Brig. Gen. Eugenio Hernandez of the 1st Marine Brigade, the 6ID said in a

statement.

Pressures from continued military operations and local civilian officials' persuasion prompted Manguda's group to end their lawless activities in the coastal towns of Kalamansig and Lebak in Sultan Kudarat, the 6ID added.

Manguda's group yielded two AK47 rifles, one M16 rifle, one hand grenade and assorted ammunitions, according to Maj. Arvin Encinas, 6ID public affairs office head.

Maj. Gen. Cirilito Sobejana, 6ID commander, lauded the Marine contingents and village officials of barangay Rifao in Upi, Maguindanao for their collaboration that led to the voluntary surrender of the 10 local insurgents.

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10 NPAS SURRENDER IN SULTAN KUDARAT

CAMP SIONGCO, Awang, Datu Odin Sinsuat, Maguindanao: At least 10 New People's Army (NPA) insurgents surrendered to the Marines on Tuesday, saying they got exhausted with the relentless operations by the military against them. Maj. Arvin Encinas, spokesman for the Army's 6th Infantry Division, said the former rebels voluntarily surrendered to Lt. Col. Oliver Baylon, commanding officer of the 1st Marine Battalion Landing Team-7 (MBLT-7). The group has been harassing the Teduray community in Upi, Maguindanao. The surrenderers belonged to NPA squad Primera led by Cesar Marcos Manguda, alias Commander Armla/Alas, of the Cherry Mobile Platoon, GF73

operating in the towns of Lebak and Kalamansig, all in Sultan Kudarat. They also turned over two AK47 rifles, one M16 rifle, one hand grenade and assorted ammunition. Last February 22, five former NPA rebels of Dulangan-Manobo Tribe also surrendered to MBLT-2 and received immediate assistance under the Enhance Comprehensive Local Integration Program. The former rebels were currently undergoing custodial debriefing, and if found to be eligible, they would be given assistance through the Enhanced Comprehensive Local Integration Program.

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13 rebelde, sumuko

Kinumpirma kahapon ng Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) ang pagsuko ng aabot sa 13 kaanib ng New People's Army (NPA) sa Sultan Kudarat, kamakailan.

Tinukoy ni 1st Lt. Adrian Martial, Civil Military Officer ng Marine Battalion Landing Team 7, ang mga sumuko ay kumikilos sa ilalim ng Primera Squad, Cherry Mobile Platoon, Guerilla Front 73 sa pamumuno ng isang Kumander "Alas".

Sinabi ni Martial na ang grupo ay nagsasagawa ng operasyon sa Lebak at Kalamansig sa Sultan Kudarat.

Isinuko rin ng mga rebelde ang dalawang M14 rifle, isang M16 rifle, isang AK47, isang cal. 45 pistol, dalawang homemade Uzi sub-machine gun, dalawang granada at iba't ibang bala ng bari.

6 Fer Taboy

INQUIRER

By Jeffrey Maitem
@inqmindanao

COTABATO CITY—The leader of the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM) has assured employees of the political entity that used to govern the Bangsamoro region that their job security would be addressed during the transition process.

Murad Ebrahim, chair of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) and interim chief minister of the BARMM, said every change would always bring fear, doubt and resistance.

"Maybe the most frequently asked question among yourselves could be, 'What would happen to us now?'"

Consistent with my earlier statements, your status in the BARMM will be determined by the nature of your appointments," Murad told employees during the flag-raising ceremony on Monday at Shariff Kabunsuan Complex in this city, the new seat of the BARMM.

According to Murad, permanent employees will remain in their posts until the Bangsamoro Transition Authority adopts the transition plan. He said they would honor employees' contracts of service but they would undergo a performance review.

Cooperation

"My only request to you, fellow workers of the BARMM, is cooperation. I truly understand your concern for your careers, but somehow we have to start this overhauling of the regional government," he said.

The Bangsamoro Organic Law, which created the BARMM, was ratified by voters in plebiscites held on Jan. 21 and Feb. 6 in provinces that composed the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM). This was the final step in a peace pact that the MILF signed with the government four years ago.

The law aims to give Muslim Mindanao an expanded autonomous area, offering self-determination to the



Murad Ebrahim

country's four million Muslims by empowering them to elect their own parliament.

"We believe that a ministerial form of government can cure the defects in our governance—foremost of which is its distinct feature of fusion of executive and legislative branches that easily facilitates mutual checks and balances," Murad said.

He said these changes "may be good or bad for you on the personal level, but I ask you to go beyond personal interests."

Water project

Meanwhile, the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the government of Japan have signed a new partnership to provide jobs and promote peace through improved water supply and sanitation services in the BARMM.

The \$2.6-million project aims to reduce poverty in communities prone to conflict, the ILO said in a statement.

"Using a peace lens, the project will reach out to returning combatants, vulnerable youth, indigenous peoples, and women and men displaced and vulnerable to conflict. Water is life and the project focuses on providing one of the most basic needs—safe and reliable water supply," said Khalid Hassan, director of the ILO country office for the Philippines. 113

The ILO said communities would be involved in developing, constructing, operating and maintaining water supply, sanitation and hygiene facilities. —WITH A REPORT FROM TINA G. SANTOS INQ

Bear with Moro region's birth pains—Murad

ARMM posts lower employment rate

By **ANTONIO L. COLINA IV**

DAVAO CITY – The Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) posted an employment rate of 93.7% in January 2019, lower compared to 97.4% recorded in the same period of last year, according to the results of the January 2019 Labor Force Survey of the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) released on Thursday.

The ARMM had been replaced by the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao after majority of its population voted in favor of the ratification of the Republic Act 11054 or the Organic Law for the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (OLBARMM) in a plebiscite last January 21 and February 6.

The latest employment figure of the ARMM was the lowest among Mindanao's six regions and the second lowest in the Philippines. The National Capital Region had the lowest at 93.6% while the highest was 96.9% of the Cagayan Valley.

The ARMM registered a labor force participation rate (LFPR) of 47.7%, the lowest in the Philippines, given the population 15 years old and over of 2.44 million as of January 2019.

The Northern Mindanao posted the highest employment rate at 95.8% in Mindanao; Davao Region,

95.5%; Zamboanga Peninsula and Soccsargen, 95.4%; and Caraga, 94.1%.

Based on the preliminary results of the Annual Labor and Employment Estimates for 2018 of the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA), the ARMM's employment rate of 96.3% for the entire 2018 was the highest in Mindanao.

The country's employment rate in January 2019 was estimated at 94.8%, slightly higher compared to 94.7% recorded in the same period last year. The survey found the LFPR in the country was 60.2% given the population 15 years old and over of 72.95 million.

Workers in the services sector comprised the largest proportion of the employed population at 58.1%; agriculture sector, 22.1%; and industry sector, 19.7%.

BARMM residents to benefit from Japan, UN projects

By FRANCIS WAKEFIELD

Residents of the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM) will have greater access to safe and reliable water supply as well as acquire new knowledge and skills on food production and security through new projects signed by the Office of the Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process (OPAPP) on Wednesday.

The "Project for Agricultural Training for the Establishment of Peace in Mindanao" and the "Project for the Improvement of Water Supply Equipment Management Capacity for the Establishment of Peace in Mindanao" were signed by Japanese Ambassador to the Philippines Koji Haneda, Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) Country Representative Jose Luis Fernandez, and International Labor Organization Country Director Khalid Hassan with Presidential Peace Ad-

viser Carlito Galvez Jr. as witness.

In his message during the event, Galvez lauded the international peace partners for their continuing support for the peace process.

"We are honored and extremely grateful for our international peace partners' unwavering commitment and continuing support in our quest for peace and development in Mindanao. With these projects, we are confident that the farmers and fisherfolks will be equipped with the necessary skills that will enable them to obtain sustainable sources of livelihood," Galvez said.

The projects will be implemented by the ILO and FAO and will be funded by the Government of Japan with US\$2.6 million (P135.8 million) and US\$1.7 million (P88.8 million), respectively.

The FAO will be providing the locals with vocational skills training, including hands-on activities and demonstrations on crop production, integrated pest management, and

harvest and post-harvest processes.

"I would like to reiterate the Government of Japan and FAO's commitment to supporting the Government of the Philippines in ensuring sustainable and profitable agriculture that will translate to a better quality of life of Mindanaoans," Fernandez said.

Meanwhile, the ILO will spearhead the community-based water supply development wherein the communities will be involved in developing, constructing, operating, and maintaining water supply, sanitation, and hygiene facilities.

Hassan emphasized the ILO's strengthened vision for social justice and promotion of decent work as the organization marks its 100th anniversary.

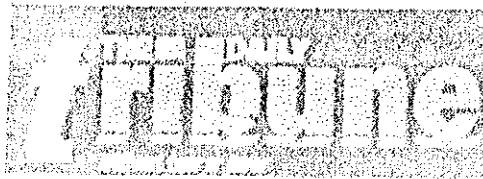
"This project will therefore be one of the centerpieces for ILO's Centenary as interventions in the Bangsamoro areas are meant to create jobs while advocating the Decent Work Agenda," Hassan said.

Ambassador Haneda said: "I look forward to seeing more households in the Bangsamoro region with better access to potable water, averting vulnerabilities to water-borne diseases caused by unsafe sources."

The ambassador also said the skills training to be organized by the FAO will help farmers, fishermen, and decommissioned combatants acquire up-to-date agricultural knowledge that they can use to gain stable employment or set up their own business.

The Japanese Government has played a significant role in the Bangsamoro peace process in various capacities through its involvement in peace mechanisms and development programs.

Recently, Japan pledged US\$2.3 million (P120 million) for the security aspect of the normalization program for the Bangsamoro. It also committed a US\$200 million (P10.4 billion) loan for road infrastructure projects in conflict-affected areas in Mindanao.



BARM water supply deal forged

The International Labor Organization (ILO) and the Government of Japan have signed

an agreement to develop a community-based water supply and sanitation services in the newly formed Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao which is expected to provide jobs and promote peace in the region.

The \$2.6 million project aims to reduce poverty in communities prone to conflict. It will also organize communities, provide skills training, create

jobs and promote better working conditions. Communities will likewise be involved in developing, constructing, operating and maintaining water supply, sanitation and hygiene facilities.

"Using a peace lens, the project will reach out to returning combatants, vulnerable youth, indigenous peoples, and women and men displaced and vulnerable to conflict. Water is life and the project focuses on providing one of the most basic needs - safe and

reliable water supply," said Khalid Hassan, Director of the ILO Country Office for the Philippines.

Despite having vast water resources, the majority of households in the ARMM still have inadequate access to safe water. Most communities are vulnerable to water-borne diseases, with many poor families still relying on unprotected and contaminated water resources.

MBA

8 March 2019

The Manila Times

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ABU SAYYAF MEMBER WANTED FOR KIDNAPPING NABBED

IPIL, Zamboanga Sibugay: An alleged notorious Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) sub-leader, long wanted for several kidnapping activities, was arrested with firearms and ammunition on Tuesday in the outskirts of this capital town. Police Col. Redentor Robusta, Zamboanga Sibugay Police commander, identified the suspect as Maldimar Mahmor, subject of the search warrant for illegal possession of firearms and ammunition. His group operates in Ipil and its adjacent towns of Naga, Surabay, Tungawan and Kabasalan. Recovered from him were high-powered firearms, a rocket propelled grenade launcher, a hand grenade, an M-16 Armalite rifle and a caliber .38 revolver. Mahmor also served as ASG liaison officer and facilitator in several areas of Zamboanga del Sur and Zamboanga del Norte, and was allegedly involved in the kidnapping of former Naga town mayor Salome Adan and a Duterte couple in Siocon, Zamboanga del Norte.

ANTONIO P. RIMANDO A7

INQUIRER

The real transition for the Bangsamoro

The Bangsamoro Transition Authority (BTA), led by Chief Minister Al Hajj Murad Ebrahim, must be equal to its mandate as interim government of the expanded Moro region if it is to retain its leadership in the first elections of 2022.

With more than half of the 80-member BTA, the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) rebel group-turned-political force dominates the transition regime. The new bureaucrats need to solidify their leadership by building a strong political party and jump-starting social and economic reforms, to forge a road to lasting peace and growth in the Moro region.

How will the MILF-led interim government meet these challenges in three years, in a region ruled by feudal oligarchs and ethnic clans who also claim the region's wealth, land and resources? Traditional power in the new Bangsamoro Autonomous Region (BAR) is wielded by at least 34 political families, many of whom will capture congressional seats and local government posts in the May 2019 elections. Some of their members have also been appointed to the BTA.

As in the now-extinct Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM), the new Bangsamoro regime creates two nexus of political authority—the BTA, and the old system of dynasties present in Congress and LGUs. For sure, the traditional politicians will sneak into the BAR parliament, while some BTA leaders will morph into politicians with their own fiefdoms. The Bangsamoro Organic Law (BOL) guarantees such opposing claims of authority when Congress expunged a provision banning political dynasties in the new Moro region. This compro-

COMMENTARY

BOBBY M. TUAZON

mise runs smack against the "democratic political system" which the BOL enshrines.

Thus, the BTA will have to coexist with the bedrock of feudal power in the region. This is expected, since the MILF as a rebel group was not keen on changing existing power relationships that would have democratized access to governance for the marginalized populations. Under coexistence, the region's political families will compete for a bigger pie of the region's economic resources and development opportunities in the new system.

The MILF cadres in the BTA face a narrow window in making the interim government inclusive and depriving the local power blocs the chance to expand their political base so critical in future political exercises. How will the MILF-led BTA balance itself against the hegemonic influence of the powers-that-be without yielding to old politics?

Now the BTA's program, Murad says, prioritizes education, health, economic development, infrastructure and "moral leadership" in Moroland. Whether such a program will alleviate the social injustice that ignited the Moro struggles is unclear. Truth is, what can potentially correct the historical social injustice against the Moros—land redistribution and the settling of land disputes—is indiscernible in the BOL, much less included in the BTA's menu of priorities.

Yet agrarian reform constitutes the real transition that will put closure to centuries-

long social unrest fueled by land dispossession and displacement. The right to land is the heart of the armed conflict in the Moroland. The political territory in the expanded Moro region serves mainly for self-governance and autonomy where, based on the BOL, existing land property ownerships are retained even if these had been acquired by the elite, the transnational corporations and powerful clans over decades of anti-Moro atrocities. Without redistributive land reform to rectify unjust property relations that lock millions of landless farmers to perpetual poverty, the peace that the new order seeks to establish will not last.

Peace advocates and progressives may still give critical support to the new Bangsamoro regime for as long as its new leaders institute policy reforms toward inclusive governance, where grassroots communities have a voice in charting the region's political and growth maps. Such option may include forming political parties to engage in the region's parliamentary elections.

Another option is to work for agrarian reform as a social justice platform. The BTA and the elected parliamentary government that will succeed it should take this as a legitimate challenge. To make this happen, however, the Bangsamoro leadership needs a reform vision, and must be ready to deal with local oligarchs and corporate landholders. This is the acid test for the new Bangsamoro leadership. *MA*

Bobby M. Tuazon is the policy studies director of the Center for People Empowerment in Governance and teaches in UP Manila.

GOTCHA

JARIUS BONDOC

Scarborough: Phl 'island territory' that US mutually must defend

The Phl-US Mutual Defense Treaty holds: "An armed attack on either of the Parties is deemed to include an armed attack on the metropolitan territory of either of the Parties, or on the island territories under its jurisdiction in the Pacific Ocean, its armed forces, public vessels or aircraft in the Pacific."

Scarborough Shoal, 120 miles west of Zambales, is one such island territory of the Philippines. Manila has exercised jurisdiction over it since the 1700s. Chinese warships, from 600 miles away, grabbed the shoal in 2012. The 2016 UN arbitration invalidated China's baseless claim to Scarborough. Manila peaceably, creatively, resolutely must retake it. China threatens violence on any Manila effort to reassert sovereignty. It water cannons and rams Filipino fishing boats that venture near. China alone is escalating hostilities. The US must help the Philippines defend Scarborough under the 1951 Mutual Defense Treaty.

The Spanish colonial authority in Manila patrolled Scarborough as part of the territory. The shoal first was identified in Philippine maps as "*punto de mandato*" or official outpost, then named Scarborough, Panacot, and Bajo de Masinloc. (Present name: Panatag.) The Treaties of Paris, 1898, and of Washington, 1900, ceded the archipelago to the US. The American colonial seat continued to control the shoal. Geodetic surveys and scientific researches were conducted there. Commerce was governed and shipwrecks litigated in Manila. Jurisdiction was transferred in 1935 to the Philippine Commonwealth, and in 1947 to the Philippine Republic. The US Departments of State, of War, of Commerce, and of the Navy confirmed Manila's sovereignty over Scarborough in official exchanges in 1937-1938.

From the historical events and legal documents, international maritime law expert Dr. Jay L. Batongbacal concluded: "If Scarborough Shoal was included as part of the archipelago transferred by the US to the independent Republic of the Philippines, then it is arguably Philippine 'island territory' subject to American defense commitments under the MDT.

"This is important in light of the most prominent means by which China now asserts its claims to the South China Sea: Through the use of lightly armed but large Coast Guard vessels against foreign ships and more recently through reclamations.

(Note that the Chinese Coast Guard recently was placed under the Navy.)

"Under present circumstances, the only thing that prevents legal commitments under the MDT from being invoked are that there has not been 'an armed attack ... on the island territories ... its armed forces, public vessels or aircraft.'

"If China were to aggressively use its vessels in the same way it did with Vietnam, and ram or sink Philippine vessels, it could qualify as an armed attack that would engage US defense

commitments."

Batongbacal said that in Sept. 2014. His lecture, "Bajo de Masinloc (Scarborough Shoal): Less Known Facts vs. Published Fiction," is available on *imoa.ph*, website of the Institute for Maritime and Ocean Affairs.

Avoiding confrontation, President Rody Duterte has shelved the 2016 UN victory. He is employing appeasement. China has shown only increasing deliberate belligerence.

Even if Manila does not reassert sovereignty over Scarborough, China should be careful to not push its luck. Batongbacal said:

"If China were to attempt to install a station on, or undertake reclamation of, Scarborough to transform it into an artificial island, it would amount to nothing less than a permanent taking of a piece of Philippine territory, and therefore be considered a direct threat to the territorial integrity of the country. The Philippines would then be entirely justified in sending public ships to impede or prevent such taking. If China then responds in the same way as it did with Vietnam with respect to the oil rig, by deploying a protective fleet of ships to block and ram such Philippine vessels, then it will thereby be carrying out a threat of an external armed attack while actually taking the shoal."

That is because the MDT in Article III states: "The Parties, through their Foreign Ministers or their deputies, will consult together from time to time regarding the implementation of this Treaty and whenever in the opinion of either of them the territorial integrity, political independence or security of either of the parties is threatened by an external armed attack in the Pacific."

Said Batongbacal: "China's continuing blockade of Scarborough is thus skirting a very fine and dangerous line; it has pushed the envelop to the point that just one mistake will qualify its actions as an armed attack under the MDT. The question that must be asked and seriously considered now is whether and how the Philippine government is preparing for these scenarios and contingencies."

Triangle-shaped and ten miles wide, Scarborough covers about 150 sq.km., about one-fourth of Metro Manila. It is strategic to Philippine environmental security, food security, commerce, and defense. Only 1.5 to 13 meters deep, the waters ringed by reefs and rocks teem with fish and other marine life. Chlorophyll flow, meaning plankton, connect Scarborough to mainland Luzon. As an outpost, the shoal can guarantee the free flow of air and sea trade. It guards entrances to Manila and Subic Bays.

* * *
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★

Communists here have always relied on foreign funds

A personal account

Along
last, the
state has
moved to
stop the



**RIGOBERTO
D. TIGLAO**

communists' foreign funding, which
in different forms and from different
countries since 1969 has been the
most important reason for its growth.

➤ TiglaoA5

Communists here have always relied on foreign funds

According to a news report, representatives of the newly formed National Task Force to End Local Communist Insurgency (Executive Order 70) met with officials of the European Union to reveal that funds of a number of Europe-based "do-gooder" NGOs and even of the Belgian government have in fact been channeled to the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) and its New People's Army (NPA).

These have been disguised as funding for projects of indigenous peoples and other marginalized sectors.

The task force presented intelligence reports of the Armed Forces of the Philippines that showed that the Belgian government itself had released the first tranche of more than 621,000 euros (P36 million) out of a 15-million-euro (P886 million) grant to some non-government organizations for its 2017-2021 "humanitarian" programs to the Philippines.

The military identified seven of these recipient organizations. "We bring this to the EU as one of our major concerns and we seek your cooperation for the sake of our people by helping us stop the flow of funds," Alex Paul Monteaugudo, Director General of the National Intelligence Coordinating Agency (NICA) was quoted as saying in a news report.

Nothing new

The news really is not new. In contrast to their claims that the CPP and the NPA have grown because of the rightness of their cause and the people's support, the truth is that they grew and survived from foreign funding from their inception.

That news report triggered in my mind images of the time when I was a communist cadre receiving funds from China for our revolution.

Since its establishment in 1968 up to 1975, when Ferdinand Marcos and his wife Imelda met with Mao Zedong in Beijing, the International Division of the Chinese Communist Party regularly sent funds to the CPP.

That was when China's "Great Helmsman," party chairman Mao Zedong was an adherent of Leon Trotsky's "permanent revolution" theory, that communism cannot exist and in just one or two nations but has to be "exported" to developing nations.

That Mao financed Jose Maria Sison's party is not conjecture, nor something I read somewhere or heard from somebody.

One of my tasks when I was deputy head of the Manila-Rizal regional committee of the CPP in the early 1970s was to physically receive the funds, which was about P200,000 monthly, a huge sum for that time, equivalent to at least P1 million today.

Paranoliac

That was work assigned to me by the head of the regional committee, who has lived for four decades now as a middle-class Canadian in Toronto.

I would later find out that it was a job given to him personally by Sison, but he was too paranoid about his personal security that he passed on the chore to me. That chore ended after about four months when Sison found out that it wasn't that now Filipino-Canadian who personally received the funds but me, and ordered him to carry out the job himself.

Still barely out of my teens at the time, I was excited over the cloak-and-dagger nature of my meetings with the Chinese communist cadre. The usual venue was the "loge" section of movie theaters in Chinatown, at the first screening time in the morning, when the place was practically empty.

The venues for the meetings had been agreed beforehand. The precise date and time were set through a code in a wanted ad in the classified ads section of the *Manila Bulletin*, looking for "Maid Yaya." The telephone number given in the ad had a code that determined the day and time of the meeting.

The Chinese communist cadre, a young man who looked to me like a People's Liberation Army officer, spoke in that kind of Filipino taught in universities abroad, formal, not the kind you hear spoken in real life, which made it difficult for me to understand.

Filipino courses

I would learn years later that the Chinese intelligence officers had learned Filipino in a Moscow university, where two exiles of the pro-Russia Partido Komunista ng Pilipinas taught a course on the language.

In each of our meetings, I would

The then defense secretary Juan Ponce Enrile inspects the intercepted landing of arms from China—a haul that included automatic rifles, ammunition, bazookas, mortars and anti-aircraft guns.

brief the Chinese agent on developments in the country — with my superior telling me to exaggerate the growth of the revolution and the party.

Mao's huge role was crucial for the growth of Sison's party, that there was even a five-man delegation in Beijing that was a liaison for this. This episode has been reported in detail in Mario Miclat's book *Secrets of the Eighteen Mansions*, which I reviewed in a 2010 column "Secrets of the Communist Party."

The "18 mansions" are the buildings in a secret compound in Beijing where the Chinese Communist Party in the 1960s and 1970s housed delegations of communist parties from all over the world to facilitate its clandestine aid to their own insurgencies.

The Chinese communists' support for Sison was such that it even secretly set up at huge cost a factory that manufactured the US assault rifle M-14s, since they didn't want to risk having their standard rifles, patterned after the Russian AK-47, captured, thereby exposing their role in fomenting revolution. (The factory would be the core of Norinco — China North Industries Group Corp. Ltd. — which has become one of the world's largest weapons manufacturer, flooding the market now with cheap knock-offs of renowned US and European pistols.)

The NPA tried to land 5,000 rifles from China through two ships, the *MV Karagatan* and *MV Andrea* in July 1972. The arms landings failed miserably. The first ship landed in Digoyo Point in Isabela, which the NPA thought was

deserted but which actually was a busy refuge for fishermen and loggers, who promptly alerted the military of a ship bringing onshore suspicious-looking crates.

The other, the *MV Andrea*, was lost in a storm, and saved by the Hong Kong coast guard. The two ships were manned by UP student activists given a few months' crash course on how to sail a ship. Sison told them Mao Zedong Thought would speed up their education on maritime matters.

When Marcos announced the interception of the arms shipment of the *MV Karagatan*, the Liberal Party, especially its star Benigno Aquino Jr., ridiculed it as fake, intended he said to prepare people's minds for the declaration of martial law.

The entire leadership of the Armed Forces, however, became frightened that the might of China was upon the country, and behind the NPA, and therefore wholeheartedly supported Marcos' declaration of martial law. With its Vietnam quagmire already reeling out of control, and its military bases here a crucial part of its war in that country, it was a no-brainer for the US to support Marcos' martial law.

Another irony — or tragedy — of our history, isn't it? The communists' wish to get arms from China gave Marcos a good reason for imposing martial law, which they claim was the worst thing to have happened to our country.

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10 'disillusioned' NPA rebels surrender in Maguindanao

By Edwin Fernandez

COTABATO CITY – Ten communist rebels, who said they have grown disillusioned with the terror-listed group, surrendered to the Philippine Marines on Wednesday, a military official said.

Lt. Col. Oliver Baylon, commanding officer of 7th Marine Battalion Landing Team (MBLT-7), said Thursday the surrenderers belonged to the Cherry Mobile Platoon of the New People's Army (NPA) Guerilla Front 73 operating in the upland areas Sultan Kudarat and Maguindanao provinces.

"All of them were from the Teduray indigenous community who were duped by NPA rebel leaders into joining their ranks and fight the government," said Baylon.

Baylon, whose unit operates under the area of responsibility of the Army's 6th Infantry Division (6ID) in Central Mindanao, said the surrenderers also expressed disillusionment with the rebel movement. The NPA, the armed wing of the Communist Party of the Philippines, is listed as a terrorist organization by the European Union and the United States.

The Marine official added that the military's "relentless pursuit operations in the hinterland areas of Kalamansig and Lebak towns in Sultan Kudarat and North Upi and South Upi municipalities in Maguindanao have also contributed to the rebels' decision to turn themselves in.

Baylon said the surrender was also facilitated by the local officials of Barangay Rifao, North Upi, Maguindanao.

The surrenderers were presented Wednesday to Brig. Gen. Eugenio Hernandez, commander of the 1st Marine Brigade, North Upi Mayor Ramon Piang and South Upi Mayor Reynalbert Insular at the headquarters of the MBLT-7 in Sitio Plateau, Barangay Mirab, North Upi, Maguindanao.

The former rebels turned over two AK-47 rifles, one M16 rifle, one hand grenade, and assorted ammunition.

"We are tired of hiding. We also experienced hunger, hardship, and dissatisfaction of the NPA ideology," Jerome alias 'Ka Jun-Jun', one of the surrenderers, told Marine officials.

The local governments of North Upi and South Upi have initially included the surrenderers in the municipal payroll system as casual employees with a monthly pay of PHP5,000 to support their families.

Maj. Gen. Cirilito Sobejana, the Army's 6ID commander, welcomed the former rebels to the fold of law.

Sobejana said that if they are eligible, the returnees may avail of the Enhanced Comprehensive Local Integration Program (E-CLIP) of the government for them to start a new life and live peacefully with their families.

On Feb. 22, five former NPA rebels from the Dulangan-Manobo cultural community in Sultan Kudarat province also surrendered to the Marines in the area and had received immediate assistance under the program. **(PNA)**