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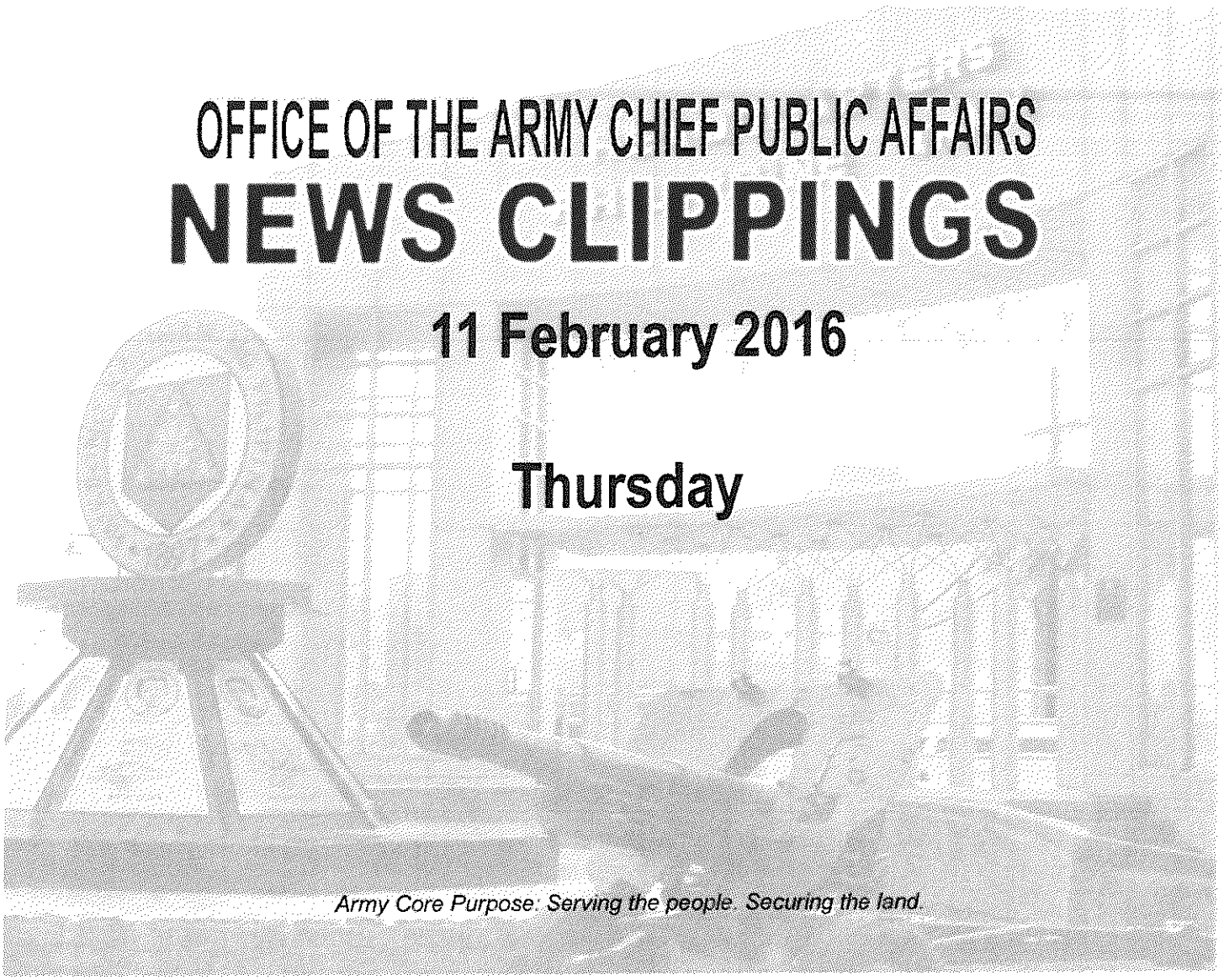
NEWS CLIPPINGS

11 February 2016

Thursday



Army Core Purpose: Serving the people. Securing the land.

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11 FEBRUARY 2016

Army Core Purpose: Serving the people. Securing the land.

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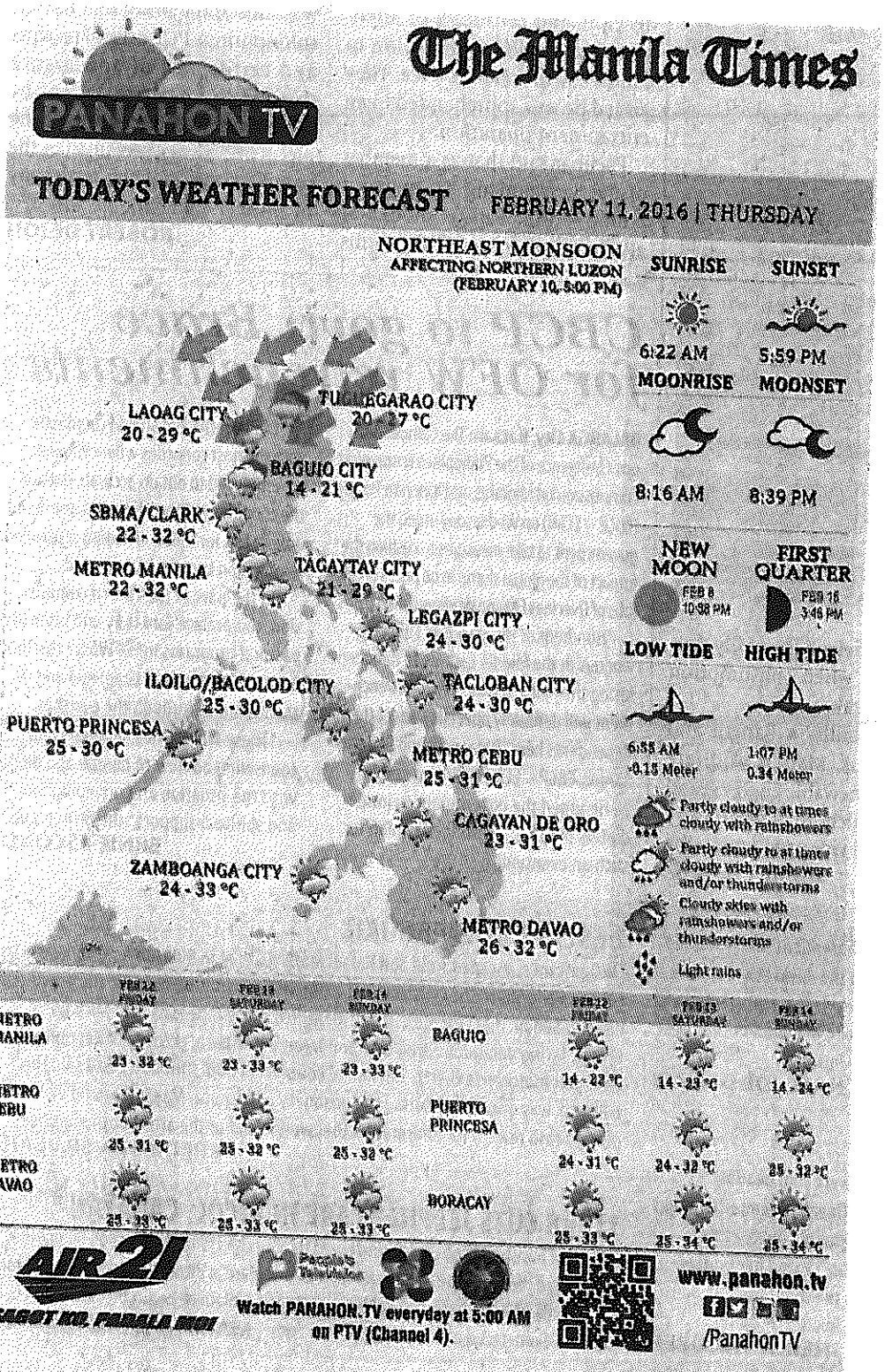

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THE PHILIPPINE STAR
TRUTH SHALL ENDURE

Page: 1

Ash Wednesday ushers in Lent: Don't be hypocrites

By EVELYN MACAIRAN

As the Catholic faithful flocked to churches yesterday to have foreheads daubed with ash, Manila Archbishop Luis Antonio Cardinal Tagle had a message in this Lenten and election season: don't be hypocrites, and don't use Lenten rituals for publicity stunts.

In his homily during the morning mass for Ash Wednesday that heralded the start of the 40-day Lenten season, Tagle said that some people might take advantage of the call to be charitable to glorify themselves.

He reminded the faithful of Jesus' teaching, that when one gives alms, one should do it secretly and not turn it into photo opportunities, like hypocrites who only want to be praised by others.

Aside from the "photo ops" when showing off their generosity, Tagle also discouraged people from spending a long time kneeling in church just to project themselves as pious.

He said the church must also not be turned into a venue for fashion shows in order to draw attention to oneself.

"When you do not think of others or God when you do a generous act, and only want to draw attention to yourself, this is an insult to the one receiving your alms because your true intention is not to help... you are using that person for your own benefit. That is not being generous, that is not being charitable," Tagle added.

He said that during this season, the faithful are encouraged to prepare for God's resurrection that would fall on Easter Sunday and asked that they return to the Lord.

Alms giving is one of three ways to renew ties with God during Lent.

The other two are praying and offering sacrifice such as fasting. Tagle also said that when people decide to fast, they should not be motivated by the prospect of losing weight or saving money.

He also asked that the savings from fasting be donated to the Archdiocese of Manila's Pondo ng Pinoy and Fast2Feed of Hapag-Asa to feed hungry and malnourished children.

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PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER

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BIFF leader captured in raid

COTABATO CITY—Military officials announced the capture of a top-ranking leader of the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF) and the death of his son during a raid in the city on Tuesday.

The arrest of Hasan Indal by government forces in Barangay Kalanganan was confirmed by Abu Misri Mama, spokesperson of the BIFF which split from the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) in 2008 to continue a secessionist cause.

Another BIFF leader was killed earlier in a clash with soldiers in Maguindanao province.

Col. Ranny Sevilla, commander of the Army's 5th Special Forces Battalion, said Indal, the BIFF's vice chair for internal affairs, was taken at 11:40 p.m. from a house, where he had been hiding. He did not resist arrest but his son, identified as Ali Indal, fought back and was killed, Sevilla said.

The raiders team recovered a Baby Armalite rifle, a .45 cal. pistol and a fragmentation grenade, he said.

Indal was arrested in connection with a case of murder and frustrated murder filed at the Regional Trial Court's Branch 18 in North Cotabato in 2012. Sevilla said Judge George Jabido issued the arrest warrant but did not provide details of the case.

"A concerned resident provided us the information. We conducted surveillance before we carried out the raid last night," Sevilla said.

Capt. Jo-ann Petinglay, spokesperson of the Maguindanao-based 6th Infantry Division, said Indal and his son had been hiding in the safe house due to intense military operations against the BIFF in Datu Salibo, Maguindanao province, since Friday.

On Tuesday, at least four rebels were killed and seven others were hurt in the fighting. Among the fatalities was BIFF commander Mamadra Guino, also known as Abu Sufian, Col. Felicisimo Budiongan, commander of the Army's 1st Mechanized Brigade, told the INQUIRER.

Budiongan said Guino died when his group clashed with soldiers around 10 a.m. in the village of Sambulawan in Datu Salibo. Mama also confirmed Guino's death.

At least three soldiers have been wounded, while more than 10,000 residents evacuated to safe grounds since the clashes began.

Maj. Gen. Edmundo Pangilinan, 6th ID chief, told reporters that Indal's arrest was an accomplishment not only of the security forces but of the entire community, accusing the rebel of being behind the planting of improvised bombs in public places.

Mama said the BIFF would not be affected by the setbacks and vowed that his group would continue to launch attacks against the military. ***Jeoffrey Maitem and Edwin Fernandez. Inquirer Mindanao***

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THE PHILIPPINE STAR

Page: 14

BIFF leader nabbed, son slain in raid

COTABATO CITY – A leader of the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF) was arrested while his son was killed during a raid on their hideout on Tuesday.

Hassan Indal, alias Abu Azam, vice chairman for internal affairs of the BIFF, was collared in Barangay Kalanganan based on a warrant issued by the Cotabato Regional trial Court for murder and double frustrated murder.

Indal did not resist arrest, but his son Alih was killed in a gunfight with the raiding team.

Brig. Gen. Restituto Padilla, Armed Forces of the Philippines spokesman, said Indal's group was behind a series of atrocities since the BIFF was formed in 2010.

"His reported death (in an air strike) in 2014 was unverified. This time, he was positively identified by witnesses," Padilla said.

Army and police operatives recovered an M-16 assault rifle, a .45 caliber pistol and a fragmentation grenade at the scene.

– **Jaime Laude, John Unson**

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11 February 2016 The Standard

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Soldiers clash with MILF, not BIFF, in Maguindanao

By Florante Solmerin, Francisco Tuyay

GOVERNMENT troops from the Army's 61st Division Reconnaisance exchanged a series of firefights over the past six days with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front and not the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters as previously believed, even as a military spokesman insisted the military fought with the BIFF although the sites of encounter were close to MILF areas.

Ground commanders who spoke on condition of anonymity said they were verifying reports that troops they had encountered in Maguindanao were actually from the MILF. "Or, it could be a composite of both groups," one of them told **The Standard** in a phone interview.

Captain Jo-An Petinglay, spokesperson of the Army's 6th infantry Division, said the firefight between the soldiers and the BIFF started Friday in Datu Salibo have spread to Barangay Dawang in Datu Saudi Ampatuan town.

One soldier was wounded in the encounter.

Another military source said "earlier today, our forces came in contact with elements they believed were BIFF but turned out to be MILF forces."

MILF spokesman Von An Haq, in a published report, blamed the soldiers for not coordinating their ongoing pursuit of the BIFF and simply going into an MILF area.

This is a similar argument for the fighting involving the Philippine National Police-Special Action Force in Mamasapano, Maguindanao on Jan. 25, 2015.

The clashes occurred after the failure of Congress to pass the Bangsamoro Basic Law last week.

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THE DAILY tribune

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BIFF commander nabbed, son killed

By Mario J. Mallari

A top commander of the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF) was captured while his son who serves as one of his security aides was killed during a law enforcement operation launched by combined military and police forces in Cotabato City Tuesday night.

Nabbed was Hassan Indal, alias Abu Hazam, tagged as commander of the BIFF's 4th division and vice chairman for internal affairs of the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Movement (BIFM).

Killed was Ali Indal, a son of the BIFF commander, who chose to shot it out with the government troops out to serve a warrant of arrest against the elder Indal.

The elder Indal was the subject of an arrest warrant for murder and double frustrated murder charges in connection to atrocities staged by the BIFF in Central Mindanao since its founding in 2010.

The military received reports that Indal moved to Cotabato City to evade ongoing skirmishes between Army and BIFF in Maguindanao, particularly in Datu Salibu which is a known lair of the BIFF.

Capt. Jo-Ann Petinglay, public affairs officer of the Army's 6th Infantry Division (ID), said that combined elements of the 5th Special Forces Battalion, 603rd Brigade, Criminal Investigation and Detection Group-Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao and ARMM-Regional Intelligence Division launched the law enforcement operation.

Petinglay said that the government troops swooped down in Barangay Kalangan, Cotabato City late Tuesday night after confirming the presence of the Indals.

Seized from the father and son duo were an M653 rifle with magazine loaded with 10 ammunition, a caliber .45 pistol with two magazines loaded with 14 ammunition and a fragmentation grenade.

Maj. Gen. Edmundo Pangilinan, commander of 6th ID, attributed the successful operation to the coordination extended to the government forces by civilians.

"This is an accomplishment not only of the security forces but of the entire community because Indal is one of the BIFF leaders who continually sow terror to civilians by laying IEDs (improvised explosive device) and attacking communities," Pangilinan said.

"We are thankful for the growing awareness of the community in fighting terrorism by providing essential information for his capture," he added.

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'Dead' BIFF leader arrested in Cotabato

BY VICTOR REYES

A LEADER of the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters was arrested by government forces in Cotabato City on Tuesday night, two years after the military claimed to have killed him in an air strike in Maguindanao.

Apprehended was Hassan Indal alias Abu Hazam, the No. 4 man of the BIFF, being the group's vice chairman for internal affairs, said Capt. Jo-ann Petinglay, public affairs officer of the Army's 6th Infantry Division.

Indal's son, Ali, who is also affiliated with the BIFF, was killed in the same operation carried out by the Army's 5th Special Forces Battalion, 603rd Brigade, and police operatives.

In January 2014, then 6th ID spokesman Col. Dickson Hermoso reported that the elder Indal was killed in an air strike, during a military offensive against the BIFF that killed 40 BIFF men.

Sought for reaction, Hermoso said reports about the death of Indal in 2014 were based on intelligence information. "We didn't recover his body actually," he said.

AFP spokesman Brig. Gen. Restituto Padilla said: "It seemed that it (killing of Indal in 2014) was not verified, that's why he was subjected to an operation now (last Tuesday night)...He was certainly arrested because people identified him as (Hassan Indal). This is the same person named in the warrant of arrest. He was even with his son."

Petinglay said the troops swooped down on the safehouse of the two in barangay Kalangalan MB in Cotabato City around 11:50 p.m. by virtue of an arrest warrant on the elder Indal for murder with double frustrated murder issued by a Cotabato City court.

Recovered from the house were an M653 rifle with ammunition, a cal. 45 pistol with ammunition, and a fragmentation grenade.

Petinglay said Ali fired at the operating troops who fought back, killing the younger Indal in the process.

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Gov't troops pursuing BIFF clash with MILF

BY VICTOR REYES

FIGHTING between Moro Islamic Liberation Front forces and government soldiers who were pursuing members of the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters broke out yesterday in Datu Saudi Ampatuan town in Maguindanao.

This prompted officials of government and the MILF, which signed a peace agreement in March 2014, to activate peace mechanisms to diffuse the tension, said a security official who spoke on condition of anonymity.

"There is an initial update but still subject to verification that earlier today, our forces came in contact with elements they believed were BIFF, but it turned out to be MILF forces," the official said.

But the source questioned the presence of BIFF members in the area – Barangay Gawang – which he said is an MILF community.

Barangay Gawang is in Datu Saudi Ampatuan town which is near Datu Salibo town where clashes between soldiers and BIFF members extorting money from a construction firm erupted Friday.

The source said Barangay Gawang "is in the general area of our encounters with the BIFF during the last few days."

The incident in Barangay Gawang is the first known mistaken encounter between government and MILF forces since last year's January 25 Mamasapano incident that claimed the lives of 44 police commandos.

The commandos were killed by the MILF, the BIFF, and private armed groups after the policemen entered an area that the MILF claims to be its territory.

The source said the MILF called the attention of ceasefire officials, complaining that government soldiers engaged MILF rebels. Citing military reports, the source, however, said those engaged by the soldiers were actually BIFF men.

"They encountered the BIFF though the MILF claimed that their fighters were the ones engaged by the military," the source said.

He said the barangay is an MILF community where BIFF members and their families also live. The BIFF is composed of former MILF leaders and members.

"Ang tanong diyan, since may BIFF sa community nila, may violation sila (MILF) sa ceasefire. Bakit nandiyan ang BIFF?... Kung kini-claim na sila (MILF) yun, ang tanong is bakit nandun yung BIFF sa community nila?" he said.

"At hindi basta-basta pumapasok ang sundalo sa lugar na walang coordination, nagcoordinate naman sa CCCH (Coordinating Committee on the Cessation of Hostilities) are ...Bakit nila binanatan ang mga sundalo kung MILF sila?" he added.

Capt. Jo-ann Petinglay, public affairs officer of the Army's 6th Infantry Division based in Maguindanao, said initial information showed the soldiers clashed with BIFF fighters and not MILF rebels.

"What we know is that they are BIFF because the MILF knows that we are there," said Petinglay of the armed group they clashed with. "We made (prior) coordination and everybody knows about the ongoing operation (against the BIFF)," she said.

Petinglay said the fighting, involving troops from the 61st Division Reconnaissance Company, was near an MILF community. She said one of the operating troops was wounded in the fighting which lasted until around 11 a.m. She said the BIFF suffered an undetermined number of casualties.

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COTABATO RAID

BIFF commander arrested, son killed

BY JULMUNIR I. JANNARAL AND AL JACINTO
SENIOR CORRESPONDENTS

COTABATO CITY, Maguindanao: The Army's 6th Infantry Division (6ID) based in Camp Siongco in this province announced the arrest of a high-ranking leader of the outlawed Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF) during a raid that also killed the rebel's son on Tuesday night.

BIFF Vice Chairman for Internal Affairs and 4th Division Commander Hassan Indal, alias Abu Hassan and Tambako, is now undergoing interrogation after Tuesday's arrest, 6ID spokesperson Army Captain Jo-ann Petinglay said. Indal's son – Ali – died in a gunfight with the law enforcers.

Policemen, backed by the Army's Special Forces, swooped down on Indal's hideout in Barangay Kalangan Mother in Cotabato where intelligence agents tracked him down.

"Indal [has been] involved in different criminalities and atrocities in central Mindanao since 2010," Petinglay told The Manila Times.

Citing intelligence reports, Petinglay said Indal and his son had been hiding in a safe house in the outskirts of Cotabato City since intense military operations were launched Friday against the rebel group in the town of Datu Salibo, Maguindanao.

BIFF spokesman Abu Misri Mama said the ranking rebel leader, who has been suffering from diabetes, was in the city to seek medical attention.

"That is why he was in Cotabato City, not hiding, but for medication," Mama added.

Colonel Ranie Sevilla, commander of the 5th Army Special Forces, said Indal's arrest was made on the basis of a warrant of arrest issued by the local court for various heinous crimes.

"His son resisted arrest and traded shots with the lawmen," Sevilla said.

Chief Inspector William Santos, officer in charge (OIC) of the Criminal Investigation and Detection Group in the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (CIDG-ARMM), said it took the government forces eight minutes to execute Indal's arrest.

He said that while the lawmen were serving the arrest warrant, Ali grabbed an M-16 armalite rifle and tried to shoot the arresting officers but law enforcers quickly responded and shot him dead.

The raiding team seized an M-16 armalite rifle, cal .45 pistol and fragmentation grenade.

Santos also explained that the CIDG had to bring Ali's remains, though he belonged to an Islamic faith, to a local funeral parlor here for fingerprinting and data processing.

Maj. Gen. Edmundo Pangilinan, 6th ID commanding general, said informants provided them vital information that led to Indal's arrest.

"This is an accomplishment not only of the security forces but of the entire community because Indal was one of the BIFF leaders who continually sowed terror among civilians by planting improvised bombs in public places," he said.

The continuing military operations since last week ensued after the MILF separatists harassed personnel of an ongoing flood control project in Datu Salibo, where they burned heavy equipment and attacked government forces, defusing a bomb planted under a bridge in the area.

The skirmishes resulted in the death of nine jihadists, including its sub-leader, whom the military identified only as Abu Supian, in Tuesday's military pursuit operation.

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MANILA BULLETIN
THE NATION'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

Page: 14

Rebels abandon checkpoint as AFP troops move in

By MIKE U. CRISMUNDO

BAYUGAN CITY, Agusan del Sur – They were bold enough to conduct their own checkpoint along Maharlika Highway here Tuesday morning.

But when troops of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) arrived, a group of New People's Army (NPA) rebels scampered for safety, sending government forces hot on their heels.

Along with earth-moving equipments, troops from the Third Special Forces Battallion, supported by the regional, provincial and city mobile forces of Police Regional Office 13 (PRO 13), are now heading towards the Diwata mountain range with the objective of catching up with some 50 heavily armed NPAs who manned the checkpoint.

At 5:45 a.m. on Tuesday, NPA rebels conducted a checkpoint at the Maharlika national highway at the Bayanakon area in Barangay Wawa, this city, flagging down passing vehicles and seemingly looking for government soldiers.

The NPAs occupied the area for almost 15 minutes then fled without any untoward incident, some villagers residing along the side of the national highway said.

"Murag dunay ilang gipangita" (It seems they were looking for someone)," one of the commuters, who requested anonymity, said.

However, some of the residents in the area believed that the rebels were searching for government soldiers.

"Kalit nga milakaw pud sila padulong dinha sa dool nga bukid' (They immediately left to the nearby mountain,' a villager also said.

As of press time, the Army's 401st Infantry (Unity) Brigade based at New Leyte, Prosperidad, Agusan del Sur is hunting down the NPA rebels.

In another development, a statement released to the local media, the NPA warned that "the attack on the pineapple and banana companies in Bukidnon province were just the first step in demanding a payback for the company's social debt, which has already piled up," Alan Juanito, the NPA spokesperson, said.

Last January 26, armed men believed to be NPA guerrillas torched a bulldozer, an owner-type jeep and a generator rented by the Del Monte Philippines in Sitio Kitanglad, Barangay San Juan, Balingasag town, Misamis Oriental. The damage was placed at ₱15 million.

A few days later, NPAs launched another series of coordinated attacks in the compounds of Dole Philippines, Lapanday and DMPI in various locations in Malaybalay City.

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2 NPA rebels, huli sa pangongotong

CAMP G. NAKAR, Lucena City – Dalawang hinihinalang miyembro ng New People's Army (NPA) na diumanoy nangongotong sa mga kontratista at negosyante ang naaresto ng mga operatiba ng 85th Infantry Battalion and PNP Quezon Public Safety Company sa Barangay Cagsiay 2, Mauban, Quezon, nuong Martes.

Kinilala ni Brig. Gen. Rhoderick M. Parayno, 201st Infantry Brigade commander, ang mga suspek na sina Alex Perdiguera, alias Daniel/Abil, at Mark Ryan Relao Asores alias David.

Nakumpiska ng mga pulis ang isang .45-caliber pistol mula sa isa sa mga suspek.

Ayon kay Parayno, positibong kinilala ng mga construction workers ang dalawang suspek na siyang sumunog sa isang backhoe na pag-aari ng isang construction firm.

Sasampahan ng kaukulang kaso ang dalawang rebelde na nasa custody na ngayon ng pulisya.

Naiulat nuong November 2015 na sinunog ng NPA and isang backhoe nang hindi maibigay ng mga contractors ang hinihingi nilang pera.

"The NPA sent extortion letters again to contractors and businessmen but this time they were asking for higher fees," ayon kay Parayno. **(Danny Estacio)**

www.inquirer.net

Moro rebel killed, 3 wounded in clash between MILF, Army in Maguindanao

By: Karlos Manlupig

DAVAO CITY – A Moro rebel was killed while a 15-year-old civilian, another rebel and a government soldier were wounded when fighting erupted between members of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front and Army soldiers in the town of Datu Saudi in Maguindanao on Wednesday morning.
Von Al Haq, vice chair for military affairs of the MILF, said the fighting started at 10 a.m. after government forces who were conducting pursuit operations against the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters, allegedly entered without any coordination an identified base of the group's 105th Base Command.
"We were shocked when we received reports about the incident because we were informed about the ongoing military operations against the BIFF and we told the AFP through the ceasefire mechanism to be careful because we have a base near the area," Al Haq said.

He said the MILF was confident that there would be no complications because they have informed the military about the location of the 105th Base Command under Commander Haon.

"The MILF immediately activated our ceasefire committee to pacify the fighting. We also asked the International Monitoring Team to help troubleshoot the problem," Al Haq said.

Another rebel was reportedly wounded while a government soldier was also hurt in the encounter.

The heavy firefight ended around noon after a total ceasefire was implemented.
"Both the MILF and the government, through the help of the IMT, should investigate why this incident happened despite our efforts to inform about the location of our forces," Al Haq said.

The MILF initially requested that the operating government troops temporarily pull out from the area so that an organized ceasefire could be enforced to prevent further casualties.

Despite the death of a fighter, the MILF said that the peace agreement was not going to be disrupted. The MILF leadership expressed optimism that the encounter would be resolved and would not escalate.

The MILF said the clash was not in any way connected to the refusal of the present Congress to legislate the Bangsamoro Basic Law, which was aimed at facilitating the full implementation of the peace agreements between the rebel group and the government. **SFM**

news.pia.gov.ph

23 rebels surrender since January 2016

Joey Sem G. Dalumpines

DAVAO CITY, Feb 10 (PIA) A total of 23 rebels returned to the folds of the law since January 1 this year from various fronts in the regions of Davao and Socksargen.

Captain Rhyan Batchar, spokesperson of the 10th Infantry Division attributed the surrender to the open arms policy being offered by the local government units and the soldiers to those thinking of leaving the armed struggle.

He said the military has also intensified its security operations in the countryside making the rebels to be always on the run.

Soldiers under the 10th ID were involved in a series of encounters with rebel forces last week in the provinces of Compostela Valley and Davao Oriental.

Batchar identified the latest to surrender in their aliases as Pablo 21, Borjack 18, and Boboy, members of the front 71 of the New People's Army Far South Mindanao Region.

They surrendered to the authorities in Jose Abad Santos, Davao Occidental.

Major General Rafael Valencia, commander of the 10th ID welcomed the former rebels and assured fair treatment from the government.

He also vowed to run after rebels who continue the armed struggle.

"We hope that the active rebels will follow their former comrades. The rebel movement has caused a lot of broken families, lives wasted and denial of peace and development in communities," he said. (PIA 11-Joey Sem G. Dalumpines)

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MANILA BULLETIN
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Children warriors bewail life of rebellion

BULUAN, Maguindanao – "We're bored with guerrilla life (and are) longing to enjoy-at least briefly – festivity in areas like Buluan."

So, said one of four boys, who admitted being combatants of the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF) when the Manila Bulletin chanced upon their group at the height of the Fifth Sagayan Festival which began here Monday.

Unrecognizable as the children warriors that they really are, the boys easily mixed with the other people who came out to join the weeklong festival which will have a regatta (banca race) along the Buluan River, street dances attuned with the Sagayan theme, the Kategelan sa Maguindanao (a local version of national and international talent shows), a carabao race, and several other colorful events.

"Please don't harm us or report about our presence while we are here. We came for peace without the knowledge of our parents," 13-year-old Norodin, not his real name, told the Bulletin anxiously in mixed Pilipino and Maguindanao dialect.

Norodin said he and his three friends, who are also children of BIFF rebels, agreed on Sunday to sneak out of their parents' makeshift homes in a marshy village in Maguindanao after hearing an invitation by Maguindanao Governor Esmael Mangudadatu, that was aired over radio, for the public to join the festivities.

"With little money, we hiked some kilometer and then took passenger cars twice to reach Buluan Sunday morning at a time hundreds of young and old people parading around for the festival's opening," Norodin said.

Norodin's peer, Toting, who could hardly speak in Pilipino, narrated their terror-filled childhood in a life of rebellion. (Ali G. Macabalang)

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MILF airs frustration over BBL setback

By EDD K. USMAN

Congress' failure to pass the proposed Bangsmoro Basic Law (BBL) has stirred widespread frustration in Muslim Mindanao, Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) chief negotiator Mohagher Iqbal said.

He and other MILF peace panel members are in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia together with their counterparts from the Government of the Philippines (GPH) for a special meeting until today.

He said that "as a result of the failure of government, particularly Congress to pass the BBL, there is widespread frustration on the ground among our people and members of the MILF."

Iqbal said the Moro people and the MILF members are accusing the government that the delay is a tactic "and just managing the conflict in Mindanao."

But he indicated clearly the Moro Front, headed Chairman Al-Haji Murad Ebrahim, is not abandoning the Mindanao peace process.

"In view of this, the MILF and government shall jointly find ways and means to address this dangerous situation and avoid actions that may increase the frustrations. We must provide them hope that there is chance for passage of CAB-compliant BBL whoever will be the next president," said Iqbal, also the chairman of the Bangsamoro Transition Commission (BTC) that drafted the original BBL.

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AFP chief submits retirement papers to Noy

By ROEL PAREÑO

ZAMBOANGA CITY – Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) chief Gen. Hernando Iriberri has submitted his retirement papers to President Aquino as he bows out of the service a few days before the elections in May.

Iriberri confirmed his retirement when asked about a possible extension of his term during the ban on appointments in the election period.

"It will be presumptuous to say that I have already submitted all my retirement papers to the President," Iriberri said, laughing off his possible extension in the service by the President.

Observers say the extension of Irriberi's service until after the election period will give the next administration a free hand in selecting its new military chief.

Some senior military officers who were with Iriberri said the President, as commander-in-chief, could request the Commission on Elections to allow him to appoint the successor of Iriberri.

Iriberri, of Philippine Military Academy Class 1983, assumed as AFP chief last July 10, 2015. He is set to retire on April 22 when he turns 56 years old, the mandatory age of retirement from the military.

Iriberri declined to speculate on who his possible successor could be.

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New deputy commander

DAVAO CITY – Brig. Gen. Ronnie S. Evangelista, the newly named deputy commander of the Eastern Mindanao Command (Eastmincom) of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) assumed his post in Camp Panacan, Davao City Tuesday. Eastmincom commander Maj. Gen. Rey Leonardo B. Guerrero led the welcoming of Evangelista to the command. The new deputy commander was accorded with traditional arrival honors followed by information briefing on the peace and security situation in Eastern Mindanao. Evangelista is a member of Philippine Military Academy Class of 1986. (Alexander D. Lopez)

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Military ramps up security operations for May polls

By ELENA L. ABEN

To ensure peaceful and orderly elections in May, the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) announced it is stepping up operations against known threat groups in the country.

In a press briefing at Camp Gen. Emilio Aguinaldo, AFP spokesperson Brig. Gen. Restituto Padilla said that this is the rationale behind ongoing security operations against the New People's Army (NPA), the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF), Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG), and private armed groups (PAGs).

He stressed that these operations are designed to keep threat groups on the run and prevent them from conducting any election-related atrocities.

"Some of the operational considerations at this moment I cannot (impart) or relay to you so we can protect our troops appropriately," he added.

ComVal clash

Meanwhile, one NPA rebel was killed, two were wounded and two others arrested in separate operations in Compostela Valley province and in Quezon province, according to reports reaching Camp Aguinaldo.

Capt. Rhyan B. Batchar, Army 10th Infantry Division (10th ID) public affairs officer, said soldiers from the 46th IB figured in an encounter with NPA guerillas in Pantukan, Compostela Valley Province around 4 p.m. Tuesday.

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Peace panels in KL to revive pact

By Nikko Dizon

PEACE negotiators from the government and the secessionist Moro Islamic Liberation Front yesterday began a two-day special meeting in Kuala Lumpur, following the failure of Congress to pass the proposed Bangsamoro Basic Law, the key measure needed to implement the peace agreement that the Aquino government signed with the rebels in 2014.

Government chief negotiator Miriam Coronel-Ferrer said last week that the two panels would meet as soon as the "emotions" over the nonpassage of the BBL had settled.

In his opening statement at the meeting, MILF chief negotiator Mohagher Iqbal asked the Aquino government to remain committed to the Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro (CAB) and implement it without changes.

"The most immediate step is either the BBL will be refiled in Congress or a new basic law, faithful to the letter and spirit of the CAB, will be crafted by the Bangsamoro Transition Commission (BTC), which will most likely have new faces as members," Iqbal said in his statement, a copy of which was sent to the INQUIRER.

Iqbal stressed the need for government and the MILF to continue working together, assuring yet again that the MILF "will adhere to the CAB and comply with its obligations."

But he said there was "widespread frustration on the ground by our people and members of the MILF" as result of the failure of Congress to pass the BBL.

He said both the government and the MILF "must provide them hope that there is a chance" that a Bangsamoro law would be passed "whoever the next President would be."

"This must be in the form of firm and unequivocal commitment from government that it shall continue to comply with its obligations under the CAB, particularly on the passage of the CAB-compliant BBL, which is a unilateral obligation of the government," Iqbal said.

The proposed BBL sought to create a new, wider autonomous Muslim region that would replace the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) that was created following the signing of a peace agreement in 1996 between the government and the main Muslim insurgency, the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF).

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Phl, US may conduct joint patrols in South China Sea

By PIA LEE-BRAGO

The Philippines and the United States may conduct joint patrols in the South China Sea this year, Foreign Affairs Secretary Albert del Rosario said yesterday.

"Possibly. Depending on discussions that are being undertaken now at lower levels," Del Rosario told journalists when asked about the joint patrols during his annual get-together with the media at the Diamond Hotel.

He said the patrols in the disputed maritime region might involve other countries as well.

"It could be multilateral depending on how the discussions go," he said.

When asked if the possible joint patrols with the US would be raised during the US-ASEAN Summit next week, Del Rosario said it might not be tackled since it was discussed during the recent 2+2 ministerial meeting with top US officials.

"We're looking to see how that might work," he said.

The *USS Lassen* began its patrol in the South China Sea last October.

The guided-missile destroyer reportedly received orders to travel within 12 nautical miles of Panganiban (Mischief) and Zamora (Subi) reefs in the South China Sea, both at the heart of a controversial Chinese island-building campaign that has soured ties between Washington and Beijing.

The US said its military will continue air and sea patrols in international waters even after the Chinese navy repeatedly warned a US surveillance plane to leave the airspace over artificial islands China is creating in the South China Sea.

The Philippines voiced support for the US freedom of navigation operations in the disputed area.

US Ambassador Philip Goldberg said the conduct of freedom of navigation operation has been done by the US for 70 years as Washington made a commitment to do the operations on a routine and regular basis.

Meanwhile, the Philippine military is coordinating with their Vietnamese counterparts in the rescue of a Filipino fisherman whose boat sank and drifted off Sinh Ton Island (Sin Cowe) in the Spratlys.

Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) spokesman Brig. Gen. Restituto Padilla said they have yet to receive an official report on what happened to the Filipino fisherman.

Vietnam's *Thanhnien News* identified the rescued Filipino fisherman as 34-year-old "Anthongradule of Nasungpo, Batangas," probably referring to Nasugbu.

The report added the rescued Filipino fisherman is safe.

Vietnamese troops rescued him as he was hanging on to his capsized small boat last Monday.

The report quoted the rescued fisherman as saying that his group left Batangas port last Feb. 3 to fish in the Spratlys and arrived in the area three days later.

While in the area, five of them boarded one of 10 small boats, with each boat manned by five to 10 people deployed by their mother ship to conduct fishing.

However, the rescued Filipino told his Vietnamese rescuers that their boat was battered by big waves and capsized. He said he was lucky enough he was able to stay afloat by clinging to the capsized banca.

– **With Jaime Laude**

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PNP bucks Marcelino's detention transfer

By EDU PUNAY

The Philippine National Police Anti-Illegal Drugs Group (PNP-AIDG) has opposed a proposal of the Department of Justice (DOJ) to transfer Marine Lt. Col. Ferdinand Marcelino to another detention facility while undergoing preliminary investigation on drug charges.

PNP-AIDG chief Senior Superintendent Manolo Ozaeta opposed the recommendation of Senior Deputy State Prosecutor Theodore Villanueva to the Bureau of Jail Management and Penology (BJMP) to transfer Marcelino to the custody of the National Bureau of Investigation or the Philippine Navy.

Marcelino's camp earlier requested the DOJ for the transfer after he was moved from the PNP-AIDG detention facility at Camp Crame in Quezon City to the BJMP's Quezon City jail annex at Camp Bagong Diwa in Taguig.

"Allowing the transfer of Marcelino will set a bad precedent and open the floodgates of similar requests from members of the AFP (Armed Forces of the Philippines) who are in jail," Ozaeta said in a one-page letter to the BJMP.

"To prevent public perception that Marcelino enjoys special treatment while in detention, it is best to keep him at the BJMP facility pending preliminary investigation of his case," Ozaeta added.

The DOJ earlier raised concern for Marcelino's safety at the Quezon City jail annex where drug suspects arrested by the Marine officer are also being held.

But Ozaeta believes the BJMP is capable of handling the situation.

Marcelino, a former director of the Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency (PDEA)'s Special Enforcement Service, and his Chinese interpreter, Yan Yi Shou, were arrested in a raid on a suspected shabu storage facility in Sta. Cruz, Manila on Jan. 21.

PDEA agents recovered 64 kilos of shabu worth P256 million during the sting.

Authorities said Marcelino was found sitting in a couch when the police arrived.

The DOJ also proposed the transfer of Yan to the NBI facility.

Yan denied the drug charges filed against him by the police in a counter-affidavit submitted to the DOJ yesterday.

He maintained that he is an "action agent" of the PDEA. He insisted that his presence in the raided drug facility was part of a covert operation.

Marcelino had earlier denied the charges of conspiracy in the manufacture and possession of illegal drugs under Republic Act 9165 or the Comprehensive Dangerous Drugs Act of 2002.

The former PDEA official said he was on a mission order to go after drug lords and operators, but failed to show documents to support his claim.

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PNP blocks transfer of Marcelino

By **LEONARD D. POSTRADO**

The Philippine National Police (PNP) has blocked the bid of former Philippined Drug Enforcement Agency (PDEA) director, Marine Lt. Col. Ferdinand Marcelino, to be detained either at the Philippine Navy (PN) or at the National Bureau of Investigation (NBI).

During Wednesday's preliminary investigation hearing on the former PDEA official's drug case, the PNP insisted that it retain custody of Marcelino, saying that allowing his transfer to a detention facility at the PN or NBI will set a bad precedent to other erring government officials involved in drug cases.

In a letter to Senior Deputy State Prosecutor Theodore Villanueva, PNP Anti-Illegal Drugs Group (PNP AIDG) officer-in-charge Sr. Supt. Manolo Ozaeta warned that granting Marcelino's transfer, would "open the floodgate for requests coming from members of the Armed Forces of the Philippines who are languishing in jail."

"To avoid negative public perception that (Marcelino) enjoys special treatment while in detention, it is best to detain him pending preliminary investigation at the BJMP facility," Ozaeta explained.

Ozaeta also rebutted the argument of Philippine Navy Vice Admiral Caesar Taccad, who invoked Executive Order 106, to justify the transfer of Marcelino from the BJMP facility.

EO 106 states that if a crime is committed by an Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) personnel or other law enforcement agencies, it is mandated that the military offender should be delivered to the nearest AFP authorities.

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Marcelino transfer to Navy opposed

BY ASHZEL HACHERO

THE Philippine National Police-Anti-Illegal Drugs Group yesterday opposed the bid of Marine Lt. Col. Ferdinand Marcelino to be transferred from his present detention place in Camp Bagong Diwa in Bicutan, Taguig to the Philippine Navy or the National Bureau of Investigation.

The PNP-AIDG set it would set a bad precedent, adding: "It is best to detain him at the Bureau of Jail Management and Penology facility to avoid negative perception that respondent Lt. Colonel Ferdinand Marcelino enjoys special treatment."

The PNP-IDG stand was stated in a letter to the Department of Justice signed by Sr. Supt. Manolo Ozaeta, who said Marcelino's concerns on his safety must be addressed by the BJMP.

Marcelino had requested that he be transferred to the custody of the Navy or NBI due to security concerns, saying he shares his Taguig detention facility with individuals whom he caused to be arrested when he was still the head of the Special Enforcement Service of the Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency.

The Navy, through its head, Vice Admiral Caesar Taccad, also requested that Marcelino be placed under their custody for "his safety and protection."

The DOJ had earlier proposed Marcelino's transfer to the custody of the NBI and the Navy.

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Hope despite the death of the BBL

THE PROPOSED Bangsamoro Basic Law is dead. The last day of the 16th Congress sealed the fate of the once celebrated document. Produced by representatives of the government, the Moro Islamic Liberation Front, foreign stakeholders, local peace advocates and grassroots communities, the 17-year product of constant dialogue and continuous consultation was killed by inaction and indifference.

As early as last December, some proponents of the BBL had lost hope and were sounding the death knell for the proposed law. All the trust and momentum that made us believe that peace and reconciliation could indeed be possible in Mindanao were lost in an unfortunate incident that claimed the lives of 64 Filipinos (44 Special Action Force troopers, 17 members of the MILF and three civilians). What was deemed a fair structure that could give the original inhabitants of Mindanao their due died in an ill-fated mission that the majority of the Moro people had nothing to do with.

The rippling effect of the Mamasapano encounter in January 2015 cannot be denied. It resulted in a maelstrom of mistrust, so strong it reinvigorated the age-old bias sown by colonizers against the Moro people. Suddenly, an entire nation became apprehensive of the BBL. Such apprehension fueled what was displayed during the last session days of the 16th Congress—the disinterest, apathy and antagonism of lawmakers which ultimately led to the body's failure to come to terms with what the proposed law intends to provide the Moro people.

What is curious about the BBL (which may also be the reason for the strong resentment against it) is that people see it according to its seeming religious undertone: the Moro people being followers of a religion that has been constantly met with prejudice, when in fact it is not the issue to begin with. What the Moro people are fighting for is their "indigeneity" —being among the first inhabitants of Mindanao, men and women who fought valiantly and thwarted the many attempts of colonizers to subjugate them. They are still with us today because they resisted the tools of homogenization employed by foreign invaders.

COMMENTARY

Jesse Angelo L. Altez

While the Moro people were able to fend off colonization, the introduction of many state policies and government migration programs in Mindanao during the early 20th century resulted in the original inhabitants becoming a minority in their domain—marginalized, brought to the peripheries in the land they once owned.

Is it fair to deny the Moro people what is due them because of something not of their own making? By denying them what they rightly deserve, the patterns laid down by history were strengthened. As a result, they may fight back. Oppression and marginalization are the root cause of all insurgencies. And the oppressed and marginalized have just been given another reason not to trust the majority.

All our Moro brethren want to do is to preserve their identity. All they are after is for their children to realize the richness of who they are by instituting a framework that will safeguard their heritage in their own land. They are not after secession. They want the BBL because it will lead to a just and reparative structure that will empower them as a distinct cultural group, so that they can actively take part in nation-building. They have just been denied that.

Cardinal Orlando Quevedo, the archbishop of Cotabato, affirms that the insurgency in Mindanao is "rooted in the injustices done against the Moro people, against their Moro identity, their valid cry for political sovereignty, and their demands for integral development." The goal of the BBL is to address exactly that.

Talking with some of my Moro friends, I can feel their frustration over what has happened. They feel betrayed by the majority and are upset that they were again portrayed in a bad light in Mamasapano. I ask our Moro brethren to not give up, to still be willing to talk peace.

At this time, all we can hope for is that the trust and confidence built during the 17 long years of dialogue and deliberation will be sustained. While the prepared framework didn't see the light of day due in part to prejudice and discrimination, the networks and friendship established between and among those who took part in the lengthy peace process—the Christians, Moros, and indigenous peoples of Mindanao —are something to celebrate. More and more people are now seeing the beauty of dialogue, and, despite this tragic reversal, are beginning to understand the plight of the Moro people and other minorities in our country in general. They are fighting a legitimate and just battle.

These words are from a Christian settler who has seen the reality in Mindanao. May we learn to open our hearts to our Moro brethren. May we finally let go of our prejudices and truly give peace a chance. The road to peace is full of obstacles; may the death of the BBL be considered only as such. Despite its death, we still long for peace. Despite its demise, may we still work hard for an inclusive framework that will address the needs of the diverse composition of Filipinos in Mindanao.

Let us continue to hope.

Jesse Angelo L. Altez (jesseangelo.altez@msugensan.edu.ph) teaches philosophy at Mindanao State University in General Santos City. He is engaged in the work of the Transitional Justice and Reconciliation Commission, the research arm formed under the Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro. The views expressed here are his own.

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METRO CORNER

AFPRESCOM

By ERIK ESPINA

AS someone who has always respected the great contributions of our men in uniform, and the stabilizing force they provide to our liberty, I have always supported what is called "institution building," for and within the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP). We need rams and policies to professio e the soldier (not civilianize him), provisioning him with the battle competencies for new (if not higher) skills accompanied by actual purchases of armaments, with platforms of the latest technology, both defensive and deterrent against all domestic and foreign enemies, coupled with state backing for speedy medical evacuation in field hospitals. This is only right for a profession in which one enrolls life as its gurantee for peace. This is an ideal set-up worth aiming for.

Last week, the commander of the AFP Reserve Command (AFPRESCOM), Brig. Gen. Leoncio Cirunay Jr., a regular officer overseeing a unit of reservists, sent me an important announcement regarding "Volunteer Troops to undergo assembly tests." The letter reads:

"In line with the AFP Chief of Staff's guidance to carry out capacity and capability enhancement programs for the Reserve Force, the AFPRESCOM will conduct an Assembly Test to Reservists personnel of Technical and Administrative Service Brigades (Reserve) and Civil Military Affairs Brigade (Reserve) starting Feb. 6 to April 2016 to be held at the AFPRESCOM Headquarters for NCR-based units and in the Unified Commands for Luzon, Visayas, and Mindanao. The aim is to validate the personnel fill-up of Reserve Units and their readiness to support AFP mission.

"The activity is divided into 4 sections: Registration, Organization, Training, and Inspection which will be simultaneously facilitated by the Technical and Administrative Service Group, AFPRESCOM Training Group, Logistics Office OG4, and Reservist and Retiree Affairs OG9. Highlights of the opening program after the keynote and inspirational speech by B/General Ciruñay before the formation and inspection of troops, Reservists will undertake lectures on the Articles of War, Military Courtesy, Discipline, and Protocol to refresh and hone their knowledge about the military and to pep up their commitment to serving the nation. It is an opportunity to disseminate Command and AFP Guidance, to address concerns of respective units.

Annually, Assembly Tests are organized to ensure preparedness of the reserve units to augment and support national needs in times of natural and man-made disasters. The AFPRESCOM is one of the wide support and separate units of the AFP, founded April 1, 1993, under RA 7077 AFP Reservist Act. It is dedicated to recruit, train, equip, develop, administer AFP Technical Reserve and Affiliated Reserve Components into a capable and deployable Reserve Force in supporting the AFP mission to protect the state and participate in socio-economic activities."

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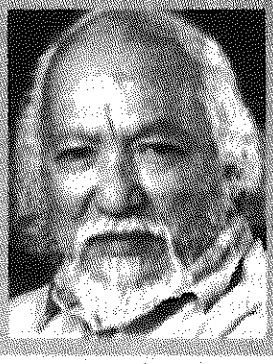
EDCA could be 'a double-edged sword'

NESTOR MATA



The new US-Philippine defense pact "does little to boost Manila's security and may exacerbate superpower rivalry."

THE Supreme Court of the Philippines has cleared a legal obstacle to the implementation of the Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement (EDCA), but the Philippine Senate, two former senators, and progressive groups, have challenged its constitutional validity.

The Senate has demanded that EDCA go through the ratification process, deeming it a treaty agreement that mandates the concurrence of the upper chamber, while former Senators Francisco S. Tatad and Rene Saguisag and progressive groups called it an "affront" to the nation's sovereignty.

Richard Javad Heydarian, professor of political science at De La Salle University in Manila, viewed the agreement in a different perspective. In an article published by The Diplomat magazine, he said a closer look at the EDCA revealed that it did not pave the way for the re-establishment of US bases in the country, but rather paved the way for a massive increase in the American military footprint on Philippine soil, particularly across a series of much-prized bases, some of which are close to the South China Sea. As he put it, "we are looking at a new generation of American overseas military access."

Yet, Prof. Heydarian, author of the book titled "Asia's New Battlefield: US, China, and the Struggle for Western Pacific", noted that the pact did not give any assurance that it would significantly enhance Manila's hands in the disputed parts of the South China Sea, and even warned that the "regional maritime disputes could get even more complicated as the two superpowers, China and the United States, move dangerously close to each other."

He pointed out that the EDSA provided US forces "rotational, negotiated, and limited access to a number of mutually-agreed upon locations, and that so far, the Americans have zeroed in on at least eight prime military bases, including Subic and Clark, as well as Oyster Bay in Palawan, strategically close to disputed land features and waters in the South China Sea."

Instead of permanent US bases, he went on, we are looking at the establishment of forward operating sites and cooperative security locations, where the host nation, theoretically, enjoys considerable supervision and control over the activities of the visiting forces. This means that the US will enjoy low-cost and flexible access to presume locations in the Philippines, he said, because it will no longer have to pay huge sums to rent out Filipino bases, not to mention that the Philippines will actually end up paying for the transportation and utility costs of the visiting forces.

In short, he went on, the US will enjoy low-cost and flexible access to premium locations in the Philippines. So what is the country getting in exchange? There is nothing in the EDCA that compels the US to come to the rescue as far as Sino-Philippine territorial disputes are concerned. All that it has reiterated, in the new agreement that was signed, shortly before President Barack Obama's visit to this country in mid-2014, was that it was not aimed at China, but instead at enhancing the two allies' capabilities in the realm of humanitarian relief and disaster management operations.

A cursory look at Washington's diplomatic position, he recalled, reveals that in the past decades various administrations refused to clarify whether the US-Philippine Mutual Defense Treaty (MDT) will be applied in the event of a conflict over Philippine-claimed/occupied territories in the South China Sea.

In conclusion, Prof. Heydarian voiced "the hopes of the Philippines that an increased US military footprint on its soil will nonetheless provide some element of latent deterrence against further Chinese provocations. Although not legally obligated to do so, Washington will surely come under tremendous political pressure to help the Philippines in an event of contingency in the disputed waters. Furthermore, EDCA facilitates the expansion of joint military exercises, the enhancement of interoperability among the two allies, and the transfer of more US funds and military equipment to the Armed Forces of the Philippines."

At all events, with a growing American presence in the area, will China step up its construction activities in the South China Sea and act more aggressively in its territorial disputes not only in the South China Sea but also East China Sea, and thus set the stage for a new phase of Sino-American rivalry in the Asian region? Or, will it bring peace?

***

Quote of the Day: "What we dignify with the name of peace is really only a truce in accordance with which a country renounces its claims, whether just or unjust, until such time as it as it can find an opportunity of asserting them with arms!"– Anon.

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Cops, military, NBI, US narc in '90s drug bust

HUMAN FACE

Ma. Ceres P. Doyo

IN THE 1990s I did a magazine investigative series on the bloody encounter at the Magallanes Commercial Center in Makati between National Bureau of Investigation agents and suspected members of a drug syndicate. When the smoke cleared, two military officers and a civilian operative lay dead, shot by NBI agents under retired police general Alfredo Lim (later mayor of Manila), who acted on a tip about a big heroin haul.

It was a shootout like no other. In Pinoyspeak, *naghalo ang balat sa tinalupan*.

Killed were Northern Luzon Command (Nolcom) deputy commander Col. Rolando de Guzman, 52; Nolcom intelligence chief Avelino Manguera, 26; and Criminal Investigation Service civilian agent Franco Calanog, 39. A woman from a prominent family was arrested. After the shootout, the NBI team led by former police captain Reynaldo Jaylo recovered 10 kilos of heroin worth about P230 million at that time. Jaylo said the seized dope was being sold by the slain military officers to one Phil Needham, an American drug dealer who fled after the shootout.

Turned out, Needham was a US narcotics agent who, along with other US agents, orchestrated the "drug bust." According to reports, American agents based in the Philippines had arranged the "controlled delivery" of the heroin using De Guzman as courier. Needham, who was a US Drug Enforcement Administration operative based in Bangkok, and not known to De Guzman, was to pose as the buyer. Needham then tipped off the NBI agents, who acted thinking they were on a real drug bust operation.

That encounter was a big front-page story the next day and several days after. I worked for weeks on the what, where, when, how and, most of all, the why, to come up with a magazine series much later. It was disturbing to learn about the underworld and the operatives involved. For no sooner was the 10-kilo heroin "buy bust" splashed all over the dailies than the story mutated into a complex, intriguing web involving military men, the CIA, the NBI and a woman of high social pedigree. (I interviewed the woman while she was in detention. She is now out of prison.)

Many interviews later (with law enforcers, the accused, lawyers, etc.), and with documents in my hands (some of them once classified), I was able to form a picture and write a story that, I must regrettably say, still happens today. Yes, as in the case of the recent drug raid in Sta. Cruz, Manila, where Lt. Col. Ferdinand Marcelino, a former official of the Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency, was apprehended along with a Chinese national allegedly operating as an interpreter, and several others. When the PDEA closed in, these persons were found in the *shabu* laboratory that contained huge amounts of drugs. They were promptly handcuffed.

An INQUIRER report said Marcelino's arrest in the raid came as "a total surprise" to his former organization, Undersecretary Arturo Cacdac Jr., PDEA director general, told a news conference at the Philippine National Police headquarters in Camp Crame. For Marcelino had contributed a lot to the national antidrug campaign during the time of PDEA Director General Dionisio Santiago. Unfortunately, Cacdac said, Marcelino is a suspect because he was present at the *shabu* lab. A Marine officer with the Philippine Navy, he denied any link to drug syndicates and insisted he was on a "legitimate intelligence operation." (He is now on the tenth day of a hunger strike.)

The question remains: If he was on a legit intelligence operation, what exactly was the nature of his presence there? Portraying himself as an underdog, he tearfully said the handcuffs were the price of his loving his country so much. He was saying that although he was no longer with the PDEA, he contin-

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ued his mission and that was the reason he was there. Doing what, we would like to know. PDEA operatives were not immediately buying his explanation. Marcelino was "not in their radar." Just show us proof—a mission order or whatever—to justify your presence there, PDEA was saying. Marcelino couldn't seem to produce it. So, what was the PDEA to do? Should Marcelino be simply released on his own say-so? What would that mean when a similar predicament presents itself again?

Marcelino's full explanation about his presence in the *shabu* lab when he had no business being there has to be sufficient, otherwise, testimonials from his colleagues about his integrity would not be enough.

We wait for the story to unfold, for the twists and turns to be presented, like the 1990s case of the bloody "buy bust" involving the NBI, military officers and a US narcotics agent that revealed the intricacies of the underworld. But even as I dug deep then, I knew I was scratching only the surface. Reading my series again just now gave me the shivers.

Journalists, like undercover agents, go to places where many people fear to tread. We have only our press cards to show when the going gets rough. Still we take risks. But I would not go into a drug den or laboratory—surreptitiously or not—to get a story unless I had the go-signal of my editor. My trips to rebel lairs and remote places always had my editor's nod, and included travel insurance from our personnel department.

Journalists live dangerously, but we always remind ourselves that no story is worth dying for—that is, if we know that the risks are very high. We should never join military convoys in battle areas. Several colleagues had died or were wounded for doing that. Or while covering a rebel camp, we were never on our own. There would be armed men or women ready to pull us away from the line of fire in case a battle erupted. But we could always explain our presence if we survived.

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Firefight between gov't, MILF forces erupts in Maguindanao

A firefight between members of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) and government forces broke out in the town of Datu Saudi in Maguindanao on Wednesday morning.

Von Al Haq, vice chair for military affairs of the MILF, said the fighting started at around 10 a.m. after government forces, who are on a pursuit operation against the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF), intruded into an identified base of the group's 105th Base Command.

"We were shocked when we received reports about the incident because we were informed about the ongoing military operations against the BIFF and we told the AFP (Armed Forces of the Philippines) through the ceasefire mechanism to be careful because we have a base near the area," Al-Haq said.

He explained that the MILF was confident that there will be no complications because they have informed the military about the location of the 105th Base Command under Commander Haon.

"The MILF immediately activated our ceasefire committee to pacify the fighting. We also asked the International Monitoring Team (IMT) to help troubleshoot the problem," Al Haq said.

Sources said that the ceasefire mechanism is now using all means to stop the fighting including the help of both peace panels, however, sporadic firefight is still going on as of press time.

Reports said that a government soldier was wounded in the incident while an MILF member was killed.

"Both the MILF and the government through the help of the IMT should investigate why this incident happened despite our efforts to inform about the location of our forces," Al Haq said.

The MILF said that the peace agreement still stands and that the leadership is optimistic that the incident will be resolved and will not escalate.

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AFP nakahanda sa tangkang paghihiganti ng BIFF re: pag-aresto sa kanilang lider

By Analy Soberano

Malaking dagok sa grupong Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF) ang pagkakaaresto sa ika-apat na lider ng rebeldeng grupo nito sa Cotabato City kagabi.

Nakilala ang naarestong top BIFF leader na si Hassan Indal alyas Abu Hassam na siyang vice chairman for internal affairs ng Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Movement at commander din ng 4th Division sa BIFF.

Bukod sa pagkaaresto kay Indal napatay din sa nasabing engkwentro ang anak nito na nakilalang si Alih Indal.

Napag-alaman na nanlaban ang batang Indal sa mga tropa ng pamahalaan.

Ayon kay AFP spokesperson Brig. Gen. Restituto Padilla na anumang pagkaaresto sa hanay ng BIFF ay siguradong makakaapekto sa kanilang organisasyon.

At dahil dito nakahanda ang militar sa anumang tangkang paghihigante ng rebeldeng grupo.

Sinabi ni Padilla na nakaalerto ang puwersa ng militar sa buong Maguindanao area.

Aniya nananatiling nasa proactive measures ang militar dahil na rin ito sa maraming mga pagsalakay na inilulunsad ng BIFF simula noong nakaraang taon.

Pagbibigay diin ni Padilla na nais kasi ng BIFF na hadlangan ang ongoing development project sa nasabing probinsiya.

Sa kabilang dako, ina-assess pa ng militar kung ililipat dito sa Metro Manila ang naarestong lider ng BIFF.

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AFP chief nasa Mindanao para tiyakin all set na ang seguridad sa 2016 polls

By Analy Soberano

Nasa Mindanao ngayon si AFP chief of staff General Hernando Iriberri para tiyakin na in-placed na ang inilatag na security measures ng militar lalo na sa mga lugar na mayroong presensiya ng mga bandidong Abu Sayyaf at Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF).

Ayon kay AFP Spokesperson BGen. Restituto Padilla na ang pagtungo ni chief of staff sa Western Mindanao Command ngayong araw ay bahagi ng kanilang paghahanda sa nalalapit na halalan lalo na sa mga lugar na kinokonsiderang election watchlist areas.

Sinabi ni Padilla na mas mainam na direktang tutungo si Irriberi sa mga tropa para maging maliwanag sa mga ito ang guidance ng higher headquarters na manatiling apolitical sa nalalapit na halalan.

Mahigpit na tinututukan ngayon ng militar ang mga lugar na may mga presensiya ng armadong grupo.

Kinokonsidera pa rin ng militar na malaking banta sa nalalapit na halalan ang presensiya ng mga private armed groups.

"The most serious threat sa election is the presence of private armed groups and as part of our efforts, make sure security, stepping up operations in selected areas," pahayag ni Padilla.

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Promotion ng AFP officials na nagpakita ng political leanings nanganganib

By Analy Soberano

Nagbabala ang pamunuan ng Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) na posibleng malagay sa alanganin ang promosyon ng sinumang sundalo na mahuhuling nag-like sa social media ng isang pulitiko o masangkot sa pamumulitika.

Ayon kay AFP spokesperson BGen. Restituto Padilla na minomonitor nila ang bawat galaw ng kanilang mga tauhan lalo na ngayong opisyal nang nagsimula ang campaign period.

Sinabi ni Padilla na bahagi ito ng direktiba ng AFP leadership na matiyak na walang sinuman sa kanilang hanay ang masasangkot sa pamumulitika sa layuning mapangalagaan ang imahe ng institusyon at mapanatili ang pagiging apolitical.

Bukod sa promosyon, nanganganib din na masampahan ng kasong administratibo at reklamong conduct unbecoming of an officer sa ilalim ng Articles of War ang sinumang sundalo na magpapakita ng political leanings.