

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



TEAM ARMY

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OFFICE OF THE ARMY CHIEF PUBLIC AFFAIRS

NEWS CLIPPINGS

22 April 2017

Saturday

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

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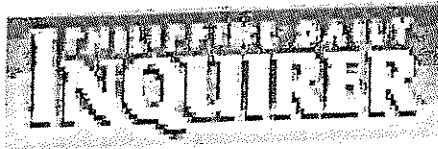
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BALANCED NEWS - FEARLESS VIEWS

TODAY'S WEATHER FORECAST | APRIL 22, 2017 | SATURDAY

RIDGE OF HIGH PRESSURE AREA
EXTENDING ACROSS LUZON AND VISAYAS
EASTERLIES
AFFECTING THE EASTERN SECTION OF MINDANAO
(As of 5:00 PM - Apr. 21, 2017)

PHILIPPINE AREA OF RESPONSIBILITY (PAR)

SUNRISE	SUNSET
5:38 AM	6:11 PM
MOONRISE	MOONSET
2:14 AM	2:14 PM
NEW MOON	
APR 16 5:57 AM	APR 25 8:16 PM
LOW TIDE	HIGH TIDE
MANILA SOUTH HARBOR	
1:45 AM 0.95 Meter	6:38 PM 0.78 Meter

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

	APR 23	APR 24	APR 25	APR 26	APR 27	APR 28
METRO MANILA	25-34°C	26-35°C	22-32°C	21-32°C	24-31°C	25-31°C
TUGUEGARAO	25-35°C	26-36°C	25-32°C	26-33°C	24-32°C	24-32°C
LAOAG	24-31°C	24-31°C	26-33°C	26-33°C	26-34°C	26-33°C
BAGUID	16-25°C	16-25°C	26-32°C	26-32°C	24-32°C	24-32°C
SBMA/CLARK	25-35°C	26-35°C	25-32°C	25-32°C	 SRGUT KO, PADALA MO!	

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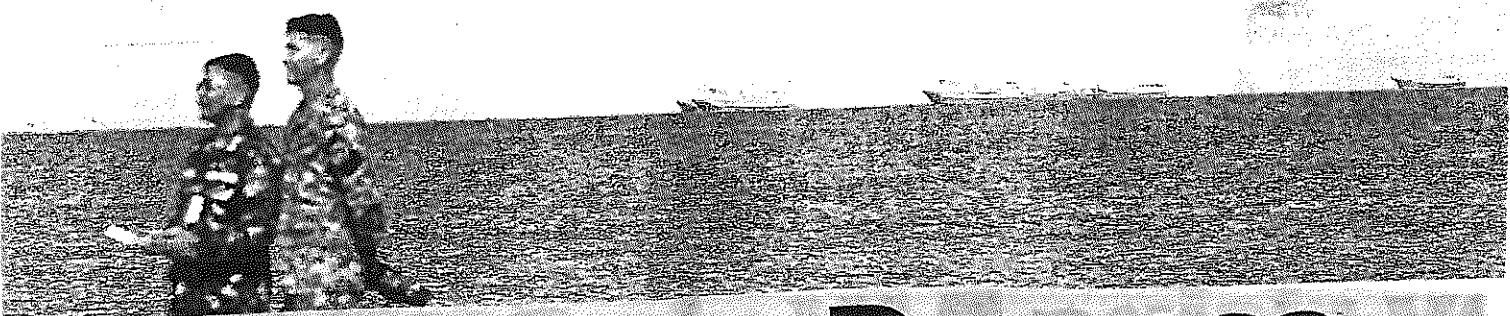


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PH TO TURN PAG-ASA INTO TOURIST SPOT

STORY BY PHILIP C. TUBEZA

The government is setting aside P1.6 billion to turn Pag-asa, the biggest Philippine-held island in the Spratlys, into a tourist attraction, according to Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana, who visited the island on Friday along with the top brass of the armed forces **A4**



PH to turn Pag-asa into tourist attraction

FROM A1

By Philip C. Tubeza
@pctubezaINQ

PAG-ASA ISLAND, WEST PHILIPPINE SEA—The government has set aside P1.6 billion to turn the biggest Philippine-held island in the Spratlys into a tourist attraction and marine research center, Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana said on Friday.

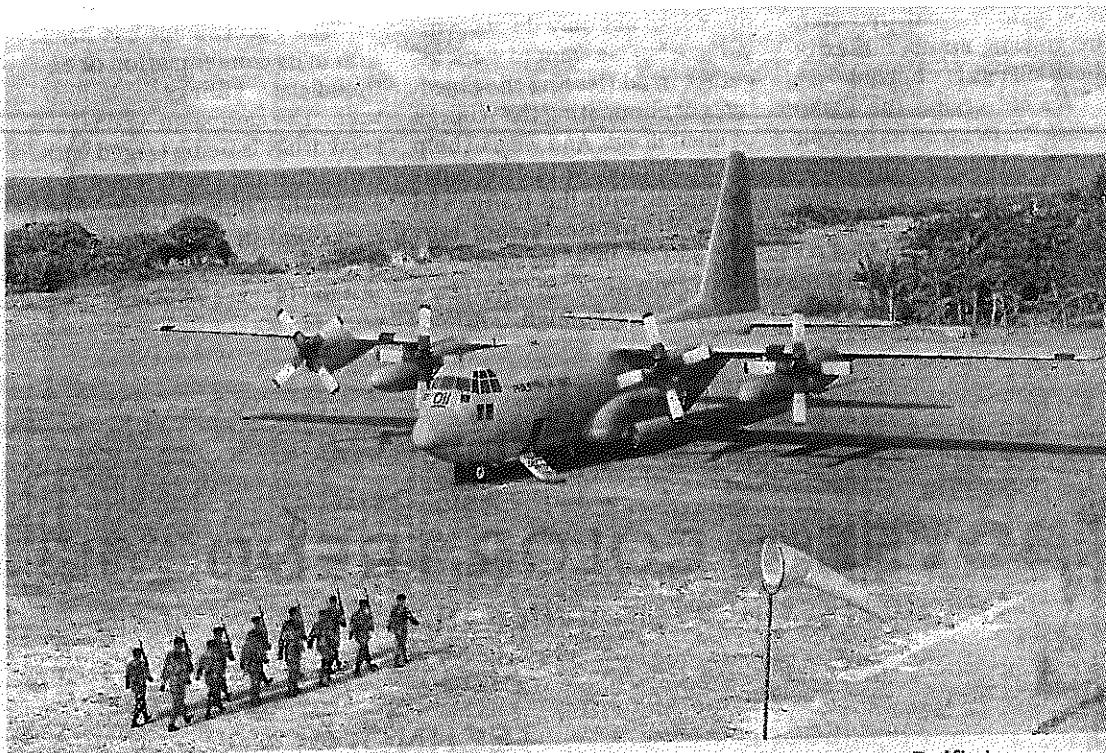
Lorenzana visited here along with the top echelon of the Armed Forces of the Philippines, including AFP chief of staff Gen. Eduardo Año, Philippine Army chief Lt. Gen. Glorioso Miranda, Air Force chief Lt. Gen. Edgar Fallorina, and Western Command chief Lt. Gen. Raul del Rosario.

He was also accompanied by Palawan Gov. Jose Alvarez and representatives of government agencies involved in Pag-asa's development.

"The reason we are here is to check the area because our President wants a lot done here... The President said, 'Do it already' and that we should not tarry," Lorenzana told Pag-asa residents. "We have already set aside money to repair the runway and, once that is finished, many people will come here because this is a tourist attraction. The beaches here are beautiful."

Besides repairing the runway, Lorenzana said the government also planned to put up a fishport, radio station, power plant, desalination plant, an ice plant, while the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources will set up a marine research facility.

While P1.6 billion will be set



Troops march to welcome the C-130 transport plane that flew Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana and party to Pag-asa Island. —AP

aside to develop Pag-asa Island, Lorenzana said the seven other islands in the Spratlys controlled by the Philippines will also get P20 million each to develop the structures there.

Lorenzana downplayed suggestions that the building projects would irk China.

"They've filed (diplomatic) protests before and we've also protested. We just answer each other. Although we are managing the issues through protests and dialogue, I don't think there will be any untoward incident," Lorenzana said.

"As I told the Chinese ambassador, we've been here since the late 60s and in 1971 we constructed the runway," he added. Lorenzana also pointed out

that the Chinese had developed Subi Reef, which is 26 kilometers (14 nautical miles) from Pag-asa, into an island with facilities.

"You've seen the other side. you saw Subi Reef. We are the ones who are being left behind here," Lorenzana said. "Vietnam has also built up (their islands) so we should have done this before."

Lorenzana said the Philippines put on hold its plans for the Spratlys after it filed a case at the Permanent Court of Arbitration in The Hague, which last year ruled in its favor.

"So, now that that is finished, I think we could already resume and that is also what our President wants—to improve the facilities here," he said.

Lorenzana said that the construction should begin immediately before the rainy season starts in July.

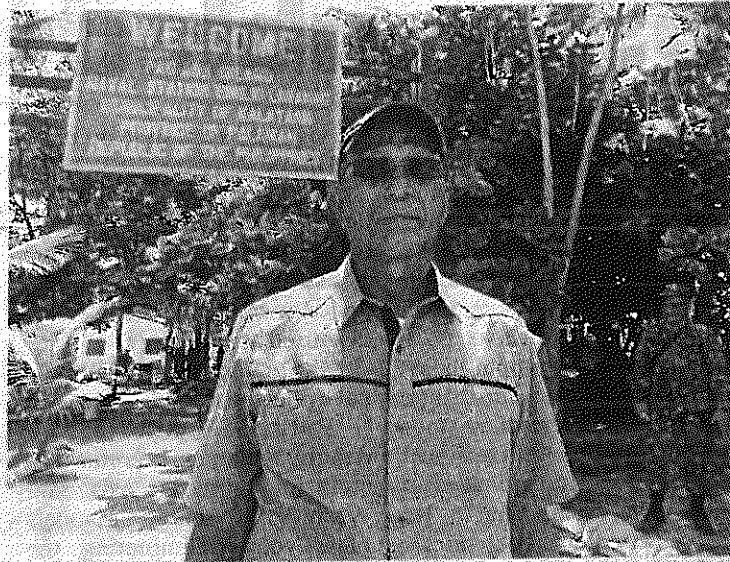
"The Philippine Navy has a plan for the beaching of (dock landing ships) that will carry the construction materials," he said.

"The gravel, sand and cement that will be used here will come from Palawan or Luzon. So, you can expect the help of our government to arrive," he added.

Chinese challenge

While flying over the disputed region aboard a C295 aircraft, the Chinese military "challenged" through radio Lorenzana's party.

The Chinese allegedly told



Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana on Pag-asa Island —AP

the plane pilots that they were entering Chinese airspace and that they should leave to avoid any "miscalculation."

"That's just normal. Whenever an aircraft comes here to resupply (Filipinos in Pag-asa), they always challenge, and we always tell them also that we are flying over Philippine territory," Lorenzana said.

Lorenzana said that it had become "protocol" for the Chinese in Subi Reef to challenge Philippine aircraft as they fly near the reef before they land on Pag-asa.

"That's procedural. We also reply that we are flying over our territory so we just answer each other. There is no untoward incident," he added.

Lorenzana doubted that the Chinese would file a formal diplomatic protest because of his visit, which he said was a normal trip within Philippine territory.

But the trip came shortly after the Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) confirmed it was investigating allegations by a group of Filipino fishermen who said their vessel was fired upon by the Chinese Coast Guard as they sailed on the Spratly archipelago on March 27.

"(Princess Johann) was re-

portedly fired upon seven times by a Chinese speedboat with seven Chinese coast guards on board," a PCG statement said.

The armed speedboat approached the Filipino vessel after it dropped anchor about 3.7 kilometers (two nautical miles) off the Chinese side of the Union Banks atoll, it said. "The crew hid and eventually cut their anchor line and fled the area," the statement added.

Representatives at the Chinese Embassy in Manila could not be reached for comment on Friday.

If confirmed the incident would be the first hostile episode in nearly a year involving the two countries, which have seen warming relations since President Duterte was elected in mid-2016.

Both the PCG and military are investigating the incident.

China claims most of the South China Sea and in recent years has been building up disputed reefs into artificial islands that can house military facilities.

Brunei, Malaysia, Taiwan and Vietnam also claim the Spratlys either wholly or in part.

—WITH REPORTS FROM AP AND AFP
INQ

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Chinese challenge Phl defense chief's plane

By JAIME LAUDE and
MICHAEL PUNONGBAYAN

A military aircraft flying Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana and Armed Forces chief Gen. Eduardo Año over the West Philippine Sea received a warning yesterday from Chinese forces to leave the airspace.

The Philippine Air Force (PAF) C-130 transport aircraft was circling over Zamora or Subi Reef for its final approach to the unpaved Rancudo airfield on Pag-Asa Island in the Spratlys when it received a radio warning from the Chinese to stay away from the area.

The PAF pilot responded that the aircraft was flying in Philippine airspace.

Lorenzana downplayed the incident. "It's already normal because each time our planes conduct resupply operations here they are challenged (by the Chinese)," he said.

"We replied that we are flying over Philippine territory," Lorenzana later told reporters.

AFP spokesman Brig. Gen. Restituto Padilla said the Chinese told the Filipino pilots to stay away from Subi to avoid a miscalculation.

"As before, (the pilots) were

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Chinese From Page 1

once again challenged as they made their pattern of landing," Padilla said.

From being merely a "seabed" in "international waters" under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), Subi Reef has metamorphosed into a bustling artificial island, with massive structures, a 3,000-meter runway, two ports, gun emplacements, and radar domes.

There were reports the Chinese have installed a missile defense system on the reef. Based on UNCLOS, there can be no territorial waters for features built on the seabed. Subi Reef is about 40 nautical miles from Pag-asa Island.

With Lorenzana and Año on the plane were Army commanding general Lt. Gen. Glorioso Miranda, Western Command (Wescom) commander Lt. Gen. Raul del Rosario, and other AFP officials and members of the media. The aircraft touched down at around 8 a.m. The DND chief attended a flag ceremony along with 45 military officials and personnel stationed on the island.

The group, with Palawan Gov. Jose Alvarez and representatives of the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR), toured the island.

On the West side of Pag-asa facing the West Philippine Sea, Lorenzana personally witnessed the presence from a distance of four to five Chinese Coast Guard ships.

In a statement, the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) said it welcomed efforts of the Department of National Defense and the AFP to secure Pag-asa Island.

"We defer to the DND and the Armed Forces on how best to fulfill their Constitutional mandates with respect to improving the safety, welfare, livelihood and personal security of Filipinos in the Palawan municipality

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of Kalayaan," the DFA said.

'Unsafe side'

Soldiers assigned on Pag-asa island told **The STAR** they call the Eastern side of the island the Philippine side and the Western part the "unsafe side" as they wouldn't want to call it the Chinese side.

In remarks, Lorenzana assured government troops the administration of President Duterte and the AFP are looking after their welfare despite the Chinese menace.

The Chinese, he explained, "believe that this is theirs, they protest to say that they do not want what we are doing here."

The Philippines maintains that the island group including Pag-asa is part of its territory, which Filipinos occupied as early as the late 1960s, and on which a runway was built in 1975.

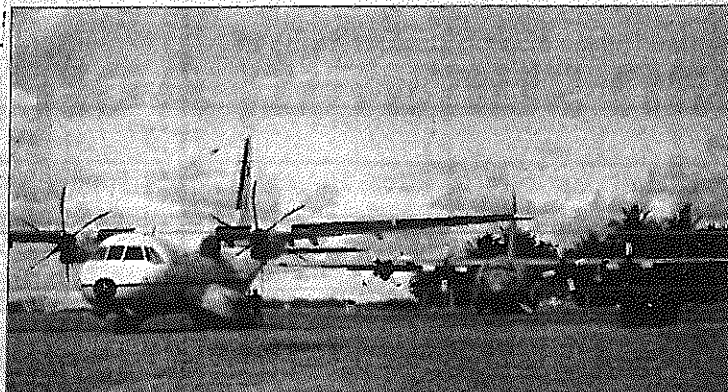
"I don't think I should give them any message. This is just a normal visit within our territory, we believe and we know that this is our territory and I am just visiting to look at the conditions of our people here," Lorenzana said.

Reacting to China's challenging the PAF's flight over Subi, National Security Adviser Hermogenes Esperon Jr. said the administration takes seriously the Chinese action.

"We mind and we respond appropriately. We have our challenges and answers where protocols to be made if it is bad enough that that could be the basis for some note verbales," Esperon said after President Duterte's visit to Russian ship *Varyag* yesterday.

"A challenge is not something that is really positive. But a challenge could be just to identify yourself but it could also mean that you're challenging because you think that's your territory," he added.

Asked if Duterte would go



Philippine Air Force military aircraft stand ready after landing on Pag-asa island in the Spratlys during Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana's visit yesterday.

EPA

to Pag-asa island in the future. Esperon said: "In the future? Let me answer you that in the future."

Pressed if the President would spend a night in the island, the national security adviser replied: "Why not? But not now."

P1.6-B Pag-asa dev't

Meanwhile, Lorenzana also revealed the administration has set aside at least P1.6 billion to develop Pag-asa.

He said the building of a beaching ramp would be prioritized and hopefully done by July this year so that construction materials like gravel and cement as well as heavy equipment could be brought to the island by sea.

He told reporters in a press briefing that BFAR also intends to build a fish port in the area.

The government also wants to put up a radio station, an ice plant, water desalination facility, homes for soldiers stationed in the island, and put up a sewage system.

"We will develop this into a tourism area and marine research (facility)," Lorenzana said.

"These are our plans, the plans of the President and he said do it now and do not delay. That's why we are here now," he stressed.

"We've been here since 1971, and our flag has been planted way back in the 1970s. We were here first, the others just followed," he said of the country's

claim on the Kalayaan Islands.

Lorenzana said the development of Pag-asa has long been delayed because of the arbitration case filed by the Philippines that resulted in a moratorium on the implementation of projects.

The DND chief said President Duterte's treatment of China shows that he is just trying to develop friends around the neighborhood.

"China is the most powerful country in our neighborhood, economically and militarily, and we are trying to manage the issue and talk to them one-on-one bilaterally, settle this dispute in the South China Sea," he said.

"I believe that the President is right in talking to the Chinese leadership on how to manage the issue here in South China Sea," he added.

The second biggest island next only to the Taiwanese-occupied Itu Aba, Pag-asa is a fifth class municipality in Palawan exercising overall jurisdiction over the country's regime of islands in the disputed Spratlys region.

Lorenzana's trip to Pag-asa came only a day after reports came out about Chinese coast guards firing warning shots to drive a group of Bataan-based Filipino fishermen from Union Bank. The incident, which reportedly happened on March 27, involved Chinese coast guards securing the reclaimed Gaven Reef.

Philippine Coast Guard

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spokesperson Commander Armand Balilo confirmed receiving information about the Chinese harassment of Filipino fishermen around Union Bank.

He said a Chinese coast guard speedboat with guns and carrying seven personnel fired shots at the fishing boat *Princess Johann*, which is owned and operated by Dionisio Cabacungan.

The Chinese reportedly fired warning shots when the Filipino boat dropped anchor some two nautical miles from Union Bank. The crew panicked, cut off their anchor line and fled the area.

Balilo said they were not able to interview the fishermen as they had already returned

to the sea. "We were only able to communicate with them via radio. But according to the boat captain, the Chinese Coast Guard did not directly fire shots at them," he said.

Vietnamese and Chinese forces have already occupied most of the maritime features within the Union Bank, a wide body of submerged features right within the country's 200-nautical mile exclusive economic zone.

Malaysia, Taiwan and Brunei also have overlapping maritime claims in the region. Only Brunei has no military presence in the areas it claims.

– With Evelyn Macairan,
Helen Flores, Alexis Romero

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The Manila Times

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'China fired at us' – Filipino fishers

A GROUP of Filipino fishermen have accused China's coast guard of shooting at their vessel in disputed West Philippine Sea (South China Sea) waters, Philippine authorities said Friday.

Philippine officials said they were investigating the reported attack on the Princess Johann boat, which the crew said occurred near a Chinese-occupied section of the Kalayaan (Spratly) archipelago on March 27.

There were no casualties during the incident, authorities added.

"(Princess Johann) was reportedly fired upon seven times by a Chinese speedboat with seven Chinese coast guards on board," a Philippine Coast Guard statement said.

The armed speedboat approached the Filipino vessel after it dropped anchor about 3.7 kilometers (2 nautical miles) off the Chinese side of the Union Banks atoll, it said.

"The crew hid and eventually cut their anchor line and fled the area," the statement added.

Chinese foreign ministry spokesman Lu Kang told reporters at a regular briefing that Beijing had "no information" on the matter.

If confirmed the incident would be the first hostile episode in nearly a year involving the two countries, which have seen warming relations since Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte was elected in mid-2016.

Both the Philippine coast guard and military are investigating the incident.

"(The Union Banks) is located inside the Philippines' exclusive economic zone," military spokesman Brig. Gen. Restituto Padilla said.

The UN Convention on the Law of the Sea grants coastal states exclusive rights to develop and exploit natural resources in the waters that extend up

► Fired A2

■ FIRED FROM A1

'China fired at us' – Filipino fishers

to 370 kilometers off their coasts.

But China claims most of the South China Sea and in recent years has been building up disputed reefs into artificial islands that can house military facilities.

Brunei, Malaysia, Taiwan and Vietnam also claim the Spratlys either wholly or in part.

Reversing the course set by predecessor Benigno Aquino, Duterte

has sought to improve his nation's relations with Beijing by adopting a non-confrontational approach over their competing claims in the strategically vital waters.

Since then, Duterte said China has allowed Filipinos to fish in waters around the Panatag (Scarborough Shoal), another outcrop in the South China Sea that Beijing seized in 2012 after a stand-off with the Philippine Navy. **AFP**

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3 civilians die as army battles NPAs in Masbate

By NINO N. LUCES

CAMP GEN. SIMEON OLA, Legazpi City— Three innocent civilians, aged 9, 11, and 70, were killed in the crossfire when army troopers and New People's Army (NPA) rebels battled it out in Cawayan municipality, Masbate last Thursday.

Senior Inspector Malu Calubaquib, Police Regional Office 5 (PRO5) spokesperson, identified the fatalities as Lolita Pepito, 70; Crislyn, 11, a Grade 4 pupil; and Reden, 9, all residents of Sitio Lubigan, Barangay Panan Awan in Cawayan.

Calubaquib said the Philippine Army's 3rd Scout Ranger Company led by Lieutenant Karl John Cabillo had engaged seven NPA guerrillas in a gun battle when the rebels positioned themselves outside the house

of Paulino C. Pepito, a 70-year-old widower, who was also wounded in the crossfire.

The report reaching the PRO5 did not mention whether the bullets that killed the three civilians and wounded Pepito in the left arm were fired by the rebels or the soldiers.

No one was killed or wounded on the side of government forces, said Calubaquib.

Rebel activity has been high in Masbate in recent weeks with armed encounter between the military and the NPA last Saturday resulting in the deaths of three guerrilla fighters in Barangay San Antonio, Milagros town.

Army Colonel Greg Almerol, commander of the 2nd Infantry Battalion (2IB), said the rebels, led by Ruel Ibañez, alias "Ka Gemo," were in Barangay San Antonio to conduct extortion activities.

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3 killed as NPA, soldiers clash

CAMARINES NORTE – A woman and her two grandchildren were killed and another was wounded in a clash between government troops and New People's Army rebels in Masbate on Thursday.

Lolita Pepito, 70, Crislyn Pepito, 11, and Reden Pepito, 9, were caught in the crossfire when rebels positioned themselves in front of their house in Sitio Lubigan, Barangay Panan-Awan in Cawayan town.

Paulina Pepito, 70, was hit in the arm by a stray bullet.

Senior Inspector Malu Calubaquib, Bicol police spokesperson, said soldiers of the 3rd Scout Ranger Co. led by Lt. Karl John Cabillo encountered around seven rebels.

Calubaquib said an undetermined number of rebels were wounded in the clash. – Francis Elevado

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The Manila Times

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ASG DRUG TRAFFICKER SHOT DEAD, 34 NABBED

SHARIFF AGUAK, Maguindanao: Soldiers in a joint law anti-drug campaign gunned down a drug trafficker and arrested 34 others, all identified with the Abu Sayyaf Group, in Barangay Danag, Patikul town in Sulu. Chief Supt. Reuben Theodore Sindac, Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) police director, identified the slain suspect as Jah Addul, who engaged the operatives serving an arrest warrant for murder against Namil Ahajari who was with their group, in a gunfight. A trooper, Cpl. Jeffrey Maramag of Bravo Company of 45th IB, was wounded. Police said 34 men were eventually arrested after the brief gunfight. Sindac said recovered from the arrested suspects were an undetermined amount of shabu, firearms and ammunition of various calibers.

JULMUNIR I. JANNARAL

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The Manila Times

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3 BIFF CATTLE RUSTLERS SLAIN IN SHOOTOUT

SHARIFF AGUAK, Maguindanao: Three bandits of the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF) who doubled as cattle rustlers were killed by farmer-militiamen whose cattle they tried to steal on Friday. Police identified the slain bandits as Tarzan Buntazil, Kensem Dungandong and Salik Rusman who were shot dead by pursuing

personnel of the Citizen's Armed Forces Geographical Unit (CAFGU). Chief Insp. Donald Cabigas of Pikit police said the suspects first stole a pair of cattle owned by siblings Ariel and Constantino Wacan in Barangay Bualan, Pikit. The Wacans and CAFGU men ran after the bandits who caught up with them in a secluded area triggering a gunfight for more than 30 minutes. Investigators said the villagers identified the slain suspects as the ones who subjected them to excessive collection of revolutionary tax. Cabigas added the cattle rustlers belong to a group led by Commander Arpie, reportedly involved in robbery, drug trafficking and engaged in illegal Marijuana plantations.

JULMUNIR I. JANNARAL

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3 BIFF todas sa bakbakan sa NorCot

Patay ang tatlong miyembro ng **Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF)** makaraang makipagbakbakan sa mga tropa ng militar at mga tauhan ng **Citizen Armed Forces Geographical Unit (CAFGU)** sa Pikit, North Cotabato nitong Huwebes ng hapon.

Ayon sa report na tinanggap ng Pikit Municipal Police, dakong 2:20 ng hapon nang mangyari ang engkuwentro sa Sitio Valencia, Barangay Bualan sa Pikit.

Dahil dito, napilitang magsilikas ang mga residente at nagtungo sa eskuwelahan.

Kinilala ng pulisya ang mga napatay na sina Tarzan Buntasil, Kensem Dungandong, at Rusman Salik Mohammad, pawang tauhan ni Kumander Arpie at kabilang sa mga pumuga sa Cotabato District Jail sa Bgy. Amas sa Kidapawan City.

Sinabi ni Chief Insp. Donald Cabigas, hepe ng Pikit Municipal Police, na ninakaw ng grupo ni

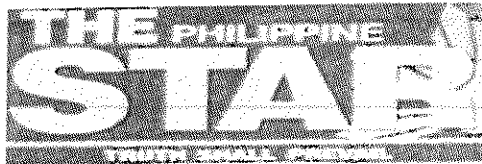
Kumander Arpie ang dalawang alagang baka sa Bgy. Bualan na pagmamay-ari ng magkapatid na CAFGU na sina Ariel Wacan at Constantino Wacan.

Kaagad na tinugis ng mga CAFGU at ng 38th Infantry Battalion ng Philippine Army ang mga magnanakaw ng baka hanggang makasagupa ang grupo ni Kumander Arpie.

Nakuha mula sa mga napatay na bandido ang tatlong matataas na uri ng baril at mga bala.

Fer Taboy

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3 BIFF members die in shootout

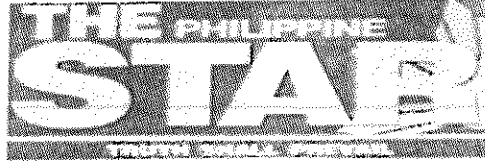
NORTH COTABATO – Three suspected members of the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters were killed in an alleged shootout with militiamen.

Tarzan Biantazil, Kensem Dungandong and Salik Rusman shot it out with members of the Citizens Armed Force Geographical Unit who chased them for stealing cattle owned by Ariel Wacan and his brother Constantino in Barangay Bualan in Pikit town.

Probers said villagers positively identified the bandits as among those collecting protection money from them.

– John Unson

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8 hurt in grenade blast

MAGUINDANAO – Eight persons, including a mayor, were wounded in a grenade explosion at a mosque in Talayan town yesterday.

Datu Anggal Mayor Nathaniel Midtimbang and his father Kagui Ali, 62, had just emerged from the mosque after an obligatory prayer when unidentified men on two motorcycles hurled two grenades.

Datu Anang Mupak, Sandy Aron, Manap Balumol and three others identified only as Kasim, Marcos and Makalanga were also wounded when one of the grenades went off.

The victims were taken to the Notre Dame Hospital in Cotabato City.

Senior Superintendent Agustin Tello, Maguindanao police director, said one of the motorcycles used in the attack was found abandoned along the highway in Barangay Mapayag in Datu Anggal.

Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao Gov. Mujiv Hataman ordered ARMM police director Chief Superintendent Reuben Theodore Sindac to oversee the investigation into the attack.

– John Unson

22 April 2017

NGAYON

Pahina. 6

NPA vs militar: Lolo, 2 apo patay!

**CAMARINES NOR-
TE** – Tatlong miyembro ng pamilya ang namatay habang isa pang matanda ang sugatan sa engkuwentro sa pagitan ng tropa ng pamahalaan at pinaghihinalang miyembro ng New People's Army (NPA) sa Sitio Lubigan, Brgy Panan Awan, Cawayan, Masbate kamakailawa. Ang mga nasawi ay sina

NI FRANCIS ELEVADO

Lolita Pepito, 70, may asawa at kanyang dalawang mga apo na sina Crislyn Pepito, 11-anyos, Grade 4 pupil at Reden Pepito, 9-anyos habang sugatan si Paulino Pepito, 70, biyudo. Sa ulat, habang nagsasagawa ng combat operation ang 3rd Scout Ranger Com-

pany ng Philippine Army sa pamumuno ni Lt. Karl John Cabillo, nang makasagupa nila ang 7 armadong lalaki dakong alas-5:30 ng mada-ling araw. Ang nasabing pamilya ay naipit sa engkuwentro matapos na magtago sa labas ng kanilang bahay ang mga

hinihinalang NPA at nakipagpalitan ng putok sa tropa ng pamahalaan. Makaraan ang ilang minuting sagupaan, mabilis na tumakas ang mga NPA na ilan dito ay mga sugatan. Huli na nang matuklasan ng grupo ng mga sundalo na may mga sibilyang nadamay sa loob ng nasabing bahay na ikinamatay ng tatlong katao habang sugatan ang isa pang senior citizen. Wala namang nasugatan sa panig ng sundalo, ayon sa ulat na ipinarating kahapon.

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Pahina. 6

6 BIFF utas sa engkuwentro

COTABATO CITY – Tatlong umano'y kasapi ng Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF) ang bumulagta matapos na maka-engkuwentro ang militar at mga tauhan ng Citizen Armed Forces Geographical Unit (CAFGU) sa Sitio Valencia ng Barangay Bualan sa bayan ng Pikit, North Cotabato at Datu Usay, Maguindanao.

Nakilala ang unang tatlong napaslang na sina Tarzan Buntasil, Kensem Dungan-dong at Rusman Salik Mohammad, na mga tauhan ni Kumander Arpie.

Si Mohammad ay isa sa mga preso na pumuga sa Cotabato District Jail sa Barangay

Amas Kidapawan City noong Enero 4.

Ayon kay P/Chief Insp. Donald Cabigas, hepe ng Pikit Police, ninakaw ng grupo ni Kumander Arpie ang dalawang alagang baka sa Brgy. Bualan na pag-aari ng magkapatid na Cafgu member na sina Ariel Wacan at Constantino Wacan.

Agad silang tinugis ng Cafgu at 38th Infantry Battalion ng Philippine Army at nakasagupa nila ang grupo ni Kumander Arpie sa Sitio Valencia, Brgy. Bualan Pikit dakong alas-2:20 ng hapon. Tumagal ng isang oras ang palitan ng putok sa magkabilang panig sanhi ng pagkasawi ng tatlong miyembro ng BIFF

habang nagsilikas ang mga residente sa lugar.

Samantala, tatlong miyembro ng BIFF ang napaslang sa engkuwentro sa military sa Datu Unsay, Maguindanao kamakalawa. Sa ulat ng 6th ID, pasado alas-5 ng umaga nang magkabakbakan sa Brgy. Meta na nagresulta sa paglikas ng 200 residente sa lugar.

Ang BIFF ay nasa likod ng pambobomba sa National Grid Corporation sa Central Mindanao gayundin ng ibang pambobomba, extortion at iba pa.

Nagpapatuloy naman ang opensiba ng tropang gobyerno laban sa BIFF. **Joy Cantos/Rhoderick Benez**

Mag-utol dedo sa road mishap

COTABATO CITY - Kapwa sinalubong ni kamatayan ang magkapatid na kasapi ng Citizens Armed Forces Geographical Unit o CAFGU habang tatlo pa ang sugatan matapos na mabangga ng van ang sinasakyan nilang motorsiklo sa Barangay Dualing, Aleosan, North Cotabato alas-8:30 kahapon ng umaga. Kinilala ni P/SI Edwin Abantes, hepe ng Aleosan Police ang nasawi na sina Nestor Campollo Cantomayor, 20-anyos at Michael John Campollo, 26-anyos kapwa miyembro ng CAFGU at residente ng Bagolibas sa nasabing bayan. Sa ulat, mabilis umanong binabaybay ng Toyota Hi Ace van ang nasabing lugar at pagdating sa kurbadang daan ay nasalpok nito ang XRM motorcycle. Namatay noon din ang magkapatid na CAFGU habang nahagip din ang isa pang payung-payong na motorsiklo kung saan sakay ang mga sugatang pasahero na sina Jerry Cabanting, 51, Milrose Cabanting, 46 at isang apat na taong gulang na si Jennifer Fernandez. **Rhoderick Benez**

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ASG will be crippled once Sahiron surrenders – AFP

By FRANCIS T. WAKEFIELD

The commander of the Armed Forces of the Philippines' (AFP) Joint Task Force Sulu (JTFS) expressed confidence that "60 to 70 percent" of its problem with the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) will be solved once the bandit group's senior leader Radullan Sahiron surrenders to government forces.

The assessment was made by Brig. Gen. Cirilito Sobejana as he reacted to reports that Sahiron, who took over the Abu Sayyaf in 2006 following the death of Khadaffy Janjalani, was willing to turn himself in.

Sobejana said, considering that Sahiron was a respected leader, the military expects his followers to follow suit, and also surrender.

"He is very much respected by his followers, that's why we expect them to also surrender. Most probably 60 to 70 percent of the problem will be solved if he indeed surrenders," Sobejana.

"For a while there will be a leadership vacuum, there will be a power struggle among the sub-

leaders on who will succeed as leader," he added.

Sobejana said if Sahiron dies or turn himself in, ASG sub-leaders Hatib Hajan Sawadjaan and Yasser Igasan will likely succeed him.

"Igasan or Sawadjaan are the most likely successors if he dies. For a while there will be a leadership vacuum, there will be a power struggle among the subleaders," he said.

When asked if there was already a date on when Sahiron will likely surrender, Sobejana said there was none yet.

"There is still no date but he already signified his intention to surrender because he, as reported to us, is already weak, tired and weary because they are moving from one place to another," Sobejana said.

"We are not stopping with our operations. We don't get tired because we (always) rotate our forces," he added.

Sobejana said no less than Sahiron's close associate relayed the information that he already wanted to surrender.

"They are on the run, they are running short of logistics. They are outside their comfort zones. They no longer enjoy the support coming from the community," he said.

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Sayyaf abducts former MNLF rebel in Sulu

BY JULMUNIR I. JANNARAL AND AL JACINTO

SHARIFF AGUAK, Maguindanao: An Army soldier who was a former Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) rebel integrated into the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) was abducted on Thursday by the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) in Patikul, Sulu.

Capt. Jo-ann Petinglay, spokesperson of the Western Mindanao Command (West-MinCom), identified the soldier as Staff Sergeant Anni Siraji of the 32nd Infantry Battalion (32nd IB) under Joint Task Force Sulu.

He was forcibly taken by

at least seven armed men at about 9:30 a.m. on the road to Igasan, Patikul, Sulu.

A platoon from the 32nd IB was dispatched to conduct hot pursuit and blocking operations at the area where the abductors fled.

"The recent abduction involving our soldier should not be

a reason for us to back out but should further motivate us to continue our relentless and sustained focus military operations against the ASG and the rescue of all kidnap victims," Brig. Gen. Cirilito Sobejana, Joint Task Force Sulu commander, said.

Patikul, a known stronghold of the ASG terrorists, is a main target area of military offensives for three months now.

Siraji, a Tausug, was among many former MNLF rebels who joined the AFP when Chairman Nur Misuari signed the final peace agreement with the government on September 2, 1996.

A salient provision of the

agreement was the integration of former MNLF rebels into the AFP.

"It is frustrating that a Tausug soldier, who wants a peaceful community and working for it really hard so that an influx of progress will come to his home province, will have to be a victim of the bandits. Obviously, the Abu Sayyaf can victimize anyone, even someone from their own tribe," the Western Mindanao Command chief, Lt. Gen. Carlito Galvez Jr., said.

"For now, we will continue to hunt the perpetrators and the rest of the Abu Sayyaf. We will not stop until we get our soldier back to his family," Galvez added.

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Sayyaf kidnaps soldier

By ROEL PAREÑO

ZAMBOANGA CITY—Suspected Abu Sayyaf bandits kidnapped a soldier in Patikul, Sulu on Thursday.

Staff Sgt. Annu Siraji of the Army's 32nd Infantry Battalion was traveling to Barangay Igasan when he was seized at around 9:30 a.m.

"It is frustrating that a Tausug soldier who wants a peaceful community and is working for it really hard... will be a victim of the bandits... The Abu Sayyaf can victimize even someone from their own tribe," said Lt. Gen. Carlito Galvez Jr., Western Mindanao Command chief. "We will not

stop until we get our soldier back."

Brig. Gen. Cirilito Sobejana, Joint Task Force Sulu commander, said operations to rescue Siraji are ongoing.

The kidnapping came while government forces have yet to recover 27 other captives, including 20 foreigners.

Sobejana said relentless pursuit operations for the bandits would continue.

Meanwhile, the Moro

Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) and Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) said they would not extend assistance to Abu Sayyaf "stragglers" believed to be still hiding in Sitio Ilaya in Barangay Napo, Inabanga, Bohol after a botched siege.

Bohol provincial board member Ricky Masamayor said Moro commanders assured him during his visit to Libak, Sultan Kudarat that they would not intervene in military operations to arrest the bandits.

Masamayor noted that many Abu Sayyaf bandits are former MILF and MNLF

members.

He said one of the bandits, whom he did not identify, was a classmate of his father.

A report of the Criminal Investigation and Detection Group-Bohol said Josesito Melloria, who reportedly hosted the bandits at his home in Bohol, was sighted in Barangay Cawayan in Inabanga at the house of a certain Noel Niño.

Melloria married a Muslim woman whose father is allegedly one of the leaders of the Abu Sayyaf.

—With Lino de la Cruz, Ric Obedencio/Freeman News Service

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Abu Sayyaf abducts soldier in Sulu

BY FRANCIS T. WAKEFIELD AND NONDY E. LACSON

A Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) integratee-turned-soldier, who was working for peace and progress in Sulu, was abducted by the Abu Sayyaf Thursday morning.

Armed Forces of the Philippines-Western Mindanao Command (AFP-

WestMinCom) Spokesman Capt. Jo-Ann Petinglay identified the female soldier as Staff Sergeant Anni Siraji of the 32nd Infantry Battalion (32IB) under the Joint Task Force Sulu.

The perpetrators were believed to be members of the Abu Sayyaf ► **13**

Abu Sayyaf abducts...

◀ **1**

Group (ASG). A report said he was forcibly taken by a group headed by Waltun Julhasan, a known member of the team of ASG leader Hatib Hajan Sawadjaan operating in Patikul, Sulu.

The group fled with the captured soldier towards Sitio Lagaron, Barangay Kabbuntakas, Patikul, Sulu, the report from the AFP Western Mindanao Command said.

The Commanding Officer of the 32nd IB immediately directed one platoon from the unit to conduct pursuit operation the general area where the abductors fled. All operating troops were alerted and tasked to conduct pursuit and blocking operations within the immediate vicinity.

"The recent abduction incident involving our soldier should not be a reason for us to back out but should further motivate us to continue our relentless and sustained military operations against the ASG and the rescue of all kidnap victims," Brigadier General Cirilito Sobejana, the Commander of the Joint Task Force Sulu, said.

For three months now, Patikul has been one of the main target areas of the military offensives as it was reported to be a stronghold of the bandits.

Tausug soldier

AFP Western Mindanao Command Chief Lieutenant General Carlito G. Galvez Jr., said it is frustrating that a Tausug soldier who wants a peaceful community and is working really

hard so that progress will come to his home province, will be a victim of the bandits.

"Obviously, the Abu Sayyaf can victimize anyone, even someone from their own tribe," Galvez said.

"Therefore, we are calling on all the people of Sulu to join us in this fight. I firmly believe that as long as we are together on this, we will be able to disallow these bandits to continue creating havoc and fear to everyone."

"For now, we will continue to hunt the perpetrators and the rest of the Abu Sayyaf. We will not stop until we get our soldier back to his family," he added.

Abu Sayyaf member surrenders

Meanwhile, a member of the ASG operating under Furugi Indama became the 17th leader of the group to surrender to the military. He surrendered last Wednesday in Barangay Bohe Pahu, Ungkaya Pukan, Basilan.

Petinglay identified the ASG surrenderee as Nasser Sagap, alias, Sinbad, 20 years old and a resident of Barangay Limbu Upas, Tipo-Tipo, Basilan.

Sagap surrendered to soldiers of the 18th Infantry Battalion under the Joint Task Force Basilan and turned over his caliber .30 Garand rifle with one clip and four rounds of ammunition.

Since the start of the "no let-up operation" against the group in January this year, Indama is the fifth to surrender in Basilan province.

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Rebel-turned-soldier kidnapped by ASG

By FRANCIS T. WAKEFIELD

A Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) integree turned soldier who was working for peace and progress in Sulu was abducted by the Abu Sayyaf earlier Thursday.

Staff Sergeant Anni Siraji of the 32nd Infantry Battalion (32IB) under the Joint Task Force Sulu was forcibly taken by about sev-

en persons at 9:30 a.m. Thursday while he was heading to Igasan, Patikul, Sulu.

The perpetrators were believed to be members of the ASG under Julhasan, a known member of ASG leader Hatib Hajan Sawadjaan who operates in Patikul.

It was learned that Julhasan and his cohorts fled with their captive towards sitio Lagaron, Barangay Kabbun takas, Patikul,

Sulu.

AFP Western Mindanao Command Chief Lieutenant General Carlito G. Galvez, Jr. expressed his frustration that even a Tausug soldier who is aiming for peace in their community would become a target of the bandits.

"Obviously, the Abu Sayyaf can victimize anyone, even someone from their own tribe," Galvez said.

A native of Sulu, Siraji joined the AFP through the integration program of the 1996 Final Peace Agreement between the government and the MNLF.

Meanwhile, Galvez urged the residents in Sulu to collectively help the military to end the menace of the ASG.

"I firmly believe that as long as we are together on this, we will be able to disallow these bandits to continue creating havoc and fear to everyone," said Galvez.

"Therefore, we are calling on all the people of Sulu to join us in this fight.

"For now, we will continue to hunt the perpetrators and the rest of the Abu Sayyaf. We will not stop until we get our soldier back to his family," he added.

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Sundalo dinukot ng Abu Sayyaf

**Nina FER TABOY
at NONOY LACSON**

Kinumpirma kahapon ng Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) na dinukot ng mga miyembro ng Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) ang isang sundalo, na nagsisilbing undercover agent ng Philippine Army sa ilalim ng Joint Task Force Sulu (JTF-Sulu), habang naglalakad patungong palengke sa Barangay Igasan, Patikul, Sulu, nitong Huwebes ng umaga.

Kinilala ni Armed Forces of the Philippines-Western Mindanao Command (AFP-WestMinCom) spokesman Capt. Jo-Arn Petinglay ang dinukot na sundalong si Staff Sgt. Anni Siraji, ng 32nd Infantry Battalion.

Si Siraji ay dating miyembro ng Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) na tumulong sa gobyerno sa peace at development effort sa Sulu.

Ayon sa militar, tinangay si Siraji ng pitong armadong bandido, na pinamumunuan ni Waltun Julhasan, bandang 9:30 ng umaga nitong Huwebes.

Sinabi naman ni Brigadier General Cirilito Sobejana, commander ng JTF-Sulu, na ang "abduction incident involving our soldier should not be a

reason for us to back out but should further motivate us to continue our relentless and sustained focus military operations against the ASG and the rescue of all kidnap victims."

Samantala, sumuko sa militar nitong Miyerkules ng hapon sa Bgy. Bohe Pahu sa Ungkaya Pukan, Basilan, ang tauhan ng Abu Sayyaf leader na si Furuji Indama na si Nasser Sagap, 20, alyas "Sinbad", at

taga-Bgy Limpu Upas, Tipo-Tipo. Ika-17 miyembro ng Abu Sayyaf na sumuko sa gobyerno, bitbit din ni Sagap ang kanyang .30 caliber Garand rifle na may apat na bala.

Kasabay nito, inihayag ni Lt. Gen. Carlito Galvez, Jr., commander ng WestMinCom, ang pagkakakubkob sa kampo ng grupo ni Indarna sa Bgy. Cabcaban, Sumisip.

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Pahina. 2

Sundalo binihag ng Sayyaf

Isang sundalo ang binihag ng mga bandidong Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) sa lalawigan ng Sulu.

Kinilala ni Captain Jo-Ann Petunglay, Spokesperson ng AFP-Western Mindanao Command ang binihag na sundalo na si Staff Sergeant Anni Siraji, kasapi ng Army's 32nd Infantry Battalion sa ilalim ng Joint Task Force (JTF) Sulu.

Batay sa ulat, bandang alas-9:30 ng umaga noong Huwebes nang bihagin ng mga terorista si Siraji sa bisinidad ng highway patungong Brgy. Igasan, Patikul ng lalawigan.

Nabatid na natiyempuhang nag-isa ang biktima at hindi na nanilaban nang tutukan ng baril at tinangay patungo sa kanilang pinagkukutaan sa kagubatan ng naturang bayan.

Nabatid na sa loob ng tatlong buwang opensiba laban sa Abu Sayyaf ay isa ang munisipalidad ng Patikul sa target ng tropa ng militar dahil maraming mga bandido ang namumugad sa nasabing bayan.
-Joy Cantos-

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Hunt for Abus in Bohol clash reaches Cebu island

**By Doris C. Bongcac
and Leo Udtohan**
@inquirervisayas

CEBU CITY—The armed forces continued the hunt for two armed men suspected to be members of the Abu Sayyaf who had been spotted on the beaches of a village in Olango Island, an area famous to bird watchers.

Cyrus Eyas, chair of San Vicente village, said sightings of the armed men and the presence of government soldiers were sowing fear among residents of two communities in San Vicente.

At least 25 families from one community, Sitio Basdaku, fled to an elementary school on Thursday and spent the night there.

"The residents are very scared," said Eyas.

He said the armed men could be Abu Sayyaf members who are fleeing soldiers on the hunt for bandits who clashed with soldiers in Inabanga town in Bohol, which is about an hour by boat from Olango.

Eyas said he believed the armed men "were looking for medicines and food."

The hunt for the armed men, however, would not be

easy as they could hide in the 1,100-hectare mangrove forest near a bird sanctuary in San Vicente.

It is also possible that they had already left Olango, said the village chief.

In a separate interview, Bohol Gov. Edgar Chatto said he believed the bandits are still in Inabanga.

A resident of Olango, Erlinda Taneo, reported seeing the armed men past noon on Thursday.

The two wore jackets and carried backpacks and rifles. Their faces were covered.

"One man appeared to be

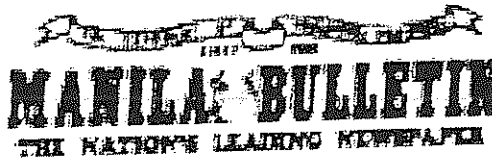
weak because he was being supported by his companion while walking," said Eyas, quoting witnesses' accounts.

Two hours after the sighting of the armed men was reported to police, at least 20 soldiers arrived in San Vicente. Bursts of gunfire were heard afterward.

Eyas said members of the police's Special Weapons and Tactics Team found a shelter in the middle of the mangrove forest in Olango.

Found in the shelter were hammocks made of jute sacks, water bottles, empty cans and dried fish. INQ

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Armed men seen on Cebu island; tourists kept away

By MARS W. MOSQUEDA JR

OLANGO ISLAND, Cebu — Authorities barred tourists from going to Olango Island, a bird sanctuary in Cebu, on Friday after residents reported the presence of masked armed men there.

The Central Command of the Armed Forces of the Philippines sent troops to Barangay Sabang after one resident said four men, wearing masks and carrying bags which reportedly contained long firearms, asked food and money from her.

Aida Patigdas, who owns a convenience store in Sitio Tuburan, said the four men went to her house Thursday noon and asked for money and food. Patigdas said she refused to give the men money because she was scared.

Responding police heard gunfire at Sitio Bas Toral, Barangay San Vicente.

Police, along with soldiers from the Army's 47th Infantry Brigade and the Philippine Navy were said to be searching the island for criminal or terrorist groups.

Authorities however had not confirmed the presence of armed men and if they were members of the Abu Sayyaf.

Olango is adjacent to Inabanga town in Bohol, where a clash between the Abu Sayyaf and government troops left nine people dead, including three soldiers and a policeman.

Chief Insp. Miguel Andesa, Olango police chief, said Navy vessels were patrolling the island's shoreline which is dotted with mangroves and coconut trees.

The fighting in Inabanga has raised concerns that the Abu Sayyaf has infiltrated Bohol where it plans to set up a base from which to launch attacks in the Visayas.

Police officials have downplayed such a concern, saying there is no evidence the Abu Sayyaf has established a base in Eastern Visayas.

Just the same, Police Regional Director Chief Supt. Elmer C. Beltejar told Manila Bulletin that they asked the public to be vigilant and report to the authorities any suspicious strangers in their communities.

The military has said troops were looking for the remaining seven members of the Abu Sayyaf that engaged soldiers and policemen in Barangay Napo, Inabanga, last week. (With Nestor L. Abrematea)

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VIGILANCE – Philippine National Police (PNP) special forces patrol the 1,030-hectare mangrove area in Barangay San Vicente, Olango Island in Cebu, after a resident claimed seeing two armed men, believed to be Abu Sayyaf members, at about 2 p.m. Thursday. (Juan Carlo de Vela)

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P1-M reward for ASG head better be used for intel gathering – solon

By **Gerry Baldo**
and **Mario J. Mallari**

A lawmaker from Mindanao yesterday urged the Duterte government to rethink its move to offer a P1-million reward per head for the death of Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) members.

According to Anak Mindanao party-list Rep. Maknood Mending Jr., the reward money should instead be used for intelligence gathering.

He stressed that while many would want the reward money, the members of the ASG are difficult to find.

Mending came up with the statement following President Duterte's announcement that he is offering a P1-

million reward for every ASG killed.

"The way I see it, if there is a reward money, many are going to try and find an ASG but they do not have a permanent camp. They are very agile. They have speed boats and they can also afford to go to the mountains," said Mending.

Mending also expressed apprehensions that the reward money could be put to naught as a killer could claim that his victim is a member of the ASG even if he is not in any way a part of the group.

"The money had better be used for intelligence gathering which is the key to getting them exposed," Mending said.

The lawmaker said it would be better if the ASG members are arrested and brought before the bar of justice. **Turn to page 7**

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Defense cooperation eyed between Phi, Russia

by ALEXIS ROMERO

The Philippines and Russia are expected to forge a defense cooperation agreement during President Duterte's visit to Moscow next month, his national security adviser said yesterday.

"Defense cooperation will be finalized when the President visits Moscow by the end of May," national security adviser Hermogenes Esperon told reporters after Duterte's visit to Russian ship *Varyag* in South Harbor, Manila.

"Defense cooperation will come in the form of training, probably some exchange of information," he added.

Asked if the Philippines and Russia would hold joint military exercises, Esperon said: "That's a long way to go but it can come to that later on."

"We don't really intend to go into alliances, which is a fighter agreement. But we can go into partnerships in mutually beneficial activities," he added.

Esperon said Duterte's planned visit to Moscow was mentioned during his visit to the guided missile cruiser *Varyag*.

"(Russia) ambassador (to the Philippines Igor) Khovaev is here... When the President was about to come down, 'Mr. President, we will see you in



President Duterte is given a tour of the Russian guided missile cruiser 'Varyag' that arrived in Manila yesterday for a four-day goodwill visit.

May for the trip to Moscow," he said.

Duterte is scheduled to visit Russia on May 25 to strengthen ties between Manila and Moscow.

In November, Duterte and Russia President Vladimir Putin met on the sidelines of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation meet in Lima, Peru to discuss ways to enhance the ties between their countries.

Ship visit

Duterte also toured the Rus-

Philippine military officials.

Duterte first went to the upper deck where the short-range anti-missile rocket system is located. He then proceeded to the mid-ship where the long-range anti-aircraft missile rocket system is placed.

The President also went to the bow, where the ship's main weapon or long distance anti-ship missile and anti-aircraft carrier is located.

"The Russians are with me, I shall not be afraid," the President while posing for a photo with Russian officials.

Duterte also toured the ship museum and the admiral's room for the guest book signing.

"He (Duterte) is impressed. This is an old ship. The President has not boarded so many ships so he took time to come here," Esperon said.

Esperon clarified that there are no exercises scheduled between the Philippine and Russian navies.

"When they go out of the port, it is customary for our naval ship to see them off. Probably in the vicinity of Corregidor," the national security adviser said.

In January, Duterte also toured the Russian large anti-submarine ship Admiral Tributs, which also anchored in the country for a goodwill visit.

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PH troops defy China challenge

By Francisco Tuyay and John Paolo Bencito

PAGASA ISLAND—Members of the Chinese coast guard challenged the military transport planes carrying Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana and Armed Forces of the Philippines chief-of-staff Gen. Eduardo Año to Pagasa Island Friday morning.

Pilots of the Airbus Military C-295 and Lockheed C-130 Hercules cargo aircraft received the challenge from Subi Reef, a Chinese-controlled atoll some 30 to 40 nautical miles away from Pagasa Island.

“We replied that we are flying over Philippine territory,” Lorenzana said when asked for details regarding the Chinese challenge.

The Defense chief added that the challenge is automatic and part of the protocol of any country claiming jurisdiction over a particular area, especially when ships and aircraft pass through it.

Aside from the challenge, nothing untoward happened, Lorenzana said.

Other ranking officials aboard the two military aircraft were Army commander Lt. Gen. Glorioso Miranda and Western Command head Lt. Gen. Raul del Rosario.

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PH...

From A1

National Security Adviser Hermogenes Esperon said the Philippines is keeping track of the continued challenges posed by Beijing.

He said while such challenges are normal for countries with overlapping claims, Manila does not take these lightly.

“We mind and we respond appropriately. We have our own challenges and answers to appropriate situations. If it’s bad enough, that could be the basis for a note verbale,” Esperon said.

“A challenge is something that does not help us, but a challenge could be just to identify yourself. But it could also mean, you’re challenging [us] because they think that’s their territory,” he said.

In the same interview, Esperon said the President will still push through with his visit to Pagasa Island and might even stay overnight.

“Why not? But not now,” he said.

Lorenzana said Friday morning the government will allocate P1.6 billion to improve the Rancudo Airfield in Pagasa Island and construct ports and beaching ramps in the locality.

Lorenzana made the announcement to Filipino troops and local government officials shortly after arriving on the island.

Priority will be given to the construction of a beaching ramp that will allow cargo ships to unload construction materials and other supplies in Pagasa Island, thus expediting the improvement works.

The Defense chief said construction of the facility will start immediately, so that it will be completed and operational before the rainy season starts.

Runway improvements include the concreting of the entire Rancudo Airfield to make it accessible during all types of weather.

Other improvements for Pagasa Island include the construction of a desalination plant, more solar panels and generator sets for power purposes, and the establishment of a Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources marine research and shelter center.

More shelters will be also constructed for military personnel tasked to secure Pagasa Island and other Philippine-claimed features in the Spratly Islands. Other facilities to be erected are a fish port and ice plant.

Lorenzana said he sees no violation in the Philippines’ decision to improve its facilities on Pagasa Island, adding that the country should have done this before as other claimants in the Spratlys have already boosted and modernized their structures.

Pagasa Island is about 280 nautical miles northwest of Puerto Princesa and 579 miles southwest of Metro Manila. The population is estimated at 300, consisting of a single municipality, Kalayaan, and a small elementary school and medical clinic.

Lorenzana said he expected Beijing to protest the developments on the island.

“The protest is just automatic because they are claiming this [Pagasa Island]. However, when they are doing something in other areas which we claim, we also lodge a protest,” he said.

Lorenzana, in his recent talk with Chinese Ambassador Zhao Jianhua, said the Philippine presence on Pagasa Island dates back to the late 1960s.

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22 April 2017



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Joma to Gina: Make a presentation

By Delfin T. Mallari Jr.
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LUCENA CITY—The founder of the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) and an official of the social development arm of the Catholic Church on Friday welcomed a plan by Environment Secretary Gina Lopez to work with rebels in mining communities in Agusan del Sur province.

CPP founding chair Jose Maria Sison urged Lopez to present her plans to the National Democratic Front of the Philippines (NDFP), which has resumed peace talks with the government to end the nearly 50-

year-old insurgency in the Philippines.

"It would be fine if the NDFP negotiating panel becomes well informed about the area development plan being proposed by [Department of Environment and Natural Resources] Secretary Gina Lopez," Sison said in an online interview on Friday.

"The desire of [Lopez] to work with the [New People's Army] for peace and development is welcomed by the NDFP," he said.

Fr. Edwin Gariguez, executive secretary of the National Secretariat for Social Action of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines, also

supported Lopez's plan, saying it would help push the peace process forward.

"That's a very good initiative and move in pursuing the peace process while seeking to collaborate with stakeholders for social change," said Gariguez, noting that the poor are often the victims of environmental injustice.

Asked if there might be any danger in working with the NPA, the priest said: "To lay down their arms is a gesture that the NPAs are agreeable to pursue their cause in a peaceful way."

"We need to seek and open windows for dialogue and last-

ing peace," Gariguez added.

Sison, who serves as NDFP consultant in the peace talks, said the head of the rebel negotiating panel, Fidel Agcaoili, was in Manila for consultations with his counterpart, Labor Secretary Silvestre Bello III.

"It is advisable that Fidel converse with [Lopez] so that the NDFP becomes well-informed about the proposed area development plan, gains understanding and acts accordingly," Sison said.

Speaking at a business forum in Pasay City on Thursday, Lopez disclosed plans to work with the NPA in developing Agusan del Sur into a model of

her agency's "ecological, economic, educational" or E3 thrust.

Agusan del Sur, a province that has heavily benefited from mining and where communist guerrillas are also active, is one of the first areas to be transformed into an E3 zone, according to Lopez.

The department has earmarked P6 billion to develop E3 zones nationwide.

Lopez said the area development plan would soon be presented in a meeting with representatives of two mining firms, the NPA, the military, local governments and other stakeholders.

Sison, who has yet to meet Lopez, encouraged her to attend the fifth round of formal peace talks scheduled for May 26 to June 2, in the Netherlands.

"I have long admired her position and actions on environmental and other issues. I have long paid attention to what she advocates and does," he said.

He said Lopez's plan "is directly related to the environment, agrarian reform and rural development now being negotiated under the substantive item Comprehensive Agreement on Social and Economic Reforms."

—WITH A REPORT FROM JULIE M. AURELIO INQ

22 April 2017

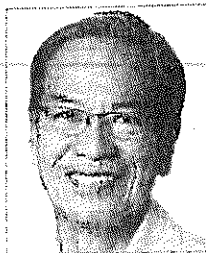


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AT GROUND LEVEL

SATUR C. OCAMPO

Infusing social justice into the mining industry



Two aerial views from a military helicopter, hovering above the mountain terrain in Caraga region last Tuesday, remain vivid – and disturbing – in my mind. One is that of a winding river and its tributaries in Agusan del Sur whose waters are oddly thick brownish-yellow. The other, where the sea nears the edge of a vast range of verdant mountains and gullies in Surigao del Norte, is that of a carved-out area of deep-rust earth.

One immediately senses that the murky river and the scarred mountain-side are aberrations – unhealthy intrusions into the otherwise wholesome environment. The eyesores are in the expansive mining area for nickel and other ores in Claver and adjacent towns of Surigao del Norte. It's there where DENR Secretary Gina Lopez told a prominent congressman that his brother's mining firm had "killed a big mountain." As regards the river's unusual hue, I was told that it was due to chemicals and mineral residues carried downstream from the largely unregulated mining areas in Compostela Valley. That combination practically renders the river unfit for human, fishery or agricultural use.

The destructive impact of large-scale and irresponsible mining was again made clear to me on that helicopter ride. Me, on a military helicopter? Well, I was one of three newspaper columnists who got invited by Secretary Lopez to join her recently as she visited two mining sites in Mindanao. These were the Philsaga Mining Corp. in Bunawan, Agusan del Sur and the Manila Mining Corp. in Placer, Surigao del Norte. Both mines principally produced gold.

We also visited a barangay in Claver (Hayanggabon) to witness the launching of the DENR's Biochar Community Enterprise Project. This is a part of Lopez's Area Development Initiative for the mined-over areas in Caraga. The biochar project aims to mobilize communities to rejuvenate the lands left barren by abandoned mines, rendering them tillable again and growing food crops, as well as trees and other vegetation. This allows the people to earn and be productive, and eventually create and manage ecotourism sites.

Appreciating what I wrote in this space on Feb. 18 (*Refocus mining industry to domestic priorities*) Secretary Lopez invited me to join her field visit "to get an actual feel of the situation on the ground." She said it was important that the information reaching the people should not only come from her – which she acknowledged might be perceived as biased – "but from media practitioners who support our environmental causes."

What made me accept with alacrity was what she wrote further: "We, at the DENR, present a platform to effect change and an opportunity to do what is right to make sure future generations will continue to enjoy our precious natural resources, anchored on the principle of social justice and the common good."

She only gets involved in a project, she says, if there is a commitment to social justice. Thus, she has been enjoining the mining firms to share a bigger part of their huge profits with the communities affected by their operations. Area development plans have been drawn

up to implement this objective. During that day-long trip, using a private plane, Lopez took us to a side trip in Davao City where she spent an hour meeting with a representative of the CPP-NPA to ask for the latter's support for her social-justice-oriented projects. She received a positive response. (None of us journalists was present.)

I was also curious to find out the difference between an active mining firm that has passed an audit of its operations, such as the Philsaga Mining, and another firm that has been temporarily shut down but maintained for 15 years – the Manila Mining Corp., partly owned by Lepanto Mines.

Based on that audit, Lopez had ordered the cancellation of the contracts/permits of 23 operating mines, the suspension for six months of five others, and the cancellation of the contracts on 75 projects that had not yet started. The reason for such orders was that the mining firms had violated environmental laws, which the DENR is mandated to enforce. The 75 new projects cancelled, Lopez avers, are all located in watersheds, which should never be allowed because they threaten further widespread environmental despoliation, as has repeatedly happened over the decades.

The Chamber of Mines of the Philippines has protested and blocked Lopez's confirmation by the Commission on Appointments. (The chamber continues its opposition even as President Duterte has reappointed her.) Meantime, the affected firms have appealed to the Chief Executive to nullify her orders, complaining that their right to due process has been violated. Consequently Duterte directed the Mining Industry Coordinating Council (MICC) to review Lopez's orders; she and Finance Secretary Carlos Dominguez Jr. are its co-chairs.

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OCAMPO From page 9

Controversy continues to swirl within the MICC. Finance Undersecretary Bayani Agabin, who substitutes for Dominguez, questions the validity of Lopez's orders because the audit on which they were based didn't comply with Executive Order 79. But Lopez asserts that the audit was done according to the DENR's mandate and functions and not under Executive Order 79, which was issued in 2012 and never implemented. Lopez also avers that the MICC findings

after a review will only be recommendatory, the final decision being that of the President.

Both at the Philsaga and the Manila Mining visits, Lopez focused concern on the conditions of the mine tailings ponds. (These are large dug-out fortified reservoirs for the waste produced in processing the ores. The waste is usually toxic, although it could be treated/detoxified at huge financial cost before being allowed to be released into rivers, streams, or into the sea.) Historically, severe disasters in mining areas have been caused mainly by tailings ponds that spill over or burst.

Although the audit team deemed Philsaga's tailings pond to be safe, Lopez got the firm to agree to further raise the dam's height to further protect the surrounding communities from potential disaster. As for Manila Mining, which had two cases of tailings pond problems in the 1990s, Lopez advised it to take appropriate safeguards before granting it a new permit to operate again.

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ONLINE NEWS

22 APRIL 2017

Armed Force Western Command now in full alert

From Update Philippines (Apr 20): Armed Force Western Command now in full alert



Armed Forces of the Philippine Western Command (WESCOM) is now on heightened alert. The military command also activated Joint Task Unit Coron to make sure its area of responsibility is free from any terrorist activities.

Joint Task Unit Coron is composed of the Marines, Navy, Air Force, Philippine National Police and Philippine Coast Guard personnel to oversee security operations in the area purposely to prevent kidnapping activities.

WESCOM said it is now on heightened alert to ensure that peace and security, and the Palaweños are protected from terrorist acts. "WESCOM is now intensifying target hardening on probable targets for kidnap for ransom."

"Maritime Patrols on sea lanes of communication and mobility corridors have been intensified to deter KFRG from conducting kidnapping activities especially in known tourist destinations. Random checkpoints, mobile patrols and AFP visibility in places of convergence have been initiated for public safety," WESCOM said.

It is also coordinating with the resort owners, national police and Philippine Coast Guard "for collaborative and synergistic actions to deter KFRG incidents in the province."

"We call on the people of Palawan to remain vigilant, calm and are encourage to report any suspicious looking individuals to the nearest AFP and PNP stations for appropriate action. The key to a secure and safe Palawan is the collaborative and synergistic actions of all stakeholders," WESCOM said.

<http://www.update.ph>

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Troops find abandoned Abu Sayyaf camp in Basilan

From the Philippine Star (Apr 20): Troops find abandoned Abu Sayyaf camp in Basilan



Troops found the abandoned camp while on a tracking operation against the bandit group. Westmincom, released, file

ZAMBOANGA CITY, Philippines — Government troops seized an Abu Sayyaf camp during operations Sunday in the hinterland of Sumisip town in Basilan, a military official said Thursday.

The ground forces also recovered assorted war materiel and camouflage attire belonging to the Abu Sayyaf group in the nearby town of Maluso on the same day, said Western Mindanao Command (Westmincom) chief Lt. Gen. Carlito Galvez Jr.

He said the elements of the 68th Infantry Battalion under Joint Task Force Basilan chief Col. Juvymax Uy were on a tracking operation when they discovered the Abu Sayyaf lair at Barangay Cabcaban, Sumisip town Sunday afternoon.

Galvez said the troops reported the camp was hastily abandoned by the Abu Sayyaf militants who detected the approaching soldiers.

The government troops initially encountered the Abu Sayyaf in the same area on April 11. Eight militia members were killed and 11 others — six soldiers and five militiamen — were wounded in the clash.

The soldiers described the abandoned camp as having three guard posts and 38 bunkers.

Separate forces, composed of Army Rangers and militia also recovered a single-shot rifle, a shotgun, assorted ammunition, a radio transceiver, and battle dress attire (BDA) uniforms belonging to the Abu Sayyaf at uphill Barangay Abong Abong, Maluso town.

Galvez said soldiers from the 15th Special Forces Company also stumbled on an arms cache while tracking down the Abu Sayyaf militants along the mangrove area of Langas Island off Maluso town last Tuesday.

They found an M16 rifle with a magazine, and an M1 Garand with an ammunition clip and a bandolier wrapped in a sack.

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Locals told the troops they noticed two people bringing the sack with the suspicious items.

According to Uy, the civilians also said one of the two had his arm wrapped with a bandage.

The military suspects that the two suspects were among the followers of Abu Sayyaf group sub-leader Furuji Indama, who was himself wounded in the encounter Tuesday last week at Barangay Cabcaban.

<http://www.philstar.com>

ASG leader Radullan Sahiron tired of life on the run

From the Philippine News Agency (Apr 20): ASG leader Radullan Sahiron tired of life on the run

One of the hunters of Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) leader Radullan Sahiron has confirmed the willingness of the bandit chief to surrender due to old age, fatigue and incessant military pressure.

This was disclosed by Joint Task Force commander Brig. Gen. Cirilito Sobejana in an interview Wednesday.

"There is no definite date yet for his surrender but he has expressed willingness to surrender and as reported to us, he is weak, tired and weary due to their constant movement from one place to another as our focused military operation against them is unceasing due to our constant rotation of our forces," said Sobejana in Filipino.

Sobejana declined to identify the ASG chief's emissary but said the latter is a close and respected friend of the bandit chieftain.

He also declined to give additional details as efforts are still ongoing to ensure that Sahiron's surrender will materialize.

"We believe that once Radullan surfaces (and surrenders), his followers and other (leaders) will follow," the military official added.

Should this develop, 70 percent of the ASG problem will be solved, the Joint Task Force Sulu commander stressed.

One of the conditions set by the ASG leader is that the Philippine government will not turn him over to the US government.

Sahiron is the leading figurehead of the ASG in Sulu after most of the founding leaders of the group were killed.

The US Federal Bureau of Investigation has set a USD1 million reward for the capture of Sahiron.

Sobejana said that one of the conditions they set is that the ASG chief should also convince his followers to surrender also.

The total number of surrendered Abu Sayyaf members has reached 16, following the order of President Rodrigo Duterte to finish off the bandit group in six-month period. The deadline will lapse on June 30.

There are over 40 Abu Sayyaf members who have been killed in the island provinces of Basilan, Sulu, and Tawi-Tawi since January.

<http://www.pna.gov.ph>

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Abu Sayyaf member surrenders in Basilan

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A member of the dreaded Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) has surrendered to the military in the island province of Basilan, the Western Mindanao Command (Westmincom) announced on Thursday.

Lt. Gen. Carlito Galvez Jr., Westmincom chief, identified the Abu Sayyaf surrenderee as Nasser Sagap alias Sinbad, 20, a resident of Barangay Limbu Upas, Tipo-Tipo.

Galvez said Sagap is known to be under the group of ASG leader Furuji Indama.

Galvez said Sagap surrendered to the troops of the 18th Infantry Battalion under the Joint Task Force Basilan at around 2 p.m. Wednesday in Barangay Bohe Pahu, Ungkaya Pukan.

He said Sagap turned over a caliber .30 M1 Garand rifle with one clip and four rounds of ammunition.

"This only manifests that our troops are already gaining grounds with the combat operations launched by the units and the growing support of the local government and the people in Basilan. The Abu Sayyaf bandits are now compelled to leave their bailiwicks as we work closely with the local government and our partners to turn the strongholds of the Abu Sayyaf into peaceful communities." Galvez said.

"We want to work for peace without the use of arms and prevent bloodshed and in this light, we are encouraging other Abu Sayyaf bandits, as Filipinos, to lay down their arms and join the government in working for a peaceful and progressive Mindanao," he added.

Last week, 11 Abu Sayyaf members from the southernmost province of Tawi- Tawi also surrendered to the military. A rehabilitation program is being prepared for them.

Seventeen Abu Sayyaf bandits have surrendered to the government since January.

Galvez said the ageing and most senior leader of the Abu Sayyaf, Radullan Sahiron, has also sent surrender feelers to the military.

<http://www.pna.gov.ph>

2 freed soldiers given more time with family to recover from trauma

From the Philippine News Agency (Apr 20): 2 freed soldiers given more time with family to recover from trauma

The 10th Infantry Division is giving the two soldiers released by the New People's Army (NPA) more time with their families to help them recover from physical and psychological trauma.

Capt. Rhyan Batchar, 10th ID spokesperson, said they are glad that the NPA "has come to their senses and decided to release the two abducted soldiers."

Batchar noted the communist rebels "treacherously" abducted Sgt Solaiman Calocop and Pfc Samuel Garay of the 39th Infantry Battalion last February 2 while the peace talks were ongoing and the unilateral ceasefires still in effect. Batchar said the released soldiers were immediately brought to the Matanao municipal hall and presented to Mayor Vincent Fernandez.

The two were later brought to Camp Panacan Station Hospital in Davao City for physical and medical evaluation and debriefing, he added.

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