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NEWS CLIPPINGS

29 March 2017

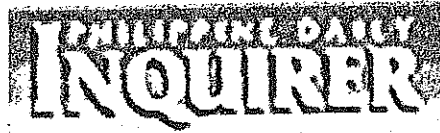
Wednesday

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


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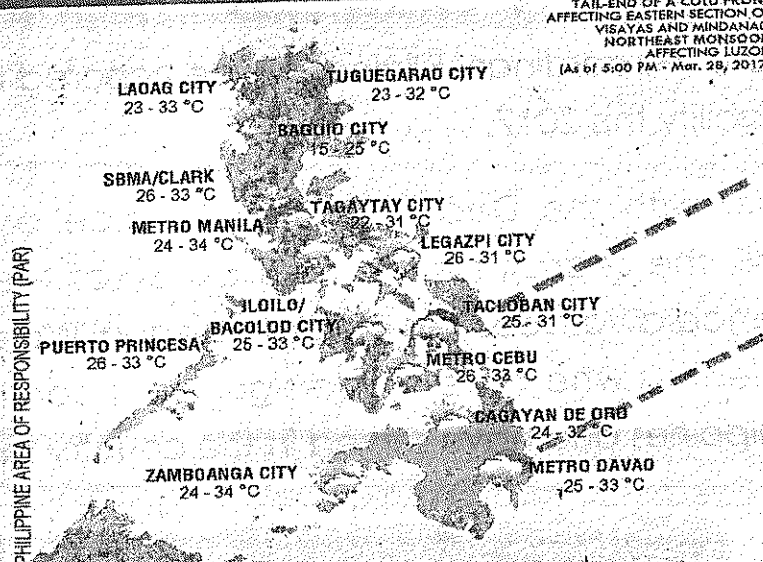


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PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER
BALANCED NEWS • FEARLESS VIEWS

TODAY'S WEATHER FORECAST | MARCH 29, 2017 | WEDNESDAY




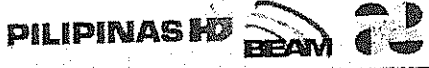
PHILIPPINE AREA OF RESPONSIBILITY (PAR)

TAIL-END OF A COLD FRONT AFFECTING EASTERN SECTION OF VISAYAS AND MINDANAO. NORTHEAST MONSOON AFFECTING LUZON (As of 5:00 PM - Mar. 28, 2017)

SUNRISE	SUNSET
5:54 AM	6:08 PM
MOONRISE	MOONSET
6:44 AM	7:21 PM
NEW MOON	FIRST QUARTER
MAR 28 10:58 PM	APR 4 2:30 AM
LOW TIDE	HIGH TIDE
MANILA SOUTH HARBOR	
5:05 AM	11:41 PM
0.05 Meter	0.71 Meter

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

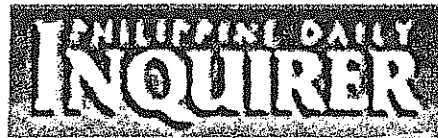
	MAR 30	MAR 31	MAR 30	MAR 31	MAR 30	MAR 31		
METRO MANILA	24-33°C	24-34°C	TAGAYTAY	22-31°C	22-30°C	TACLOBAN	25-32°C	25-31°C
TUGUEGARAO	24-33°C	24-34°C	LEGAZPI	26-31°C	25-31°C	CAGAYAN DE ORO	24-32°C	23-32°C
LAOAG	24-33°C	24-33°C	PUERTO PRINCESA	26-32°C	25-32°C	METRO DAVAO	25-34°C	25-33°C
BAGUID	16-26°C	16-26°C	ILOILO/BACOLOD	26-33°C	25-33°C	ZAMBOANGA	23-34°C	24-34°C
SBMA/CLARK	25-33°C	25-32°C	METRO CEBU	26-32°C	25-33°C			

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China man-made isles ready for military use

FROM A1

BEIJING—A report from a US think tank says China has nearly completed construction work on three artificial islands in the South China Sea, giving it the ability to deploy combat aircraft and other military assets to the disputed region whenever it wishes.

The Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative (AmTI), part of Washington's Center for Strategic and International Studies, said the work on Philippine-claimed Kagitingan, Zamora and Panganiban reefs included naval, air and radar facilities and hardened surface-to-air missile shelters.

The three islands—known internationally as Fiery Cross, Subi and Mischief reefs—are part of the Spratly chain, which is claimed in whole or in part by China, the Philippines, Brunei, Malaysia, Vietnam and Taiwan.

Next: deployment

The think tank cited satellite images taken this month, which its director, Greg Poling, said showed new radar antennas on Kagitingan and Zamora.

"So look for deployments in the near future," Poling said.

On each of the reefs, China has constructed enough concrete hangars for 24 fighter jets and four or five larger planes such as bombers or early warning aircraft, the report said.

China already uses an existing airfield on Woody Island in the similarly disputed Paracel chain, located to the north, where it has maintained mobile HQ-9 surface-to-air missiles for more than a year and deployed antiship cruise missiles on at least one occasion, the think tank said.

The think tank said advanced surveillance and early-warning radar facilities on Kagitingan, Zamora and Calderon (Cuarteron) reefs, as well as Woody Island, and smaller facilities elsewhere gave it similar radar coverage.

The airfields and advanced surveillance and early-warning radars will allow China's military to operate over virtually the entire South China Sea.

"Beijing can now deploy military assets, including combat aircraft and mobile missile

launchers, to the Spratly Islands at any time," the report said.

Civilian purposes?

China's creation of seven artificial islands in the South China Sea has drawn strong criticism from Washington and others, who accuse Beijing of further militarizing the region and altering geography to bolster its claims.

Beijing has denied Washington's charges that it is militarizing the South China Sea, although last week Premier Li Ke-qiang said defense equipment had been placed on islands in the disputed waterway to main-

But he said "China's continued construction in the South China Sea is part of a growing body of evidence that they continue to take unilateral actions which are increasing tensions in the region and are counterproductive to the peaceful resolution of disputes."

Limiting China access

US officials said last month that China had finished building almost two dozen structures on Zamora, Panganiban and Kagitingan reefs that appeared designed to house long-range surface-to-air missiles.

In his Senate confirmation

tain "freedom of navigation."

China "never has any intention to engage in militarization in the South China Sea," Li told a news conference with Australian Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull in Canberra.

He said installations that had been placed on the islands, including airstrips and missile batteries, were "primarily for civilian purposes."

A Pentagon spokesperson, Cmdr. Gary Ross, declined to comment on the specifics of the Anti report, saying it was not the defense department's practice to comment on intelligence.

hearing in January, US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson angered China by saying it should be denied access to islands it had built up in the South China Sea.

Tillerson subsequently softened his language, saying that in case of an unspecified "contingency," the United States and its allies "must be capable of limiting China's access to and use of" those islands to pose a threat.

In recent years, the United States has conducted a series of freedom-of-navigation operations in the disputed waterway, raising tensions with China. —REPORTS FROM

AP AND REUTERS

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Tugboat engineer rescued from Abus

By ROEL PAREÑO

BASILAN – Government troops rescued on Monday in Basilan the chief engineer of a tugboat kidnapped by Abu Sayyaf bandits last week.

Laurencio Tiro, 62, of M/T *Tug R 9* was rescued along the shore in Sitio Sasa, Barangay Basakan in Hadji Mohammad Ajul town at around 10:30 p.m. by personnel of the 4th Special Forces Battalion led by Lt. Col. Andrew Bacalla and a barangay police action team, said Col. Juvymax Uy, Joint Task Force Basilan commander.

Tiro was brought to the Camp Navarro General Hospital in Zamboanga City for checkup. He was also presented to Western Mindanao Command chief Maj. Gen. Carlito Galvez Jr.

Tiro and the captain of the tugboat, Aurelio Agac-ac, were rescued in the waters off Sibago Island on Thurs-

day. Agac-ac was rescued on Saturday near the area where Tiro was found.

"This is another successful operation. We hope it will continue so we can rescue the remaining kidnap victims," Galvez said.

Birthday gift

Tiro said his freedom is his only gift to his wife, who celebrated her birthday yesterday.

He said he was no longer expecting to be rescued because they were constantly

on the move to avoid pursuing troops.

"Due to the relentless pursuit operations, my captors were forced to release me to evade combat," Tiro said in Cebuano.

Naval forces earlier seized two pump boats from the bandits while conducting a maritime blockade off the coast of Al-Barka.

Soldiers also seized an assault rifle and three speedboats during operations to rescue Agac-ac. One of the suspects died in the encounter.

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The Manila Times

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Kidnapped roll-on-roll-off tugboat engineer rescued

BY JULMUNIR I. JANNARAL

SHARIFF AGUAK, Maguindanao: The Joint Task Force Basilan with the intelligence and civil-military on Monday evening pressured the terrorist Abu Sayaff Group (ASG) to release their kidnap victim – the chief engineer of roll-on-roll-off (Ro-Ro) tugboat.

Western Mindanao Command (Westmincom) spokesperson Capt. Jo-ann Petinglay identified the rescued kidnap victim as Laurencio Tiro, chief engineer of Super Shuttle Roro 9 tugboat.

Petinglay said Tiro was rescued at 10:30 p.m. along the shoreline of Sitio Sasa, Baran-

gay Basakan, Hadji Mohammad Ajul town in Basilan.

She said four days of extensive search-rescue-recovery operations by the elite Army unit of the 4th Special Forces Battalion under Lt. Col. Andrew Bacala and the Barangay Peacekeeping Action Team of Basilan resulted in Tiro's rescue.

Tiro was kidnapped along with Aurelio Agac-ac, boat captain of Super Shuttle T/B 1 of the Asian Marine Transport last March 23 along the seawaters off Sibago Island in Basilan by a group of armed men suspected to be ASG's kidnap-for-ransom group.

Major General Carlito Galvez Jr, Westmincom commanding general, said "terrorism and violent extremism, including kidnapping-for-ransom and other capital crimes have no place in our civilized society."

"The recent case of rescue and recovery of Mr. Agac-ac and Mr. Tiro from the clutches of the terrorist ASG is the success of a military-political-social approach in thwarting violent

extremism and criminality from establishing foot holds in our communities," he added.

He also urged the people to keep a united front in protecting their community from criminals and fight back by cooperating with the security forces in unmasking the terrorists.

Upon his rescue, Tiro, was immediately escorted to the headquarters of the 19SFC in Barangay Dancalan, Lamitan City and made to undergo a medical check up.

He was then brought to the Westmincom on Tuesday where he underwent another medical checkup at Camp Navarro General Hospital in Zamboanga City. He will be escorted back to his family.

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The Manila Times

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IEDs exploded, defused in Central Mindanao

THE police detonated on Monday night an improvised explosive device (IED) under the Tamontaka Bridge, a major span in Cotabato City, a few hours after a powerful IED exploded in Maguindanao town.

Senior Insp. Rustum Pastolero, Cotabato City police station 3 chief, said the IED, composed of black powder with cut nails as shrapnel and a mobile phone as triggering device, was found at about 8 p.m. or two hours after a similar bomb went off in Talayan town of Maguindanao.

"It was planted under the bridge, near the police and the Army's Special Forces detachment at the approach of Tamontaka Bridge," Pastolero said.

Bomb experts from the EOD (explosive ordnance division) immediately cordoned off the area and detonated the IED at about 8:15 p.m., described as powerful that could cause the bridge to collapse. The bridge is the lone link of Cotabato City to Maguindanao and Cotabato airport in Awang, Datu Odin Sinsuat town in Maguindanao.

"Obviously, the IED was intended for police and soldiers," Pastolero said.

Two hours earlier, a powerful IED exploded at the gate of Talayan town hall. No one was hurt but it caused minor damages to the guard house sentry.

Colonel Roberto Sarmiento, commander of the Army's 19th Infantry Battalion, said unidentified men planted the IED at the gate apparently to inflict injuries, even death, to local officials coming out of the government facility.

Meanwhile, investigation is looking at the angle if the Talayan bombing was connected to the detonated IED at Tamontaka Bridge.

Authorities suspected new recruit members of the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF) could be behind the twin attacks as the IEDs had similar marks contents to the ones used by the rebels.

But the BIFF, under the faction of Ismael Abubakar alias Bungos, denied involvement in the recent atrocities.

**JULMUNIR I. JANNARAL
AND MOH SAADUDDIN**

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Malaya
The National Newspaper

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Abu Sayyaf captive recovered

THE chief engineer of a tugboat was released by his Abu Sayyaf captors on Monday night in Hadji Mohammad Ajul town in Basilan, four days after he and his captain were abducted in the province.

The Abu Sayyaf is still holding 26, 20 of them foreigners.

Troops recovered Laurencio Tiro, chief engineer of Super Shuttle Tug 1, at the shoreline of Sitio Sasa in Barangay Basakan at around 10:30 p.m. or shortly

after his release, said Capt. Joann Petinglay, spokeswoman of the military's Western Mindanao Command.

"They were pressured by the presence of the military. There was no ransom paid (for his release)," said Petinglay when asked what prompted the Abu Sayyaf to release the kidnap victim.

Tiro was abducted last Thursday off Sibago island in Basilan along with tugboat captain Aurelio Agacac. – *Victor Reyes*

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

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NPA attack delays road, displaces 50 workers

By LIEZLE BASA INIGO

ALCALA, Cagayan — Suspected New People's Army (NPA) rebels torched last Sunday night three heavy equipment of a private contractor tasked with completing the road connecting this town with neighboring Baylosis, commander of the army's 17th Infantry Battalion (17th IB) based in Barangay Masin, Alcala, expressed disappointment at the NPA's latest atrocity as it delays the building of the road which is essential ushering in development the two towns.

Moreover, about 50 workers involved in the construction project were

Baggao.

At least six heavily-armed guerrillas set fire on three heavy equipment of Pulsar Construction Corp. in Barangay Baybayog, here and then used the firm's Isuzu Elf truck as their getaway vehicle, which they also torched and abandoned in Barangay Adaoag, Baggao.

Lieutenant Colonel Rembert R. immediately rendered jobless by the NPA attack.

Prior to the torching of the P10 million worth of heavy equipment for construction, a worker confirmed that he was handed an extortion letter by an NPA member with the instruction to give it to the Pulsar management.

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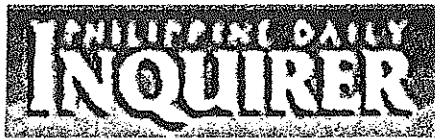
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• **Cops tag NPAs for killing of village official**

KIDAPAWAN CITY – Police here tagged the liquidation squad of the New Peoples' Army (NPA) Front 53 as behind the killing this Sunday of a village official. City police director, Superintendent Leo Ajero, said that based on the SOGO reports, the gun used to execute barangay kagawad Albert Domingo of Barangay Marbel here, was the same pistol used in killing a certain 'Bantito', a businessman from Arakan, North Cotabato, two years ago. Both were assets of the military. Domingo was a former member of the Army's 39th Infantry Battalion. Ajero said that of the three angles they have identified in Domingo's killing, the NPA's involvement is 'closest to reality.' Other motives include carjacking, as the suspects snatched the motorcycle being driven by the village official after the execution. Authorities also did not discount possibility that 'love triangle' was behind Domingo's murder. (Malu Cadelina Manar)

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CHINA ASSURES PH OF BILATERAL MECHANISM IN SOUTH CHINA SEA

By Leila B. Salaverria
@LeilasINQ

China on Monday assured President Duterte of its commitment to a "bilateral mechanism" and a code of conduct that would prevent territorial disputes in the South China Sea from erupting into conflict.

Chinese Ambassador to the Philippines Zhao Jianhua told Mr. Duterte during a meeting in Davao City that China was looking forward to the convening in May of the first meeting of the bilateral mechanism set up to handle the South China Sea disputes, according to presidential spokesperson Ernesto Abella.

Avoiding misunderstandings

"Through this bilateral mechanism, mutual trust and maritime cooperation will be forged and misunderstandings will be avoided," Abella said.

Zhao also said China would cooperate with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean) toward the conclusion of a code of conduct in the South China Sea.

The Philippines, as this year's Asean chair, is pushing for the completion of the framework for the proposed code of conduct.

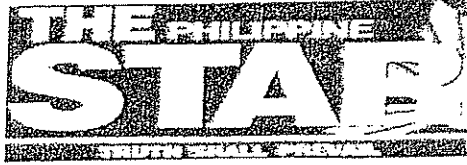
China claims almost all of the South China Sea, but the Philippines, Brunei, Malaysia, Vietnam and Taiwan have competing claims in the strategic waterway through which \$5 trillion in global trade passes every year.

The UN-backed Permanent Court of Arbitration in The Hague ruled last year in a case brought by the Philippines, invalidating China's claim and declaring that Beijing had violated Manila's rights to fish and explore for resources in the West Philippine Sea, waters within the country's exclusive economic zone in the South China Sea.

But Mr. Duterte, after winning presidential election last year, upended Philippine foreign policy by deferring assertion of the tribunal's ruling, steering the country away from the United States, and making overtures to China and Russia. INQ

(1)

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Duterte, Misuari meeting cordial - Palace

By ALEXIS ROMERO

President Duterte and Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) founder Nur Misuari discussed on Monday ways to achieve peace in Mindanao in a meeting described as "warm" and "cordial."

Presidential spokesman Ernesto Abella could not provide details about the closed-door meeting of Duterte and Misuari in Davao City, merely saying that the discussions were about the situation in Mindanao.

"(It) was a close-in meeting so... Basically, it was a reaffirmation of the importance of securing just and lasting peace and development for Mindanao. It was warm, cordial, positive," Abella said.

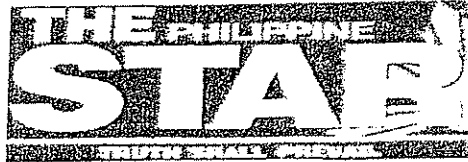
Abella could not say whether the two talked about mea-

sures seeking to establish a federal government in the country and proposed changes to the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM).

Misuari founded the MNLF in 1972 to advocate the establishment of an independent Moro state in Mindanao. The group and the Philippine government signed the Tripoli Agreement in 1976 which paved way for the creation of the ARMM two decades later.

Misuari, who was accused of being the mastermind of the bloody Zamboanga siege in 2013, met with Duterte in Malacañang last November after the court suspended the implementation of an arrest warrant against him. – With Helen Flores, Marvin Sy, Jess Diaz, Delon Porcalla, Non Alquitran

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China to work with Asean on sea code

By ALEXIS ROMERO

China is determined to work with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) for the crafting of a framework for the code of conduct for claimants in the South China Sea dispute.

Chinese Ambassador Zhao Jianhua relayed the message to President Duterte during their meeting in Davao City last Monday, presidential spokesman Ernesto Abella said.

"His excellency Zhao expressed China's determination to work with ASEAN member states in finalizing the Code of Conduct Framework on the South China Sea middle of this year," Abella said in a statement.

Zhao said China is looking forward to the first meeting on bilateral mechanism for the South China Sea row in May.

"Through this bilateral mechanism, mutual trust and maritime cooperation will be forged and misunderstandings will be avoided," Abella said.

Hours before the meeting, United States Ambassador Sung Kim called on Duterte to convey his country's readiness to assist the Philippines in terms of military equipment and training.

"The President said that Philippines-US relations at the bilateral level remain strong and there is readiness to discuss more matters of mutual interest with the US," he said.

"His Excellency Sung Kim also assured (President Duterte) that the US understands the security concerns of the Philippines and

that the US is ready to provide more military equipment, assistance and training," he added.

Abella said Duterte and Kim agreed that their countries have mutual interests and shared values and that fruitful engagements and discussions are very important "in ensuring that both states are on the same page."

Duterte and Zhao also discussed the handling of the South China Sea issue, defense cooperation and capacity building, infrastructure projects financing, anti-poverty and the campaign against illegal drugs.

Abella said Zhao assured Duterte that China is ready to implement a cooperation agreement signed by the two countries' coast guards.

"He (Zhao) looks forward to the Philippine Coast Guard delegation's visit to China to hammer out actions, activities and new engagements to ensure that South China Sea is a sea of cooperation," Abella said.

"He is also looking forward to the resumption of bilateral defense cooperation and participation in the One Belt, One Road Summit in Beijing in May 2017," he added.

Zhao said China is hopeful that the Philippines would soon use its donations for anti-poverty programs and anti-illegal drugs operations.

Duterte also met with Péter Szijjártó, Hungary's foreign affairs and trade minister, and expressed readiness to strengthen bilateral ties between Manila and Budapest.

"The President said that the Phil-

ippines is very interested in further strengthening bilateral relations with Hungary in terms of trade and investment and commerce, opening up the Philippine countryside as potential new markets, security cooperation and people-to-people exchanges through scholarship programs," Abella said.

Szjijártó informed Duterte that Hungary is set to reopen its embassy in the Philippines.

"There will also be constant dialogue and person-to-person exchanges through scholarship programs to Hungary. Citing these areas of cooperation, Szijjártó said he is excited about the upgrade in the Philippines-Hungary cooperation," Abella said.

Szjijártó said Hungary shares a common vision with the Philippines in the fight against terrorism and illegal migration.

Panatag master plan

Despite an earlier denial of reports that it was building a monitoring station on Panatag Shoal, China actually has a master plan for the full development of the shoal which is within the Philippines' exclusive economic zone, former Paranaque congressman Roilo Golez said yesterday.

Based on the master plan, Beijing is eyeing a 3,000-meter long runway and a harbor on the shoal.

"In our various strategic meetings – that latest was held in Japan – China, it turned out, already has a master plan (for Panatag Shoal)," Golez said in a forum at the Manila Hotel yesterday. – With Jaime Laude, Paolo Romero

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Military belittles NPA, says it's a spent force

BY VICTOR REYES

ON the eve of 48th foundation anniversary of the New People's Army, the Armed Forces yesterday told the armed wing of the Communist Party of the Philippines to reflect on its existence amid the supposed "growing disdain" of the people on the movement.

"It is time for it to seriously introspect on their relevance in the light of growing disdain of the people over the NPA's forced monetary exactions, destructive arson of farm implements and public conveyances, their various atrocities and abuses, and their duplicity to the peace talks," said Col. Edgard Arevalo, chief of the AFP public affairs office.

Military estimates place the NPA strength at about 4,000 men, mostly in the Northern Mindanao and Davao regions. The NPA thrives on "revolutionary tax," a euphemism for extortion, from businesses and individuals.

Arevalo said the NPA

Arevalo said the military considers the NPA a spent force, compared to decades ago. The group reached its peak strength of more than 20,000 in the 1980s.

"Given the serious degradation of the strength and followings of the NPA, we deem it no longer a force to recon with as compared to the '70s and the '80s. Today, they have been relegated to pure banditry and terrorism as they continue to extort money from people or corporations that provide employment to our people," said Arevalo.

Formal peace negotiations between the government and the communist National Democratic Front are due to resume on April 2 in the Netherlands. The two sides

have expressed intent to re-instate their respective ceasefires, prior to the resumption of the talks.

President Duterte lifted the government ceasefire and terminated the talks last month after a series of NPA attacks on civilian and military targets. The communists followed suit, citing government violations of its ceasefire.

There is still no word from Malacañang as to the government truce will be reinstated. The communist group said it is going to declare a new ceasefire before March 31.

NO NPA IN METRO

Last Monday, dozens of masked protesters, claiming to be NPA rebels, held a lighting rally in Quezon City. The protesters said the rally was part of the celebration of the NPA anniversary.

An intelligence official, speaking on condition of anonymity, said the protesters are actually members of the "legal fronts" of the communist party. He said no NPA member has been monitored in Metro Manila.

"They are from the legal fronts, posing as Red fighters. There are no armed (NPAs) here in Metro Manila," the official said.

Arevalo said: "Our reports provide that those who pulled out the lightning rally are paid NPA sympathizers, supporters, and front organizations posing as NPAs."

"We nonetheless urge them not to abuse the magnanimity of the present administration as regards freedoms of assembly and of expression. While they may want to exercise both, they should do so with due regard to the people who stand to suffer the disruptions in livelihood and well-being," said Arevalo.

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Benham Rise potential source of energy

By MARIO B. CASAYURAN

The 24-million hectare Benham Rise undersea plateau east of Luzon has potential methane hydrates that could be a possible source of energy for the Philippines.

This assessment was made yesterday by Sen. Sherwin Gatchalian, chairman of the Senate economic affairs committee, as he conducts this morning a hearing on a proposal by Sen. Juan Edgardo Angara to create a Benham Rise Development Authority (BRDA). It will be the committee's second hearing since three weeks ago.

Gatchalian said the Philippines has at present explorations and research

partnerships with different countries.

The undersea level of Benham Rise goes deeper as the continental shelf is measured eastward into the Pacific Ocean.

"In fact, marami ang gusto makipag-partner sa atin para ma-explore at painamin ang research diyan sa Benham Rise sa nakitang methane hydrates," he said. (There are many parties that want to go into joint explorations with us, particularly given the existence of methane hydrates; it will be good for research too.)

Gatchalian had said creation of the BRDA would show to the world, including China, that Philippine activity and governance exist in the area.

If these activities are not done at

Benham Rise, China might be tempted to come in unmolested like what it had done in the West Philippine Sea (WPS) where China reclaimed parts of the Spratly island chain and built air and naval bases in the reclaimed land, the senator added.

Some quarters had questioned the sudden presence of a Chinese vessel in the Benham Rise area and President Duterte's announcement that he was not averse to China building observation structures at Scarborough Shoal (Panatag island).

Gatchalian said he had invited the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) to give clarity and enforce Philippine sovereignty over the Benham Rise.

Because of alleged Chinese incur-

sions into the area, Gatchalian said he also invited the Department of National Defense (DND) so that the DND could be given representation in the proposed BRDA.

"Ang mahalaga din dito ay 'yung makukuha natin ang long-term strategy, whether it is defense or in other aspects," he stressed. (What is important here is the formation of a long-term strategy, whether it is defense or other aspects.)

"The concept of the BRDA is holistic sustainable development. What this means is that future generations should benefit from what we could get from Benham Rise, whether food or energy, among others." Gatchalian added.

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PAGBABAGO

West Philippine Sea – an unfinished advocacy of Letty Shahani



By FLORANGEL ROSARIO BRAID

THE last advocacy which the late Letty Shahani, diplomat, politician, educator, development and culture advocate, took up with such intense passion, was that of the country's sovereign right to the West Philippine Sea (WPS). As in her other advocacies – women and children's rights, culture and education, rule of law and governance, and international relations – she approached all these within a holistic framework, one that weighed lessons from the past, futuristic concerns, and the various economic, social, political, cultural, humanistic implications.

Those of us who have lived close to Philippine waters could then empathize with her feelings of protectiveness over our rights to our national territory. Like her, I lived close to the beaches of Dagupan, Pangasinan, as a child, and experienced as well working

on fisheries resources management projects in the most marginalized fishing communities for 7 years. Thus, I understand her pleasant remembrance of romping around the beach, and comprehend as well how the current encroachment into our sovereign waters in Scarborough Shoal can affect the future of our fishermen, their womenfolk and children. In an interview, she showed her fighting spirit when she suggested that the women activists form a chain all the way to Panatag Shoal (or Bajo de Masinloc or Scarborough) to show their protest over China's claims. Panatag located near Pangasinan waters. This brought to mind how critical these resources are in providing women alternative livelihood as shown in our experience in a Bohol fishing community. The availability of funding support motivated a dozen or more fishermen's wives who were working as domestics in Manila, to return home to work on a

community project on processing and marketing dried fish.

I am pleased to note that Professor Jay Batongbacal, director of the UP Institute for Maritime Affairs and Law of the Sea, had added another credible voice in the people's protest against the current establishment of structures on Panatag Shoal.

According to Supreme Court Associate Justice Antonio Carpio, Beijing is now planning to build a radar station, a move meant to back its maritime claims in the region. Justice Carpio asks the government to rethink our China ties as this recent move could escalate militarization in the area. The planned environmental monitoring station may just be a first step in a "creeping occupation as seen in previous Chinese incursions in Kagitingan Reef," he noted. Carpio suggests holding a national debate and consensus on how the nation should proceed with its bilateral relations with China. A

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possible implication is that China will use these military installations “to enforce the nine-dash line as China’s national boundaries and that it would grab 80% of Philippine EEZ or Exclusive Economic Zone and 100% of Philippine extended continental shelf in the WPS.”

Jay, a fellow consultant on the ADB-PH fisheries resources project 17 years ago, noted in an interview that he found President Duterte’s statement that we cannot stop China’s building activities, “troubling.” That we have sovereign rights over these maritime territories is very clear in the Constitution. The President had allowed China to undertake research but even this activity, like other resource explorations, requires certain consent procedures to protect our interests. Our current stance – “waffling” on position and admission of helplessness is not an acceptable basis for negotiation. And asserting your rights does not mean you have to go to war, according to Jay, our expert on the laws of the sea. If she were still with us, I am sure she would have spoken candidly on the current development.

We remember Senator Letty’s authorship and sponsorship of some of the most

important legislation – the Anti-Rape Law and the early bills which provided the basis for the reproductive health law; the laws that created the National Commission for Culture and the Arts and the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority. During the policy consultations on the revision of the Fisheries Code that our IEC Advocacy Team conducted, Letty provided some of the most valuable insights in the crafting of the final draft.

The nation mourns the passing of an outstanding and brilliant diplomat and legislator, a woman ahead of her times, a patriot who had demonstrated consistency in her thoughts, speech, and action. She has brought grace, dignity, and intelligence in all the platforms where she has performed – on the world stage at the UN, at the legislature, in the classroom, and in the farmland. Adieu to a friend, kababayan, admirer, and fellow traveler towards the quest for authentic independence, equity, and social justice!

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29 March 2017

The Manila Times

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Reds to fortify revolutionary forces

THE Communist Party of the Philippines-New People's Army (CPP-NPA) Far South Mindanao command announced it will strengthen its wing armed forces as it recently made a show of force in Pakibato district of Davao region.

Carlo, field commander of the NPA district guerilla unit in Sarangani province, said their main focus is to strengthen the revolutionary forces in Mindanao as the rebels mark the 48th founding anniversary of the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) this Wednesday.

The Far South Mindanao regional command has urged revolutionary mass organizations to increase their base and strengthen the forces of the revolution.

The NPA said their forces in Mindanao region already gained its strength before the unilateral ceasefire with the government took effect.

As communist rebels they have expanded their group and consolidated their mass base in the Central and Southern part of the region, Carlo said.

He said they strongly protest the accusation that the CPP-NPA are "extortionists and terrorists" as the government and the international community call them.

The NPA also condemned the burial of former President Ferdinand Marcos at the heroes' cemetery and decried President Rodrigo Duterte's anti-drug

campaign which resulted in the extra judicial killings of suspected users and pushers of illegal drugs.

The group also said that while the nationwide campaign against illegal drugs has drastically curbed illegal drugs in the country it did not eliminate its widespread proliferation. Even the thousands of confessed users who surrendered since July 2016 have returned to the vice because the government has not offered job opportunities to them, according to Carlo.

He added they will not hesitate to kill and attack any member of the Armed Forces and the police if the situation calls for it.

Both the Philippine government and the CPP-NPA-National Democratic Front (NDF) agreed to reinstate their respective unilateral ceasefire declarations that will take effect before the scheduled fourth round of talks this April. The NDF is the umbrella organization representing the CPP-NPA in the peace negotiations with the government.

The NPA is the armed wing of the CPP that was founded by Bernabe Buscayno, known as Commander Dante, on March 29, 1969.

The NPA conducts its armed guerilla struggle based on the strategic line of protracted people's war according to military records.

JERRY N. ADLAW

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ONLINE NEWS 29 MARCH 2017

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Sailors worked like slaves with threat of beheading hanging over their heads

From Asia One (Mar 28): Sailors worked like slaves with threat of beheading hanging over their heads
Five Malaysian men held captive by Abu Sayyaf were fearing for their lives throughout their eight-month ordeal in the jungles of the southern Philippines as the Abu Sayyaf militants threatened to behead or shoot them.

Tayudin Anjut, one of two men rescued first, said they lived in the jungle and were moved from one place to another at night.

"Sometimes they wore face masks. We were not blindfolded or tied though," said the frail-looking man after being rescued and brought to the Prime Minister's residence yesterday.

There were no physical beatings but Tayudin and Abd Rahim Summas, the other rescued sailor, suffered body aches. They had to be wheeled into the residence as they were reunited with their family.

Tayudin, said the captives were forced to work for the captors.

"We were treated like slaves. Disuruh bikin itu, disuruh bikin ini we were asked to do this and that)," he told the media.

According to Tayudin, they had little to eat and drink.

"We were ordered to cook for them, and they only gave us leftovers to eat ... if there was nothing left over, then there would be no food for us," he was quoted as saying by Bernama

"Sometimes we would have rice. Without food and medicine, my eyesight is failing and I can barely see now," he said.

Tayudin said the kidnapers allowed them to contact their families several times, but each time, they also threatened to kill them.

Both Tayudin and Abdul Rahim did not know they were being rescued.

"There were no parting words between us and the other three captives because we did not realise we were being released," he said.

The 45-year-old, who looks older than his age, was able to speak slowly despite his fatigue.

Abd Rahim, 62, however, could barely speak and choked on his words when he tried to answer questions posed by reporters.

"Thank you to the Government for helping us return to our home land," the older man said in barely a whisper.

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Abd Rahim, who also suffers from high blood pressure, appeared weak and was bent over in the wheelchair as he was brought in.

His teary-eyed daughter Rasniyati, 40, hugged him and said she was glad that her father had been returned safely to the family.

She said Abd Rahim had contacted the family several times during his capture.

"Once he told me to tell my mother that his body ached all over," she said.

The two men will be treated at the Selayang hospital. They were among five tugboat crewmen abducted in waters off Dent Haven in Lahad Datu district last July 18.

Tayudin said that last Thursday, he and Abd Rahim were taken by villagers in a boat before being handed over to the Philippine authorities.

Tayudin was welcomed back by his wife Gustia Sultan, 47, and their children, Nurerin Farisha, 13, and Mohd Fahirin, five, while Abdul Rahim was met by his daughter Rasniyati, 40, and several other family members, who all could not hold back their tears when they met.

At 9.30am yesterday, ESSCom commander Datuk Wan Abdul Bari Wan Abdul Khalid confirmed that the three other kidnapped men – Fandy Bakran, 27, Mohd Jumadil Rahim, 24, and Mohd Ridzuan Ismail, 33, – were rescued on Sunday night.

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BIFF blamed for bombing in Maguindanao

From the Philippine Star (Mar 28): BIFF blamed for bombing in Maguindanao

a bomb near the municipal hall of Talayan town just two hours before experts defused an explosive found beside a security checkpoint in Cotabato City.

Senior Superintendent Agustin Tello, director of the Maguindanao provincial police, said no one was hurt in the bombing in Talayan but the incident triggered panic among residents.

Officials of the Army's 6th Infantry Division are convinced the outlawed Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF) was behind the attack.

The group, which boasts of loyalty to the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, is known for bombing non-military targets to avenge losses in encounters with pursuing state security forces.

The BIFF, feared for its enforcement of a ruthless Taliban-style justice system in areas where it operates, lost more than 20 members during a three-day Army operation early this month in nearby Salibo municipality in Maguindanao.

The bombing near the Talayan municipal center preceded the deactivation at about 8:00 p.m. Monday by bomb experts of an improvised explosive device (IED) found near a joint Army-police security checkpoint in Tamontaka District in Cotabato City.

The city police said it was for the vigilance of villagers and barangay officials that the bomb was found and immediately dismantled by responding police and Army bomb experts.

The IED was fashioned from an explosive blasting powder packed with twisted nails and rigged with a battery-operated detonator that can be set off from a distance using a mobile phone.

City residents have been experiencing a conspicuously fragile peace since last year owing to the iron-fisted policy of Mayor Cynthia Guiani-Sayadi in maintaining law and order in all of the 37 barangays under her jurisdiction.

The mayor's office and the city police had arrested dozens of drug offenders in recent months and had cleared the city's thoroughfares from hostile people through periodic nighttime joint law enforcement patrols.

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