

Army Vision: By 2128, a world-class Army that is a source of national pride



TEAM ARMY

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OFFICE OF THE ARMY CHIEF PUBLIC AFFAIRS

NEWS CLIPPINGS

25 March 2017

Saturday

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

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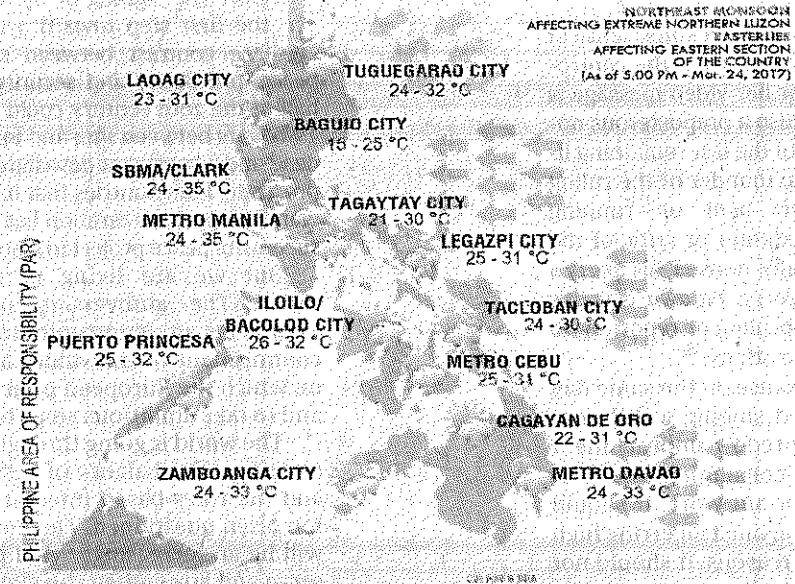


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PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER
BALANCED NEWS • FEARLESS VIEWS

TODAY'S WEATHER FORECAST | MARCH 25, 2017 | SATURDAY



PHILIPPINE AREA OF RESPONSIBILITY (PAR)


NORTHEAST MONSOON AFFECTING EXTREME NORTHERN LUZON
EASTERLIES AFFECTING EASTERN SECTION OF THE COUNTRY
(As of 5:00 PM - Mar. 24, 2017)

City	Temp Range (°C)
LAOAG CITY	23 - 31 °C
TUGUEGARAO CITY	24 - 32 °C
BAGUIO CITY	15 - 25 °C
SBMA/CLARK	24 - 35 °C
TAGAYTAY CITY	24 - 30 °C
METRO MANILA	24 - 35 °C
LEGAZPI CITY	25 - 31 °C
ILOILO/BACOLOD CITY	26 - 32 °C
TACLOBAN CITY	24 - 30 °C
PUERTO PRINCESA	25 - 32 °C
METRO CEBU	25 - 31 °C
CAGAYAN DE ORO	22 - 31 °C
ZAMBOANGA CITY	24 - 33 °C
METRO DAVAO	24 - 33 °C


Event	Time
SUNRISE	5:57 AM
SUNSET	6:07 PM
MOONRISE	3:37 AM
MOONSET	3:34 PM
LAST QUARTER	MAR 23 11:58 PM
NEW MOON	MAR 28 10:57 PM

City	MAR 26	MAR 27	MAR 28	MAR 29	MAR 30	MAR 31
METRO MANILA	24 - 34 °C	25 - 32 °C	21 - 30 °C	20 - 29 °C	24 - 30 °C	25 - 31 °C
TUGUEGARAO	23 - 31 °C	23 - 30 °C	25 - 31 °C	25 - 31 °C	23 - 31 °C	23 - 30 °C
LAOAG	23 - 31 °C	23 - 31 °C	25 - 32 °C	25 - 31 °C	24 - 33 °C	25 - 31 °C
BAGUIO	15 - 25 °C	14 - 24 °C	26 - 31 °C	25 - 31 °C	24 - 33 °C	24 - 32 °C
SBMA/CLARK	24 - 33 °C	25 - 33 °C	24 - 31 °C	25 - 30 °C		

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SAGOT KO, PADALA MO!



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DUTERTE BLAMES US FOR CHINA BUILDUP

STORY BY REUTERS AND AFP

President Duterte said on Thursday that the United States' inaction when China started building artificial islands in the South China Sea was the cause of tensions in the region **A2**

Duterte blasts US inaction in South China Sea

FROM A1

President Duterte on Thursday accused the United States of having a provocative stance on the South China Sea and said its inaction when China started building artificial islands was the cause of tensions now be-setting the region.

Mr. Duterte said Washington's freedom of navigation patrols risked a "miscalculation" that could spark conflict, and accused the previous US administration of pressuring the Philippines to take a stand against China, without a guarantee of military support.

A shot could lead to explosion

"You go there in the pretense of challenging them?" he said of the US patrols that began under the Obama administration.

"One single solitary shot, it could lead to an explosion and it could lead to a war and it will be a slaughter," he said.

Mr. Duterte is open about his grudge against the Philippines' oldest ally, which he said was bound by a treaty to protect the Philippines, but had done nothing when China started building in parts of Manila's exclusive economic zone (EEZ) in the South China Sea.

"Why in hell, America, the only one who can act there, why did it want my navy to go there? It will be a massacre for my soldiers," he told an audience of lawyers.

"Why did you not, the first instance, go to Chinese working there, building structures there?" he said.

He added: "Why did you not reprimand them? Why did you not send five aircraft carriers? And you had to wait for the problem to ripen to an international issue involving, this time, so many countries. You could have [nipped] the problem in the bud had you taken a decisive action."

Mr. Duterte's comments came amid concern in the Philippines that China would build several environmental monitor-

ing stations in disputed waters, including on Panatag (Scarborough) Shoal 230 kilometers off the coast of Zambales province.

China has dismissed reports of the plan as “not true.”

The United States insists it wants to preserve freedom of navigation and oversight in the strategic waterway and that its actions are not a provocation.

In contrast to his tirade against Washington, Mr. Duterte did not criticize China, which he is trying to cultivate as a buyer of the Philippines’ farm produce and builder of its infrastructure.

His overtures toward a country long regarded by Manila as a maritime aggressor marked an astonishing foreign policy shake-up.

Recalling his remarks at an October meeting with Chinese President Xi Jinping, he said the two had a lot in common.

“I decided to change a little bit our foreign policy,” he said.

“Why is it that we are too far from trade and commerce with China? They said we are Americans. Said who?—China,” he said.

“I went to China, [and said, ‘I don’t like Americans, we’re the same. I came to shake your hand and if I can have participation in trade and commerce,’” he said.

Mr. Duterte invited China to send a battleship to visit the Philippines and suggested sharing offshore energy resources in the Philippine EEZ that China lays claim to.

China said on Friday it was in touch with the Philippines about the possible visit of a Chinese naval vessel to the country.

Mr. Duterte said the Philippines could not exploit the natural resources there on its own.

“Even if I wanted to extract everything we do not have the capital. Even the [oil] rig and everything we can’t afford it,” he said. “I would consider sharing it.”

Mr. Duterte’s predecessor, President Benigno Aquino III, had challenged China’s claim to almost all of the South China Sea, where islets, reefs and

atolls are believed to be sitting atop vast energy reserves.

Besides China and the Philippines, Brunei, Malaysia, Vietnam and Taiwan also claim parts of the South China Sea, through which \$5 trillion in global trade passes every year.

After China seized Panatag Shoal in 2012, the Aquino administration in 2013 filed suit at the Permanent Court of Arbitration in The Hague challenging Beijing’s claim to nearly all of the strategic waterway.

The UN-backed tribunal ruled in favor of the Philippines in July last year. But China rejected the ruling, insisting it owns the South China Sea.

Mr. Duterte, who had taken office days before the tribunal’s ruling, has since reversed Aquino’s policy and is seeking billions of dollars of investment and grants from Beijing.

He said he and Xi agreed in Beijing last year that they would look to boost faltering trade ties that had been impacted by the sea row.

No war

Mr. Duterte said he also told Xi the Philippines would put off a discussion of the Hague tribunal’s ruling.

But he said the two countries would have to discuss the issue the moment China began to extract minerals in the Philippine EEZ.

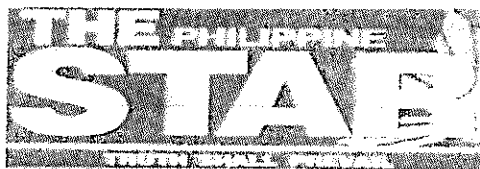
Mr. Duterte repeated earlier pronouncements that he would not go to war with China over the disputed claims.

He said it was pointless trying to challenge China’s fortification of its artificial islands and ridiculed the media for referring to a comment he made during his election campaign, when he said he would ride a Jet Ski to one of Beijing’s reclaimed reefs, and put a Philippine flag there.

“We cannot stop them because they are building it with their mind fixed that they own the place. China will go to war,” he said. “People want me to Jet Ski. These fools believed me.”

—REPORTS FROM REUTERS AND AFP

25 March 2017



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Duterte: US to blame for China sea actions

It was the inaction of the United States that emboldened China to aggressively assert its claim in the South China Sea and the West Philippine Sea, including building artificial islands, many of which have evolved into military

facilities with advanced communications and weapons systems, President Duterte told a gathering of lawyers Thursday night.

In remarks before members of the Integrated Bar of the Philippines (IBP) in Pasay

City, Duterte said only the US has the capability to stop China's actions in disputed waters, but the superpower appeared to have let the Chinese have their way, to the consternation of neighboring

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Duterte: US From Page 1

countries.

The President stressed that the Philippines – under his leadership – would never engage in a violent confrontation with any country, much less with China, just to promote its maritime interests.

"Why in hell *ang* America, *siya lang talaga ang pwede kumasa doon, bakit sabihin niya ngayon magpunta ang Navy ko* (Only America can assert itself there, so why would it tell me to send my Navy)? It will be a massacre for my soldiers, I will not do it," the President said.

Duterte claimed that the Philippines had been warned that "something was afoot" at Panatag (Scarborough) Shoal as "some sort of structure" was being set up in the area as early as five years ago.

"Bakit hindi mo pinuntahan doon? Bakit hindi mo sinita? Bakit hindi ka nagpadala ng limang aircraft carrier at kinasahan mo (Why did you not go there? Why did you not confront them? Why did you

not send five aircraft carriers?) and you had to wait for the problem to ripen into international issue involving this time so many countries," the Philippine leader said.

"You could have (nipped) the problem in the bud had you taken a decisive action," he added.

Duterte said a simple miscalculation in the South China Sea could lead to a war.

"I'm 72 years old. I have so many faults in life. I have a lot of problems, some intentional, some unintentional. I have learned about miscalculation. Be careful of that word," the President said.

He said the US presence in the region was apparently "on the pretext" of challenging China. He said such move nonetheless is very dangerous.

"It is one single solitary shot. It could lead to an explosion and it could lead to war, and it will be a slaughter," the Chief Executive warned.

Duterte again stressed that

the Philippines is no match for China's military might.

"We do not have cruise missiles. We are no match and we have to be brutally frank to admit it. Let us not fool ourselves," he said.

"If that happens, they (China) will attack the island of Palawan. The logistics of America are there... So we go back to the days where it could have been solved or settled, but why did America do nothing about it?"

Panatag Shoal is only 124 nautical miles from Zambales and is well within the Philippines' 200-mile exclusive economic zone.

In a ruling on Manila's maritime case against Beijing, the UN-backed Permanent Court of Arbitration declared the shoal a common fishing ground but invalidated China's sweeping claim in the South China Sea.

China started occupying the shoal in 2012 when it barred the Philippine Navy from apprehending Chinese poachers who had harvested endangered corals, giant clams and

baby sharks

Reports have quoted a Chinese official as saying that China would start this year preparations for the construction of an environmental monitoring station on Panatag Shoal.

Xiao Jie, the mayor of what China calls Sansha City, said the monitoring station is included in the Chinese government's projects lined up for this year.

Sansha is the name given by China to the municipal government that administers several island groups, including disputed areas like the Spratly Islands and Panatag Shoal.

China later denied plans to build structures on the shoal.

Duterte stressed that he would not entertain any military alliance with China, noting that the Philippines has an existing defense treaty with the US.

"There's the RP-US Defense pact. It's passé now but it's there. So I will not enter into a military alliance with anybody but certainly, I can choose the friends who are kind to us, those who understand us, and those who do not make imposition," he told members of the Federation of Filipino-Chinese Chambers of Commerce and Industry yesterday in Pasay City.

Duterte also thanked China

for its readiness to support the Philippines' projects and for allowing the entry of Philippine fruits into its vast market.

Grain of salt

China's assurance that it is not building any structure on Panatag Shoal is a welcome development but should be taken with a grain of salt, defense and military officials who declined to be named warned yesterday.

They urged President Duterte not to take China's

assurance hook, line and sinker as Beijing has a record of breaking promises, as it did in the 1990s during the Ramos administration when it made the Philippines believe that it was only building a shelter for fishermen at Panganiban Reef. The "shelter" eventually evolved into a naval facility.

The fisherman's group Pamabansang Lakas ng Kilusang Mamamalakaya ng Pilipinas or Pamalakaya also expressed doubts on China's assurance –

Jaime Laude, Ding Cervantes

No militarization in disputed sea - China

SYDNEY – China is not militarizing the South China Sea, Premier Li Keqiang said yesterday, although he acknowledged that defense equipment on islands in the disputed waterway had been placed there to maintain "freedom of navigation."

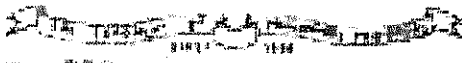
China has drawn international criticism for large-scale building in the South China Sea, although Li told reporters in Australia the development was for civilian purposes only.

"China's facilities, Chi-

nese islands and reefs, are primarily for civilian purposes and, even if there is a certain amount of defense equipment or facilities, it is for maintaining the freedom of navigation," Li said.

China claims most of the resource-rich South China Sea, through which about \$5 trillion in shipborne trade passes every year. Neighbors Brunei, Malaysia, the Philippines, Taiwan and Vietnam also have claims on the strategic waterway. – Reuters

25 March 2017


MANILA BULLETIN
THE NATION'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

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Wealth-sharing with China eyed

Duterte open to joint exploration of mineral resources in disputed South China Sea

By GENALYN D. KABILING

The Philippines is willing to consider a joint mineral exploration with China in the disputed South China Sea de-

spite overlapping claims in the area.

President Duterte had earlier announced he is open to “sharing” resources with China after admitting the country is unable to afford exploring the mineral resources on its own.

“Hindi naman ako madamot. Ang gusto kong kunin ang lahat, wala naman tayong pang-capital. Even in the rigs and everything, we cannot afford it. Baka sharing-sharing na lang [I am not selfish. Even if I wanted to extract

everything, we don't have the capital. Even in the rigs and everything, we cannot afford it. I would consider sharing instead,” Duterte said in a gathering of lawyers in Pasay City Thursday night.

But Duterte made it clear that once China starts extracting minerals in the disputed waters, he intends to raise an arbitration court's decision upholding the country's maritime entitlements.

►14

Wealth-sharing with China... ◀1

'I claim it'

"When you start to dig there the minerals, the riches of the bowels of the sea, kasali tayo (we're part of it)," the President said. "Kasi kalabitin ko na siya. 'Di ba sinabi ko (I'll call its attention and say), you claim it, I claim it. So I claim now my ownership, my entitlements then we have to talk," he added.

The Permanent Court of Arbitration in The Hague had earlier ruled over disputes in the South China Sea in favor of the Philippines. The arbitration court ruled that China has no historical rights to the resource-rich waters, but Beijing has refused to recognize the decision.

However, the President has opted to put the arbitration case in the back-seat focusing instead on enhancing the country's economic relations with China for now. But he has promised not to surrender any sovereignty to Beijing, saying he would raise the arbitral judgment within his term.

This was Duterte's message to the leaders of China during his visit to Beijing last year.

"Sabi ko (I said), you know, I come here in peace. I will shake your hand but there is one thing that you must realize at this early before we start talking, and that is during my term, anytime into that span of many years,

there will be a time that I will mention to you about the arbitral ruling," Duterte said.

"We'll have to talk about it because you claim it to be yours, it is also ours by judgment. I mean, I do not care (about) your history, it is yours. Sabi ko, mag-usap talaga tayo (I said, we really need to talk)," he added.

The President reaffirmed that he would not wage war with China over the territorial conflict since it will lead to a massacre. He conceded the country's military cannot match China's might.

"Wala tayong mga cruise missiles, wala tayo 'non. We are no match and we have to be brutally frank to admit it. Huwag na nating bolahin ang sarili natin," he said.

Meantime, the President expressed gratitude to China for assuring it would not build structures on Panatag Shoal, located within Philippine territory.

"I was told by the Chinese government that in deference to our friendship... and they want to preserve the relations," he said. "They are not building anything sa (on) Panatag. O, sabi ko, 'Thank you,'" he added.

China's foreign ministry had earlier belied media reports that it would build radar stations on Scarborough Shoal, also known as Panatag Shoal. It said it continues to value relationship with the Philippines.

Facilities on reefs

However, Chinese Premier Li Keqiang, who is in Australia, said China needs military equipment on reclaimed reefs in the South China Sea to defend its trade interests in the region. He, however, denied his nation is militarizing the disputed waters.

"China's facilities on Chinese islands and reefs are primarily for civilian purposes," Li said in a news conference on Friday in Canberra with Australian Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull. "Even if there is a certain amount of defense equipment or facilities, it is for maintaining freedom of navigation and overflight."

Li's comments were made during his sole briefing during a five-day visit to Australia. He told lawmakers and business leaders on Thursday that Australia doesn't need to take sides between China, its largest trading partner, and main strategic ally the US.

While Australia has been careful not to offend China, which took 31 percent of its merchandise exports in the 12 months to July, it's been uneasy about Beijing's military build-up in the South China Sea, which contains some of the world's busiest naval trading routes. Alongside China, nations such as the Philippines, Vietnam, and Malaysia claim some of the waters.

About 80 percent of China's oil imports pass through the South China Sea, according to the US Energy Information Administration.

"It is the responsibility of all countries in this region to work together and to maintain peace and stability in the South China Sea and uphold freedom of navigation and overflight," Li said.

Code of Conduct

While disputed remain unsolved, China vowed to strive to complete consultations on a draft Code of Conduct in the South China Sea (COC) framework by mid-2017, together with ASEAN member countries under the condition of no outside disruptions.

The Chinese foreign ministry made this pledge just days before the 20th Joint Working Group Meeting on Implementing the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea (DOC) is held in Cambodia scheduled from March 29 to 30.

On the basis of fully and effectively implementing the DOC, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Hua Chunying said China and ASEAN member countries are committed to "strengthening maritime practical cooperation, actively move forward consultations on the COC, and formulate a set of regional rules acceptable to all."

"With the concerted efforts of China and the ASEAN countries, the situation in the South China Sea is improving toward greater stability," said Hua in a press briefing held in Beijing a transcript of which was posted in the official website of the Chinese embassy in Manila. "Parties concerned have returned to the right track of resolving disputes through negotiation and consultation. The DOC is being implemented in a comprehensive and effective way. The first draft of the COC has also taken shape. Relations between relevant countries are improving. China feels heartened by all these.

On the passage of Chinese vessels conducting marine scientific research across waters near Benham Rise, a seismically active undersea region and extinct volcanic ridge located in the Philippine Sea approximately 250 kilometers east of the northern coastline of Dnapique, Isabela, the Chinese foreign ministry spokesperson emphasized that "there has never been and will not be any dispute between China and the Philippines over that area."

While she admitted Chinese vessels did sail across relevant waters to the northeast of Luzon in the vicinity of Benham Rise at the end of last year, Hua stressed that no operations or other activities were conducted during the passage of the ships because China fully respects the Philippines' rights and interests over the region.

PH rights recognized

She said the Chinese government fully recognizes the fact that the Philippines is entitled to carry out exploration and exploitation of natural resources in this region since the Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf approved in 2012 the submission made by the Philippines in 2009 in respect of the limits of the continental shelf beyond 200 nautical miles in the Benham Rise region.

However, Hua pointed out that Chinese vessels sailing across relevant waters in Benham Rise is supported by international law.

On the basis of international law, including the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Seas, she noted that a coastal state's rights over the continental shelf do not affect the legal status of the superjacent waters and the air space above those waters, nor do they affect foreign ships' navigation freedom in the coastal state's EEZ and on the high seas, or their innocent passage through the coastal state's territorial sea.

"China attaches great importance to the Sino-Philippine relations and cherishes the sound developing momentum of the bilateral relations," said Hua. "Going forward, China will remain committed to properly addressing relevant maritime issues together with the Philippines and creating favorable atmosphere for the healthy, stable and fast development of the Sino-Philippine relations as well as the progress of mutually beneficial and friendly cooperation in various fields.

Chinese war ship to PH

China is expected to deploy one of its biggest battleships to the Philippines and this early, President Duterte is eager to board the sea vessel during its friendly visit.

The President has allowed China to sail through local waters amid improving relations between the two countries but clarified there is no imminent military alliance with the Asian giant.

"China is sending one of its biggest ships. I told the Ambassador of China that I will board it," Duterte said during a gathering of lawyers in Pasay City last Thursday night.

The President, however, said he prefers to enhance the country's trade and economic relations with China instead of forging a military alliance. Besides, the country cannot enter into military alliances with another country due to an existing defense treaty with the United States, according to Duterte. (With reports from Bloomberg and Roy C. Mabasa)

25 March 2017



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METROLINE

BGC shops offer discounts to soldiers

More than two dozen shops at the Bonifacio Global City in Taguig are offering special discounts to soldiers and their families from March 22 to April 30 to mark the Philippine Army's 120th anniversary.

Col. Benjamin Hao, Army public affairs chief, said the "Sundalo Ko, Bayani Ko (My Soldier, My Hero)" project was launched in 2014 to honor the country's soldiers.

Veteran and active members of the Philippine Army

and other major units of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) and their dependents are the beneficiaries of the project.

Hao said they must present a valid AFP identification card in the participating shops in order to avail of the discounts.

On all Sundays from March 22 until April 30, children of soldiers may also explore The Mind Museum for free while their adult companion will be given a special discount.

The list of participating shops is on www.bcda.gov.ph.

– Michael Punongbayan

25 March 2017



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Military personnel, dependents to get discounts at selected BGC shops

Showing their appreciation to the valiant soldiers who are defending the country against all forms of threat, the Bases Conversion and Development Authority (BCDA) yesterday announced all military personnel and their dependents can avail themselves of discounts and other privileges in Bonifacio Global City (BGC), Taguig City.

Philippine Army spokesman Col. Benjamin Hao said this incentive is good from March 22 to April 30 and part of their *Sundalo Ko, Bayani Ko* project.

Helping the Army in this event are the BCDA, Fort Bonifacio Development Center, Station Square East Commercial, Ayala Malls and Serendra.

Hao said the project is a joint social responsibility activity which was first launched in 2014. It aims to give honor and recognition to the heroism of our soldiers.

Veteran and active members of the PA and other

major units of the Armed Forces of the Philippines and their dependents are the beneficiaries of the program.

Hao said these personnel must present a valid AFP identification card in the participating shops in order to avail themselves of the discounts, privileges or other similar offerings and services of the program.

Also on all Sundays from March 22 until April 30, children of soldiers may also explore The Mind Museum located in Taguig for free while their adult companions will be given a special discount.

The PA spokesman said soldiers and their dependents may visit www.beda.gov.ph to get the list of the participating shops and merchants for the *Sundalo Ko, Bayani Ko* project and the promos and discounts they offer.

PNA

25 March 2017

The
Standard
DEFINING THE NEWS

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Army-Reds clash: 3 killed

By Florante S. Solmerin

TWO separate clashes between government forces and members of the New People's Army occurred on Thursday (March 23) afternoon and early Friday (March 24), killing two communist rebels and a member of the Civilian Armed Forces Geographical Units.

Lieutenant Colonel Rommel Pagayon, Commander of the 26th Infantry Battalion reported a 30-minute encounter on Thursday between the Philippine Army and NPA rebels in Loreto, Agusan del Sur.

Pagayon said the encounter happened at 1:30 p.m. at the outskirts of Sitio Mandanao, Barangay Bunucayan.

"Civilians confirmed the two [male and female] NPA fatalities

that were accordingly left in the outskirts area. Unfortunately, one Cagfu member [name withheld prior notification of kin] also died after suffering a gunshot wound on his inguinal area," he said.

Soldiers scouring the encounter site later found the dead body of a woman, allegedly an NPA rebel.

"Tracks of blood and flesh from the severely wounded NPA members were seen in their escape route.

Troops also recovered 2 high-powered firearms [AK47 and an Akkar Shot gun], personal belongings, and subversive documents left by the beleaguered NPAs. Furthermore, civilians also saw the NPAs carrying their wounded and dead," Pagayon said.

On Friday, at 7:15 a.m., fierce fighting erupted between government troops and suspected NPA rebels in an upland village in Tampakan town in South Cotabato.

Sr. Insp. Harold Cornel, Tampakan municipal police station chief, said the clashes ensued after about 50 heavily armed rebels attacked a Cagfu detachment.

He said there were no immediate reports of casualties from both sides.

Citing reports from village officials, Cornel said Cagfu personnel manning the detachment managed to fight back, triggering the firefight.

He added that the Army's 27th Infantry Battalion immediately sent reinforcements to the site, which is located near the base camp of mining firm Sagittarius Mines Inc.

"It's [fighting] still ongoing at this time and there were already reports of evacuations in nearby communities," he said in an interview before noon over radio station dxKR.

Sr. Supt. Franklin Alvero, South Cotabato police director, said he has sent police personnel to the area to assist the operations.

He alerted all police offices and stations in the province for possible attacks from other NPA units.

Prior to the incident, the police officials said they monitored movements of NPA rebels in the hinterland areas of the province, specifically in parts of Barangay Ned in Lake Sebu and the province's boundaries with Sarangani Province in T'boli town and with Sultan Kudarat in Tampakan. **With PNA**

25 March 2017



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5 killed as clashes continue between gov't, NPA forces

By ANTONIO L. COLIMA IV
and MIKE U. CRIS-UNDO

DAVAO CITY – Three Communist insurgents, a militiaman and an Army sergeant were killed, while three other soldiers were wounded in separate clashes by government forces with New People's Army (NPA) in Agusan del Sur, Bukidnon, Davao Oriental, and North Cotabato provinces on March 23.

In a report from the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) Northeastern and Northern Mindanao command, a male and a female NPA combatants were slain in a firefight with elements of the 26th Infantry Battalion in Sitio Mandanao, Barangay Binucayan, Agusan del Sur.

The 30-minute encounter occurred at 1:30 p.m. and also resulted in the wounding of an undetermined number of Communist rebels, according to 26th IB Commander Lt. Col. Rommel Pagayon.

Pagayon also confirmed that a member of the Civilian Armed Force Geographical Unit (CAFGU), whose identity was withheld until after notification of his next of kin, was fatally shot

in the encounter.

Then in Barangay Cayaga, San Fernando, Bukidnon, three skirmishes, also Thursday, resulted in the killing of Sgt. Leo Lugo. The encounter was with rebels belonging to the NPA's Guerilla Front 55 in Brgy Cayaga, San Fernando, Bukidnon.

The firefight also resulted in the wounding of Corporals Zhelmer Roque-ro and Hansen Dave Pajarillo.

The casualties were immediately airlifted to Camp Panacan Station Hospital.

Another 10-minute encounter occurred at 7:20 p.m. after joint army-police team composed of troops from 39th Infantry Battalion and the Cotabato Police Public Safety Company (PPSC) responded to report that there was an NPA presence in Barangay Camutan, Antipas, North Cotabato.

About 200 families fled their homes in Antipas due to the presence of the Communist insurgents.

According to 39th Infantry Battalion Spokesperson First Lieut. Silver Belvis, about 40 rebels, under the command of a certain Alvin Gulmatico, who is also known as Commander Jofel, of the NPA Guerilla Front 53, arrived Thursday in sitios Imbangan and Matias in Baran-

gay Camutan, and sitio Patot in Barangay Datu Agod in a bid to recruit local residents to join the insurgency.

Meanwhile, the elements of the 30th Infantry Battalion, who were providing security for a humanitarian group, also clashed with NPA guerillas in Barangay Jubgan, San Francisco, Surigao del Norte, last Tuesday.

The incident happened at 2 p.m., after the humanitarian team convoy composed of Army, Navy, reservists, health officers from Surigao del Norte Provincial Health Office, Malimono Rural Health Unit and Kiwanis International had just finished the conduct of medical, dental and relief operations in Malimono and San Francisco, when government security troops clashed with the NPAs.

San Francisco town was the most devastated when a powerful 6.7 magnitude earthquake struck the area on Feb. 10, 2017.

An NPA cadre identified as Giovane Pancepano, 38 was killed when an undetermined number of heavily armed NPAs conducted a lightning attack on an Army patrol base in the far-flung area of Comota in La Paz town, Agusan del Sur, also last Tuesday. (With a report from Joseph Jubelag)

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**2 NPA members killed
in firefight**

Two members of the New People's Army were killed in a firefight with government troopers in Loreto town, Agusan del Sur on Thursday, the military said. One member of the Citizen Armed Force Geographical Unit (Cafgu) also died. The encounter happened at 1:30 p.m. in the outskirts of Sitio Mandanao, Barangay Bunucayan in Loreto. Lt. Col. Rommel Pagayon, commanding officer of the Army's 26th Infantry Battalion, said he sent his men to the area after receiving reports about "NPA extortion activities." —PHILIP C. TUBEZA

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The Manila Times

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AS TROOPS PURSUE REBELS IN NORTH COTABATO

NPA uses 400 people as human shield

BY JULMUNIR I. JANNARAL

SHARIFF AGUAK, Maguindanao: Some 400 residents of upland Barangay Camutan in Antipas, North Cotabato were used as human shields by the New People's Army (NPA) rebels on Thursday, a local government official said.

The rebels held the civilians hostage when fighting erupted between them, and government forces in this remote village close to mountain ranges in North Cotabato village. There is a heavy NPA presence in Camutan.

The Department of Education and school officials immediately closed all schools and evacuated the schoolchildren to safer areas.

Antipas Mayor Egidio Cadun-gon, chairman of the municipal peace and order council, confirmed the occupation of Barangay Camutan by armed NPA rebels who looted houses, collected money from the villagers and took

their farm animals.

Supt. Romeo Galgo, Police Regional Office-12 spokesman said about 300 fully armed NPA rebels stormed Camutan at around 4:00 a.m. on Thursday, preventing residents from leaving in an apparent attempt to use them as human shields against pursuing government forces.

"The village of Camutan has about 133 households, only 47 managed to escape and are now staying at an evacuation center in Antipas," Galgo added.

Galgo said the fighting erupted at 7:15 p.m. when joint elements of the 39th Infantry Battalion,

members of the Antipas Philippine National Police (PNP) and North Cotabato PNP converged in Camutan.

"Tension was still high as of 9 p.m. since the NPAs remained in Sitio Malapangi and other rebels also occupied the sub-villages of Matias and Gumay," he said.

Chief Insp. Rolando Dillera, Antipas town police chief, said residents of the nearby villages of Agod and Malire immediately fled when they saw the rebels had occupied Sitio Malapangi at 6 a.m.

Classes in the affected villages were suspended.

Army and police intelligence units are now validating reports that the NPAs are still holding 70 residents as captives, to be used as "human shields" if the military will drive them away.

The first to evacuate right after the NPAs arrived in Barangay Camutan were 47 families driven away at gunpoint after they were robbed of their money and personal belongings such as wrist-

watches, farm tools, clothes and the livestock in their yards. The rebels also ransacked and took goods from san-sari stores abandoned by their owners.

Gadungon said the attack also caused panic in the neighboring villages.

The mayor said relief workers could not reach trapped families in Barangay Camutan as there was no clearance from the military, adding that efforts by the local government are underway to negotiate with the rebels to allow the safe release of civilians.

Meanwhile, a contingent of Philippine Marines prevented the NPA from robbing villagers of Kalamansig town in Sultan Kudarat of money and *palay* (unmilled rice) harvests after they attacked the communist rebels last week.

Earlier, a young serviceman, Private Albino Bahian 3rd of the 2nd Marine Battalion, was killed in the bloody March 17 incident that also left nine of his fellow Marines wounded.

They were attacked by the NPA guerrillas while on their way to Sitio Tinagdagan in Barangay Hinalaan in Kalamansig to validate the reported presence of gunmen collecting "protection money" from residents.

Sources from the tribal elders, said the NPAs, led by Tirso Sakudal, actually planned to rob local residents of food and other valuables but failed when the Marines arrived that started the fire fight.

Sakudal, also known as "Mac-Mac," is wanted for heinous offenses including cattle theft, extortion and large-scale propagation of marijuana plants. He is a senior leader in the NPA's Guerilla Front 73.

Local officials in the hinterland towns of Sultan Kudarat confirmed that six NPAs were killed when the Marines returned fire while three more were wounded in the ensuing firefight and died while being carried away from the crime scene by their companions.

Major Gen. Carlito Galvez, Jr.,

commanding general of the Zamboanga City-based Western Mindanao Command of the Armed Forces of the Philippines, said the Marines were sent to Barangay Hinalaan only to validate reports that gunmen were seen encircling farming enclaves there.

Kalamansig and nearby seaside towns in Sultan Kudarat are more known as bastions of the Moro National Liberation Front and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front, where the NPA's presence was never felt until Friday's incident that caused panic among local residents.

Kalamansig Mayor Ronan Eugene Garcia said the NPA has lately been trying to expand its operations in certain highland villages in the municipality populated by indigenous tribal folks.

Garcia on Friday said he has been receiving feedback that the NPAs who ambushed the Marines were out to collect money from farmers and divest them of rice and corn grains in their barns.

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POLICE FILES

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3 PATAY SA BAKBAKAN NG NPA AT CAFGU SA AGUSAN DEL SUR

DALAWANG miyembro ng New People's Army (NPA) at isang miyembro ng Caggu ang nasawi sa naganap na engkwentro sa Loreto, Agusan del Sur

Pansamantala munang hindi pinangalan ang namatay na CAFGU habang 'di pa batid ng kanyang pamilya. Inaalam naman ang pagkakakilanlan ng dalawang nasawing rebelde na kinabibilangan ng isang amasona

Ayon kay Capt. Joe Patrick Martinez, spokesman ng 4th Infantry Division, dakong 1:30 ng hapon nang maka-engkwentro ng mga elemento ng 26th Infantry Battalion ang 'di pa batid na bilang ng mga rebelde sa Sitio Mandanao, Barangay Bunucayan sa Loreto.

Nagsagawa ng operation ang militar matapos na makatanggap ng report kaugnay ng ginagawang pangigkil ng mga rebelde sa nasabing lugar.

Ang bakbakan ay tumagal ng halos 30 minuto.

Narekober ng militar sa pinangyarihan ng engkwentro ang AK 47 automatic rifle, Akkar 12 gauge shotgun, subversive document at mga personal na gamit. (Mark Obleada)

25 March 2017



Pahina. 3

4 tumba sa bakbakan ng militar at NPA

UMAKYAT na sa apat ang mga nasawi sa walang patid na sagupaan ng Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) at New People's Army (NPA) sa magkakahiwalay na lugar sa bansa.

Sa bayan ng Loreto sa Agusan del Sur, patuloy ang opensiba ng 26th Infantry Battalion ng Philippine Army laban sa komunisang grupo sa bahagi ng Sitio Mandanao, Barangay Bunucayan na nagsimula noong Huwebes at nagresulta sa pagkamatay ng dalawang rebelde at ikinasugat pa ng ilan.

Nakarekober ang militar sa lugar ng engkwentro ng dalawang armas kabilang ang isang AK-47, isang Akkar shotgun at iba pang subersibong dokumento.

Sinabi ni Lt. Col. Rommel Pagayon, pinuno ng 26th IB, kumilos ang mga sundalo kasunod ng sumbong na nagsasagawa ng pangngikil sa lugar ang NPA.

Ayon pa kay Pagayon, ilang mga residente sa nabanggit na lugar ang nakasaksi na kalong-kalong ng mga gerilya ang kanilang sugatang mga kasamahan habang papatakas.

Kinumpirma rin nito na isang miyembro ng CAFGU ang namatay habang tinutugis ang mga rebelde.

Sa Davao Oriental, nasawi naman ang isang sundalo sa sagupaan sa Sitio Maglahos, Brgy PM Sobrecary, Caraga.

Tinukoy ni Major General Rafael Valencia, commander ng 10th Infantry Division, ang napatay na si Army Sgt. Leo Lugo habang nasugatan naman sina Corporal Zhelmer Roquero, Hansen Dave Pajarillo at Private First Class Rodullo Bascon. Nagpapatrilya ang militar nang matiyempuhan ang may 50 rebeldeat agad nagkaputukan sa lugar. **JEFF G**

25 March 2017



Pahina. 4

2 NPA rebs utas sa encounter

Bulagta ang dalawang miyembro ng New People's Army (NPA) at isang Caggu sa naganap na sagupaan ang tropa ng militar at komunistang grupo sa liblib na lugar ng Sitio Mandanao, Barangay Bunucayan, bayan ng Loreto, Agusan del Norte noong Huwebes ng hapon. Sa ulat na nakarating kay Captain Joe Patrick Martinez, spokesman ng Army's 4th Infantry Division, nakasagupa ng Army's 26th Infantry Battalion ang grupo ng mga rebelde na sinasabing nanghaharas sa mga sibilyan kaugnay sa revolutionary tax. Tumagal ng 30-minuto ang bakbakan hanggang sa mapatay ang dalawang rebelde habang isang Caggu ang nalagas. Samantala, sinasabing marami naman ang tinamong sugatan sa hanay ng NPA rebs na mabilis na nagsitakas patungo sa direksyon ng kagubatan. Narekober sa encounter site ang isang AK 47 rifle at isang Akkar shotgun. **Joy Cantos**

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3 killed in Agusan encounter

Two New People's Army rebels and a Civilian Armed Forces Geographical Unit member were killed in an encounter in Agusan del Sur Thursday.

Army Capt. Joe Patrick A. Martinez, 4th Infantry Division spokesperson, said troops under the Army 26th Infantry Battalion were patrolling Sitio

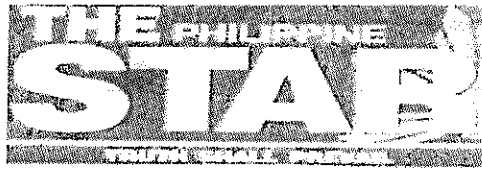
Mandanao, Barangay Bunucayan, Loreto, Agusan del Sur at around 1:30 p.m. after receiving information that NPA rebels were engaged in extortion activities in the area.

They chanced upon a group of NPA rebels, triggering a firefight. Two NPA rebels and a CAFGU member were killed in the 30-minute

encounter.

Several NPA rebels were reportedly wounded in the encounter. Troops recovered an AK47 and an Akkar shot gun, personal belongings, and subversive documents in the encounter site. **(Francis T. Wakefield and Mike U. Crismundo)**

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AFP washes hands of housing mess

The Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) is not to blame for the delay in the award of units to military personnel at government housing projects in Bulacan.

Brig Gen Restituto Padilla, AFP spokesman, said the statement of the National Housing Authority (NHA) blaming the AFP housing board for the takeover of vacant housing units by members of the militant group Kalipunan ng Damayang Mahihirap (Kadamay) was "inaccurate."

"The AFP housing board desires that every soldier acquire their own houses... It had worked closely with a lot of organizations, including the NHA," Padilla said.

However, he said the NHA

has yet to respond to the request of the soldiers to adjust the size of the units.

A soldier who asked not be named said the units occupied by Kadamay are too small. He said the villages still lack water, electricity and other facilities.

Philippine National Police chief Director General Ronald dela Rosa said he would look into the reported delay in the award of housing units to police officers.

Around 5,000 members of Kadamay took over the housing units allotted for soldiers and policemen in Pandi and San Jose del Monte City last week.

The militants were told to vacate the units by Sunday or face eviction. – **Jaime Laude, Emmanuel Tupas**

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MAINTAINING FREEDOM OF NAVIGATION

SPRATLYS GUNS FOR CIVILIAN USE—CHINA

SYDNEY—China is not militarizing the disputed South China Sea, the country's premier said Friday in Australia, claiming defense equipment Beijing has installed on artificial islands is "primarily" for civilian use.

The South China Sea is a source of growing regional tension, with Beijing insisting it has sovereignty over virtually all the resource-rich waters, which are also claimed in part by several other countries, and deemed international waters by most of the world.

"Even if there is a certain amount of defense equipment or facilities, it is for maintaining the freedom of navigation," Premier Li Keqiang told a press conference with Australia Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull in Canberra. "Because without such freedom, or without stability in the South China Sea,

the Chinese side would be among the first to bear the brunt of it."

'Civilian purposes'

China "never has any intention to engage in militarization in the South China Sea", he said, adding installations that include airstrips and missile batteries are "primarily for civilian purposes."

Li said aircraft and ships that transit through the South China Sea were from trading partners with Beijing, "so one can easily imagine how many Chinese interests are at stake here."

Sydney-based independent strategic consultant Tim Johnston said the nations involved in the dispute, including China and other claimants such as Vietnam and the Philippines, were "being slightly disingenuous."

"You build up features in the

South China Sea in disputed waters, you are likely to have to defend them, which implies some degree of militarization," he told Agence France-Presse (AFP). "We have the photographs of what looks like military installations on a number of the islands that China occupies."

Li's comments that Beijing did not want to restrict navigation in the South China Sea was also to be expected as no country was seeking such an outcome, Johnston said.

Instead, it was China's need for a veto over activities in the waters that were contentious "in a region where nationalism is very raw and borders are undefined," he said.

But he added the premier's remarks could be interpreted as an attempt "not to exacerbate the situation," at least for the current period. —AFP

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WARDING OFF CHINA

PH WARSHIP TO PATROL BENHAM RISE

By Philip C. Tubeza
@pctubezaINQ

The Philippine Navy will regularly patrol Benham Rise in the western Pacific after Chinese research vessels were sighted in the area. Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana said on Friday.

Lorenzana spoke after the Philippine Navy sent one of its warships, the frigate BRP Ramon Alcaraz, to begin patrolling the undersea region and biodiversity hot spot off eastern Luzon.

"The Navy will henceforth regularly patrol Benham Rise partly due to past Chinese activities there but, more importantly, because it is part of our

continental shelf and awarded to us by the [United Nations]," Lorenzana said.

In 2012, the United Nations said Benham Rise was part of the Philippines' continental shelf under the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea.

The undersea region is located 250 kilometers east of Isabela and Aurora provinces.

Exploration

"Our next activity is to have the area surveyed to clearly determine its limits, depths, coral formations," Lorenzana said.

The 12-million-hectare undersea region is rich in biodiversity and minerals.

A military spokesperson earlier said that the Navy

might deploy the BRP Gregorio Velasquez, which is capable of oceanographic and hydrographic surveys, to Benham Rise.

Lorenzana earlier this month said a Chinese research vessel was sighted for about three months in Benham Rise, raising fears that China was going to claim it.

President Duterte, however, played down the Chinese presence in the region, saying he was informed beforehand that China was sending research ships there.

China later said that it respected the Philippines' maritime rights over Benham Rise and that its ships were just passing through the region. INQ

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Navy deploys warship to patrol Benham

By JAIME LAUDE

The Philippine Navy has deployed one of its three warships to Benham Rise.

The *BRP Ramon Alcaraz* has started patrolling the 13-million-hectare under-sea region and biodiversity hotspot east of Luzon, officials said yesterday.

"The Navy will henceforth regularly patrol Benham Rise partly due to past Chinese activities there but more importantly because it is part of our continental shelf," Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana told reporters.

Lorenzana said the Navy would deploy the *BRP Gregorio Velasquez* to conduct a survey of Benham Rise.

"Our next activity is to have the area surveyed to clearly determine its limits, depths, coral formations, etc.," Lorenzana said.

Lorenzana earlier revealed a Chinese survey ship was spotted off Benham Rise for three months last year.

He described the presence of Chinese survey ships as "very concerning" and ordered the Navy to drive away the foreign ships.

In 2009, the Philippines

lodged a full territorial claim to Benham Rise with the UN Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf.

The claim was granted in 2012, with Benham Rise as an extension of the Philippines' continental shelf, located some 350 nautical miles off Aurora province in the country's eastern seaboard.

China said on Thursday it fully respects the Philippines' rights over the continental shelf in Benham Rise.

China, however, stressed that it still has the right and freedom of navigation in those areas.

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MANILA BULLETIN
THE NATION'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

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Duterte bares reason tension escalated in South China Sea

The United States had a chance to nip in the bud the territorial conflict in the South China Sea years ago but has "done nothing" about it, according to President Duterte.

The President has sharply rebuked the United States for its inaction when China started its reclamation works in

the disputed waters a few years ago, accusing America of waiting for the conflict to ripen into an international issue.

Duterte is resenting US pressure to take a stand against China for its failure to take a "decisive action" to resolve the matter in the past. ▶6

Duterte bares reason...

◀1

"Why in hell ang Amerika siya lang naman talaga ang pwedeng kumasa doon. Bakit sabihin niya ngayon magpunta ang Navy ko? (Why in hell did America not move when it is the only one who can stand against China? Why did it want my Navy to go there?) It will mean a massacre for my soldiers. I will not do it." Duterte told a gathering of lawyers in Pasay City Thursday night.

"Why did you not, at the first instance pinuntahan ninyo 'yung mga Instik doon nagta-trabaho (confront the Chinese working there), building that structures there?" he said.

The President recalled that the Philippines was "warned by everybody" about China's construction works in disputed territory five years ago. At the time, the United States, Australia, and other nations were conducting over flights in the area.

He asked why the US, which is bound by a defense treaty to protect the Philippines did not confront China to stop building on parts of the country's territory.

Miscalculation

"Bakit hindi mo pinuntahan doon? Bakit hindi mo sinita? Bakit hindi ka nagpadala ng limang aircraft carrier at kinasahan mo? (Why did you not

go there? Why did you not reprimand them? Why did you not send five aircraft carriers?) And you had to wait for the problem to ripen into an international issue involving this time so many countries Vietnam, lahat na," he said in his rebuke of the US.

"You could have cut the problem in the bud had you have taken indecisive action," he added.

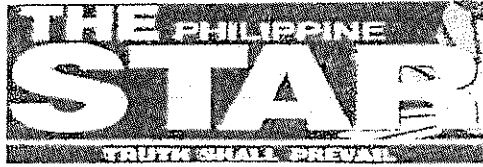
At present, the President said the Philippines cannot challenge China's presence in the disputed area because it was no match with the Chinese force.

He warned against "miscalculation" of moves that might worsen the conflict in the South China Sea. "It is one single solitary shot. It could lead to an explosion and it could lead into war, and it will be a slaughter," he noted.

"So we go back to the days where it could have been solved or settled but why did America done nothing about it? Wala. Tapos ngayon tayo ang ipasubong. They want us to be assertive, for what reason?" he added.

Duterte also downplayed his earlier campaign promise to ride a jet ski to the disputed territory and plant a Philippine flag to assert the country's claim. He said his comment was part of the campaign rhetoric when he ran for president. (Genalyn D. Kabiling)

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Duterte threatens to 'flatten' NPA mountain lairs

President Duterte may be ready to resume talks with communists, but he is also prepared to "flatten mountains" to assert to the rebels that they cannot claim any part of Philippine territory to be theirs.

Speaking at the Integrated Bar of the Philippines (IBP) convention in Pasay City Thursday night, the President said while the government and communists are

now holding backchannel talks in preparation for formal negotiations, there are some things that he cannot give up.

He would insist on a ceasefire agreement with clear parameters and would not recognize rebels' claim that policemen or soldiers cannot enter areas they consider as their territories, he said.

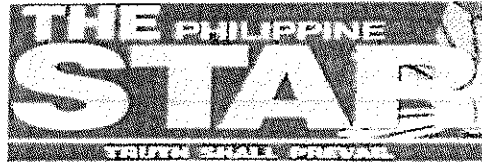
"The Republic of the Philip-

ines owns every inch of this island of this Republic as delineated in the Constitution. Nobody but nobody claims any part of it except the Republic of the Philippines. *Pag wala 'yan, giyera na lang tayo* (Without this, let's just go to war)."

"We have been at war for 50 years. You want another 50 years? Fine," he said.

– Alexis Romero,

25 March 2017



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Rody recalls life as NPA hostage

By **ALEXIS ROMERO**

When communist rebels pointed an M-14 rifle at his head, President Duterte thought about his third child who was still in the womb of his wife.

Duterte, then a prosecutor, was held hostage by the New People's Army (NPA) and underwent trial by what he called a "kangaroo" court because of his role in the imprisonment of some rebels.

"I could feel the cold steel here in the (temple). The first thing that crossed my mind was my son, still in the womb of my wife," Duterte said, referring to his youngest son Sebastian, during graduation rites of the Philippine National Police Academy class 2017 yesterday in Cavite.

"I told them it's OK for me to die. Everyone will die. If it's my time, it's my time," he added.

Duterte said he made a request to the rebels who wanted to execute him.

"Let the world know that you killed me because of my job. That's it. Just a little

favor... That you killed me because I was doing the prosecution work against your comrades," he said.

Duterte said the rebels decided not to push through with their threat.

"The fools did not push through with my execution. Now, when I go to their area, they cook for me and guard me. Well, that's life," Duterte remarked.

Duterte narrated the anecdote as he was explaining the benefits that his administration provides to policemen and their families.

"We fathers, especially those with young children, what bugs us when we go out to fight and even to travel to dangerous places," he said. Duterte then vowed to build a multibillion-peso trust fund for policemen's families and to give jobs to the widows of fallen law enforcers.

Duterte terminated talks with communist rebels last February after they insisted on their demand to free their jailed colleagues with criminal cases.

– **With Ben Serrano, Jaime Laude**

25 March 2017



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At Ground Level

SATUR C. OCAMPO

Give free rein to 'passion for peace'



The momentarily disrupted work on the GRP-NDFP peace talks has continued. In eight days the 4th round of formal negotiations will take place in Norway (April 2-6). This time the talks will not be in Oslo but in a town called Noordwijk.

The change in the venue seems aimed at providing a fresh atmosphere for non-adversarial negotiations to proceed on the primordial agenda of social and economic reforms and on the sensitive matter of forging a viable interim bilateral ceasefire agreement for the duration of the peace talks.

Recall that in early February the volatile President blusteringly cancelled the GRP-NDFP peace talks he had revived in August and let loose his war-making impulse. Taking the cue, his defense secretary declared an "all-out war" against the CPP-NPA. Then early this month, while having signalled he would pursue the peace talks, Mr. Duterte "meantime" reinforced the aggressive campaign with express permission to the AFP and PNP to use all their "assets" in waging it.

That has set off more aerial bombings of communities in the hinterlands across the country, using warplanes and helicopter gunships, aside from artillery bombardments from AFP field units on the ground. Such combined bombings – supposedly launched under the rubric of "focused operations" with "surgical" accuracy – have had little, if any, effect against NPA combatants, according to reports. Instead, as documented by human rights groups, the aerial assaults have caused increasing numbers of civilians to flee back again to evacuation centers. Many rural homes get flattened or burned. The farmers' crops are damaged, and other sources of livelihood are seriously disrupted.

In brief, aerial bombings are causing much "collateral damage" (a term coined by so-called US counterinsurgency experts). Having anticipated these, President Duterte even offered apologies in advance to the civilians who would be adversely affected by his orders to his soldiers to go ahead and "flatten the hills."

But would that advance apology suffice to make up for the damages inflicted upon his impoverished constituencies whose lives he had vowed to uplift?

Moreover, Mr. Duterte would also have realized by now that flying aircraft and dropping bombs and rockets entails more financial costs for the government and the people than whatever gains are expected in this all-out war. Hadn't he said that rather than buy bullets he would prefer to buy machineries and give them away to help the poor?

This mode of war will continue until otherwise ordered by the AFP chief of staff, Gen. Eduardo Ano, says the armed forces spokesman. Or until the two sides shall have reinstated their respective unilateral ceasefire declarations before the formal negotiations begin on April 2. (The earlier ceasefires had been in effect between August 2016 and February 2017.) The reinstatement was agreed upon in a joint statement issued in Utrecht, the Netherlands last March 11, after successful back-channel talks initiated by Mr. Duterte.

Within the next eight days, other steps agreed upon are expected to be taken, mainly by the government, such as the following: 1) releasing an NDFP consultant arrested in Davao City in February to join the 4th round of negotiations; 2) ensuring the continued participation in the talks of 19 NDFP consultants and staff released in August (but ordered rearrested in February) by taking all legal means to enable their “free and unhindered movement;” 3) releasing three NDFP consultants convicted of common crimes through presidential pardon also to enable them to join the Norway talks; and 4) exerting best efforts to effect the release, on or before April 2, of 19 aged, sickly and long-detained political prisoners on humanitarian grounds.

All these commitments by the GRP panel comply with the Joint Agreement on Safety and Immunity Guarantees and the Comprehensive Agreement on Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law – both reaffirmed by the two parties a second time on March 11 along with all previously signed agreements and joint statements.

Giving impetus to the continuation of the peace negotiations are the exhaustive efforts and sustained financing by the Royal Norwegian Government, which has acted as third-party facilitator since

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OCAMPO From page 9

2004. The Norwegians have harnessed the cooperation of the Dutch government in facilitating the safe entry into and exit from the Netherlands of NDFP participants in the peace talks.

It's now appropriate for the Duterte government to give full rein to what presidential adviser Jesus G. Dureza calls the President's “passion for peace” towards fulfilling his campaign promise to continue and complete the GRP-NDFP formal peace negotiations. After all, the administration's Philippine Development Plan 2017-2022, approved recently, cites the attainment of

just and lasting peace as its first “cross-cutting bedrock strategizing” target.

On its part, the National Democratic Front of the Philippines has responded with an unprecedented show of cooperation with Mr. Duterte. It has agreed to accelerate the pace of the negotiations. In the past three rounds of talks it made sure draft agreements were completed as to make it probable for the key agreements on social and economic reforms and on political and constitutional reforms to be sealed within the first half of Mr. Duterte's term. That could enable the two sides to initially implement the agreements, and thus provide immediate benefits

to the Filipino people

The NDFP has also conceded, however problematical as it turned out to be, to the reciprocal unilateral ceasefire declarations which held for five months. It has agreed to mutually reinstate these before the start of the fourth round of talks, and to resolve the issues raised during the five months as it negotiates the terms of reference of a bilateral interim ceasefire agreement.