

*Army Vision: By 2028, a world-class Army that is a source of national pride*



# **TEAM ARMY**

Serving the people. Securing the land.

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OFFICE OF THE ARMY CHIEF PUBLIC AFFAIRS

## **NEWS CLIPPINGS**

**03 April 2017**

**Monday**

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

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**PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER**  
BALANCED NEWS • FEARLESS VIEWS

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**TODAY'S WEATHER FORECAST | APRIL 3, 2017 | MONDAY**

PHILIPPINE AREA OF RESPONSIBILITY (PAR)

TAN-END OF A COLD FRONT AFFECTING SOUTHERN LUZON EASTERLIES AFFECTING THE EASTERN SECTION OF VISAYAS AND MINDANAO (As of 3:00 AM - Apr. 2, 2017)

<b>SUNRISE</b>  5:51 AM	<b>SUNSET</b>  6:08 PM
<b>MOONRISE</b>  11:11 AM	<b>MOONSET</b>  10:23 PM
<b>NEW MOON</b> MAR 28 10:58 PM	<b>FIRST QUARTER</b> APR 4 2:39 AM
<b>LOW TIDE</b> MANILA SOUTH HARBOR 10:59 PM -0.11 Meter	<b>HIGH TIDE</b> MANILA SOUTH HARBOR 2:05 PM 0.99 Meter

- Partly cloudy to at times cloudy with rainshowers
- Partly cloudy to at times cloudy with rainshowers and/or thunderstorms
- Cloudy skies with rainshowers and/or thunderstorms

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APR 4		APR 5		APR 4		APR 5		APR 4		APR 5	
<b>METRO MANILA</b>	 22-31 °C	 23-32 °C	<b>TAGAYTAY</b>	 19-28 °C	 19-29 °C	<b>TACLOBAN</b>	 24-29 °C	 24-29 °C			
<b>TUGUEGARAO</b>	 20-29 °C	 20-30 °C	<b>LEGAZPI</b>	 25-30 °C	 25-30 °C	<b>CAGAYAN DE ORO</b>	 24-31 °C	 24-31 °C			
<b>LADAG</b>	 20-32 °C	 21-32 °C	<b>PUERTO PRINCESA</b>	 26-32 °C	 26-32 °C	<b>METRO DAVAO</b>	 25-32 °C	 25-31 °C			
<b>BAGUIO</b>	 14-24 °C	 14-25 °C	<b>ILOILO/ BACOLOD</b>	 26-30 °C	 26-31 °C	<b>ZAMBOANGA</b>	 25-32 °C	 25-32 °C			
<b>SBMA/ CLARK</b>	 23-32 °C	 23-32 °C	<b>METRO CEBU</b>	 25-30 °C	 25-31 °C	 SAGOT KO, PADALA MO!					

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INQUIRER

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# Reds demand free land distribution

By Allan Nawal and Karlos Manlupig @InqNational

DAVAO CITY—Free land distribution and rural industrialization as main vehicles to deal with widespread poverty are proposed in a draft agreement on social and economic reforms prepared by communist rebels.

Government and communist rebel negotiators are to discuss the draft agreement at the resumption of peace talks—scheduled to start on April 2 and end on April 6 in a hotel in Noordwijk in The Netherlands—aimed at ending the almost five-decade communist insurgency.

The opening ceremony of the fourth round of talks should have started on Sunday morning (The Netherlands time) but was delayed by several unresolved issues.

President Duterte on Sunday called the government negotiators—Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process Jesus Dureza, Labor Secretary and peace panel chair Silvestre Bello III and peace panel member Angela Librado-Trinidad—before the start of the talks.

Sources said that both panels would meet before lunch to set the agenda and schedule for this round of talks. If the panels agreed on the schedule and outline of the agenda, the opening ceremony would proceed in the afternoon.

## Proposed Caser

In its version of the proposed Comprehensive Agreement on Social and Economic Reforms (Caser), the National Democratic Front of the Philippines (NDFP) said "distribution of land to the tillers for free" was a key component of an effective agrarian reform program that would dismantle what the rebels called land monopoly, or the concentration of huge tracts of land in the hands of a few owners.

Under the government's Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program and its extension, beneficiaries can pay for the land awarded to them for 30 years at 6 percent yearly interest. Government records showed that 8.25 million hectares had been distributed to 5.43 million beneficiaries as of 2014.

In its draft Caser, the NDFP, the political arm of Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP), also proposed a rural industrialization program to spur development in areas outside urban centers.

Rural industrialization, the NDFP Caser said, would require "provision of more farm technicians, agricultural credit to tillers, postharvest facilities, marketing agencies, irrigation systems and farm-to-market roads."

## Ban on open-pit mines

The NDFP also sought to enforce stringent rules on environmental protection that would include a ban on open-pit mines, reclamation projects, logging for export and monocrop (single crop) plantations.

It also seeks to outlaw ecologically destructive business practices and the use of manufacturing processes and technologies that produce toxic wastes.

The NDFP also wants foreign or local corporations to have no control over plant, animal and other biological resources through patents.

"No other document has authoritatively articulated concrete solutions to the long-standing economic, social and ecological crises in the Philippines," said the environmental group Kalikasan People's Network for the Environment, commenting on the proposed NDFP Caser.

Anakpawis Rep. Ariel Casti-lao, a member of the leftist Makabayan bloc in the House of Representatives, said the peasant sector and local government units should rally behind the NDFP draft Caser "as it sincerely pushes for the welfare of poor peasants in the country, as well as genuine de-

velopment in the countryside.

#### Roots of conflict

Casilao said he believed the NDFP document would lead to fundamental reforms in the country and deal with the roots of the armed conflict involving the New People's Army (NPA), armed wing of the CPP.

"A majority of the NPA (members) are farmers who were victimized by displacement, feudal and semifeudal forms of exploitation, driven to bear arms to fight oppression and exploitation," Casilao said.

Dureza, presidential peace adviser, would not comment on the contents of the NDFP Caser proposal but said there was no magic formula to achieve peace except for everyone to take part.

"There can be no peace without development," Dureza said. "There can be no sustainable development without peace," he added.

#### Federal system

Besides Caser, the two parties will also discuss details of the Comprehensive Agreement on Political and Constitutional Reforms, including the campaign promise of Mr. Duterte for a shift to a federal system.

This round of talks is the first under the Duterte administration in which no ceasefire is in place following the withdrawal of the indefinite unilateral ceasefire declarations earlier this year.

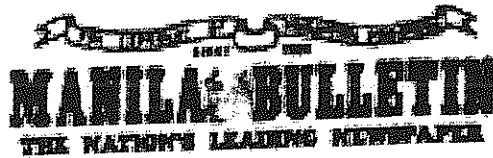
After the withdrawal of the ceasefire declarations, there have been clashes between government troops and the rebels, leaving many combatants and civilians either dead or wounded.

To deal with the issues and jump-start the talks, both parties met in Utrecht last month for a back-channel meeting. The panels agreed to proceed with the fourth round of talks and to reinstate the unilateral ceasefire to pave the way for a bilateral ceasefire agreement.

The government decided not to reinstate its ceasefire, which prompted the NPA to do the same. —WITH A REPORT FROM INQUIRER RESEARCH INQ



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# Peace talks in peril?

By **ROCKY NAZARENO** and **GENALYN D. KABILING**

**N**OORDWIJK, Netherlands — The start of the fourth round of talks between the Philippine Government (GRP) and the National Democratic Front (NDF) was postponed from its original schedule Sunday afternoon to Monday

The formal start of the talks was supposed to be held at 3 p.m. Sunday after Presidential Peace Adviser Jesus Dureza came out of a huddle with Bello and members of the GRP Peace Panel, informing the media that President Duterte has already given them his final directive to get negotiations with the NDF going.

morning (this afternoon in Manila) at the Radisson Blu Palace Hotel, here.

According to GRP Peace Panel Chairman Silvestre Bello, the start of the talks was moved to 10 a.m. Monday because "there are still some things that have to be tackled in the agenda."

Dureza had earlier said a bilateral ceasefire agreement will be the centerpiece of the fourth round that could effectively address months of violent confrontations and allegations of attacks ever since the government and communist rebels withdrew their respective unilateral ceasefire orders early February. ▶6

4

"We are going to take up, across the table, the issue of the bilateral ceasefire. And I think we will measure the success or non-success (of this round) depending on the outcome of the talks on the bilateral ceasefire," Dureza said.

He also emphasized that the President made it clear that he wanted a bilateral ceasefire, while negotiations are ongoing with the Communist rebels.

"We quiet the guns and provide an enabling environment for negotiations," Dureza said.

There had been some anxious moments in this North Sea-facing hotel since Saturday night as word circulated that the President, who has expressed exasperation over the continued attacks waged by the NDF's armed wing, New People's Army (NPA), was reportedly mulling calling off the talks even before the fourth round could start.

And it was only around 9:30 a.m. Sunday that Dureza, GRP Peace Panel Chairman Silvestre Bello III and the other panel members were able to break out of a huddle at the hotel café, after taking a phone call from the President, to finally announce that the talks will push through.

But Dureza denied that the talks were nearly called off by the President.

"Talagang schedule naman sa hapon ang opening (The schedule of the opening was really in the afternoon). Siguro baka akala nyo sa umaga (Maybe you thought it was in the morning). Pero siguro, very important sa amin (But it's very important to us that), we get direct guidance from the President, no less. He's with us every step of the way," he maintained.

Then the confirmation from Bello at around noon that the start of the negotiations was moved to Monday morning.

For the NDF, while it appears that they also welcome the signing of the bilateral ceasefire agreement, this would not be possible during this round of talks.

"Malaki yung (There are strong) possibilities and opportunities to have a bilateral ceasefire agreement, perhaps not immediately sa next few days, pwede sa next round," said NDF Senior Adviser Luis Jalandoni.

Jalandoni underscored that there were still a lot of issues that should

be tackled before a bilateral ceasefire agreement could be reached. He said such sensitive matters like buffer zones or sanctuaries for each side, the composition and tasks of the joint monitoring committee, and definition of what constitute hostile acts should be determined.

"Actually may posibilidad yung unilateral ceasefire from each side na pwedeng gawin sa (that we could merge into a) joint statement na pinag-isa (that could be unified), in preparation for the bilateral ceasefire," he said.

"Baka mahirapan na (It could be difficult) in the next five days (to reach) magawa yung bilateral ceasefire agreement. Pero pagsisikapan pa rin ng panel," Jalandoni added.

#### Duterte's stance

Earlier in Cagayan de Oro City, the President declared the government is ready to "fight until kingdom come" if the communist rebels refuse to heed four conditions to the peace negotiations.

Duterte laid down anew his "barest" conditions to the peace process with the local communist group, such as the signing of a document establishing parameters of the peace talks and the bilateral ceasefire.

The communists must also stop the collection of revolutionary taxes, must not claim any territory in the country, and must release all prisoners, according to the President.

"Kapag wala 'yan, walang peace talks (Without it, there's no peace talks)," the President said in a media interview during a visit to Cagayan de Oro.

"I will be telling the Filipino people, we'll just have to fight until kingdom come, wala akong magawa (there's nothing I can do)," he added.

The President confirmed that he talked to the government negotiators ahead of the resumption of the peace talks in the Netherlands about his conditions to peace.

He said the negotiators sought his guidance on some matters wherein he mentioned were "not acceptable to me." "My objections are contained in four conditionalities that I just said," he said.

Duterte insisted that he hates to wage a fight with fellow Filipinos, ad-

mitted his heart breaks whenever he learns about the death of soldiers and rebels alike.

"This fight has been going on for the last 50 years. I hate it, I don't want it... Bigyan mo lang ng ibang kalaban, huwag lang sana ang akin kababayan (Present a different enemy, just not our own countrymen)," he said.

"But I cannot do anything because I am occupying a position with a burden with getting this country to peace. That's my mission but there's a condition attached to it," he added.

#### AFP slams NPA

Meanwhile, the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) called on the public to condemn all communist atrocities and anti-development activities following a series of violent activities committed by the New People's Army (NPA).

The latest of these attacks was the burning of farm implements and construction equipment employed for the construction of a road in Alcala, Cagayan last week.

In a statement, General Eduardo Año, AFP Chief of Staff, appealed to the public to report all attempts at extortion so that law enforcers and soldiers can act immediately and proactively assists law-abiding citizens who have been the target of these nefarious activities by the NPA.

Año said national growth has been impeded by the acts of masquerading ideologues who have degenerated into plain terrorists and extortionists.

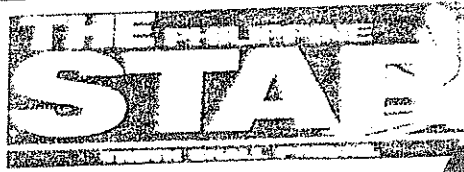
He cited that since the resumption of hostilities with the NPA, more than 60 incidents of arson related to extortion by the rebels have been recorded.

He said that AFP initiated operations in response to information provided by concerned citizens swelled to 104 from February 4 until the end of March, this year.

The military chief said this was among the reasons why government cannot agree to a unilateral ceasefire because the NPA has taken advantage of the ceasefire period to undertake more extortion activities at the expense of legitimate business and peace loving citizens.

"We have a mandate to follow and that is to protect our people," Año said. "For the peace talks to succeed, we have to see more sincerity on their part." (With a report from Francis T. Wakefield)

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Philippine Army reservists rappel down a five-story building as part of the military's disaster response training at the Delpa Evacuation Center in Manila yesterday.

EDD GUMBAI



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## INQUIRER

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# MILITARY CALLS FOR JOINT CEASEFIRE DEAL WITH COMMUNIST REBELS

By Philip C. Tubeza  
and Karlos Manlupig  
@Team Inquirer

A top official of the Armed Forces of the Philippines on Sunday called for a joint ceasefire agreement between the government and communist rebels so that third-party observers could ensure its implementation.

Brig. Gen. Restituto Padilla Jr., AFP spokesperson, said a joint ceasefire agreement would also be more durable

than both sides declaring unilateral ceasefires that they could easily scrap.

"What is more important is the signing of a joint ceasefire agreement that will have mechanisms and third-party implementers who will make sure that both sides will follow and will be made accountable for any violation," Padilla said in a radio interview.

### Taken aback

Communist rebel negotiators were taken aback by what

they said was a turnaround in the government's acceptance of a proposal for the rebels and the government to separately declare a ceasefire before a bilateral ceasefire agreement could be forged.

But Fidel Agcaoili, National Democratic Front of the Philippines (NDFP) chief negotiator, said the NDFP was "willing to be flexible" in talks for a truce. The NDFP is the political arm of the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP).

Agcaoili issued the state-

ment after the government peace panel chair, Labor Secretary Silvestre Bello III, disclosed that President Duterte was not keen on reinstating an order for government troops to cease offensives against the New People's Army (NPA), the armed wing of the CPP.

Bello said Mr. Duterte wanted a bilateral deal.

Agcaoili said this "last-minute announcement" of the government on its refusal to restore a ceasefire order for government troops "constitutes an

unexpected departure" from an agreement reached on March 11 in back-channel talks.

During the back-channel talks, he said, both parties agreed to separately but simultaneously declare ceasefire orders before the fourth round of talks between the NDFP and the government started.

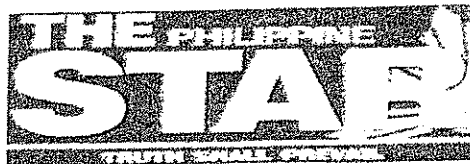
"The NDFP and the [government] agreed to this measure in the interim in order to move the talks forward and improve the atmosphere for negotiations after the impasse last February,"

Agcaoili said.

But Agcaoili said this unexpected kink would not derail the talks, which would be held in Noordwijk in South Holland province in The Netherlands. The fourth round of talks will run until April 6.

He said the NDFP negotiating panel was "willing to be flexible and is open to discussing with its counterpart what kind of bilateral ceasefire agreement is desired by [the government] in place of the unilateral ceasefire." INQ

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## NDF orders Noy's 'arrest' over Kidapawan killings

The communist National Democratic Front (NDF) on Saturday accused former president Benigno Aquino III of human rights violations

during the bloody dispersal of protesting farmers in North Cotabato.

It also sought Aquino's "arrest" and trial before a "people's court," I reported.

On April 1 last year, farmers in Kidapawan were protesting the lack of government assistance amid the harsh El Niño weather phenomenon when authorities ordered their dispersal. Two farmers were killed while scores of protesters and police officers were injured in the resulting melee.

The NDF-Southern Mindanao claimed Aquino committed "war crimes, crimes against humanity and other

serious violations of international human rights law" relating to the dispersal.

Also tagged in the allegations were, North Cotabato Gov. Emmylou Taliño-Mendoza, Kidapawan City Mayor Joseph Evangelista, North Cotabato Rep. Nancy Catamco, and other military and police officials.

The group said it has "prescribed the arrest of said respondents," and the respondents "be meted out with appropriate penalties" after due trial by a "People's Court."

President Duterte is leaving it to the courts to decide whether Aquino is liable for the violent dispersal in Kidapawan last year.

He maintained that he would be responsible for the incident if it happened under his watch.

"I am ready to be imprisoned. If you include Aquino, it's okay. We will be in different cells," the President said.

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Duterte said the food at the Philippine National Police (PNP) Custodial Center, where former senators Jinggoy Estrada and Ramon Revilla Jr. are detained, is "like a feast." Both men are on trial for their role in the pork barrel scam.

"Mahirap man ako, makiano na lang ako kay Noynoy (I'm just poor. I will just eat with Noynoy)," he said in jest.

The PNP Civil Security Group, which secures high-ranking government officials, declined to immediately confirm if additional security personnel will be provided to Aquino following NDF's announcement but presidential spokesman Ernesto Abella said measures are being undertaken to ensure the safety of the former president and other officers.

He also refused to recognize the "indictment," noting that there is only one government and justice system in the Philippines.

"Only the appropriate body can rule on the issue of the violent dispersal of farmers in Kidapawan," Abella said.

Rubi del Mundo, NDF Southern Mindanao spokesperson, said the indictment "effectively prescribed the arrest" of the "respondents."

"The indictment recommended that (they), after due trial by a People's Court, be meted out with appropriate penalties for having committed the above-mentioned acts constituting war crimes, crimes against humanity and other serious violation of international humanitarian law and human rights law," Del Mundo said in a statement.

Maoist rebels have been waging an armed struggle against the Philippine government for nearly five decades, making it the longest-running communist insurgency in Asia.

The NDF represents the communists in the peace negotiations with the government that resumed in the Netherlands yesterday.

Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) chief of staff Gen. Eduardo Año urged the public to condemn the group and the crimes it has committed against Filipinos as he described the New People's Army, NDF's armed unit, as "evil terrorists and extortionists who impede national growth."

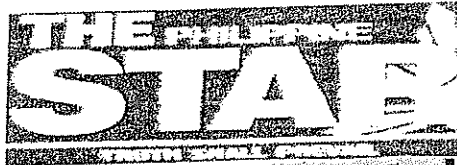
He said the public should condemn all the communist atrocities and anti-development activities and report attempts at extortion so law enforcers and soldiers could act and proactively assist victimized citizens.

- Alexis Romero, Michael Purong-

bayan

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## Gov't set to talk with MNLF in May

Talks with Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) founder Nur Misuari may start next month, President Duterte said, as he urged rebels to control their forces while the negotiations are ongoing.

"Nur Misuari assured me we can begin talks by next month," Duterte told reporters in Cagayan de Oro yesterday.

Duterte and Misuari met in Malacñang last Monday to discuss the peace talks and the situation in Mindanao. Presidential spokesman Ernest Abella said the meeting between the two was "warm and cordial."

Misuari founded the MNLF in 1972 to fight for the creation of an independent Moro state in Mindanao. The group and the government forged the Tripoli Agreement in 1976 which led to the creation of the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao two decades later.

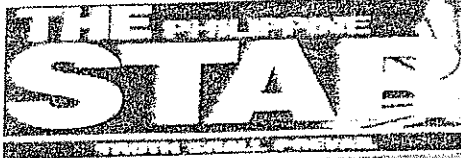
Misuari, who was accused of plotting the bloody Zamboanga siege in 2013, met with Duterte in Malacñang last November after the court had suspended the implementation of an arrest warrant against him.

Even before the siege, Misuari has been criticizing the peace talks between the government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front, the break-away group of the MNLF.

– Alexis Romero



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# Gov't-NDF peace talks resume

## No truce; AFP warns vs NPA extortion

Over a month after talks were scrapped, formal peace negotiations between the government and communist rebels resumed yesterday in Oslo, Norway, but without any ceasefire and with both parties warning of continuing violence.

The government could not announce a unilateral ceasefire because the New People's Army (NPA) had taken advantage of the truce in the past to extort funds from businesses and civilians, Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) chief Gen. Eduardo Año said in a statement.

In a separate statement, the Communist Party of the Philippines said it expected intensified operations by the military amid the talks. The CPP explained it did not declare a

unilateral ceasefire because of the government's refusal to declare its own truce.

President Duterte had scrapped the talks with the communist National Democratic Front (NDF) in February.

Angered by the deaths and kidnapping of soldiers even while the NPA was supposed to be observing a unilateral ceasefire, Duterte ordered soldiers to resume fighting.

Año urged the public to report all extortion activities by the rebels. The military said

it had recorded more than 60 incidents of arson related to extortion since the breakdown of the truce in February.

Duterte wants to end conflict with both communist and Muslim rebels that have been hampering economic development.

Yesterday he said the government is winning the war against the communists.

"Many NPA members are going down from the mountains to live peaceful lives,"

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### Gov't From Page 1

he told reporters in Cagayan de Oro.

He said members did not benefit from the funds collected by the NPA.

"Ngayon, nalaman nila malaki pala. Tignan mo... Umabot ba sa inyo? Wala (They learned how big the amounts were. Did it reach you? No)," the President said.

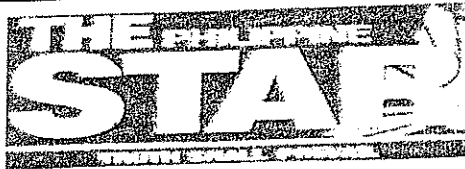
He insisted that certain conditions have to be met so that the peace talks can prosper. These include the bilateral ceasefire agreement, stopping the burning of equipment and the collection of the so-called revolutionary tax, stopping the claiming of territories and the release of people kidnapped by the rebels.

"I am occupying a position with the burden of getting this country back to peace. That is my mission but there is a condition attached to it," Duterte said.

The conflict between the government and the NPA, the armed wing of the CPP, has raged since 1968 and killed more than 40,000 people.

- Alexis Romero, Reuters

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## Phil Navy ship deal: Indonesians arrested

By EDITH REGALADO

DAVAO CITY — Ranking officials of an Indonesian state shipbuilder were reportedly apprehended before the weekend by anti-corruption authorities over a bribery case involving the sale of two warships to the Philippine Navy worth at least P4 billion.

PT. PAL Indonesia president director Firmansyah Arifin and corporate secretary Elly Dwiratmanto were taken for questioning by elements of Indonesia's Komisi Pemberantasan Korupsi (KPK) or Corruption Eradication Commission regarding the sale of two strategic sealift vessels (SSV) to the Philippine Navy.

Arifin and Dwiratmanto were reportedly taken in Thursday by KPK after several personnel of PT. PAL's

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finance department were also questioned earlier by KPK.

Arifin and Dwiratmanto were reportedly picked up from the company's headquarters in Surabaya, East Java, around 11 p.m. local time, according to a *Jakarta Post* report.

PT. PAL Indonesia had reportedly won a tender for the construction of two SSV worth Rp 1.1 trillion (\$82.57 million) for the Philippine Navy.

The first warship delivered to the Philippines, named *BRP Tarlac*, arrived on May 14, 2016 after a five-day journey from the PT PAL shipyard in Surabaya. It was commissioned in short ceremonies at Pier 13, Manila South Harbor on June 1, 2016.

The second vessel, christened *BRP Davao del Sur*, is scheduled to be delivered this month or by May.

The two-unit SSV procurement project of the Navy reportedly has an approved budget contract of P4 billion sourced from the Armed Forces of the Philippines' (AFP) Modernization Act Trust Fund.

Sources in Indonesia maintained that the bribery case against PT. PAL officials does not involve any officials of the Philippine Navy or AFP.

"What I understand is that the bribery case was between the Indonesian broker company and the PT. PAL officials, and does not involve anyone from the Philippines," a source of *The STAR* said.

As of press time, however, the non-involvement of Philippine officials in the alleged bribery case could not be confirmed.

Likewise, the delivery of *BRP Davao del Sur* as scheduled amid the issue could not be ascertained.

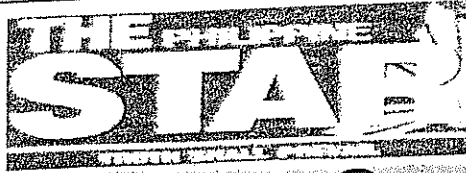
*BRP Davao del Sur* was launched and christened in ceremonies also held in Surabaya and attended by Philippine officials in September 2016.

Just like *BRP Tarlac*, *BRP Davao del Sur* is also a Makassar-class landing platform dock.

Both *BRP Tarlac* and *BRP Davao del Sur* serve as floating command-and-control ships, especially in the conduct of humanitarian assistance and disaster response, and will also serve as a military sealift and transport vessel.

*BRP Davao del Sur* has an overall length of 120 meters, breadth of 21 meters and draft of five meters. It carries a payload of 2,800 tons.

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# After Navy, Coast Guard patrols Benham Rise

By EDU PUNAY

For the first time yesterday, the Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) patrolled Benham Rise, following the reported presence of Chinese vessels in the area declared by the United Nations as part of the extended continental shelf of the Philippines.

The PCG said a Britten Norman Islander aircraft was sent to the area to conduct maritime domain survey.

No PCG station or facility has ever been put up in Benham Rise, a 13-million-hectare area off the coast of Aurora province that has been a usual pathway of typhoons from the Pacific Ocean.

Due to the vastness of the area, PCG spokesperson Commander Armand Balilo said the PCG personnel manning the aircraft had to refuel in Baler, Aurora before continuing the surveillance.

Recently, the Philippine Navy's cutter *BRP Ramon Alcaraz* surveyed the vast waters of Benham Rise.

Government officials earlier invoked the country's sovereign rights over Benham Rise following the

salinity and water currents because the water column in the ECS belongs to mankind; and depth soundings for

passage of Chinese vessels in the territory.

Supreme Court Associate Justice Antonio Carpio explained that the Philippines has the exclusive right to explore and exploit the oil, gas and other mineral resources in Benham Rise, which has been confirmed by the UN Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf (CLCS) as part of the country's extended continental shelf or ECS.

Benham Rise is said to have untapped natural resources, including rich mineral deposits, and is said to be wider than Luzon, Samar and

Leyte combined.

Carpio clarified, however, that while the Philippines has the exclusive right on oil, gas and minerals in Benham Rise, the country cannot claim sovereignty over it because it is "not part of Philippine national territory."

The associate justice explained that other states like China "have the right to conduct in Benham Rise fishery research because the fish in the ECS belongs to mankind; surveys on water

navigation purposes because there is freedom of navigation in the ECS."

Turn to Page 8

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Meanwhile, Sen. Sherwin Gatchalian yesterday underscored the need for the Philippine government to be vigilant on the motives of China, as well of other nations, on the resource-rich Benham Rise and to tighten rules and coordination on the issuance of permits to other countries and foreign entities seeking to conduct scientific research in the area.

Gatchalian, chairman of the Senate committee on economic affairs, said that up to now, no one knows what exactly the Chinese research vessel *Xiang Yang Hong* did during its three-month expedition crisscrossing the Philippine Sea as well as waters near Taiwan and Japan late last year.

The senator asked the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) to continue pressing Beijing for information on what the vessel did, and the Coast Guard and the Navy to establish major stations or bases somewhere in the eastern seaboard to closely monitor activities in the Philippine Sea.

"There is really a question mark on the supposed research of the Chinese vessel," Gatchalian told radio station *dzBB*. "Definitely, we have to be wary of their intentions in our exclusive economic zone, not only with China, but (also) with other nations."

He said that while there are no claimants to Benham Rise, one could be not so sure in the future.

During the hearing of the committee on Benham Rise last week, DFA's maritime and ocean affairs executive director Ma Lourdes Montero said that the vessel had no permit, and that the office had also rejected similar applications from certain Chinese institutions in 2015 and 2016.

This was because the Chinese applicants refused to allow Filipino scientists to join the expedition, as required by the Philippine government in issuing permits for maritime research by foreign entities, she said.

Gatchalian, however, pointed out the vessel proceeded with its voyage, citing the doctrine of freedom of navigation.

Citing provisions of the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), he said the doctrine could only be invoked if a foreign vessel conducts only basic research on salinity and sea temperatures, among others.

"Whatever, they (foreign researchers) will discover there (Benham Rise), they will use only for their own benefit," the senator said.

In a related development, the Department of Science and Technology's Benham Rise resource mapping project deal with a Japanese agency fell through after the initiative has been excluded in the DOST's research and development agenda in the next five years.

- With Paolo Romero,  
Rainier Allan Ronda



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**MANILA BULLETIN**  
THE NATION'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

News

Monday, April 3, 2017

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# AFPMC chief retires

By FRANCIST WAKERFIELD

**T**he Commander of the Armed Forces of the Philippines Medical Center (AFPMC) has retired after 30 years of dedicated service.

A retirement and testimonial parade was held to honor and duly recognize Brig. Gen. Mariano Mejia and his outstanding accomplishments last Friday at Camp Aguinaldo, Quezon City.

"As Commander of the AFP Medical Center, Mejia took on the challenge of bringing the unit into greater heights by ensuring the highest quality of healthcare services to all AFP personnel," said Marine Colonel Edgard Arevalo, the AFP Public Affairs Office Chief.

Col. Patrick De Leon, the current Deputy for Administration of the hospital will serve as acting AFPMC Commander.

Under Mejia's watch, the AFPMC deployed Forward Medical and Surgical Rotators to military hospitals in Zamboanga City, Cotabato City, and Jolo, Sulu.

The teams consist of Medical Corps and Nurse Corps Officers who augmented the medical ser-

vices in military treatment facilities.

Aside from medicines, equipment was also sent to Camp Teodulfo Station Hospital in August, 2016.

"In line with the ongoing military operations against terrorists groups and other security threats, Mejia, through the First Forward MEDICS provided Personnel, Medical, and Logistic Support to bring about its mandated function of conserving the fighting strength of our troops," Arevalo said.

Aside from being a brilliant military doctor, he is also a Scout Ranger and was assigned to different military treatment facilities particularly in Visayas and Mindanao.

Mejia was named

AFPMC commander in an acting capacity on August 8, 2016 and officially became the Commander on December 9, 2016.

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# BusinessMirror

A private look at today's business

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## DND looking for more equipment to boost external-defense capabilities

BY PRIAM E. NEPOMUCENO  
*Philippines News Agency*

**W**ITH the delivery of the South Korean-made FA-50PH "Fighting Eagle" jet fighters nearing completion and more modern equipment coming in line, Defense Secretary Delfin N. Lorenzana said the Philippines is now looking for more platforms that will further boost its external-defense capabilities.

"As we are now in the Second Horizon of the Armed Forces Modernization Program, we are looking into the acquisition of more equipment for our external-defense missions," Lorenzana said.

While he did not give specifics on what kind of equipment the Department of National Defense is looking to acquire, he said it is possible that these include missile-armed frigates,

antisubmarine helicopters, as well as multi-role fighters, long-range patrol aircraft, to name a few.

On March 29 two more FA-50PH jet fighters were delivered in Clark Air Base, Angeles City, Pampanga, increasing the number of Mach 1.5 jet aircraft in the Air Force inventory to eight.

Another four more are expected to be delivered within the year, completing the country's 12-plane order from Korea Aerospace Industries, worth P18.9 billion.

The Armed Forces Modernization Program is divided into three horizons, with the first lasting from 2013 to 2017, the second from 2018 to 2022 and third 2023 to 2028.

The Second Horizon calls for the acquisition of equipment more attuned to external-defense missions and has a programmed funding of around P100 billion.

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## DND looking for more platforms to boost external defense capabilities

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The Manila Times

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# Military hits Reds as peace talks resume

BY FERNAN MARASIGAN

**A**RMED Forces of the Philippines (AFP) Chief of Staff Gen. Eduardo Año had harsh words for the New People's Army (NPA) as peace talks between the government and communist rebels resumed in the Netherlands on Sunday.

The AFP chief also appealed to the public to report all NPA attempts at extortion so that law enforcers and soldiers could act immediately, adding that economic growth had been impeded by the "acts of masquerading ideologues who have degenerated into plain terrorists and extortionists."

"The chief of staff of the Armed Forces of the Philippines, following a series of violent NPA activities that saw the burning of farm implements and construction equipment employed for infrastructure development, calls on the public to condemn all these atrocities and anti-development activities," the military said in a statement.

The AFP noted that since the resumption of hostilities with the NPA in February, more than 60 incidents of arson and extortion

said to have been conducted by the rebels have been recorded.

"AFP-initiated operations in response to information provided by concerned citizens swelled to 104 since [February 4] this year up to the end of March," the military claimed.

The government and the communist rebels lifted their unilateral truce declarations in February when peace talks bogged down over a rebel demand to free their detained comrades.

The AFP again accused the NPA of taking advantage of the ceasefire to extort money from businessmen and "peace-loving" citizens, adding that the continued attacks were among the reasons the government could not agree to another unilateral ceasefire.

"We have a mandate to follow and that is to protect our people,"



**HUDDLE** Presidential Peace Adviser Jesus Dureza (center) and government peace panel chief Silvestre Bello 3rd (right) form a last-minute huddle with the communist rebels' chief negotiator, Fidel Agcaoili (left). Peace talks resumed at Radisson Blu Palace Hotel in Noordwijk San Zeeland, the Netherlands on Sunday.

Año said in the same statement.

"For the peace talks to succeed, we have to see more sincerity on their part. We now see the concrete manifestation of the evil in our society that has been a major cause of underdevelopment, the anti-development and anti-people activities of the NPA," he added.

The AFP issued the statement a day after Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana tagged the NPA as "terrorists" and "anti-poor."

Lorenzana pointed out that NPA rebels had attacked and ambushed

military and police personnel "on home leaves."

"They did these nefarious acts after they have asked for the resumption of peace talks and after they have announced that they will go on a unilateral ceasefire," the Defense chief said.

"They are anti-development, anti-progress and anti-poor," he added.

Lorenzana called upon "all peace-loving Filipinos to resist these thugs, these terrorists who have brought nothing but misery to the Filipino people in the past 48 years."



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THE DAILY  
**tribune**  
Mitsani for a better

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## NPA attacks 'anti-development, anti-poor,' says military chief

As the fourth round of formal peace talks between the government and communist peace panels started yesterday in The Netherlands, another top-ranking government security official lashed out at the New People's Army (NPA) for being "anti-people and anti-development."

Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) chief of staff Gen. Eduardo Año issued the statement in condemnation of the recent atrocities launched by the communist rebels in various parts of the country – days before the fourth round of peace talks started yesterday.

"We now see the concrete manifestation of the evil in our society that has been a major cause of underdevelopment, the anti-development and anti-people activities of the NPA," said Año.

At the same time, the AFP chief called on all peace-loving Filipinos to unite against the "extortionist" NPAs.

"We must join hands and collectively work to end all these so we can protect change for the better. As a people, we must all work to have a nation worthy of all Filipinos and Filipinos worthy of the nation."

Año noted a series of violent NPA activities

that saw the burning of farm implements and construction equipment employed for infrastructure development, apart from the use of improvised explosive device (IED) during ambushes.

He also appealed to the public to report all attempts at extortion so that law enforcers and soldiers can act immediately and proactively assist law-abiding citizens who have been the target of these nefarious activities by the NPA.

Año said national growth has been impeded by the acts of masquerading ideologues who have degenerated into plain terrorists and extortionists.

He added that since the resumption of hostilities with the NPA, more than 60 incidents of arson related to communist

terrorists extortion have been recorded.

The AFP initiated operations in response to information provided by concerned citizens swelled to 104 since February 4 this year up to the end of March.

Año said this was among the reasons government cannot agree to a unilateral ceasefire because the NPA has taken advantage of the ceasefire period to undertake

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AÑO

## NPA attacks 'anti-development, anti-poor,' says military chief

From page 1

more extortion activities at the expense of legitimate business and peace-loving citizens.

"We have a mandate to follow and that is to protect our people," the military official stressed.

"For the peace talks to succeed, we have to see more sincerity on their part," he added.

Año's tirades against the NPA came a day after Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana accused the communist group of insincerity, saying extortion activities by the NPA have heightened despite the resumption of negotiations between the government and the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP).

Lorenzana issued the strong

statements against the NPA on the eve of the resumption of the peace talks.

He stressed the NPA does these to "companies who build roads, export produce, transport people - activities that help generate employment and wealth for Filipinos."

The Defense chief added in the past weeks the NPA also attacked and ambushed military and police personnel "who were doing their constitutional duties" and killed military personnel on home leaves.

Lorenzana said the rebels "did these nefarious acts after they have asked for the resumption of peace talks and after they have announced that they will go on a unilateral ceasefire."

**Mario J. Mallari**

3 April 2017

The Manila Times

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## P500K to go to families of soldier, police casualties

THE family of a soldier or a policeman killed or wounded in action stands to receive up to P500,000 in financial assistance under the government's Comprehensive Social Benefits Program (CSBP).

The CSBP has been rolled out by the Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG) and Department of National Defense, in cooperation with the Office of the President and supporting agencies, for members of the Armed Forces of the Philippines and the Philippine National Police.

DILG Secretary Ismael Sueno cited the timeliness and necessity of greater government efforts for military and police casualties given the dangers that security forces face in the Duterte administration's campaign to stamp out illegal drugs, criminality and corruption and to foster peace and order in the country.

Sueno called for soldiers and policemen to be brave in carrying out their duties from the *barangay* (village) level upward, stating, "As long as you follow the rule of law, and follow the oath of your office, I repeat what the President has said, *Huwag kayong matakot* [Don't be afraid], I will support you."

The CSBP covers four levels of assistance.

A Special Finance Assistance (SFA) of P500,000 will be granted in two tranches to beneficiaries of those killed in action; P250,000 to beneficiaries of those wounded in action with total permanent physical dis-

ability (TPPD), and P100,000 to beneficiaries of those with major and minor injuries.

There will also be generous shelter assistance to families of those killed or wounded in action with TPPD worth P450,000; health care assistance through coverage of premiums from the Philippine Health Insurance Corp. (PhilHealth) worth P2,400 a year and maintenance medicines provided by the Department of Health for qualified beneficiaries of those killed in action; and educational assistance in the provision of annual stipends for up to two children or other beneficiaries of those killed in action or wounded in action with TPPD.

Aiding the implementation of the CSBP is the Killed in Action/Wounded in Action One Stop Assistance Program Management Office (PMO) based at the DILG-National Police Commission Center.

In addition, Sueno said, President Rodrigo Duterte intends to start a trust fund for those killed or wounded in action, beginning at P1 billion and adding more to it each year.

He enjoined the public to emulate the heart of the President for the country's frontliners.

The President "knows the risks they take and the sacrifices that they have given for us, so he wants to give back to the spouses and the children [of the soldiers and policemen]," Sueno said.

JING VILLAMENTE

OFFICE OF THE ARMY CHIEF

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2)

April 2017

# INQUIRER

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## AERIAL SPRAYING

# REBS SAY THEY FIRED AT CROP DUSTER

SAN FRANCISCO, AGUSAN DEL SUR—Communist rebels said they fired at a crop duster spraying pesticides on a banana plantation in Tagbina town in Surigao, saying the attack served as a punitive action against environmentally destructive aerial spraying.

Ariel Montero, spokesperson of the New People's Army (NPA) Northeastern Mindanao Regional Command, said the plane owned by Sumifru, piloted by a certain Capt. Magbanua, was shot at while aerial spraying the banana plantations in the village of Sta. Fe on Monday.

Sumifru is a subsidiary of the Sumitomo Corporation.

"The wing and wheel of the plane were struck, forcing its emergency landing. The pilot was not hit and was safe," Montero said.

### Warning

He said the NPA had warned banana plantation owners against aerial spraying because of the damage it could cause to the environment and health of people living near plantations.

"This practice has been discontinued in other places like Davao City, because of the people's opposition to its proven harmful effect," Montero said.

He said the punitive action also served as a warning against land grabbing by banana plantations, which deprived farmers of land to till.

"The small number of those employed suffer from low wages, lack of benefits and lack of job security," the NPA spokesperson said.

He also warned aviation companies against renting out planes for aerial spraying.

—CHRIS V. PANGANIBAN INQ

April 2017

# BusinessMirror

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## CPP dumps declaration of unilateral cease-fire

**I**N a tit-for-tat with the Duterte administration, the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) did not declare a unilateral cease-fire in time for the fourth round of peace talks in the Netherlands from April 2 to 6.

The newly elected CPP Central Committee opted not to issue any directive about the cease-fire that the New People's Army (NPA) has been waiting for even before its 48th anniversary on March 29 after President Duterte said no unilateral cease-fire will be declared for the duration of the talks.

A joint statement issued by the National Democratic Front and the government peace panel on March 11 said the cease-fire declarations would be issued reciprocally.

The CPP earlier expressed its willingness to comply with the agreement, but Duterte had to consult his national security and military officials before he could even consider issuing a reciprocal cease-fire declaration.

"It can only be surmised that he [Duterte] heeded the advice of Armed Forces officials on the matter," CPP said.

The party noted that the military has intensified the campaign against the NPA, and is even conducting aerial strikes against suspected NPA lairs in Luzon and Mindanao.

As a result, the CPP in a statement called on the people to "rally and protest the extra-judicial killings, aerial bomb-

ings, occupation of communities, forcible evacuations, hamletting and other attacks perpetrated by the Armed Forces".

The CPP also held out the possibility of the NPA's establishing more guerrilla units "to protect the people from the Armed Forces".

"The NPA must open its doors wide open in order to accommodate the large numbers of people who want to join the armed struggle in their aspiration to attain justice and work to end the prevailing social system," the CPP said.

Nevertheless, the party said it fully supports the scheduled fourth round of government-NDF peace negotiations that started on Sunday despite the nonissuance of a ceasefire declaration by either side.

"CPP looks forward to fruitful discussions and positive steps towards forging an agreement on socioeconomic reforms, as well as political and constitutional reforms. The CPP anticipates that the question of free land distribution to the tillers, the most pressing social-justice issue in the country, will be fully addressed in the talks," the party added.

Moreover, it also anticipates "intense discussions and debates on the people's demand for national industrialization, as well as expansion of public services, versus the insistence of the government to pursue liberalization, privatization and deregulation".



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MANILA BULLETIN  
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BUSINESS BEAT

# Annihilating the Abu Sayyaf



By MELITO SALAZAR JR.

**T**HE March 28 issue of the New Straits Times in Malaysia had a photo of Prime Minister hugging released Malaysian hostages on its front page with the headline “8 Month Anguish Ends.” At least it is a happy ending for the two hostages as well as three other Malaysians released earlier. Regrettably such is not the case for the beheaded European and Canadian citizens. This is certainly a cause for anxiety among the relatives and friends of the estimated 20 foreigners still in the clutches of the Abu Sayyaf.

The Philippine military upon direct orders from President Rodrigo Duterte has been relentlessly pursuing this bandit group. However, they cannot focus on this operation as they have to contend with other enemies – the New People’s Army (NPA) which continues to engage the Philippine armed forces in guerrilla warfare, the various Muslim secessionist movements, and the emerging ISIS-influenced forces. Spread over a wide front, the Philippine soldiers require logistical support which is seen as still inadequate despite

increases in the defense budget.

Peace negotiations with the National Democratic Front could decrease the incursions of its military unit, the NPA. Realization of peace could free up the Philippine military forces for more operations against the Abu Sayyaf. A successful conclusion of the negotiations of the Philippine government and the Muslim secessionist forces could lead to a strong autonomous region whose leadership could engage the Abu Sayyaf on the military and community fronts. Bereft of their supporters since the autonomous region will mobilize the local communities toward maintaining a facilitative environment for investments, jobs and prosperity, the Abu Sayyaf could easily be annihilated.

While these peace initiatives are still proceeding, the Philippine government will be better positioned to deal with the Abu Sayyaf if instead on leaning solely on the support of the American “advisers” (shades of the beginnings of the Vietnam war), it will undertake joint military activities with its ASEAN partners, specifically Malaysia and Indonesia.

The Sulu Sea where the Abu Sayyaf preys on commercial vessels, foreigners,

and tourists touches the shores of these countries and the Philippines. It is logical for the three countries to work together to annihilate the Abu Sayyaf. Joint military and police operations under a joint command will lead to pooling of resources, delineation of areas for intensive patrol, and agreements allowing active pursuit of the Abu Sayyaf even into a partner country’s territory. A coordinated campaign among nationals in each other territory would isolate the Abu Sayyaf from communities that are seen as present supporters.

Joint military and police operations could enhance

existing trade and investment cooperation. BIMP-EAGA is hardly heard of these days. But this innovative initiative began during the presidency of Fidel Valdez Ramos could sow seeds of prosperity in this area of influence and ultimately cement the peace and progress of these three countries. Poverty has been the cause of the emergence of such groups as the Abu Sayyaf. Eliminating poverty in the border communities of Malaysia, the Philippines, and Indonesia would lead to the annihilation of the Abu Sayyaf.

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# INQUIRER

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## CORDILLERA REBEL UNIT STATEMENT

# NPA GUERRILLAS VOW TO PUNISH FAKE COLLECTORS OF REVOLUTIONARY TAXES

BAGUIO CITY—Fake communist rebels have been collecting “revolutionary taxes” in the highlands during the last three months of 2016, according to the New People’s Army (NPA) unit operating in the Cordillera provinces of Benguet, Abra, and Mountain Province, and in Ilocos Sur province.

“They have been extorting large sums of money from their victims and [have] even threatened to kill the victims should they refuse to pay,” according to Salaknib Monteverde, spokesperson of the Antonio Licawen Front Operations Command (Alfoc), in a letter released to the Inquirer on Thursday.

The NPA urged the public to provide them information that may help them “punish” the sham rebels.

Among the supposed victims of the fake group was an Abra town vice mayor and his budget officer, who received identical letters directing them to provide money for medicine to help NPA rebels wounded in

combat, Monteverde claimed. Monteverde said the vice mayor was instructed to drive to an area near a military detachment and leave money at a waiting shed.

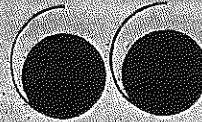
“Common sense dictates that a person who is not afraid to collect the extorted money near a military detachment is somebody who is inside the detachment himself,” the rebel spokesperson said.

The Inquirer could not independently verify this report at press time. The officials allegedly victimized by the fake NPA rebels live in a remote Abra municipality.

Monteverde acknowledged that the NPA collects revolutionary taxes from “foreign imperialists, bureaucrat capitalists, local big businessmen and landlords operating within the guerrilla zone.”

“Revolutionary taxes are collected based on the authority and recognized political strength of the revolutionary government,” Monteverde said.

He said the NPA sent letters,



**Common sense dictates that a person who is not afraid to collect near a military detachment is somebody who is inside the detachment himself**

**Salaknib Monteverde**  
NPA spokesperson in Cordillera

bearing the logo and signature of the spokesperson or designated official of the concerned NPA command, to those being taxed and conduct negotiations

during scheduled meetings.

Monteverde claimed his unit never uses threats.

He also urged victims of the extortionists to “bring the matter to a unit of Alfoc.”

“Then, we can give these criminals appropriate disciplinary action,” he said.

Monteverde said rebels were trying to determine if the alleged scams were perpetrated by the military and the police, or by the political rivals of the vice mayor.

President Duterte had listed what he said were signs of goodwill which he was waiting for rebels to demonstrate that would convince him to believe in rebel sincerity in the ongoing peace process.

One of these gestures of goodwill, Mr. Duterte said, is a stop to rebel collection of taxes in their territories.

But Jesus Dureza, presidential peace adviser, said what Mr. Duterte listed were just “wishes” and not preconditions for the peace talks. —KIMBERLIE QUITASON INQ

Army vision: By 2028, a world-class Army that is a source of national pride.

## ONLINE NEWS

### 03 APRIL 2017

[www.inquirer.net](http://www.inquirer.net)

#### AFP chief: No truce unless Reds stop attacks, extortion

By: Philip C. Tubeza - @inquirerdotnet

09:55 PM April 02, 2017



FILE – Members of underground groups under the Communist Party of the Philippines occupy the intersection of Edsa and Aurora Boulevard in Cubao, Quezon City, to mark the 48th anniversary of the New People's Army (NPA) on March 29. NIÑO JESUS ORBETA / PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER

Communist rebels should first show sincerity before the government can forge a ceasefire agreement with them, Armed Forces Chief Gen. Eduardo Año said on Sunday.

Año said the New People's Army should stop its "extortion activities" and attacking businesses.

"For the peace talks to succeed, we have to see more sincerity on their part," Año said.

"We have a mandate to follow and that is to protect our people," he added.

The military chief issued the statement hours before the government and rebel peace panels resumed formal peace negotiations.

"We now see the concrete manifestation of the evil in our society that has been a major cause of underdevelopment, the anti-development and anti-people activities of the NPA," Año said.

"We must join hands and collectively work to end all these so we can protect change for the better. As a people, we must all work to have a nation worthy of all Filipinos and Filipinos worthy of the nation," he added.

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[www.retiredanalyst.blogspot.com](http://www.retiredanalyst.blogspot.com)

## **29 wounded as military clash with Abu Sayyaf in Sulu**

From ABS-CBN (Apr 2): 29 wounded as military clash with Abu Sayyaf in Sulu

**Twenty-nine soldiers were wounded in a clash with members of terror group Abu Sayyaf in Jolo, Sulu Sunday.**

The encounter happened at around 9:30 a.m. and ended at around 10:45 a.m.

**As of posting time, the number of injured members of the Abu Sayyaf has yet to be identified.**

**Members of the bandit group that were encountered by soldiers were allegedly led by a certain Hatib Hajan Sawajaan.**

The wounded soldiers were brought to a hospital in Barangay Busbus, Jolo, Sulu for treatment.

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

Army vision: By 2028, a world-class Army that is a source of national pride.

[www.inquirer.net](http://www.inquirer.net)

## Gov't-NDFP talks in Netherlands off to rocky start; Duterte calls negotiators

Formal opening re-set by several hours as President gave instructions to Dureza, Bello - sources

By: Karlos Manlupig - Correspondent / @kmanlupigINQ

Inquirer Mindanao / 06:19 PM April 02, 2017



**HUDDLE BEFORE TALKS.** Presidential Peace Adviser Jesus Dureza (center) and GRP peace panel chair Silvestre Bello III (right) in a last minute huddle with NDF chief negotiator Fidel Agcaoili (left) in the resumption of formal talks at Radisson Blu Palace in Noordwijk, The Netherlands on Saturday. CONTRIBUTED PHOTO / ROLLY FRANCIA

DAVAO CITY – The fourth round of talks between the Philippine government and the National Democratic Front of the Philippines has not yet started, but it is already showing signs of becoming the most challenging.

The opening ceremony of the fourth round of talks should have started on Sunday morning The Netherlands time but it was delayed by several unresolved issues.

President Duterte on Sunday called the government negotiators now in The Netherlands. The details of Duterte's directive were not clear but sources told the Philippine Daily Inquirer that Duterte directly talked with Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process Jesus Dureza, Labor Secretary and peace panel chair Silvestre Bello III and peace panel member Angela Librado-Trinidad.

Sources said that both panels would meet before lunch to set the agenda and schedule for this round of talks.

If the panels would agree on the schedule and outline of agenda, the opening ceremony would proceed in the afternoon.

This round of talks would be the first under the administration of Duterte where no ceasefire is in place following the withdrawal of the indefinite unilateral ceasefire declarations earlier this year.

After the withdrawal of ceasefire declarations, numerous armed hostilities have been reported, leaving many combatants and civilians either dead or wounded.

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To address the issues and jumpstart the talks, both parties met in Utrecht last month for a backchannel meeting. The panels agreed in the backchannel meeting to proceed with the fourth round of talks and to reinstate the unilateral ceasefire to pave the way for a bilateral ceasefire agreement.

The government decided not to reinstate its ceasefire, which prompted the NPA to do the same.

The fourth round of talks is scheduled to start on April 2 and end on April 6 in a hotel in Noordwijk in The Netherlands.

At the top of the agenda in this round of talks is the crafting of the Comprehensive Agreement on Social and Economic Reforms, which is expected to address the underlying causes of the conflict.

The two parties will also discuss details for the Comprehensive Agreement on Political and Constitutional Reforms, including the campaign promise of Duterte for a shift to a federal system.

The conflict between the CPP and the government has stretched for at least 47 years and is now known as one of the longest Maoist movements in Asia. **SFM**

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## AI-Barka residents want more troops to protect infra projects

From the Philippine Star (Apr 2): AI-Barka residents want more troops to protect infra projects



*Road projects in Basilan, like this one connecting Mebak and Bohe Languyan, are potential targets of the Abu Sayyaf. John Unson*

**Residents in AI-Barka, Basilan want more troops to protect local infrastructure projects that the Abu Sayyaf opposes.**

**The 16 barangays in AI-Barka have been scenes of deadly clashes between the military and the Abu Sayyaf in recent years.**

**AI-Barka Mayor Darussalam Lajid said on Sunday that while the presence of the Abu Sayyaf in the municipality had been weakened in recent months due to interventions by agencies in the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao and the military, bandits are still capable of attacks to disrupt ongoing projects.**

**Lajid said the Abu Sayyaf is opposed to big-ticket government infrastructure projects that can provide economic empowerment to local sectors and weaken its influence in impoverished areas where its members are holding out.**

Thousands of AI-Barka residents displaced by conflicts in past years returned to their barangays in 2016 through the efforts of local officials and ARMM's inter-agency regional peace and order council.

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"The infrastructure projects implemented in Al-Barka from 2012 up ushered in improvements in our domestic security situation and the local economy. That is what misguided extremists do not want," Lajid said in accented Filipino.

**Barangay leaders urged the Zamboanga City-based Western Mindanao Command of the Armed Forces of the Philippines to tighten security in the municipality after officials launched last week P10 million in projects designed to address poverty and underdevelopment in Al-Barka.**

The March 27 groundbreaking rite for the projects under the ARMM Health, Education, Livelihood, Peace and Governance Synergy in Barangay Macalang was led by Regional Governor Mujiv Hataman, Maj. Gen. Carlito Galvez, Jr. of AFP's Westmincom and Malaysian Army Gen. Masrani Paiman of the International Monitoring Team.

The Malaysian-led peacekeeping team, comprised of soldiers and police from Malaysia, Brunei and Indonesia and non-uniformed conflict resolution experts from Japan, Norway and the European Union, is helping enforce in Basilan and other provinces in Mindanao the 1997 interim ceasefire pact between the government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front.

Hundreds of MILF guerrillas helped units of Westmincom drive away Abu Sayyaf rebels from Al-Barka in recent joint operations assisted by local officials and volunteers from the Moro National Liberation Front.

The launching of new socioeconomic and humanitarian projects in Al-Barka last March 27 was also attended by Basilan Gov. Jim Hataman and members of the league of mayors in the island province.

The event was capped off with the conduct in Barangay Macalang of the ARMM "People's Day," where health and social workers from the regional government provided free medical and relief services to no fewer than 3,000 villagers who had suffered from the impunity of the Abu Sayyaf.

Lajid said it was in 2012 when the ARMM government started allocating huge infrastructure grants for Al-Barka.

Records obtained from the office of engineer Don Loong, ARMM's Public Works secretary, indicated that P877 million in projects has been allocated for Al-Barka from 2012 to 2017 in separate allocations drawn from the region's yearly infrastructure subsidy.

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"All of the projects implemented in my municipality were religiously implemented. The impact of these projects to the lives of my constituents is now being felt," Lajid said.

The Abu Sayyaf had thrice attempted to kill Basilan's district engineer, Soler Undug, using improvised explosive devices as part of a ploy to derail the implementation of infrastructure projects in far-flung areas in the island's 11 towns and in its capital, Lamitan City.

Galvez, who had served as commander of the Army's 104th Infantry Brigade in Basilan while still a colonel, said the Abu Sayyaf is good at using poverty and underdevelopment to stoke public animosity towards the government.

"Now they are losing ground gradually because of the infrastructure projects implemented in Basilan in the past four years. There are more projects now in the pipeline and we will provide security support to ensure that these terrorists cannot get close to the project sites," Galvez said.

Galvez said he is grateful to the MILF for its continuing support to the military's continuing effort to clear Al-Barka of Abu Sayyaf bandits.

The government and the MILF are bound by the July 1997 Agreement on General Cessation of Hostilities to cooperate in addressing peace and security issues in conflict flashpoint areas in Southern Mindanao.

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