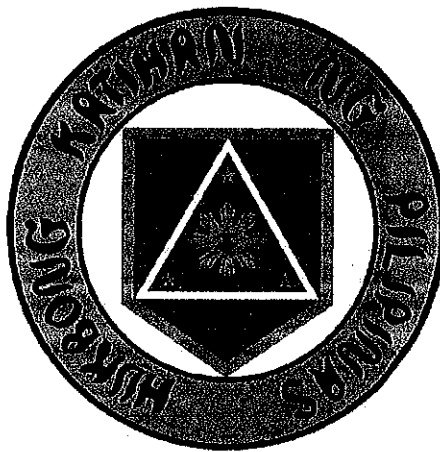


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26 March 2019

Tuesday



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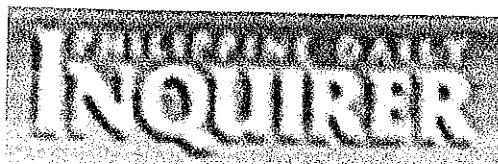
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PENALIZE WATER FIRM, PETITIONERS ASK MWSS

STORY BY MATTHEW REYSIO-CRUZ AND RONNEL W. DOMINGO

They urge the regulator to order the concessionaire to refund customers for the purchase of drums and pails, waive the minimum charge, and provide rebates for forgone earnings due to the water shortage.

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Penalize Manila Water, petitioners ask MWSS

FROM A1

By Matthew Reysio-Cruz
and Ronnel W. Domingo
@Team Inquirer

Several customers of Manila Water Co. led by a party-list lawmaker petitioned the Metropolitan Waterworks and Sewerage System (MWSS) Regulatory Office on Monday to penalize the company for breach of contract for the water shortage in large areas of Metro Manila and parts of Rizal province early this month.

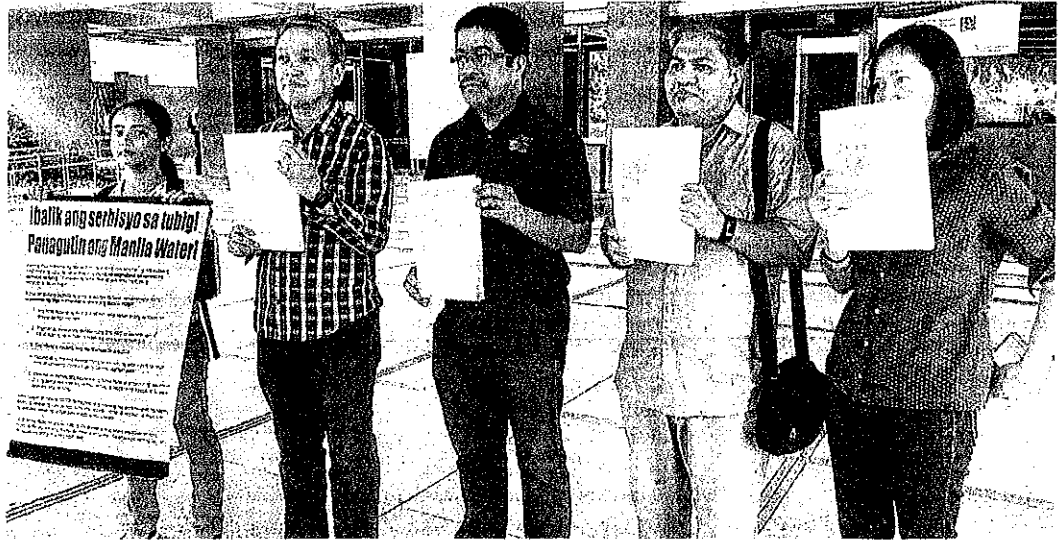
They argued that penalties were warranted because Manila Water had failed to adhere to Section 5.1.2 of its concession agreement with the MWSS requiring it to ensure continuous water supply to all its customers.

Bayan Muna Rep. Carlos Zarate, Bagong Alyansang Makabayan secretary general Renato Reyes, Mandaluyong City resident Veronica Dacillo, Quezon City resident Reginald Vallejos and Lolita Donato—all Manila Water account holders—filed the petition with the MWSS at its main office in Quezon City.

The group asked the regulator to order Manila Water to refund customers for the "unexpected, emergency purchase of incidentals," such as water drums and pails, waive the P83.14 minimum charge for consumers who experienced service interruptions, and provide a rebate to cover "forgone revenue or earnings" caused by the shortages.

It also urged the MWSS to revisit the approved rate increase and suspend its implementation until it had conducted a "thorough performance review of Manila Water." The rate increase covers the current five-year regulatory period that lasts until 2022.

"Allowing [Manila Water] to continue charging customers at the new approved rates, over the next five years, is tanta-



CONSUMERS' DEMAND Bayan Muna Rep. Carlos Zarate (center) and other Manila Water customers demand a refund from the concessionaire in a petition they filed on Monday at the Metropolitan Waterworks and Sewerage System office in Quezon City. —MATTHEW REYSIO-CRUZ

mount to rewarding inefficiency, mismanagement, if not untruthfulness to the public," the petitioners said.

Accountability

Patrick Ty, chief regulator of the MWSS, said he would study the complaint, but pointed out that the process of seeking accountability for the water shortages in the east zone had already been set in motion weeks ago.

"I've already signed a notice to explain to Manila Water for them to explain why they should not be penalized based on the terms of the concession agreement," Ty said.

Manila Water has five days to respond to the notice issued by the regulatory office.

The water shortage stems from the concessionaire's failure to solve the water supply deficit of 150 million liters per day, as demand has outstripped supply.

In contrast, customers of Maynilad Water Services Inc., the concessionaire in the west zone, did not suffer any water shortage, as the company was able to tap other sources, like its plant in Muntinlupa City that

filters water from Laguna Lake.

The west zone covers other areas in Metro Manila and parts of Cavite province.

Manila Water said supply had been returning to most of the areas and that it was looking for ways to restore it to its regular schedule.

'Moral pressure'

Ty said that when it came to the issue of refunding customers and refraining from collecting their monthly bill, he would apply "moral pressure" on the concessionaire in a meeting the two were scheduled to have later on Monday.

He added, however, that a decision on whether to penalize Manila Water would likely be reached in June or July.

But the petitioners demanded immediate action. "Manila Water has admitted it was their fault, but it seems like our regulators are still waiting on the moon to shine before acting," Zarate said.

"That is why we as consumers took it upon ourselves to push this issue of accountability," he said.

Ty, who had yet to read the

petition, tried to modulate expectations.

"We are bound by the concession agreement," he said. "The authority of the office is a bit limited."

Zarate said the MWSS would be remiss in its duties if it waited until June to render its verdict.

Public hearings

Reyes called for greater public participation in determining the penalties by asking the MWSS to hold public hearings in every affected city.

"This is necessary to determine how households, businesses and government offices were severely affected by the water crisis," he said.

On Monday, Sen. Grace Poe urged Manila Water to implement a "fair and just" bill reduction for its customers who suffered from its inadequate water supply in the previous weeks, describing it as the best form of apology.

"Manila Water can absorb it. Their income will not dry up. It is a drop in their bucket of profits. An apology is best expressed monetarily," Poe said in a statement. —WITH A REPORT FROM LEILA

B. SALAVERRIA INQ

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31 celebrities on narco list

By ROMINA CABRERA

At least 31 celebrities are included in the narco list, the head of the Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency (PDEA) revealed yesterday.

"All 31 are popular; not one is a has-been," PDEA director general Aaron Aquino said in Filipino.

The PDEA had earlier said two celebrities were clients of a party drug dealer who was slain in a sting in Manila this month.

Steve Pasion, who was killed in the parking lot of his condominium, allegedly sold illegal drugs to well-known celebrities.

The PDEA chief said they recovered text messages from a male celebrity who allegedly bought 200 pieces of the party drug ecstasy from Pasion.

Pasion allegedly sourced the narcotics from the Netherlands and other parts of Europe through the dark web.

In a related development, around 20 more local executives with suspected links to the illegal drug trade could

be included in the narco list, Interior and Local Government Secretary Eduardo Año said.

"What the President released is just an initial list. There are still others undergoing validation, around 20," Año told reporters.

President Duterte previously named 46 alleged narco politicians, consisting of 43 local executives and three members of the House of Representatives.

The names of the other politicians, if ever they would be made public, would likely come after the midterm elections on May 13, Año said.

He explained that validation takes 14 months as they have to be certain that the politicians are really involved in the narcotics trade.

The four agencies conducting the validation are the

Turn to Page 2

PDEA, National Intelligence Coordinating Agency, Intelligence Service of the Armed Forces of the Philippines and Philippine National Police.

"The information should really be confirmed," Año said.

The DILG has filed graft and administrative charges before the Office of the Ombudsman against the 46

narco politicians.

Año explained that as government workers, "these officials should follow higher standards in terms of public service."

"You are accountable because public service is a public trust, meaning you are not the same with the rest of the citizens," he said.

— With Emmanuel Tupas

Rody: Still no to war with China

By EDITH REGALADO

DAVAO CITY – President Duterte stands firm on his position that the country cannot not afford a war with China despite its victory before the Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA) in The Hague.

"What do you want me to do, we'll go to war tomorrow? If you want, then I will go for it. I have many firearms. We can go to war tomorrow if you want, but we can just probably go as far as Palawan. They can already hit us at that place," the President said in Cebuano during the Partido ng Demokratikong Pilipino-Laban ng Bayan rally in Cagayan de Oro City the other night.

He reiterated his stand following the "crime against humanity" complaint that former foreign secretary Alberto del Rosario and former ombudsman Conchita Carpio-Morales filed against Chinese President Xi Jinping before the International Criminal Court.

Both complainants wanted to hold Xi accountable for destroying some marine areas in the South China Sea, especially those parts that are also claimed by the Philippines.

"Manila can be reached by the cruise missile of the Chinese in seven minutes. It will be devastated. So, when the time comes for us to retreat,

where will we go? We can go to Palawan but that place has plenty of mosquitoes," Duterte said.

China, where Duterte is scheduled to attend the 2nd Belt and Road Forum next month, remains among the top source of funds for the Philippine government's "Build, Build, Build" infrastructure projects.

Malacañang expressed doubt yesterday on the motive behind the complaint, saying this may be more "political in nature" on the part of Del Rosario and "righteous indignation" on the part of Morales. "They may know that China is not a member state party. Philippines is not also a state party so how can ICC assume jurisdiction?" presidential spokesman Salvador Panelo said as he echoed a professor's view that the complaint might even strengthen China's stance on the South China Sea.

He also turned the tables on Del Rosario, who he accused of not bringing up the issue when he was still foreign affairs secretary.

Panelo, who is also the chief presidential counsel, said he is gathering evidence to prove that Del Rosario was reluctant to "rock the boat" when he was still at the helm of the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA).

If he would be able to gather the evidence, he said this

would prove that Del Rosario was also to blame.

"That's why I told my source, I need documents; I need communications from your group to DFA; I need pictures that you have given them; I need official response coming from Del Rosario. Because if that is true, then... that is wrong," he added.

While it was during Del Rosario's time that the Philippines pushed for the filing of claim before the PCA, Panelo questioned why the government then allowed the structures to be put up before the arbitration complaint.

"Why did you not act back then? Why are you moving now that you are no longer in the (government) when (back then) you could have made protests, made noise?" he asked.

Del Rosario belied this claim in a statement sent to **The STAR** yesterday.

"For the information of the good secretary, we officially protested as many times as possible the building of unlawful structures (the DFA records would evidence this). We also voiced out our objections at multilateral meetings battling for inclusion in final statements. We furthermore sought the assistance of our treaty ally," the statement said.

It added: "We resorted to a legal track in search of a

lasting and peaceful solution resulting in an overwhelming victory for the Phl and our people, which our government decided to set aside."

For Senate President Pro Tempore Ralph Recto, Malacañang should not oppose the complaint, given the country's stake over the West Philippine Sea.

"All Filipinos must support this move. After all, we already won in the arbitral tribunal," Recto said, referring to the case won by the Philippines before the Permanent Court of Arbitration disputing China's nine-dash line claim that covers the entire South China Sea.

— With Christina Mendez, Paolo Romero, Cecille Suerte Felipe



'China's Spratlys baseline plan exceeds nine-dash line'

China's plan to draw straight baselines around the Spratly Islands and declare much of South China Sea as part of its internal waters closed to foreign planes and ships would further escalate tensions in the region, according to the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative (AMTI).

"China has made no secret of its intention to eventually declare straight baselines around the rest of its claimed features in the South China Sea, including the Spratly Islands," AMTI said.

"In any form, a baselines declaration in the Spratlys would escalate tensions in

the region. Claimants like the Philippines and Vietnam would find disputed seas, including those immediately around some of their outposts, suddenly labeled China's internal waters closed to foreign planes and ships," AMTI said.

"The United States and other outside parties would also be sure to undertake operations to signal their non-recognition of those internal waters," it added. "And both commercial shipping and airline companies would face the possibility of China attempting to close previous routes through and above these baselines."

— Pia Lee-Brago, Marc Jayson Cayabyab, Cecille Suerte Felipe

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Panelo: Phl won't renege on Chico loan

By CHRISTINA MENDEZ
and HELEN FLORES

Malacañang downplayed yesterday the warning of Supreme Court Senior Associate Justice Antonio Carpio that the P3.69-billion loan for the Chico River pump irrigation project in Kalinga would put the Philippines at risk of losing the oil-rich Recto (Reed) Bank should it default on the loan.

Presidential spokesman Salvador Panelo said the contract – deemed onerous by some legal luminaries – should not be a cause for alarm because “we never defaulted from any ob-

ligations to any international organization with respect to loans of our country.”

“*Palagi naman tayong nagbabayad eh* (We always pay)... We are known for paying our obligations... We will never renege,” he said.

Panelo also justified the terms of the loan, saying Beijing always has the last say as creditor.

“They have been asking why the contract is favorable to China. Why? Do we have a say when we borrow? When we loan from the bank, it’s always the terms of the bank,” he said in English and Filipino.

According to Carpio, the loan agreement for the Chico River pump irrigation project has a provision that reads: “In case of default by the Philippines in repayment of the loan, China can seize, to satisfy any arbitral award in favor of China, patrimonial assets and assets dedicated to commercial use of the Philippine government.”

Carpio said under paragraph 8.1 of the loan agreement, the Philippines waived any sovereign immunity over all its assets except properties of Philippine embassies and missions, assets of a military

character under the control of the local military and assets located for public or government use as distinguished from patrimonial ones and those dedicated for commercial use.

Carpio said in case of dispute, arbitration shall be held in Beijing with Chinese as majority members of the panel.

Panelo said it is just natural for Beijing to make sure that they will not be disadvantaged after providing the loan that was signed on April 10, 2018.
– With Paolo Romero, Cecille Suerte Felipe

DEFAULT PROVISION

RECTO BANK AS COLLATERAL FOR CHINA LOAN? NOTHING WRONG, SAYS PANELO

By Christine O. Avendaño
@10avendanoINQ

There is nothing wrong if the government used gas-rich Recto Bank as collateral for a \$62-million loan agreement with China, Malacañang said on Monday.

"For me [China seizing Reed Bank should there be a default in the repayment of the loan] is ... not a possibility because we never reneged," presidential spokesperson Salvador Panelo told reporters, using the international name of Recto Bank.

"We are known for paying our obligations," Panelo added.



Salvador Panelo

Carpio warning

Panelo was commenting on the warning of Supreme Court Senior Associate Justice Antonio Carpio during a presentation at Pamantasan ng Lungsod ng Maynila on Friday that China could seize Recto Bank if the Philippines failed to repay the loan for the Chico River Pump Project in Kalinga province.

Panelo said he had not yet seen the loan agreement for the river project. But assuming that what Carpio had said was true, he said he was standing by his statement.

On whether the loan agreement favored China, Panelo likened it to a bank loan for which "the terms of the bank" were followed.

"It's only natural that they will make sure that they will not lose from the loan to us," he said.

But that provision is "useless" because China knows the Philippines can repay the loan, he said.

Panelo said he believed the economic managers allowed the provision because they knew the country could repay the loan.

He said he did not think the terms were unconstitutional because the definition of patrimonial assets was unclear.

On Carpio's statement that the loan contract is expected to be the template for other loan contracts with China, Panelo said: "[I]f we show the Chinese government that we are on time, regularly paying, if you were the ... lender ... you will know the borrower is good and there is no need to impose onerous conditions [on] them. So not necessarily that this will be the template."

'Standard' terms

He added: "The onerous conditions that some are saying [are] incorporated in the contract [are] standard between lender and borrower to be sure that the lender will be getting what they have lent to the borrower."

Seismic surveys have indicated that Recto Bank is rich in oil and gas deposits.

The UN-backed Permanent Court of Arbitration in The Hague ruled in 2016 that Recto Bank is within the Philippines' exclusive economic zone in the South China Sea, meaning the country has sole sovereign right to explore resources there.

China, which claims Recto Bank, rejected the ruling.

—WITH A REPORT FROM FRANCES
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Palace sees PH-China loan deal standard, rules out debt default

MALACANANG on Monday said it sees nothing wrong with using the country's natural resources as collateral for loans from China, saying that such terms are "standard" between lenders and borrowers.

Presidential Spokesman Salvador Panelo issued this statement after Supreme Court Senior Associate Justice Antonio Carpio warned that China could seize natural gas deposits in Reed Bank (Recto Bank) if the Philippines fails to pay the \$62-million Chinese loan for the Chico River irrigation proj-

ect.

"This is... standard in [a] contract whenever our country gets loans from other countries," he said, adding that "you cannot also blame the lender" if he imposes "certain terms that are favorable towards them."

Panelo added that the country has always repaid its loans, so that the provision on a possible default is "useless."

He said there is no possibility that China will seize the Reed Bank as Carpio suggested.

Next page

Palace...

From A1

"To me, it's not a possibility because we will never really renege [on the loan pay-

ments]. It has never happened to us. We are known for paying our obligations," he said.

The loan agreement, signed on April 10, 2018, states that "in case of default by the Philippines in repayment of the loan, China can seize, to satisfy any arbitral

award in favor of China, "patrimonial assets and assets dedicated to commercial use of the Philippine government."

Panelo said he was confident that the country could repay the loan. It can only rescind it if there is fraud. **Nat Mariano**

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Panelo: Show proof fishers being harassed in Panatag

President's spokesperson assures gov't action once Chinese aggression is proven

By Julie M. Aurelio
and Gabriel Cardinoza
@InqNational

The Philippines is bent on filing a diplomatic protest if it is proven that the Chinese Coast Guard is driving away Filipino fishermen from Panatag (Scarborough) Shoal in the West Philippine Sea, presidential spokesperson Salvador Panelo said on Monday.

"They have to show proof that's being done now [again]. If that is being done, certainly we will protest. We will not allow our countrymen to be subjected to that kind of harassment," he said.

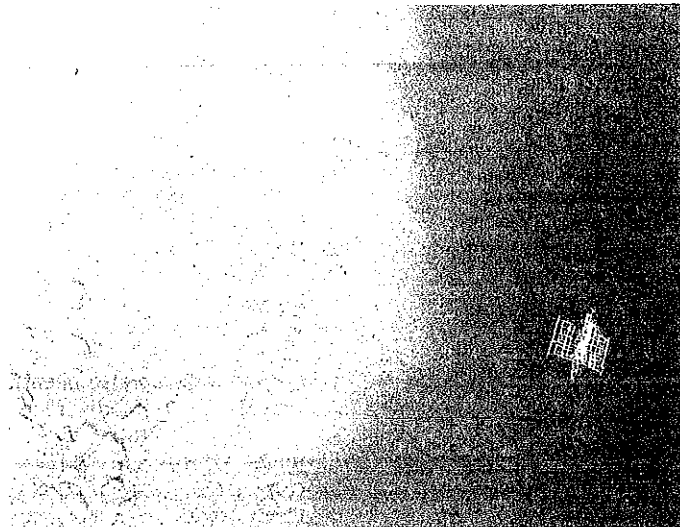
He added: "If there was a negotiation, there was an agreement not to touch them (fishermen). And then one incident, two incidents violate this agreement, then we have to tell them (Chinese) and they will have to correct it."

Panelo was referring to an agreement between the Philippines and China in which fishermen were to be allowed to freely navigate the South China Sea, except the marine-protected areas.

China control

"If there is a violation, we have to go back to them (China) and say, 'There's a violation, you better stop.' The policy is you cannot be harassing our fishermen," he said.

However, he noted that even though the Philippines claimed the contested territory for its own, China asserted control over the area as it had built



PANATAG BOUNTY In this photo taken in November 2016, Zambales fishermen are able to fish in Panatag Shoal amid patrols done by the Chinese Coast Guard. —REM ZAMORA

several structures there.

China claims 90 percent of the 3.5-million-square-kilometer South China Sea, including waters within the Philippines' 370-kilometer exclusive economic zone (EEZ).

The shoal lies 240 km southwest of the coastline of Subic, Zambales province, and within the Philippines' EEZ.

A triangular chain of reefs and rocks surrounding a lagoon, the shoal has a perimeter of 46 km and an area of 150 sq km, making it a rich fishing ground.

In 2012, China seized the shoal after a two-month standoff between Chinese and Philippine vessels. It has since cordoned off the place, driving away Filipino fishermen from

their traditional fishing grounds.

"Can we do something about it? They have control over it as of now. They have forces there. We can only protest like any other country laying claims to it," Panelo said.

However, this does not mean that the Philippines agrees that China should have control over areas that belong to the Philippines, he said.

Diplomatic talks

"Certainly that is ours, and the arbitral ruling says it's ours," he said, citing an international ruling that favored the Philippines' claims over China's nine-dash line argument.

According to him, President Duterte preferred to hold

diplomatic negotiations with China, as no entity could enforce the arbitral ruling that backed the Philippine claim.

"Tell me if any arbitral ruling by this international court had been enforced previously? If there is, there is hope. As of now, we can't do something about it so let's just talk about it," he said.

Back to shoal

On Monday, a group of fishermen from Infanta, Pangasinan province, sailed to Panatag Shoal, hoping the Chinese Coast Guard would not stop them.

"They have nowhere else to go at this time of the year but to return there," said Napoleon Domalanta, chief of Barangay Cato in Infanta.

Quoting his brother-in-law, who had just returned from the shoal, Domalanta said Chinese Coast Guard ships had increased from four to six since last week.

Yoyoy Rizol, a fisherman, said if they would be denied access to the shoal, they would have to fish again within Infanta's municipal waters for their day-to-day food.

In Zambales, fishermen have been avoiding the disputed shoal as the Chinese Coast Guard remained aggressive, driving them away from their traditional fishing ground.

They said they wanted to prevent an experience similar to that of fellow fishermen in Pangasinan who were driven away by the Chinese troops from the shoal early this month. —WITH A REPORT FROM JOHANNA ROSE AGLIBOT INQ

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PH to protest if Chinese coast guards drive away Pinoy fishermen – Panelo

By GENALYN D. KABILINO

The Philippine government is determined to file a protest if Chinese coast guards were really driving away Filipino fishermen from Panatag Shoal.

Presidential Spokesman Salvador Panelo said evidence must show that the fishermen were supposedly still being harassed in the country's territorial waters.

Panelo was reacting to a short documentary released by senatorial candidate Neri Colmenares on the alleged harassment of local fishermen by Chinese coast guards and how it has affected their livelihood in the West Philippine Sea.

The six-minute clip showed fishermen from Masinloc, Zambales complaining of low fish catch since Chinese personnel were supposedly driving them away and at times seizing their best catch and ramming their boats.

"They have to show proof that's being done now again. If that is being done, certainly we will protest. We will not allow our countrymen to be subjected to that kind of harassment," Panelo said during a Palace press briefing.

"If there was a negotiation, there was an agreement not to touch them, and then one incident, two incidents,

violate this agreement, then we have to tell them and they will have to correct it," he said.

He said Filipinos fishing in Panatag shoal or anywhere in the country's waters should "not be touched or harassed."

"If there is a violation, we have to go back to them (China) and say 'May violation daw, you better stop.' The policy is you cannot be harassing our fishermen," he said.

The two countries previously agreed to let fishermen to freely navigate the South China Sea except for marine protected areas. The alleged harassment of Filipino fishermen however has still been reported a number of times in recent months.

Meantime, Malacañang acknowledged that while the country asserts the territory is "ours," China has "control" over the area since they reportedly built structures there.

"May magagawa ba tayo? Sila ang may control as of now. Meron silang pwera doon. We can only protest like any other country na nagke-claim [Can we do something about it? They control it as of now. They have forces there. We can only protest like other claimant countries]," he said.

"You want us to declare war against them?" he asked.

But he clarified that they don't agree that China should have control over the territory that belongs to the country. "Certainly that is ours and the arbitral ruling say it's ours," he said.

For now, Panelo said the country has pursued diplomatic negotiations with China to resolve the territorial dispute, adding it could not afford to wage war with the Asian neighbor.

He said the President prefers the country to hold a dialogue with China especially no one could enforce the arbitral ruling that backed the country's claims in the West Philippine Sea.

Asked if the country was powerless against China, Panelo said: "What I'm saying is, tell me, has any arbitral ruling by this international court been enforced previously? Kung mayroon, may pag-asa. Sa ngayon, wala pa tayo magagawa so pag-usapan na lang natin [If there is, we still have hope. For now, we can't do anything so let's just talk about it!]"

He noted that the country has previously made diplomatic protests against China's activities in the West Philippine Sea although some were made quietly.

"What is important is we are not agreeing to what they are doing to us. We are not allowing it. We're opposing it," he said.

PH to file protest if China drives away Pinoy fishers

BY CATHERINE S. VALENTE

THE Philippine government would file a protest against China if reports that Filipino fishermen were being driven away from the Panatag Shoal (Scarborough Shoal) by Chinese Coast Guards were confirmed, Malacañang said on Monday.

Palace spokesman Salvador Panelo made the statement after Senate candidate Neri Colmenares released a short documentary on the alleged harassment of local fishermen by Chinese coast guard personnel.

The six-minute clip showed fishermen from Masinloc, Zambales detailing how the Chinese Coast Guard would seize their catch and drive them away from the area.

Panelo said Filipinos fishing in Panatag shoal or anywhere in the country's waters should "not be touched or harassed."

"They have to show proof that's being done now again. If that is being done, certainly we will protest. We will not allow our countrymen

to be subjected to that kind of harassment," Panelo said during a press briefing.

"If there was a negotiation, there was an agreement not to touch them and then one incident, two incidents violate this agreement, then we have to tell them and they will have to correct it," he added.

The Philippines and China previously agreed to let fishermen to freely navigate the West Philippine Sea (South China Sea) except for marine protected areas.

Former Foreign Affairs secretary Albert del Rosario, former ombudsman Conchita Carpio-Morales and Filipino fishermen had filed a communication against Chinese President Xi Jinping be-

fore the International Criminal Court for crimes against humanity.

Panelo acknowledged that while the country continues to attest that the territory is "ours," China has "control" over the area since it built structures there.

"*May magagawa ba tayo? Sila ang may control as of now. Meron silang pwersa doon. We can only protest like any other country na nagke-claim* (Can we do something about it? They control it as of now. They have forces there. We can only protest like other claimant countries)," he said.

Panelo, however, clarified that the government did not agree that China should have control over the territory that belongs to the country.

"Certainly that is ours and the arbitral ruling says it's ours," he said.

For now, Panelo said the country would pursue diplomatic negotiations with China to resolve the territorial dispute, adding it could not afford to wage war with the Asian neighbor.

He said President Rodrigo Duterte preferred the country to

hold a dialogue with China, especially when no one could enforce the arbitral ruling that backed the country's claims in the West Philippine Sea.

"What I'm saying is tell me has any arbitral ruling by this international court been enforced previously? *Kung mayroon, may pag-asa. Sa ngayon, wala pa tayo magagawa so pag-usapan na lang natin* (If there is, we still have hope. For now, we can't do anything so let's just talk about it)," Panelo said when asked if the country was powerless against China.

"What is important is we are not agreeing to what they are doing to us. We are not allowing it. We're opposing it," he added.

Since assuming his post, Duterte has sought to downplay Manila's maritime dispute with Beijing in exchange for improved ties with the world's second largest economy.

Duterte has also refused to flaunt the Philippines' victory against China in a United Nations-backed arbitration court in 2016, which invalidated Beijing's expansive claims to the waters. *12*

Filing of ICC complaint political move — Palace

MALACANANG on Monday said the filing of a case against China before the International Criminal Court (ICC) might be a political move.

Former Foreign Affairs secretary Albert del Rosario and former ombudsman Conchita Carpio Morales last week filed a communication against Chinese President Xi Jinping before the ICC for implementing a "systematic plan to control" the contested South China Sea (West Philippine Sea).

The two officials also accused Xi and other Chinese officials of committing crimes within the jurisdiction of the ICC.

"I think [the ICC case is] more of a political [move]. They may know that China is not a member state party. Philippines is not also a state party, so how can ICC assume jurisdiction?" Palace spokesman Salvador Panelo said in a press briefing.

According to the ICC, it could exercise its jurisdiction when a State becomes a party to the Rome Statute, if the alleged perpetrator was a national of a State Party or if the crime was committed in the territory of a State Party; and if a State not party to the Statute may decide to accept the jurisdiction of the ICC.

The communication was filed two days before the Philippines' withdrawal from the Rome Statute took effect.

Panelo slammed anew the former administration for "ignoring" and "letting" China build structures in the West Philippine Sea.

"My source said they (Aquino administration) only filed [the case] when everything was already erected. Why is it that when the

structures were only beginning to be erected, you did not do anything? When it was all built, you make noise," he said.

Also on Monday, Sen. Leila de Lima said with Manila's withdrawal from the ICC, the country could no longer go to the ICC to assail a nation's acts of aggression against the Philippines.

"This is precisely what was achieved by del Rosario and Morales when they filed the communication against China," de Lima said in a statement.

De Lima said Associate Justice Antonio Carpio raised this issue when the Supreme Court tackled the case filed by senators questioning the constitutionality of the Philippine withdrawal without the Senate's concurrence.

"Justice Carpio asseverates that, in the future, the Philippines might find itself in a very difficult situation since it would be without recourse to the ICC from acts of aggression of a foreign power if it withdraws from the Rome Statute," the senator said.

"Unfortunately, any future act of aggression by any foreign country committed after March 17, 2019 can no longer be raised by the Philippines to the ICC because of its withdrawal from the Rome Statute," de Lima said.

"More than Duterte, who remains to be covered by the ICC preliminary examination for crimes against humanity committed before March 17, 2019, the Philippines' withdrawal seems to have also benefited foreign aggressors, to the detriment of the Philippines' interests and national security," she said.

**BERNADETTE E. TAMAYO AND
RALPH EDWIN U. VILLANUEVA**

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TODAY

ICC case: Political motive hit

By Nat Mariano

TWO former government officials who filed a complaint against Chinese President Xi Jinping before the International Criminal Court for crimes against humanity over Chinese actions in the West Philippine Sea may have been politically motivated, a Palace official said Monday.

"They may know that China is not a... state-party, [and] the Philippines is also not a state-party, so how [can] the ICC assume jurisdiction?" Presidential Spokesman Salvador Panelo said in a Palace briefing.

Panelo said some observers have said the move might even harden China's stand

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ICC case:....

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on the South China Sea while others point out the ICC doesn't really have jurisdiction over the case.

Two days before the Philippines' withdrawal from the ICC became official, former Foreign Affairs chief Albert Del Rosario and former Ombudsman Conchita Carpio-Morales accused Xi of crimes against humanity for the top Chinese leader's actions to gain control of the South China Sea.

In a communication to ICC Chief Prosecutor Fatou Bensouda, Del Rosario and Morales asked that Xi and other Chinese officials be investigated for crimes against humanity.

"The enclosed communication outlines how President Xi Jinping and other officials of China, in implementing China's systematic plan to control the South China Sea, have committed crimes within the jurisdiction of the International Court of Justice," the two said in a joint statement.

Both Del Rosario and Morales said the "atrocious actions of Chinese officials in the South China Sea and within Philippine territory" constitute crimes against humanity that can be prosecuted by the ICC.

While the Palace said the two former officials have a right to file a case, it said this would be a futile exercise since the ICC has no jurisdiction over China or the Philippines.

"They could be motivated with righteous indignation over the establishment

of structures on some parts of the South China Sea which have been ruled to be rightfully belonging to us. To their minds, the establishment of those structures endanger the environment as well as our fishermen," Panelo said.

"Whether or not the case will prosper is another matter. It could be dismissed because China is not a member of the ICC, [nor] is the Philippines," he added.

In the same briefing, Panelo also blamed Del Rosario, who was the country's top diplomat at the time, for not doing anything when China was just starting erecting activities in the contested territories.

He did not offer specifics, however, and did not name the source of his information.

Solicitor General Jose Calida on Monday said the Philippines' withdrawal from the ICC will have no negative effect on the country's justice system.

Calida said the country's institutions are strong, able to function, investigate and prosecute drug-related cases, with without ICC membership.

The Solicitor General cited data showing that 49,034 drug-related cases have been filed in various courts as of 2018, while 75,327 are pending before the public prosecutor's office.

"The Philippine justice system functions independently with or without membership in the ICC. Hence, the withdrawal of the Philippines from the Rome Statute has no effect in our justice system," Calida said in a statement.

"All these facts show that the government is not unwilling or unable to prosecute these crimes, despite what

administration critics say," he added.

Calida said the decision to withdraw from the ICC was a prerogative of the government.

"As a sovereign state, it is our prerogative to be a party to the Rome Statute or not," the chief state lawyer said.

Calida said there are laws to protect the Filipinos' fundamental rights and that Manila remains a party to other human rights treaties.

At the same time, he said the move will not affect foreign aid to the country.

Panelo, meanwhile, said the government will file a diplomatic protest if it is shown that Chinese coast guard have been keeping Filipino fishermen away from Scarborough or Panatag shoals in the West Philippine Sea.

He was reacting to a short documentary released by senatorial candidate Neri Colmenares, showing local fishermen explain how their catch had dropped from 20 tons to only two tons because Chinese ships were driving them away.

"As far as I know, [Chinese] Ambassador Zhao Jianhua told me that the fishermen there are not being harassed. Now if there is a violation, then we will have to go back to them and say, 'Hey, they say there's a violation, you better stop it,'" Panelo said.

"The policy is always, 'You cannot be harassing our fishermen,'" he added.

Beijing and Manila have previously agreed to let fishermen freely navigate the disputed waters except for marine protected areas.

DOJ: ICC complaint more a political than legal move

BY ASHZEL HACHERO

JUSTICE Secretary Menardo Guevarra yesterday said the filing of a complaint against Chinese President Xi Jinping before the International Criminal Court by two former Philippine government officials could be more of a political statement than a legal one.

Guevarra also said there are jurisdictional issues and questions about legal standing, which he said could doom the complaint filed by Albert del Rosario, who served as foreign affairs secretary in the Aquino administration, and

former Ombudsman Conchita Carpio Morales.

The complaint was filed two days before the Philippine withdrawal from the ICC took effect on March 17.

"I believe that the complaint was filed not with the hope of a favorable judgment by the ICC, but probably to impress upon China that if the Philippine government is not willing to vigorously assert its West Philippine Sea arbitration victory at this time, there are Filipinos who are unwilling to defer further action

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DOJ

to enforce the arbitral ruling," Guevarra said.

China, which has rejected the 2016 ruling of the arbitral panel dismissing its massive claims in the South China Sea, is not a party to the Rome Statute which established the ICC.

Guevarra said the complaint may have been filed also to stress a point that the Philippines' withdrawal from the ICC was a mistake, as "this is one forum where enforcement action in the West Philippine Sea may actually be sought."

"All of these notwithstanding, I trust that the President has the greater interest of the country in mind in pursuing his kind of foreign policy, and for that reason we ought to give him all the leeway and flexibility he needs," he said.

On Sunday, Guevarra belittled the filing of the complaint against Xi and other Chinese officials saying such a move is futile and could be just a political statement.

Yesterday, Guevarra reiterated his point adding that the complaint was more of a political statement than a true legal action.

"Let me just explain that making a political statement is not the same as doing a partisan, politically-motivated act. Private citizens or groups can say or do something to influence public opinion or affect State action pertaining to matters of public interest, but not necessarily aligning themselves with mainstream political aggruppations in the partisan context. This is the context in which I stated earlier that the complaint was more of a political statement than a true legal action," he explained.

Duterte announced the country's withdrawal from the Rome Statute last year citing "baseless, unprecedented and outrageous attacks" against him and his administration over war against the illegal drugs trade, which is being blamed for thousands of alleged extrajudicial killings.

In filing the complaint, Del Rosario and Carpio-Morales said Xi

and other Chinese officials committed crimes against humanity over environmental damage in the South China Sea.

They said these crimes caused serious injury to Filipino fishermen and future generations of inhabitants of the coastal countries in the SCS by accelerating the collapse of fisheries stocks.

Likewise, Del Rosario and Carpio-Morales said the ICC has jurisdiction over the case because the actions of Xi and other Chinese officials took place when Manila was still a party to the Rome Statute.

FISHERS

Del Rosario reiterated that the plight of poor Filipino fishermen affected by Chinese activities in the West Philippine Sea prompted the filing of the complaint.

"Our estimate is that there are 300,000 fishermen that have had their livelihood affected plus that fact that the food security was a factor," Del Rosario told CNN's "The Source" program.

"We are not politicians. We don't intend to drag in politics into our actions. This is not a political move. This is a move taken by private citizens who want to protect our marginalized fishermen," he added.

He said this is the reason he and Carpio-Morales did not include any politician in filing the complaint.

"We didn't want to politicize the effort that we are undertaking to help our people, to help our fishermen," he added.

Del Rosario was instrumental in Manila's winning the case against China in 2016 before the Netherlands-based Permanent Court of Arbitration which invalidated Beijing's massive claim in the disputed waters.

He said the move was also meant to dispel the notion that small countries like the Philippines are powerless against big powers such as China. He said this was first proven wrong when Manila filed a case against Beijing in 2013 before the Permanent Court of Arbitration.

He added that if their ICC bid fails, they will still file more complaints and communications against China.

"If it doesn't work, we will at least have brought to the floor the abuses that being endured by our people for which we should be doing something," he said.

Carpio-Morales, in the same program, said: "This is not a political move. It is a move undertaken by private citizens, by individuals who are minded to protect our marginalized fishermen."

She said allowing the Chinese to continue their activities in the area would deprive Filipino fishermen of livelihood on a massive scale.

"We'd like to thank those who have been supportive of our cause, not to give up, to have faith on the merits of the communication we have sent and to pray for our marginalized fishermen. If no one takes up the cudgels for them, who will?" she added.

POLITICAL MOVE

Chief Presidential Legal Counsel and concurrent presidential spokesman Salvador Panelo said the complaint is "more of a political" move.

Panelo said Del Rosario and Carpio-Morales are well aware that the ICC has no jurisdiction over China.

"They may know that China is not a member state party. The Philippines is not also a state party, so how can ICC assume jurisdiction?" he added.

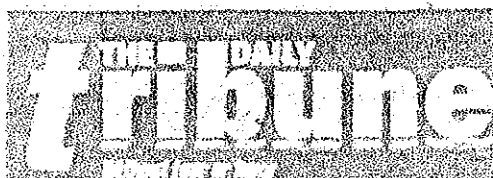
Panelo also questioned the timing of the filing. He said Del Rosario, as foreign affairs secretary, could have taken actions against China when it was just starting construction activities in the disputed territory.

Del Rosario led the filing of the case against China before the Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA) in The Hague.

Panelo said the Duterte administration has decided to set aside the PCA ruling and focus instead on strengthening ties between Manila and Beijing. — *With Jocelyn Montemayor*

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ICC complaint political not legal

Guevarra expressed the belief that the complaint was filed more as a political statement and not with the hope of a favorable judgment by the International Criminal Court.

By Alvin Murcia

Justice Secretary Menardo Guevarra said yesterday the complaint filed by former Philippine officials against Chinese President Xi Jinping at the International Criminal Court (ICC) is more a political action than a legal one.

The complaint, filed by former Foreign Affairs secretary Albert del Rosario and former Ombudsman Conchita Carpio Morales two days before the Philippines' withdrawal from the ICC became effective, accuses Xi of crimes against humanity over China's activities to gain control over most of the West Philippine Sea (WPS).

Guevarra expressed the belief that the complaint was filed more as a political statement and not with the hope of a favorable judgment by the ICC.

Making a political statement, he pointed out, is not the same as doing a partisan, politically motivated act. "Private citizens or groups can say or do something to influence public opinion or affect state action pertaining to matters of public interest, but not necessarily aligning themselves with mainstream political aggrupations in the partisan sense," he explained.

"I believe that the complaint was filed not with the hope of a favorable judgment by the ICC (jurisdictional issues and legal standing are huge stumbling blocks), but probably to impress upon China that if the Philippine government is not willing to vigorously assert its West Philippine Sea arbitration victory at this time, there are Filipinos who are unwilling to defer further action to enforce the arbitral ruling," Guevarra said.

The complaint, he added, may also have been filed to stress a point: that the Philippines' withdrawal from the ICC was a mistake, "as this is one forum where enforcement action in the WPS may actually be sought."

"All of these notwithstanding, I trust that the president has the greater interest of the country in mind in pursuing his kind of foreign policy, and for that reason, we ought to give him all the leeway and flexibility he needs," explained Guevarra.

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WPS dispute options limited – Palace

By Kristina Maralit

Malacañang reiterated yesterday the country has only two options when it comes to asserting its right over the West Philippine Sea – either through diplomatic negotiations with Beijing or a declaration of war.

Presidential spokesman Salvador Panelo made this clear yesterday when asked for his reaction to reports that Chinese vessels are harassing and chasing away Filipino fishermen attempting to enter the Panatag (Scarborough) shoal.

"My question is, what can we do when they're the ones who have control over there. They have forces there," Panelo said in a Palace briefing yesterday in response to a video released by opposition senatorial candidate Neri Colmenares.

The six-minute long mini documentary shows Filipino fishermen being driven away from Scarborough Shoal by the Chinese Coast Guard.

We can only protest like any other country who also has a claim.

The incident allegedly took place a few days after several Filipino fishermen and former government officials filed a communication before the International Criminal Court against Chinese President Xi Jinping for crimes against humanity.

"We can only protest like any other country who also has a claim (to the area) like Vietnam. That's all we can do. You want us to declare war against them?" the official asked.

He said President Duterte himself conceded that the Philippines won't stand a chance against China should war break out as their cruise missiles "could reach Manila within seven minutes."

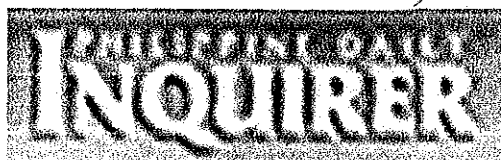
The Philippines could opt to rally for international support for its historic victory over China before the International Tribunal in The Hague.

The ruling of the Permanent Court of Arbitration, however, has been put in the backburner by the Duterte administration because it supposedly cannot be enforced.

"Tell me, has any arbitral ruling by this international court been enforced previously? If there is, then we have a chance. If none, then there's nothing we can do at the moment. We can only resort to negotiations," Panelo said.

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20 more narcopoliticians under probe-Año

The names of 20 more politicians suspected of involvement in the drug trade will soon be added to the list of 46 local officials facing administrative cases in the Ombudsman, according to the Department of the Interior and Local Government. "The [46 names] released by the President were just the initial list. There are some [cases] still undergoing validation. In fact, around 20 are being validated now," Interior Secretary Eduardo Año told reporters in Quezon City on Monday. Año said the 20 were mostly mayors, but also included a vice governor. "But let's see. The next release [of names] might already be after elections because [the validation of reports] is a long process. Just the [validation of the] initial 46 names took 14 months." The Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency (PDEA) earlier said 82 local politicians, 64 of them running for reelection in May's midterm polls, were on its validated narcolist. PDEA Director General Aaron Aquino also recently said that another narcolist included prosecutors, judges and even journalists. "These are part of [a list of] about a thousand [people] the President is holding," Año said. The PDEA, the police, the military and the National Intelligence Coordinating Agency jointly validate the list, he said. --JAYMEE T. GAMIL

PNP identifies 941 election hotspots

By MARTIN A. SADONGDONG

Exactly seven weeks before the May 13 midterm elections, the Philippine National Police (PNP) identified on Monday at least 941 poll hotspots nationwide where police force are expected to be augmented.

Director General Oscar Al- ▶9

PNP identifies 941...

bayalde, PNP chief, said the number is equivalent to 57.60 percent of the total 1,634 cities and municipalities in the country.

Of the 941 election hotspots, 131 towns and cities are in the "Yellow" category; 238 in "Orange," 570 in "Red" while two others - Cotabato City and Daraga, Albay - were already placed under the control of the Commission on Elections (Comelec).

The Comelec, PNP, and Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) identify and classify election hotspots into four categories: Green, Yellow, Orange, and Red.

Category Green refers to areas of no security concern and are relatively peaceful and orderly.

Category Yellow are areas with a history of election-related violence or existence of intense partisan political rivalry.

Category Orange includes areas where, aside from having the factors

considered in the Category Yellow, there are also serious threats posed by domestic terror groups and the likes.

Lastly, Category Red is comprised of areas where, aside from the factors considered in Category Orange, relevant government agencies declare the existence of conditions which may constitute grounds for the declaration of Comelec control.

'Red' areas

Albayalde said that areas placed under Red category will be given more monitoring since this is where election-related incidents are likely to occur.

Of the 570 areas under the Red category, 454 are cities and municipalities of the 27 provinces in the six regions of Mindanao. The Comelec had earlier declared the entire region under the Red category.

As of March 20, 118 Red areas were identified in the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao

(ARMM); 93 in Northern Mindanao (Region 10); 73 in Caraga (Region 13); 72 in Zamboanga Peninsula (Region 9); and 49 each in Davao Region (11) and Soccsksargen (Region 12).

"There will be a realignment of our deployment with regards to this development," Albayalde said.

"I'll be traveling, together with some officers, to check personally the deployment of our personnel in these areas, especially those areas that are of grave concern or under color Red," he added.

Meanwhile, no Red area has been identified in the National Capital Region (NCR) and Ilocos Region.

The PNP had earlier said that it will deploy 181,775 police personnel for public safety and general law enforcement duties on Election Day.

Of the number, 99,976 will be assigned in polling centers; 54,532 will be assigned to Quick Reaction Teams (QRTs); 18,177 will compose the Reactionary Standby Support Force (RSSF); and 9,089 will make up the Red Team and Headquarters Skeletal Forces.

GOV'T TROOPS CAPTURE TOP RED LEADER IN NEGROS

By Maricar Cinco
and Carla P. Gomez
@InqNational

A former Catholic priest-turned-rebel was the sixth peace consultant of the National Democratic Front of the Philippines (NDFP) to be arrested since President Duterte formally ended peace talks with the political arm of the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP).

Francisco Fernandez, or "Father Frank," 71, secretary of Komiteng Rehiyonal-Negros, was arrested with his wife, Cleofe Lagtapon, 66, in a police-Army operation in Liliw, Laguna province, at 5 a.m. on Sunday.

Fernandez served as NDFP regional party chair and spokesperson, and Lagtapon, secretary for communications and education, **A2**

Gov't troops capture top Red leader in Negros

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officials said.

Military officials said Fernandez used the aliases "Ago," "Tatay," "Tuloy," "Pidong" and "Andot," and had a bounty of P8 million for his capture on charges of rebellion, murder and attempted murder in Guihulngan, Negros Oriental province.

They said Lagtapon was known as "Guia," "Ella," "Pidang" and "Emay."

Arrested with the couple was Gee-Ann Perez, 20, who authorities said was a "staff" of the CPP regional committee in Negros, Cebu, Bohol and Siquijor.

She and Lagtapon are facing a murder and robbery case in Cadiz City, Negros Occidental province.

Maj. Gen. Rhoderick Parayno, commander of the Army's 2nd Infantry Division, said Fernandez was the subject of four arrest warrants for murder and multiple murder.

Guns, grenades

Senior Supt. Eleazar Matta, Laguna police director, said three .45-caliber pistols and three hand grenades were seized from them, along with cell phones and documents, in the couple's rented apartment at Barangay Calumpang.

The three underwent inquest proceedings at the Laguna prosecutor's office Monday afternoon for violation of the election gun ban.

Fernandez and his wife arrived in Laguna in October but settled in Liliw only in January, Matta said.

He was seeking medical treatment in the province, human rights group Karapatan said, describing him as "sickly."

Negros' last ideologue

For more than 30 years, authorities had been hunting down Fernandez, considered the "last of the true ideologues" of the communist rebel move-

ment on Negros Island even by military officials.

He remained mainstream when many of his colleagues joined the revisionist movement in the 1990s that led to the breakaway group, Revolutionary Proletarian Army-Alex Boncayao Brigade, which later entered into a peace agreement with the government in 2000.

"We caught the No. 1 big fish of the CPP-NPA (New People's Army) in Negros," said Brig. Gen. Benedict Arevalo, 303rd Brigade commander in Negros. This shows that CPP-NPA members "cannot run away from justice even for so long. There is always a time for reckoning, and justice will eventually be served," he said.

According to the Army, Fernandez was involved in the 2017 ambush by the NPA, the armed wing of the CPP, in Guihulngan City, Negros Oriental, which resulted in the death of six policemen and a civilian.

Army hospital

Kristina Conti of Public Interest Law Center and Karapatan said lawyers and family members were barred from seeing Fernandez, who had been confined to the Army's general hospital at Fort Bonifacio in Taguig City.

Lt. Col. Demy Zagala, Army

WHAT WENT BEFORE

At least six consultants to the National Democratic Front of the Philippines (NDFP) have been arrested since President Duterte signed Proclamation No. 360 in November 2017 terminating peace talks with the communist-led NDFP.

Francisco "Frank" Fernandez, 71, spokesperson for the NDFP in Negros and part of the 23-member NDFP peace panel, was arrested with his wife, Cleofe Lagtapon, 66, on Sunday in Liliw, Laguna province. Lagtapon was said to have served as NDFP deputy secretary for communications and education in Negros, Cebu, Bohol and Siquijor.

On March 20, Renante Gamara, 61, and retired priest Arturo Joseph Balagat, 72, were arrested in Balagat's house in Imus City, Cavite province. Both were charged with illegal possession of firearms and explosives.

Gamara, a former labor union and urban poor organizer, was part of the NDFP political and constitutional reforms committee during the talks.

In 2018, four NDFP advisers were arrested.

Rey Casambre, 67, and his wife, Patricia Cora, 72, were arrested in Bacoor, Cavite, on Dec. 7, 2018, while in their car on the basis of a warrant for murder and attempted murder issued by a Regional Trial Court in Lupon, Davao Oriental province.

Casambre is also the executive director of the private Philippine Peace Center, and his wife is a translator for the group.

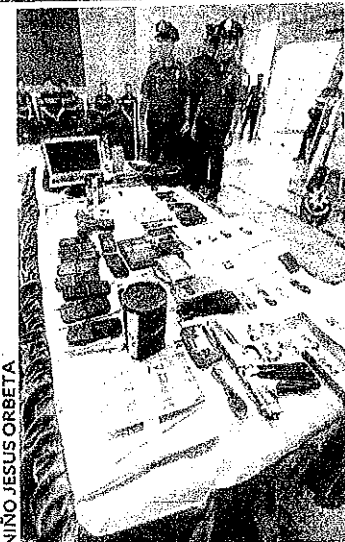
On Nov. 8, 2018, Vicente Ladlad was arrested on illegal firearms charges in a midnight raid on a house in Novaliches, Quezon City. Police and military operatives said they seized from Ladlad and an elderly couple, Alberto and Virginia Villamor, "high-powered firearms, ammunition, grenades and several subversive documents."

On Oct. 15, 2018, Adelberto Silva, 71, was arrested with four others in Santa Cruz, Laguna, by members of the Criminal Investigation and Detection Group for alleged illegal possession of firearms and explosives.

On Jan. 31, 2018, Rafael Baylosis and his companion, Roque Guillermo Jr., were arrested while waiting for a ride in Quezon City. They allegedly had two .45-caliber pistols tucked in their waists and a grenade in a bag of red rice.

A year later, the Quezon City Regional Trial Court Branch 100 dismissed the charges against Baylosis and Guillermo, saying their arrest was illegal with the state "failing to meet its burden of proving their guilt beyond reasonable doubt." —INQUIRER RESEARCH—

Source: Inquirer Archives



The items seized from Fernandez and his wife.

spokesperson, said Fernandez had told officers "he was not feeling well" and was first brought to Asian Medical Center in Muntinlupa City. He and his wife were later transferred to the Army camp.

Zagala said the military was not giving Karapatan the runaround to deny Fernandez his rights to a counsel. "We treated him well, put him in a room—not a ward, and gave him medical attention," he said.

Fernandez came from a small town in Cebu and was assigned as priest to Negros. His

last posting was at San Vicente Ferrer Parish in Barangay Antipolo, Pontevedra town, Negros Occidental.

Fernandez was an activist during his seminary days. He became a full-fledged rebel in the 1980s.

San Carlos Bishop Gerardo Alminaza said he would pray for the safety of Fernandez and his two companions.

"I pray that their fundamental human rights are respected even as they are made to account for whatever they're accused of," he added. INQ

MILITARY OPERATIONS VS NPA REBELS

TOURISTS BARRED AMID CLASHES IN SOUTHERN ILOILO'S UPLANDS

By **Nestor P. Burgos Jr.**
@nestorburgosINQ

ILOILO CITY—The military has advised tourists to avoid visiting hinterland villages in three towns in the southern portion of Iloilo province following a series of clashes between government troops and communist rebels.

Lt. Col. Sisenando Magbalot, commander of the Army's 61st Infantry Battalion (61IB), said tourists should avoid the mountainous areas in the towns of Igaras, Miag-ao and San Joaquin as a precautionary measure.

These areas in southern Iloilo are popular summer destinations for hiking, mountain trekking and spelunking.

Magbalot said civilians could be displaced by government offensives against the New People's Army (NPA).

"We are asking them to avoid especially the areas where the encounters have happened and adjacent villages because of ongoing operations," Magbalot told the Inquirer.

NPA anniversary

He said government troops had been conducting operations to disrupt rebel activities, especially during the commemoration of the NPA's 50th founding anniversary on March 29.

Troops under the 61IB, with the help of tracker dogs, have been pursuing rebels after four clashes since March 17.

An NPA rebel was killed in a clash at Barangay Alimodias, Miag-ao, on Sunday, the fourth firefight in Iloilo and Antique

provinces in a week.

The 61IB reported a clash with rebels at Barangay Maulangan in Igaras on March 17, and an encounter at Barangay Osorio I in San Remigio, Antique, on March 19.

On March 20, a soldier was wounded in a firefight at Barangay Lacay Doldol, Igaras.

In a statement, the NPA's Coronacion Chiva "Waling-Waling" Command belied the military's report that a clash erupted in Igaras on March 17.

Not rebels

The rebel command said none of its members were in the area and denied that three residents—Roberto Elamparo and brothers Ramon and Ruperto Enar—who were arrested by soldiers, were rebels.

Reports said government troops recovered improvised explosive devices from Elamparo's house.

Last week, the police filed criminal complaints in the Iloilo provincial prosecutor's office against 10 suspected rebels, including the three residents of Maulangan village.

The complaints include illegal possession of explosives, multiple attempted murder and direct assault.

But Joselito Echiverria, village chief of Maulangan, maintained that those arrested were farmers.

"Anybody who wants to know who these three are can come to our village and ask the residents. We will tell you that they are not NPA rebels," Echiverria told the Inquirer. INQ

NDF consultant, 2 NPA leaders nabbed in Laguna

By EMMANUEL TUPAS

A consultant of the National Democratic Front (NDF) and two New People's Army (NPA) officials were arrested in Liliw, Laguna on Sunday.

NDF consultant Francisco Fernandez, 71; his partner Cleofe Lagtapon, 66, said to be the NPA's regional deputy secretary for communications and education in Negros, and Geen-Ann Perez, 20, regional communications staff, were apprehended at their hideout in Barangay Calumpang at around 5:16 a.m., Philippine National Police chief Director General Oscar Albayalde said yesterday.

Albayalde said three .45-caliber pistols, three hand grenades, two sling bags, three cell phones and USB ports, which contained subversive materials, were recovered from the suspects.

He said the three face

charges for illegal possession of firearms and explosives and violation of the Omnibus Election Code.

"The operation that led to their arrest is part of our aggressive campaign against crime, terrorism and wanted persons," Albayalde told a press briefing.

Maj. Gen. Rhoderick Parayno, 2nd Infantry Division commander, said Fernandez is the sixth NDF consultant arrested since President Duterte terminated peace talks with communist rebels.

Parayno said 17 other NDF consultants who were given safe conduct passes remain at large.

"The government will be

unrelenting in its pursuit for peace and prosperity, whoever, whatever and wherever the threat may be," he said.

Chief Superintendent Edward Carranza, Calabarzon police director, said Fernandez is a former priest who has pending warrants of arrest for murder.

"There were a series of operations to get him but he would always evade arrest," Carranza said.

Fernandez is tagged in the killing of the police chief of Guihulngan City in July 2017 and the ambush of soldiers earlier this year.

Rebels surrender

In Misamis Oriental, four NPA leaders surrendered to the 58th Infantry Battalion (IB) in Barangay Poblacion, Claveria, Misamis Oriental last week.

The surrenderees were identified as vice platoon lead-

er Jan-Jan Senagonia, squad leader Robert Cayasan, team leader Rejie Cayasan and his wife Catherine, alias Em-Em, of the North Central Mindanao Regional Committee.

"This shows that NPA rebels are tired and suffering in their organizations... communities are also reporting on their presence," Lt. Col. Anthony Derilo of the 58th IB said.

Meanwhile, in Samar, the military blamed NPA guerrillas for "orchestrating" the evacuation of over 150 families in Barangay Hagbay and San Nicolas in San Jose de Buan also last week.

Maj. Gen. Raul Farnacio, 8th Infantry Division commander, said the evacuation occurred as the rebels harassed members of a community support program team. — Emmanuel Tupas, Non Alquitran, Ed Amoroso, Michael Punongbayan, Miriam Desacada

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Another CPP-NPA-NDF peace consultant arrested

By **AARON B. RECUENCO**
and **DANNY ESTACIO**

Police and military operatives arrested a consultant of the Communist Party of the Philippines-New People's Army-National Democratic Front (CPP-NPA-NDF) and two other local communist officials in a raid in Liliw,

Laguna, Monday morning.

Francisco Fernandez, who used to be an NDF consultant in the botched peace negotiations with the government; Cleofe Lagtapon; and Gee-Ann Perez were arrested when soldiers from the 202nd Brigade and policemen swooped down on the former's lair in Barangay Calumpang at

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Another CPP-NPA-NDF... ◀1

around 5 a.m. Monday, Director General Oscar Albayalde, chief of the Philippine National Police (PNP), said.

Seized from them were three handguns with various bullets, three hand grenades, various documents, cellular phones, a laptop, and several USBs (Universal Serial Bus).

Officials said the 66-year old Lagtapon is reportedly a partner of Fernandez. She is reportedly the Regional Deputy for Communications and Education of the NPA operating in the Negros provinces. The 20-year old Perez, on the other hand, is a Regional Communications Staff, Komite Rehiyon-Negros, Cebu, Bohol, and Siquijor (KR-NCBS).

"The operation that led to their arrest is part of our aggressive campaign against crime, terrorism and wanted persons. The subject of the operation, Francisco Fernandez, has standing arrest warrant for murder," said Albayalde.

Maj. Gen. Rhoderick Parayno, commanding general of the 2nd Infantry Division, said the 71-year-old Fernandez and the two others are currently under their custody.

Parayno said Fernandez is the sixth NDF consultant arrested since Duterte decided not to talk anymore

with the communist rebels.

He said there are 17 more NDF consultants who were given safe conduct passes.

Priest-turned-rebel

Chief Supt. Edward Carranza, director of the Calabarzon (Cavite, Laguna, Batangas, Rizal, Quezon) regional police, confirmed that Fernandez used to be a priest in Negros Island before he joined the NPA.

"In the past, we had a lot of operations to get him but he would always evade arrest. There were several people arrested before but they were just look-a-like," said Carranza.

Carranza said Fernandez is currently confined at an Army hospital after he complained of chest pains after the arrest.

"He is an old man so we understand his situation. But the arrest warrants will be returned to the court that issued them," said Carranza.

Based on their background check, Carranza said Fernandez has four standing arrest warrants for murder.

Fernandez also serves as spokesman for NPA operating in Negros and the deputy secretary for the organization.

Why Laguna

Fernandez is the second top leader

of NPA arrested in Laguna in recent months, according to Senior Supt. Eleazar Matta, director of the Laguna Provincial Police.

He said Laguna seems to be the favorite hiding place of the communist rebels due to continuously increasing population in the province, aside from the fact that residents are getting used to presence of strangers due to migration.

"They have all they need in Laguna. They also prefer the province probably due to its strategic location," said Matta.

Laguna is near the mountainous area of Quezon province.

Political links

Albayalde said all the documents and other items seized from Fernandez will be turned over to the military to check on their intelligence value.

Among them, he said, are the laptop and the USBs.

"The military intelligence will check on them. We also would like to find out if they have connections with some candidates based on the documents that would be extracted from the laptop and USBs," said Albayalde.

The Department of the Interior and Local Government had earlier said that they are monitoring various re-electionist and candidates who are supporting the NPA.

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NDF consultant, 2 others nabbed

By AARON RECUENCO

Joint police and military operatives have arrested a National Democratic Front (NDF) peace consultant and two leaders of the New People's Army (NPA) in a raid in Liliw, Laguna.

Director General Oscar Albayaalde, chief of the Philippine National Police (PNP), said soldiers from the 202nd Brigade and policemen swooped down on the lair of Francisco Fernandez at around 5 a.m. in Barangay Calumpang.

Aside from Fernandez, who used to be a consultant for the NDF before it was terminated by President Duterte, also nabbed were Cleofe Lagtapon and Gee-Ann Perez.

The 66-year-old Lagtapon is reportedly a partner of Fernandez. She is reportedly the Regional

Deputy for Communications and Education of the NPA operating in Negros provinces.

The 20-year-old Perez, on the other hand, is a staff of the Regional Communications Staff of the NPA in Negros Island.

"The operation that led to their arrest is part of our aggressive campaign against crime, terrorism and wanted persons. The subject of the operation, Francisco Fernandez, has standing arrest warrant for murder," said Albayaalde.

Seized from those arrested, according to Albayaalde, were three handguns with various bullets, three hand grenades, various documents, cellular phones, a laptop and several USBs.

Maj. Gen. Rhoderick Parayno, commanding general of the 2nd In-

fantry Division, said the 71-year-old Fernandez and the two others are currently under their custody.

Parayno said Fernandez is the sixth NDF consultant who were already arrested since Duterte decided not to talk anymore with the communist rebels.

He said there are 17 more NDF consultants who were given safe conduct passes.

Chief Supt. Edward Carranza, director of the CALABARZON (Cavite, Laguna, Batangas, Rizal, Quezon) regional police, confirmed that Fernandez used to be a priest in Negros Island before he joined the NPA.

"In the past, we had a lot of operations to get him but he would always evade arrest. There were several people arrested before but they were just look-a-like," said Carranza.

May 2019

17 pang NDF consultant susunod na aarestuhin

Labingpito pang consultant ng National Democratic Front ang susunod nang aarestuhin ng security forces matapos namang tuldukan na ni Pangulong Rodrigo Duterte ang usapang pakikipagkapayapaan sa Communist Party of the Philippines-New People's Army-NDF.

Ayon kay Major General Rhoderick Parayno, Commander ng 2nd Infantry Division ng Philippine Army, 23 NDF

consultants ang naunang nabigyan ng safe conduct pass ng pamahalaan.

Sa nasabing bilang ay anim na ang magkakasunod na nasakote ng security forces at nasa 17 pa ang patuloy nilang pinaghahanap.

Idinlin ng opisyal na dahil tinapos na ni Pangulong Duterte ang peace talks sa hanay ng komunistang grupo ay wala nang bisa ang safe conduct pass ng nasabing mga NDF Consultants.

Pinakahuli sa mga nasakote ay ang dating pari na naging top NPA terrorist at NDF consultant na si Frank Fernandez alyas Ka Ago ng NPA Komiteng Rehlyon Negros na nabitag sa raid sa safehouse ng mga ito sa Brgy. Calumpang sa pagitan ng hangganan ng mga bayan ng Liliw at Nagcarlan, Laguna.

Samantala, nilinaw kahapon ng Diocese ng Imus na walang kaugnayan at hindi naging bahagi ng diyosis ang retiradong pari na inaresto at inakusahang kaanib ng NDFP.

Ayon kay Imus, Cavite Bishop Reynaldo

Evangelista, walang koneksyon sa kanilang diyosisis si retired Fr. Arturo Balagat dahil matagal itong nag-serbisyo sa Diocese ng San Bernardino, California.

Sinabi pa ng chairman ng Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines (CBCP) Permanent Committee on Public Affairs na bumalik lang si Balagat sa Cavite nang mag-retiro na ito.

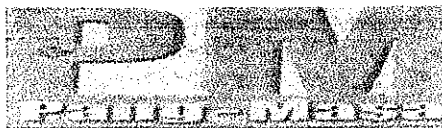
Inamin naman ni Pangulong Duterte na sumuko na siyang makipag-negosasyon pa sa CPP-NPA-NDF.

Ito ang pagpapaliwanag ni Pangulong Duterte sa harap ng libu-libong political supporters ng PDP-Laban habang nag-sagawa ng rally sa isang university gym sa Barangay Lapasan, Cagayan de Oro City kamakalawa ng gabi.

Sinabi ni Duterte na pinutol na niya nang tuluyan ang negosasyon sa pamamagitan ng pagbuwag sa government peace panel dahil walang marating ang negosasyon sapagkat hindi sinsero ang kabilang panig. (Rudy Andal, Joy Cantos at Doris Franche) 2

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17 PA NDF CONSULTANTS TINUTUGIS

Nakatakdang arestuhin ng mga otoridad ang nasa 17 pang mga consultants ng National Democratic Front (NDF) matapos tuldukan na ni Pangulong Rodrigo Duterte ang peace talks sa hanay ng CPP-NPA-NDF.

Sinabi ni Major General Rhoderick Parayno, Commander ng Army's 2nd Infantry Division, nasa 23 NDF consultants ang nabigyan ng safe conduct pass ng pama-

halaan na kung saan ay anim na ang magkakasunod na nasakote ng security forces at nasa 17 pa ang patuloy nilang pinaghahanap.

Ayon kay Parayno, na wala nang bisa ang safe conduct pass ng mga nasabing NDF consultants matapos na tuldukan ni Pangulong Duterte ang ang peace talks sa hanay ng komunistang grupo.

"This will definitely have an impact on their

Ni JOY CANTOS

leadership. After the termination of the peace talks, yung mga involved sa talks and even the consultants, I think there are 23 of them and 6 have been arrested. So this will definitely put an end to the effort ni Joma Sison na ibalik sa national level yung peace talks", ani Parayno na sinabing mas pabor ang mga ground commanders at miyembro ng NPA sa local

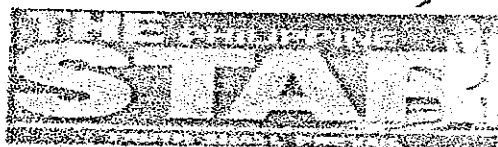
peace talks.

Kabilang sa mga hinahanting na NDF Consultants ay ang mag-asawang Wilma at Benito Tiamzon.

Pinakahuli sa mga nasakote ay ang dating pari na naging top NPA terrorist at NDF consultant na si Frank Fernandez alyas Ka Ago ng NPA Komiteng Rehiyon Negros na nabitag sa raid sa safehouse ng mga ito sa

Bigy. Calumpang sa pagitan ng hangganan ng mga bayan ng Liliw at Nagcarlan kasama ang dalawa pang opisyal ng NPA na sina Cleofe Lagtapo 66, at Ge-Ann Perez 20.

Si Fernandez ay nakatagpuan sa Army Hospital sa Fort Bonifacio, Taguig City matapos itong dumaing ng paninikip ng dibdib nang masakote ng security forces.



AFP wants Joma Sison indicted for murder, terrorism

Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) founding chairman Jose Ma. Sison should be charged with murder and terrorism, according to the military.

"We, together with other government agencies under the National Task Force to End Local Communist Armed Conflict, are working for the indictment of Mr. Sison and his cohorts," Armed Forces of the Philippines spokesman Brig. Gen. Edgard Arevalo said yesterday.

Arevalo said the CPP and its armed wing, the New People's Army (NPA), must be held accountable for the murder of thousands of their comrades on suspicion of being military informants or those who have expressed their desire to go back to mainstream society.

However, he said it is up to the political leadership to decide on whether to request for Sison's extradition.

Meanwhile, Interior

Secretary Eduardo Año belittled Sison's threat of intensified attacks in response to the government's termination of peace talks with communist rebels.

Año said the declaration is proof that Sison is "very detached" from reality and unaware of the actual situation on the ground.

"In two years time, *tapos na itong* CPP-NPA.... He's very irrelevant. Better for him to come home," Año said.

He said Sison is "dreaming" when he claimed the NPA is still a potent force when it has only 3,700 regular members nationwide.

He said the number of NPA rebels and their supporters is expected to further dwindle as the government pursues localized peace talks.

"We are putting and delivering services to their affected areas, that is the difference now," Año said.

— Michael Punongbayan, Emmanuel Tupas

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AFP belies Joma: Talks progressing

DESPITE the rants of Communist Party of the Philippines founding chairman Jose Maria Sison, localized peace talks seem to be working well as the number of New People's Army fighters and supporters who have surrendered continues to rise, military officials said Monday.

"It's funny, annoying and pitiful to hear Sison because he always says that local peace talks are just a waste of time and people's money because they won't succeed," said Armed Forces of the Philippines spokesman Brig. Gen. Edgard Arevalo, speaking in Filipino over radio dwIZ. "The mere fact that he continues to speak ill of this kind of peace negotiation just shows that this is bearing fruit."

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AFP...

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"The numbers do not lie. As we have said, over 11,000 of their comrades have surrendered since January of 2018," he added.

Arevalo said that for the first three months of 2019, about 600 NPA fighters and supporters have surrendered to government troops.

"They have realized that they have been deceived and have descended from their mountain hideouts to rejoin their families, avail of government benefits, and live normal lives," he said.

Government efforts to aid rebels and supporters who surrender are contained in the government's Enhanced Comprehensive Local Integration Program (E-CLIP).

The E-CLIP, which was institutionalized by President Rodrigo Duterte on April 3, 2018, provides a complete package of assistance and interventions to former communist rebels and their immediate families to prepare them for integration to mainstream society.

These include skills development training from the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority, PhilHealth enrollment, housing, livelihood and legal assistance.

The Palace, meanwhile, dismissed Sison's threats to deliver "more lethal blows against the Duterte administration."

"Other than saying that his rants are psychologically challenged, they are undeserving of a response," Presidential Spokesman Salvador Panelo said in a text message.

In a statement on Saturday evening, Sison said that the "best way" to frustrate the administration is for the NPA to deliver more lethal blows on weak points of the enemy forces in the countryside.

The top communist official also promised "head blows" to the regime's "most brutal, corrupt and drug-trading officials" in the cities.

Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana also made light of Sison's threat.

"Hahaha, lethal blows? With what and how? His men who are tired of his lies are coming down in droves to avail of the benefits being offered by the government," Lorenzana told the Manila Standard.

"Sison's threats are plain and simple bluster and braggadocio," he added.

Lorenzana said Sison has become irrelevant but was "trying hard to appear relevant."

"The NPA holdouts who are reduced to being terrorist extortionists devoid with any ideology will continue to extort, burn equipment and ambush soldiers and policemen," he said. "That is the only thing they could do now."

Earlier this year, Sison said overthrowing the government remains their top priority, vowing to strengthen the CPP's armed wing.

"The National Democratic Front of the Philippines is authorized to be open to peace negotiations with the current and prospective regime of the reactionary government, but its principal work now is to work for the ouster of the Duterte regime," Sison said in January.

Troops in the countryside are more than ready to face any attacks by remnants of the NPA, who are now desperate due to the government's decision to permanently terminate the peace talks with their political leaders, the head of the AFP public affairs office, Col. Noel Detoyato, said.

"Our troops are already given instructions and we are actually in the offensive in running after their armed group and their fronts organizations," Detoyato said Monday. Francisco Tuyay, PNA

Duterte on peace talks: 'I surrendered'

BY JOCELYN MONTEMAYOR
and VICTOR REYES

PRESIDENT Duterte on Sunday night said he "surrendered" in the peace efforts with the Communist Party of the Philippines-New People's Army-National Democratic Front of the Philippines (CPP-NPA-NDFP).

He said he formally terminated the peace efforts because these had become "useless."

The President, speaking at the PDP-Laban campaign rally in Cagayan de Oro, said the communist war has been going on for 53 years despite peace efforts by the government.

"With the NPAs, I am the one who surrendered. I said I will stop talking to them because it is really useless. We have been talking for the last 30 years. And they have been trying to destroy the legitimate government since 53 years ago. We will never achieve anything out of it," he said in mixed English, Filipino and Visayan.

He added that after 53 years of fighting, nothing good had resulted from it, which is why he ordered military and the police to put an

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end to communist atrocities within his term.

"I told the soldiers and the police, 'Let's finish this. It's either we surrender or they do. It's either they'll defeat us or we'll defeat them'," the President said.

Duterte, last week at the Army anniversary, announced he is terminating the peace talks with the communist leadership and his government would now focus on localized talks.

The Armed Forces said CPP founder Jose Maria Sison and his cohorts should be held accountable for the killing of over 80,000 people during their 50-year rebellion now that the peace talks with the communist have been permanently ended.

AFP spokesman Brig. Gen. Edgard Arevalo said the military, under the recently-formed National Task Force to End Local Communist Armed Conflict, "is

working for the indictment of Mr. Sison and his cohorts."

Sison, who has been on self-exile in the Netherlands since the late 1980s, is also the chief political consultant of the NDFP.

"They must be held to answer for the murder of thousands of their comrades on mere suspicion of being military informants or have expressed desire to go back to mainstream. The number of their victims, to include non-combatant civilians, children, and the elderly reached more than 80,000 during CPP's 50 menacing years," said Arevalo.

Many of the deaths were attributed to the purging or "cleansing" operations by the NPA in the 80s and 90s. The purges were done by the communists on suspicion that their ranks had been infiltrated by military agents.

Some communist leaders have been charged in court for the operations, including Satur Ocampo and Luis Jalandoni.

A consultant of the NDFP,

another NPA leader, and a staff member were arrested in Nagcarlan town in Laguna on Sunday.

Francisco Obeda Fernandez, 71, a former priest; Cleofe Sabadisto Lagtapon, 66, deputy secretary for communication and education of the NPA in Negros; and Gee-ann Perez, 20, a staff member of Lagtapon, were nabbed during a raid by soldiers and policemen on their safe house in Barangay Calumpang.

Brig. Gen. Arnulfo Marcelo Burgos, commander of the Army's 202nd Brigade, said Fernandez and Lagtapon were arrested by virtue of warrant for murder. He said Perez was also nabbed because of the firearms and grenades seized from the group.

The Army's 2nd Infantry Division said Fernandez, who carries the aliases Frank, Ago, Uloy, Pidong and Andot, is the highest NPA leader in Negros, being the head of the Komiteng Rehiyon Negros.

Fernandez is also the chairman and spokesman of the NDFP in Negros and serves a consultant of the NDFP.

Lagtapon alias Guia, Ella, Pidang, and Emay is reportedly Fernandez' wife.

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Bulacan town declares CPP-NPAs 'persona non grata'

By FRANCIS T. WAKEFIELD

The municipal peace and order council of Doña Remedios Trinidad (DRT), Bulacan approved a resolution, declaring Communist Party of the Philippines-New People's Army (CPP-NPA) terrorists persona non grata.

The proposal for a resolution came from the Army's 48th Infantry Battalion (48th IB) which is based in Bulacan.

Lt. Col. Felix Emeterio M. Valdez, acting commanding officer of the 48th IB, proposed the idea during the Municipal Peace and Order Council (MPOC) of DRT last March 12, 2019.

"This is where we come a step closer to the lasting peace we aim for. The declaration speaks in behalf of the people of DRT, that they are ready to embrace the lasting peace for sustainable development in the years to come," Valdez said.

The MPOC meeting was presided by Mayor Ronaldo T. Flores. It was attended by the different department heads of

the DRT local government, DRT Chief of Police Sr. Insp. Isabelo Mondejar, and members of the Sanguniang Bayan were also at the meeting.

The resolution was formed in line with the Memorandum Circular No. 2018-211 of the Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG) with the Subject: Prohibition of Support to Left Wing Rebel Group, and Executive Order No. 70: Institutionalizing the whole-of-nation approach in attaining inclusive and sustainable peace, creating a national task force to end local communist armed conflict, and directing the adoption of a national peace framework.

Maj. Gen. Lenard T. Agustin, commander of the Seventh Infantry (Kaugnay) Division, emphasized that the whole-of-nation approach marks the start of a new campaign to end the insurgency.

"And those who religiously practice this approach give the people a chance to have better and more peaceful lives," Agustin said.

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CPP, NPA 'finished' in 2 years – Año

BY ROY D.R. NARRA AND ROSELLE AQUINO

THE Communist Party of the Philippines-New People's Army-National Democratic Front (CPP-NPA-NDF) would be "finished" in 2021, Interior and Local Government Secretary Eduardo Año said on Monday.

Año said the arrest of NDF consultants and the success of localized peace talks would banish communist groups to oblivion in two years.

"In two years' time, the [CPP-NPA-NDF] will be over and Joma [Sison] is already out of touch. He's very irrelevant. Better for him to come home," he said in Filipino and English.

Sison, CPP founder, is in exile in The Netherlands.

Año said members and sympathizers of the communist groups were "tired" of their antics against the government.

"I think everyone believes that the CPP-NPA should be finished and they are tired from burning materials and killing people. This is the time to end them so that the next administration would not have to deal with them," he said.

Año made the statement in response to Sison's claim that the NPA had strong forces in various regions nationwide, and it would be difficult for the military and police to fight them.

"It is impossible for the reactionary military, police and paramilitary forces to defeat the NPA

through sheer military operations and puerile psywar. The NPA already has nationwide strength and is deeply rooted among the toiling masses. It occupies almost all the strategic areas favorable for guerrilla warfare in the stage of strategic defensive and for the prospective regular mobile warfare in

the strategic stalemate," Sison said in a statement.

But Año dared Sison to come home to witness the arrest of some high-ranking communist rebels.

The latest to be captured were NDF consultant Francis Fernandez, his wife Cleofe Lagtapon, and Gee-Ann Perez. The three were arrested on Sunday in Liliw, Laguna for murder charges.

Chief Supt. Edward Carranza, Calabarzon (Cavite, Laguna, Batangas, Rizal and Quezon) regional director, said the arrest of the suspects, who were holding key rebel positions, would greatly affect the CPP-NPA leadership.

Fernandez reportedly serves as the spokesman of the NPA in

Negros and the deputy secretary for the organization.

Of the 23 NDF consultants released to attend peace negotiations in Norway in 2016, six have been rearrested.

The Philippine National Police earlier arrested CPP leaders Rafael Baylosis, Vicente Ladlad, Rey Claro Casamber and Renante Gamara.

There are about 3,700 regular members of the CPP-NPA-NDF and more than 100,000 supporters.

Brig. Gen. Edgard Arevalo, Armed Forces of the Philippines spokesman, earlier said more than 11,000 NPA members, supporters and sympathizers had left their hideouts and surrendered to the government. A3



Members of the National Democratic Front stage a lightning rally near Mendiola Bridge in Manila to rally support for the observance of the 50th anniversary of the New People's Army. PHOTO BY GERARD SEGUIA

'Grave' poll hot spots increase to 570

By Jaymee T. Gamil
@JGamilINQ

With the entire Mindanao region already declared by the Commission on Elections (Comelec) a Red election area "of grave concern," the number of areas placed under the highest category of poll hot spots has jumped from only 94 last month nationwide to 570.

At a press briefing in Camp Crame, Quezon City, on Monday, Philippine National Police Director General Oscar Albayalde said that of the 941 election hot spots

under various categories nationwide, only two—Cotabato City and Daraga town in Albay province—had been placed under Comelec control.

The Comelec last week decided to place 454 towns and cities in 27 provinces in Mindanao as "areas of grave concern."

It also reduced the number of Orange areas of "immediate concern" nationwide to 238 from 382 and Yellow "areas of concern" to 131 from 223 last month.

Albayalde said he believed

that the Comelec just wanted "to ensure that the deployment of [police] personnel [in Mindanao] was enough."

Police deployment

Police deployment will be "realigned" with the new development, he said.

"It's not necessarily that the Red areas of grave concern are unruly. We know the [Bangsamoro Organic Law (BOL)] plebiscites had just been conducted in Mindanao. We just want to ensure peaceful elections [there] because as we all

know, there were also those who opposed the BOL," Albayalde said.

Areas placed under the Yellow category are those with a history of election-related violence in the last two elections and intense political rivalry. These areas had been previously placed under Comelec control.

Areas under the Orange category include places where there is a serious armed threat from the New People's Army, Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters, Abu Sayyaf, rogue elements of the Moro National Liberation Front

and Moro Islamic Liberation Front, and other terror groups.

Private armed groups

As of March 20, 118 Red election areas were identified in the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao, 93 in northern Mindanao, 73 in Caraga, 72 on the Zamboanga Peninsula, 49 each in the Davao region and Soccsargen (South Cotabato, Cotabato, Sultan Kudarat, Sarangani and General Santos), 45 in Eastern Visayas, 28 in Cordillera region, 21 in Bicol, five in Calabarzon (Cavite, Laguna, Batangas,

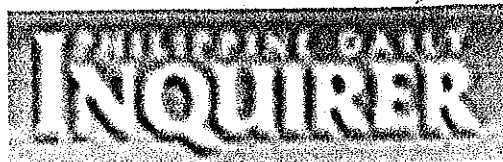
Rizal and Quezon), four each in Central Luzon and Western Visayas, two in Cagayan Valley and one in Central Visayas.

Meanwhile, Albayalde said the police would intensify operations against private armed groups and loose firearms in preparation for the start of the campaign period for the local elections on March 29. A3

"Based on historical data [from] previous elections, election-related incidents resulting from intense political rivalry are expected to escalate during this period," he said. INQ

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Duterte vows to reduce IS threat to 'barest minimum' by 2022

President Duterte has admitted that the government cannot completely eradicate the threat posed by the Islamic State (IS) in the last three years of his term. But he promised to reduce the terrorist threat at least to the "barest minimum" before he steps down in 2022. In a speech during the Partido Demokratiko Pilipino-Lakas ng Bayan's campaign rally in Cagayan de Oro on Sunday night, Mr. Duterte spoke about the "problems in the South," referring to the Abu Sayyaf. "[The Abu Sayyaf is] really patterned after the [IS] ... It's a violent world. There are bombings everywhere, even inside the church. There are plenty of massacres, too," the President said in Visayan. The government, he admitted, has not been able to totally defeat the terrorist groups. "We have never gone past that huge barrier. And I do not think that I would be able to solve it during the last remaining three years of my term. But I am trying my best to reduce it to the barest minimum possible," Mr. Duterte said. —JULIEM. AURELIO

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Maguindanao declares state of calamity

By ALI G. MACABALANG

COTABATO CITY — The provincial government of Maguindanao has declared a state of calamity after a four-office assessment report showed that some P130-million worth of crops and livestock have been damaged in the ongoing dry spell, officials announced Monday.

Engr. Abdulrahman Asim, provincial administrator, said the declaration came through a resolution passed on March 19 by the Sangguniang Panlalawigan.

"The resolution was unanimous after I presented to SP members and presiding Vice Governor Lester Sinsuat in their Tuesday session the consolidated findings of an assessment body on the extent of drought-related damages across Maguindanao," Asim told *The Manila Bulletin*.

As of March 11, the consolidated reports of the offices of the provincial disaster risk reduction management, social welfare and development, agriculture, and veterinary showed at least P130-million worth of drought damages in 26 of

36 towns in Maguindanao, Asim said.

The damage included P50-million worth of rice farms, P70-million corn fields and the death of 324 livestock, mostly cows and goats, he said.

Asim said the brunt of dry spell was felt in the towns of Paglat and Datu Paglas, whose Sangguniang Bayans have earlier declared municipal-level states of calamity.

Gov. Esmael Mangudadatu ordered the conduct of the "synchronized" assessment by the four provincial offices a few days after the Philippine Atmo-

spheric, Geophysical, and Astronomical Services Administration (Pagasa) announced on March 6 that the provinces of Ilocos Norte, Zamboanga Del Sur, Zamboanga Sibugay, Maguindanao, and Sulu had started experiencing meteorological drought as early as last February.

Pagasa officials predicted that the dry spell would worsen in April and cover 22 other provinces in the country.

Mangudadatu emphasized to his constituents the need to develop and sustain backyard gardening for vegetables and

other food crops to cushion the effect of dry spells on every households.

News about Mangudadatu's backyard gardening advocacy sparked discussions in other component provinces of the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM).

A Maranao women's group said in Facebook posts that dozens of households in Ditsaan-Ramain, the hometown of Lanao del Sur Gov. Soraya Alonto-Adlong had started opening backyard gardens because signs of drought began to be felt in their province.

The Manila Times

3 Sayyaf bandits killed in Sulu clash

ZAMBOANGA CITY: Three Abu Sayyaf bandits were killed after an encounter with Philippine Marines in the remote island of Simisa in Bangui, Sulu where security forces are hunting pro-Islamic State terror group, military officials said on Monday.

Citing an intelligence report, military officials claimed that three bandits were killed in Sunday and Monday's clashes, but soldiers failed to recover bodies of the slain bandits. No soldiers were reported wounded or killed in the fighting on the island.

Col. Gerry Besana, Western Mindanao Command (WestMinCom) spokesman, said Marines encountered at about 7:58 a.m. the Abu Sayyaf rebels under the supervision of subleader Najir Arik in Simisa Island.

"The exchange of fire that lasted for a less than five minutes, resulted in three enemies killed based on an intelligence report, while no casualty was reported on the government side. Military troops immediately pursued the fleeing bandits," Besana said.

"While conducting pursuit operations at 8:02 a.m. troops of the Marine Battalion Landing Team 1 chanced upon the fleeing bandits a few meters away from the first encounter site. An intermittent firefight that lasted for about 20 minutes followed," said Lt. Gen. Amel Dela Vega, WestMinCom chief.

The Abu Sayyaf was still holding nearly a dozen mostly Malaysian and Indonesian fishers kidnapped for ransom off Sabah, Malaysia. They have recently threatened to execute three captives if ransoms running into tens of millions of pesos were not paid by Jakarta or Kuala Lumpur. No deadline was set for the execution of the two Indonesians and a Malaysian fisher.

AL JACINTO AND
DEMPSEY REYES

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'Duterte revelation of Misuari threat on federalism a hard sell'

BY WENDELL VIGILIA

AN opposition lawmaker yesterday dismissed as sheer propaganda President Duterte's revelation of Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) founder Nur Misuari's threat to wage war should the administration's push for federalism fail.

"The revelation of Nur Misuari declaring war should federalism fail is a hard sell. The push for federalism is losing steam, losing popularity so the administration is trying to revive it. What's worse is the use of intimidation," said Rep. Gary Alejano (PL, Magdalo).

President Duterte made the disclosure Wednesday last week during a campaign rally of the ruling PDP-Laban in Marikina City.

Duterte and Misuari met a day earlier in Malacñang, where the MNLF leaders reminded the President of his campaign promise to facilitate the shift to federalism.

The shift to a federal form of government was one of Duterte's campaign promises. Duterte has been advocating for a shift to federalism which

he said would help address the historical injustice against Moros as well as usher in progress in other parts of the country.

Alejano, who is running for senator under the Orso Diretso senatorial slate, said the government is accountable to the people alone "and therefore, should not be held hostage by the desires of certain groups."

"Rather, let us build on the efforts of both sides to chart a path towards a long-lasting peace for our people," he said.

The House last December approved on final reading a measure which seeks to amend the 1987 Constitution to shift to a federal form of government, including the proposal to lift the term limits of legislators and local officials.

Congressmen adopted the measure hoping that senators will eventually agree to convene as a constituent assembly with them to amend the Constitution. The measure remains pending at the Senate.

Under the proposed setup, the country will be

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DUTERTE

divided into federal states with their respective legislatures and local governments but will retain the current system of having a national government with an Executive, Legislative and Judicial branches.

Alejano, however, said the country's self-sustainability should precede the call for autonomy and "this is not the time to put the country in jeopardy because of the push for federalism."

"Remember that there is strong evidence against a shift to federalism as only NCR, Re-

gion IV-A, and Region III would thrive under this set-up," he said.

The MNLF was responsible for the September 2013 attack on Zamboanga City where the secessionists tried to raise their flags in their quest for independence.

Authorities have said the three-week conflict resulted in the death of about 200 MNLF men and the capture of 300 others. The fighting also claimed the lives of dozens of government troops and civilians.

The MNLF now has at least two major factions, one led by Misuari and the other by incumbent MNLF chairman Yusuf Jikiri.

Opposition bets still believe in Aquino 'magic'

BY WENDELL VIGILIA

MANNA from heaven or a kiss of death?

Otso Diretso senatorial candidates strongly believe their chances will significantly improve if former President Benigno Simeon "Noy" Aquino III will accompany them in the campaign trail.

"We believe that the former president is still a powerful political force especially in Cebu," former solicitor general Florin Hilbay told reporters in Mandaue City. "And so, we are trying to collate all the forces of the opposition to be able

to project strength. What's important is for the former president to accompany us because he was strong in Cebu (when he ran for president)."

Hilbay and fellow opposition senatorial candidates Samira Gutoc, former Quezon Rep. Lorenzo "Erin" Tañada, and human rights lawyer Chel Diokno are in the vote-rich province for a two-day campaign schedule.

Yesterday, they held multi-sectoral dialogues in Barangay Labogon in Mandaue City and Barangay Pulpogan in Consolacion town before attending an election forum at the University of San Carlos.

This is the second time for the Otso Diretso slate to visit Cebu, which has a total of 3,082,621 voters, comprising some five percent of the total vote.

Aquino is expected to accompany the opposition bets in their campaign sortie today to boost their chances since out of the eight candidates, only two—former interior secretary Manuel "Mar" Roxas II and Sen. Paolo Benigno "Bam" Aquino—are known to many voters.

Aquino will tag along his candidates as they attend the "Manindi-

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OPPOSITION

gan Forum" this afternoon at the Southwest University in Cebu City.

He will also accompany the opposition slate at the IEC Convention Center in the evening where they will be met with allies and supporters.

The opposition bets are banking on Aquino's political strength and influence even if, Roxas, his "anointed" candidate in the 2016 presidential elections, badly lost to then Davao City mayor and now President Rodrigo Duterte who received more than P1.1 million votes in Cebu in 2016.

Roxas, who has been mostly campaigning on his own, is among the eight senatorial bets of the opposition.

Tañada said the Otso Diretso slate does not consider the controversies hounding Aquino as an extra baggage for them, particularly the case he is facing for the 2015 Mamasapano massacre where 44 members of the PNP-Special

Action Force (SAF) were killed. He said the allegations against the former president has yet to be heard and decided in court "so it will all depend on the evidence that will be presented."

"We'll just leave it to the courts to decide. Until the courts decide (against him), the former president remains innocent and it will prove that what he had was country's interest in mind and his track record will prove that," Tañada said.

Tañada said Cebu was one of the provinces that helped seal the victory for Aquino in 2010 since he received a million votes in the province.

"(Former) president Noy Aquino won by a huge margin here in 2010 and we've identified Cebu as one of the provinces that can deliver votes for Otso Diretso," he said.

Amid its candidates' optimism, the opposition's campaign is clearly an uphill battle since the former Liberal Party has already lost many of its allies who have joined the ruling PDP-Laban.

Mandaue City Mayor Luigi Quisumbing, a former LP member, has endorsed the administration's Hugpong ng Pagbabago senatorial slate while Cebu City Mayor Tommy Osmeña has yet to endorse the opposition slate until now.

Gutoc, a civic leader in war-torn Marawi City, said Otso Diretso bets have to be given a chance based on their track records.

"We were victims of (former president now Manila Mayor Joseph) Erap's (Estrada) all-out war (against the Moro Islamic Liberation Front) and (former president and now Speaker) Gloria Arroyo's (alleged graft and) corruption. President Duterte has to account for all the deaths (linked to the drug war). So our issue is what Otso Diretso offers and we are new faces. We did not inherit any case," she said.

Gutoc said that while the administration candidates have the advantage of government machinery, "we have former presidents behind us like PNoy and that is the strength of the Otso Diretso."

Probe sacked Cabinet men

Rody prods Ombudsman

That's true, there's corruption. And these were all relayed to the Ombudsman

By Kristina Maralit

Sacked Cabinet members will not have the luxury of looking forward to a peaceful life after ransacking the public coffers as the Ombudsman will be after them, President Rodrigo Duterte said in a speech late Sunday.

Mr. Duterte said

he and Ombudsman Samuel Martires recently had a meeting in which one of the topics was to make sure that charges are filed against appointees terminated due to corruption.

Before participants of the Partido Demokratiko Pilipino rally in Cagayan de Oro, the President urged Martires to file charges immediately after an investigation is completed.

Among those dismissed by the

President were former Interior Secretary Mike Sueno, Dangerous Drugs Board Chairman Dionisio Santiago, Commission on Higher Education Chairman Patricia Licuanan and former Philippine Commission on Urban Poor Chairman Terry Ridon.



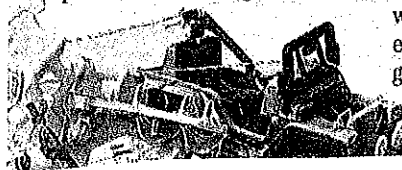
Sueno was relieved in April 2017 due to corruption allegations over the irregular purchase of the Rosenbauer firetrucks from Austria.

Also fired was Peter Laviña, who served as Mr. Duterte's spokesman during the 2016

campaigns following corruption allegations at the National Irrigation Administration.

Even his fraternity brothers at Lex Talionis Michael Robles and Al Argosino, who were former associate commissioners at the Bureau of Immigration, were sacked after allegedly extorting money from Chinese gaming tycoon Jack Lam.

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Probe sacked Cabinet men

Mr. Duterte once again expressed the pain he had to go through in removing officials who had helped him

From page 1

"That's true, there's corruption. And these were all relayed to the Ombudsman. Investigation is ongoing and charges will be filed," the President said.

Mr. Duterte once again expressed the pain he had to go through in removing officials who had helped him win the presidency.

"They were with me even during the past years, in 1988 when I ran for the first time for public office. They were there to help me and assist me in everything," he said.

Such relations, however, will not hinder investigations on his appointees as Mr. Duterte had sought himself the conduct of such probes.

Bangsamoro soon in place

At the same event, President Rodrigo Duterte said the new Bangsamoro Autonomous Region (BAR) will be implemented "in the days to come."

"We have achieved something already. We have ratified the BOL (Bangsamoro Organic Law). Its implementation will be in the days to come. Truly, as we agreed with them," the Chief Executive said.

They were with me even during the past years in 1988 when I ran for the first time for public office.

"I hope that when it is implemented initially it would reflect the true sentiments of our Moro brothers in Maguindanao," he added.

The BOL, the charter which created the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM) or simply known as BAR, is the result of decades-long peace negotiations between the rebel groups in Mindanao, mainly the Moro Islamic Liberation Front, and the government.

With the creation of the BARMM, the President expressed optimism that the grievances of the Moro people, many of which stem from disputes over ancestral lands and decades of neglect, would finally be addressed en route to lasting peace in the region.

Mr. Duterte claimed "things have quieted down since the Marawi siege" in Mindanao, under military rule until the end of the year, but cautioned that there may still be "rebellious ones" remaining who have pledged allegiance with the Islamic State (IS).

Abus still a worry

"We also have a problem in the South, the Abu Sayyaf. They are really patterned after the IS. If not, it is really the IS who are

there," the President stated.

"It's a violent world. There are bombings everywhere, even inside the church. There are plenty of massacres, too," he continued.

The Chief Executive admitted that the government would be hard-pressed to totally resolve the peace and order situation in Mindanao with just a little over three years remaining in his presidency.

He, however, vowed to "reduce it to the barest minimum possible."

Meanwhile, more than a month since taking their oaths in Malacañang, the members of the Bangsamoro Transition Authority (BTA) have yet to convene as a parliament.

The first session of the BTA, the interim governing body of the BARMM, has been moved a few times due to Mr. Duterte's unavailability.

Investigation is ongoing and charges will be filed.

It was initially slated for 11 March, a couple of weeks after the BTA members were sworn into office last 22 February. It was then moved to 21 March and then 25 March.

The Palace has yet to make an official announcement as to when the President would finally take part in the BTA's inaugural session.

Cam fate up to Ombudsman

On the other hand, presidential spokesman Salvador Panelo said the Palace would also allow the Office of the Ombudsman to handle the allegations of hidden wealth of Philippine Charity Sweepstakes Office board member Sandra Cam.

The executive has no plan of conducting a separate investigation against Cam, he said.

"From what I understand, somebody has already filed a case in the Ombudsman. So, that's the Ombudsman's call now," the Palace official said.

"It's being investigated. We will not duplicate an investigation, considering the fact that there is no more pending case with the Ombudsman," he added.

In a complaint filed before the Ombudsman's office on 22 March, a certain Lino Espinosa Lim Jr. claimed that Cam concealed her ownership of several properties in Masbate province by registering them under the names of her sister Purisima Martinez, brother Martin Cam and son Marco Cam.

Panelo said Cam's fate would depend on the results of the Ombudsman's investigation.

"Since it's already with the Ombudsman and the Ombudsman has the power to suspend, I think we'll let it do the process," he said.

Ex-MNLF chair downplays Nur war threat

War is not a child's play and already considered uncivilized

By Maya M. Padillo

Former Moro National Liberation Front chairman Muslimin Sema downplayed Nur Misuari's threat of going to war in the name of Federalism, saying the entire hierarchy and membership of the MNLF Central Committee commit themselves to pursuing the path of lasting peace.

Sema said misleading statements on the true intentions and aspirations of the MNLF have been made the past few days, confusing the people. He was referring to pronouncements made

by Misuari, the MNLF founding chairman, when he met President Duterte in Malacañang last week.

As a former MNLF chairman duly elected by the MNLF Central Committee, Sema clarified that they respect and adhere to the provisions of the 1996 Peace Agreement signed by and between the Government of Republic of the Philippines (GRP) and the MNLF as witnessed by the Republic of Indonesia and the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) Secretary General.

Sema said while Federalism may be a solution to the Bangsamoro issue, the 1996 Final

Peace Agreement (FPA) does not provide for it but merely for meaningful autonomy and the integration of their fighters to the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP).

He said their quest for meaningful autonomy can be realized through fully implemented peace agreements such as the 1996 FPA and the 2014 Comprehensive Agreement to Bangsamoro (CAB), which is a final peace agreement signed between the GRP and the MNLF.

Sema added that they support the recommendations made by the Tripartite Review Panel composed of the GRP, the MNLF and the OIC most specifically the convergence of all Moro Fronts and other Bangsamoro organizations and peoples to support all efforts to achieve lasting Peace in

Mindanao through the enactment of the Bangsamoro Organic Law (BOL) which was sponsored by Congressmen and women of Mindanao specially Bai Sandra Sema and recently approved by President Duterte.

He said the root causes of Moro secession is being addressed through RA 11054 or the BOL and now the Bangsamoro Transition Authority and Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao.

"There is no valid reason to make threats of war, veiled or otherwise. War is not a child's play and already considered uncivilized. Our people has been through to so much of violence and displacement. It is time we truly give them not only peace of mind but more importantly the chance to rebuild their lives and enjoy the dividends of peace," he said.

BARMM SETS INAUGURAL SESSION ON FRIDAY

COTABATO CITY: Officials of the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM) will take their oath of office before the Qur'an during their inaugural session in this city on Friday.

"We started the jihad with an oath before the Qur'an. This time, we will also take an oath before the Qur'an as we start our governance," Chief Minister Al Haj Murad Ebrahim, said on Monday.

He explained that the process of taking an oath before the Islam Holy Book is one way of observing consultative and collective leadership in the Bangsamoro region, which promotes "Islamization of governance."

During the recent assembly in the *barangay* (villages) of Gambar and Pagalugan in Kabuntalan town in Maguindanao, Ebrahim noted that the "assembly is one way of following rules, which many of us were ignorant of or were not observed by all authorities."

"We will start the change from the top, while you also help us start changing below," he added.

"We struggled to change our system of governance," Ebrahim said, adding that following the creation of BARMM, a more difficult jihad was ahead of the Bangsamoro leadership. "We entered the system in order to change it from within."

"We must accept the principle

that governance must be exercised by the many, not few," he said.

According to Ebrahim, his administration would advocate moral governance.

Referring to Barangay Gambar, he said, "This was my hiding place before," as he reminisced on his days "going against the government."

As chairman of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front, Ebrahim and his comrades entered into peace negotiations with the national government that resulted in the passage of Republic Act 11054

or the "Bangsamoro Basic Law."

He then reminded the *barangay* chairmen who attended the event to remember that the BARMM was the result of a "long struggle."

Ebrahim also underscored the importance of holding events that involved participation of all stakeholders.

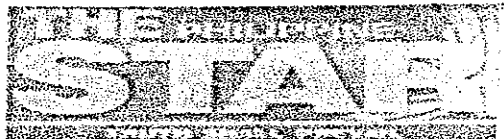
"This assembly is one way of following rules, which many of us were ignorant of," he said, adding "we are also here today to listen to you and to hear your suggestions so that we can resolve issues together."

"It is up to us if we want our governance to improve. All our

contributions matter here," Ebrahim said. **JULMUNIRI JANUARAL**

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POSTSCRIPT

FEDERICO D. PASCUAL Jr.

Patrimonial assets hocked to China!

PRESIDENT Duterte is bound by duty to disclose to the people to what extent and under what conditions he has hocked some of their patrimonial assets to China to get loans for his ambitious Build! Build! Build! program.



With the revelation of some details of huge debts he has contracted, including his waiving of sovereign immunity on the enforcement of any arbitral award, the President cannot invoke the non-disclosure clause in the loan agreements.

An example of a disturbing Chinese deal was given this week by Supreme Court senior associate justice Antonio Carpio. He cited the Chico River project in the Cagayan Valley, estimated to cost P4.37 billion, of which about 85 percent (or P3.7 billion) will be funded by a loan from China.

In case of default, Carpio said, China could take, for example, gas-rich Reed (Recto) Bank that the Permanent Court of Arbitration in The Hague ruled in 2016 to be within the Philippine Exclusive Economic Zone. China has shown interest in it, going to the extent of harassing oil exploration in the area.

China may pick other valuable patrimonial assets – except those for diplomatic missions, military facilities, and property dedicated to a public or governmental use – to satisfy itself as lender extracting overdue payment.

In the Chico River contract signed on April 10, 2018, the Philippines agreed that in a dispute arising from a default, a three-member tribunal in Beijing (whose chair and one other member are Chinese) will resolve it with finality. A sure case, Carpio observed, of what Filipinos call "*Iutong Macau*" (a raw deal)!

The Chico River deal could be a template or pattern of other China deals that Duterte has approved. Other loan contracts could contain similarly disturbing terms, which stoke public curiosity.

Before the country sinks deeper into what experts have warned as a "debt trap" – into which other borrowers of China have fallen – President Duterte should make a full disclosure. Filipinos should at least know what might hit them.

Future generations might just see certain strategic areas in the archipelago and valuable patrimonial assets being taken over by a money-lender who has taken advantage of what looks like perfidy of some leaders of the country.

• Constitution requires full disclosure

SIMILAR, or even worse, deals could have been contracted by past administrations, but that is no excuse for continuing the reckless and possibly traitorous contracting of onerous foreign loans.

Any review of questioned past loans should not becloud or block discussion of China loans of the Duterte administration, because corrective or preventive action is urgently needed.

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Before President Duterte embarks next month on his fourth trip to China in less than three years, he might want to order the publication of a complete list, with a full disclosure of the terms and conditions, of all his loan contracts with Beijing.

Article II of the Constitution says: "Section 28. Subject to reasonable conditions prescribed by law, the State adopts and implements a policy of full public disclosure of all its transactions involving public interest."

Article III says: "Section 7. The right of the people to information on matters of public concern shall be recognized. Access to official records, and to documents and papers pertaining to official acts, transactions, or decisions, as well as to government research data used as basis for policy development, shall be afforded the citizen, subject to such limitations as may be provided by law."

On foreign loans, Article VII says: "Section 20. The President may contract or guarantee foreign loans on behalf of the Republic of the Philippines with the prior concurrence of the Monetary Board, and subject to such limitations as may be provided by law. The Monetary Board shall, within 30 days from the end of every quarter of the calendar year, submit to the Congress a complete report of its decision on applications for loans to be contracted or guaranteed by the Government or government-owned and controlled corporations which would have the effect of increasing the foreign debt, and containing other matters as may be provided by law."

The Constitution requires "prior concurrence" of the seven-member Monetary Board headed by the governor of the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas. All board members, btw, are presidential appointees.

• Duterte agrees to waiver of immunity

WE DON'T know how Carpio got a copy of the Chico River loan contract despite its non-disclosure clause. Until details of other loans are available, we can use it as a guide.

Carpio quoted Article 8 of the contract: "8.1 Waiver of Immunity. The Borrower hereby irrevocably waives any immunity on the grounds of sovereign or otherwise for itself or its property in connection with any arbitration proceeding pursuant to Article 8.5 hereof or with the enforcement of any arbitral award thereto. Notwithstanding the foregoing, the Borrower does not waive any immunity of its assets which are (i) used by a diplomatic or consular mission of the Republic of the Philippines, (ii) of a military character and under control of a military authority or defense agency of the Republic of the Philippines, or (iii) located in the Philippines and dedicated to a public or governmental use (as distinguished from patrimonial assets and assets dedicated to communal use)."

The Chico River loan from China has an interest rate of 2 percent and a "management fee" of \$186,260, as well as a "commitment fee" valued at 0.3 percent per year.

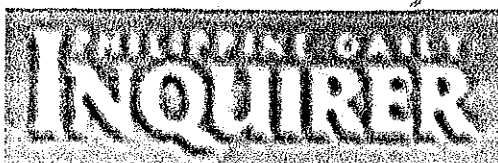
Without giving details, economic managers of Duterte have expressed confidence that the Philippines will not default during the repayment period of 20 years, including a seven-year grace period.

But if the Philippines does default, Carpio warns, it will have to submit to arbitration -- the pre-agreed mode of resolving the ensuing dispute -- that is loaded against the borrower. It will be governed by the rules of the China International Economic and Trade Arbitration Commission.

* * *

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SHAMELESS ATTEMPT TO REWRITE HISTORY

The Marcos family continues to be hell-bent on their selfish desire to recapture Malacañang. They now use their plundered wealth to finance hundreds of "trolls" in their shameless attempt to rewrite history.

I was one of the thousands of courageous men and women who experienced arrest and torture during the dark years of the Marcos dictatorship. I join these martial law heroes in opposing this brazen plan of the Marcos family to rule our country again.

Yes, martial law is over. The cruel tyrant is gone. But there were other perpetrators during this gruesome era, and many of them are still around today.

There is a "pseudo-documentary" on YouTube, "Martial Law vs. People Power, the Untold Story," that extols the supposed accomplishments of the conjugal dictatorship. It enumerates all those expensive projects like the North Luzon Expressway, the Folk Arts Theater, the Philippine Heart Center,

etc. It trumpets the claim that Marcos built more roads, bridges and hospitals than all the previous presidents of the Philippines.

Left unmentioned are the avaricious cronies who, together with the Marcos family, looted the economy through kickbacks and corruption. The Bataan Nuclear Power Plant and the Chico River Dam, funded with loans from the World Bank, were the sources of ill-gotten wealth through bribery and huge debt.

Bongbong Marcos ran for vice president in 2016. Political analysts saw it as a trial balloon of the Marcoses' campaign to eventually recapture Malacañang. Marcos Jr. was soundly beaten by Leni Robredo, but still claims he was cheated. Now his sister Imee is seeking a Senate seat.

We who were arrested and tortured will continue to stand up against these people who dare to revise our history of struggle against tyranny.

MANUEL LAHOZ

Stripped naked by history

It's taken over half a century since that infamous massacre of Jabitah, 23 young Muslim soldiers in Marcos' clandestine attack force on Sabah, to arrive at this new moment in Mindanao.

After centuries of war provoked from within and without, that powder keg exploded in 1968 in a new Moro generation's war against "Imperial Manila." But their Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) turned into a reality check for both sides, however—a Philippines dependent on the oil fields of the MNLF's Middle East allies and a brave but far outnumbered young Moro army warring for self-rule.

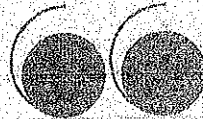
The "autonomy" the powers-that-be eventually dangled revealed the MNLF's internal contradictions. Pressured by their main sponsor, Libya's Moammar Gadhafi, MNLF Chair Nur Misuari signed the Tripoli Agreement in 1976 without consulting Commander Hashim Salamat. Salamat led the split that founded the rival Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), with 57 other battle-hardened field commanders leaning to independence.

Today, the MILF is government's partner under the new Bangsamoro Organic Law that aspires to a new Bangsamoro. First named by Misuari's fiery generation, Bangsamoro today means a new patchwork of Muslim, Christian and indigenous communities taking steps to live together in peace, closer to Mindanao's present-day reality with generations of Christian migrants.

Two major changes in the MNLF's original concept of Bangsamoro introduced by

COMMENTARY

SYLVIA L. MAYUGA



WITH NAYSAYERS ATTEMPTING TO DERAIL THIS NEW PROCESS BY BOMBING PLEBISCITE POLLING PLACES AND EVEN THE JOLO CATHEDRAL, A STRIKING NEW ELEMENT IS THE LOUD PROTEST OF MORO WOMEN AGAINST THE CENTURIES-OLD PATTERN OF CONTINUED WAR TO SETTLE DIFFERENCES

the MILF are a measure of Mindanao's historical evolution. First, the MILF decided to remain part of the Philippine Republic as a sub-state. Second is the primacy of basic Islamic precepts, not political ideology,

in its internal affairs. Together, they raise hopes for Mindanao's full development in its unique culture and character.

With naysayers attempting to derail this new process by bombing plebiscite polling places and even the Jolo Cathedral, a striking new element is the loud protest of Moro women against the centuries-old pattern of continued war to settle differences.

One voice belongs to Ayesha Merdeka Concon, 24, historian daughter of MNLF founding member and vice chair Abul Khayr Alonto. Her father went to war from a heady mix of historical grievance and Marxist ideology. Ayesha now bears witness to her father coming down from the hills to tell a Misuari pussyfooting from implementing the Tripoli Agreement that he, Abul Khayr, would lead the implementation "if only to give our people reprieve from the horrors of this war."

Four decades have since stripped things down to essence in Mindanao. Misuari is now known as a failed ARMM governor. Abul Khayr Alonto is Mindanao Development Authority chair. The faith-oriented MILF is holding at bay territorial splinter groups like the kidnap-for-ransom Abu Sayyaf and other extremist Islamic groups influenced by the Jemaah Islamiyah. Not too difficult to tell who's on the right side of history.

Sylvia L. Mayuga is an essayist, sometime columnist, poet, documentary filmmaker and environmentalist. She has three National Book Awards to her name.

Kiko Pangilinan and his stupid law

THE
Phil-
ippine
Air Force
(PAF) has
been re-

plenished with new UH-1H "Huey"
helicopter parts and maintenance equip-
ment from Japan.



IN MY LINE
OF SIGHT

**RAMON
T. TULFO**

► TulfoA5

Kiko Pangilinan and his stupid law

The fresh arrivals, which are a donation from the Japanese government, are worth P5 billion.

Lt. Gen. Rozzano Briguez, PAF chief, said the donation was "of great help to our combat utility fleet."

Let's hope there's no hanky-panky in the PAF's new helicopter deal.

During the administration of President Noynoy *abnoy kuyakoy*, the PAF was given 21 Huey choppers bought for P1.2 billion by the Department of National Defense.

Then Defense Secretary Voltaire Gazmin signed the contract for the purchase of the combat helicopters that turned out to be chopper scraps harvested from a German military junkyard, pieced together and made into choppers.

The choppers, assembled in a private yard in the US, were passed off as "combat-capable" with "night vision."

Two helicopters from this batch have crashed since they were acquired in 2015.

A Senate investigation was conducted on the highly irregular purchase as a result of the twin crashes.

Nothing came of the probe.

Gazmin and his cohorts are laughing their way to the bank.

The whistleblower in the irregular PAF helicopter purchase, Rhodora Alvarez, an employee of the Bureau of Internal Revenue (BIR), has been harassed by Gazmin et al with libel suits.

Alvarez has testified before the Senate that Gazmin received a 7 percent kickback from the P1.2-billion deal.

For a while, Alvarez was placed under the Witness Protection Program, but the protective custody was lifted by the Department of Justice for unknown reasons.

Now, the poor woman is running scared.

The water shortage in large parts of Metro Manila is being blamed on the mismanagement of the Metropolitan Waterworks and Sewerage System or MWSS.

How in heaven's name did a retired police general, Reynaldo Velasco, get to be the MWSS administrator?

Why wasn't a career engineer with experience in water infrastructure projects appointed as MWSS head instead?

Manila Water, one of two concessionaires of MWSS — the other being Maynilad — to distribute water in Metro Manila and some parts of Rizal, is taking the rap for the water shortage.

Manila Water is owned by the Zobel de Ayalas.

It's high time the government take back its contract with Manila Water and award it to another group.

The Zobel de Ayalas, who are into real estate development, have been greatly remiss in their job as water distributor.

They should just concentrate on real estate development.

The 17-year-old suspect in the grisly murder of 16-year-old Christine Silawan is not being identified in the press because he's a minor.

Blame Sen. Kiko Pangilinan for protecting young criminals like the 17-year-old suspect.

Under the stupid Pangilinan Law, the court that will try the suspect will have to determine whether the boy acted with discernment when he committed the heinous crime.

Teenagers today are far more advanced in thinking than their grandfathers when they were their

age. Today's youths have access to all kinds of information through the internet.

Because of the stupid Pangilinan Law, many minor offenders have committed murder and rape with impunity.

A 14-year-old boy who raped a restaurant cashier after robbing the establishment years ago went scot-free, thanks but no thanks to that stupid law.

Filipino voters must be so stupid as to have voted for Senator Pangilinan when he ran for reelection in 2013.

Kiko Pangilinan, whose term as senator expired in 2016, is now Liberal Party president.

If memory serves, in Davao City during the time of then-Mayor Rody Duterte, a 13-year-old boy stabbed to death a 20-year-old college student after the latter refused to part with his watch.

The victim was a PWD or person with disability.

The 13-year-old suspect was not held in custody, but his body was found in a deserted spot in the city with many stab wounds days later.

His assailant or assailants have not been known up to this day.

Here in my "*Isumbong mo kay Tulfo*" offices, we have on record at least 10 cases of women who were gang-raped.

It's a heinous crime, and one that requires that all rapists involved to get their just desserts.

However, if I may be so forward, I do have something to say to all our women, too.

Stop putting yourselves in situations where it can happen.

If a woman goes to a drinking session with many men whom she hardly knows, she's courting trouble.

At "*Isumbong*," we've learned about cases of women getting drunk with men they hardly knew and were gang-raped.

In a perfect world, women should feel safe in the company of strange men.

But ours is not a perfect world.

Just because one or two of the men in the drinking session are people you know or trust does not make you safe.

In Puerto Princesa City, a 16-year-old girl was raped by the uncle of her classmate with whom she drank a few bottles of beer in the classmate's home.

Unless a woman wants to get laid, she should never drink with a man she hardly knows.

Date rapes happen that way.

The woman in that Subic Freeport rape case a few years ago had willingly gone with the American accused of raping her.

She met the US serviceman that night and got so drunk she forced him and his companions into allowing her to get in the van that was to take the sailors back to their ship.

She got laid at the back of the van while it was moving.

The poor seaman got convicted of rape and served time in our prisons.

I was bashed by legions of people for siding with the American in my column then at the *Inquirer* because I was told the whole story by an objective source.

I was exonerated in the end after the woman recanted her accusation before the Court of Appeals which ordered the American serviceman released.

P.S. The woman, who I was told was considered *asawa ng bayan* (woman of loose morals) in her city, was made a US citizen for retracting her charges.

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March 2019

The Manila Times

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Focus shifts to termination of the communist insurgency

First
word

IN the
book,
*Force and
Statecraft*



OBSERVER

YEN
MAKABENTA

by Gordon A. Craig and Alexander
L. George (Oxford University Press,
Oxford, 1995), the authors, one a
historian of international affairs and
the other a distinguished political
scientist, make this startling claim:

► MakabentaA4

Focus shifts to termination of the communist insurgency

"Students of military strategy have not given much systematic attention to the problem of terminating wars, and military planners have also traditionally neglected these problems, concentrating upon how to start wars and fight them successfully, rather than upon how to end them. Japanese leaders, for example, developed an ingenious plan for a surprise attack on Pearl Harbor but had no notion of how the resulting war with the United States might be concluded."

The armed forces and the government find themselves today in much the same predicament as the Japanese in fighting the twin armed challenges to the Philippine state — the 50-year-old communist insurgency, and the just-as-old Muslim secessionist rebellion in Mindanao.

By nearly every indicator in the conflicts, the Armed Forces of the Philippines has fought its way to the cusp of victory in the test of arms with both groups.

But then, while so close to defeating both insurgencies, the government still cannot fully terminate the strife and liberate the nation from both scourges.

It is striking that both insurgencies are coming to a head during the current term of President Rodrigo Duterte.

The challenge to his government now is how to terminate both conflicts expeditiously, before the baton passes on to his successor in 2022.

War termination

Craig and George devote a major chapter in their book specifically to the subject of "war termination."

They specifically chose the term "war termination" not peace in their discussion.

"One must distinguish," they said, "between a mere cessation of hostilities and a peace agreement that attempts to resolve the conflicting aims over which the battle has been waged. Hostilities may end with a ceasefire or armistice that leaves the issues at stake unsettled and defers their consideration to a later peace conference."

On the question of what strategists and planners should do when things do not go according to plan, the authors wrote:

"Wars or conflicts are often prolonged as a result of military estimates that prove too optimistic

regarding the expected effectiveness of one's military strategy and unrealistically downgrade the capabilities and will of the opponent.

"What factors set into motion and facilitate efforts to terminate a conflict?

"Generally speaking, a belligerent side will not consider ending the conflict unless it stands to realize the minimum goals for which it has been fighting. But it must also have the resources and the will to continue fighting for its minimally acceptable outcome.

"The process of reevaluation will take place on both sides, until the two sides agree that settling for less than they had hoped for is preferable to continuing hostilities.

"War termination typically involves not one but a number of important issues on which both the two sides disagree: such as, the timing and conditions of a ceasefire, the disposition of territories, the withdrawal of forces, and provisions for reparations.

"The ideal outcome of course is a peace agreement between the two sides."

The need for statecraft

In response to a request from a friend, I wrote sometime last year a brief paper on the communist insurgency and the riddle of terminating it.

I will use in this column some of the thoughts I raised in that essay.

The first point I raised in my discussion is that skillful and effective statecraft has been missing from the government policy and strategy in ending the communist insurgency.

What is statecraft? Statecraft is the use of the assets or the resources and tools (economic, military, intelligence, media) that a state has to pursue its interests and to affect the behavior of others, whether friendly or hostile. It involves making sound assessments and understanding where and on what issues the state is being challenged and can counter a threat or create a potential opportunity or take advantage of one.

Statecraft requires good judgment in the definition of one's interest and a recognition of how to exercise military or soft economic power to provide security and promote the well-being of one's citizens.

It is a mistake for any government

or president to enter negotiations — even if he thinks it is largely for show — without a vision and an understanding of acceptable outcomes. Once in a negotiation, there are political costs for walking away. The longer a negotiating process goes, the more it tends to justify itself — and the more one must not lose sight of its initial purpose.

Duterte concessions misjudged

The failure of the negotiations with the Communist Party of the Philippines-New Peoples Army (CPP-NPA) under President Duterte is due principally to poor statecraft on the government side. Government negotiators did not have a clear vision of an acceptable outcome from the talks; they withered in the face of the intransigence and clear-eyed objectives of the communist side.

The government got very little in return from the enormous concessions that President Duterte granted to the communists in order to get the negotiations moving, notably:

1. President Duterte's decision to appoint nominees from the communists to his initial Cabinet, involving no less than four portfolios.

2. DU30's decision to allow the provisional release of communist political detainees to enable them to serve as consultants for the communist side in the negotiations.

3. Extension of political space in the parliamentary arena to communist party-list front organizations and their designated representatives.

These major concessions were misjudged as signs of weakness on the part of government; the communists used them as a springboard to expand their ranks and mount fresh NPA attacks on military and police forces. They thought Duterte would be another Cory Aquino.

Delusion about 'peace talks'

The government policy and strategy in the negotiations has been wrong-footed by a delusional idea of the magical efficacy of peace talks. This thinking is a legacy from the Benigno Aquino 3rd government and its Church supporters, which created the office of the presidential adviser on the peace process.

DU30 can infuse new purpose and vigor in the government's policy toward the insurgency with a change in focus:

1. Dropping "peace talks" totally from its vocabulary in dealing with the CPP-NPA, whether formally or informally. "Peace" should only enter the picture when a settlement is ready for signature.

2. Adopting "war termination" as the explicit and only acceptable outcome in the resolution of the communist insurgency.

The change in terminology will effect a sea change in the public's perception of the President's iron resolve to end once and for all the 50-year-old communist insurgency.

This will crown the President's decision to call off peace talks permanently and to dissolve the government peace panel.

This means that the government should utilize its massive superiority of firepower and command of resources to mount unrelenting pressure on the CPP, NPA and the National Democratic Front to shift their attention toward the termination of the insurgency.

The isolation of Jose Maria Sison and other communist leaders in the Netherlands and the surrender of so many NPA groups at local level point to a decisive reduction of strength of the armed struggle.

Relentless action to stop NPA capacity to mount attacks against government forces, uproot revolutionary taxation in the countryside, curtail the activities of communist front organizations in Congress and the media will collectively sap the will of the insurgents to carry on the armed struggle.

A "no quarter given" approach to the insurgency, coupled with a forceful communications campaign on the futility of the communist cause and ideology should pull the rug from under the rebellion.

Communist leaders must be told that the only discussion possible now between government and the insurgency should be "surrender" or "war termination."

President Marcos did it with the Partido Komunista ng Pilipinas, and got them to surrender.

President Duterte should do the same with the CPP-NPA.

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Carpio's fear mongering yet again

SENIOR Associate Justice Antonio Carpio is once again fear-mongering, which results from his apocalyptic vision of the arbitration proceedings of the China International Economic and Trade Arbitration Commission (Cietac).

Carpio is warning the public about a specific provision in the Chico River Pump Irrigation Project loan agreement between the Export-Import Bank of China and the Department of Finance. He said this in connection with Article 8.1 of the agreement, where the Philippines waived its sovereign immunity to be subjected to arbitration.

One of the elements of this article states that "...the Borrower does not waive any immunity of its assets... (iii) located in the Philippines and dedicated to a public or governmental use (as distinguished from patrimonial assets and assets dedicated to commercial use)."

Carpio was peeved at that parenthetical phrase. He argued that "patrimonial assets" include the gas resources in Reed Bank and the West Philippine Sea (WPS). So, if the Philippines couldn't pay its loan, Carpio said, China "could" just take over these resources. This is wrong, as I will discuss below.

In social media, netizens' paranoia was heightened by their lack of understanding of what "waiving of state immunity" means. They think that the Philippines has waived its rights over its "patrimonial assets," which to them, because of Carpio's insinuation, is the entire WPS.



FOR THE
MOTHERLAND

**SASS
ROGANDO
SASOT**

Sovereign immunity is a right every state has flowing from their sovereignty. Sovereignty means that the state is the highest and absolute authority within its territory and that states have equal sovereignty — no higher authority exists above them.

This foundational principle of international relations renders state consent sacrosanct. States cannot be sued, be part of a treaty, etc. without its consent.

Article 8.1 provision automatically waives our sovereign immunity in relation to that contract.

Waiving sovereign immunity doesn't mean you are waiving territorial rights or even sovereign rights flowing from the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (Unclos). International law was part of my undergraduate program at Leiden University, a leading university in that field. Sovereign immunity was actually the topic of my final paper in public international law and I'm pretty sure I would have failed that paper if I had argued that waiving of sovereign immunity entails ceding territory or giving up sovereign rights.

Article 8.1 is about allowing ourselves to be subjected to an arbitration proceeding in relation to that loan. So, in case there are any disputes regarding our rights and obligations, we can be subjected to an arbitration proceeding in Cietac.

Since its establishment in 1956, Cietac has become Mainland China's premier arbitration institution on commercial and trade disputes. In its processes, Cietac combines mediation and arbitration.

The distinctiveness of this feature

is succinctly explained by international lawyer Yang Ing Loong: "This innovative and flexible procedure allows the arbitrators to switch roles to mediators during or after the conclusion of an arbitration hearing (as parties wish) to settle the dispute. Should the mediation not be successful, the arbitrators will revert to their original roles and continue to hear the arbitration to its conclusion."

Carpio is right, Cietac's decision are final and binding. But he got a lot of things wrong.

First, he claimed that Reed Bank and WPS are our "patrimonial assets" while at the same time arguing that "patrimonial assets" would be defined according to "Chinese law, interpreted by a Chinese-majority tribunal in Beijing."

China claims that it has indisputable sovereignty over almost the entire South China Sea, which includes our parcelized version of that body of water (i.e. WPS) and the Reed Bank. If China defines WPS and Reed Bank as part of our patrimonial assets, then it would entail first giving up their assertion that it was theirs. In other words, China would have first to admit that they are ours.

Second, Carpio claimed that the arbitration decision will be "enforced by the Chinese government in the Philippines."

In their "A Simple Guide to Arbitration in Mainland China," Deacons, Hong Kong's oldest and largest independent law firm, explained that Cietac "has no power to enforce awards." If the losing party and his/her property is in China, the winning party can enforce the award by applying to China's Intermediate People's Court.

Now, if the losing party is in another country, "a successful party can apply to the competent foreign court for enforcement of a Cietac award, pursuant to the 1958 New York Convention on the Recognition and Enforcement of Foreign Arbitral Awards, in the country where the foreign party is situated."

This means that our government would enforce the decision after our courts decide on the application for enforcement of the decision.

And third, in case we can't pay our loan, our patrimonial assets (such as natural resources that generate revenue for us) wouldn't be handed over to the Export-Import Bank of China. The future revenues from that patrimonial asset would be our loan repayment and not the patrimonial asset itself.

Carpio has the resources to study the entire history of Cietac arbitration proceedings, which have a reputation for fairness and competence. It's up to him to demonstrate that his apocalyptic vision isn't only logical and legal, but has actual precedents in the history of Cietac arbitration proceedings. *AL*

E-mail: srsasot@gmail.com

Dead as a doornail



ABOUT TOWN
ERNESTO M. HILARIO

IF THERE are still doubts that the political negotiations between the national government and the communist-led National Democratic Front have reached an inevitable, irrevocable dead-end, the recent decision of President Rodrigo Duterte to dissolve the government negotiating panel should put them to rest.

Duterte's pronouncement that the NDF and its two allied organizations, the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) and

"The peace talks with the Reds is definitely over."

its armed wing, the New People's Army (NPA) will have to wait for the next president if they expect any possibility of a resumption of any negotiations spells the doom of what had promised to be fruitful talks at the start of his term in mid-2016.

With three years to go before the

Duterte administration walks off into the sunset, we can therefore expect a search-and-destroy and take-no-prisoners policy by the military designed to bring the 50-year-old insurgency to its knees.

The recent arrest of what the NDF claims as a "peace consultant" and his companion, a retired priest, and the filing of charges of illegal possession of firearms and explosives against them—a standard operating procedure now, it would seem, against arrested rebel suspects so they would stay behind bars for a long, long time, indicates a stepped-up drive against the communist insurgency by the military. Several other prominent

AY

Turn to A5

Dead...

From AA

"peace consultants" earlier released from prison to take part in negotiation in Europe have since been rearrested as well.

The government now wants local peace talks as an alternative to the scuttled national-level negotiations that had been held off and on since the post-EDSA era.

The idea of local peace talks sounds good in theory: talk to the local NPA leaders, convince them that armed struggle is futile because the government is addressing their grievances, such as agrarian reform, and even offer them cash for arms, housing, and livelihood assistance.

But will the rebels bite this tactic, and stream to military camps to surrender?

That's highly unlikely. The military may be able to convince some of the rebels to go down from the hills and return to a normal life in the social mainstream, but probably not in sufficient numbers to dismantle the rebel apparatus in the countryside. We're talking here of armed struggle that's been going on for half-a-century, or spanning two generations, and the aging communist leaders and their second liners steeped in Marxism-Leninism-Maoism aren't likely to give up so easily.

Let's kill all the lawyers?

The famous quote was uttered by the character 'Dick the Butcher' in William Shakespeare's Henry VI, but it looks like someone—or perhaps a group of people, we really don't know at this point—may have taken to heart the Shakespearian line quite literally, with devastating results.

A total of 38 lawyers have been killed during the Duterte administration. The latest fatality, lawyer Rex Jasper Lopez, was gunned down by unidentified men on March 13 evening in front of a shopping

mall in Tagum City, Davao del Norte.

The Integrated Bar of the Philippines has condemned the killing, of Lopez as the most recent "in a quick succession of violent attacks" against members of the Bar.

"We are almost losing count, but there have been 38 such reported killings since Atty. Rogelio Bato Jr. was killed by unidentified gunmen in Tacloban, Leyte on August 23, 2016," the IBP said.

The 40,000-strong lawyers' group urged the police to solve the cases, including the murder of former Cebu City Prosecutor Mary Ann Castro in January 2019 and the abduction of lawyer Alwyn Mendoza in Nueva Ecija in February.

"The series of unsolved crimes against lawyers has germinated a dark halo of fear that has paralyzed the most important pillars of the justice system," the IBP said. "Murder and other forms of mindless violence have no place in civilized society. Lawyers are professionals who must not be associated with the perceived crimes of their clients," they added.

We agree completely.

The IBP is correct in urging the Supreme Court to conduct a thorough and impartial investigation of the series of killings of lawyers.

The High Tribunal should initiate a dialogue among the SC, IBP, the military and the police, as well as NGOs to ensure the safety of lawyers nationwide.

Chief Justice Lucas Bersamin said last year that he would ask his colleagues to conduct an independent probe into the rash of killings of lawyers.

Whatever happened to his pledge? Is he waiting for more murders to occur until he becomes all by his lonesome the last lawyer standing in this country?

ernhil@yahoo.com

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TODAY

Up-in-the-air Upper House



FORMATION
GARY
OLIVAR

RIGHT up front, I'm asking my readers to pray for the recovery of broadcast journalist Twink Macaraig, who's battling Stage 4 cancer.

A news anchor and program manager on TV-5, Twink is also my sorority sister from Sigma Alpha Nu. An essay of hers in the *Philippine Star* last Sunday showed that she's lost none of her feistiness, not just about her own health issues, but also including the political causes she cares deeply about.

"I'm still a fighter!" she declared. God bless and reward you for that, sis.

A different kind of fighter is how one might describe Nur Misuari, the MNLF and ARMM leader, who's now threatening to wage war again if the country doesn't adopt federalism. As a federalist advocate myself, I have to say that with friends like him, who needs enemies?

Most accounts of the long battle to pass the new Bangsamoro Organic Law say that Nur never cooperated with his rivals in the much bigger MILF and kept trying to block its passage. Now that the BOL is part of the law of the land, Nur is evidently ready to break the law just to keep his own ageing personal ambitions alive, after the well-documented failures of the ARMM experiment that he led.

For his part, MILF chair Al-Hajj Murad is counselling peace and vowing that he will abide by the Constitution. Would he be just as peaceful if the BOL battle had not gone his way? It's an interesting question, but by now purely academic, since Murad is now responsible for building a new sub-nation, not trying to destroy the larger nation. Plus, a federalist constitution will also give him more room to expand his autonomy and authority on the ground.

"Up in the air" is how one might describe the honorable members of the Upper House—the Senate—who repeatedly remind us of the increasing distance between their own little world and the larger world of us poor mortals on the ground.

Since Duterte took office, the senators—many of them professedly aligned with the

administration—have repeatedly stalled or blocked key items of his agenda that were sent up from the Lower House, e.g. the "Trabaho Bill", the second part of comprehensive tax reform; the charter change initiative; and now, even the proposed budget this year.

Among the essential items being sidelined by the senators' intransigence is the budget for acquiring right of way (ROW) for infrastructure projects. To give you an idea of the importance of ROW: In Central Visayas alone, only 12 infra projects have been implemented out of a total 95 projects due to ROW problems. Fifty-seven projects worth P2 billion have been suspended, while the balance of 26 projects worth P4.5 billion were outright terminated.

"When it comes to making themselves more comfortable, the sky's the limit."

It's probably easy to dismiss these trivial concerns from the lofty aerie inhabited by the senators, who after all have no specific constituency to answer to. But when it comes to making themselves more comfortable, the sky's the limit.

Ground has already broken for building the senators a new home in the Fort, to the tune of a staggering P8 billion. That's an average P333 million to make each senator feel better about the kind of office he has to work in.

Senator Ping Lacson reminds us that the Senate will be saving P171 million in annual rentals to GSIS. At that rate, it will take 46.7 years for the new building to pay for itself. And of course, GSIS will be losing rental income that would otherwise have strengthened the pension fund of government employees.

Lacson says the project will encourage future senators to "behave and act with the dignity of an edifice" like the one now being built for them. Evidently it is already too late to similarly reform the current crop of lawmakers. But if a new building will prompt future senators to behave better than their predecessors—hey, it might just be worth it after all.

Another font of entertaining wisdom is senatorial aspirant Neri Colmenares, who wants government to drop the Kaliwa dam project because it would displace thousands of families among the indigenous peoples who inhabit the Sierra Madre range. Instead, he wants government to "look at" alternatives like "rehabilitation of the Wawa dam and [construction of] the Kaliwa weir."

It's characteristic of Colmenares and his comrades in the Makabayan bloc of legislators to shoot down infrastructure and other projects with their ideological jargon, while dumping on government the responsibility of coming up with alternatives. Won't people also need to be relocated away from Wawa? How much water can a 7-foot run-of-river weir provide year-round by comparison with a 70-meter-high reservoir dam?

Compensating and relocating affected local communities is part of virtually every large infrastructure project, especially dams. But it requires asking tough questions and working hard on the answers, not taking cheap shots at the expense of the welfare of the larger majority.

Thoughts on today's Gospel (Matthew 18:21-35):

In the parable of the unforgiving servant, Jesus answers a question from Peter by saying that we should be ready to forgive our enemy, not just seven times, but seventy-seven times. That may seem unreasonable to some. Why should we be so forgiving to people who don't deserve it? More important: even if we wanted to, how can we bring ourselves to such excessive magnanimity?

As to the first question, the parable presents us with the servant who, despite being forgiven his debts by his master, threw into prison another fellow servant who owed him a much smaller amount. We have no right to be so hard-hearted with our neighbor when we ourselves, as congenital and original sinners, are continually and repeatedly being forgiven for much worse offenses by our Creator.

As to the second question, the first servant might not have behaved so badly had he paid closer heed to the example being set for him by his master. There is only one source of the limitless grace that not only allows for the forgiveness of our own sins, but also teaches us, by example, how to forgive others as well—up to seventy-seven times, and more.

Readers can write me at gbolivar1952@yahoo.com.

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Functionaries

EVERY Tom, Dick and Harry in the US officialdom has recently been saying that they have our back in case of trouble in the West Philippine Sea.

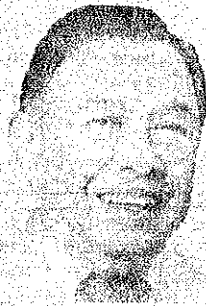
I wonder whose trouble and with whom are they referring to. I do not see us having trouble with China in the foreseeable future. As President Duterte aka Digong said, we are absolutely in no position to fight China. With or without the Mutual Defense Treaty (MDT) with the US, if I may add.

But back to the US officials... they were Secretary of State Mike Pompeo; commander of Army forces in the Pacific Gen Robert Brown; vice chief of staff of the Army Gen. James McConville; commander of the US 7th Fleet Vice Adm. Phillip Sawyer; State Department Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary for Southeast Asia Patrick Murphy; and commander of a minesweeper Lt. Cmdr. Frederick Crayton.

Geez, they all are nothing but mere functionaries in the US civilian and military establishments. They do not make policy! Meanwhile, the one who does, embattled President Donald Trump, hasn't uttered a single word about having our back! And even if he did, we would be foolish to simply take his word for it. He has the US Congress to reckon with.

A couple of the above functionaries have also reportedly said that neither the US nor the Philippines has requested for a review of the MDT.

On the US side, it is clear they do not want a review.



CROSSHAIRS

REY O. ARCILLA

'US government functionaries say they have our back in case of trouble in the South China Sea. But they do not make policy! And the one who does, President Trump, has to reckon with the US Congress.'

On our side, it is clear that Digong hasn't yet made up his mind. This is evident through the fact that his defense and foreign secretaries have taken opposite views on the matter.

Perhaps Digong is waiting for the right time to make his position clear.

However, as I said in the past, time is not on his side. The longer he waits, the more difficult and dangerous it will be for him to make that decision, especially if his popularity rating goes down.

Nonetheless, I fervently hope his final position will be consistent with his previous pronouncements, i.e., he does not want foreign troops on our soil and that he no longer wants an alliance with any foreign power, be it China, Russia or the US, in line with his pursuit of an independent foreign policy

as mandated by the Constitution.

Surely, Digong must be aware that his detractors, e.g., the opposition, the mainstream media, the oligarchs, the elite, the crime syndicates, and last but not least, the US and her lackeys here that include some in his cabinet as well as in the security establishment, must be assiduously plotting his premature exit, or at the very least, putting up stumbling blocks to prevent him from achieving his objectives till his last day in office in June 2022.

If they succeed, it would be the greatest tragedy for the Filipino masses who are now greatly aware of his sincere efforts to uplift their lives and make them proud of and stand tall for their country.

Last week, there was a report in the Daily Inquirer that Defense

Secretary Delfin Lorenzana was to meet with a "senior" US Defense official "to discuss plans to amend the Philippines-US Mutual Defense Treaty (MDT)."

The US "senior" official referred to was one Joseph Felter, deputy assistant secretary for defense for South and Southeast Asia.

There has been no report that Lorenzana indeed met with Felter, but if he did, why him? Si Felter, assistant secretary lang, deputy pal He should have assigned Felter's counterpart in the DND for the exploratory talks on what he said the US "thinks about our proposal to open discussions on what is in the MDT."

It's time our government officials learned the importance of proper protocol in engaging officials of other nations, especially when it comes to delicate affairs of state. Kailangan palaging counterpart to counterpart!

MORALES/DEL ROSARIO SUIT VS XI JINPING

Ex-Ombudsman Conchita Carpio Morales and ex-foreign secretary Albert "Super Amboy" del Rosario have filed a complaint, technically called "communication," against Chinese President Xi Jinping before the International Criminal Court (ICC) from which we have earlier withdrawn. China is not an ICC member. *By*

The two filed the complaint

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FUNCTIONARIES

against Xi supposedly on behalf of Filipino fishermen who have allegedly been "persecuted and injured" by China's "atrocious actions" in the West Philippine Sea.

Assuming, without granting, that their action is based solidly on the rules of the ICC, I still couldn't help feeling aghast at the action of the two former government officials. Do they really honestly believe that the ICC can take action against the leader of the second biggest economy, soon to be the first, some say, in the world?

The foolhardiness of their action is a clear reflection of their utter lack of appreciation of how international relations and politics work.

Too, Morales was so daft as to liken their action to the biblical story of David and Goliath where the puny David slew the giant Goliath by hurling a stone to the latter's forehead.

To me, their action is more like Miguel de Cervantes' Don Quixote charging windmills which he, at the level of his insanity, thought were evil giants who were his imaginary enemies.

As for Del Rosario, it would seem that the fellow still couldn't get over his colossal blunder that led to our losing Panatag Shoal. He just couldn't resist making all sorts of noises, perhaps in an attempt to ease his conscience? Too late! Perhaps it would be best for him to just keep quiet about the matter from now on. What he's doing only reminds

the people of his huge mistake.

THAT NEW SENATE BUILDING

The construction of a new Senate building in plush Bonifacio Global City met with a very palpable negative reaction from the public.

The construction of the building which will reportedly cost a whopping P10 billion when finished is definitely ill-timed. For instance, the honorable senators must be aware of the ongoing campaign to clean Manila Bay dirtied by, among others, the esteros and tributaries of Pasig River. Surely, they know that the garbage accumulation in these areas that end up in Manila Bay is due to, among others, the presence of poor informal settlers. Why do they live there? Because they have nowhere else to go!

My point is the P10 billion would be better spent at this time to building houses for the informal settlers pronto. That certainly must be prioritized, rather than the ostentatious building that will house a Senate whose image right now is, to say the least, heavily tainted not only by corruption, but also by the fact that it has several members who, according to President Digong and the people in general, do not deserve to be there.

There is also the urgent need for more funds to hasten the completion of the administration's "Build, Build, Build" program which will more directly

benefit the people.

To begin with, why didn't the Senate think of locating a new building adjacent to the present Batasang Pambansa? Batasang Pambansa, isn't the Senate an integral part of that? Being next to each other would certainly facilitate the legislature's work and save the people whom they have sworn to serve a lot of money.

Surely, I do not think, the honorable senators consider themselves one rung higher than the members of the House of Representatives.

Oh, there is one other thing — people are asking why the Senate opted to award the contract to a firm that has been investigated by the Senate in 2014 to 2016 for controversial construction projects in Makati.

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 House 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 332nd day of the 12th year of the enforced disappearance of Jonas Burgos, son of the late press icon and founder of this newspaper, Joe Burgos.

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

From an internet friend:

Husband: Shall we try a new position tonight?

Wife: Sure. You stand by the ironing board, and I'll sit on the couch watching TV while drinking beer and farting.

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

Walking the talk, beyond office

THEY did it.

Former Foreign Affairs Secretary Albert del Rosario and former Ombudsman Conchita Carpio-Morales did what the current administration could not do: they haled Chinese President Xi Jinping to the International Criminal Court, alleging that the latter and other Chinese officials committed crimes against humanity because of the environmental damage done to the West Philippine Sea.

As we all know, China is notorious for using its giant super dredgers to create artificial islands in disputed waters. Even the Permanent Court of Arbitration, in its decision in the arbitration filed by the Philippines against China, recognizes this. The award states in part: "There is no question that the artificial island-building program is part of an official Chinese policy and program implemented by organs of the Chinese State."

The arbitral tribunal sought the opinion of three coral reef experts (Dr. Selina Ward, Professor Peter Mumby, and Dr. Sebastian Ferse) to determine the truth of the Philippine claim that China's reclamation activities have caused massive damage to coral reefs and marine life in the West Philippine Sea. All three independent experts were unanimous in saying that China's construction activities have "impacted reefs on a scale

unprecedented in the region," citing satellite photos that show "up to 60 percent of the shallow reef habitat at the seven reefs have been directly destroyed."

More disturbing is the finding of Dr. Ferse that the damage to coral reefs, built over centuries, is near-permanent. Yes, let that sink in for a moment: near-permanent. They also stated that the damage will take decades to repair. Juxtapose this with the fact that China started testing a new super dredger (a 140-meter-long excavation vessel called Tian Kun Haoback) and you just know that they aren't in the mood to stop their reclamation activities any time soon. Any Philippine official who thinks



IT'S COMPLICATED

ABIGAIL VALTE

The Del Rosario and Carpio-Morales initiative is certainly creative in its attempt to stop China's impunity in disputed waters.

that this new BFF status of the incumbent president with Xi is enough to get the Chinese to stop its island building has his head up the wrong orifice.

The Del Rosario and Carpio-Morales initiative is certainly creative in its attempt to stop China's impunity in disputed waters. Recall also that some experts were on the fence about the chances of the Philippines' claim against China regarding the latter's failure to comply with its obligations under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) to preserve and protect the marine environment, but this was also decided by the tribunal in favor of the Philippines.

Beyond infringing on sover-

eignty and sovereign rights, China's actions have indeed caused near-irreparable harm to the environment in and around these areas in question. It has deprived not just the present generation of Filipinos of their right to benefit from these marine resources, but also generations to come.

It's no wonder that thousands of Filipinos online have put their signature to an online petition supporting Del Rosario and Carpio-Morales. Recent surveys have shown a high distrust among our people of China, despite repeated attempts by this administration to smooth over objections by saying that PH-China relations are now enjoying a revival. BY

Despite relinquishing their public duties at the end of their respective tenures, both Del Rosario and Carpio-Morales have shown us that even private citizens can do their part in making sure that Chinese aggression will not win the day. Along with Supreme Court Senior Associate Justice Antonio Carpio, who continues to sound the alarm whenever necessary (the most recent being the problematic Chico river pump irrigation loan from China) we are assured that there are those among us who will continue to stand in the gap against China's Goliath. These three—Del Rosario, Carpio-Morales, and Carpio—deserve all the support they can get from us ordinary citizens.

Wake up to reality, Leni

“What the yellows never admitted to is the fact that while the PCA junked China’s claim... the Philippines lost its claims over Scarborough Shoal.

Vice President Leni Robredo really should realize that if she has nothing to say, she shouldn’t then say it since, sometimes, blabbing about something she hardly understands makes her look completely clueless on foreign affairs and even officialdom’s foreign policy.

What it does is to cement the perception that she was and still is not ready for the presidency – or even the vice presidency, for that matter.

But apparently, she still does not get it.

A few days ago, Robredo was quoted as saying in the media that, through the complaint filed against Chinese President Xi Jinping and some other Chinese officials by two former Philippine officials, referring to former Foreign Affairs Secretary Albert del Rosario and former Ombudsman Conchita Carpio-Morales, the complaint filed by her yellow colleagues as well as the fishermen before the International Criminal Court (ICC) has proven that the Philippines can stand up to China, a



FRONTLINE
Ninez Cacho-Olivares

– militarily and even economically or, for that matter, judicially before the ICC on grounds that Xi and Chinese officials committed crimes against humanity in connection with China’s activities in the West Philippine Sea (WPS)?

The way it looks, ICC’s humanity crime charge is being abused by the Filipino

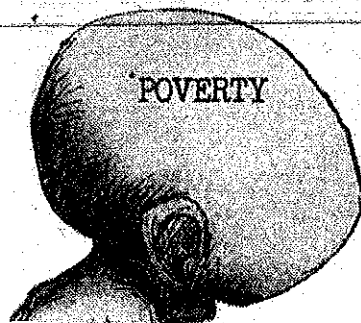
complainants.

The yellows are using this complaint against Xi to generate propaganda, not just for local consumption, but also for the world.

If such accusation by Del Rosario and Morales can be described as a crime against humanity, then shouldn’t they also have filed the same crime against Noynoy Aquino who deliberately left his troops to be massacred by the Muslim rebels that he watched in real time, despite the fact that these special forces commandos begged for assistance and air power since they were being massacred?

Morales, then Ombudsman, again protected her yellow patron, Aquino, which is why he is still scot-free.

But what makes Robredo, along with the like-minded yellows, believe that given our military and economic inferiority compared to China, we can crush it with what she claims are the newly inspired hope and



military and economic giant.

"It is as if we kept our hopes alive in our hearts, showing, if not proving, that we still have the strength to fight a giant like China," Robredo said.

The Vice President thanked Del Rosario and Morales for giving Filipinos hope.

Really Leni? Through this complaint which will likely not even prosper, how does this give Filipinos, not only hope, but also the strength to fight the military giant in Asia?

Does Leni realize how idiotic what she says sounds? What? We have the strength to fight China

strength given to Filipinos through the yellow complaint to fight China?

Under the yellow regime of Noyon Aquino, the yellows rejoiced over the ruling of the Permanent Arbitration Court (PCA) in The Hague for having ruled in favor of the Philippines, a ruling that can hardly be enforced by the court and even proved detrimental to the Philippines.

What the yellows never admitted to is the fact that while the PCA junked China's claim of the nine-dash line covering virtually all of

the South China Sea, the Philippines lost its claims over Scarborough Shoal, the fishing grounds used by the Filipinos and the ruling virtually opened for other fishermen, such as the Vietnamese and other non-Filipino, to fish in shoal.

It was stressed many times that the PCA ruled "that not only the features the Chinese were occupying were mere 'rocks' but that all features in the Spratlys were not 'islands' but rocks.

"But what makes Robredo, along with the like-minded yellows, believe that given our military and economic inferiority compared to China, we can crush it.

"That means even our Pag-Asa Island and every geographical feature under the Kalayaan group of islands, which Marcos annexed to our territory, became mere 'rocks.'"

Besides it has become clear that the 2016 PCA ruling could not be enforced.

In the meantime, the yellow regime, whose position against China, even if the PCA generally favored the Philippines, was never enforced, apart from the fact that the yellow President, in taking the confrontational approach to China, left the nation with no opportunities in trade and even infrastructure from neighboring China. Tension remained high during the term of Aquino, who tried to fight China with the backing of the US, but even failed to get China out of the shoal area.

Today, we have good relations with China and, even better, we have improved trading with China - to the point where China is now the Philippines' number one trade partner, while the US is just the country's third in trade.

There is hardly any tension in the WPS and tension comes only when the USA tries to create tension between ASEAN governments - especially the Philippines - and China.

Yet Robredo claims elation that the former officials had the strength to come forward and fight for the Philippines' sovereign rights and jurisdiction in what she calls the WPS.

Wake up to reality, Leni, and don't spin the fight as a fight for sovereign rights and jurisdiction. The yellows screwed it up and already lost Scarborough Shoal.

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Misuari at crossroads

“ Misuari, at this stage should buckle down to the serious business of negotiating and partnering with others... on what constitute progress, equality and justice.

Like an ageless warrior that just wouldn't fade away, Nur Misuari is back where he thrives the most — in the limelight.

After lying low since the failed Zamboanga City siege of 2013, the mercurial founding chairman of the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) is haunting us anew with his fiery rhetoric, not least among them the threat of waging another war in the name of Federalism.

Misuari, a charismatic scholar, had been in hiding since his forces allegedly launched attacks on civilians in Zamboanga City leading to a three-week battle against the military that claimed about 200 lives.

No less than President Duterte, his long-time friend and ally, revealed what the 80-year old rebel leader plans to do should the government's planned shift to Federalism fails. The President said Misuari made the threat during a meeting in Malacañang last week.

A federal system of government, Misuari said, was an undelivered promise of former President Cory Aquino. According to him, he would rather witness the implementation of Federalism over the Bangsamoro law recently ratified by the very people the rebel leader wanted to lead.

Duterte assured Misuari he would propose the creation of negotiating panels to discuss the kind of Federalism the MNLF leader is pushing for the Moro people. The President wants to craft the setup within the federal structures and in accordance with the Constitution. Malacañang likewise downplayed Misuari's war threat, saying the government is prepared to thwart any rebellion while believing that the two sides would not reach that stage.

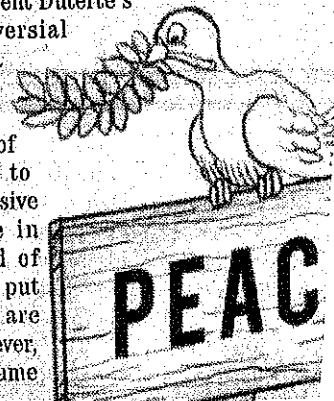
The question now foremost in every observer's mind is whether Misuari still has the following to make real his threat. Is the MNLF really a spent force as what some analysts are saying? Or to put it another way, can he really help the administration find the path to long and lasting peace in Mindanao?

Belligerent as he is, Misuari would be the first person to downplay insinuations that he no longer commands a following. “They think I'm a spent force. They're stupid, they're crazy,” he was quoted to have said at the time he was facing charges of rebellion and violation of international humanitarian law in the aftermath of the three-week Zamboanga siege.

“If I launch a war now, I tell you I can destroy the government. But no, I don't like. According to the Holy Koran, if you kill one human being without a cause, it's as if you killed the whole of humanity,” he pointed out.

Whether he still has 100,000 followers as he claims he has, Misuari, we believe could still contribute to the quest for peace in Mindanao. We share President Duterte's optimism that the controversial Muslim leader can still be a force for peace.

He has a sizeable mass base in the poor villages of Sulu which can be utilized to achieve a comprehensive and lasting peace in the so-called Land of Promise if they are put on board. What we are apprehensive of, however, is if he still has the same



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old charisma that held absolute sway over the Bangsamoro given the Zamboanga devastation that infuriated many a Mindanaoan.

Add to that the fact that Misuari may now have to adjust to the stronger field presence and the views of other MNLF factions like the Moro Islamic Liberation Front which bolted out of the MNLF due to disenchantment with his governance in the failed Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao.

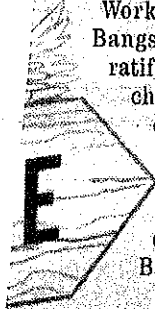
“
Can he really help the administration find the path to long and lasting peace in Mindanao?”

Probably feeling the subtle intimations of his mortality, Misuari has installed his eldest son, Haji Uto Karim, a Shariah scholar reportedly more radical than his father as his vice chairman. Analysts see this as a ploy to reinforce his clout in the Muslim community which must have grown tired of his empty rhetoric.

Instead of resorting to being a firebrand, Misuari, at this stage should buckle down to the serious business of negotiating and partnering with others who also have other ideas on what constitute progress, equality and justice.

Working within the structure of the newly-created Bangsamoro framework which the Moro people had ratified is a good start. Misuari can then use whatever charisma and goodwill he still has to transcend the ethnicity-based grievances and prejudices that has divided the Moros.

Misuari now has a choice. He can make himself an instrument of division with declarations of war or a messiah of peace by unifying the beleaguered Bangsamoro people.



ONLINE NEWS

26 MARCH 2019

<https://news.abs-cbn.com/>

Soldiers who fought rebels honored in army anniversary

ABS-CBN News

Posted at Mar 25 2019 08:19 PM

Soldiers who battled communist rebels and ISIS-inspired terrorists were among military personnel recognized during the 122nd founding anniversary of Philippine Army, Thursday (March 21).

The Distinguished Conduct Star (DCS), known as the second highest military award in the Armed Forces, and the Gold Cross Medal (GCM), or the the fourth highest military award, were among the accolades given during the event.

The DCS was awarded to Sgt. Arnel Alberto, Cpl. Roel Delos Reyes, and Pvt. Jerry Wassig for their roles in fighting Maute terrorists in separate encounters.

Meanwhile, the GCM was awarded to 1st Lieutenants Francis Hernaez, William Hiponia, and Antonio Cortes; and Staff Sgt. Juljiri Abdurajik for fighting communist insurgency across the country.

Currently, the Philippine Army is open for applicants who are interested to join the troops.

Watch more in [iWant](#) or [TFC.tv](#)

President Rodrigo Duterte led the conferment of medals. He also took a look into the Army's current capabilities and modernization plan during the anniversary program.

Prior to the anniversary activities, Duterte had also led the unveiling of the Marawi Heroes Memorial Monument at the Libingan ng mga Bayani.

- [Duterte unveils Marawi Heroes Memorial](#)

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