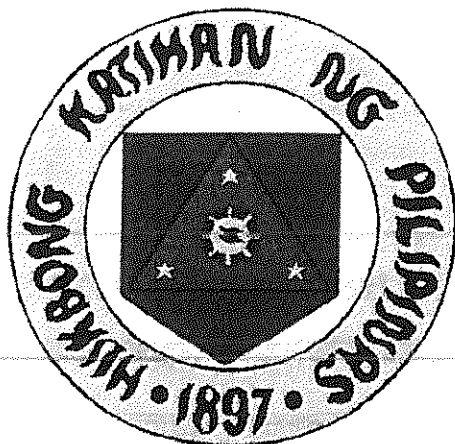


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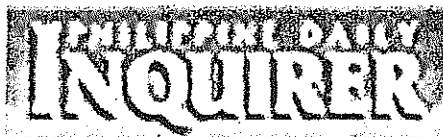
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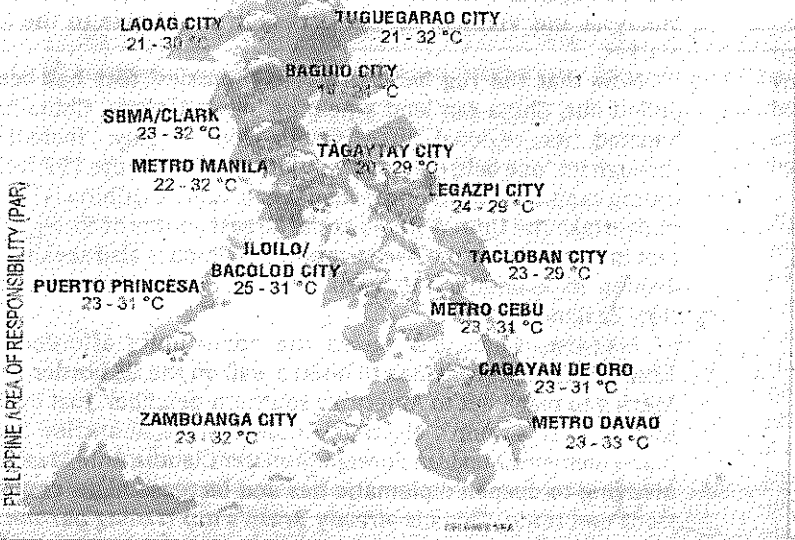
















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





















NORTHEAST MONSOON AFFECTING LUZON
(As of 5:00 PM - Mar. 14, 2017)






PHILIPPINE AREA OF RESPONSIBILITY (PAR)

SUNRISE	SUNSET
 6:04 AM	 6:06 PM
MOONRISE	MOONSET
 9:30 PM	 8:29 AM
FULL MOON	LAST QUARTER
 MAR 12 10:54 PM	 MAR 20 11:56 PM
LOW TIDE	HIGH TIDE
MANILA SOUTH HARBOR	
 6:08 AM	 12:06 PM
0.09 Meter	0.36 Meter

-  Partly cloudy skies
-  Partly cloudy to at times cloudy with rain/showers
-  Partly cloudy to at times cloudy with rain/showers and/or thunderstorms
-  Light rains

	MAR 15	MAR 17	MAR 16	MAR 17	MAR 16	MAR 17		
METRO MANILA	 22 - 33 °C	 25 - 33 °C	TAGAYTAY	 20 - 31 °C	 22 - 32 °C	TACLOBAN	 23 - 32 °C	 25 - 35 °C
TUGUEGARAO	 22 - 32 °C	 24 - 32 °C	LEGAZPI	 24 - 31 °C	 24 - 32 °C	CAGAYAN DE ORO	 23 - 31 °C	 24 - 31 °C
LAOAG	 21 - 31 °C	 23 - 32 °C	PUERTO PRINCESA	 23 - 32 °C	 24 - 32 °C	METRO DAVAO	 24 - 33 °C	 24 - 33 °C
BAGUIO	 14 - 25 °C	 16 - 26 °C	ILOILO/BACOLOD	 25 - 31 °C	 26 - 32 °C	ZAMBOANGA	 23 - 32 °C	 23 - 33 °C
SBMA/CLARK	 23 - 33 °C	 24 - 34 °C	METRO CEBU	 23 - 31 °C	 24 - 32 °C	 SAGOT KO, PADALA MO!		

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March 2017



Page: 01

Military confirms Abus killed Vietnamese hostage

By **ROEL PAREÑO**

ZAMBOANGA CITY – The military confirmed yesterday that Abu Sayyaf bandits killed one of the six Vietnamese sailors kidnapped more than three

weeks ago off Pearl Bank in Tawi-Tawi. Col. Cirilito Sobejana, commander of Joint Task Force Sulu (JTFS), said they received reports that the Abu Sayyaf killed one of their hostages as the bandits were evading the military

operations against the bandits in Tawi-Tawi.

“Actually, only five were left because one of the victims was killed while the bandits were fleeing. So there are five remaining Vietnamese captives that

were taken from Pearl Bank,” Sobejana said.

The gunmen kidnapped the victims last Feb. 19 after they intercepted the *M/V Giang Hai* some 17 nautical miles

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Military From Page 1

off Pearl Bank, near the vicinity of Taganak Island.

The suspects killed one of the victims while aboard the cargo vessel and took six sailors hostage.

Sobejana, however, said the Vietnamese taken from Pearl Bank were not brought to Sulu.

“As we speak they are not here in Sulu. They are still kept by the Abu Sayyaf but not here in Sulu,” Sobejana said.

Aside from those Vietnamese sailors taken from Pearl Bank, the Abu Sayyaf has been holding captive six other Vietnamese sailors taken last November near Sibago Island off Basilan.

The military said the bandits now have more than 30 hostages that include 11 Vietnamese, one Dutch, one Korean, seven Indonesians, five Malaysians and eight Filipinos.

March 2017



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Abra on red alert as NPA steps up attacks

By **ZALDY C. COMANDA**

LA TRINIDAD, Benguet — New People's Army (NPA) attacks have stepped up in some parts of Luzon since last weekend when government and communist party leaders announced a resumption of the peace talks in April, forcing the police in Abra to raise the red alert.

The Abra Police Provincial Office (PPO) was put on red alert a day after five police officers were wounded in an ambush by NPA rebels in Poblacion, Malibcong town. The Agustin Begnalen Command of the NPA has admitted to

the attack

Last Sunday, 30 guerrillas stormed the Malibcong Municipal Police Station (MPS) and ransacked its armory just hours after Government of the Republic of the Philippines (GRP) and National Democratic Front (NDF) peace negotiators meeting in Utrecht, The Netherlands, announced that talks were back on track.

Tension in the province has been high with Abra Governor Joy Bernos condemning the NPA attacks in Malibcong. "I do not see valid reasons for our brothers in the left to act like this. I support a peaceful negotiation for the safety and welfare of the people of

Abra," Bernos said.

Down south of Luzon, the military's Southern Luzon Command (SOLCOM) said a gunbattle between elements of the army's 31st Infantry Battalion (31st IB) and NPA rebels raged for 15 minutes before dawn Monday in Sitio Anahawan, Barangay Togawe, Gubat, Sorsogon.

The rebels withdrew, leaving behind baby armalite.

A few hours later, 30 NPA rebels engaged soldiers from the army's 83rd Infantry Battalion (83rd IB) in Barangay Pinamihagan, Lagonoy, Camarines Sur. One rebel was killed in the gunbattle.

March 2017

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

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Offensive against NPA rebels to pursue – AFP

By **Mario J. Mallari**

Massive military combat operations against the New People's Army (NPA) will continue in the absence of official order coming from Malacañang to stop the all-out offensives against the communists throughout the country.

At a press briefing, Col. Edgard Arevalo, Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) public affairs office chief, said that the 125,000-strong military will not stop operating against the NPA throughout the country unless an order is received ordering otherwise.

As of yesterday, Arevalo said the military has not received official order to halt offensives against the NPA even after pronouncements of

the resumption of the peace talks between the government and the communist group.

"Until and unless we receive official instruction saying we stop...focused, massive operations against the NPA in all parts of the country will continue," Arevalo said.

Last Saturday, the government and the National Democratic Front (NDF), the political wing of the NPA, peace panels agreed to resume formal peace negotiations next month.

Prior to this, President Duterte ordered the AFP and the Philippine National Police (PNP) to use all available assets against the NPA following the ambush-killing of four policemen by communist rebels in

Bansalan, Davao del Sur.

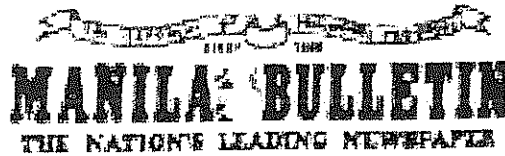
Duterte last month lifted the government's unilateral ceasefire with the communists and ordered the suspension of formal peace talks after the NPAs ambushed Army forces in Davao del Sur that ended in the killing of three soldiers, including a junior officer.

Since the suspension of the peace talks, Arevalo said that a total of 61 atrocities were launched by the NPAs.

On the other hand, he said that military operations during the period resulted in the neutralization of 120 NPA rebels -21 killed, 18 arrested and 81 voluntarily surrendered.

Arevalo said that more than 60 various firearms were also seized.

March 2017



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300 families flee as troops pursue BIFF in Maguindanao

CAMP SIONGCO, Maguindanao (PNA) – About 300 families have fled three adjoining villages in Datu Salibo town, Maguindanao for fear of getting caught in the crossfire between government forces and the outlawed Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF), a military spokesperson said on Tuesday.

Capt. Arvin Encinas, Sixth Infantry Division (6th ID) spokesperson, said troops have launched pursuit operations against the BIFF after reports of renewed harassment by the bandit group against government forces and installations in the province.

The latest attempt was a strafing incident Tuesday dawn, he said.

Encinas said the BIFF also planted

four improvised explosive devices (IEDs) along the road in the village of Gawang, Datu Salibo on Monday.

Encinas said the recovered IEDs "had the signature" of the BIFF, and were the same kind of explosive they have been using against government forces.

Of the four IEDs, one was safely defused, while three others were detonated using igniters.

Since last week, the BIFF has been launching "hit and run" attacks on soldiers manning checkpoints and government forces travelling to and from Army bases.

The atrocities committed by the BIFF, according to Encinas, left two soldiers slightly wounded.

Due to massing of BIFF forces in the so called "SPMS box" or the adjoining

towns of Shariff Aguak, Pagatin (Datu Saudi), Mamasapano and Datu Salibo, the military conducted aerial assaults while ground troops scoured the interior of Datu Salibo town.

Encinas said reports from village officials and residents showed that "several foreign-looking individuals were seen in the company of the BIFF."

March 2017



Pahina. 06

11 BIFF todas sa air strike

Tinatayang nasa labing-isang bilang na miyembro ng Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF) ang napaslang sa tuluy-tuloy na air strike ng militar sa dalawang pinagkukutaan ng grupo sa Datu Salibo, Maguindanao, ayon sa ulat kahapon.

Sinabi ni Capt. Ervin Encinas, tagapagsalita ng 6th Infantry Division ng Philippine Army, partikular na pinuntirya sa inilunsad na opisiba ang grupo na pinamumunuan ni Kumander

Bungos kung saan kasama nito ang tatlong daluyuhan na umano'y mga eksperto sa paggawa ng bomba.

Bukod umano sa bilang ng mga nasawi ay ilan din sa mga miyembro ng BIFF ang malubhang nasugatan sa air strike na nagsimula noong Lunes ng hapon.

Ayon pa kay Encinas, ang unano'y pinagkukutaan ng grupo ni Kumander Bungos na nasa dalawang barangay ng Andavit at Tee sa Datu Salibo ay may 300 resi-

denteng naninirahan at naipit sa military offensive kung kaya't ipinasya ang kanilang force evacuation doon.

Sa pahayag naman ni Col. Diosdado Carreon, commander ng 601st Infantry Brigade, isang senior member ng Jemaah Islamiyah at umano'y kilalang bomb maker na si Mohammad Ali alyas 'Muawiyah' ay kabilang sa tatlong foreign terrorists na kasama sa grupo ni Kumander Bungos. (JG Tumbado/Betchai Julian)

March 2017

1988



MANILA BULLETIN
THE NATION'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

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Military air strikes sow fear in Mabini, ComVal

By **YAS D. OCAMPO**

DAVAO CITY – A top official of Mabini, Compostela Valley has asked local residents to return to their homes after they fled Saturday due to helicopter rocket attacks by the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) against known encampments of the New People's Army (NPA).

Mabini municipal administrator Primitivo Rasonable said he has issued an advisory to the 120 families, who fled to a municipal basketball court in Golden Valley, Mabini, to return to their respective homes.

"Luwas na nga mobalik ang mga bakwit sa tagsa-tagsa nilang pinuy-anan sa maong bukid (It is now safe to return to their residences)," Rasonable said.

Tactical Operations Group (TOG) 11 com-

manding officer Lt. Col. Jose Ritchie Pabilonia, in an interview with Manila Bulletin, admitted that the two MD520s of the 15th Strike Wing conducted air support operations to ground troops of the 1001st Brigade last Saturday.

These assaults were apparently conducted near Golden Valley, forcing villages to flee to the barangay gym.

The municipal and provincial government have since provided for the medical and other needs of the evacuees.

Last week, President Rodrigo Duterte instructed the AFP to "flatten the hills" in pursuing Communist rebels, following an NPA attack in Bansalan, Davao del Sur which killed four police officers.

The government cried foul of the incident, saying that the officers were "non-combatants."

March 2017



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MILITARY EXEC SAYS SORRY FOR KIDS' DEATHS IN CLASH

ZAMBOANGA CITY—A top Army official here said the military regretted the deaths of two children during an operation against Abu Sayyaf bandits in Tabuan Lasa town in Basilan province last week.

"I feel very bad until now. I am really very sorry over the [deaths of the] two [children]. They were caught in the crossfire," Maj. Gen. Carlito Galvez Jr., commander of Western Mindanao Command, told the Inquirer.

The main target in the raid was Mubin Kulin alias Mulawin, a cousin of Abu Sayyaf leader Isnilon Hapilon and who was behind several kidnapping cases.

Galvez said the military received reports that almost 100 Sulu-based Abu Sayyaf members were seen on Tapiantana Island in Tabuan Lasa.

He said government troops organized a team to arrest Kulin in Tabuan Lasa but the soldiers were met with gunfire from about 30 bandits.

"That firefight allowed the escape of Kulin and his men," he said. Galvez's information corrected earlier reports saying Kulin was killed in that operation.

Galvez said it was only after the firefight that the troops learned about the deaths of two children.

"We did not expect children [to be] in that place," Galvez said.

He promised that the military would help the families of civilians caught in the crossfire.

Dr. Arlyn Jumao-as, executive director of the group, Save the Children from Armed Conflict in Basilan, identified the victims as 1-year-old Nurmaida Abbi and Ashab Abulhairie, 12.

Two other adults were killed—Hadji Billamin Hassan and Nuruddin Musaddul Muhlis.

Human rights group Suara Bangsamoro condemned the incident, saying it considered the killing of Hassan as a case of "extrajudicial killing."

"According to his wife, he was still alive when the raiding team took him [and left aboard a] naval gunboat," Suara Bangsamoro chair Amirah Lidasan said in a statement.

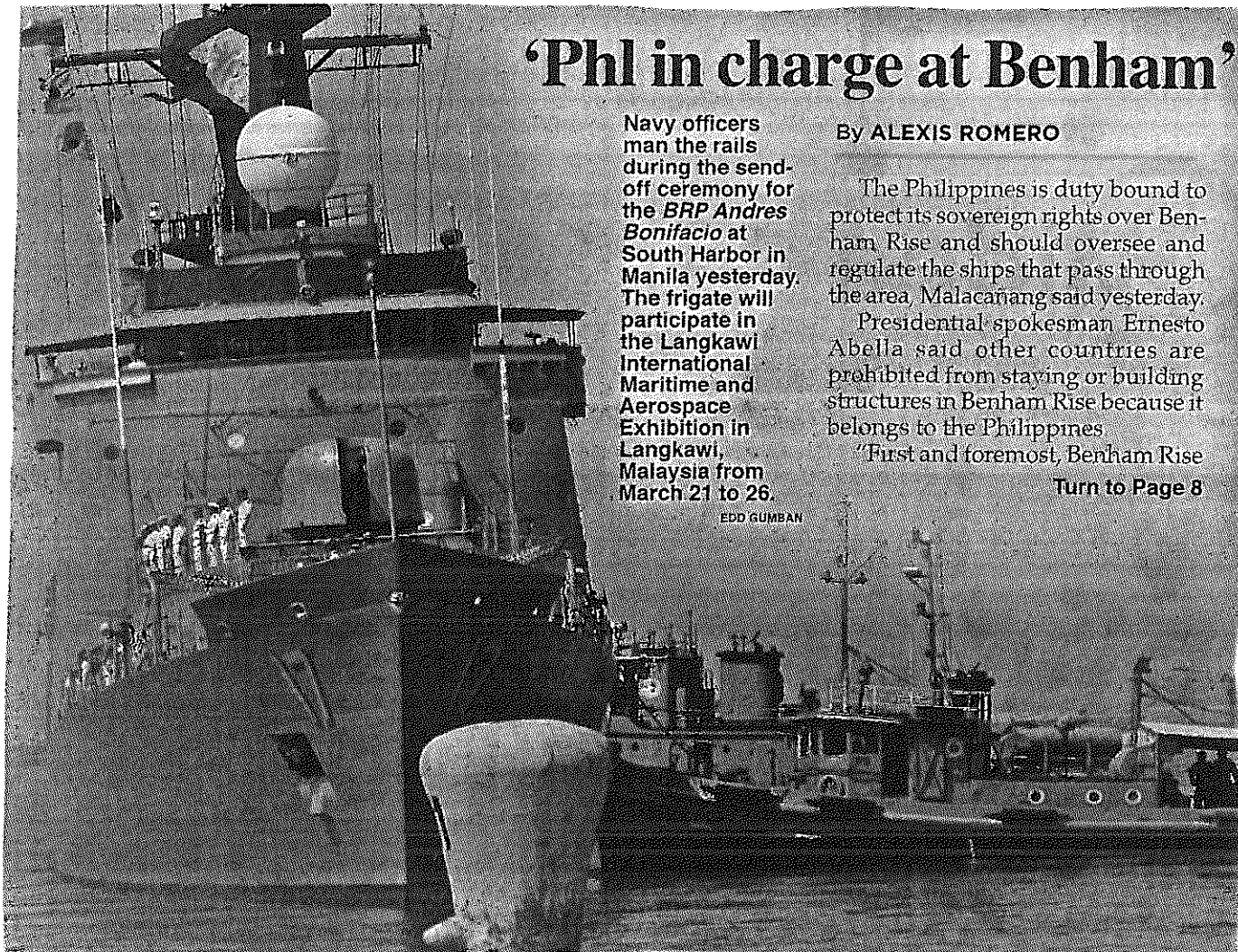
Lidasan said Hassan had bullet wounds in the chest and shoulder, and bruises on his face.

"During the raid, the military sprayed bullets on at least three adjoining houses, hitting residents who were sleeping, some saying the Fajr (dawn) prayer," Lidasan said. —JULIE S. ALIPALA INQ

March 2017



Page: 04



‘Phl in charge at Benham’

Navy officers man the rails during the send-off ceremony for the *BRP Andres Bonifacio* at South Harbor in Manila yesterday. The frigate will participate in the Langkawi International Maritime and Aerospace Exhibition in Langkawi, Malaysia from March 21 to 26.

EDD GUMBAN

By ALEXIS ROMERO

The Philippines is duty bound to protect its sovereign rights over Benham Rise and should oversee and regulate the ships that pass through the area, Malacañang said yesterday.

Presidential spokesman Ernesto Abella said other countries are prohibited from staying or building structures in Benham Rise because it belongs to the Philippines.

“First and foremost, Benham Rise

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Phil From Page 1

belongs to the Filipino people and the government is duty bound to defend our sovereign and territorial right over the region," Abella said.

"Other countries can exercise innocent passage and territorial navigation. But they are not allowed to stay and establish any structure in the area," he added.

Abella issued the statement after a Chinese ship was seen in Benham Rise, a 13-million hectare area in the Pacific with untapped natural resources.

Located off the coast of Aurora province, Benham Rise was declared by the United Nations as part of Philippine territory in 2012.

"The Philippines' claim to Benham Rise is supported by UNCLOS (United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea). The Philippines has the responsibility to oversee and regulate the sailing ships of other countries that pass through the waters around Benham Rise,"

Lorenzana had ordered the Philippine Navy to conduct patrols in Benham Rise after a Chinese ship was spotted lingering in the area.

The Navy refused to say whether it carried out Lorenzana's directive to accost Chinese ships in Benham Rise.

But sources said the Navy has dispatched one of its vessels to patrol Benham Rise.

'Benham resources reserved for Phi'

China cannot explore for oil and gas in the mineral-rich Benham Rise, according to Supreme Court Senior Associate Justice Antonio Carpio.

"We have the exclusive right to explore and exploit oil, gas and other mineral resources in Benham Rise, which has been confirmed by the UNCLOS as part of the extended continental shelf (ECS) of the Philippines," Carpio said.

"If the Chinese vessels were conducting seismic surveys to look for oil, gas and minerals, then they could not do that because UNLCOS has reserved the oil, gas and minerals in the

Abella said.

The Philippines has asked China to explain the presence of one of its ships in Benham Rise. In response, the Chinese foreign ministry claimed that the Philippines cannot claim Benham Rise as part of its territory even if it is situated within the country's 200-nautical mile exclusive economic zone (EEZ).

Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Geng Shuang said a coastal state's rights over a continental shelf do not affect the legal status of the superjacent waters or of the air space above those waters and foreign ships' freedom of navigation and innocent passage.

Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana maintained that the Philippines has sovereign rights over Benham Rise.

Lorenzana, however, admitted that China was correct when it said that the area is not part of Philippine territory.

"Technically speaking, China is correct because the UN only recognized the Philippines' exclusive economic zone over Benham Rise," Lorenzana said.

ECS to the Philippines," he added.

Carpio, who was part of the legal team that presented the government's case against China's reclamation in the West Philippine Sea before the UN Permanent Court of Arbitration in 2015, said the Philippines may again take action if China was indeed conducting mineral exploration in the area.

The SC magistrate clarified that while the Philippines has exclusive right to oil, gas and minerals in Benham Rise, it cannot claim sovereignty over it.

"Benham Rise is not part of Philippine national territory because we do not have sovereignty over Benham Rise," he said, pointing out that sovereignty is different from sovereign rights.

"Other states, like China, have the right to conduct fishery research in Benham Rise because the fish in the ECS belongs to mankind; surveys on water salinity and water currents because the water column in the ECS belongs to mankind, and depth soundings for navigational purposes because there is freedom of navigation in the ECS," Carpio explained.

He said there was nothing wrong if China's ship patrolled Benham Rise for reasons other than mineral exploration.

"If the Chinese vessels were looking for submarine passages and parking spaces, that would be part of freedom of navigation and the Philippines has no reason to complain," Carpio said.

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National security

Former foreign affairs secretary Albert Del Rosario warned yesterday against the country's decision and actions that may lead to "trading away" national interest.

Del Rosario said he sees greater need for the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) to continue working closely with the Department of National Defense (DND), treaty allies and partners to outline options for consideration of President Duterte in light of negative observations of the South China Sea and Benham Rise. "Under no circumstances would it be wise for us to trade away our national security," Del Rosario said.

He said there should be a clear differentiation between promoting national security and enhancing economic diplomacy. "Our northern neighbor, for example, could not be postured as a total solution to our economic well being, especially the diminished importance of a host of countries that have been assisting the Philippines to achieve economic growth over the past several years," Del Rosario said without naming China as the northern neighbor.

Gov't urged: Assert rights in Benham

Sen. Sonny Angara said the incursion by Chinese ships in Benham Rise was unauthorized.

Angara called on the government to assert its sovereign rights over the region.

"Benham Rise is undisputedly part of Philippine territory. We have the exclusive rights to explore and exploit its natural resources," he said.

Angara said it is high time to accelerate the development of Benham Rise as a rich source of alternative energy, marine resources and tourism destination by creating the Benham Rise Development Authority, which he proposed under Senate Bill 312.

He said it has been five years since the UN declared Benham Rise as part of the country's 200-nautical mile EEZ, yet it remains unexplored.

An expert on maritime law urged the Duterte administration to assert the Philippines' exclusive sovereign rights to Benham Rise following reports of Chinese ships' activities in the region.

"We should assert our sovereign rights. We have all the right to demand an explanation (from China)," Jay Batongbacal, director of the University of the Philippines' Institute for Maritime Affairs and Law of the Sea, told The STAR in a phone interview.

Batongbacal said only the Philippines can regulate the exploration and exploitation of natural resources in Benham Rise.

Batongbacal said the DND and DFA were correct in seeking an explanation from Beijing over the reported presence of Chinese survey ships in the region.

He cautioned against dismissing the incident without asserting the Philippines' exclusive sovereign rights in the region.

He said China could not conduct any marine scientific research in the seabed and water column within the EEZ without consent from the Philippines.

But within the ECS, other countries may conduct marine scientific research within the water column as long as it does not pertain to oil exploration.

Batongbacal said the Philippines could build structures within the EEZ.

"We can set up structures along the eastern coast of Luzon, arrange patrols," he said.

Bagong Alyansang Makabayan (Bayan) said President Duterte should assert Philippine sovereignty against Chinese incursion in Benham Rise.

"Instead of being concerned with upsetting China, which has promised to invest in the Philippines, the President should send a clear message to China that Benham Rise is part of Philippine territory," Bayan secretary general Renato Reyes said. – **With Jaime Laude, Edu Punay, Pia Lee-Brago Janvic Mateo, Manny Galvez, Rhodina Villanueva**

OFFICE OF THE ARMY CHIEF PUBLIC AFFAIRS – Email add: oacpa.army2012@gmail.com – Tel no. (02) 845-9555 Local: 5285, 5295

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'Bonifacio' off to marine expo

THE BRP *Andres Bonifacio*, the country's third Hamilton-class or Gregorio del Pilar-class cutter, was dispatched to Malaysia on Tuesday to participate in the Langkawi International Maritime and Aerospace Exhibition.

The *Andres Bonifacio* and its 206-man crew was sent off by Navy Vice Commander Rear Adm. Rafael Mariano in a ceremony at Pier 13 of the Manila South Harbor.

Aside from the maritime exhibition, the *Andres Bonifacio* will also make port calls at Lumut and Port Klang, Malaysia as part of a new partnership with Malaysia and Indonesia to conduct joint patrols of waters between the three nations.

The *Andres Bonifacio* was the originally known as the United States Coast Guard Cutter "*Boutwell*" which was already 49 years old when it was decommissioned in 2016. It was built and launched in 1967.

The *Boutwell* was one of

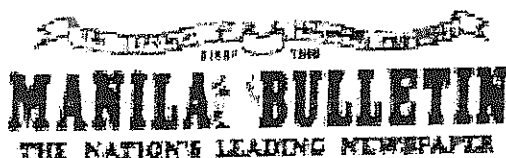
12 Hamilton-class cutters that served in the US Coast Guard, which still has three vessels in service. The Philippines acquired three of these cutters as Excess Defense Articles.

The first to be delivered was the first of its class—the USCGC "*Hamilton*"—which was rechristened the BRP "*Gregorio del Pilar*" in March 2011. The second was the USCGC *Dallas* which was renamed BRP "*Ramon Alcaraz*" in May 2012. The third was the *Andres Bonifacio* was transferred in July 2016.

The Navy has since renamed the entire class of vessels as the Gregorio del Pilar-class after the first of its kind in the Philippines.

Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana had earlier said the *Andres Bonifacio* would be deployed in waters around Sulu to help the BRP *Tarlac*, an amphibious transport dock, which is involved in anti-terrorism and anti-piracy operations in Sulu province.

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We need to be vigilant over Benham Rise

BENHAM Rise has been in the news lately. This is an undersea region as big as Luzon 250 kilometers east of Isabela 5,000 meters above the sea floor and 3,000 meters below sea level. It is a seismically active region which, scientists believe, affected the Philippine Fault System to the west in 1990, causing the disastrous earthquake that hit Baguio City in that year.

But it is as a rich fishing area that Benham Rise has long been known for. Ancient Catanduanes people are said to have fished in the area long before the colonial period and they continue to fish there to this day. In 2008, the Philippines filed a claim for Benham Rise with the United Nations Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf, and the UN approved the Philippine position in 2012.

It is against this background that Secretary of Defense Delfin Lorenzana said last Thursday that several Chinese ships, including a warship, were monitored by satellite to be sailing around the area for three months last year. Considering our previous dispute with China over Scarborough Shoal just west of Zambales in the South

China Sea, the secretary expressed concern that Benham Rise may become another problem area in Philippine relations with China.

The Chinese foreign ministry, through its website, said last weekend that its ships were only sailing through the maritime area. It acknowledged that the UN has approved the Philippine position that Benham Rise is well within the limits of Luzon island's continental shelf. But it does not mean that the Philippines can claim it as its own territory, it said.

We hope the Benham Rise situation will not deteriorate into another dispute with China. The Aquino administration, we may recall, filed a case with the Arbitral Court in The Hague which eventually ruled in our favor against China's claims in the South China Sea. But President Duterte believes it is best, at this time, not to press China and instead seek ways for the two nations to work together in mutually beneficial projects.

We just need to be vigilant against intrusions of any kind that may infringe on our fishermen's ancient right to carry on with their livelihood in the rich maritime region and on our legal right to the area under international law.

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A war on several fronts

**BACK
CHANNEL**

**ALEJANDRO
DEL ROSARIO**

THE Philippines is fighting a war on several fronts. Aside from the war on drugs, the Armed Forces is stretched on military operations against the terrorist kidnap for ransom Abu Sayyaf group and the communist New People's Army.

All this is going on even as a tenuous peace agreement is still hanging fire with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front. With the aborted Bangsamoro Basic Law, a modified framework accord is yet to be worked out by legislators. Then there is the external threat posed by China's aggressive moves in the West Philippine Sea.

It does not take a rocket scientist nor a former defense secretary to tell the government that economic community development should also be implemented to pacify the restive elements of society. A military solution alone won't solve the problem of insurgency from the communists nor the Muslim secessionists. But where will the government source the funds for a complementary social melioration program if it plans a total ban on mining which generates

an estimated P73 billion in revenues?

The civil war in Syria is still raging without a peace settlement in sight because of the hard-line stance of the Bashar al-Assad regime and the rebels. Multilateral involvement of Russia, the United States and the United Nations so far have failed. Because of Vladimir Putin's vested interest that Syria does not fall into the US-backed rebels, the carnage in rebel stronghold Aleppo continues with women and children as collateral victims. This was what drove a flood of refugees and migrants into Europe. They fled the daily bombing, drone attacks and the savage treatment when captured by Assad's loyalist troops. As hard as it is to believe, the man has a following. Who knows the fate that awaits them if the revolutionaries win?

There is, however, a ray of hope that even the longest and most bitter civil strife in a divided nation can be achieved through patience, perseverance and compromise. This was the case in the bloody civil war between Protestants and Catholics in Northern Ireland.

The decades-long struggle between government forces and the communist New People's Army continue to this day even as the two sides across the negotiation table huddle and haggle. The

government accuses the NPA of violating the truce by attacking soldiers on patrol while the rebels claim government troops entered rebel-held territory.

From Oslo, Norway, the peace talks between the GRP and the National Democratic Front-Communist Party of the Philippines shifted to Rome where it was suspended because of disagreements on demands by the NDF-CPP. Now it's on again—but for how long will these talks last before a final and enduring peace accord is reached?

We have a competent government panel headed by Chief Negotiator Jess Dureza, Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana and Labor Secretary Silvestre Bello. But the NDF-CPP side is still composed of an aging group of Jose Ma. Sison and Luis Jalandoni. Their intransigence and hard-line positions are as old as they are. Flexibility and compromise are the two key elements needed in reaching a settlement. The stumbling blocks to a peace settlement remained elusive, but then it's better for both sides to be talking than shooting.

Amid this backdrop of conflicts that confront the country, Deputy Speaker Romeo Acop is proposing the revival of the Reserved Officers Training Corps, the military training program that used to be a component of college education. Our young

men these days cannot even handle a rifle. The nearest they get hold of a weapon is a loose firearm used in barkada brawls.

Back in the day, ROTC officers taught us how to disassemble and reassemble rifles. Firing a rifle at a shooting range a requisite. Preparing our men in the event of war is necessary. Although a conventional ground war has become obsolete with the advent of missiles and nuclear arsenal, military training is still a must so if conquered by the enemy, a guerrilla war can still be waged. This, the Viet Cong proved when they defeated French forces and then American troops in the Vietnam war. North and South Vietnam laid the foundation for a strong unified nation. The Philippines, occupied by Spain, the US and Japan still has to emerge united. Internecine politics and cursed with corrupt leadership, the Philippines remains behind the rest of stable countries in the region.

While the economy has shown signs of robust growth, political stability still has to be achieved. The underlying reason for this malady, according to political observers, is that the Filipino electorate still keep voting for the wrong leaders and basing their choices on the candidates' popularity instead of their competence and vision to lead the nation.

ONLINE NEWS

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www.dwdd.com.ph

Abu's Sub-leader wanted for kidnapping killed in Tawi-Tawi

Posted by **Lui Claudio** on March 24, 2017 at 4:36 PM

Headquarters, Western Mindanao, Command, Camp Navarro, Calarian, Zamboanga City- A notorious sub-leader of the Abu Sayyaf and Kidnap for Ransom Group was killed after resisting arrest of the joint elements of the military and police in Tawi-Tawi today.

Buchoy Hassan, a.k.a Black or Bocoi, was neutralized following a successful law enforcement operation launched by the Joint Task Force Tawi-Tawi and the police at his residence in Barangay Panglima Alari, Sitangkai.

Further recovered by troops were one (1) M16 rifle, five (5) speedboats and several outboard motors found in the residence of the Abu Sayyaf sub-leader.

Hassan, 48, is one of the wanted personalities in Malaysia for his involvement in the abduction of Taiwanese national Chang An Wei, a.k.a Evelyn Chan, at the Pom Pom Island Resort in Sabah in November 2013. Hassan's possible involvement in the kidnapping activities cannot be discounted and are being looked into.

He was reportedly dwelling in Barangay Panglima Alari, Sitangkai, where he used his share from ransom payment for his illegal drugs "shabu" operations in the municipalities of Sibutu, Sipangkot and Bongao, all in Tawi-Tawi.

Hassan recruited cohorts and acquired several speedboats to sustain his illegal activities and became the key facilitator in the illegal drugs trade in Tawi-Tawi.

"We are continuously conducting law enforcement support operations to assist the police and other law enforcement agencies in expediting the arrest of notorious members of the Kidnap for Ransom Group and in pre-empting kidnapping attempts in the province," said Major General Carlito G. Galvez, Jr., Commander, Western Mindanao Command.

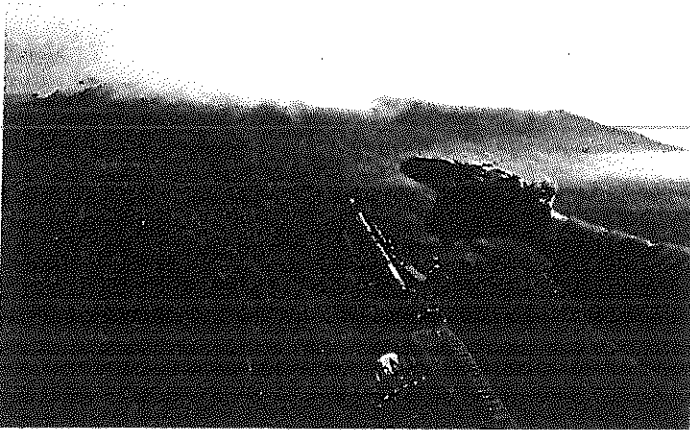
"We would also like to urge local leaders and communities to continue reporting whereabouts of these lawless elements especially Abu Sayyaf members to competent authorities. They should not allow these bandits to stay or roam around their respective areas so that their community can live in peace.

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Abu Sayyaf kill Vietnamese captive in Tawi-Tawi

By Roel Pareño (philstar.com) | Updated March 14, 2017 - 8:47pm



The Vietnamese captive was killed while the Abu Sayyaf were evading troops on Tawi-Tawi, the military said. **STAR/File**

ZAMBOANGA CITY, Philippines — The military has confirmed that the Abu Sayyaf killed one of six Vietnamese sailors abducted off the Pearl Bank near Tawi-Tawi more than three weeks ago.

Col. Cirilito Sobejana, commander of Joint Task Force Sulu, said they have received reports that Abu Sayyaf gunmen killed their captive while escaping from pursuing troops somewhere in Tawi-Tawi.

"Actually, only five are left because one of the victims was killed while on their way (escaping). So, there are five remaining Vietnamese captives who were taken from Pearl Bank," Sobejana said.

Gunmen believed to be linked to the Abu Sayyaf group seized the victims from the M/V Giang Hai 17 nautical miles off Pearl Bank on February 19. The gunmen killed one of the crew members while aboard the cargo vessel and took six captives.

Sobejana, however, said the Vietnamese taken from the Pearl Bank were not brought to Sulu.

"As we speak, they are not here in Sulu. They are still kept by the Abu Sayyaf but not here in Sulu," Sobejana said.

Aside from the Vietnamese taken from Pearl Bank, the Abu Sayyaf group has been holding captive six other Vietnamese sailors near Sibago Island off Basilan last November.

The military said the Abu Sayyaf is still holding 11 Vietnamese, a Dutch national, a Korean, seven Indonesians, five Malaysians, and eight Filipinos captive.

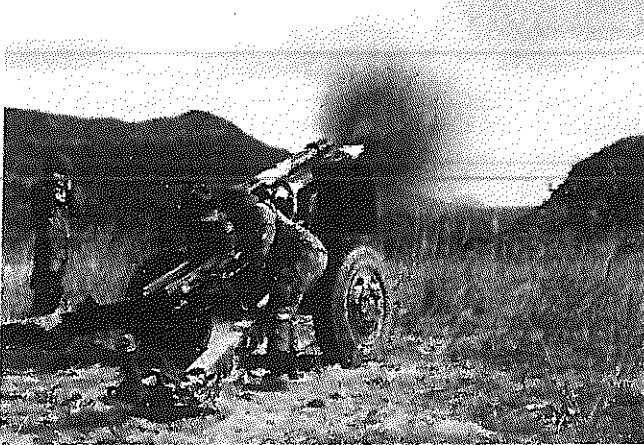
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3 militants hurt in Army bombardment of training camp

By [John Unson](#) (philstar.com) | Updated March 14, 2017 - 6:13pm



Philippine Marines fire an M101 105 mm howitzer during artillery live-fire training at Crow Valley, Philippines. **Cpl. Courtney G. White/U.S. Marine Corps, file**
MAGUINDANAO, Philippines — Three extremists were reportedly wounded in the military's continuing bombardment since Monday of a training camp of fanatical jihadists in Salibo town in Maguindanao.

More than 400 ethnic Maguindanaon families have evacuated to safer areas after Army units started shelling the enclave there of a breakaway faction of the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters led by Commander Salahudin, whose real name is Salahudin Hassan

The Army operation in Salibo's adjoining Barangays Andavit and Gawang was launched after authorities learned that Salahudin and companions Abdulmalik Esmael, Bashir Ungab, Nasser Adil and Ansari Yunos are coddling a foreign militant named Mauwiyah.

Salahudin and his four henchmen were jointly trained in handling and fabrication of improvised explosive devices in nearby Mamasapano town in 2014 by the slain Malaysian terrorist Zulkifli bin Hir, most known as Marwan, and his accomplice Abdulbasit Usman.

The elusive Mauwiyah is also known as Hamoodi Ali, Mohammad Ali and Suharduno.

He is of mixed Singaporean-Indonesian descent and is a member of the Jemaah Islamiya, which started as a cell in Indonesia of the al-Qaeda and eventually became identified with the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria.

Displaced residents said three members of the Dawlah Islamiya, which is based in Butig town in Lanao del Sur, were hurt when artillery shells landed in the hideout of Salahudin in the initial barrage of artillery fire from nearby Army positions.

"They were carried away from the scene by companions and brought to a marshy area near the boundary of the provinces of Maguindanao and North Cotabato," a local official said Tuesday.

Mauwiyah and Salahudin were said to have relocated to a swampy area in Butilen District near Talitay town in Maguindanao as the bombardment ensued.

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Barangay leaders said they have been receiving persistent feedback from informants purporting that the radical BIFF faction under Salahudin and the Dawlah Islamiya, more popularly known as the "Maute" terror group, merged in November 2016.

"That explains why three Maranaws from Lanao del Sur were allegedly injured when mortar projectiles hit the hideout of Salahudin," one of the sources said.

Two of the three militants are fluent in Cebuano, according to the sources.

The Army's 6th Infantry Division, which operates in Maguindanao and nearby Sultan Kudarat and North Cotabato provinces, said one of the targets of the ongoing law enforcement operation in Salibo is Imam Bongos, a leader of another BIFF faction.

In a statement Tuesday, the 6th ID said its law enforcement activities in Salibo and nearby towns were properly coordinated with the joint ceasefire committee helping oversee the enforcement of the 1997 interim truce between Malacañang and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front.

The 1997 Agreement on General Cessation of Hostilities between the government and the MILF enjoins both sides to mutually cooperate in addressing peace and security issues in potential conflict flashpoint areas in southern provinces.

www.philstar.com

Outgoing IMT chief: Jihadists, 'rido' threats to Mindanao peace

By John Unson (philstar.com) | Updated March 14, 2017 - 3:20pm



The erstwhile chief of the Malaysian-led International Monitoring Team, Gen. Wira Zamrose (left) and his successor, Gen. Paiman Masrani, huddle with Philippine Army officials present in Tuesday's IMT leadership transition rites in Cotabato City. **John Unson**

COTABATO CITY — The outgoing chief of the Malaysian-led International Monitoring Team (IMT) has warned that "rido" and the spread of misguided jihadists in Mindanao could imperil the southern peace process.

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Malaysian Army Gen. Wira Zamrose on Tuesday said stakeholders to the Mindanao peace process should work harder in addressing cases of "rido," which means clan war in most Moro dialects.

He said multi-sectoral cooperation is also needed in preventing the expansion to many areas of local extremists boasting of allegiance to the Independent State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS).

Zamrose completed this week his 12-month peacekeeping mission in Mindanao's conflict-flashpoint areas covered by the 1997 ceasefire accord between Malacañang and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF).

He relinquished on Tuesday the IMT leadership to compatriot Gen. Paiman Masrani, who is also from the Malaysian Army.

Zamrose's subordinates in the IMT had also been replaced with a new batch under Masrani.

The IMT, comprised of military and police personnel from Malaysia, Brunei and Indonesia, and non-uniformed conflict resolution experts from Japan, Norway and the European Union, has been helping enforce since late 2003 the interim truce between the government and the MILF.

"I have urged some senior MILF leaders not to let misguided Islamic militants get through their communities," Zamrose said.

He said clan wars involving big groups in certain areas covered by the government-MILF ceasefire pact have also been affecting the peace overtures of both sides.

"In addressing rido we need the utmost cooperation of the MILF, the local communities and the Philippine police and military sectors. Once security forces intervene without coordination, undue encounters happen. That should be avoided," Zamrose said.

He said local sectors and government agencies involved in the Mindanao peace process should also work together in putting end to the continuing rise of local ISIS-inspired groups.

"The presence of these groups can eventually affect the peace process," he said.

Major Gen. Carlito Galvez, Jr., commander of the Zamboanga City-based Western Mindanao Command of the Armed Forces of the Philippines, earlier said there are now more than 50 terrorist cells, patterned after ISIS, in Lanao del Sur and in parts of central Mindanao.

The largest and most active of these fanatical extremist factions, the Maute terror group in Butig town in Lanao del Sur, has been sowing havoc in the province for two years now.

The Maute terrorists, led by siblings Omar and Abdullah Maute, are enforcing a ruthless Taliban-style justice system in areas where they operate and are using the black ISIS flag as their revolutionary banner.

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Duterte to military: Tell China Benham Rise is ours

(Associated Press) | Updated March 14, 2017 - 7:57am



President Rodrigo Duterte gestures as he answers questions from reporters during a press conference at the Malacanang presidential palace in Manila, Philippines on Monday, March 13, 2017. The Philippine president has ordered the military to assert his country's ownership of a vast offshore region off its northeastern coast where Chinese survey ships have been sighted last year and alarmed defense officials. **AP/Aaron Favila** MANILA, Philippines — President Rodrigo Duterte said Monday he has told the military to assert Philippine ownership of a large ocean region off the country's northeastern coast where Chinese survey ships were spotted last year, in a discovery that alarmed Philippine defense officials.

Duterte said he ordered the military to assert ownership of Benham Rise in a friendly way, repeating that his country has no option but to be diplomatic because "I cannot match the might of China."

"My order to my military, you go there and tell them straight that this is ours, but I say it in friendship," Duterte said in a news conference when asked about the issue in the waters facing the Pacific Ocean.RE

Beijing and Manila have a separate long-running territorial feud in the South China Sea west of the Philippines, but tensions have eased considerably since Duterte took office in June and began reaching out to China. He has placed the dispute on the backburner while seeking Chinese trade and economic aid.

The Philippine military spotted the Chinese survey ships crisscrossing the Benham Rise waters suspiciously from July to December last year, Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana said last week. He said the government is considering an increase in patrols and the building of territorial markers in the offshore region.

The Chinese ships' presence in the area was to be discussed late Monday at a meeting of National Security Council executive members and Duterte.

The Department of Foreign Affairs said it asked China through its embassy Friday to clarify what the survey ships were doing in Benham Rise.

In 2012, the U.N. Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf declared Benham Rise to be part of the Philippine continental shelf, where the country has exclusive rights to fish and exploit resources, including undersea deposits of oil and gas, Philippine officials said.

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The Chinese foreign ministry has said its ships have a right to pass through the area under international law.

In the South China Sea, Duterte has scuttled plans made under his predecessor for joint Philippine patrols with the U.S. Navy in disputed waters to avoid offending China. A U.S. Navy aircraft carrier, the USS Carl Vinson, has been sailing on a mission to ensure freedom of navigation in the sea, claimed virtually in its entirety by China.

"America wants to pick a fight there," said Duterte, who has openly criticized U.S. security policies. "Why would I get into a trouble in that area?"

www.pna.gov.ph

PHL looking to survey Benham Rise -- DND chief

By Priam F. Nepomuceno

MANILA, March 14 (PNA) -- To demonstrate Philippine control and ownership of Benham Rise, Department of National Defense (DND) Secretary Delfin Lorenzana said they are looking at a possibility of conducting a survey to determine its exact size and its possible resources.

The maritime feature is located off the Aurora and Isabela coastlines.

"We will make a survey to determine the area's exact size and then later on we will decide what to do with the area," he said in Filipino.

President Rodrigo Duterte, in his press briefing on Monday stressed that the country has rights on the Benham Rise and the possible resources that can be found there.

The DND chief said they will also continue sending out patrols in the area and they will also determine what can be installed or deployed to showcase Philippine claims in Benham Rise.

We will study what we can put there, to exploit also the resources as we know that Benham Rise is the spawning ground of yellow fin tuna and very rich (in maritime resources). It is almost as big as Northern and Central Luzon. So we will continue to study what will be the best way to develop that area for our needs," Lorenzana stressed.

The 13-million-hectare Benham Rise is believed to be a fuel-rich area and awarded to the Philippines by the United Nations in 2012.

Earlier, the People's Republic of China claimed that its vessels were only exercising its right of innocent passage when the DND announced that several Chinese survey ships were spotted in the locality last year.

Lorenzana disputed this Chinese claim and said ships exercising right to innocent passage steam on a definite course and speed and not constantly changing their courses and speeds.

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Previously, Chinese survey ships were also seen off Scarborough Shoal and Reed Bank surveying the sea bed for possible mineral deposits, he added.

The Chinese has gained total control of Scarborough Shoal (also known as Panatag) after a stand-off with the Philippine Navy in April 2012. (PNA)

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