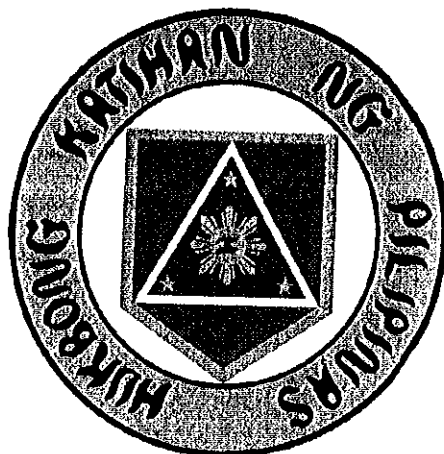


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NEWS CLIPPINGS

10 March 2019

Sunday



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BALUTAN HINTS HE QUIT OVER 'SOMETHING I CAN'T STOMACH'

STORY BY MELVIN GASCON AND LEILA B. SALAVERRIA

The former Marine combat veteran is disputing Malacañang's explanation that he was removed for corruption, indicating he resigned because he could not bear doing something ordered by someone in the Palace or Congress. Two senators are pushing for charges against him over alleged anomalies in the state-run charity. **A10**

FROM A1

By Melvin Gascon
and Leila B. Salaverria
@Team_Inquirer

Former Philippine Charity Sweepstakes Office (PCSO) general manager Alexander Balutan on Saturday said he had resigned and hinted at pressure to do so, disputing a Malacañang statement that he was fired due to corruption allegations.

In a text message, the retired Marine major general recalled that he made a vow regarding the limits of his tolerance for shenanigans when he assumed his post in 2016.

"I told all PCSO employees when I assumed as GM (general manager) in 2016 that if somebody from OP/Congress (Office of the President/Congress) ask/order me to do something which I cannot stomach ... I WILL RESIGN," he said.

Serious allegations

He did not respond when asked whether someone in Malacañang or Congress had asked for something which he "cannot stomach."

Presidential spokesperson Salvador Panelo on Friday said President Duterte fired Balutan "due to serious allegations of corruption."

"We hope that this will serve as a stern warning to all government officials and employees that there are no sacred cows in

the current administration, especially when it comes to serving the Filipino people with integrity and loyalty," Panelo said.

Balutan also did not respond to questions on allegations of corruption that hounded his administration in the PCSO, but he indicated that he quit to keep his integrity intact.

"Career for me is just temporary but character is lifetime ... even beyond my grave," he said.

Mr. Duterte sacked Balutan three days after the combat veteran appeared before a probe at the House of Representatives, where he and other PCSO officials were confronted by lawmakers over alleged corruption in the issuance of Small Town Lottery (STL) franchises across the country.

House inquiry

The STL was conceived as an alternative to "jueteng," an illegal numbers racket.

In Tuesday's hearing, House Minority Leader Danilo Suarez warned that the House committee on public accounts, which he headed, would recommend a "thorough revamp" of the PCSO leadership if its findings supported the corruption allegations.

He said lawmakers disclosed receiving "unconfirmed" reports that people close to Balutan had been bidding out the grant of STL franchises to interested operators. The alleged anomaly was exposed supposedly by a number of disgruntled STL franchise holders who failed to launch their operations



**Career for me is just temporary
but character is lifetime ...
even beyond my grave**

Alexander Balutan

Former Philippine Charity Sweepstakes Office general manager

despite payment of the "fees."

Suarez said lawmakers have also expressed dismay over the PCSO's alleged "lack of cooperation" in the proposed setting up of a "nationwide online lottery system."

This system was meant to eliminate the possible manipu-

lation of STL winning results—a practice that has been exploited by unscrupulous franchise holders for illegal gambling activities.

Despite reports of income shortfalls of the PCSO under him, Balutan said he performed well.

"I did not ask for this position. PRRD (President Rodrigo Roa Duterte) retired me early from the Marines to help him run his administration. In silence, I did and I [excelled]," he said.

Balutan said he did not ask for "anything in return" from President Duterte for the job.

"The rest is history," he said, without elaborating.

Decorated veteran

Balutan, a member of the Philippine Military Academy (PMA) Class of 1983, is a decorated veteran of military campaigns against Moro rebels in Mindanao.

He was a recipient of the Ten Outstanding Philippine Soldiers award from Metrowbank Foundation in 2011.

As a sign that they vouched for his integrity, some retired and active duty military officers have shared Balutan's statement on Facebook.

Sen. Panfilo Lacson, a more senior PMA graduate, however, expressed disappointment over Balutan and said charges should be filed against him.

Impression changed

"Since Malacañang has already cited and announced the reason for his sacking, it is incumbent upon them to file the necessary criminal charges for violation of the country's anti-graft laws," he said on Saturday.

Lacson also said his impression of Balutan had changed after the latter had taken over the helm of the state-run charity.

He said he once saw Balutan

as a "highly principled and courageous officer worthy of emulation" by all the members of the Armed Forces of the Philippines.

That was when Balutan stood by his superior, Brig. Gen. Francisco Gudani, when the latter exposed vote-rigging in the 2004 elections won by former President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo.

But after the Senate's own hearings on alleged corruption in the STL operations, his view of the former Marine officer changed, Lacson said.

Face the music

"I kept asking myself—what has happened to this man?" Lacson said, adding that he was "inclined to think there is basis in (Balutan's) sacking" considering the former PCSO chief's "demeanor" and the information gathered during the Senate's STL hearings.

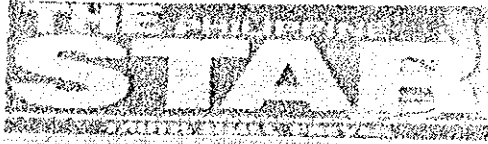
Sen. Sherwin Gatchalian also said Balutan should face charges for alleged irregularities.

According to Gatchalian, Balutan should have been removed from his post much earlier, after it was disclosed that the PCSO spent P6 million for the state-run charity's Christmas party at a high-end hotel in 2017.

Balutan defended the expenses, saying they were "very austere" compared to previous Christmas parties.

Gatchalian said that money could have been spent on indigents who sought PCSO's assistance. —WITH A REPORT FROM

FRANCES MANGOSING INQ



Rody opposes medical marijuana legalization

By EDITH REGALADO

DAVAO CITY – In yet another about face, President Duterte on Friday said he would not legalize marijuana in the country as it can be used for purposes other than the treatment of ailments.

He added that those involved in the narcotics trade can use the measure as an excuse to further expand their business.

"You must remember that heroin, cocaine and the derivatives are products of opium poppy plant. So *matagal masyado magtama* if at all *talagang mabuang* (So the effect is not instant if at all it can drive abusers mad)," Duterte said in a speech during the campaign rally of Partido Demokratiko Pilipino-Laban ng Bayan in Victorias City, Negros Occidental last Friday night.

"Marijuana. They are cultivated," he added.

The President also said considering marijuana as a medicinal drug is tantamount to condoning wrongdoing.

Turn to Page 8

Rody

From Page 1

Duterte maintained that the legalization of marijuana would not happen during his administration.

"Sabihin medicinal. Lahat na lang mag-medicinal na. That would be an excuse. Hindi ako pumayag. (People claim it is medicinal. Everything is supposedly medicinal. That would be an excuse, I did not allow it)," the President said.

"Not in my time. Not in my time. Maybe some other... some other president maybe," he added.

Duterte admitted that he was clueless on marijuana research.

"I am ignorant of that kind of research, I must admit and I do

not read it and I do not intend to legalize it," Duterte said.

The President's statement was a turnaround from his position last December when he said he was willing to sign a bill that would legalize marijuana for medical purposes but not for recreational use.

House Bill 6517 or the Philippine Compassionate Medical Cannabis Act, which seeks to legalize marijuana for medical purposes, is pending before the House of Representatives.

Last year the President joked that marijuana keeps him awake at long international summits. — With Christina Mendez

Farm tourism grows in Leyte village

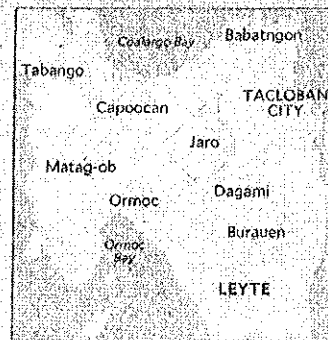
By Joey A. Gableta
@joeygabletaINQ

JARO, LEYTE—For decades, people dreaded going to Villaconzillo. Not only was the farming village poor and remote, it was also a sanctuary of communist rebels.

"There was no access road. Poverty was widespread and we were once tagged as a haven of the New People's Army," said Alex Aborita, who was the barangay chair from 2007 to 2018.

Community efforts have transformed Villaconzillo, an interior village of 365 people, into one of the tourist destinations in Jaro, a third-class municipality with annual income of not more than P45 million.

Eighteen farmers led by Aborita organized themselves and cultivated a 1,000-square-meter lot into a lush field of vegetables, which they sold to public markets and restaurants in the town center. Ten years later, the farm expanded to 23 hectares and produced the first



JARO,
LEYTE

INQ GRAPHICS

MANILA

tourism farm school in Eastern Visayas.

With its success, Villaconzillo is now the most developed village in Leyte, with malnutrition nonexistent.

"Almost all families now own a motorcycle and have household appliances. Parents can send their children to

school. They have their own savings. These are the things unimaginable before," said Aborita, 43, whose wife, Myrna, is the incumbent village chief.

Farmers' association

Realizing that one way of getting government attention to the plight of the village was to organize, Aborita convinced 17 of his neighbors to form the Villaconzillo Community Association and tap the government's livelihood programs.

With a capital of only P1,800, the group tilled the small plot owned by Aborita, growing lettuce, cabbage, broccoli and cauliflower. They sold their produce on market day in Palo and the nearby town of Carigara.

Some establishments later asked them to supply their vegetables. Sales eventually grew.

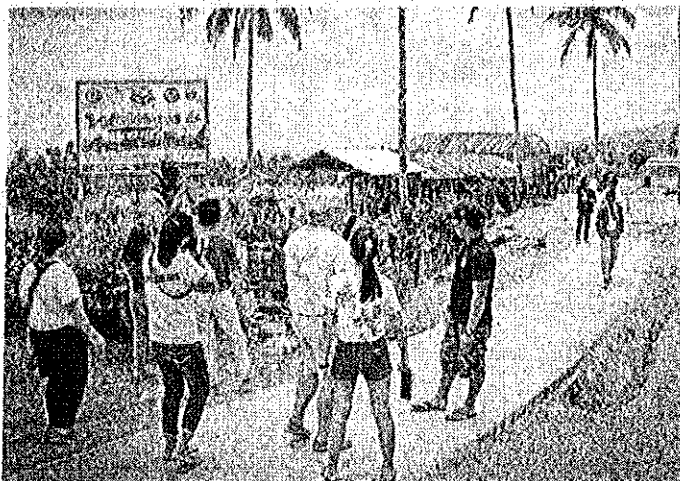
"From just 1,000 sq m, we slowly expanded by buying farm lots adjacent to our original farm area until we reached our present area of about 23 ha," Aborita said.

They also started producing other fruits and vegetables, such as tomatoes, eggplants, watermelon, rambutan, jackfruit, cacao and even strawberries. They penetrated shopping malls in Tacloban City.

Training programs

To make farming more sustainable, the group attended training sessions from the Agricultural Training Institute, an attached agency of the Department of Agriculture, and the provincial agriculture office. Their studies convinced them to create a farm school, a relatively new concept being pushed by the Department of Tourism.

On June 15, 2017, the group opened Villaconzillo Farm



LIVES TRANSFORMED The farm school has given residents of Barangay Villaconzillo alternative sources of income.—PHOTO COURTESY OF DEPARTMENT OF TOURISM-EASTERN VISAYAS

School, offering agriculture-related programs and courses on agricultural production, organic farming and horticulture.

More than 1,000 people have so far undergone on-the-job training in the school, which is accredited by both the Commission on Higher Education and the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority. Most of them are students of Visayas State University, considered one of the country's leading agricultural schools, which is based in Baybay City, Leyte.

The school embarked on another endeavor, farm-to-table restaurant, where customers pick from among the vegetables planted in the farm for cooking. The food is delivered on their table in less than an hour.

"What's good about our products is they are all naturally grown. We don't use any fertilizers or chemicals. They can eat them fresh," Aborita said.

"Our guests are enjoying their visit here because they themselves harvest the fruits and vegetables that they want to eat. They can also catch tilapia from our own pond," Aborita said.

Farm tour

On ordinary days, more than 100 people visit Villaconzoilo Farm. An entrance fee of P100 is collected for adults and P50 for children and students.

A guide leads visitors around the farm and teaches them how to plant vegetables properly.

Last December, the group opened a swimming pool using spring water from the nearby Mt. Amandiwing, the highest peak in Eastern Visayas.

Aborita estimated that the association's assets were now worth millions of pesos—an exceptional leap from its initial capital of P1,800 a decade ago.

Members are likewise reaping the benefits of success. Al-

most all families are no longer availing themselves of state subsidies through the Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program, the government's antipoverty initiative.

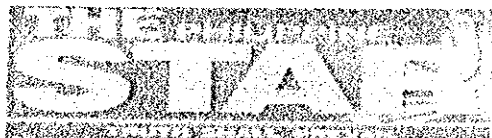
"It's really a big help to us, for my family. We could now buy things that we only wished for in the past," said Diosdado Lego, 54, who has seven children. He now earns at least P25,000 a month.

The association has employed 28 workers—half of them as regulars—who are also children of members.

Aborita said he did not expect that what started as a simple desire to put food on their table would become this big.

Now, he wanted Villaconzoilo to become the center of agri-tourism in Eastern Visayas so the next generation would no longer seek opportunities outside the village.

"That is my dream," he said. INQ *AM AIF*



Duterte orders distribution of gov't lands in Negros

By CHRISTINA MENDEZ

President Duterte directed the Department of Agrarian Reform (DAR) to distribute government-owned lands, including those in the mountain areas, to entitled beneficiaries.

Duterte made the commitment after he led the ceremonial distribution of 3,423 Certificates of Land Ownership Award (CLOAs) to representatives of 2,495 beneficiaries in Barangay Kauswagan in Sagay City on Friday.

Duterte vowed to speed up the allocation of lands in the remaining three years of his term. He said, however, that he would prioritize the distribution of state properties to agrarian reform beneficiaries.

"I still have three more years. I will give everything to the people, especially lands owned by the government which are not being utilized. I already ordered (DAR Secretary John) Castricones to give the land to the people," the President said.

Duterte invoked the implementation of the Comprehen-

sive Agrarian Reform Program (CARP).

He lamented that the government is met with many challenges in the distribution of lands, especially when occupants refuse to give them up or when some groups use the issue of land distribution for political interests.

Duterte said he wanted to seek peace with the communist New People's Army (NPA) rebels but it has been hard to strike a deal.

"I don't want to kill the NPAs. I don't even want to kill anybody, especially the Filipinos. Why can't we have discussions instead?" the President added.

To help the farmers, Duterte said he already tasked Agriculture Secretary Emmanuel Piñol to ensure that the assistance would reach the countryside.

The President reiterated his firm commitment to alleviate the lives of the poor. "I want them to prosper, at least during my term," he said.

"I don't tell promises that I cannot keep. Once I said it to the public, I will honor my

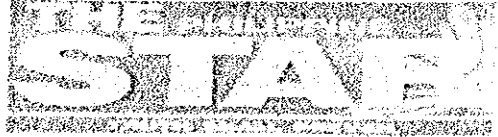
words till I die. I will do it," he stressed.

Duterte also promised the beneficiaries who received their CLOAs during the ceremonial distribution that they would also receive fertilizer and support services.

He also vowed to give each of them cellular phones so they could report their complaints if these promises are not fulfilled.

According to DAR, a total of 485 of the beneficiaries who received their land titles have already been provided with essential support services from the agency, including credit facilitation and availment, capacity-development, trainings, provision of common service facilities, livelihood support, agri-extension services, lawyering and market linkages, among others.

The CLOAs that were distributed covered a total of 1,609 hectares acquired land situated in eight cities and 11 municipalities in Negros Occidental, one of the provinces in the Philippines with vast private agricultural lands.



43 Zambo Sur rebel returnees get P2.7-M aid

ZAMBOANGA CITY – At least 43 former New People's Army (NPA) rebels in Zamboanga del Sur have received livelihood and emergency assistance worth P2.7 million.

The rebel returnees each received P65,000 under the Enhanced Comprehensive Local Integration Program or E-CLIP during a ceremony held at the headquarters of the 53rd Infantry Battalion in Guipos town on Friday, Capt. Clint Antipala, public affairs officer of the Army's First Infantry Division, said.

The military said surrenderees who turned over their firearms also received remunerations ranging from P50,000 to P60,000.

The groundbreaking ceremony for a halfway house in Zamboanga del Sur that will serve as the venue for the rehabilitation and skills training of former NPA rebels was also held on Friday.

In Mountain Province, an NPA guerrilla identified only as Bonie surrendered in Barangay Poblacion, Sagada also on Friday.

Senior Inspector Carolina Lacuata, Cordillera police spokesperson, said they are assisting the surrenderee avail himself of government assistance.

– Roel Pareño, Raymund Catindig

COUNTERINSURGENCY TACTIC

SISON SLAMS GOV'T RED WITCH HUNT IN EUROPE

By Delfin T. Mallari Jr.
@dtmallarijriNQ

LUCENA CITY—Exiled Communist Party of the Philippines founder Jose Maria "Joma" Sison slammed what he said was an anticommunist witch hunt extended to Europe by the Duterte administration.

The administration, Sison said, was using its red-tagging strategy to paint Belgian and Philippine nongovernmental organizations as fronts of communist rebels.

"They are trying to use the European Union and the Belgian government to collaborate with them," Sison said in a statement.

No names

Sison issued the statement in reaction to a statement attributed to Brig. Gen. Antonio Parlade Jr. who was quoted as saying that the European Union and Belgium were investigating a report from the Philippine military warning financial institutions against un-

wittingly financing communist rebels in the Philippines.

Parlade, deputy Armed Forces chief for civil military operations, was quoted as confirming reports that the National Task Force to End Local Communist Armed Conflict, created last year, already met with officials of the European Union, European Parliament and the European Commission to request that Belgium and EU member countries stop giving aid to nongovernmental organizations in the Philippines. INQ 19

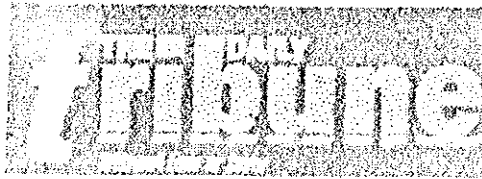
10 March 2019

MANILA BULLETIN
THE NATION'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

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• **NPA ambush**

QUEZON - Military and police forces clashed with the New People's Army (NPA), resulting in the wounding of three police corporals and two Army privates on Friday, the Quezon Police Provincial Office (QPPO), reported. Police Corporals Astovesa, Narciso, Gasagas, Privates Telan, and Bistora were wounded in a 20-minute firefight with NPA rebels in Sitio Little Baguio, Barangay Magsaysay in Infanta town at 8:08 a.m. The joint military and police Special Action Forces were conducting a security patrol, some two kilometers away from the Marcos Highway from the temporary base of SAF-PNP, when an ambush was staged by the rebels which resulted to the wounding of the said government forces. The rebels withdrew towards the southwest portion of the village with the military and police hot on their heels. (Danny Estacio)



Manhunt on versus extorting terrorists

Lt. Col. Arnold Gasalatan, commander of 85th Infantry Battalion, said the retreating suspects brought with them an undetermined number of wounded and slain comrades

By Kathleen Mae Bulquerin

Government troops are in hot pursuit of a band of communist terrorists who had reportedly resorted to extortion and other criminal activities to support and strengthen their movement in Lopez, Quezon.

The suspects, who belong to New People's Army (NPA) sub-regional military area 4-B, engaged the soldiers in a gun battle Friday morning in Barangay Villanacab before fleeing in different directions.

Lt. Col. Arnold Gasalatan, commander of 85th Infantry Battalion, said the retreating

suspects brought with them an undetermined number of wounded and slain comrades.

Gasalatan said the troops were conducting combat operation in the area when they received reports that the terrorists were extorting money and forcibly grabbing food and other supplies from residents of Barangay Villanacab and other nearby areas.

This prompted the government soldiers to proceed to the area that resulted in a firefight between them and the terrorists.

Brig. Gen. Elias Escarocha, commander of the 201st Infantry Brigade, for his part,

said the encounter effectively scuttled the initial plan of the terrorists to conduct atrocities in the area.

Meanwhile, the Philippine Marine Corps Foundation, a group dedicated to helping Marines who were wounded and killed during combat, was launched over the weekend.

Foundation chairman retired Lt. Gen. Rustico Guerrero, said they will provide opportunities for the professional enhancement, facility and capability development of the members of the marine corps.

"All of these programs are designed to help the Corps in performing its mandate to the country and the Filipino people," he added.

The launching of the foundation was one of the projects of the Philippine Marine Corps' Board of Advisers which was first conceptualized last year.



Freedom fighters no more Members of the New People's Army are reportedly resorting to criminal activities like robbery extortion to sustain their movement.

Rebelde, hirap na sa bundok, sumuko

BONTOC, Mountain Province - Dahil sa hirap na pamumuhay sa bundok at patagu-tago tuwing may military operations, nagpasya na lamang na sumuko sa pamahalaan ang isang kaanib ng New People's Army (NPA), sa Sagada, Mt. Province, kamakailan.

Sa ulat na natanggap ni Police B/Gen. Rolando Nana, regional director ng Police Regional Office-Cordillera, mula sa Mountain Province Provincial Police Office, ang nasabing rebelde ay kinilala lamang sa alyas na "Bony", 28, na tubong Sadanga, Mt. Province, para na rin sa kanyang seguridad.

Inamin ng dating rebelde na pumasok siya sa Kilusang Larangang

Guerilla (KLG), Nona Del Rosario Command sa pag-aakalang makatutulong ito sa kahirapan, noong Setyembre 2018.

Ayon kay Nana, sumurender ang dating rebelde sa mga tauhan ng Mountain Province, Regional Intelligence personnel, Provincial Mobile Force Company, Philippine Army at Bontoc Municipal Police Station sa Poblacion, Sagada, nitong Marso 5.

Dinala muna siya sa Provincial Social Welfare and Development Office (PSWDO) para sa assessment at proseso sa kanyang initial assistance at livelihood program na ipagkakaloob ng gobyerno.

5 **Rizaldy Comanda**



NPA todas, Army sugatan sa bakbakan

Patay ang isang pinagluhinalaang miyembro ng mga rebeldeng New People's Army (NPA) habang isa namang sundalo ang nasugatan matapos ang bakbakan sa pagitan ng magkabilang panig sa Brgy. Gangao, Baleno, Masbate nitong Sabado ng umaga.

Ayon kay Captain Joash Pranis, Spokesman ng Army's 9th Infantry Division (ID), kasalukuyang nagsasagawa ng combat operation ang tropa ng 2nd Infantry Battalion at 1st Masbate Mobile Force Company nang makasagupa ng grupo ng mga teroristang NPA rebels.

Ang palitan ng putok ay tumagal ng dalawang oras na kinasugat ng isang sundalo habang isa sa mga rebelde ang napatay na inaalam pa ang pagkakakilanlan.

Narekober sa encounter site ang isang M-16 rifle, isang molotov, tatlong rifle grenades, dalawang cartridge ng M203 grenade launcher at mga subersibong dokumento.

Kaugnay nito, nakasagupa rin ng tropa ng Army's 85th Infantry Battalion ang naturang grupo ng mga rebelde sa Brgy. Villanacaob, Lopez, Quezon bandang alas-3:05 ng hapon.

Sinabi ni Captain Jay Patrick Retumban, tugapagsalita ng Army's 2nd ID ang palitan ng putok ay tumagal ng sampung minuto hanggang sa magsitakas ang mga rebelde, hibat ang mga sugatan sa kanilang hanay-Jay Cantos.

INQUIRER

CATHEDRAL BACK TO LIFE, BUT JOLO FOLK STILL IN PAIN

By Edwin O. Fernandez
@inqmindanao

COTABATO—Cries of pain broke the sad melodies of prayers sung as hymns at the Jolo Cathedral on Saturday, where at least 24 people were killed and hundreds wounded in a terror attack in January.

The cathedral commemorated the 40th day of the attack in a community prayer for those who died.

"Pain is still deep, sorrow is still paralyzing," said Fr. Romeo Saniel, OMI, Jolo vicariate administrator, during homily.

"But letting go is a grace of God as we remember the martyrs who died inside the cathedral," Saniel said.

Parishioners lit candles and offered flowers at the spot where a friend or a relative died in one of two explosions that hit the church during Sunday Mass.

Tightly guarded

It was the first time since the bombings that a community prayer was held inside the cathedral.

Soldiers stood guard outside and inside the cathedral as Mass was celebrated.

Saniel offered prayers for at least 112 people injured in the blasts. Many of them are still in hospitals, he said.

Fr. Romeo Saniel, OMI
Jolo vicariate administrator

In a joint statement issued shortly after the terror attack, then Jolo Bishop Angelito Lampon, OMI, DD, and then Cotabato Archbishop Orlando Cardinal Quevedo, OMI, DD, described the attack as "the most heinous desecration of a sacred place, on a sacred day and at a sacred moment of worship."

"It is truly a satanic act that all sacred religions must condemn," the two prelates said.

Saniel appeared to be hopeful, though, that life would return to normal in the cathedral.

Original design

He said the rebuilding of the cathedral, with a new design, would soon start with architect Marcos de Guzman Jr. leading the work with Cotabato City-based architect Rebecca Hagad.

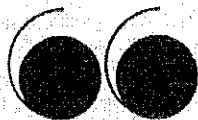
De Guzman's father and namesake designed the cathedral when it was built in 1964.

The military said the attacks were carried out by Indonesian suicide bombers.

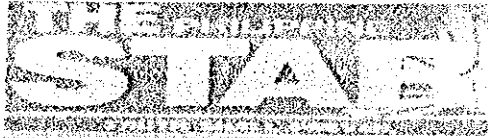
The suspects, a man and woman, wrapped themselves with bombs which were set off minutes apart in the middle of the place of worship and just outside the main entrance, according to the military.

An international monitor said the Islamic State had claimed responsibility.

Military operations were still continuing in the mountains of Jolo and nearby islands against Abu Sayyaf, which the government said had helped the foreign bombers carry out the bloodiest attack on the cathedral.



Letting go
is a grace of
God



AFP pounds Abu Sayyaf lairs in Sulu

The Philippine Air Force (PAF) launched air strikes targeting Abu Sayyaf lairs in Sulu yesterday as the military continued its offensive.

On Friday, security forces of the Joint Task Force

Sulu (JTFS) bombarded an area in the hinterlands of Patikul, where around 200 Abu Sayyaf bandits led by Radullan Sahiron and Hajan Sawadjaan were believed holed out.

"As of 6:40 a.m. yesterday, the PAF conducted bomb runs... in Sitios Agas-Agas and Limasan in Barangay Kabbun Takas, Patikul," Brig. Gen. Divino Rey Pabayo Jr., JTFS commander,

said.

The assault operations were conducted after the bandits, who were reportedly plotting fresh terror attacks, were monitored in the area.

Pabayo said no casualties

have so far been reported, noting that clearing operations are ongoing.

Col. Gerry Besana, spokesman for the Western Command (Westcom), said there would be no letup in

military offensives.

Lt. Gen. Arnel dela Vega, Westcom commander, appealed to the public for prayers for the safety of government troopers.

- Jaime Laude

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10 March 2019

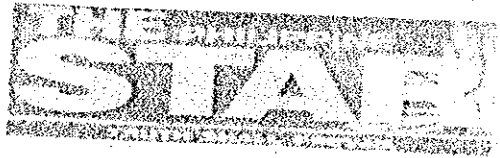
The Manila Times

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ASG MEMBER KILLED IN SULU CLASH

A MEMBER of the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) was killed in a clash with government troops in Talipao, Sulu on Saturday morning. A report from authorities said the 2nd Special Force Battalion engaged an escaping Abu Sayyad subgroup, led by Jaber Susukan, to a 20-minute gun battle in Barangay Upper Blinuang at around 6:50 a.m. One bandit was killed. The battalion was part of the blocking force of the Joint Task Force Sulu in Patikul town to hunt down ASG members.

ROY D.R. NARRA



Maute drug suspect, 2 high-value targets slain

By JOHN UNSON and RAMON EFREN LAZARO

Another drug trafficker with alleged links to Maute militants was killed in a police operation in Lanao del Sur on Friday.

Police said two other large-scale drug dealers were slain in a drug bust in Nueva Ecija on Thursday night.

The Lanao del Sur police said Caharodin Abocadama resisted arrest and fired at law enforcers in Barangay Banday, Malabang.

Senior Superintendent Madzgani Mukaram, provincial police director, said the

operation was carried out with the help of local officials and villagers who provided information on Abocadama's location.

The fatality reportedly remitted the proceeds of his drug deals to Owaida Marohombsar, also known as Abu Dar, the new leader of the Maute group.

On Wednesday, Mamintal

Manan, who also allegedly helped fund the operations of Maute terrorists through drug trafficking, was killed in an alleged shootout with police officers in a drug sting in Barangay Pugaan, Ditsaan Raman.

In Nueva Ecija, police said Fernando Lopez, alias Intsik, and George Niño Casipe shot it out with police officers in Barangay Abar First, San Jose City.

Police said sachets of shabu and the guns used by the slain suspects were recovered.

Superintendent Heryl Bru-

no, city police chief, said the fatalities were with a drug ring operating in Central Luzon and Metro Manila.

In Sultan Kudarat, businessman Ricky Santillan was apprehended at his residence in Barangay Sallao, Esperanza yesterday for illegal drugs and possession of an unlicensed gun.

The arrest was based on a warrant issued by Judge Jose Edgar Sinangote.

The suspect reportedly yielded sachets of shabu and an unlicensed gun.

- With Raymund Catindig

10 March 2019

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• **Maute backer slain**

COTABATO CITY - A murder suspect allegedly sharing proceeds of his drug trafficking activities with the Maute terror group was slain in a recent law enforcement operation in Lanao del Sur, police said Friday. The fatality was identified as Mamintal Manan of Barangay Pugaan in Ditsaan Ramain, a farming town the first district of Lanao del Sur. Provincial police operatives trying to entrap Manan were forced to return fire when he fired at them first with a KG9 machine pistol while evading arrest in the vicinity of his residence, an initial investigation showed. The shootout happened last Wednesday but Chief Supt. Graciano Mijares, regional police director for the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region, announced Manan's death after two days for their units in Lanao del Sur to prepare for any possible retaliation by his cohorts, who are still at large. (All G. Macabatang)

EU to train MILF officials in public administration

By ALI G. MACABALANG

COTABATO CITY - The European Union (EU) is set to train Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) officials working in the Bangsamoro Transition Authority (BTA) of the just-created Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM) to make them effective administrators.

Initially, 41 middle executives from the MILF will be trained on public policy, governance and management by the Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies (CPCS), and the Bangsamoro Leadership and Management Institute (BLMI) "starting this summer," an EU statement furnished Friday to the Manila Bulletin said.

"Out of the 41 (prospected trainees), six are members of the MILF central committee," said Thelma Gecolea of the EU communications group.

"It is expected that the middle managers will be the gatekeepers for the BTA members and therefore will play a crucial role in providing technical support to

the BTA members," Gecolea said.

She said the EU has set a consultation among the CPCS, the BLMI and the MILF Peace Implementation Panel (PIP) to "align the design, content and timeline of the activities including the training program."

"Part of the technical support is a seven-day study tour to a country or countries where peace processes allowed for revolutionary organization's transition to political organization," the EU statement said.

The CPCS is a Cambodian non-government organization (NGO) working in the field of peace building and conflict transformation in Asia while the BLMI is a product of the Mindanao process and is run by MILF to train its members to get adept with the challenges of transitioning from an armed revolutionary movement to the formal political arena.

The MILF's PIP, chaired by front second Vice Chair Mohagher Iqbal, is mandated to ensure efficient implementation of peace accords signed the government, especially the 2014 Comprehensive Agreement on Bangsamoro

(CAB). CAB is the main basis of RA 11054 enacted in July last year for the creation of BARMM.

EU Ambassador Franz Jessen said the current transition is "definitely critical" but "presents an opportunity for all actors to work in a harmonious spirit to lay down a solid foundation for political, economic and social stability in Mindanao."

"The EU remains committed to support the need for a better future for Bangsamoro and its people - the aspirations and visions for the future of every well-meaning citizen, not only of Bangsamoro but outside of Bangsamoro," Jessen said.

He added: "While there will be challenges along the way, there is so much hope and dynamism in the Bangsamoro region. This is extremely important because any peace process cannot be successful, if not supported by economic success, growing prosperity and inclusive growth."

The EU is one of foreign entities long involved in the peace process between the MILF and the Philippine government.

Officials of the Japanese International Cooperation Agency (JICA) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), both involved also in the peace process, sounded off commitments last week for separate assistance to the BTA-BARMM in other aspects of governance, including local revenue generation.

On Jan. 22, President Duterte constituted the 80-member BTA, naming MILF Chair Murad Ebrahim as interim Chief Minister. Ebrahim consequently initially named 10 ministries and their ministers.

Last March 4, Monday, Ebrahim led in Cotabato City the BARMM's first flag-raising ceremony, and appealed for public support in his three-year transitional administration that will end in June 2022 upon election of the first elected BARMM ministers. 14

In past media interviews, Ebrahim said he would not seek election in the new regional autonomy to remain as figure head of MILF. The MILF has created its own political party to field candidates in the 2022 elections and beyond.

41 MILF, sasanayin ng EU sa public administration

Nakatakdang sanayin ng European Union (EU) ang Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) officials na naglilingkod sa Bangsamoro Transition Authority (BTA) ng kabuuo lamang na Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM), upang maging epektibong administrators.

Nasa 41 middle executives mula sa MILF ang sasanayin sa public policy, governance at management ng Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies (CPCS), at Bangsamoro Leadership and Management Institute (BLMI) "starting this summer," base pahayag ng EU.

"Out of the 41 (prospected trainees), six are members of the MILF central committee," pahayag ni Thelma Gecolea, ng EU communications group.

"It is expected that the middle

managers will be the gatekeepers for the BTA members and therefore will play a crucial role in providing technical support to the BTA members," ayon kay Gecolea.

Sinabi niya na ang EU ay nagtakda ng konsultasyon sa CPCS, BLMI at MILF Peace Implementation Panel (PIP) upang "align the design, content and timeline of the activities including the training program."

"Part of the technical support is a seven-day study tour to a country or countries where peace processes allowed for revolutionary organization's transition to political organization," base sa pahayag ng EU.

Ayon kay EU Ambassador Franz Jessen, ang transition ay "definitely critical" ngunit "presents an opportunity

for all actors to work in a harmonious spirit to lay down a solid foundation for political, economic and social stability in Mindanao."

"The EU remains committed to support the need for a better future for Bangsamoro and its people- the aspirations and visions for the future of every well-meaning citizen, not only of Bangsamoro but outside of Bangsamoro," sabini Jessen.

Idinagdag niya na, "While there will be challenges along the way, there is so much hope and dynamism in the Bangsamoro region. This is extremely important because any peace process cannot be successful, if not supported by economic success, growing prosperity and inclusive growth."

3 **All G. Macabalang**

Anak ng MILF kumander, itinumba

Dead-on-the-spot ang anak ng isang kumander ng Moro Islamic Liberation Front o MILF matapos na pagbabarilin ng armadong riding-in-tandem habang sakay ng motorsiklo nito sa Purok San Isidro, Brgy. New Cebu, Lambayong sa lalawigan ng Sultan Kudarat, kamakalawa.

Sanhi ng mga tama ng bala ng baril sa iba't-ibang bahagi ng katawan, nasawi noon din ang biktimang si Norman Sanday alyas "Dong", nasa hustong gulang, at anak ni MILF 106 Base Command Commander Guevarra, matapos pagbabarilin ng mga suspek dakong alas-8:00 ng umaga habang sakay ng kanyang motorsiklo sa naturang lugar.

Narekober ng mga pulis sa crime scene ang tatlong basyo ng kalibre 45 pistol.

Batay sa imbestigasyon ng mga otoridad, posibleng personal grudge ang motibo sa pamamaslang sa biktima. -*Rhoderick Benez*

MAHATHIR TO MURAD: Progress realizable in absence of war

MALAYSIAN Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad on Friday met a Filipino Muslim rebel leader who has become a regional governor under a Malaysian-brokered peace deal, telling him while it's easier to shoot and kill than to develop a nation, prosperity can only happen in the absence of war.

Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) Chairman Murad Ebrahim said Mahathir pledged during their meeting in Manila that his country would help ensure the success of the peace accord that transformed him and other rebel commanders last month into administrators of a conflict-racked Muslim autonomous region in southern Philippines.

Mahathir met Murad on the last day of his visit to Manila, where he held talks with President Rodrigo Duterte on a wide range of issues, including combating Islamic State-linked terrorists in Mindanao.

"Prime Minister Mahathir told him it's easy to shoot and kill, but it's difficult to develop. Chairman Murad said 'Yes, that is the next level of our struggle, how to develop and transform our revolutionary organization,'" said Nabil Tan, a Philippine official who joined the meeting.

Murad said Mahathir told him, "If there is peace, then everything will come ... He really encouraged us."

"I explained to him our priorities, the challenges. Part of the challenges is our transformation from revolutionaries to this governance. We want to have programs that will benefit the people," Murad told The Associated Press.

Under the peace deal brokered by Malaysia, Murad's group gave up its goal of a separate Muslim state in exchange for broader autonomy.

The 40,000 fighters and at least 7,000 firearms that Murad's group has declared are to be demobilized starting this year in three phases depending on progress in the agreement's enforcement.

The first huge batch of about 12,000 guerrillas and their firearms would be demobilized in two to three months, Murad said.

His people, including fierce



Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad

Muslim commanders facing criminal cases for past attacks, were sworn in last month to comprise 41 of 80 regional administrators, who would lead a transition government for the five-province region called Bangsamoro until regular leaders are elected in 2022.

Duterte picked his representatives, along with Muslim rebels from another group, to fill the rest of the transition authority, which will also act as a regional parliament.

The Philippine and Western governments see effective Muslim autonomy as an antidote to nearly half a century of Muslim secessionist violence, which the Islamic State group could exploit to gain a foothold in the region. An annual grant, which could reach more than \$1-billion, is to be set aside to bolster development in a region that has little infrastructure and is deeply scarred by decades of fighting.

Smaller but more violent groups aligned with the Islamic State group like the Abu Sayyaf still threaten the region.

A Malaysia-led team of 28 international peace monitors will remain in Mindanao until all Muslim guerrillas have demobilized under the peace deal, Malaysian officials said.

The European Union, Japan and Brunei Darussalam have contributed personnel to the peacekeeping contingent, which has been credited for enforcing a years-long ceasefire and helping ease major fighting in the past. A2 AP

BARMM tourism potential

"Sulu has unspoiled beaches with pristine waters and white sands which if developed properly could compete with or provide an alternative to Boracay."

The territories of the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM) are blessed with natural resources which are potential mother lode of tourist revenues. It is rich with heretofore untapped and unexplored assets which could augment the so-called seed money and whatever revenue dole outs the government will give to the brand-new regional government. Autonomy means self-governance with minimum interference and intervention from central authority and you cannot self-govern if you are dependent from national government for income and expenditure.

On the heels of the signing of the 1996 Peace Pact with the Moro National Liberation Front, the mother of all rebel movements including the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) now governing the BARMM, I was tasked to draw up a long-term tourism plan for Morolandia. I was then undersecretary for Tourism Promotion. I posthaste organized a Department of Tourism (DoT) Team of experts who conducted researches, including visits and evaluation of the areas. We came out with a tome of documents, including detailed action plans, timelines, drafts and recommendations which we submitted to the Office of the President.

To our dismay it was returned to us after a few months with the now familiar red-linked handwriting marginal note of President Ramos that reads "CSW" for complete staff work or whatever that means. Now, the product of our labor is probably gathering dusts in the archives of DoT.

This comes to mind as the BARMM "fastens its belt" to tread



SOUTHERN VOICES
Macabangkit B. Lanto

and unitary, sans template to guide them.

I am unable to recollect now most of the contents of our report but foremost among them were the identification, prioritization and development of target probable tourist destinations.

In Lanao del Sur, for instance, we have proposed the development of Koto Padangkarbala, at the town of Bayang where one of the fiercest battles of resistance of Maranaws to American military campaign took place resulting in the death of all 700 Moro defenders of the fort, including women who refused to leave their husbands. A marker likewise to be constructed in memoriam to the bravery and heroism of Datu Amalpapak of Dansalan (now Marawi) who likewise was martyred battling the Americans. This will stoke hopefully the spirit of patriotism among young Maranaws at the same time attracts tourists. We planned likewise to market the serene and cool breeze of mystical and picturesque ancient Lake Lanao as a haven for aqua sports like leisure windsurfing, water skiing and boating. A portion of ground zero in Marawi should be

on an unfamiliar grounds (from the battlefields to bureaucracy, so says Ohlef Minister Murad Ebrahim) and starts the horrendous task of governing a new regional government structure, a cross-bred parliamentary

preserved *a la* Hiroshima and Nagasaki, a magnet surely for domestic and foreign tourists.

In Cotabato City, a cave at the foot of Colina Hill presently marketed for tourists has been proposed for improvement, including the yearly commemoration of the coming of Shariff Kabunsuan, highlighted by a fluvial parade at the Polangi River and construction of marker for legendary Sultan Kudarat. Camp Darapanan has the prospect of attracting visitors being the former headquarters of the MILF.

Sulu has unspoiled beaches with pristine waters and white sands which if developed properly could compete with or provide an alternative to Boracay (I remember distinctly that large sum of money was released by DoT to the Autonomous government for the tourism development of these areas). Likewise, there was an initial development of the caves on the mountains of Jolo which played important role in the history of the place like Bud Dajo and Bud Bagsak. These enclaves were the scenes of the bloodiest battle between Moro Tausugs and American soldiers.

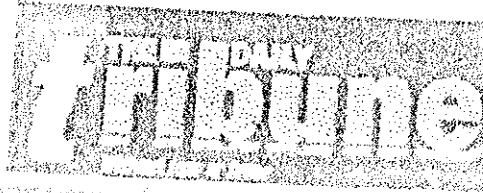
The list is endless. Basilan, Tawi-Tawi and other areas have potential tourist spots waiting to be discovered and developed.

There's a robust and fertile market out there for middle eastern tourists just waiting to spend their petrodollars for destinations sensitive to Muslim culture, *halal* foods and other peculiar religious mores. 4

Peace dividends are bottomless.

The purpose of this piece is nothing but to open the eyes of the BARMM administrators on the smorgasbord of opportunities before them that could help them carry out their mandate. Their three-year term is concededly too short to accomplish anything of substantial significance.

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Women of substance?

Talks are rife that the reason the Aquino administration refused to initiate moves to reclaim Sabah during its time was because Malaysia offered 12 billion Malaysian ringgit (around P153 billion) for the exclusion of Sabah from the then proposed Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao.

Two former Princeton University students from the Philippines, both women, have been placed on the spotlight for the wrong reasons as the nation observed International Women's Day the other day.

One has been riding high on reportedly false credentials while the other is out on bail for various offenses that include cyber libel.

The educational background of senatorial aspirant and Ilocos Norte Gov. Imee Marcos continues to be discussed following statements from Princeton and the University of the Philippines (UP) College of Law that she did not earn degrees there.

Maria Ressa, a journalist and author best known for co-founding Rappler and spending nearly two decades working as a lead investigative reporter in Southeast Asia for CNN, was arrested for cyber libel amid accusations of various instances of falsified news and corporate tax evasion.

Imee, the eldest child of former President Ferdinand Marcos and First Lady Imelda Marcos enrolled in Princeton in 1973, taking up a variety of courses in religion and politics but

never pursued a major. Wikipedia says she withdrew from Princeton in 1976, returned in 1977 and then withdrew for the last time in 1979 without receiving a degree.

Attending an Ivy League school and not being able to graduate there would have been perfectly alright knowing the high standards set by the American institution. What perhaps Marcos bashers can't take is Imee claiming in numerous venues, campaign leaflets and her official website that she had graduated from the prestigious university. The resulting media uproar brought up old articles and documents to show that the Marcos sibling did not earn a degree as she claims.

Our crowdsourcing efforts likewise revealed records confirming what was obvious — Imee did not finish her Princeton studies. Apparently because she was not able to earn a degree, it follows that she couldn't have earned a law degree from UP. When the Dillman school held its recognition ceremonies in 1983, it was supposedly covered live by television at the Meralco theater. The rites, which critics say were staged-managed to please the powers-that-

he at that time, showed Imee graduating with *magna cum laude* honors. Documents, however, reveal Imee's name never appeared on the list of approved graduates. They pointed out that she never really graduated from said school.

What was so surprising, according to our source, and to the credit of the late strongman, Marcos never even lifted a finger for UP to give her a diploma despite the intimidation that allegedly characterized his regime.

□ □ □

Having had to post bail six times in two months, according to Ressa, "is not regular." Five other counts of tax evasion have been filed against her which made her believe she is getting "special treatment" from the government.

JV says he has to stand by his principles despite a possible showdown with his half-brother Jinggoy Estrada who is out on bail on charges of plunder and graft in connection with the pork barrel scam.

Her tax evasion cases are common knowledge now that she had been haled to court. What probably few people know is the scandalous mess she left in ABS-



Manny Angeles

CBN where she was once the senior vice president. A broadcast insider told us that when she was given the free hand to overhaul the news network, she fired 35 people which many believed was just part of her efforts to

streamline the network. The move proved to be controversial to many of the longtime broadcasters at ABS-CBN. What really stirred the hornets' nest, according to our source, was her alleged lesbian affair with a producer while Maria was in a long-time relationship with another woman.

There she was, the insider said, a supposedly a woman of principles who turns down bribes, cheating on her longtime partner. The same source said the producer provided Maria the needed support to continue the overhaul she started. Her relationship became so open that it has caused quite a stir in the newsroom. The producer, with Maria backing her, acted like she owned the newsroom to the chagrin of the more veteran newscasters. Did the two live happily ever after? Maybe we could ask ABS-CBN. After all, they are, as their slogan goes, in the service of the Filipino.

□ □ □

TITLE-TATTLES - Talks are rife that the reason the Aquino administration refused to initiate moves to reclaim Sabah during its time was because Malaysia offered 12 billion Malaysian ringgit (around P153 billion) for the exclusion of

Sabah from the then proposed Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao. The Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) of Nur Misuari, it is claimed, was earlier given the offer but it was turned down by the secessionist rebel group. It is this refusal, the source told the *Daily Tribune* that prompted Malaysia to close the MNLF training camp and stop all support they have been providing the MNLF. To undermine Misuari's leadership, Malaysia, the same source said, made a deal with the Aquino administration to create a so-called council to oust Misuari as chairman of the MNLF. The plan boomeranged when the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, with its 57-strong membership, refused to recognize the council. Talk about bullying and reelectionist Sen. JV Ejercito has a thing or two to say about the issue. He knows whereof he speaks, having admittedly been bullied often enough not by his classmates or friends but by his very own half-brother. "I'm often bullied and I often give way," was how JV, the son of former President and now Manila Mayor Joseph Estrada by former actress Guia Gomez, described the situation in the family. This time, however, JV says he has to stand by his principles despite a possible showdown with his half-brother Jinggoy Estrada who is out on bail on charges of plunder and graft in connection with the pork barrel scam. Ejercito ran and won a Senate seat using "Estrada" in 2013 where he was listed as JV Ejercito Estrada in the ballot.

For comments, feedback and information, e-mail us at mannyangeles27@gmail.com