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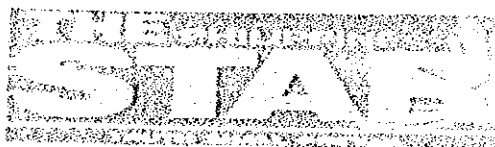
12 March 2019

Tuesday

TABLE OF CONTENTS

12 MARCH 2019

Weather Forecast- http://pagasa.dost.gov.ph/weather/daily-weather-forecast		
Page Nr.	Title	Source
NATIONAL NEWS		
1-3	Rody prods Congress: Pass 2019 nat'l budget	P Star-1
4-5	Provinces start to reel from El Nino	PDI-A1
AFP/ SECURITY RELATED NEWS		
6	Navy: nowhere to put new assets	PDI-A9
7	Military conducts community dialogues in Surigao conflict areas	M Bulletin-13
8	Workers stage protest vs red-tagging	P Star-5
9	Cop killed, another hurt in NPA ambush	P Star-12
10	Rebels kill cop in ambush, wound female officer	PDI-A9
11-12	Reds also source funds from Fil-Ams in US, Canada-ex-rebels	M Bulletin-1
13	Troops scuttle NPA attack in Agusan	M Bulletin-13
14	Troops repulse rebels	Tempo-4
15	Suspected NPA rebels ambush police van	Tempo-4
16	Pulis todas, 1 pa sugatan sa NPA attack	Balita-5
17	Abu member wanted for 2001 kidnap falls	P Star-11
18	Miyembro ng Abu Sayyaf dakip sa Taguig	PM-2
19	ASG dawit sa mga pagkidnap, pagpatay huli ng NBI	Ngayon-3
20	5 BIFF men killed in air, ground strikes	P Star-12
21	2 BIFF men , soldier dead in Maguindanao assault	Malaya-B2
22	Airstrikes vs BIFF rebels mistakenly kill soldier	M Standard-A3
23	2 BIFF, 1 sundalo todas sa engkwentro	PM-2
24	Maguindanao airstrikes kill 2 terrorists, soldier	M Times-A7
25	Sultans insist there is normalcy in Marawi	M Times-A7
26	DSWD to continue facilitating release of financial aid to SAF 44 kin	M Standard-A3
EDITORIAL/ COMMENTARY		
27	Retort	P Star-6
28	All pensioners should be treated equally	P Star-7
29	Atrocities	P Star-7
30	Don't be deceived	P Star-7
31	Japan supports Mindanao peace process	PDI-A11
32-33	Scrap the MDT, VFA and EDCA	Malaya-B4
34	Kanya-kanyang pahayag	Ngayon-4
ONLINE NEWS		
35	Massive military operation launched vs. BIFF in Maguindanao	www.pna.gov.ph
36	Maguindanao resident hands over live explosives to Army	www.pna.gov.ph



Rody prods Congress: Pass 2019 nat'l budget

But he won't sign 'illegal' document

By PAOLO ROMERO AND ALEXIS ROMERO

With the Senate and House of Representatives digging in for further confrontation over this year's annual appropriation, President Duterte has warned that "everyone will suffer" if the government continues to operate on a reenacted budget.

Even as Duterte prodded Congress on the P3.7-trillion outlay, he also said he would not sign an "illegal document."

"We will have a slide in the GDP if we are going to reenact the budget. Everyone will suffer including our law enforcement," Duterte said during the awarding of outstanding female uniformed and civilian employees at Malacañang yesterday.

But he stressed, "I will not sign anything that will be an illegal document."

Senate President Vicente Sotto III also said yesterday he would not sign the enrolled copy of the General Appropriations Bill (GAB) ahead of

its transmittal to Duterte for enactment unless the House withdraws all the changes it made after the bicameral conference and submits the original version as ratified by Congress last Feb. 8.

Sotto and Senate Minority Leader Franklin Drilon in separate interviews reiterated that amending the GAB after the Senate and the House ratified it violated the Constitution as well as a provision in the Revised Penal Code on falsification of legislative documents.

"Let's revert back to what we (Congress) passed in the bicam, ratified by both Houses, send it to

Turn to Page 2

Rody prods From Page 1

us — we know what we passed — and I'm sure we can transmit the budget to the President in a matter of days. It's that simple," Sotto told reporters.

"It's simple. What was passed should be the enrolled copy (to be transmitted to Malacañang). It can't be touched," he said.

Sotto relayed his message through his partymates in the Nationalist People's Coalition in the House and through the "right hand person" of Speaker Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, whom he did not identify.

He said the possibility of the GAB being "archived" and the government running on a reenacted budget or the 2018 General Appropriations Act "is really looming now" if the House insists on its position.

Sen. Panfilo Lacson on Sunday warned the government may continue to run on a reenacted budget until August if the impasse is not resolved when Congress resumes session from the last week of May to early June.

Lacson had alleged the House made realignments of about P95 billion from the ratified GAB, of which P70 billion was "parked" at the Department of Public Works

and Highways (DPWH) central office apparently for future disbursements for projects to be identified by concerned congressmen.

Some House members, including Northern Samar Rep. Raul Daza and Zamboanga del Sur Rep. Aurora Cerilles, ran to senators and complained that their previous allocations for projects in their districts were reduced and transferred to other congressional districts.

Sotto said if the GAB is not passed, the Senate will push for the approval of a supplemental budget to fund projects not listed in the 2018 GAA.

Sotto and Drilon scoffed at Camarines Sur Rep. Rolando Andaya Jr.'s assertion that the chamber was simply itemizing lump sums created during the bicameral conference committee meetings on the GAB, and that the Senate also made their post-ratification changes. Andaya chairs the House appropriations committee.

Information obtained by senators from the Legislative Budget Research and Monitoring Office (LBRMO) showed the House did not just provide details for their projects but realigned appropriations.

"If they (House) think what they did was legal, then they should sign it (GAB) and just submit it us," Sotto said, even as he denied that senators also made realignments.

He said the realignments apparently adversely affected congressmen identified with ousted speaker Pantaleon Alvarez and former House majority leader Rodolfo Fariñas.

Drilon warned that failing to enact the GAB into law would negatively affect growth as government spending accounts for a quarter of the country's Gross Domestic Product.

Drilon proposed that upon resumption of Congress session on May 20, the two chambers recall their ratification of the GAB and reconvene the bicameral conference committee to rework the alleged revisions before approving them.

He said it does not matter if the GAB had already been printed as reported by the House, as there had been precedents such as the Cocco Levy Fund Bill that was vetoed by Duterte. Asked if he is sure about his proposal, Drilon said "that's the only remedy."

Senate's hidden pork

Turning the tables on the Senate, House leaders claimed senators have their own pork

barrel funds concealed in engineering districts but which are made to appear like congressional allocations.

"Funds for engineering districts will again balloon and congressmen will be made to look like the real owners of the funds. The truth is, it's the senators who placed the funds in congressional districts," Andaya said in Filipino. He was referring to the P75-billion post-bicam realignments by the Senate.

Andaya scored senators for reportedly vilifying congressmen about alleged insertions after they ratified the budget.

Of the P75 billion, the House disclosed "at least P25 billion was parked as additional fund for the senators' pet projects in the Department of Public Works and Highways."

"No details of the parked funds were contained in the bicam report," he said. "Members of Congress will again be at a loss how the parked funds of the senators found their way to the congressional engineering districts."

"We have no means of extrapolating the proponent senators for these projects since the Senate did not submit the individual names of the proponent per project," Andaya pointed out, insisting that senators come up with

detailed allocations, just like what House members did.

For his part, Rep. Anthony Bravo of party-list Coop-Natco said the bickering between the two legislative chambers could be rooted in Sen. Panfilo Lacson's long time animosity toward Speaker Arroyo.

"The way I look at it, in my own assessment, Senator Lacson is holding the budget hostage because of personal vendetta to our Speaker GMA. He has not said anything good about the Speaker, from the very start of her leadership as Speaker," he told reporters.

"I don't have any personal grudge or animosity with Senator Lacson. But in my own analysis, I think the agenda is clear: he doesn't want the Speaker to be successful in her leadership... and it's the budget (that suffers)," Bravo opined.

Still confident

Amid the squabble between the two chambers, Malacañang said it is hopeful that the government will not operate on a reenacted budget until August.

Presidential spokesman Salvador Panelo said the administration is optimistic that House and Senate leaders would settle their differences so the budget could be transmitted to the Office of the President.

"I'm sure they (lawmakers)

will be agreeing eventually on what to do. All of them are concerned about the welfare of the country," Panelo said at a press briefing yesterday.

"As we have said earlier on... if the budget is reenacted, we are prepared for that also... Many will be affected. Projects will be delayed," he added.

Asked what Malacañang would do to prevent a budget reenactment, Panelo replied: "Perhaps, if I will have my educated guess—the President will persuade (them) so that their (row) will be finished, if there is any."

"But knowing members of Congress, they always agree eventually," he added.

Panelo said Duterte would exercise his veto power "if he feels that indeed the budget to be given to him does not conform with the Constitution."

"He will examine the provisions of the budget. And if he feels it does not conform, he will do exactly what he has to do," the spokesman said.

Pressed if the President would ask lawmakers to do away with the last-minute amendments to the budget, Panelo said: "It's the President's call. But as far as I know, he'll just wait for the enrolled bill to be submitted to him."

— Delon Porcalla, Alexis Romero

PROVINCES START TO REEL FROM EL NIÑO

STORY BY THE INQUIRER STAFF

By the end of March, 22 provinces are likely to experience dry conditions, 41 would have a dry spell and nine would suffer from drought, according to the weather bureau.

A5

FROM A1

By the Inquirer Staff
@Team_Inquirer

Things will get worse before they get better, as the dry spell is expected to deepen across the country.

This early, the dry spell stemming from El Niño is already destroying crops, reducing water supplies and endangering the health of millions of Filipinos, according to officials.

Abnormally low rainfall in most parts of the country is expected this month, and dry spells and drought are due in the coming months until August, according to the Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration (Pagasa).

By the end of March, 22 provinces are likely to experience dry conditions, 41 likely to experience a dry spell, and nine to experience drought, Pagasa said.

In Zamboanga City, a state of calamity has been declared amid the drastically reduced water levels in rivers and the Pasonanca watershed.

"The city agriculture [office] also reported damage to crops, as well as ill effects on health of the city's constituents," Vice Mayor Cesar Iturralde said on Monday.

Early harvest

At Laoag City in Ilocos Norte province, farmers have started harvesting crops such as corn earlier than scheduled before these are laid to waste due to rising temperatures.

Some fishpond operators have also been harvesting tilapia to avoid fishkill.

Farmers have resorted to pumping water from the ground through shallow tube wells but acknowledge that the volume is not enough.

El Niño conditions are expected to last until May, according to Pagasa. The phenomenon is characterized by unusually warm sea surface temperatures in the cen-

tral and eastern equatorial Pacific.

Pagasa has said weak El Niño conditions are prevailing over the country since February, warning the public of warmer-than-average surface temperatures and a prolonged dry season in the months to come.

Climate outlook

In the March to August climate outlook presented on Feb. 20, Pagasa climate monitoring and prediction section chief Ana Liza Solis said that this month, only southern Mindanao and Surigao del Sur were likely to experience "near normal" rainfall, with the rest of the country to experience below normal rainfall.

Solis said that this month, 22 provinces were likely to receive

way below normal rainfall, 50 below normal, only eight near normal, and three above normal.

"Way below normal" means a reduction of more than 60 percent from average rainfall, while "below normal" means a 21- to 60-percent reduction.

Drought is declared after three consecutive months of way below normal rainfall conditions or five consecutive months of below normal rainfall.

Cotabato crop damage

Solis identified the possible areas to be hit by drought this month as the provinces of Ilocos Norte, Ilocos Sur, La Union, Occidental Mindoro, Palawan, Zamboanga del Sur, Zamboanga Sibugay, Maguindanao and Sulu.

Crops in hundreds of hectares of land in at least 10 villages in the town of Kabacan, Cotabato, are suffering from the effects of high temperatures, according to its mayor, Herlo Guzman.

Guzman placed the initial damage to rice and corn at P32.5 million in the villages of Aringay, Pisan, Bangilan, Dagupan, Magatos, Kayaga, Cuyapon, Banawag, Nangaan and Katiduan.

More than 500 hectares in these areas had become parched due to lack of rainfall since December last year, he said.

In Kidapawan City, Mayor Joseph A. Evangelista has ordered the City Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Office to intensify information and education campaign on grass fire.

Vast grasslands in the city have become dry due to intense temperatures, which also lowered the water level of Nuangan River.

Drop in crop harvest

In eastern Pangasinan, rice farmers expect a drop of up to 50 percent in their harvest due to lack of irrigation water and rainfall.

"The palay (unmilled rice) grains did not fully develop because of lack of water. Half of the grains we harvested are 'ipa' (empty)," Ponciano Onla said.

Despite rising temperatures, water in San Roque Dam in San Manuel town, Pangasinan, is sufficient for irrigation if El Niño hits the province, said Tom Valdez, vice president for corporate social responsibility of

San Roque Power Corp.

Despite the assurance from San Roque Dam officials, the provincial government continued to install tube wells.

The Ilocos Norte government will hold a water summit on March 15 to discuss mitigating measures during El Niño and mobilize immediate assistance for affected towns.

Magat Dam water

In Isabela, water in Magat Dam was still 10 meters above the 160-meter critical level in its catch basin on Sunday.

The dam supplies water to 85,000 ha of rice farms in Isabela, Quirino, Cagayan and Ifugao provinces, and provides water for power generation to the hydroelectric power plant.

On Sibuyan island, Romblon, the Cantingas River, which powers the island's hydroelectric plant, has receded from its normal level of 2.4 meters to 1.70 meters, over the last two weeks of February.

In Bulacan province, the water level in Angat Dam remained high as of Monday at 200.55 meters. Its low critical level is 170 meters.

Angat Dam is a major source of potable water for Metro Manila.

In Albay, the Provincial Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Office is conducting an inventory of areas vulnerable to El Niño.

Che Rebeta, Albay provincial agriculture office chief, said a team of farm technicians was still validating report that the dry spell was starting to affect the towns of Oas and Polangui.

"Unlike Catanduanes and Masbate, the province [of Albay] would only experience moderate dry spell in the months of March and April and drought by May to June," Rebeta said.

--REPORTS FROM JAYMEE T. GAMIL, JULIE ALIPALA, WILLAMOR MAGBANUA, YOLANDA SOTELO, GABRIEL CARDINOZA, LEILANIE ADRIANO, VILLAMOR VISAYA JR., CARMELA REYES-ESTROPE AND MAR S. ARGUELLES INQ

12

March 2019

Page:

A9

LACK OF FACILITY

**NAVY: NOWHERE
TO PUT
NEW ASSETS****By Jeannette I. Andrade**
@jiandradeINQ

While the Philippine Navy is in an acquisition spree of modern sea assets, it has admittedly overlooked the basic requirement of where to put them.

In an interview aired on Monday over radio station dwDD, Navy flag officer in command Vice Adm. Robert Empedrad said the Navy expected the delivery of two missile-armed frigates in 2020 and 2021, and the arrival within the year of two antisubmarine AgustaWestland "Wildcat" AW-159 helicopters equipped with torpedoes and missiles, and a corvette from South Korea.

Empedrad admitted that the Philippine Navy was currently faced with the challenge of the absence of facilities to house newly acquired sea assets and materiel, particularly missiles.

"When we acquired these capabilities, we failed to address, to look into the attendant requirements," he said, adding that it was a lesson for the Navy.

The Navy has no docking facility for its bigger vessels as well as hangars for its helicopters. INQ A9

C

Military conducts community dialogues in Surigao conflict areas

By MIKE U. CRISMUNDO

TAGBINA, Surigao del Sur — The Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) will continue to conduct dialogues in conflict-affected areas to win the hearts and minds of far-flung villagers in the hinterlands of Surigao del Sur.

Second Lt. Maricris C. Capilitan, Civil Military Operation Officer (CMO) of the Army's 75th Infantry (Marauder) Battalion (75th IB) told The Manila Bulletin on Monday that the units' Community Support Program (CSP) spearheaded the community dialogue in far-flung villages of Barangay Sta. Juana, in Tagbina town, Surigao del Sur last week.

Close to 200 residents participated in the peace dialogue where government programs were laid down by local government units (LGUs) and government agencies.

The "Dialogue for Peace and Development" (DPD) was held at Sta. Juana Gymnasium, Tagbina town of that same province. Barangay Sta. Juana was a recipient of the Peace and Development Zone (PDZ) program in Caraga region.

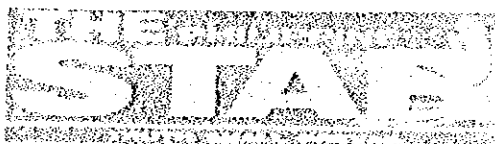
"PDZ will promote durable peace by addressing the root causes of conflict through reconciliation, institution building, and social, political, and economic transformation particularly in Conflict Affected Areas (ConAAs)," said 75th IB commander Lt. Col. Jaime R. Datuin, who spearheaded the activity.

Among the key personalities present

during the occasion were Tagbina town Mayor Generoso Naraiso, Regional Director Dr. Florencio Sunico Jr. of Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA), Provincial Director Rey Cueva, also of TESDA in Surigao del Sur and other local officials, Department of Agriculture (DA), Department of Trade and Industry (DTI), Business Permit Licensing Office (BPLO), Municipal Treasurer's Office (MTO) and Municipal Environment and Natural Resources Office (MENRO).

During the community dialogue, barangay officials and concerned residents raised issues and concerns with the respective government agencies.

Mayor Naraiso said the efforts of the government to reach the grassroots through dialogues only shows its sincerity in facilitating the peace and development concerns of affected communities. "If there is no peace, there is no development," he added.



Workers stage protest vs red-tagging

By MAYEN JAYMALIN

Government employees and militant workers yesterday staged a rally in front of the Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE) main office in Intramuros, Manila to protest the alleged attempt of the military to link trade unions to communist rebels.

Ferdinand Gaité, president of the Confederation for Unity, Recognition and Advancement of Government Employees (COURAGE), said they have received information that some of their leaders and members have been identified by the National Intelligence Coordinating Agency (NICA) as communist fronts and members.

"This ploy utilizing the military and intelligence groups have long been a practice to quell legitimate dissent. Since the ruling administration cannot and will not address the genuine problems of injustice and inequity, it will use deceit and repression to silence the workers," Gaité said.

Gaité said the president of the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) Employees Association of the Philippines was

one of those listed in the NICA report as a communist party member.

Since Duterte assumed the presidency, Gaité said, there have been three illegal arrests of union organizers and several incidents of surveillance and profiling of union leaders in different government agencies.

Gaité said the ongoing harassment of activists was apparently based on Duterte's order creating the National Task Force to End Local Communist Armed Conflict.

Members of the militant Kilusang Mayo Uno (KMU) also denounced the NICA orientation called by DOLE for its executives.

NICA has been conducting orientation meetings with government agencies as part of Duterte's directive to end the communist insurgency, KMU said.

According to KMU, NICA is branding legitimate organizations as communist fronts or communist-terrorist organizations to discourage workers from joining or forming unions.

KMU chair Elmer Labog warned DOLE not to be influenced by NICA to formulate and issue guidelines

and regulations that would affect the restriction of union membership of workers in all workplaces.

"Our member unions are legitimate organizations of workers who are advancing legitimate struggles and grievances. Unionism is not terrorism," Labog said in a statement.

Labog urged Labor Secretary Silvestre Bello III and other DOLE officials to protect the Filipino workers' right to form unions and uphold the freedom of association.

"The terrorist-tagging campaign has resulted in actual human rights violations such as illegal arrest and detention, harassment and serious threats to the very lives of our members and their families," Labog noted.

He said KMU has documented cases of members who were forced to resign from their posts in their unions and revoke their membership.

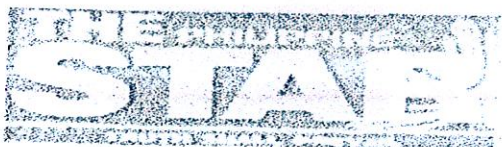
Labog said KMU is filing

complaints of red-tagging and terrorist-tagging in violation of workers' rights provided in the Constitution and the ILO Convention 87 before the Commission on Human Rights and the International Labor Organization.

"Hopefully the plight of Filipino

workers will be part of the ILO conference in June and the Philippine government will be called," he said.

Labog said the Filipino people and the international community should be made aware of the problem affecting the labor sector.



Cop killed, another hurt in NPA ambush

CATBALOGAN CITY – A police officer was killed while a policewoman was wounded in an ambush staged by suspected New People's Army (NPA) rebels in Motiong town in Samar yesterday.

Senior Superintendent Dante Novicio, Samar police

director, said Police Officer 3 Gleen Meniano and PO1 Jane Jabinar were in a patrol vehicle on their way to the police station after fetching water in Barangay 1 when they were waylaid at around 7 a.m.

Novicio said Meniano died at the scene. Jabinar was wounded and taken to a hospital for treatment. 12

Pursuit operations for the rebels are ongoing.

-- Miriam Desacada, Emmanuel Tupas

12 March 2019

Page: A9

Rebels kill cop in ambush, wound female officer

A former intelligence operative of the Samar police was killed, while a policewoman was wounded in an ambush on Monday in the village of Malatogawe, Motiong town, Samar province. Killed was PO3 Glenn Meniano, former operative of the provincial drug enforcement unit. Supt. Bella Rentuaya, Eastern Visayas police spokesperson, said PO1 Jane Abejar was wounded in the ambush believed perpetrated by New People's Army guerrillas. The two were returning to the Motiong police station after fetching water in Paranas town when they were ambushed near the town's cockpit arena. —ROBERT DEJON A9

12 March 2019

MANILA BULLETIN
THE NATION'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

Page: 1

Reds also source funds from Fil-Ams in US, Canada – ex-rebels

A group of former communist rebels welcomed the move of European leaders to look into the reported funding by EU-member countries in support of the advocacies of the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP). But it does not end there.

The former rebels revealed the communist group also receives funds

from Filipino-American communities in the US and Canada.

"Pinapahayag namin ang pagsuporta sa inisyatibang ilantad ang gawain ng CPP-NPA-NDF para magpasok ng pondo para sa digmaang bayan (We are expressing support to the initiative to expose the CPP-NPA-NDF acquisition of funds for the

►4

Reds also source...

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people's war)," the Kilusan at Alyansa ng mga Dating Rebelde (KADRE) said in a statement dated March 6.

KADRE, a group of more than 300 former members of the CPP and its armed wing, the New People's Army (NPA) nationwide, issued the statement following reports that a Philippine delegation showed European leaders documents indicating that communist front organizations receive funds from the Belgian government and some European countries in the guise of marginalized and pro-poor programs.

The group said it was common for CPP-NPA-NDP to use legitimate advocacies like human rights, climate change, education reform, among others, to convince progressive nations to grant them financial aid.

"Eksperito ang international unit ng Partido ng gumamit ng campaign advocacy groups particular sa larangan ng human rights, climate change advocacy, environmental issues, educational reform agenda dahil dito galante at nakatutok ang mga maunlad na bansa sa aspeto ng pagtulong sa mga developing countries (The international unit of the party are experts when it comes to using campaign advocacy groups particularly in the field of human rights, climate change, environmental issues, educational reform because progressive nations are generous to developing countries)," said Ka Apo, a leader of KADRE.

Other fund donors

Aside from EU-member states, some Filipino-American communities are also funding the CPP.

"Hindi lang Europa ang kanilang ginagatasan. Nandyan din ang pang-gagatas nila sa mga 'Fil-Am Communities' sa Estados Unidos at Canada. Ang lagi na lang sinasabi yung pondo ay gagamitin sa 'Campaign Info Drive on Climate Change

Resiliency (It's not only Europe spending for them, there is also the Fil-Am communities in the US and Canada. They keep saying that the funds will be used for a 'Campaign Info Drive on Climate Change Resiliency)," he added.

Ka Apo said questionable handling of the international unit of the CPP-NPA prompted him to leave the group.

As one of the original founders of Migrant International, he said CPP sent him abroad as an overseas Filipino worker to form the alliance of progressive organizations composed of overseas Filipinos and their families.

A Philippine delegation met with officials of the European Union (EU), European Parliament, and European Commission (EC) in Brussels, Belgium in February and asked them to stop the flow of funds to the CPP-NPA.

The Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) revealed that the Belgian government has already released its first tranche of more than 621,000 Euros (P36,663,840) out of the 15-million Euro (P885,600,000) grant to some seven non-government organizations for the 2017-2021 program. This year, some 1.3 million Euros (P76,752,000) are expected to be released.

Brig. Gen. Antonio Parlade Jr., AFP Deputy Chief of Staff for Civil Military Operations, confirmed that communist terrorist groups hide behind legitimate organizations.

Parlade added that the information about the EU and Belgian government funding organizations affiliated with the CPP-NPA came from EU and the Belgian government themselves.

The CPP-NPA were earlier declared a terrorist organization by the US and EU. (PNA)

12

March 2019

MANILA BULLETIN
THE NATION'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

Page:

13

Troops scuttle NPA attack in Agusan

By MIKE U. CRISMUNDO

CAMP BANCASI, Butuan City—An attempt by New People's Army (NPA) terrorists to conduct terroristic activities was aborted when troopers from the Army's 23rd Infantry (Masigasig) Battalion (23rd IB) engaged them in a brief gun battle Saturday in the vicinity of Purok 7, Barangay Lower Olave, Buenavista town, Agusan del Norte province.

Field troops of the 23rd IB responded to reports from villagers about the presence of the rebels in the area which prompted Lt. Col. Francisco L. Molina, commanding officer of the 23rd IB, to dispatch its community support teams to check the veracity of the report.

The team of the 23rd IB engaged the rebels at 11:50 a.m. on Saturday, but the insurgents disengaged from the gunfight.

Upon securing the encounter site, operating troops recovered 2 carbine M1 rifles, one cal.22 pistol, 1 anti-personnel mine armed with blasting cap, 30 meters electrical wires, 3 cartridges of 40mm, HE, 1 hand grenade, 3 UHF commercial radios (Cignus), 3 magazines for carbine rifles, 350 rounds of live ammunition for carbine rifles, 5 cellphones, 2 binoculars, 1 monocular,

1 sniper scope and 7 pack bags containing hammock, personal belongings and subversive documents.

Molina said the fleeing Communist fighters were trying to conduct terroristic activities in the villages but were stopped when they were engaged by the operating troops.

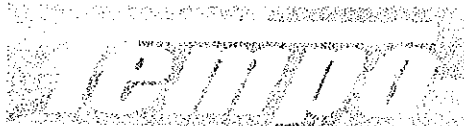
He thanked the residents of Barangay Lower Olave, Buenavista for providing timely information on the presence of CNTs.

"Through the cooperation of the civilians, we were able to save lives by thwarting the plans of the NPAs in using the prohibited anti-personnel mines which can victimize even ordinary civilians," he said.

"We encourage the NPA members to abandon their armed struggle and go back to the folds of the government and live a peaceful life together with their families and

loved ones. Our government is open to help you," Molina added.

13



Troops repulse rebels

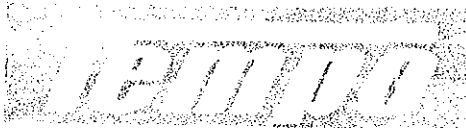
BUTUAN CITY – Government troops drove away a group of New People's Army (NPA) rebels following a brief gunbattle near Purok 7, Barangay Lower Olave, Buenavista, Agusan del Norte Saturday.

In a belated report, troopers from the Army's 23rd Infantry (Masigasig) Battalion (23rd IB) were dispatched by its commanding officer Lt. Col. Francisco Molina after receiving reports from the villagers.

The rebels, who engaged the soldiers in a five-minute battle at 11:50 a.m., fled after realizing they were outnumbered and outgunned.

After securing the encounter site, troops recovered two carbine M1 rifles, one cal.22 pistol, one anti-personnel mine armed with blasting cap, 30 meters electrical wires, 3 cartridges of 40mm, HE, 1 hand grenade, 3 UHF commercial radios (Cignus), 3 magazines for carbine rifles, 350 rounds of live ammunition for carbine rifles, five cellphones, two binoculars, a monocular, a sniper scope and seven pack bags containing hammock, personal belongings and subversive documents.

Molina thanked the residents of Barangay Lower Olave, Buenavista for providing timely information on the presence of CNTs. (Mike Crismundo)



Suspected NPA rebels ambush police van

TACLOBAN City – Suspected New People's Army (NPA) rebels ambushed a police van traveling along Maharlika Highway in Motiong, Samar Monday morning.

Killed in the attack was PO3 Glenn Meniano whose body was found near the burned van.

His companion, PO1 Jane Abejar managed to escape and have her wounded thigh treated in the hospital.

There were reports that improvised explosive devices were used.

PSSupt. Nicolas Torre III, chief of the Police Regional Office 8 Operations Division, said they are conducting a follow up investigation and pursuit operation against the assailants.

A SunStar report said the suspects opened fire using M16 rifles, causing the driver to lose control of the vehicle and crashed into the highway guardrail barrier, followed by the explosion of the mobile patrol car. (Marie Tonette Marticio)

4

Pulis todas, 1 pa sugatan sa NPA attack

NI MARIE TONETTE MARTICIO

TACLOBAN CITY - Patay ang isang pulis habang sugatan ang isa pang kasamahan nito nang ambusin sila ng mga pinaghihinalaang niyembro ng New People's Army (NPA) sa Motiong, Samar, kahapon ng umaga.

Binawian ng buhay sa pinangyarihan ng insidente si PO3 Glenn Meniano dahil sa mga tama ng bala sa katawan at sugatan naman ang kasamahang si PO1 Jane Abejar dahil sa tama ng bala sa kanang hita.

Sa paunang imbestigasyon ng mga awtoridad, pabalik na ang dalawang pulis sa kanilang istasyon sa nasabing bayan, sakay ng patrol car, dala ang kanilang inigib nang bigla silang pagbabarilin ng umano'y grupo ng mga rebelde sa Maharlika Highway sa Barangay Uno, dakong

7:00 ng umaga.

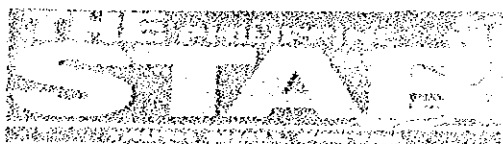
Ayon sa imbestigador, hindi na nakalaban ng dalawa dahil sa bilis ng pangyayari.

Tinutugis pa ng mga tauhan ni Police Regional Office 8 operations division chief, Senior Supt. Nicolas Torre III ang grupo ng mga rebelde.



DI NAAWA Sumalpok sa gilid ng palayan ang patrol car na sinasakyan nina PO3 Glenn Meniano at PO1 Jane Abejar nang tadtarin sila ng bala ng umano'y grupo ng mga rebelde sa Motiong, Samar, kahapon ng umaga.

5



Abu member wanted for 2001 kidnap falls

Another alleged member of the Abu Sayyaf bandit group, wanted for the 2001 kidnapping of workers at a plantation in Basilan, was arrested in an operation in Taguig City on Wednesday, the National Bureau of Investigation (NBI) said yesterday.

Salahim Dawani, alias Abu Moadz, was served an arrest warrant issued by the Basilan regional trial court at a house in Maharlika Village at around 5 p.m. after the NBI received a tip, according to Counter-Terrorism Division chief Raoul Manguerra.

Two survivors of the 2001 Golden Harvest plantation kidnapping in Lantawan, Basilan – Primitivo Falcasantos and Crisanto Suela – identified Dawani as among a group of men who kidnapped them and burned the

plantation's chapel.

Some of the workers who were kidnapped were later beheaded.

The NBI said Dawani was also seen being trained by foreign terrorists in bomb making.

Dawani was also tagged in the kidnapping of American missionaries Martin and Gracia Burnham in Dos Palmas, Palawan, the NBI said.

Another victim testified that the suspect served as part of an augmentation force for Abu Sayyaf members who staged a kidnapping in Sipadan in Sabah, Malaysia in April 2000.

In February, alleged Abu Sayyaf members Harub Jaljalli and Pinky Anu Hadjinulla, who were also charged for the plantation kidnapping, were arrested in Zamboanga City. ||

– Rey Galupo

12 March 2019



Page: 12

Miyembro ng Abu Sayyaf dakip sa Taguig

Isang pinaghihinalaang miyembro ng teroristang Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) ang naaresto ng mga tauhan ng Bureau of Investigation (NBI) sa Taguig City, nitong Miyerkules.

Ang suspek ay kinalalang si Salahim Dawani a.k.a. Abu Moadz na naaresto sa bisa ng arrest warrant na inisyu ng

Basilan Regional Trial Court (RTC) na may kaugnayan sa pagdukot sa ilang manggagawa ng Golden Harvest Plantation, Tairan, Lantawan, Basilan noong 2001. Ayon sa mga saksi na kasama si Aby Moadz sa mga grupo na nanunog ng mga bahay sa lugar at pagpugot sa ulo ng trabahador na sina Primitivo Falcasan-

tos at Crisanto Suela. Isa rin ang suspek na nagsilbing augmentation force sa mga ASG na kumidnap sa mga biktima sa Sipadan, Pulao, Sabah, Malaysia noong April 23, 2000 na tumulong din para madala ang mga kidnaper victims sa Talipao at Patikul sa lalawigan ng Sulu. *Ludy Bermudo.*

12 March 2019

Page: 3

ASG dawit sa mga pagkidnap, pagpatay huli ng NBI

Nalambat na ng mga ahento ng National Bureau of Investigation (NBI) ang isang miyembro ng Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) na responsable sa mga insidente ng kidnap at pagpatay, sa isinagawang operasyon sa Taguig City.

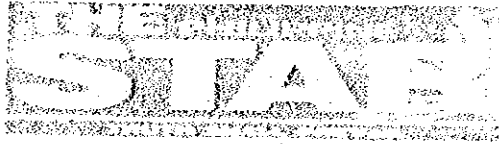
Kahapon iniharap sa mga mamamahayag ni NBI Deputy Director for Investigation Services, Vicente De Guzman III ang ASG member na si Salahim Dawani, alyas Abu Moadl, na dinakip sa bisa ng warrant of arrest na inisyu ng Basilan Regional Trial Court (RTC) para sa multiple counts ng kasong kidnapping at serious illegal detention kaugnay sa pagdukot sa mga trabahador ng Golden Harvest noong taong 2001 sa Talren, Lantawan, Basilan.

Magkakasanib ang pwersa ng NBI-Counter Terrorism Division, Death Investigation Division (DID) at Western Mindanao Regional Office ang sumalakay sa pinagtataguan ni Dawani sa Taguig City noong nakalipas na linggo.

Kasunod ito nang impormasyon na nasagap ng NBI at maberi-pika na si Dawani ang isa sa wanted sa pagdukot sa mga manggagawa ng Golden Harvest Plantation na nanunog pa ng nasabing plantation chapel at tirahan ng plantation manager, bukod sa pagpatay kina Primitivo Falcasantos at Crisanto Suela at pagtangay sa mga manggagawa.

Kabilang din umano si Dawani sa pagdukot sa Dos Palmas, Palawan resort na kinabibilangan ng mag-asawang Martin at Gracia Burnham taong 2001.

Lumutang din umano ang testigo na nagluturo kay Dawani na kabilang sa augmentation force ng ASG nang dukulin sila sa diving resort sa Sipadan, Pulau, Sabah, Malaysia noong Abril 23, 2000 at nagsilbing bantay ng mga kidnap victims nang dalhin sila sa Talipao at Patikul, Sulu. (Ludy Bernudo with trainees Nicole Manlapaz at Alocsis Edel)



5 BIFF men killed in air, ground strikes

MAGUINDANAO

-- Five members of the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF) have been killed in military offensives in this province since Saturday.

The fatalities were identified as Karim Binua, Munir Masdal, Ganih Lantih, Bukhari Samad and Sanday Musib, all followers of BIFF leader Abu Toraiife.

Maj. Gen. Cirilito Sobejana said four followers of Toraiife were also reportedly wounded in the military operations.

Personnel of the 6th Infantry Division (ID) launched air and artillery strikes in Shariff Saldona

Mustapha after receiving reports on the presence of the bandits in Barangays Pinditen and Inaladan.

According to reports reaching the 6th ID and the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao police, a big number of BIFF bandits fled to the two barangays after the military pounded their hideouts in Salibo town last week.

Four soldiers were killed in BIFF attacks here in the past two weeks.

BIFF spokesman Abu Misry Mania said the killings were perpetrated by the BIFF to avenge the deaths of their members in encounters with soldiers.

-- John Unson

12

Malaya

B2

2 BIFF men, soldier dead in Maguindanao assault

BY VICTOR REYES

MILITARY aircraft and artillery assets pounded a lair of the Daesh-inspired Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters in Shariff Saydona Mustapha town in Maguindanao on Monday, leading to the death of two BIFF men and a soldier and wounding of six other BIFF members.

"It started with a bomb run," said Maj. Gen. Cirilito Sobejana, commander of the Army's 6th Infantry Division.

He said the bomb run, which started at 5:50 a.m., targeted a lair of the BIFF in Barangay Inaladan.

Sobejana said MG 520 attack helicopters then fired rockets at

the lair, followed by shelling, using military howitzers.

"There was demonstration of air power initially then after that, there was a ground maneuver. The ground maneuver resulted to multiple encounters, leading to the death of two and wounding of six on the enemy side initially," said Sobejana. B 2

Sobejana said a sergeant from the Army's 61st Division Reconnaissance Company was hit in the head while maneuvering towards the enemy lair across a river. The identity of the soldier was withheld.

As of yesterday afternoon, Sobejana said sporadic firefight were still ongoing against an estimated 100 to 120 BIFF men led

by Abu Toraype, Salahudin Hassan and Singaporean Muhamad Ali Abdul Rahiman, alias Mauwiyah.

HE said that also in the area was Esmail Abubakar, alias commander Bungos, a leader of a BIFF faction. Sobejana said Toraype and Abubakar had differences on how to run the organization a few years back.

"They've established a tactical alliance and they are fighting side by side against us," Sobejana said.

Sobejana said members of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front are ready to come to the aid of the military if necessary. The BIFF is composed mostly of former members of the MILF that signed a peace accord with government in 2014.

Airstrikes vs BIFF rebels mistakenly kill soldier

A GOVERNMENT trooper was killed by "friendly fire" following a "bomb" run directed at the location of a Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters camp in Maguindanao.

Philippine Army 6th Infantry Division commander Major General Cirilito Sobejana rued the incident, but said they would still continue with the airstrike against suspected BIFF rebels.

"Namatayan na kami ng isa, pero tuloy tuloy pa rin 'yung exchange of fire," Sobejana told reporters on Monday.

"Nag-start ng airstrike kanina early morning. Tapos ground maneuver, airstrike, artillery, mortar, then ground maneuver. During the ground maneuver nandoon, medyo tinamaan 'yung tropa natin. Okay lang, that's part of our job," he added.

Despite the ongoing airstrikes, the BIFF, however, did not suffer any casualty according to Captain Arvin Encinas, spokesman of the 6th Infantry Division.

"As of this time, wala pang reported na mga casualties. Kasalukuyan ginagawa nila ang clearing operations to determine kung meron nga talagang casualty as far as 'yung ginawang air and artillery fire mission," he said.

Encinas said the soldiers are conducting pursuit operations against the armed group. *K?*

BIFF spokesperson Abu Misry Mama said the military offensive started over the weekend with howitzer fires in the towns of Mamasapano and Datu Piang, but said that the military was targeting "Moro communities." **Francisco Tuyay**

12 March 2019



Page: 2

2 BIFF, 1 SUNDALO TODAS SA ENSKUWENTRO

Naglunsad ng surgical air strike operation at artillery mission ang tropa ng militar sa kuta ng Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF) na ikinasawi ng dalawang miyembro at isang sundalo kahapon ng umaga sa kagubatan ng Salibo, Pagatin, Mamasapano at Shariff Agunk sa lalawigan ng Maguindanao.

Ito ang inilalat ni Army's 6th Infantry Division (ID) at Joint Task Force (JTF) Central Commander Major Gen. Cirilito Sobejana at nasa anim rin ang mga nasugatan sa mga kalaban.

Nabatid na dakong alas-5:00 ng umaga nang isagawa ang surgical air strike operation at artillery mission ng mga sundalo laban sa target na Daesh inspired Abu Torayfe group. *Joy Cantos*

Maguindanao airstrikes kill 2 terrorists, soldier

BY DEMPSEY REYES

TWO terrorists were killed while six others were wounded during the conduct of a series of airstrikes and ground operations by the military in several towns in Maguindanao to ferret out an Islamic State (IS)-inspired terrorist group known to be hiding there.

Maj. Gen. Cirilito Sobejana, commander of the Philippine Army's 6th Infantry Division (6th ID), said the surgical air, artillery and ground operations started at about 5:50 a.m. in the towns of Datu Salibo, Pagatin,

Mamasapano, Shariff Aguak and Datu Unsay, which are part of the so-called "SPMS box."

Sobejana also said that Salahudin Hassan, alias Abu Toraype, and the Singaporean terrorist and "remaining remnant" of Zulkifli

Abdhir alias Marwan, Mauwiyah, were spotted during the operations.

He added that a sergeant under the 61st Division Reconnaissance Team was killed in the firefight.

As of Monday afternoon, he said the operation against the Toraype-led faction was still ongoing in the area.

The airstrikes were initially conducted in Datu Salibo, Pagatin, Mamasapano and Shariff Aguak, then extended to Shariff Saydona Mustapha.

"It started with a bomb run followed by rockets from our MG520, then indirect fire from our howitzer cannons, and we

used air power as well. We also had ground maneuvers which resulted in multiple encounters," Sobejana told reporters.

Around 200 members under Hassan's command were hiding in the area, according to Sobejana, noting that they were sighted in the town's adjacent villages.

Maj. Arvin Encinas, 6th ID spokesman, explained that two towns were the first targets of the operations: Shariff Aguak and the boundary of Datu Unsay and Datu Salibo.

The operations started when civilians reported the presence of fully-armed men around the SPMS box. A7

Sultans insist there is normalcy in Marawi

MARAWI CITY: The Marawi Sultanate League (MSL) said the city is not a "ghost town" and insisted that there was normalcy in most parts of the Marawi City.

In a statement, the league said only the 24 *barangay* (villages) of the most affected area (MAA) remain isolated and unsafe because of unexploded ordnance that were buried there after the Maute siege.

While the military said it was now clearing the area of unexploded ordnance and improvised explosive devices (IED), Task Force Bangon Marawi (TFBM) started weeks ago to clear debris from the MAA. They were slowed down, however, by the difficulty of ascertaining the bonafide property owners and other technicalities of the government's procurement processes.

"By normalcy, we mean that generally, the people are enjoying tranquility in their homes and are peacefully engaged in their usual business or livelihood undertakings," the MSL said.

On February 1, *The Washington Post* came out with an article stating the city is still a ghost town, a declaration which TFBM chief, Sec-

retary Eduardo Del Rosario, belied.

He said in a media conference that the reality on the ground had nothing to show Marawi had become a ghost city "but instead it is full of economic activity."

Del Rosario stressed that the most-devastated area in the city was only 250 hectares out of the city's total area of 8,000 has.

But former Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) vice governor Haroun Alrashid Lucman Jr. said Marawi was a ghost town. "Why can't we be truthful about it?"

He said, "It's obvious the *Post* was referring to the MAA, which it is," responding to others who called the article as merely semantics in describing Marawi City.

Marawi civic leader and opposition Senate aspirant Samira Gutoc belied the claim of del Rosario that the war-torn area was "alive and booming" and not a "ghost town."

"It's really ghost. It is a ghost when you have the commercial capital in Marawi City burned and you have not yet rebuilt it after 20 months," Gutoc told reporters.

Recently, it was reported that Maranao leaders sought the aboli-

tion of TFBM for its alleged failure to rebuild the city almost two years after it was devastated during the Marawi Siege.

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

Major clans

MSL is an aggruppation of sultans and datus in Marawi founded in 1954 by the late city mayor Sultan Bato Ali. Headed by Sultan Maamor of Dansalan Nasser Sampaco, most MSL members are high ranking traditional leaders.

According to local *Taritib* (traditions), Marawi is called *Lima Pumagsopa sa Marawi* because it is composed of the five major clans represented by the five sultans of Bacolod, Toros, Sakayo (Marawi), Guimba and Madaya. None of them is a member of MSL.

In December 2018, MSL conferred on Secretary del Rosario the title of "Adopted Son of Marawi Sultanate League," which became

controversial when the city's royal traditional leaders questioned its moral authority to do so.

Sultan Abdul Hamidullah Atar, the reigning Marawi sultan, said the five major clans in Marawi had nothing to do with the event the Sultanate League staged.

He said not one of the Sultan of the five clans was present during the conferment of the title upon del Rosario.

Besides, Atar said, del Rosario never performed an excellent job on the rehabilitation of Marawi to deserve such a conferment.

MSL has been working closely with the Marawi City government and TFBM in the city's rehabilitation and recovery.

Prominent MSL members are closely related by blood to officials in Marawi City and at the national level. *At*

MSL senior adviser Sultan Camid Gandamra is the father of Marawi City Mayor Majul Gandamra. Sultan Sampaco is the first cousin of Abdullah Mamao, Presidential Assistant on Overseas Filipino Workers and Muslim Concerns and a TFBM member.

MASIDING NOOR YAHYA

DSWD to continue facilitating release of financial aid to SAF 44 kin

By Maricel V. Cruz

THE Department of Social Welfare and Development on Monday vowed to facilitate the release of the second tranche of financial assistance allotted for the immediate relatives of the 44 policemen who were killed in the botched operation to neutralize two terrorists in Mamasapano, Maguindanao in 2015.

The DSWD issued the statement after relatives of the 44 commandos complained that they have yet to receive the financial assistance promised by the Aquino administration.

In a statement, the agency said the first tranche of the Special Financial Assistance amounting to P11,378,338.59 was released to 71 dependents in 2015.

The President's Social Fund of the previous administration under the "Social Services Program for the Families of the Armed Forces of the Philippines [AFP] and Philippine National Police [PNP] Personnel killed in Military and Police Operations," was used, the DSWD said.

Two SAF companies were sent to Barangay Tukanalipao in Mamasapano in January 2015 "to neutralize" Malaysian bomb maker Zulkifli Bin-Hir, alyas Marwan, and Filipino terrorist Bassit Usman.

Marwan was killed during the initial fighting. However, the policemen were ambushed by Moro Islamic Liberation force and other gunmen in the area leading to a daylong fighting.

Army troops led by several generals who were deployed near the area at that time refused to reinforce the beleaguered policemen, raising suspicions that the army troops in the area were protecting the Malaysian terrorist.

In the fallout after the operation, several charges have been filed against former President Benigno Aquino III, former National Police chief Alan Purisima, and former SAF director Getulio Napeñas.

Early this year, the families of the commandos complained that they have yet to receive the entire aid package promised by the Aquino administration.

The DSWD said it would assist the dependents—the recipients of the first tranche—in liquidating the funds released to them in the first tranche.

FIRST PERSON

ALEX MAGNO

Retort

When US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo visited last week, he made assurances his country would come to the Philippines' defense in the event of an armed attack on our vessels and aircraft in the South China Sea. His words were interpreted as a thinly veiled warning to China.



When asked subsequently about Pompeo's remarks, China's ambassador to the Philippines was sharp in his retort. The high profile Ambassador Zhao Jianhua is not shy in his public comments. He reiterated his country will not launch an attack in the South China Sea and that region should worry more about "the other side" doing so. That "other side" is the US.

From China's viewpoint, there is enough reason to be alarmed. Over the past few months, heavily armed ships and aircraft from US forces have pressed close to the man-made islands China built in the disputed areas.

US officials have justified these maneuvers as being meant to assure freedom of navigation in the busy maritime routes of the South China Sea. The Chinese see them as dangerous provocations that could produce unplanned skirmishes.

China should be more concerned about ensuring freedom of navigation in these vital routes. A full 80% of China's trade passes through this area.

China insists it has absolutely no plan to curtail freedom of navigation through the South China Sea. On the contrary, they point out that it is the US and some of its military allies that has undertaken the "Talisman-Saber" military exercises that are expressly a war game with the goal of closing down the Malacca Straits.

Since so much of China's trade passes through the South China Sea, it is arguable that they built those expensive facilities in the contested reefs precisely to improve the certainty of freedom of navigation. By contrast, very little of American trade passes through these sea routes.

Ambassador Zhao calls up the historical record to support his assertion that the nations with standing claims in the South China Sea should be more wary of US designs for the area. When the Philippines occupied ten islands and features in the contested area, China did not take any aggressive stance. It was Vietnam who seized Pugad Island after it was already occupied by Philippine forces.

He goes back farther in the historical past.

Over the past thousand years of commercial interchange between us, never once did China mount and attack against us. On the contrary, China warmly received delegations from Philippine kingdoms and

sultanates beginning from the trade mission sent by Rajah Kilig of Butuan in 1,000 AD.

In 1417, Sultan Paduka Batara even visited Emperor Yongle and was declared a brother. In archival documents, the Sultan was referred to as the "Eastern King."

In Jolo, there is a stone tablet memorializing the visit of Poon Tao Kong (Pei-Pei Hien), an officer of the Chinese admiral Changho. The admiral and his fleet is credited with navigating the "South Seas" and possibly sailed as far as Africa.

Ambassador Zhao reminds us of this long history of fraternal exchange to underscore the claim that his country has no aggressive intentions toward us. But he will have to work a little harder to turn back the tide of Filipino public opinion suspicious of China's intentions.

Reports of Chinese vessels chasing away Filipino fishermen from reefs they have fished on for centuries does not help Beijing's diplomatic effort. For most Filipinos, China is simply too big, too rich, too opaque and too close to be reassuring.

Dry

Over the weekend, the water level at La Mesa dam fell below the critical level. That should send all the alarm bells ringing.

We were warned this would be an El Nino year. But no one told us that water levels would fall this low even before the official start of our "summer."

Now water will have to be rationed. In some neighborhoods, faucets have run dry. In densely packed, high-rise communities, the decrease in water pressure will make life unbearable. In other communities, supply will be intermittent. Expect some amount of out-migration from the metropolis as soon as schools close.

There have been two opposing schools of thought regarding water sufficiency for the 14 million people inhabiting this sprawling urban tangle we call Mega Manila. One says, we have enough water and nothing more needs to be done to boost supply. The other says the metropolitan area will soon experience serious water shortages with the worsening effects of climate change.

The school of thought that says our supply is adequate appeared to have persuaded our policy makers.

For years, we have heard many proposals to increase our water supply: building a ring dike at the Candaba swamp to impound rainwater; filtering the water at Laguna de Bay; and, finally building the Kaliwa river diversion project. Of the three, the Kaliwa river project is finally going through with the help of Chinese financing.

All the alternatives for boosting Mega Manila's water supply will be coming too late. We will suffer many years of the sort of shortages we are experiencing now. Blame that on bureaucratic diffidence.

As it is the practice, water from the Central and Northern Luzon dams are diverted from irrigation lines to the La Mesa Dam when supply for the city runs short. This is a political decision. No government wants to antagonize 14 million thirsty, unwashed and politically articulate city residents.

Diverting scarce water from agriculture, however, will consequently produce problems in the supply and prices of food in the city.

All pensioners should be treated equally

The Government Service Insurance System (GSIS) plans to increase the minimum pension of its pensioners to P6,000 per month, according to a news item that appeared in *The Philippine STAR* of March 9. Many pensioners of course welcome it as very encouraging news.

However, the GSIS through its president made it clear that "survivorship pensioners and those who retired under The Portability Law (Rep. Act No. 7699) are not entitled to the proposed pension increase."

Many pensioners of course were disheartened by this discrimination, because they claim that under The Expanded Senior Citizens Act (Rep. Act No. 9994), it is provided that all pensioners should be given equal benefits as given under the other retirement acts.

Our group, the Philippine Association of Retired Persons (PARP) worked for the equalization of benefits for all pensioners with Congress. In fact Party-List Rep. Francisco Datol Jr. filed a House Resolution calling for an Oversight hearing to review the implementation of RA 7699, in relation to RA 9994.

In the Senate, Sen. Bam Aquino also filed a Senate Resolution seeking the review of RA 7699, with the purpose of equalizing benefits for all pensioners, but Congress adjournment to give way to the election campaign aborted further action on these resolutions. The House resolution will be archived to the dust bin, but Rep. Datol vowed to refile it. The Senate resolution is still alive because the Senate being a continuing body not affected by Congress adjournment, can still deliberate on all bills and resolutions already filed before adjournment.

We seniors hope and pray that the new set of senators and congressmen will be more concerned for seniors' welfare and be responsive to their needs, among them, equal pension benefits. — Atty. **MAFEO VIBAL**, vice president, Philippine Association of Retired Persons

Choose wisely

The 2019 campaign period for national bets has already begun. Candidates are busy conducting their campaigns. Their campaign posters and other campaign materials were already set and you can see it everywhere. Likewise, TV networks are conducting their electoral debates to test candidates' ability to answer different issues in our country.

I am excited to express my rights as a first time voter. I am curious about our senatorial candidates and want to know their platforms because I believe voters should be intelligent and wise in choosing candidates since these people will serve our nation for six years and will represent me and other fellow Filipinos.

On the other hand, I don't have the time to personally witness their campaigns, what I did is to watch the Debate 2019: The GMA Senatorial Face-Off on Feb.

9. All candidates are good debaters and they have brilliant ideas and opinions.

However, I am disappointed with the answer of senatorial candidate Rep. Neri Colmenares who is a human rights lawyer and a Makabayan representative.

GMA reporter Howie Severino who served as panelist event asked him, "*Sabi nyo tutol kayo sa lahat ng human rights violation kalit sino yong gumagawa? Tumutol na ba kayo sa mga human rights violation, mga allegations of human rights violation by the New Peoples Army?*" Rep. Neri Colmenares answered, "*Yes. Para naman sa amin syempre, maski sino ang gumawa noon maski NPA o AFP, dapat tutulan yon. Inaanin naman ng NPA na nagkamali sila. Ang problema kasi dito napakaraming Human Rights violation ang isi-na-charge sa military kung saan hindi nila inaamin kaya mas tutok ang human rights groups sa kapulisan at military.*"

What? I think there is something wrong with his answer. I am not as intelligent as them but his answer is biased. For me, whether the offender of human rights accept his offense or not, it is the responsibility of a human rights lawyer to investigate and give attention to their actions. Since the offender accepts his/their offense like the NPA, then they are guilty of the violation and charges should be filled against them. But what happens is human rights lawyers do not do anything that's why this terrorist group continue to do their atrocities. In the case of state forces, since they are not accepting the accusations, then they must continue to be investigated.

As for me I should think and choose wisely and I encourage all other voters to do so. — **ARTHURO SALIC**, Kuliat, Project 6, Quezon City

Salute to PBB, AFP

I was on my way home and got the chance to watch the night time episode of Pinoy Big Brother (PBB) aired every night at ABS-CBN network. In that episode, PBB housemates are tasked to undergo basic training under the soldiers of the Armed Forces of the Philippines.

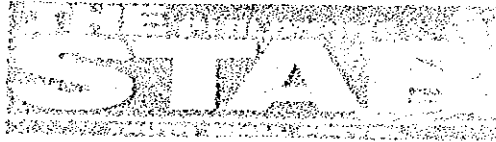
As series of physical exercises are being given and performed by the housemates both the PBB otso and PBB star hunt, it is obvious that some of them are struggling and find it difficult to do. I realized that if these youth had undergone the ROTC or CAT while they were attending their studies maybe the given tasks were not that hard for them since they had a little background on military training.

Thus, I appreciated the idea of Big Brother in letting the housemates experience the basic military training from the AFP. I do believe that the training taught the young housemates discipline, physical strength, personal character, integrity, selfworth, leadership teamwork and respect.

Salute to the PBB housemates both the PBB otso and PBB star hunt for surviving the tasks, salute to Big Brother for the idea, and salute to the men and women of the Armed Forces for sharing their military life. — **DIVINE MACAPOBRE**, Divinemacapobre18@gmail.com

12

March 2019



Page:

7

Atrocities

Hearing on New Peoples Army (NPA) atrocities are not anymore new to my ears. Their ambushes against state forces, extortion and burning down construction equipment seems to be their organization's trademark. So what's new with it? *Kung бага, "laos" na taktika ng makakaliwa.*

Yes, it harms the employee's way of life and the company itself. But for the information of the useless NPAs and their leaders, their propaganda are not anymore substantial. You may destroy the equipment that you turned into fire, but not our sympathy and eagerness to go against your

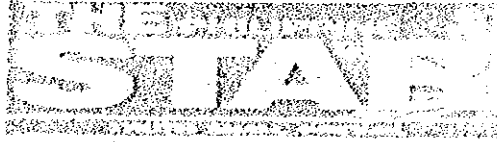
group and never give your group any revolutionary tax.

NPAs and their leaders are a pestilence to our society and the only solution to end this virus is to get rid of them by any means. So I would rather suggest to our authorities and to our government to destroy them and never go to the negotiating table.

I believe that peace talk is still important. But I think it is not for the CPP-NPA. Their actions are too much and unacceptable. They should be punished for what they did to others. There should be no mercy!! - STEPHEN LANDICHO, City Engineer 7

12

March 2019



Page:

7

Don't be deceived

I support DILG Secretary Eduardo Año's appeal to communities not to support politicians who are giving funds to the terrorist NPA and other terrorist groups by giving them extortion money.

Honestly, politicians who are supporting terrorist groups are among reasons why our government forces cannot totally defeat terrorists because they are protected and supported by some government officials. The truth is, even though how hard our government work to modernize the capability of our state forces just to neutralize terrorist groups, they cannot do it 100% because traitor

government officials are still in position.

If these politicians are true and sincere, then they should not be threatened by this lawless group. They have all the power to fight terrorism in their own way. Since they want to serve the people with all their heart, they should be the first ones to protect the people.

To voters, let us not be deceived by the sweet words of these politicians. Let us be smart voters. Once we vote, we are not only entrusting our future to these politicians but the future of our children as well. This is not just for us, our family but also for the rest of our

fellow Filipinos. --JOMARIE KAYE PATALINGHUG,
jokaye1995@gmail.com

7

Japan supports Mindanao peace process

The recent political development in the Mindanao peace process that culminated in the establishment of the Bangsamoro Transition Authority (BTA) on Feb. 22 is truly historic. I would like to commend all the stakeholders who have made this possible.

For more than a decade now, Japan has been one of the staunchest supporters of the Mindanao peace process. With crucial years ahead, we will continue to support the incoming political transition, particularly focusing on the capacity-building of the BTA, implementation of "normalization" or disarmament of Moro Islamic Liberation Front combatants, and socio-economic development assistance to enable the Bangsamoro people to benefit from the dividends of peace.

Last Dec. 11, when the Embassy of Japan co-organized the one-day "Bangsamoro Forum" with UN Manila to identify and discuss key challenges in implementing the Bangsamoro Organic Law (BOL), the tasks ahead looked daunting. I was encouraged to note, however, the large turnout for the event, with more than 100 participants from the Philippine government, MILF, diplomatic corps and international organizations, which seemed to indicate wide-ranging support for this historic endeavor.

The first critical phase since then was the plebiscite last Jan. 21 and Feb. 6 for the BOL ratification and determination of the boundary of the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao. Japan dispatched its monitoring mission, led by Parliamentary Vice Minister for Foreign

COMMENTARY

KOJI HANEDA

Affairs Norikazu Suzuki. Our mission members were quite impressed with the passion of the people who cast their votes for the future of their own homeland, as well as with the firm dedication of Commission on Elections officials and public school teachers who conducted the ballot procedure on the ground in a fair and impartial manner.

Japanese Foreign Minister Taro Kono's visit to Davao last Feb. 9-11 was another milestone occasion for Japan to reaffirm its commitment to the Mindanao peace process. In his courtesy call on President Duterte and meetings with Foreign Secretary Teodoro Locsin Jr., Finance Secretary Carlos Dominguez III and Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana, Minister Kono welcomed the BOL ratification and reaffirmed that Japan would strengthen its assistance in accordance with the progress of peace processes. Minister Kono and Secretary Locsin exchanged notes on the provision of a loan of up to \$202 million for a road network project in conflict-affected areas. Minister Kono also met with MILF chair Murad Ebrahim, and they shared the view that the Bangsamoro people should achieve the benefits of peace as early as possible.

Immediately after the establishment of the BTA last Feb. 22, Minister Kono issued a welcoming statement which highlights

Japan's new assistance package. In addition to the road network project signed in Davao, Japan will support the rebuilding of a vocational center in Marawi City, livelihood assistance in the agricultural sector, and construction of water supply facilities. Minister Kono also touched on a plan to provide vehicles and other equipment worth about P160 million for the Joint Peace and Security Team and the Independent Decommissioning Body, in order to support their initial activities for normalization. This package of new assistance is equivalent to the total amount of assistance that Japan has already provided to Mindanao through the Japan-Bangsamoro Initiatives for Reconstruction and Development projects since 2006.

The political transition process toward the establishment of the Bangsamoro government in 2022 may not be easy. The security situation would be one of the key determinants. Japan strongly condemns all the bombing incidents in the region in recent months, which defy the will of the majority of the Bangsamoro people. Despite the challenges and uncertainties surrounding the Mindanao peace process, Japan will continue to stand by the region as its close friend. We look forward to working with the Philippine government and the BTA led by newly appointed interim Chief Minister Murad and the rest of his team for the smooth political transition and welfare of the Bangsamoro people.

Koji Haneda is the Japanese ambassador to the Philippines.

12 May 2019 *Malaya* Page 34

Scrap the MDT, VFA and EDCA

AFTER losing Panatag Shoal to China in 2012 for foolishly banking on and trusting the US, one would think ex-foreign secretary Albert del Rosario would be the last person to believe that the US has our back in case of trouble in the South China Sea/West Philippine Sea (SCS/WPS).

Well, it is not for nothing that this space has given him the moniker "Super Amboy," aside from the fact that he is, or was, allegedly an American citizen. His fluency in our national language was also suspect. He was once caught on TV camera wearing a headphone along with foreigners in the audience while listening to one of the State of the Nation addresses of his erstwhile boss, fellow Amboy and ex-President Noynoy Aquino, who used to deliver his SONAs in Filipino.

Like the incumbent foreign secretary and fellow Amboy, Teodoro "Tweeter" Locsin, Jr., Del Rosario believes there is no need to review the 1951 PH-US Mutual Defense Treaty (MDT) after US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo recently gave verbal assurance that "any armed attack on Philippine forces, aircraft or public vessels in the South China Sea would trigger the MDT."

Did we actually need an assurance of that kind? A treaty is a treaty, ain't it?

Had Pompeo assured us in writing that the US is no longer "neutral" in the territorial disputes in the SCS/WPS and that she agrees to replace the phrase "in accordance with their constitutional processes" with "automatic retaliation" in the MDT, his assurance

may probably have been more believable.

One more thing, Del Rosario contends that it is the wrong time to review the MDT, "not when we have willingly allowed ourselves to have been made increasingly weakened by our northern neighbor's doctrine of domination."

What? And he is not worried about keeping the "doctrine of domination" employed against us by our former(?) colonial ruler and her lackeys both here and abroad that has actually brought us nothing but grief and woe in our seemingly never ending struggle to improve the lives of our people?! Worse, making our armed forces next only to the weakest in the region by keeping us dependent on her?

What the Duterte administration is trying to achieve is to have more balanced relations with the world's big powers to promote the country's national interest. It is a pity Del Rosario and his ilk could



CROSSHAIRS

REY O. ARCILLA

The first does not guarantee us assistance or protection as shown by our unfortunate experience in the Panatag Shoal incident, while the last two are simply magnets for an attack by a country in conflict with the US.'

not or would not understand and support that.

USELESS MDT, VFA AND EDCA

Here again, I maintain that the best option for the country is to abrogate the MDT and its adjuncts, the constitutionally infirm Visiting Forces Agreement (VFA) and the Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement (EDCA). The first does not guarantee us assistance or protection as shown by our unfortunate experience in the Panatag Shoal incident. And since the last two are mere adjuncts of the first and, more importantly, magnets for an attack by a country in conflict with the US, they too should be scrapped.

CINA WON'T ATTACK US

"Tweeter" Locsin should take his cue from his Boss, President Rodrigo Roa Duterte aka Digong,

in his mistaken belief that the US has our back in case of trouble in the SCS/WPS.

Soon after Pompeo's visit, Digong said:

"Ngayon ang America nagsabi, 'We will protect you. We will... your backs are covered I'm sure...' Pero ang problema nito 'yung i-invoke niya 'yung Defense US Treaty which was entered into by us, by our... mga ninuno natin. 'Yung... na ang attack sa America or ang attack sa atin pareho sa. But sa America magdaan pa ng Congress. Any declaration of war will pass Congress. Alam mo naman gaano ka bulls..t ang Congress sa America."

On the other hand, Locsin said in a tweet:

"A mutual defense treaty means neither side will see itself dragged into a war because an attack on one is taken as an attack on the other—two sides of one coin."

One side of that coin is us and since, like Digong, I do not see ourselves fighting China, nor do I see China attacking us in the foreseeable future, there is therefore no need for the MDT.

I believe China would not attack us unless she is provoked by the US into an armed confrontation, thus dragging us inevitably into the conflict because of the MDT.

Guess who would be among the first targets of China in such an eventuality, aside from South Korea and Japan, and possibly Australia?

The US military has been forever plying the SCS/WPS for the singular purpose of protecting and maintaining her influence and

See SCRAP > Page B5

SCRAP

domination in the region. Lately, she has intensified such activities, even prevailing upon other nations to do the same, in the guise of preserving freedom of navigation and the unimpeded flow of commerce in the area.

The US did this after China seized and established military outposts in isles and reefs in the SCS/WPS, over which the US did nothing, to protect her own national interests which, she emphatically says, include the same reason invoked by the US, i.e., to ensure freedom of navigation and unimpeded flow of commerce in SCS/WPS.

For a good reason... The bulk of China's trade with the rest of the world passes through the same sea lanes. It would be like cutting her nose to spite her face, so to speak, if she tried blocking those sea lanes. She knows she will be no match for the combined military and naval forces of the US, Japan, South Korea, Australia, United Kingdom, France and even Taiwan if she did that.

Moreover, she risks condemnation by the international community if she violates international law

on the use of the high seas.

Of course, that would give "Tweeter" Locsin the opportunity of having a grand time realizing his dream of lambasting China on the floor of the United Nations General Assembly.

By the way, whatever happened to Locsin's threat to 1) autopsy "the Yellow crowd who perpetrated the passport fraud" through the anomalous APO/UGEC contract to produce ePassports; and 2) his promise to "not contest, but protest" on the floor of the UN General Assembly China's creation of a maritime rescue center in Kagitingan Reef claimed by us in the Spratlys?

Nagkalimutan na? Ano 'yun? The usual braggadocio lang?

REMINDERS

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

1. Digong's promise to rid the country of foreign troops. This, of course, necessitates abrogating the MDT and the lopsided and constitutionally infirm VFA and

the EDCA.

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

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

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

Today is the 318th day of the twelfth year of the enforced disap-

pearance of Jonas Burgos, son of the late press icon and founder of this newspaper, Joe Burgos.

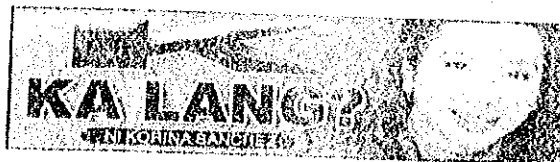
After the acquittal of Major Harry Baliaga, Jr., the only person formally charged with Jonas' kidnapping, I guess what happens next is now up to Divine Providence.

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

From an internet friend:

I can't believe I made it anywhere creatively, though, because I was raised by two loving and supportive parents. Nothing squashes creativity more than unconditional love and support from a functional household. If you have kids, sh*t on their dreams a little bit.

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



Kanya-kanyang pahayag

NOONG Biyernes, nagpahayag ang Palasyo na sinibak si PCSO General Manager Alexander Balutan, dahil sa umano'y mga "seryosong alegasyon hinggil sa katiwalian". Nangyari iyon isang araw makaraang ipahayag ni Balutan na bumaba ang benta ng tiket ng lotto magmula nang ipatupad ang buwis kaugnay sa TRAIN law at sa mga premiyong hihigit sa P10,000. Dahil bumaba ang benta, hindi rin lumalaki kaagad ang mga premyo. Mga malalaking Jackpot ang umaakit umano sa mga tao na bumili ng tiket.

Naaalala ko na naman si dating Dangerous Drugs Board (DDB) Chief Dionisio Santiago. Sinibak daw siya dahil sa mga paulit-ulit na biyahe at katiwalian. Sinibak siya ilang

araw nang magpahayag na ang malaking rehabilitation center sa Nueva Ecija ay isang pagkakamali. Ang kanyang pinalitan sa DDB ay ganundin ang nangyari. Kinontra ang mga pahayag ni President Duterte hinggil sa bilang ng mga lulong sa droga, kaya sinibak. Peligroso talaga ang posisyon kapag kinontra si Duterte, maliban na lang kung dikit ka sa kanya.

Pero isang araw matapos ang pahayag ng Palasyo na siya ay sinibak dahil sa mga alegasyon ng korapsyon, nagpahayag naman si Balutan na siya ay bumitiw sa lungkulin dahil sa mga bagay "na hindi na niya masikmura". Hindi naman siya nagpaliwanag pa. Sinabi lang niya na noong ipinasok siya sa PCSO, sinabi niya sa mga empleyado na oras na may ipinagawa ang Tanggapan ng Pangulo o Kongreso na bagay na hindi niya masisikmura, magbibitiw siya.

May mga sumuporta naman kay Balutan, partikular ang mga kasama sa militar. Si Balutan ay dating major general ng Philippine Marines, na lumaban sa mga rebelde sa Mindanao at tumanggap ng mga karangalan bilang sundalo. Pero kung si Sen. Panfilo Lacson ang tatanungin dapat ay kasuhan ng Palasyo si Balutan dahil sa mga alegasyon. Nagbagyo na rin daw ang loob ni Lacson ka

(Sundan sa pahina 5)

4

K KA LANG?... Mula pahina 4

Balutan. Kung naniniwala nga ang Palasyo na sangkot si Balutan sa korapsyon, kasuhan na nga. Ito na rin ang pagkakataon ni Balutan na magsalita, kung may nais siyang sabihin tungkol sa kanya-

yang pagbiliti, na kontra sa pahayag ng Palasyo na siya ay sinibak. Sa ngayon, ang nalalaman lang ng publiko ay ang kanya-kanyang mga pahayag, na wala rin namang mas malawak na paliwanag.

34

ONLINE NEWS

12 MARCH 2019

www.pna.gov.ph

Massive military operation launched vs. BIFF in Maguindanao

By Edwin Fernandez

CAMP SIONGCO, Maguindanao – The Army's 6th Infantry Division has stepped up its operation against the Islamic State-linked Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF) in Maguindanao after the terror group's continued attacks against the military and civilians in the province.

"The pursuit operations against the terror group will continue without letup to preempt them from further sowing fear and violence," said Maj. Gen. Cirilito Sobejana, 6ID commander, in an interview with newsmen here Monday.

The latest BIFF attack occurred on March 7 in Barangay Tuka, Mamasapano, Maguindanao, where two soldiers and a civilian were hurt. Sobejana declined to name the wounded soldiers pending notification of their respective families.

He identified the wounded civilian though as Bihamdi Abdulkarim Abdulgani who sustained injuries in his knees. Abdulgani was walking home around 10 p.m. along the village when he noticed about 300 armed men near the Army detachment in the area.

Sobejana said Abdulgani cautioned the armed men not to come near the military base but was fired upon. Other BIFF gunmen fired at the military base that injured two members of 40th Infantry Battalion 3rd Light Armor Company and sparked a 10-minute firefight.

"The BIFF then withdrew towards nearby Liguasan Marsh while the civilian victim was rushed to a hospital in Shariff Aguak, Maguindanao," Sobejana said.

The military official condemned the attack, calling it barbaric and inhuman since the civilian was a non-combatant.

Meanwhile, at least four off-duty Army soldiers were killed--three in Maguindanao and one in neighboring Cotabato City--in separate attacks over the past two weeks. The BIFF claimed they carried out the attacks in retaliation to the series of military airstrikes and artillery bombardment against them in the province.

Sobejana vowed the heightened military operations against the BIFF in Maguindanao will be sustained. **(PNA)**

www.pna.gov.ph

Maguindanao resident hands over live explosives to Army

By Edwin Fernandez

CAMP SIONGCO, Maguindanao – The Army's 6th Infantry Division (ID) on Monday lauded a resident of Guindulungan, Maguindanao, for turning over to authorities two unexploded 60-mm mortar shells he found near his farm.

For security reasons, Major Gen. Cirilito Sobejana, 6th ID commander and head of Joint Task Force Central, only identified the civilian as "Datu", who handed over the two mortar shells that appear to be new and shiny, to the Army's 90th Infantry Battalion on Saturday.

"The military's information campaign against anti-personnel mines is now getting support from the locals," Sobejana noted.

Datu said he found the explosives in an area near his farm and quickly alerted the soldiers.

The explosives, now under the care of 90th IB, will be turned over to the Army's Explosives and Ordnance Disposal Team.

Had it not been found and turned over, Sobejana said the explosives could have landed in the hands of lawless elements and convert them into anti-personnel mines.

"I appeal to the public in the countryside to be extra careful when they find unexploded ordnance and other weapons to avoid accidents," said Sobejana, adding that anyone should immediately report such find to authorities. **(PNA)**