

*Army Vision: By 2728, a world-class Army that is a source of national pride*



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**27 January 2017**

**Friday**


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Test case vs drug war



PH's growth rate leads Asia for 2016

PH's growth rate leads Asia for 2016

PH's growth rate leads Asia for 2016

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PH's growth rate leads Asia for 2016

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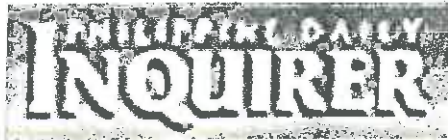


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**TODAY'S WEATHER FORECAST | JANUARY 27, 2017 | FRIDAY**





PHILIPPINE AREA OF RESPONSIBILITY (PAR)

MONYNEAN HIGH-PRESSURE AFFECTING LUZON AND VISAYAS (As of 5:00 PM - Jan. 26, 2017)

<b>SUNRISE</b>	<b>SUNSET</b>
6:25 AM	5:53 PM
<b>MOONRISE</b>	<b>MOONSET</b>
5:32 AM	5:17 PM
<b>LAST QUARTER</b>	<b>NEW MOON</b>
JAN 26 5:10 AM	JAN 26 1:01 PM
<b>LOW TIDE</b>	<b>HIGH TIDE</b>
MANILA SOUTH	
6:25 AM	5:12 PM
4.50 Meter	1.00 Meter

	JAN 26	JAN 27	JAN 28	JAN 29	JAN 30	JAN 31
<b>METRO MANILA</b>	22-31 °C	25-31 °C	20-26 °C	20-27 °C	24-30 °C	26-30 °C
<b>TUGUEGARAO</b>	19-28 °C	21-29 °C	25-30 °C	25-30 °C	24-30 °C	25-31 °C
<b>LADAG</b>	19-30 °C	22-31 °C	25-31 °C	26-32 °C	24-31 °C	26-30 °C
<b>BAGUIO</b>	14-22 °C	15-21 °C	25-30 °C	25-26 °C	24-32 °C	24-31 °C
<b>SBMA/CLARK</b>	22-31 °C	26-30 °C	24-30 °C	25-30 °C		

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27 January 2017

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

Page: 1

# PH economy leads in Asia

6.8% full-year growth tops China's 6.7%,  
Vietnam's 6.2%

By **CHINO S. LEYCO**

**T**he Philippine economy became the fastest in Asia despite slower expansion pace in the final three months of the year, the National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA) said yesterday.

The country's gross domestic product (GDP) grew by 6.6 percent in October to December, slower compared with 7.0 percent in the previous quarter, and 6.9 percent in the first-semester in 2016, data from the Philippine Statistics Authority showed.

The fourth-quarter GDP brought the country's full-year economic growth to 6.8 percent, the fastest since 2013, and placing at the higher-end of the government's 6.0 percent **►8**

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## PH economy leads...

to 7.0 percent target range

The full-year expansion of China is 6.7 percent, while Vietnam's is 6.2 percent.

According to Socioeconomic Planning Secretary Ernesto M. Pernia, the growth was driven by higher investment and consumer spending, while the slowdown was due to the transition of government.

Pernia also said investors adopted a "wait-and-see" attitude during the October to December period, noting "last quarter growth of an election year is usually slower than the first half."

Still, Pernia said the country's expansion last year was a testament that the economy remained robust and is growing at a healthy and steady pace.

The 2016 growth also brought the country's seven-year moving average of real GDP growth rate to 6.3 percent, the highest since 1978.

Presidential spokesman Ernesto Abella welcomed the country's strong GDP growth and voiced confidence this could be sustained "in the long run."

"The last quarter of an election year is usually weak with the government transition. However, in our case, it has actually improved," Abella said in a Palace news conference.

The latest economic figure is "a testament that our economy remains robust and is growing at a healthy and steady rate," Abella added.

"Overall, we believe that the target of 6.5 to 7.5 for 2017 is highly likely and that our strong economic performance is likely to be sustainable in the long run," he said.

For this year and beyond, Pernia is confident that the economy will continue to grow at a robust pace, noting "the 6.5 to 7.5 percent target [for this year] is highly likely. After 2017, we

expect growth to expand further by 7 to 8 percent."

He identified risks to the country's growth, including typhoons and extreme weather events like policy shifts overseas, especially in the United States.

Under the Duterte administration plan, the government seeks to grow the economy by 50 percent in real terms during its six years in office to lift six million people from poverty and bring the Philippines to upper middle income status.

### Main economic drivers

National Statistician Lisa Grace S. Bersales said that manufacturing, trade, and real estate, renting and business activities were the main drivers of growth for the fourth quarter.

The industry sector was the fastest at 7.6 percent, up from the 6.5 percent in the fourth quart of 2015, but services decelerated to 7.4 percent from 7.8 percent.

On the other hand, agriculture

maintained a negative trajectory, falling by 1.1 percent from a 0.2 percent drop.

Meanwhile, Pernia said the government saw a significant jump in visa application at the Philippine embassy in China, noting the number of applicants tripled following President Duterte's friendlier policy with Beijing.

"Chinese tourists are going to be coming in droves," Pernia said.

Pernia said tourism would also get a boost from the country's hosting of the 65th Miss Universe pageant and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations meetings.

The Department of Tourism recorded 5.4 million international arrivals from January to November last year, up by 12 percent from the comparable period in 2015. Visitor receipts grew 3.24 percent to ₱211 billion.

### Peso has 'muted' reaction

Meanwhile, Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas (BSP) Governor Amando M. Tetangco Jr. noted the subdued opening trade of the peso-US dollar market following the government's announce-

ment of the 6.8 percent full-year GDP growth.

The peso opened quietly enough at ₱49.65/\$1 versus Wednesday's closing of ₱49.81.

Tetangco said the GDP numbers were in line with market expectations. But he said "market reaction in the spot foreign exchange has so far been muted."

He also noted that domestic demand remains "robust" and the government's "thrust on infrastructure spending should provide a solid base for the economy to meet the 2017 growth target" of 6.5 percent to 7.5 percent.

"The inflation outlook also remains manageable (so) there is no real pressing need to deviate from current stance of monetary policy," added Tetangco. "That said, we continue to monitor external developments that may affect our growth dynamics and financial markets. We will adjust policy levers as and when necessary." (With reports from Lee C. Chipongian and Genalyn D. Kabiling)

07 January 2017



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# Lacson video shows 'tokhang for ransom'

By MARVIN SY and EDU PUNAY

Dressed in civilian clothes, the policemen entered an office and planted illegal drugs in the desk drawers of employees. Then a "raiding team" came in.

The scenes were from a series of closed-circuit television (CCTV) footage that Sen. Panfilo Lacson showed as an example of how some policemen were engaging in "tokhang for ransom" or extortion cases under the guise of the war against drugs.

At the Supreme Court yesterday, a survivor and the families of four drug suspects killed in a drug operation in Payatas, Quezon City in August last year sought a writ of *amparo* and temporary protection order (TPO) preventing police officers from entering their area.

A writ of *amparo* is a remedy available to any person whose right to life, liberty and security is violated or threatened with violation by an unlawful act or omission of a public official or employee, or of a private individual or entity.

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## Lacson

From Page 1

Lacson said the incident captured on CCTV took place on Oct. 26, 2016 at a location he declined to disclose in public because the victims were afraid to report the matter.

In one of the clips, a man carrying a backpack was seen entering the office and planting what Lacson said was "shabu" in the drawers of the employees.

Shortly after, the "raiding team" came in, causing a commotion among the employees. Two other clips showed the suspects hitting some of the employees.

The final clip showed the suspects rounding up the employees inside a small room.

Lacson said the suspects even stole various items worth P7 million and then asked the owner of the business to cough up another P2 million.

"These are SOTG Special Operations Task Group. There are officers here and not just PNCOs (police non-commissioned officers)," Lacson said.

"They (victims) are so scared that they don't want to complain. Trust is something you should earn. It cannot be demanded. You cannot just tell the victims to report (the incident). You should show them that you are able to address their problems. *Kakalat 'yan eh,*" Lacson said.

He said there were more extortion cases involving members of the PNP and he could prove them.

Lacson, chairman of the Senate committee on public order and dangerous drugs, presented the footage during an inquiry into the kidnap-slay of Korean businessman Jee Ick-joo.

The Korean is believed to have been a "tokhang for ransom" victim as policemen allegedly demanded money from his family to avoid getting charged for illegal drugs.

Lacson said the case of Jee, which started as an extortion attempt and ended with his murder, was unprecedented.

He said there were other cases that were similar in nature but did not lead to the deaths of the victims.

The Movement for the Restoration of Peace and Order head Teresita Ang See told Lacson there were at least 12 cases involving rogue policemen, whose victims were all from mainland China.

Lacson detailed two of the cases, one which took place on Oct. 24, 2016 where the victim was taken from his home and brought to Pasay City by armed policemen.

The policemen asked the wife of the victim for P500,000 but because she could only produce P200,000, they charged him with violation of Republic Act 9165 and held him without bail.

Another case involved a certain Xiao Xin Min, a 46-year-old Chinese national who was kidnapped by eight heavily armed members of the PNP.

A total of P3 million ransom was demanded by the suspects, P1 million of which was paid by the victim's brother who flew in from China with the cash.

Despite the payoff, Lacson said the victim was charged with an undisclosed case.

Lacson said the victims were reluctant to come forward out of fear of reprisal from the police.

"I said trust must be restored first. There was a time the Filipino-Chinese community, they were reporting kidnapping cases. But now we don't have this anymore. So we need to restore trust before we can solve this issue," Lacson said.

He said that administrative cases could be pursued but without any complainants, no criminal case can proceed.

Lacson told PNP chief Director General Ronald dela Rosa that it would take time to earn the trust of the civilian populace, especially the victims, and so he and his men would have to be proactive in dealing with these cases.

"Find conduits, *hanap kayo ng padrino*, how do you convince them to complain and solve it? That's the only time that you will earn the trust of the people to voluntarily complain because something is being done. But once they do not see any results, they really won't trust you," he said.

Lacson said the police force was being ruined by these incidents.

He said the Jee case was indeed tragic and unfortunate, but enough for the police force to lose public trust and respect.

"Amid these appalling circumstances, we must ask ourselves: do our men in uniform live by the honor and pride of their police badges and outfits? Or should our people live in horror and fear, unsure of their safety, at the sight of police officers in their neighborhood and even in their homes?" Lacson said.

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### SC asked: Stop 'Oplan Tokhang'

In the first case to challenge the so-called "Oplan Tokhang" after seven months of the Duterte administration, petitioners led by Efren Morillo,

the survivor in the operation who is set to testify in the murder and frustrated murder charges against police officials, also sought issuance of a temporary restraining order (TRO) stopping the implementation of the anti-illegal drug operations of the police station covering their barangay.

They likewise asked the high court to direct the PNP to produce and allow inspection and reproduction of intelligence and surveillance reports, police blotters, coordination, video and all other official and

unofficial documents involving police operations conducted on Aug. 21, 2016.

The petition was filed a day after Chief Justice Ma. Lourdes Sereno revealed that the perception of the rule of law in the country had diminished due to unresolved killings of drug suspects.

Petitioners said they sought relief from the SC to prevent further violation of their constitutional and human rights to life, liberty and security.

Morillo was joined by the families of slain drug suspects Marcelo Daa Jr., Raffy Cabo, Anthony Comendo and Jessie Cule in filing the petition through the legal assistance

of the Center for International Law (CIL).

Named respondents in the petition were Dela Rosa, Quezon City Police District director Senior Supt. Guillermo Eleazar, QCPD Police Station 6 commander Supt. Lito Patay and several other policemen, namely Senior Insp. Emil Garcia, Police Officer 3 Allan Formilleza, POs 1 James Aggarao and Melchor Navisaga.

In filing the *amparo* petition,

ing prepared against the police officials.

The 28-year-old vegetable vendor also cited the filing of charges of direct assault upon agents of persons in authority against him, which he insisted were trumped up allegations and clearly part of persecution by the perpetrators.

"The other petitioners suffer the same violation of their right to life, liberty and security. They are terrified for their own lives and the lives of their family members, relatives and loved ones because the perpetrators keep returning to intimidate and harass them into silence," the petition stressed.

"They are violated in their own homes because the perpetrators freely barge in. They could not go to work because they are afraid to leave their children alone in their houses. Their lives are at a standstill," petitioners alleged.

Petitioners further pointed out that the policemen in the actual operation - Garcia, Formilleza, Aggarao and Navisaga - were members of a police community precinct (PCP) that did not have operational jurisdiction in Barangay Payatas.

They alleged that the policemen hid this fact by fabricating death certificates of the four slain suspects showing that the incident took place in another barangay under their PCP's jurisdiction.

The victims, according to CIL lawyers, were garbage collectors and scavengers in the dumpsite.

The CIL added in a statement they were preparing a more comprehensive petition to cover the nationwide scope of Oplan Tokhang.

Dela Rosa challenged the petitioners to prove in court the four people who were killed in that police operation were not drug personalities.

The alleged drug suspects

died after they allegedly fought the arresting officers. "As I have said, I will not defend the wrongdoings of policemen," the PNP chief said.

He stressed not all anti-drug operations were the same as that of SPO3 Ricky Sta. Isabel's case involving Jee.

Dela Rosa said Jee's kidnapping and subsequent killing right inside PNP headquarters in Quezon City was an isolated case.

Eleazar said they would reopen the investigation and coordinate with the PNP-Internal Affairs Service (IAS) on the case and would abide by whatever the decision of the SC would be.

The QCPD chief did not defend the operatives but said he was inclined to believe the veracity of the report made by his men on what transpired that day.

"All of these could be subjected to investigation. I was not there... The presumption of regularity in operations is there unless... there is evidence (that there is something wrong with it), then it will not be tolerated. That is our official line," he added.

Official police records showed the four named operatives were conducting Oplan Tokhang in the residence of Daa when the shootout ensued at 9:48 p.m.

Police said the suspects opened fire when they noticed the presence of operatives in the area, which led to their neutralization.

The fifth suspect, Morillo, was able to escape and seek medical assistance at a hospital in Montalban where he was eventually arrested and transferred to East Avenue Medical Center.

845-8555 Local 5285 5295

However, there was a discrepancy in terms of the place of occurrence, as the police said the shootout ensued at Group 9, Area B in Barangay Bagong Silangan but it also said in the same report that the encounter happened at Daa's residence in Barangay Payatas B.

The QCPD later revised this initial report and said that the residence of Daa was actually in Bagong Silangan.

Still, both barangays are under the jurisdiction of the Batasan Police Station 6 of the QCPD.

Eleazar raised the possibility that the operatives were actually not operating under Oplan Tokhang but were conducting regular police operations at the time.

- With Emmanuel Tupas, Romina Cabrera, Rhodina Villanueva, Alexis Romero

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## *7 troopers hurt in clash with mayor's followers*

By JOHN UNSON

**MAGUINDANAO** - Seven soldiers were wounded yesterday in a firefight with the group of a fugitive mayor included in President Duterte's list of narco-politicians in Ampatuan town in Maguindanao.

Senior Supt Agustin Tello, Maguindanao's provincial police director, confirmed to **The STAR** that seven Army men who helped search for Ampatuan Mayor Rasul Sangki in the hinterlands of Barangay Salman were wounded in the clash.

The barangay is in the southwestern part of Ampatuan, second district of

Maguindanao, a short distance from the scene of the Nov. 23, 2009 Maguindanao massacre.

Hostilities in Barangay Salman erupted when followers of Sangki, armed with M-14 and M-16 assault rifles and 40-millimeter grenade launchers, opened fire at combined Criminal Investigation and Detection Group men and Army troopers who encircled their hideout to serve a warrant of arrest.

Four of Sangki's followers were killed while three others were wounded in the ensuing encounter.

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

## Fighting erupts as CIDG, Army serve search warrants against Maguindanao town mayor

Philippine News Agency

AMPATUAN, Maguindanao -- Firefight erupted early Thursday in the mountain areas of Ampatuan, Maguindanao while government forces were serving search warrants against a town mayor and several others, police and military officials said.

Superintendent Jimmy Daza, chief of Criminal Investigation and Detection Group (CIDG-ARMM), joint police and military forces were serving warrants of arrest against suspected illegal drug personalities in the mountains of Barangay Saniag, Ampatuan in Maguindanao.

"The operation is still on-going," Daza said in a phone interview.

Senior Supt. Agustin Tello, Maguindanao police provincial director said that included in the search warrant is Mayor Rasul Sangki of Ampatuan, Maguindanao who was named by President Duterte in August last year as among the narco-politicians in the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM).

Sangki, along with other local executives, denied he is into illegal drugs.

At least four armed men were killed and three others injured when they resisted the serving of search warrants issued by a local court.

The Army's 6th Infantry Division provided air support through its Huey helicopters and MG-520 attack helicopters to ground troops.

Several families from the Indigenous Peoples have fled to safer grounds, disaster officials said.

Daza vowed to provide more details of the anti-drug operation once report is completed.

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<http://www.philstar.com/>

## Ex-soldier, teacher killed in altercation

(The Philippine Star) - January 26, 2017 - 12:00am

LEGAZPI CITY, Philippines – A retired soldier and a teacher were killed after an altercation in Guinobatan, Albay on Tuesday night.

The fatalities were identified as former Army soldier Apollo Pallan, 58, and Reynato Nares of the Quitago Elementary School.

Initial investigation showed Nares stabbed Pallan as he was going home. Although wounded, Pallan managed to run to his house to get his gun and shot Nares.

The two men were pronounced dead on arrival at the JB Duran Memorial District Hospital.

Prior to the incident, Pallan reportedly confronted Nares regarding motorcycle-riding men coming to the teacher's house even during the wee hours of the morning.

Police said Nares was on the drug watchlist, but refused to surrender. – Francis Elevado, Celso Amo, Cet Dematera

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# THE DAILY INQUIRER

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Devotees reach out to touch the image of Saint Sebastian while it is being returned to the Lumban Church in Laguna province after a fluvial procession. —CHRIS QUINTANA/CONTRIBUTOR

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# AFP eyes buying China's bendable rifles

The Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) is now looking at buying specialized weapons from China, including bendable rifles that can shoot around corners and small remote-controlled

By MICHAEL PUNONGBAYAN

tank-like vehicles that can approach and detonate bombs.

Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana, speaking to reporters in a press briefing at Camp Aguinaldo yesterday, appeared quite excited at the thought of acquiring for the AFP such advanced weapons that are usually seen only in science fiction movies and video games.

China has given the Philippines a \$14-million grant to purchase new equipment for the country's military.

Lorenzana said the Department of National Defense has submitted a list of some items to procure, including fast boats that can be used against the Abu Sayyaf group and drones that can be used by tactical units.

But he appears more excited at the thought of buying bendable long firearms that can shoot around corners without exposing the shooter.

"The rifle that can be bended so the shooter's head would not be exposed, the one with a screen here and looks like this," Lorenzana, a retired military general, said while describing the tactical firearm that can be used in hostage situations. "We're trying to get some of those. Maybe it will be very useful to us in our urban warfare against the terrorists. We can use those in Metro Manila."

Lorenzana is also excited at the thought of buying an anti-bomb tank-like, unmanned armored vehicle for the AFP.

"We do not have that yet. Some countries in the Asian region had that in the past 10 years, we don't. We still let our people go near bombs," he said.

The \$14-million grant from China, roughly P720 million, is not much but is there for the taking with no strings attached "so we might as well take advantage," he added.

Apart from the specialized equipment from China, Lorenzana said the Philippines would also be buying weapons from Russia, including the specialized sniper rifles.

"The Russian defense ministry has offered us a lot of things—ships, submarines, aircraft and helicopters. We will look into that because we should buy in accordance with our modernization plan. I told our people in charge with modernization to buy smart," the defense chief said.

"We should be wise in buying the equipment we need. It should last long, has good quality and would suit the needs of our people on the ground because President (Duterte) also reminded me to involve the people who will actually use the equipment. We cannot just buy the equipment and ram them down their throat and tell them to use this even if they don't like it," he added.

Lorenzana said Russia has offered to sell submarines but the government is still deciding if the country really needs such materiel, instead of just buying for the sake of telling the world that the Philippines has a submarine.

But he said the defence department is evaluating Russia's offer to sell some advanced diesel-electric submarines to determine if these are essential for AFP modernization and if the country can afford to acquire and maintain the materiel.

The Philippines is the only country in the region that has no submarine fleet. Vietnam, Malaysia, Indonesia and Thailand have their own.

The acquisition of the diesel-electric class submarines was proposed under Horizon II of the AFP modernization program. The Philippine Navy has also

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## Lorenzana: US to build facilities in Phl air bases

By JAIME LAUDE

The military alliance between the Philippines and the US remains strong, with the Pentagon indicating it will soon start constructing some facilities on three key military air bases in the country, Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana said.

In a forum at Camp Aguinaldo yesterday, Lorenzana said the facilities would be built at Lumbia Air Base in Cagayan de Oro City, Basa Air Base in Flordablanca, Pampanga and Bautista Air Base in Puerto Princesa City, Palawan.

Although President Duterte remains critical of the US, he is aware of the Pentagon plans and has declared that he would honor all agreements entered into by the previous administration, including the enhanced defense cooperation agreement (EDCA).

Under EDCA, the US military is allowed to set up

certain facilities within key Armed Forces of the Philippines facilities around the country.

"EDCA is still on and according to Pentagon they will start construction of some facilities on EDCA-chosen camps," Lorenzana said.

Duterte's criticisms earlier led to the scrapping of the joint PHIBLEX (Amphibious Landing Exercises) and CARAT (Cooperation Afloat Readiness Training).

Lorenzana explained that the forthcoming US military construction activities are in accordance with EDCA provisions forged in accordance with the Mutual Defense Treaty (MDT).

The facilities, when finished, would accommodate US servicemen on deployment in the country.

Lorenzana said the US is also expected to upgrade the airfields of the three air bases.

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# EDCA still in effect; US set to build facilities in 3 RP bases



LORENZANA

By Mario J. Mallari

The United States military is expected to start construction of facilities in at least three military bases this year in accordance with the Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement (EDCA)

Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana yes-

terday said the controversial military deal, signed during the administrations of former President Benigno Aquino and ex-US President Barack Obama, is still on.

"EDCA is still on, and according to the Pentagon (US Department of Defense), they will start constructing some facilities in the EDCA-chosen camps - Basa Air Base  
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### From page 1

(Pampanga), Bautista Air Base in Palawan and Lumbia Airport (Cagayan de Oro)," he added.

"I think the first camp that they will develop these facilities is in Basa," he stressed.

The defense agreement with the US was put forward by the former Obama administration as part of its pivot to Asia which programmed a stronger presence of American forces in the Asia-Pacific region - apparently to address growing Chinese military influence in the region.

The Philippines entered into the agreement amid the incursions of the Chinese within its 200 nautical miles exclusive economic zone in the South China Sea. Beijing had built structures on seven artificial reefs in the disputed territory.

Manila even filed a formal complaint against China and subsequently won a ruling by the United Nations Permanent Court of Arbitration last August.

Lorenzana said President Rodrigo Duterte, who had threatened to scrap the deal, is aware of the plans. "What he said was, 'We will honor all agreements that were entered into by the previous government. So it's okay with him.'"

Under the Duterte administration, the Defense chief stressed the focus of cooperation had shifted to humanitarian assistance and counter-terrorism, among others.

"I think it's concrete, what the

Americans since we are still military allies, and we'll just see, we'll see," Lorenzana said.

He added possible facilities that the Americans will set up are runways, buildings for their troops and storage areas for their equipment.

While construction is expected this year, Lorenzana could not give an exact date on the start of the construction as it is dependent on the US budgetary allocations.

"We don't know, it depends on the US because they couldn't appropriate (money) allegedly. That's what they told us last year, they couldn't appropriate money until the issue of EDCA is ruled by the Supreme Court, so the Supreme Court ruled last year... and it took them so many months until October last year, also for the funding to be approved," he said.

But there's already a "go signal" for this year, according to the Defense chief.

Meanwhile, Lorenzana said he would sign military agreements with Russia when he accompanies Duterte in his visit to Moscow in April this year.

"One of the things that we will do... we hope to sign MoU (memorandum of understanding). It is a military-to-military engagement with the Russians that will allow visitations, observations. Visitation of troops and maybe, ships coming here," he added.

"They could observe our exercises, we could also observe their exercises

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## US stand on China worries Lorenzana

DEFENSE Secretary Delfin yesterday Lorenzana said he is concerned about the pronouncement of the Trump administration that the US will prevent China from taking over territory in international waters in the South China Sea.

He said the Philippines might be "caught in the middle."

"In the first place, they (Chinese) are already there. How can they (Americans) prevent them from going there since they (Chinese) are already there," he said.

On Monday, White House spokesman Sean Spicer said the Trump administration is going to make sure that US interests in the disputed area is protected. He said the US will defend international territories from being

taken over by the one country. Earlier, Secretary of State nominee Rex Tillerson said China should not be allowed access to islands it has built in the contested South China Sea.

The Department of Foreign Affairs said it will seek clarification on the statements before making any move.

"Naghihintay kami ng mas maliwanag na posisyon, how they will implement it. Will be waiting for their clarification bago tayo magsabi ng definite terms ano nag susunod nating gagawin. Dapat pang linawin kung paano ito gagawin ng US," DFA spokesman Charles Jose said.

China is occupying several areas in the South China, including newly land-reclaimed reefs. The Philippine government

recently sent a note verbale to China for installing weapon systems on these reefs.

China claims almost the entire South China Sea through which some \$5 trillion in goods pass every year. Other claimants aside from the Philippines are Vietnam, Malaysia, Brunei and Taiwan.

Lorenzana said the National Security Council will have to discuss the issue if and when the Americans implement the pronouncement. "We will react accordingly when the time comes, when they start to do that," he said.

Nevertheless, he said that Philippine government will try to maintain its "neutrality" in dealing with the US and China. – *Victor Reyes and Ashzel Hachero*

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CENTURIES-OLD TRADITION

# BE READY TO GET WET IN THIS LAGUNA TOWN FEST IN HONOR OF PATRON

## SAINT OF COPS, SOLDIERS

By **Kimmy Baraoidan**  
@KBaraoidanINQ

**LUMBAN, LAGUNA**—Every year, on the eve of the town fiesta on Jan. 20, residents of this laid-back town in Laguna province honor their patron saint, Sebastian the Martyr, through a procession along the Pagsanjan River.

After the afternoon Mass at San Sebastian Chapel, townsfolk carry the statue of Saint Sebastian down to the Pagsanjan River where an ornate boat awaits. The statue is placed on the boat, with some devotees boarding the vessel.

The boat navigates the river until it reaches the edge of town, where the statue is unloaded and carried to the parish church.

Locals douse the statue and themselves with water the whole time—from the chapel to the river and from the river to the church. Some use a *tabo* (dipper), and others pails, while children ready their plastic water guns.

A few residents outside their homes even splash water on passersby. Passing vehicles are not safe from water splashing and spraying.

### Spanish-era beginnings

For the procession this year, policemen, instead of devotees, were tasked to carry the statue of Saint Sebastian, the patron saint of athletes, soldiers and policemen.

Toward the end of the procession, water coming from a fire truck rained down on the townspeople.

Lumban's original patron saint was Saint Francis of Assisi. The town's parish church was

the first stone church built outside Manila by Franciscan missionaries in the 1570s, said Mel Anthony Liboon, vice president for ministry of the Parish Pastoral Council.

Legend has it that a statue of Saint Sebastian was washed ashore and was found on the riverbanks of Lumban. Its source was traced to nearby Pagsanjan town, so locals

brought the statue back to Pagsanjan. However, the statue was again found in Lumban, and since then, the town adopted Saint Sebastian as its patron saint.

Some 439 years later, Lumban, through the river procession, still commemorates the story of how the image of Saint Sebastian ended up in town.

Glaire Abayari, 49, head of a group of devotees, said more and more people join the procession and festivities every year.

### Lupi

The culmination of the town's weeklong commemoration of their patron saint happens every last Sunday of January, which is called the "lupi" (to fold or to close).

During this day, a fluvial parade takes place. Devotees aboard decorated boats would navigate the Pagsanjan River.

Residents said drowning incidents were reported in past stagings of the lupi. In most instances, victims were drunk or were novice swimmers.

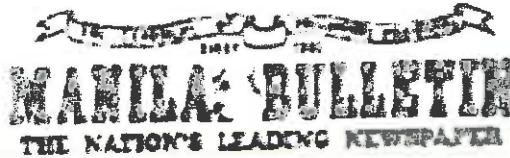
Hermingildo Legisma, 73, hopes that no one will die as they celebrate the lupi on Sunday. "Every year we pray that nobody will be 'claimed' by the river during the lupi," he said.

Legisma believes the lupi is still one of the most traditional and merriest fiestas in Laguna.

"Here, even if you are a stranger, once you enter a household, you will be welcomed and offered food," Legisma said.

"Just come here during the fiesta, and you will not be hungry. Just prepare to get wet, bring extra clothes and be a good sport," he added. INQ

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## Lanao del Sur-based militants linked to ISIS – military

By FRANCIS T. WAKEFIELD

Philippine security forces have found links between terrorist groups based in Lanao del Sur and the Middle-East based ISIS (Islamic State of Iraq and Syria), Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana said yesterday.

Lorenzana said they were able to establish the link between Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) leader Isnilon Hapilon and ISIS after monitoring communications between the two groups.

The defense chief said from his base in Basilan, Hapilon transferred to Lanao del Sur in December of last year, reportedly upon the instruction or "behest" of ISIS to establish a terrorist organization in Central Mindanao.

"That's the report we received, allegedly on the behest of the ISIS people in the Middle East to find out if Central Mindanao is conducive to the establishment of an organization," Lorenzana said.

"According to the report, Basilan and Jolo are too small that's why they can be

easily cornered so they are looking for a bigger area," Lorenzana said.

Meanwhile, the military said a number of Abu Sayyaf fighters and terrorists from the Maute Group were either killed or wounded following air strikes in Butig, Lanao del Sur, Wednesday night.

AFP Public Affairs Office (PAO) chief Marine Col. Major General Carlito Galvez Jr., through the 103rd IB under Army Col. Nixon Fortes, said the military had another major breakthrough in its intensified campaign against terror groups ASG, Maute, and Foreign Terror Groups holed in the hinterlands of Butig following the airstrikes.

Arevalo said the terror groups reportedly sustained major casualty with a number of them dead or seriously wounded due to the air strike and artillery rounds accurately landing on identified locations of the terror groups.

Arevalo said as of press time, ground troops have established foothold and began their assault.

"They are now cautiously advancing to their designated objectives – the

location of Hapilon, his select group, and brothers Abdullah, Omar, and Otto Maute, and possibly other foreigners joining their notorious group," Arevalo said.

"We will await the validated details of the results of this operation as soon as we get confirmations from our troops, now on the ground," he added.

For his part, Galvez said that they will relentlessly pursue these lawless groups and not allow them to thrive in any part of our country to sow terror.

"Your Armed Forces of the Philippines – through the support of our people and local government as shown in this case – will frustrate every attempt to disrupt our normal lives," Galvez said.

After learning about this development, AFP Chief of Staff Gen. Eduardo Año assured ground troops of the AFP's all-out support to them.

"You will have the support you need in all your endeavors in contribution to attain the mission given to us by the Commander in Chief. Let us together end in six months the menace these terror groups bring," Año said.

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## IS trying to establish base in C. Mindanao

By MICHAEL PUNONGBAYAN

The international terrorist group Islamic State or IS is trying to establish a base or a *wilayat* (province) in Central Mindanao by tapping the Abu Sayyaf and rallying the Maute group.

Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana confirmed the information yesterday, adding that IS sent Abu Sayyaf senior leader Isnilon Hapilon to infiltrate the area after noting that Basilan or Sulu is too small to become a base, leading troops to easily get cornered by authorities.

"They now have contact, based on the report that we have received, (Hapilon was sent) to find out if Central Mindanao is more conducive to the establishment of an organization or a Wilayat," Lorenzana said.

He added that aside from securing a bigger area in which to operate, IS is also trying to get the support of the Maute group, which has about 100 members in their stronghold, including some who have become town mayors and owners of a construction company.

The government, he said, is aware of what is happening and is conducting operations in Butig town, Lanao del Sur. Surveillance is also conducted in the vicinity of Lake Lanao.

"We will see to it that they will not be able to establish that kind of organization here," Lorenzana said, as he stressed that the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) is working to ensure this.

According to the information Lorenzana received, Isnilon moved from Basilan to Lanao del Sur sometime in mid-December 2016, bringing with him a small band of people.

The defense chief added that the AFP continues to operate against the Abu Sayyaf and its kidnapping activities, the latest of which happened last week when they took three Indonesian crew of a Malaysian fishing vessel in Jolo.

He stressed though that the Philippines is not the only country in the world that is having problems with IS, pointing out that even large countries Russia and China face the same threat.

The war in the Middle East, he added, is pushing the terrorist group back and forcing many to leave the region.

Lorenzana said the government is doing its best to monitor some Filipinos in the Middle East, especially those perceived to be returning to the country to establish more links to the terrorist group.

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## ISIS seeking caliphate in Lanao del Sur?

BY VICTOR REYES

DEFENSE Secretary Delfin Lorenzana said a Basilan-based senior leader of the Abu Sayyaf has moved to Lanao del Sur for the possible establishment of a caliphate of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria in Central Mindanao.

Lorenzana said the military is exerting efforts to preempt the plan of Isnilon Hapilon who was monitored to have left Basilan

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### ISIS

sometime last December.

"He moved to Central Mindanao allegedly. That's the report that we received. Allegedly, this is on the behest of ISIS in Middle East to find out if Central Mindanao is conducive to the establishment of an organization," he said.

Asked if the development means Hapilon and the Abu Sayyaf have been recognized by the ISIS, Lorenzana said: "In a way, they are recognized by the ISIS."

"It was confirmed in December when Isnilon Hapilon left Basilan and went to Lanao sometime in the middle of December," he said.

The Abu Sayyaf, notorious for its kidnap-for-ransom activities and beheading of hostages, operates mainly in Basilan and Sulu, areas that the ISIS finds

"too small," said Lorenzana.

"They are looking for a bigger area. What's happening now is Isnilon is trying to maybe rally Maute there (in Lanao) to support ISIS to become part of ISIS," said Lorenzana, referring to the Maute Group.

The Abu Sayyaf, the Maute Group, the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters and the Ansar Al-Khilafa of the Philippines have been reported to have pledged allegiance to the ISIS about two years ago.

The Maute Group is blamed for atrocities in Mindanao, including the September 2 bombing in Davao City that left 15 people dead and over 60 others wounded. Several members of the group have been arrested and have confessed participation.

Lorenzana said Hapilon brought a "small band of his people" from Basilan to Lanao del Sur.

"Now what are we doing?

We know he is there so we are conducting operations against them... We will see to it that they (ISIS) will not be able to establish those kinds of organizations here," he said.

Lorenzana said Hapilon was directed by an ISIS leader in Syria to study the possible establishment of a caliphate in Lanao del Sur.

Col. Edgard Arevalo, chief of the AFP public affairs office, said the military launched new operations against members of the Abu Sayyaf and the Maute groups in Butig town on Wednesday night.

Arevalo said the groups sustained a "major casualty with a number of them dead or seriously wounded" in the "surgical air strike" and shelling of the identified locations of the two groups.

Arevalo said ground troops have established a foothold and have begun assaults.

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# Peace talks: No final decision on political prisoners' release

By JOSE RODEL CLAPANO

The third round of talks between the Philippine government and the National Democratic Front (NDF) in Rome ended yesterday without a final decision on the demand for the release of all political prisoners.

In a joint statement, the government and NDF peace panels agreed to work on the issuance of an amnesty proclamation consequent to the progress of the peace negotiations.

The government also committed to facilitate the release of three remaining NDF consultants - Eduardo Sarmiento, Peterio Antalan and Leopoldo Calozan - through presidential clemency.

With the assistance of de-

fense lawyers, the government will expeditiously process the release of all the political prisoners listed by the NDF as consultants in the peace talks.

It will start with the 200 qualified prisoners either through bail, recognizance, pardon or other legal processes in compliance with the Comprehensive Agreement on Respect for Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law and allow them to participate in activities and mechanisms of the peace process.

Malacañang is pushing for the recommendation of government peace panel chairman Silvestre Bello III to remove the Communist Party of the Phil-

ippines (CPP) founding chairman Jose Maria Sison from the terror list of the United States.

"The request for the delisting of chairman Jose Maria Sison is aligned with the President's wish to hold peace talks with the leadership of the Communist Party of the Philippines," presidential spokesman Ernesto Abella said.

Abella said the government maintains its position that there is no reason for the US to deny this request since Sison is part of the negotiating panel. Sison is also the chief political consultant of the NDF, umbrella organization of

the CPP and the New People's Army talking peace with the government.

Abella gave assurance the Duterte administration will extend its assistance to make sure that each step will boost government efforts to strike a lasting peace agreement.

"As part of the Duterte administration's agenda for peace, it will take all necessary steps to ensure that the agreements made will be inclusive, comprehensive and integrated with all stakeholders meaningfully involved in the process of negotiation and implementation," Abella said.

Sison expressed the NDF's concerns on the burial of former president Ferdinand Marcos, human rights issues and ceasefire violations.

## Ceasefire mechanism

The talks in Rome also failed to address the ceasefire mechanism of both sides.

The government and NDF, however, noted their respective indefinite ceasefire declarations are still in effect.

Both panels have agreed to separately discuss the bilateral ceasefire in their next meeting in February.

Bello, concurrent labor secretary, said the meeting for the

bilateral ceasefire will be held in Utrecht.

NDF chief negotiator Fidel Agcaoili said they would study the draft government proposal and will submit their own draft.

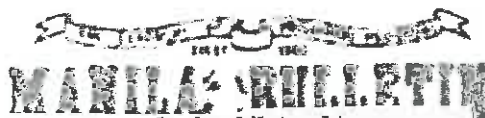
"The fact that they agreed to discuss it (bilateral ceasefire) is a positive development of the (peace) process," Bello said.

Bello expressed confidence that the commitment of the NDF to the peace process will keep in place the separate unilateral ceasefire declaration, which the rebels had earlier hinted they are seriously considering to withdraw. - With Christina Mendez, Rhodina Villanueva

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# Peace talks end.

In a joint statement, the GPH and the NDF noted that "their unilateral indefinite ceasefires remain in place," but added that "there are issues and concerns related thereto"

Instead of forging a bilateral truce, both parties signed the supplemental guidelines for the full operation of the Joint Monitoring Committee (JMC) under the Comprehensive Agreement on the Respect for Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law (CARHRIHL), and the adoption of the ground rules for the conduct of the formal meetings between the two panels' Reciprocal Working Committees (RWCs) on social-economic reforms. These vital agreements provided much-needed boost in this round, which was widely expected to churn out a bilateral ceasefire agreement.

The GRP and the NDF likewise agreed to hold the fourth round of talks in Oslo, Norway, on April 2 to 6. But prior to this, the two parties also agreed that the panel members and their respective ceasefire committees will meet in Utrecht, The Netherlands, on February 22 to 27 to tackle the draft "Agreement on an Interim Bilateral Cessation of Hostilities."

In the closing ceremony, delayed for three hours and dampened by news that Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) founding chairman and NDF chief political consultant Jose Maria Sison had to be taken to the hospital the night before, the two parties issued a joint statement outlining the gains made in the seven-day third round of talks, said Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process Jesus Dureza.

The statement heralded the positive gains that would be made with the full operation of the JMC, which will be tasked with "monitoring the implementation of, and achieving the objectives of CARHRIHL in upholding human rights and international humanitarian law."

With the JMC in full operation, reports against human rights violations committed by government forces or communist insurgents may now be investigated and acted upon by an independent body composed of representatives from the GRP and NDF.

There was also the adoption of the ground rules on the discussions on the Comprehensive Agreement on Socio-Economic Reforms (CASER), which is said to be the heart and soul of the peace talks as it will tackle basic issues such as poverty.

## Ground rules, bilateral teams

Discussions on the CASER have always been the most contentious in previous peace talks and the ground rules are expected to further accelerate negotiations, according to the GRP's RWC-CASER Chairman Roberto M. Ador.

"We have agreed to form bilateral teams which may hold meetings in the Philippines, or any mutually agreed upon venue. This will expedite the discussions, which used to be held only during the regular round of the negotiations," Ador said.

This draft was submitted by the GHP to the NDF last Tuesday, January 24, with the latter saying that "it will seriously study the proposal, submit comments, and may provide its own updated version of its proposed draft agreement for an interim bilateral ceasefire."

In that Utrecht meeting, the two panels will also deposit with a bank documents pertaining to the real identity of those included as NDF consultants and advisers in the Joint Agreement on Security and Immunity Guarantees (JASIG).

It was also stipulated in the joint agreement that the GHP has assured the NDF that it would facilitate the release of three more leftist consultants, namely Eduardo Sarmiento, Emetrio Antalan, and Leopoldo Caloza, "through presidential clemency, and other legal modes."

"The GHP, with the assistance of the defense lawyers, shall expeditiously proceed the release of all the political prisoners listed by the NDF, starting with the 200 qualified prisoners either through bail, recognizance, pardon or other legal processes," the statement also stated.

While still too vague as it was just a general statement, both parties, through their RWCs-SER, "agreed, in principle, to the free distribution of land to farmers and farm workers as part of the governing frameworks of CASER."

GHP's Supervising Peace Panel member for CASER Hernani Braganza refused to expound on the general statement because agreements have not been finalized, but NDF RWC-SER member Randall Echanis said that free land that could be distributed to farmers and farm workers could reach one million hectares.

According to Echanis, the figure was based on data from the Department of Agrarian Reform (DAR), "but total agricultural lands could reach 100 million hectares."

"We need an inventory to pinpoint these lands because this will not only include private lands, but public lands as well," said Echanis.

## Delisting Sison

Interestingly, there was no mention in the joint statement about the commitment of the GPH Peace Panel to work for the removal of the name of Sison from the terror watch list of the United States.

Bello had earlier disclosed that the government panel will be recommending to the US government the "delisting" of Sison which would allow him to travel more freely and possibly be able to finally meet with President Duterte.

Presidential spokesman Ernesto Abella said the request for the delisting of Sison is aligned with the President Duterte's wish to hold peace talks with the leadership of the local communist group.

"The government maintains its position that there is no reason for the US to deny this request bearing in mind that Mr. Sison is part of the negotiating panel," Abella said in a Paiace news conference.

President Duterte recently said he was willing to meet Sison in a neutral third country to advance the government's peace initiatives. However, he said he would wait for the results of the peace talks between the government and the communist rebel group in Rome before finalizing a meeting with Sison.

Sources in both camps said the inclusion of the GRP commitment may have been inadvertently overlooked as heated arguments between the two parties accompanied the final hours before the signing of the joint statement.

There was also no mention of a position taken by NDF peace panel chairman Fidel Agcaoli that the party's leadership, exasperated over unfulfilled promises about the release of political prisoners and disgruntled over continued military presence in the countryside, was "leaving it to the revolutionary forces (on the ground) to withdraw from the unilateral ceasefire that the NDF-CPP-New People's Army (NPA) had agreed to adopt in August, 2016."

Instead, there was only a short assertion in the statement that "the parties note that their unilateral ceasefires remain in place."

Labor Secretary and GHP chief negotiator Silvestre Bello III had earlier said that once Sison is removed from the terror list, he could join the panels in succeeding talks anywhere outside Europe.

Bello hinted the possibility of talks being held in the Philippines "because we are trying to get support from the people," Bello said.

the land.

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## GRP-NDF Rome talks end with no ceasefire; removal of 'Joma' from US terror list sought

A third round of peace talks between the Philippine government and the National Democratic Front of the Philippines ended with no deal on a permanent ceasefire the Duterte administration had billed as its primary goal. Both parties, however,

described a week of Norwegian-brokered negotiations in Rome as "successful" in a joint statement that was delayed by last-minute wrangling over wording.

In their statement, the parties noted that "their unilateral indefinite ceasefire

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# GRP-NDF Rome talks end with no ceasefire; removal of 'Joma' from US terror list sought

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remains in place," but added "there are issues and concerns related thereto."

Despite the failure to tie down a permanent ceasefire after agreement on a temporary one in August, diplomats involved in bringing the two sides together said the latest discussions had been cordial and that efforts to bring the two sides closer to a deal had advanced.

Both parties agreed to meet for a fourth round of formal talks in Oslo April 2-6. Officials dealing specifically with the ceasefire issue will meet again sooner, in Utrecht in the Netherlands on February 22-27.

Despite clashes on the ground and in the negotiating table, the government is determined to win peace with the communist group, Malacañang, for its part, yesterday assured.

"The Palace understands that there is activity on the ground, that there is also noise on the ground. However, based on the negotiating panels and based on the actions and the agreements that have been formed, they continue - their talks continue forward," presidential spokesman Ernesto Abella told a press briefing.

He said the NDF should be the one responsible in regulating its comrades.

"Their organization is also in conversation with their own people. So let us leave it to them to be able to settle matters among themselves," the Palace official stressed.

### US terror list

Malacañang also expressed hope that the United States would remove Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) founding chairman Jose Maria "Joma" Sison from its terror list to enable him to come home for peace talks.

The exiled leader has lived in the Netherlands for three decades.

Delisting Sison from terror list was aligned with President Rodrigo Duterte's intention to pursue peace dialogue with Sison, Abella said.

"The request for the delisting of chairman Jose Maria Sison is aligned with the President's wish to hold peace talks with the leadership of the CPP," he added.

"The government maintains its position that there is no reason for the US to deny this request, bearing in mind that Mr. Sison is part of the negotiating panel," the Palace official stressed.

At the third round of peace talks in Rome, Italy, the national government and the National Democratic Front have agreed to push the removal of Sison from the US terror list.

Maoist-led rebels have waged an insurgency against Philippine

governments for nearly five decades and at least 40,000 people have been killed.

But talks on ending the war have been revived under Duterte, who came to power last year calling for peace efforts in the interests of economic development.

"The government of the Philippines will recommend to (US) President (Donald Trump) the delisting of Communist Party of the Philippines founding chair...Sison from the list of international terrorists to pave the way for his Philippine homecoming without being arrested," government chief peace negotiator Silvestre Bello said in a statement.

Duterte and Sison have agreed to meet in any neutral Asian country once Sison has been removed from the list.

But Bello said the talks can be held in the Philippines **Tavera, Mario J. Mallari and**

# Abu leader expanding reach -- DND

By Florante S. Solmerin

ABU Sayyaf Group sub-leader Isnilon Hapilon, an ardent supporter of the jihadist group ISIS, has moved to Central Mindanao, the lair of the Moro rebel groups, Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana said on Thursday.

"Isnilon Hapilon has allegedly moved to Central Mindanao at the behest of the [ISIS] people in the Middle East. That's the report that we have received," Lorenzana said.

He said Hapilon left Basilan for Lanao del Sur in December 2016.

"We tried to find out why he is there, why he left the safety of his traditional area of operation from Basilan and went to

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## Abu...

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Lanao," Lorenzana said.

"He just brought [with him] a small band of his people. The bulk of his people are still in Basilan.

"I think he went there just to see the area, to find out if it is conducive to move there and establish a caliphate. Fortunately we found out that he is there, so we are pursuing him there in Butig."

Earlier reports said Hapilon had been the rising "figure head" of a handful of ISIS followers from different groups such as the Abu Sayyaf based in Basilan and Sulu, the Maute Group based in Butig, Lanao del Sur; the BIFF based in Central Mindanao, Ansar al-Khila'fa Philippines and rogue MNLF and MILF groups.

Just recently, security officials

said those homegrown terrorist groups had been uniting and evolving into just one group called Dawlatul Islamiyah Wahyatu'l Masrik or DIWM, and had chosen Hapilon as their sole leader in their aggressive efforts to be recognized by the ISIS.

Lorenzana said the ISIS had prodded Hapilon "to find out if Central Mindanao is conducive to the establishment of an organization [provincial caliphate]."

"According to the report, Basilan and Jolo are too small, they can be easily cornered there. So they are looking for a bigger area.

"Now Hapilon is already there perhaps trying to rally the Maute Group to support the daesh to become part of daesh. Now we are conducting operations against them in Lanao del Sur, particularly in the Butig area beside Lanao lake."

Lorenzana said the military was also pursuing the Abu Sayyaf in Basilan and Sulu.

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17 January 2017

The Manila Times

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# Talks with 'Reds' end with no ceasefire

**R**OME: A third round of peace talks between the Philippines and communist rebels ended Wednesday (Thursday in Manila) with no deal on a permanent ceasefire the government had billed as its primary goal.

Both parties described a week of Norwegian-brokered negotiations on the outskirts of Rome as "successful" in a joint statement that was delayed by last-minute wrangling over wording.

In their statement, the parties noted that "their unilateral indefi-

nite ceasefires remain in place," but added that "there are issues and concerns related thereto."

Despite the failure to tie down a permanent ceasefire after agreement on a temporary one in August, diplomats involved in bringing the two sides together said the

latest discussions had been cordial and that efforts to bring the two sides closer to a deal had advanced.

Both parties agreed to meet for a fourth round of formal talks in Oslo on April 2 to 6. Officials dealing specifically with the ceasefire issue will meet again sooner, in Utrecht in the Netherlands on February 22 to 27.

The communist insurgency in the Philippines, launched in 1968, is one of the longest running in the world and has claimed an estimated 30,000 lives, according to the country's military.

The government's chief nego-

tiator, Silvestre Bello, had voiced hopes at the beginning of the Rome talks that obstacles to a joint ceasefire agreement could be overcome during this round of talks.

They were held in Rome because one thing both sides could agree on was that Oslo in January was too cold for any kind of Philippine negotiation, a Norwegian source told AFP.

Malacanang also said on Thursday that the peace negotiations were gaining ground.

"The talks are moving forward and we are gaining ground and that the talks will not be hampered by any activities on the ground so

to speak," presidential spokesman Ernesto Abella said.

He also dismissed the recent clash between soldiers and members of the New People's Army, saying it had no effect on the peace process.

"The Palace understands that there is activity on the ground, that there's also noise on the ground. However, based on the negotiating panel and based on the actions and agreements that have been formed, their talks continue forward. So we're positive that things can be worked out," he added.

Abella said the Palace also sees no reason for the United States to

deny the request of the government to drop Communist Party of the Philippines founding chairman Jose Maria "Joma" Sison from its terror list.

He said that delisting Sison from the US list was "aligned with the President's wish to hold peace talks with the leadership of Communist Party of the Philippines."

"The government maintains its position that there is no reason for the US to deny this request bearing in mind that Mr. Sison is part of the negotiating panel," Abella said.

**AFP WITH A REPORT FROM CATHERINE S. VALENTE**

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OFFICE OF THE ARMY CHIEF PUBLIC AFFAIRS

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# NPA executes member in own drug war

By YAS D. OCAMPO

DAVAO CITY — The New People's Army has executed, as part of its own war on drugs, a paramilitary member and a suspected supplier of drugs to CAFGUs in the hinterlands of Davao City.

In a statement, NPA southern Mindanao regional spokesperson Rigoberto Sanchez said that the NPA killed Alberto T. Sablada and Neptali Alfredo Pondoc in two separate operations last January 16 and 23, respectively.

NPA members killed Sablada in the afternoon of January 16 in Brgy. Saloy in Calinan, while Pondoc was slain in his "farm-turned-drug den" in Taboan, Malabog, in Paquibato District.

The NPA said that Sablada was an organizer of the Alamara militia, which has been accused of human rights violations against peasants and indigenous peoples in the region, allegedly as a part of the Armed Forces of the Philippines counter-insurgency campaign.

Sablada was also identified as one of the culprits in the April 15, 2002 massacre of Apolio "Tatay Poloy" Enoc, a peasant leader; and Rosha Icatan, Charles Bayanban, Edgar Bias, Jaimae Daculo and Warlito Bayanban in Sitio Pangyan, Tamugan, Marilog district, Sanchez said.

Meanwhile, Pondoc reportedly supplied drugs to AFP detachments from as far as Diwalwal, Compostela Valley; Panabo in Davao del Norte; and Paquibato and Calinan in Davao City.

"His farm, in fact, sits in between two AFP detachments in Sitio Binaton and Sitio 24 and he supplied drugs to CAFGUs and cadre man of both detachments," the NPA said.

Pondoc has a warrant of arrest from the GRP reactionary police in Calinan, according to the spokesperson.

Red fighters also confiscated various drug paraphernalia such as weighing scales and other equipment in Pondoc's farm.

Sanchez said that the killings were in line with the stipulations of the unilateral interim ceasefire that was issued by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Philippines and the National Operational Command of the NPA.

Part of the ceasefire reads: "While ceasing offensive military operations, the NPA will continue to enforce policies and laws of the people's democratic government, perform appropriate functions of governance, and mobilize the people and resources in territories under its authority, including: maintaining peace and order including suppression of criminal groups such as drug traffickers and operators of the drug trade and large-scale gambling, private armies and private armed groups of warlords, local tyrants and vigilante groups, as well as spies."

However, Sanchez decried the evolution of the PNP's anti-drug campaign into an anti-people drug war.

Authorities have used the drug war allegedly as a mask to "encroach" on NPA territories.

"Similarly, AFP units smokescreen their offensive military operations, as what happened on January 21 in Makilala, North Cotabato, with claims of "anti-criminality" operations in order to wantonly subvert their ceasefire order and engage the Red army in armed combat," Sanchez said.

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# CSAFP Gen Año visits EastMinCom

Lui Claudio



**CAMP AGUINALDO, Quezon City** – “The AFP’s Western Mindanao Command under Major General Carlito Galvez, Jr. through 103rd IB under Army Col Nixon Fortes had another major breakthrough in its intensified campaign against the terror groups of ASG, Maute, and Foreign Terror Groups holed in the hinterlands of Butig, Lanao Del Sur,” reports AFP Chief of Public Affairs Office Marine Colonel Edgard-Arevalo.

The terror groups are reported to have sustained a major casualty with a number of them dead or seriously wounded after a midnight (between the 25th and 26th January 2017) surgical air strike and a well-directed and observed artillery rounds accurately landing in the identified locations of the terror groups.

As at press time, ground troops have established foothold and begun their assault to the same objective of the preliminary attack midnight. They are now cautiously advancing to their designated objectives – the location of ASG Leader Isnilon Hamilon, his select group, and the Brothers Abdullah, Omar, and Otto Maute, and possibly other foreigners joining their notorious group.

“We will await the validated details of the results of this operation as soon as we get confirmations from our troops now on the ground,” reports Colonel Arevalo.

“We will relentlessly pursue these lawless groups. We will not allow them to thrive in any part of our country to sow terror to our people. Your Armed Forces of the Philippines –through the support of our people and local government as shown in this case – will frustrate every attempt to disrupt our normal lives,” says MGen Galvez Jr.

After learning about this development, Gen Año tells his men, “You will have the support you need in all your endeavors in contribution to attain the mission given to us by the Commander in Chief. Let us together end in six months the menace these terror group bring.”

This is the inspiration that the AFP Chief General Eduardo Año and Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana made in the rounds of AFP Camps they did where they sounded the call to arms against these terror groups. They called on every Soldier, Airmen, Sailors, and Marines to contribute in this campaign to end the menace that the Abu Sayaff, the Maute Group, and other terror groups in western Mindanao.

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# AFP Chief hiniling sa NPA na tigilan na ang atrosidad

Lui Claudio



Hiniling ni Armed Forces of the Philippines Chief of Staff General Eduardo Año sa National Democratic Front ng New People's Army na tigilan na ang paglunsad ng mga atrosidad ng sa gayon ay maiwasan na magkaroon ng sagupaan sa pagitan ng mga tropa ng pamahalaan at ng mga komunistang rebelde.

Ginawa ni General Año ang apela matapos akusahan ng NDFP negotiator Fidel Agcaoili ang militar dahil sa paglabag sa ipinatupad na unilateral ceasefire matapos magkasagupaan ang mga sundalo at rebeldeng NPA sa Makilala, North Cotobato.

Nagbanta pa si Agcaoili na aalisin ang napagkasunduang ceasefire matapos mapatay ang isang miyembro ng NPA.

Mariin namang itinanggi ni Año ang alegasyon, depense niya, rumesponde lamang ang mga sundalo sa naganap na kaguluhan.

Sinabihan pa ni Año ang NDFP na kontrolin ang NPA lalo na sa pagsasagawa nito ng mga kriminal na aktibidad gaya ng extortion at arson.

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## General Año, nag-alok ng Medal of Valor sa mga lalaban sa mga Bandidong Grupo

Lui Claudio



Camp Aguinaldo, Quezon City — Inanunsyo ni Armed Forces of the Philippines Chief of Staff General Eduardo Año sa mga sundalo na kung gusto nilang magkaroon ng Medal of Valor, kailangan nilang mag-volunteer sa pag-laban sa Abu Sayyaf at iba pang bandidong grupo.

Ang panawagan ni General Año ay para sa lahat ng sangay ng Sandatahang lakas ng Pilipinas sa buong bansa. Sinabi pa ni Año na hindi nila hahayaang mamalagi dito sa Pilipinas ang mga bandidong grupo, aniya kailangang matanggal nila ang 'ugat' sa loob ng anim na buwan.

Sinabi ni AFP Public Affairs Office Chief Marine Colonel Edgard Arevalo, na bago magtungo sa Western Mindanao Command, bumisita rin sa Western Command ang heneral at doon ay nabigyan siya ng briefing sa kanilang Campaign Plans na magiimplement sa Development Support and Security Plan "Kapayapaan" ng AFP.

<http://dwdd.com.ph/>

## Philippine Air Force, nagpa-abot ng pakikiramay sa Pamilya ni Lt. Col. Pawa

Lui Claudio



Nagpapa-abot ng pakikiramay ang pamunuan ng Philippine Air Force sa buong pamilya ni Lieutenant Colonel Gary Pawa kasunod ng pagbitay sa kapatid nitong si Jakatia Pawa.

Sinabi ni Colonel Antonio Francisco, tagapag-salita ng Phil. Air Force na handa silang mapahatid ng tulong sa pamilya ni Lt. Col. Pawa lalo na sa dalawang naulilang mga anak ng kapatid nitong si Jakatia.

Ayan kay Francisco, tulong-tulong sila sa Air Force para ibigay ang suporta ngayon ng pamilya Pawa para maibsan ang bigat ng kanilang damdain. Kahit pa ito'y sa pormang pinansyal, o emotional support. Nangako rin si Francisco na pagsusumikapan ng buong air force na matulungan sa pag-aaral ang dalawang anak ni Jakatia.

Si Lt. Col Pawa ang tumatayong ama-amahan ng dalawang anak ng kapatid at sa kanyang tirahan sa Zamboanga tumutuloy ang mga ito. Dagdag pa ni Francisco, dalangin ng Air Force ang kapayapaan para sa buong pamilya ni Lt. Col. Pawa.

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## US to start construction in 3 Philippine military airfields

PNA

The Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement (EDCA) with the US is still in effect as the Americans will start constructing some facilities in Basa Air Base, Pampanga, Bautista Air Base in Palawan and Lumbia Airfield in Cagayan De Oro.

This was disclosed by Department of National Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana in a briefing held at the DND Social Hall, Camp Aguinaldo, Quezon City Thursday.

"EDCA is still on and according to the Pentagon (US Department of Defense) they will start constructing some facilities in the EDCA chosen camps (like) Basa Air Base (in Pampanga), Bautista Air Base (Palawan) and Lumbia Airfield (Cagayan De Oro). I think the first camp that they will develop are facilities (that) are in Basa," he added.

Lorenzana said possible facilities that the Americans will set up are runways, buildings for their troops and storage areas for their equipment.

"They can leave the buildings there and leave and they can come back again, that is the idea of EDCA," the DND chief added.

While construction is expected this year, Lorenzana could not give an exact date on the start of the construction as it is dependent on the US budgetary allocations.

Lorenzana said President Rodrigo Duterte is aware of these plans.

"(He) is okay with this, because he earlier said that (his administration) will honor all agreements that were entered into by the previous government," he added.

The DND earlier announced that EDCA with the US will continue but it will focus on humanitarian assistance and disaster relief, counter-terror, and anti-narcotics operations.

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## **LIST: Defense equipment Philippines is planning to acquire from China**

PNA

There are no strings attached to the People's Republic of China's PHP100 million (around USD14 million) weapons grant to the Philippines.

Department of National Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana in a briefing Thursday at the DND's Social Hall in Camp Aguinaldo, said they have expressed their interest in acquiring: fast boats, unmanned aerial vehicles, "flexible" rifles which can shoot around corners, sniper rifles and automatic bomb disposal equipment.

The DND chief added that China did not impose any conditions on the grant, which means the Philippines can use the weapons on any way it chooses.

He said they are still waiting for China's reply on how many of said these weapons can China supply to the Philippines.

<http://www.update.ph/>

## **Philippine military to acquire specialized equipment from Russia**

PNA

Instead of assault rifles, the Philippines is interested in acquiring specialized military equipment from Russia.

Department of National Defense (DND) Secretary Delfin Lorenzana, in a press conference Thursday said the Armed Forces of the Philippines has scant need of new rifles as it has recently acquired an estimated 50,000 units of the brandnew Remington M-4 carbine thus, the AFP has pulled out from all its field units the older M-16 automatic rifles which are now stored at its various armories.

Lorenzana said these weapons can be given to reserve military and militia units if needed.

What the DND plans to acquire from Russia are sniper rifles and unmanned aerial vehicles, he added.

Earlier, Russian diplomats and military representatives have offered to sell the Philippines naval vessels, aircraft, helicopters and even diesel electric submarines.

Lorenzana said they are still evaluating these offers to determine whether the country is capable of using, maintaining and operating these equipment in the long term.

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## Philippines evaluating Russian offer of diesel-electric submarines

PNA

Department of National Defense (DND) Secretary Delfin Lorenzana said the country is now evaluating Russia's offer to sell the Philippines some of its advanced diesel-electric submarines.

The DND chief, in a press briefing Thursday, said they are now determining on whether these specialized ships are essential for the modernization needs of the Armed Forces of the Philippines and whether the country can afford to acquire and maintain such an expensive weapons platform.

However, Lorenzana said Russia diesel-electrics submarines are considered to be one of the best in the world.

Six Russian-made Kilo-class submarines are now being operated by Vietnam People's Navy.

The Armed Forces of the Philippines is expected to acquire its own diesel-electric class submarines under the AFP Modernization Program which is now entering the 2nd Horizon (2018-2022).

Kilo-class diesel-electric submarines are mainly intended for anti-shipping and anti-submarine operations in relatively shallow waters.

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## Military Offensives Start Anew in Butig

Lui Claudio



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# Manhunt on vs. suspects in ambush of 5 in Maguindanao

Philippine News Agency

Police and military forces have launched a manhunt against gunmen who ambushed and seriously injured five persons along the national highway here Thursday dawn.

"Pursuit operations are still going on, our soldiers are helping us locate the suspects," Senior Inspector Esmael Tarusan, town police chief of Sultan Kudarat, Maguindanao, told reporters.

Investigation showed that the ambush took place at about 5 a.m. in Barangay Rebuken here where gunmen opened fire on a white Isuzu Trooper vehicle.

Tarusan said three of the five victims were identified as Jimmy Soledad, 60, Mohamad Jaime Ebad, 41 and Arbine Soledad, 30, all residents of Barangay Nuling, Sultan Kudarat, Maguindanao.

The two remained unidentified. All the victims are now confined in a hospital in Cotabato City.

Tarusan said five gunmen armed with automatic rifles were seen near a roadside furniture shop in Barangay Rebuken, who quickly opened fire as the victim's vehicle was approaching the village.

Although injured, the driver kept on speeding until they reached an Army detachment and sought assistance.

Elements of Sultan Kudarat PNP and 37th Infantry Battalion responded and found at the crime scene empty shells of Armalite rifle, Garand rifle and cal. 45 pistols.

Tarusan believed it was a case of personal grudge involving one of the victims, Jimmy Soledad, and an unidentified armed group.

Tarusan ensured the national highway remained safe for commuters as soldiers and cops have provided road security while manhunt against the suspects was in progress.

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## Abu Sayyaf leader Hapilon in Central Mindanao to establish Islamic State

PNA

Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) senior leader Isnilon Hapilon managed to escape from his Basilan enclave and moved to Central Mindanao at the behest of the terror group Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS). The move is to test whether Central Mindanao is conducive to the establishment of a "wilayat" or an Islamic State, Department of National Defense (DND) Secretary Delfin Lorenzana said Thursday. Hapilon's breakout, with a small group of loyal followers, took place middle of December, he added.

Lorenzana said Basilan and Jolo are too small and they can be easily be trapped there, hence the ASG leader's decision to move out in Central Mindanao where he is now rallying Maute Group members to support ISIS.

As of this posting, Maute Group members are placed at around 100 armed fighters.

"We know he is there so we are conducting operations against them in Lanao Del Sur, near the Butig area, just beside Lake Lanao, we've have been there before with the President sometimes last November or December, so we continue to operate against the ASG," the DND chief added.

He said all of these information are from their intelligence sources.

As this develops, the Western Mindanao Command (WMC)'s 103rd Infantry Brigade under Col. Nixon Fortes scored another major breakthrough in its intensified campaign against the terror groups of ASG, Maute Group and foreign terror groups holed in Butig, Lanao Del Sur.

"The terror groups are reported to have sustained a major casualty with a number of them dead or seriously wounded after a midnight (between the 25th and 26th January 2017) surgical air strike and a well-directed and observed artillery rounds accurately landing in the identified locations of the terror groups," Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) spokesperson Col. Edgard Arevalo said.

As of this posting, ground troops have established foothold and begun their assault to the same objective of the preliminary attack midnight.

"They are now cautiously advancing to their designated objectives – the location of ASG leader Isnilon Hapilon, his select group, and the Brothers Abdullah, Omar, and Otto Maute, and possibly other foreigners joining their notorious group," he added.

"We will await the validated details of the results of this operation as soon as we get confirmations from our troops now on the ground," Arevalo said.

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## Removing Joma Sison from terrorist list is US' prerogative—DND

By: Frances Mangosing



Joma Sison. FILE PHOTO

Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana said they see no problem with the Philippines' plan to request the United States to de-list Communist Party of the Philippines founding chairman Jose Maria Sison from the list of international terrorists.

The recommendation of the government is to allow "for his Philippine homecoming without being arrested," according to the Office of the Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process (Opapp).

"Bahala na yung US kung pakinggan tayo kung ide-list o hindi. That's actually the prerogative of the US to de-list or not de-list people in their list who are terrorists," Lorenzana told reporters in a press briefing on Thursday.

The de-listing of Sison was one of the recommendations agreed upon by the Philippine government and the National Democratic Front on their fourth day of peace negotiations in Rome.

Sison sought asylum in the Netherlands and he can be barred from re-entering Europe once he travels outside EU countries. The US, which has control of the International Police (Interpol), can always arrest Sison outside Europe.

The Opapp said that the inclusion of Sison in the US terrorist list "has become a stumbling block" for him to come home to the Philippines.

Once Sison is removed from the international terrorist list, he will be allowed to attend the succeeding peace talks outside Europe. **JE**

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