

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



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OFFICE OF THE ARMY CHIEF PUBLIC AFFAIRS

NEWS CLIPPINGS

20 May 2017

Saturday

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

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BALANCED NEWS + FEARLESS VIEWS

TODAY'S WEATHER FORECAST | MAY 20, 2017 | SATURDAY

FRONTAL SYSTEM AFFECTING NORTHERN LUZON
(As of 5:00 PM - May 19, 2017)




PHILIPPINE AREA OF RESPONSIBILITY (PAR)

SUNRISE	SUNSET
5:27 AM	6:18 PM
MOONRISE	MOONSET
12:52 AM	12:57 PM
LAST QUARTER	NEW MOON
MAY 19 9:33 AM	MAY 20 3:44 AM
LOW TIDE	HIGH TIDE
MANILA SOUTH HARBOR	
11:52 PM 0.06 Meter	4:02 PM 0.82 Meter




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

	MAY 21	MAY 22	MAY 23	MAY 24	MAY 25
METRO MANILA	25 - 35 °C	26 - 34 °C	23 - 31 °C	23 - 31 °C	25 - 31 °C
TUGUEGARAO	25 - 34 °C	25 - 35 °C	26 - 33 °C	26 - 33 °C	25 - 32 °C
LAOAG	27 - 33 °C	26 - 33 °C	25 - 33 °C	25 - 33 °C	26 - 33 °C
BAGUID	17 - 25 °C	17 - 25 °C	26 - 32 °C	26 - 33 °C	24 - 33 °C
SBMA/CLARK	26 - 36 °C	28 - 37 °C	25 - 32 °C	26 - 32 °C	
TAGAYTAY					
LEGAZPI					
PUERTO PRINCESA					
ILOILO/BACOLOD					
METRO CEBU					
TACLOBAN					
CAGAYAN DE ORO					
METRO DAVAO					
ZAMBOANGA					



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20 May 2017



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CHINA-ASEAN CODE OF CONDUCT NEARS

Rough outline of legally binding code of conduct in the South China Sea drafted, to be presented to foreign ministers for consideration in August

BEIJING—China and the 10 countries that make up the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean) have agreed on the rough outline of a legally binding code of conduct designed to prevent clashes in the strategic South China Sea, officials said on Friday.

Chinese Vice Foreign Minister Liu Zhenmin was quoted in state media as saying the agreement laid a

“solid foundation” for further negotiations.

“All parties have vowed to continue to constructively advance the negotiations” toward the early conclusion of the code of conduct, Liu was quoted as telling Xinhua News Agency, following Thursday’s meeting in the southern Chinese city of Guiyang.

The Philippines welcomed the fi-

nalization of the draft of the framework. It contains elements that the parties agreed upon and will be presented to Chinese and Asean foreign ministers in August for consideration, the statement from the Philippine Department of Foreign Affairs said.

No details were given and Liu said the text of the framework agreement would remain secret for

now. No date was given for the adoption of a full code of conduct.

Also on Friday, China and Asean member the Philippines were to meet separately to discuss an agenda for future talks on their dispute over islands and waters in the eastern portion of the South China Sea.

China was enraged by a ruling last year from a Hague tribunal invalidating most of

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China-Asean code of conduct is near

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its South China Sea claims in a case brought by the Philippines.

But President Duterte has downplayed that ruling as part of his push for a broad improvement in relations between the sides since taking office in June, a move that has cast a shadow over Manila's ties to its longtime ally, the United States.

Despite the thaw in relations, China protested a visit last month by Manila's defense and military chiefs to Pag-asa, an island it controls in the South China Sea. Manila maintains that it owns the territory where Filipino troops and villagers have lived for decades.

China and the members of Asean committed 15 years ago to signing a code of conduct, but progress has been slow amid disputes over the body of water that China claims virtually in its entirety.

In the absence of such an agreement, they have followed a separate document called the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea, or DOC, which among other provisions, commits the parties to "exploring ways for building trust and confidence ... on the basis of equality and mutual respect."

Along with the Philippines, Asean members Malaysia, Vietnam and Brunei also maintain claims in the South China Sea that overlap with those of China and Taiwan.

Candid

An estimated \$5 trillion in global trade annually passes through the South China Sea, which is also home to rich fishing grounds and a potential wealth of oil, gas and other natural resources.

China's foreign ministry said the framework had been agreed upon, but gave no de-

It said the talks had been candid and deep and made positive achievements.

The permanent secretary of Singapore's foreign ministry, Chee Wee Kiong, said that what he called a "draft" framework would be submitted to a meeting of the foreign ministers of China and Asean in the Philippines.

"We hope to continue the positive momentum of consultation and make steady progress toward a substantive COC based on consensus as directed by our leaders," Chee said, in remarks also shown on Chinese state television.

Coded message

Liu said the framework was comprehensive and took into account the concerns of all sides.

But he called on others to stay out, apparently a coded message to the United States.

"We hope that our consultations on the code are not subject to any outside interference," Liu said.

The US state department said it understood Asean and China had "not agreed on a text of a code of conduct, but on an initial framework describing how such a document might be structured."

"As we have not seen that text, we would not be in a position to comment on it," a spokesperson, Anna Richey-Allen, said.

She said the United States had been calling for "an effective and meaningful" code of conduct compatible with international law, in particular the Law of the Sea Convention.

Some Asean diplomats have expressed concern about whether China is being sincere, or whether Asean has enough leverage to get China to commit to a set of rules.

While the details of the text were not disclosed, experts said that it was a definite sign

agreement was a means to achieving its goal of keeping the United States and its allies from intervening, said Huang Jing, an expert on the region at the National University of Singapore's Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy.

"China can say, 'Look we have already reached agreements, are behaving ourselves, so no need for you Americans or others to come in and get in our business,'" Huang said, adding that the agreement suits Beijing's goal of managing rather than solving the disputes.

The issue has come to a head in recent years as China has pursued a strategy of building artificial islands capable of supporting military facilities in the region, provoking strong reactions from other claimants as well as the United States, which argues Beijing's actions threaten freedom of navigation and overflight through the strategically vital waters.

Set of norms

A draft of the text obtained by Agence France-Presse describes the envisioned agreement as "a set of norms to guide the conduct of parties and promote maritime cooperation in the South China Sea," adding that it is "not an instrument to settle territorial disputes."

The dispute has caused deep divisions within Asean, which normally seeks to operate on a consensus basis.

Under former President Benigno Aquino III, the Philippines had adopted a tough stance on China's claims, but the country's anger at the world's second largest economy has become a warm embrace following the election last year of President Duterte, who has declined to push China on territorial issues in hopes of being rewarded with investment and aid. —REPORTS FROM AP.

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China warns Duterte on SCS: We'll go to war

Rody raises UN ruling with Xi: It's ours

By EDITH REGALADO

DAVAO CITY – Contrary to what critics believe, President Duterte raised with his Chinese counterpart Xi Jinping the ruling of a UN-backed arbitral court, which trashed Beijing's claims over the South China Sea.

Xi's response, Duterte said yesterday, was that if the Philippines forced the issue, China would go to war.

Duterte said that when he met with Xi in Beijing last week, he stressed that the West Philippine Sea "is ours and we intend to drill oil there."

"Wala nang palaboy-laboy pa (Without much ado), I told the Chinese, if you think that it is yours, that is your view. But my view is that I can drill the oil because it is ours," the President said in remarks at the 33rd national convention of the Philippine Coast Guard here at the SMX Convention Center in SM Lanang Premier.

He said the Chinese officials were quick to point out that they also considered the West Philippine Sea as their territory.

"Their answer to me was, 'We are friends and we do not want to quarrel with you and we want to maintain the present warm relationship we have,'" Duterte said, adding that Xi told him, "But if you force the issue, we go to war."

"What else can I say? *Yon ang pinag-aawayan natin* (That's what we're quarreling over)," Duterte said.

"I said it is ours and I will drill the oil.

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China From Page 1

And I tell them do not do it because it is ours, that I have the arbitral ruling. But they said that if you force the issue, we will go to war," he added.

He said he could not afford going to war with China "because it would result in a massacre."

Duterte also chided former foreign affairs chief Albert del Rosario for not calling for help from the United States and the Association of Southeast Asian nations to stop China from building artificial islands in the South China Sea.

He said this would have been better than filing a case before the UN-backed Permanent Court of Arbitration in The Hague, which Del Rosario had initiated as foreign affairs chief.

"The Philippines should have called America and other ASEAN countries to nip it in the bud. And even without the arbitral ruling on the law of the sea, you cannot build any structure. *Bakit hindi nila ginawa noon* (Why didn't they do that then)?" he added.

Duterte lamented observations by Del Rosario and Supreme Court Associate Justice Antonio Carpio that he has not pushed China to comply with the arbitral ruling, which invalidated Beijing's entire nine-dash-line claim over nearly all of the South China Sea.

Monitoring continues

Meanwhile, a US military official said they are closely monitoring China's military buildup in the West Philippine Sea and South China Sea.

Brig. Gen. Brian Cavanaugh, US Assistant Balikatan exercise assistant director and deputy commander of the US Marines Corps Forces-Pacific, said that monitoring the Chinese activities in the South China Sea is part of their military training to ensure readiness.

"We keep on training and we are monitoring them," Cavanaugh said, in response to questions on whether the US military knows about China's activities in the region.

He added the US would make sure freedom of navigation and overflight within the Indo-Pacific region continue.

In a published report, China has admitted installing rocket launchers at Kagitingan (Fiery Cross) Reef, one of three major artificial islands that Beijing has fortified.

Philippine Coast Guard Rear Admiral Luis Tuason, meanwhile, revealed a plane carrying transport and local officials flew over Pag-asa Island on Tuesday to inspect the possible site of a new lighthouse. He assured the Chinese there was nothing to

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worry about the flight.

"The lighthouse is for safety. This would not only be beneficial to the Filipino fishermen but for all types of vessels transiting the area," said Tuason.

Draft framework ready

At the Department of Foreign Affairs, meanwhile, spokesman Robespierre Bolivar revealed that the ASEAN finalized Thursday the draft framework for the Code of Conduct (COC) in the South China Sea.

The DFA said the draft is important even if it is not yet legally binding.

"The Philippines welcomes the finalization by ASEAN and China senior officials of the draft of the framework of the Code of Conduct," Bolivar said.

The draft framework for the COC, for managing the region and in regulating the future behavior of the parties concerned in the South China Sea, will be presented to the foreign ministers of ASEAN and China at their post-ministerial conference in Manila in August for their consideration.

"The Philippines reaffirms its commitment to working towards an effective Code of Conduct for the South China Sea," he added.

Bolivar said the final draft of the framework was agreed upon but "the issue of the nature of the COC will be discussed when negotiations on the actual COC begin, which is after the frame-

work is approved by leaders at the November Summit in the Philippines."

Foreign Affairs Secretary Alan Peter Cayetano said that while many countries would want the draft framework to specify that the COC should be legally binding, it would suffice at the beginning that it would have the power of a "gentlemen's agreement."

He explained that legally binding means there is a court or tribunal parties can run to if another party reneges on the agreement.

"So, let me say this: definitely, it should be binding. Now, the question, if it's legally binding, which court can the parties go to? And the countries that don't comply, will they respect that court? We're all trying to avoid not only war, but instability," Cayetano told reporters during a visit at the DFA Office of Consular Affairs on Macapagal Avenue when asked about the Philippine position and whether Manila would assert a legally binding COC.

Regional members have called for a legally binding code and ASEAN has been urged to make the South China Sea ruling an "integral" part of the Code of Conduct framework and the eventual COC.

"Many countries want it to be legally binding. But what I'm saying, let's start with it being binding, gentlemen's agreement. We have a community of nations that signed

it," Cayetano said.

He stressed that a mechanism should be put in place to resolve issues if some parties are not complying with the code.

"I'm telling you the practical reality of negotiations in international agreement. So, do most or all of the countries want it to be legally binding? Yes. But will the language include that? We don't know. Because if one or two do not approve of that, they don't believe that there can be an independent court, will we go for nothing, no Code of Conduct?" Cayetano said.

"Or will we agree to a code of conduct that will be enforced only by the community of nations who signed it?" he said.

The Philippines has also been urged to prevent China from using the framework for a Code of Conduct to preserve its unlawful expansion in the South China Sea.

In 2002, ASEAN and China committed to a non-binding Declaration of Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea (DOC), specifically on how claimants should behave in the South China Sea.

Exploration

Meanwhile, Energy Secretary Alfonso Cusi said the Philippines is strategizing how to go about the joint oil and gas exploration in disputed seas.

"We are being pragmatic about it," the energy chief said

when asked about the possibility of a joint exploration in the West Philippine Sea.

"The same way, on the exploration, we are looking for a strategic solution that would be beneficial to Filipinos," Cusi said, referring to the approach taken by Duterte to make the Chinese agree to the Filipino fishermen's return to Panatag Shoal.

Chief presidential legal counsel Salvador Panelo has said the Constitution allows the President to enter into agreements with foreign firms involved in exploration of mineral resources.

And conducting joint exploration does not necessarily mean conceding sovereignty over disputed waters, he said.

During the BusinessWorld Economic Forum yesterday, businessman Manuel V. Pangilinan stressed the need for the country to look for an alternative to the Malampaya gas project, which is expected to run out by 2024.

Pangilinan is chairman of PXP Energy Corp., which holds a 70 percent operating interest in Service Contract (SC) 72 or the contract to explore Recto Bank in the West Philippine Sea through Forum Energy plc.

The company also has a direct operating interest of 50 percent in SC 75 in northwest Palawan. – With Evelyn Macairan, Christina Mendez, Danessa Rivera, Jaime Laude

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A member of the US Air Force (right) looks at a Philippine flag patch he exchanged with his Filipino counterpart after the closing ceremony of the annual joint Philippines-US Balikatan military exercise at Camp Aguinaldo yesterday. Top photo shows (from left) Maj. Gen. Herminigildo Francisco Aquino, Armed Forces chief Gen. Eduardo Año, US Ambassador Sung Kim, Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana, Foreign Affairs Undersecretary Ariel Abadilla, Lt. Gen. Oscar Lactao and US Marines Brig. Gen. Brian Cavanaugh during the closing ceremony. Story on Page 2.

AFP, REUTERS



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20 May 2017

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MANILA BULLETIN
THE NATION'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

Page: 1

10 bandits killed in clash with soldiers in S. Kudarat

By FRANCIS T. WAKEFIELD

Ten members of a lawless group were killed while eight others were

wounded in a fierce clash with soldiers in Isulan, Sultan Kudarat the other day, the military said.

Lieutenant Colonel Harold ►12

10 bandits killed in clash... ◀1

Cabunoc, commander of the Army's 33rd Infantry Battalion (33IB), said the fierce clash took place in Sitio Mantisao, Barangay Bual, at 6:30 a.m. Thursday.

Cabunoc said his men and the local police were serving a search warrant when they were fired upon by heavily-armed men, triggering a heavy exchange of fire.

A certain "Commander Dimas," alias "Dragon," was the subject of the search warrant issued by the court.

"The bandits were occupying fortified positions with machinegun emplacements and running trenches. They were ready to confront the security forces," Cabunoc said.

Cabunoc said the troops captured a bandit named Abdul Magid Logio-man, alias "Black Moro," 41, and seized an M653 rifle.

Sergeant David Desidario of the Division Recon Company was injured but was promptly treated by the Army

medics. He has been declared out of danger by attending physicians at a local hospital.

The local residents of Barangay Chua in Bagumbayan town had earlier filed a resolution requesting law enforcement operations against the lawless elements who have long been threatening local residents.

Cabunoc said the local bandits are said to be involved in extortion activities and illegal mining.

Follow-up operations are being conducted against the group, he added.

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10 armed bandits in Sultan Kudarat killed by gov't forces

Ten members of an armed group operating in Sultan Kudarat were killed yesterday while eight others were wounded after engaging government forces.

Lt. Col Harold Cabunoc, commanding officer of the Army's 33rd Infantry Battalion (IB), said joint military and police forces were sent out in Barangay Bual, Isulan town to serve a search warrant when they were fired upon by the group.

The firefight happened at around 6:30 a.m. along Sitio Mantisao.

Cabunoc said that the troops were subjected to heavy gun fires but managed to outmaneuver the armed men.

"The bandits were occupying fortified positions with machinegun

emplacements and running trenches. They were ready to confront the security forces," Cabunoc said.

The troops also captured one of the bandits named Abdul Magid Logioman, alias Black Moro, 41, and seized an M653 Rifle.

On the other hand, Cabunoc said Sgt. David Desidario of the Division Recon Company was injured but was declared out of danger by attending physicians in a local hospital.

Cabunoc said the joint operation was launched after local residents of Chua village in Bagumbayan town had earlier filed a resolution, requesting law enforcement operation against lawless elements terrorizing the area.

Mario J. Mallari

20 May 2017



Pahina. 2

10 TERORISTA PATAY SA ENCOUNTER

Napatay ng mga tropa ng pamahalaan ang sampung miyembro ng nagsanib na puwersa ng mga teroristang grupo habang walo pa ang sugatan sa isang engkwentro sa Sitio Mantisao, Brgy Bual, Isulan, Sultan Kudarat nitong Huwebes.

Ayon kay Lt Col Harold Cabunoc, Commander ng Army's 33rd Infantry Battalion (IB) dakong alas-6:30 ng umaga nang maganap ang bakbakan sa pagitan

Nina JOY CANTOS at RHODERICK BENEZ

ng kaniyang mga tauhan. Ang nakasagupa ng tropa ng pamahalaan ay ang nagsanib puwersang Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF), Maute terrorist groups at iba pang bandidong grupo sa lugar na mga terorista at lawless elements.

Inihayag ng opisyal na kasalukuyang isinisilbi ng Army's 33rd Infantry Battalion (IB) at ng lokal na pulisya ang search warrant laban sa mga armadong

lawless element tulad ni Kumander Dimas alyas "Dragon" na dating miyembro ng MILF nang magpapatok ang mga kalaban na nauwi sa bakbakan ng magkabilang panig.

Samantalang nasakote rin ng security forces ang bandidong si Abdul Magid Logioman alyas "Black Moro", 41 at nakumpiskahan rin ng isang

M653 rifle.

Nasugatan naman ang sundalong si Sgt. David Desidario ng Division Reconnaissance Company na agad istugod sa pagamutan at idineklarang nasa ligtas ng kalagayan.

Nagpapatuloy naman ang pagtugis ng tropa ng pamahalaan laban sa lahat ng grupo ng mga terorista at bandido na nago-operate sa Central Mindanao.

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Page. 2

10 armed men die in Kudarat clash

By JUN I.
LEGASPI

TEN members of an armed group operating in Sultan Kudarat prov-

ince were killed while eight others were wounded after engaging government forces in a firefight yesterday.

Army's 33rd Infantry Battalion commander Lt. Col. Harold Cabunoc said joint military and police forces were sent out to Bgy. Bual, Isulan town, to serve a search warrant when they were fired upon by the group at 6:30 a.m. in Sitio Mantisao.

Cabunoc said troops were greeted with heavy gunfire but managed to outmaneuver the gunmen.

"The bandits were occupying fortified positions with machinegun emplacements and running trench-

es. They were ready to confront the security forces," said Cabunoc.

The troops also captured one of the bandits named Abdul Magid Logioman, alias Black Moro, 41, and seized an M653 rifle.

Cabunoc said that Sgt. David Desidario of the Division Recon Company was injured but was declared out of danger in a local hospital.

He said joint operations were launched after residents of Chua, Bagumbayan town, earlier filed a resolution requesting law enforcement operation against the lawless elements terrorizing residents in the area.

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Pahina. 8

10 'terrorista' todas sa encounter

Sampung lawless elements o mga teroristang grupo ang napaslang habang walo pa ang nasugatan sa pakikipagbakbakan sa tropa ng militar at pulisya sa Sitio Mantisao, Brgy Bual, Isulan, Sultan Kudarat nitong Huwebes.

Ayon kay Lt. Col. Harold Cabunoc, Commander ng Army's 33rd Infantry Bat-

alion (IB) dakong alas-6:30 ng umaga nang maganap ang bakbakan sa pagitan ng kanyang mga tauhan at teroristang grupo.

Aniya, ang nakasagupa ng kanyang mga tauhan ay ang nagsanib puwersang Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF), Maute terrorist groups at iba pang bandidong grupo sa lugar.

Kasalukuyang isinisilbi ng Army's 33rd Infantry Battalion (IB) at pulisya ang search warrant laban sa mga armadong lawless elements nang magpaputok ang mga kalaban na nauwi sa bakbakan ng magkabilang panig na ikinasawi ng 10 bandido habang walo naman ang nasugatan.

Nasugatan naman si Sgt. David Desidario ng Division Reconnaissance Company sa sagupaan subalit idineklarang nasa ligtas nang kalagayan. Ang bandidong si Abdul Magid Logioman alyas Black Moro, 41, ay nasakote rin at nakumpiskahan ng isang M653 rifle. **Joy Cantos/Rhoderick Benez**

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POLICE FILES

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10 bandido todas sa bakbakan sa Sultan Kudarat

PATAY ang sampung miyembro ng Lawless group habang walo ang sugatan kabilang ang isang sundalo sa naganap na engkwentro sa Isulan Sultan, Kudarat kahapon ng umaga.

Inaalam pa ng mga otoridad ang pagkakakilanlan ang mga napatay na miyembro ng lawless group.

Dinala naman sa pagamuan ang sugatan sundalo na si Sgt David Desidario ng Division Recon Company at iba mga sugatan kabilang ang isa sa mga suspek na si Abdul Magid Logioman alias Black Moro upang malapatan ng lunas.

Ayon kay Lt Col Harold Cabunoc, Commander ng 33rd Infantry Battalion, dakong 6:30 ng umaga nang maka-engkwentro ng mga sundalo at pulisya ang mga bandido sa Sitio Mantisao, Brgy. Baul, Isulan Sultan Kudarat.

Nabatid na maghahain ng search warrant ang mga otoridad nang salubungin ng mga putok ng matataas na kalibre ng baril ng mga suspek simula ng matinding bakbakan.

Sinabi ni Cabunoc na tumagal ng halos isang oras na nagresulta ng pagkasawi ng 10 sa mga suspek at pagkakasugat ni Desidario at pitong iba pa.

Sa kasalukuyan ay sumasailalim sa masusing imbestigasyon si Logioman habang inihahanda ang kaukulang kaso laban dito.

Patuloy naman ang pagtugis ng militar at pulisya laban sa mga nakatakas na mga suspek. (Mark Obleda)

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Militiaman abducted by NPA ahead of peace talks

By **ROEL N. CATOYO**
and **MIKE U. CRISMUNDO**

SURIGAO CITY — With the fifth round of formal peace talks between the Philippine Government (GRP) and the National Democratic Front of the Philippines (NDFP) only a week away, another abduction of a government militia member was reported in Tandag City, Surigao del Sur.

Authorities said Jeremias E. Estrada, a member of the Civilian Armed Forces Geographical Unit (Cafgu) assigned at the Matho Patrol Base in Barangay Matho, Cortes, Surigao del Sur, was forcibly taken by heavily armed men believed to be Communist rebels from his residence in Purok Lansones, Barangay San Agustin in Tandag City at 7 a.m. yesterday.

According to Lt. Col. Randolph P. Rojas, commanding officer of 36th Infantry Battalion of the Philippine Army, the victim was off-duty and was spending time with his family when four armed men with AK 47 barged into his house, tied him up, and abducted him.

Rojas said the victim's wife Berlinda Pael Estrada said she saw more than 20 heavily armed men encircle their residence as she plead with them not to hurt her husband.

Ka Sandra, spokesperson of the Guerilla Front 30 of New People's Army operating in Tandag and neighboring towns told a local radio station, yesterday afternoon, that they were behind the abduction of the CAFGU member.

But all is not lost as far as the peace talks are concerned after the NDFP showed interest in releasing Army Technical Sergeant Joseph Paredes, who was abducted in Bukidnon, in time for the start of the fifth round of talks that will be held May 27 to June 1 in Noordwijk ann-See, The

Netherlands.

The NDFP has reportedly appealed to church leaders, who are acting as third party facilitators, to intervene in working for the freedom of Paredes.

But the New People's Army (NPA), armed wing of the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) and NDFP, asked that military and police commanders stop tactical operations in Bukidnon before they can release Paredes.

Iglesia Filipina Independiente Bishop Felixberto Calang, co-con-

venor of the Philippine Ecumenical Peace Platform, one of the third party facilitators, said they will coordinate with Bukidnon Governor Jose Maria Zubiri Jr. and members of the provincial crisis management committee for the release of Paredes.

Paredes, a member of the Army's 8th Infantry Battalion was chanced upon by a rebel-manned checkpoint near Juanilla Subdivision in Malaybalay City, Bukidnon province, where the rebels conducted a raid at an office of a security agency there on May 5, 2017.

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Rody wants Año to assume DILG post by June 2

By JAIME LAUDE

Respectfully denied.
Defense Secretary Delfin

Lorenzana yesterday said President Duterte had denied his re-

quest to extend the service of Gen. Eduardo Año as Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) chief.

"I was trying to persuade the President to extend his service with the AFP, the last time was last night (Thursday) when I said 'Mr. President, can we extend the stay of General Año with the AFP?' but the President said 'no, no, no,'" Lorenzana said.

Lorenzana confirmed the President wanted Año to immediately join the Cabinet as secretary of the Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG).

Año will be bowing out next month ahead of his mandatory retirement on Oct. 26.

Duterte wanted Año to assume the DILG post on June 2.

Lorenzana said the President also tasked him to have the turnover of command in the AFP by June. Año's replacement as AFP chief, however, has yet to be named.

Lorenzana congratulated the AFP leadership under Año and the American troops at the closing ceremonies of this year's joint Balikatan exercises at Camp Aguinaldo.

US Ambassador Sung Kim also congratulated Año on his appointment as

DILG secretary.

"Let me take this opportunity to give our warm congratulations to General Año on his recent nomination to head the DILG, a critically important Cabinet post. We will of course miss this tremendous leadership of the AFP but I think it speaks volumes that President Duterte has nominated someone of his caliber to head this very important department," Kim said.

Kim said the US embassy is looking forward to the assumption of Año as DILG secretary.

During the closing ceremonies, Año spoke about the military's success against the Abu Sayyaf extremists.

Año mentioned the timeline given to him by the President to wipe out the Abu Sayyaf.

"The timeline given to me does not mean that there will be no more Abu Sayyaf left, but to attain strategic victory. Whatever they will do now, we have already defeated them," he said.

Año declared the military has broken the Abu Sayyaf's will to fight, citing the mass surrender of the bandits in Basilan and Sulu.

Año said that once he assumes as DILG chief, it would be easy for his successor to finish off the bandit group.

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Año to exit early to start work in DILG; next AFP chief named

By Ted Tuvera

President Duterte yesterday named Army Lt. Gen. Rey Leonardo Guerrero as the next Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) chief of staff.

In a speech in Davao City, the Commander in Chief introduced Guerrero as the one who will replace the incumbent AFP Chief Eduardo Año who was earlier designated as the next Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG) secretary.

"We have Lt. Gen. Rey Leonardo Guerrero, the chief of staff," Duterte said.

"(The incumbent chief of staff) will resign this June as he will serve as DILG secretary," he added.

Año was earlier quoted in a report that he is going on an early retirement next month. He is supposed to call it quits by October this year.

Guerrero is currently the chief of the Eastern Mindanao Command (Eastmincom) based in Duterte's hometown, Davao City.

Like Año, the incoming AFP chief is used to battling communist New People's Army (NPA) rebels.

Guerrero will be the third AFP chief under the Duterte administration, succeeding Año and



AÑO

Ricardo Visaya.

Belonging to the Philippine Military Academy (PMA) class of 1984, Guerrero is set to retire December this year.

Meanwhile, Año said he will be focusing on fighting drug syndicates instead of lowly drug personalities when he assumes as secretary of the DILG.

Just like the insurgency problem, Año said that addressing the illegal drug menace should start in solving its root causes - which is cutting out the supply.

"What we will do is really focus on the drug syndicates that supply



GUERRERO

these drugs to the communities. We need to address the source itself...just like insurgency, we should address the root causes," Año said.

At the same time, Año said that he will be aligning the programs of local governments with Duterte's campaign against illegal drugs and terrorism.

He said he would also promote good governance and faster delivery of government services to the local level.

According to Año, he is still awaiting orders from the President when he will officially assume as DILG chief. He said June would be

the earliest.

But definitely, Año would be retiring earlier than October 26 when he reaches the mandatory retirement age of 56.

"I have not received official order. I will just have to prepare...the earliest is the month of June," Año said.

He expressed optimism that he could easily adjust to his duties at the DILG - having dealt with DILG agencies like the Philippine National Police (PNP) and the local government units during his stint as a military officer.

"I believe I have enough knowledge and information how to run the team in the DILG," Año said.

"Whenever there are changes, you have to make adjustments. We were trained for that and I am ready for those adjustments," he added.

Duterte last week announced that Año will be his next DILG chief - citing the problem on illegal drugs and terrorism. He, however, did not say when would Año assume the post.

The DILG top post was vacated in March after Duterte sacked Ismael Sueno following reports of irregularity in the procurement of firetrucks and other issues raised against Sueno by his three undersecretaries.

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Gen. Año to retire 5 mos. ahead to take over DILG

By FRANCIS T. WAKEFIELD

Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana said yesterday that Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) Chief of Staff Eduardo Año will retire on June 2, or almost five months before his scheduled retirement on October 26 of this year.

Lorenzana made the revelation as he spoke at the closing ceremony of “Balikatan 2017” held at the Tejeros Hall in Camp Aguinaldo, Quezon City.

He revealed that he had tried to persuade President Duterte to extend Año’s service with the AFP before eventually giving him the post as Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG) secretary.

“I was trying to persuade the President

to extend his (Año’s) service with AFP the last time was last night when I said: ‘Mr. President can we extend the stay of Gen. Año with the AFP?’ He said: ‘No, no, no, no,’” Lorenzana said.

“Let’s have the turn-over by June 2 so that’s it, its final,” Lorenzana quoted Duterte as having told him.

Meanwhile, United States Ambassador to the Philippines Sung Y. Kim congratulated Gen. Año on his recent nomination to head the DILG.

Citing how critically important the Cabinet post is, Kim said: “We will of course miss his (Año’s) tremendous leadership of the AFP... but I think it speaks volumes that President Duterte has nominated someone of his caliber to head this very important department.”

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Año vows to crush terrorists

By Francisco Tuyay

INCOMING Interior Secretary Gen. Eduardo Año on Friday vowed to crush terrorists and eradicate drugs in the country, two major rallying points that President Rodrigo Duterte had emphasized to him.

Año said his new turf would be a vital tool in fighting terrorism and the war on drugs.

"We will align the local governments to the programs of the President, especially in the fight against terrorism and the war on drugs and how to deliver services and good governance," Año said.

Año, the retiring Armed Forces

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Año...

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chief, will pass the torch to outgoing Eastern Mindanao Command Lieutenant General Rey Leonardo Guerrero on June 2.

Sources closed to both generals said the turnover in Camp Aguinaldo will be led by Duterte.

Duterte had asked Año in February to crush the Abu Sayyaf in six months, but the timetable has been disrupted following his appointment to the DILG.

However, during his tenure as AFP Chief of Staff, the campaign against the Abu Sayyaf had resulted in the death of 81 of the bandits and the surrender of at least 50 of them in Sulu, Tawi-Tawi and Basilan.

"There has been a tremendous reduction in their strength and their ability to conduct terror attacks and atroci-

ties," Año said.

He said that while it was the mandate of the Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency and the Philippine National Police to support the agency, "we'll find many ways how they can win the war on drugs by observing the rule of law."

He said the way to address the proliferation of illegal drugs was to focus on the drug syndicates.

"The important thing to do is to cut the source of drugs. It's like the insurgency wherein the root causes of it should be address. It's the same with the war on drugs, we, the citizenry, should work together," Año said.

Año, who is scheduled to assume office on June 2, vowed to institute reforms in his new turf.

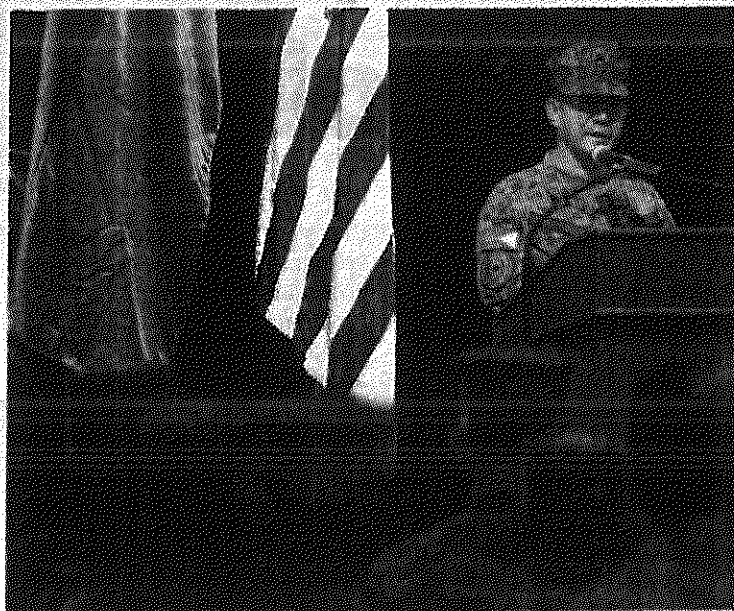
"It's very important that the image of the PNP should be morally high to be able to get public cooperation," Año said. **With Florante S. Solmerin**

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PH, US end shortened, scaled back 'Balikatan'



Armed Forces chief Gen. Eduardo Año speaks during the closing ceremony for Balikatan 2017 at Camp Aguinaldo. — NIÑO JESUS ORBETA

By Philip C. Tubeza
@pctubezaINQ

Philippine and US officials yesterday formally ended a scaled-back, shortened military exchange that shifted focus on disaster relief following President Duterte's statements seeking an end to the annual exercises called "Balikatan."

Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana led closing ceremonies of the 33rd Philippine-US Balikatan exercises at Camp Aguinaldo.

"This year's Balikatan proved to be very beneficial and critically important to our armed forces," said Lorenzana during the ceremonies.

"It allowed us to boost our regional capacity for humanitarian disaster relief operations

and for counterterrorism," Lorenzana said.

"Let us continue this yearly, not just to meet our obligation under the Mutual Defense Treaty but also to strengthen the bond of friendship, as well as our friendly relations with other nations," he added.

US Ambassador Sung Kim said the exercises would help the Philippines and the United States face challenges brought by an "increasingly complex and volatile security environment."

"Now more than ever, our armed forces must work together closely," said Kim.

"Exercises like Balikatan build upon the long and productive history between our two

der-to-shoulder in defense of our lives, our shared values and international rules-based order," Kim added.

"Balikatan is indeed a great reflection of our enduring alliance and the deep bond between our two peoples, and I know that we just finished, but we're already looking forward to training together as friends, partners and allies for next year's Balikatan," he said.

Balikatan 2017, which began on May 8, was scaled down from almost 10,000 soldiers last year to 5,400 troops but also included 80 troops from Australia and observers from Japan and Southeast Asian countries.

"Our joint undertakings are manifestations of our commi-

er's aid in times of need," said Armed Forces of the Philippines Chief of Staff Gen. Eduardo Año.

"Aside from meeting old friends and making new ones, this endeavor has unveiled many breakthroughs significant to our shared aspiration of achieving global security and stability. I am certain that the new learnings from this year's exercises will enable us to raise the level of our interoperability ever higher," he added.

Filipino and American troops conducted training exercises in different areas of expertise, including live fire advanced marksmanship, small unit tactics, countering improvised explosive devices, man-

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Phi-US Balikatan ends

The 33th Joint Phi-US Balikatan military exercises ended yesterday with Filipino and American officials citing cooperation as the only way to hurdle major challenges.

Officials described the disaster-themed joint military drill as a huge success.

Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana and US Ambassador Sung Kim attributed the completion and the success of this year's joint exercises to the months of planning, the rigorous training schedules and the hard work of all the participants.

"Months of planning and hard work during this year's exercises have reinforced long standing ties and strengthened our combined ability to respond to today's challenges," Kim said.

Over the last 12 days, Kim said US and Filipino servicemen shared critical skills, undertook planning processes and refined their combined abilities.

"By all accounts Balikatan 33rd series was a tremendous success. Our nations face an increasingly complex and volatile security environment. Now more than ever our armed forces must work together closely," Kim said as he lauded every participant in this year's exercises.

He said that both countries must stand shoulder to shoulder in defense of the alliance of the two states based on shared values and international rules-based order.

Lorenzana introduced three Filipino words in describing the just-concluded Balikatan exercise – three Ks referring

to Kaibigan (friend), Kakampi (ally) and Kadamay (collaborator).

"I am so honored to stand before you as we formally end this year's Balikatan, the most important bilateral exercise that we annually conduct. I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate all the participants, to include the foreign observers, for the success of this year's joint exercises," Lorenzana said.

The defense chief pointed out that in cooperation and working shoulder-to-shoulder, major challenges could be overcome.

This year's disaster response-themed drill were held Batanes, Calayan island in Cagayan and in Casiguran, Aurora in Northern Luzon as well as in Panay and Samar in Western and Eastern Visayas.

Anti-terror exercises were also in Ternate, Cavite as part of this year's event aimed at harnessing the anti-terrorism skills of both Filipino and US military forces.

Gen. Eduardo Año, Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) chief, said that this year's joint exercises bolstered cooperation among the participants in responding to major disasters.

Año told a story involving a series of races between a tortoise and a hare.

He said that in the first race, the hare was too complacent that before reaching the finish line he rested and was overtaken by the tortoise, which won the race.

– Jaime Laude

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Furling the flag Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) Balikatan Exercise assistant director Hermingildo Francisco Aquino (left) and US assistant director Brian Cavanaugh (second from left) lead the furling of the Balikatan Flag during the closing ceremony of RP-US Exercise Balkatan-B3-2017 at Camp Aguinaldo, Quezon City yesterday. As part of long-standing Philippine-US military ties, the exercise was launched last May 8 for the conduct of civic-military activities focused on disaster and emergency response.

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Digong: China threatened war

By **Leila B. Salaverria**
@LeilasINQ

President Duterte for the first time said on Friday that Chinese President Xi Jinping had threatened war if the Philippines insisted on pressing its claims in the South China Sea, parrying criticisms that he had been weak in pushing the issue and failing to use the arbitral ruling as leverage.

"I really said, 'It's ours. I'd like you to listen for a while.' I said, 'Mr. Xi Jinping, I would insist that that is ours and I will drill oil there,'" Mr. Duterte said in a speech at the National Con-

vention of the Philippine Coast Guard Auxiliary in Davao City.

China may claim ownership, but he said his view was that he could drill for oil because that area, which the government calls the West Philippine Sea, belongs to the Philippines.

"They replied to me, 'We are friends. We do not want to quarrel with you. ... We want to maintain the present warm relationship. But if you force the issue, we'll go to war,'" Mr. Duterte said.

"What more could I say?" he added.

National Security Adviser Hermogenes Esperon said the

meeting between the two leaders took place in Beijing during the President's visit to China last week for the One Belt, One Road initiative, an international trade conference.

Mr. Duterte said he had insisted to China that the International Arbitral Tribunal had invalidated Beijing's expansive claims over the South China Sea, but that the Chinese government replied that its claims were historical.

China also said it would be forced to tell him the truth if he pressed the issue.

"What's the truth? We will be forced to go to war," he said.

But China also indicated that it was willing to discuss the arbitral ruling in the future.

"China said if we remain friends, it said, 'We will talk about the arbitral ruling. But it cannot be now. You know why? You are not the only claimant. Vietnam is also a virulent claimant,'" he said.

He said that if it were just up to him, "we will have to fight." But he said that with China's superior military force, the war would result in a "massacre and it will destroy everything."

"The first to be struck would be Palawan," he said. INQ

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EAST CHINA SEA INCIDENT

US PROTESTS 'UNPROFESSIONAL' INTERCEPT BY CHINESE JETS

BEIJING—A pair of Chinese fighter jets conducted an “unprofessional” intercept of an American radiation-sniffing surveillance plane over the East China Sea, the US Air Force said on Friday, the latest in a series of such incidents that have raised US concerns in an already tense region.

On Wednesday, the two Chinese SU-30 jets approached a WC-135 Constant Phoenix aircraft conducting a routine mission in international airspace in accordance with international law, Pacific Air Forces spokesperson Lt. Col. Lori Hodge said in a statement.

The WC-135 crew characterized the intercept as unprofessional “due to the maneuvers by

the Chinese pilot, as well as the speeds and proximity of both aircraft,” Hodge said.

She declined to provide further details and said the issue would be addressed with China through “appropriate diplomatic and military channels.”

“We would rather discuss it privately with China,” Hodge said in an e-mail to The Associated Press. “This will allow us to continue building confidence with our Chinese counterparts on expected maneuvering to avoid mishaps.”

China declared an air defense identification zone over a large section of the East China Sea in 2013, a move the United States called illegitimate and

has refused to recognize.

China has demanded foreign aircraft operating within the zone declare their intentions and follow Chinese instructions. Hodge declined to say whether Wednesday’s incident was within the self-declared Chinese zone.

“US military aircraft routinely transit international airspace throughout the Pacific, including the East China Sea,” she said. “This flight was no exception.”

Unexpected and unsafe intercepts involving US and Chinese military aircraft have occurred occasionally over the South China Sea, which China claims virtually in its entirety.

—REPORTS FROM AP AND REUTERS

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New chapter in Phl-Russia ties seen

By **EDITH REGALADO**
and **CHRISTINA MENDEZ**

From a relatively nascent stage despite 41 years of diplomatic ties, the Philippines seeks to fast-track its relations with Russia during the landmark visit of President Duterte to Moscow next week.

"The relations can be best described as cordial albeit modest in scope and depth. Thus, we consider this visit as a landmark that will send a strong message of the Philippines' commitment to seek new partnerships and strengthen relations with non-traditional partners such as Russia," Foreign Affairs Assistant Secretary Maria Cleofe Natividad said during the pre-departure briefing at Malacañang for the President's trip from Monday to Friday.

Natividad said Duterte would have separate meetings with Russian President Vladimir Putin and Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev during his visit, when several agreements are expected to be signed and build "a stronger partnership"

and usher in a "new chapter in Philippine-Russia relations" – the theme of the official visit.

Putin and Duterte first met last November on the sidelines of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) summit in Lima, Peru.

Meanwhile, Medvedev had also met with Duterte for the first time in September 2016 during the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) summit in Laos.

"(The President) will be discussing important issues and areas of cooperation and economic partnership with Prime Minister Medvedev and with President Putin on the cooperation in political, military and defense," Natividad said.

The agreements to be signed are related to defense, military and technical cooperation as well as a memorandum of understanding on cooperation in the field of security between the respective national security councils.

A treaty on mutual legal assistance in criminal matters and on extradition will also be signed.

The President is likewise set to meet with the Filipino community and deliver a policy speech at the Moscow State Institute of International Relations (MGIMO), when he is expected to articulate his administration's commitment to pursue an independent foreign policy and share his ideas on how to achieve peace and security, especially in the Asia-Pacific region.

"We expect him to be warmly welcomed by a good-sized Filipino community crowd. We have around 5,000 Filipinos in Russia and we heard that they are very strong supporters of the President," Natividad said.

The President will also visit St. Petersburg aside from his engagements in Moscow, Natividad said.

Natividad said the President's trip to Russia has long been planned but that it has always been postponed due to weather considerations in Moscow.

Defense offices

The two countries will also open their respective defense

offices and strengthen partnership to deal with traditional and non-traditional security matters such as terrorism and drug trafficking.

"The agreement on military technical cooperation will pave the way for the Philippines to explore a possibility of military procurement from Russia," Natividad said.

"And there is really nothing that would stop Russia from participating in the defense modernization program of the Philippines," she said.

Natividad noted the agreement is in line with the statements of Duterte and Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana that they will seek partnerships with countries that can provide the best defense deals to the country.

"And also the ones that would be most compatible with the defense and needs of the Philippines, especially in the aspect of interoperability," she said.

"We welcome Russia's greater participation and involvement in the Asia-Pacific region. After all, they are already very

much engaged in the region through their participation in ASEAN, in APEC and in other dialogue fora," she said.

Boost to trade ties

The President will also serve as salesman during his visit to attract Russian investors and tourists and improve economic ties between the two countries.

Natividad said there are many untapped opportunities for mutually beneficial economic relations between the two sides that can be explored.

Russian investments in the Philippines are very modest and with this visit of the President, Natividad said "we hope we can start to correct that."

According to Natividad, bilateral trade between Manila and Moscow in 2016 totaled only \$226 million, with the Philippines exporting only \$49 million worth of goods to Russia.

She said Russian investments in the Philippines are also minuscule.

Russian tourist arrivals to the Philippines, on the other hand, are merely 28,000 as of

last year – way below that of many ASEAN countries.

"It is for this reason that the President is bringing with him an impressive business delegation who will participate in the Philippine-Russia Business Forum in Moscow," Natividad said.

She stressed the forum would be an opportune time to share with the Russian companies the benefits of doing business in the Philippines as well as the positive investment climate in areas such as infrastructure, energy, transportation and tourism.

The Department of Trade and Industry and other government agencies, together with the private and business sectors, are working together to achieve concrete results of closer economic cooperation.

Natividad said the President's visit is seen to be the start of a strong and enduring partnership between the Philippines and Russia that is "multi-dimensional, mutually beneficial" and "in keeping with the principles of sovereignty, non-interference and equality."

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AFP: No Sayyaf threat in entire Visayas

By JAIME LAUDE

The military has disputed reports on the presence of Abu Sayyaf bandits in the Visayas.

"Government forces have completed the job of eliminating the Abu Sayyaf threat in the Visayas," Lt. Gen. Oscar Lactao, Central Visayas Command chief, said on Thursday.

Lactao made the statement in reaction to reports that bandits were sighted in Aklan, Negros Oriental and Palawan.

Col. Eiezer Losanes, 303rd infantry Brigade commander, said they are coordinating with the Philippine National Police and other state security

agencies to ensure that the problem with extremist groups will not affect Negros island.

Speculation on the presence of Abu Sayyaf bandits in Negros was triggered by the arrest of Absnir Kudarat, 28, alias Abu Rafi Ben, who claimed to be a nephew of slain Abu Sayyaf leader Abu Sabaya, and Saldy Abelobah, 24. They were nabbed for illegal possession of firearms and explosives in Sulu City on Monday.

Losanes said they are vali-

dating Kudarat's claims, noting that there are inconsistencies in his statements.

The 3rd Infantry Division deployed two battalions composed of 60 soldiers and 1,500 militiamen to heighten security in the region.

In Palawan, local officials and other stakeholders are undertaking measures to ensure that residents and visitors are safe against attacks by Abu Sayyaf bandits and other terrorists, said Lt. Gen. Raul del Rosario, Western Mindanao Command chief.

"We are taking a pro-active stance in dealing with terror threats as we have done in Bohol," said Col. Edgard

Arevalo, Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) spokesman.

Arevalo assured the public that they are not letting their guard down despite the neutralization of the Abu Sayyaf in Bohol.

Bohol was declared free of the Abu Sayyaf threat after the two remaining bandits who entered the province last month were killed in operations early this week.

The AFP said military offensives have diminished the strength of the Abu Sayyaf, noting that bandits were surrendering in groups in Sulu and Basilan.

– With Gilbert Bayoran

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Rody warns Kadamay on houses: You might get shot



President Duterte warned members of the urban poor group Kadamay yesterday that they could be shot if they forcibly occupied more government housing units meant for certain sectors.

The warning was issued amid concerns raised by cer-

tain people involved in the provision of low-cost shelters that Kadamay is recruiting members for a nationally coordinated, near-simultaneous occupation of mass housing units.

Speaking in the Visayan dialect, the President urged

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Kadamay members to stop their forcible occupation of government houses because "you might be shot by the owners."

At the same event, Duterte also discussed his strategy of buying land for housing units of victims of fire in his province. This had been his practice when he was still mayor of Davao.

He told guests at the Madayaw Residences in Barangay Talomo Proper in Davao City that this was the same rationale he used when he allowed members of Kadamay to occupy the National Housing Authority (NHA) project in Pandi, Bulacan. The houses were meant for police and military personnel.

Duterte expressed frustration that there are some quarters criticizing his government when the admin-

istration is doing its best to provide for the less fortunate and homeless.

Apart from the Davao provinces, Duterte said he is also building more housing projects for the police and military personnel in Zamboanga, Caraga and Bulacan.

He, however, advised the policemen and soldiers affected by the "takeover" of Kadamay members in Pandi not to pick a fight with the informal settlers.

"I will give more houses," he said, assuring members of the Philippine Coast Guard in a third event at the SM Convention Center.

Duterte also bared that he has prevailed upon NHA general manager Marcelino Escalada Jr. not to resign from his post after he offered to quit due to intrigues after members of the militant

urban poor group Kadamay recently occupied empty units of a government housing project in Pandi.

In a speech during the groundbreaking and launching of the new housing design for the police and military called the Madayaw Residences, Duterte yesterday revealed he did not accept Escalada's resignation and urged him to stay.

"Last week, he (Escalada) attempted to resign, as sabi niya maraming intriga dito sa (he said there are many intrigues in the) housing authority, especially one of the biggest budgets sa gobyerno. Sabi niya gusto niya mapalayo lang sa intriga (he said he wants to stay out of intrigues). I told him, why would you do that? If you are doing right and good and honestly, you stay there until you die," Duterte said.

He also reminded government officials to be steadfast

in the campaign against corruption.

"Don't steal and you will have no problem," he added.

In the latter part of his speech, Duterte encouraged informal settlers to take over the property occupied by the owners of a major newspaper in Makati City.

Duterte urged the informal settlers to take over the Mile Long property.

"I will tell the people, don't be afraid of arrest, because the land you would take over belongs to you. Only the corrupt justices and judges are prolonging it," the President said in Filipino.

He said he could not stomach the corruption in the judiciary, which tolerates the oligarchs.

Duterte said he does not care if he is removed from office or goes to prison as long as he pursues what is right for the Filipino people. – Christina Mendez, Giovanni Nilles

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NDF demands free land for farmers; alarm raised

By RICHMOND MERCURIO

The Foundation for Economic Freedom (FEF) has expressed alarm over the Duterte administration's alleged inclination to give in to the National Democratic Front (NDF)'s demand

of free land for farmers as part of the peace talks, saying this is not a solution to poverty.

The government peace panel and the NDF will meet for their fifth round of talks from May 27 to June 1 after formal negotiations resumed in August

last year.

Providing free farmland has been among the demands of the NDF since the start of the peace talks.

The FEF – a group whose members include former Cabinet secretaries and undersecretaries and representatives

from the business and finance community – said giving out free land would not solve the fundamental problems of Philippine agriculture, which primarily are restrictions in the rural land market.

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NDF

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The FEF said handing out land for free would only be a populist measure similar to free irrigation and free rice.

"Giving out free land will not affect the situation on the ground because only 17 percent agrarian reform beneficiaries are paying their loan amortizations. Therefore, farmers are not effectively given their lands for free. Yet agricultural productivity has remained stagnant and rural farmers have remained poor," the FEF said in a statement yesterday.

The group also claims that the restrictions on rural land imposed by the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Law are what kept farmers poor and similarly events them from raising their agricultural productivity.

"These restrictions include the prohibition to sell or mortgage the property within ten years from grant, prohibition to lease and the prohibition to own more than five hectares of

land. These restrictions prevent agrarian reform beneficiaries from accessing cheap loans from the formal financial markets and also prevent efficient farmers from working on larger tracts of land and buying out inefficient ones," the FEF said.

"What Philippine agriculture needs is to provide the conditions for efficient farmers to introduce management, technology and capital to farmlands by removing the restrictions on the rural land market," it added.

The FEF is proposing that agrarian reform beneficiaries be given unrestricted titles to their lands instead of the collective Certificate of Land Ownership Awards, which it said "rob farmers of economic freedom and private initiative."

Duterte: Red leaders can't control NPA

President Duterte also bared yesterday that during a dinner in Malacañang, communist leaders

admitted to him that they cannot control all the units of the New People's Army (NPA), the armed wing of the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP).

Duterte made the statement in a speech during the groundbreaking ceremony of the Biyaya ng Pagbabago Housing Project at Barangay Los Amigos, Tugbok District, Davao City.

This came after the fourth round of talks between the government and the NDF following the government's call for bilateral ceasefire with the Left.

Duterte recently met with CPP leaders Benito and Wilma Tiamzon.

"They admitted to me in Malacañang when we had dinner that they could not control all the operating units of the NPA here. I'm sorry, we can go on. I don't have a problem. I will just wait for five years, then I'll go. But that conflict will continue and will continue to punish because we won't stop killing each other, when we're all Filipinos. That's the most disgusting part," the President

said in the Visayan dialect.

"Unless (CPP founder Jose Maria) Sison signs a bilateral (ceasefire agreement), both of us will announce that the fighting should stop. I didn't say you should surrender your arms. Just bury them. Don't bring your arms, just go out. No one will arrest you," he added.

Duterte also announced that he would reserve housing units for rebel returnees and victims of fire incidents. He urged the awardees not to sell the housing units and ordered them to keep the community peaceful.

The housing project, a collaboration between the private and public sector, aims to provide housing units to around 8,000 families.

The President was assisted by Cabinet Secretary Leoncio Evasco Jr., National Housing Authority general manager Marcelino Escalada Jr. and presidential daughter Davao City Mayor Sara Duterte-Carpio in burying the time capsule. – With Edith Regalado, Christina Mendez

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Red leaders admit: No control over NPA

By **EFREN MONTANO**

TOP leaders of the Reds have admitted having no control over all units of the New People's Army.

President Rodrigo Duterte made the remark even as he hoped that the fighting would end soon enough.

Duterte made the remarks, stressing that the conflicts between the Reds and the military could end if Communist Party of the Philippines founder Jose Maria Sison would sign a bilateral ceasefire ac-

cord with him.

The President made this statements after the fourth round of talks between the government peace panel and the communist National Democratic Front and amid the government's push for a bilateral ceasefire with the Reds.

"They admitted to me in Malacañang, when we had dinner, that they could not control all the operating units of the NPA here. I'm sorry, we can continue. I don't have a problem. I will just wait for five years, then I'll go. But that conflict will continue and will

continue to punish because we won't stop killing each other, when we're all Filipinos. That's the most disgusting part," President Duterte said.

Duterte met Communist Party of the Philippines leaders Benito and Wilma Tiamson recently in Malacañang.

"Unless Sison signs a bilateral, both of us will announce that the fighting should stop. I didn't say you should surrender your arms. Just bury it. Don't bring your arms, just go out. No one will arrest you," the President said.

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Marcelino vs De Lima looms after Marine's release



Marcelino

**By Jerome Aning
and Jhesset O. Enano**
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Justice Secretary Vitaliano Aguirre II on Friday said Marine Lt. Col. Ferdinand Marcelino might be asked to testify in the drug charges filed against Sen. Leila de Lima.

"He's a possible witness. If possible we can use him to testify as [an] additional witness," Aguirre said of Marcelino, who was cleared of drug charges by the Department of Justice on Thursday.

Aguirre found interesting Marcelino's earlier disclosure that De Lima visited him while he was detained to talk about a raid on a "shabu" lab in Tarlac.

Marcelino also questioned why military intelligence was excluded from the raid that De Lima ordered at the New Bilibid Prisons where drug lords were found still plying their illicit trade.

Aguirre said he will leave Marcelino's possible testimony up to Public Attorney's Office chief Persida Acosta, Marcelino's lawyer, who said Thursday the Marine officer

was willing to testify.

But De Lima questioned Marcelino's motives for wanting to testify against her. "Isn't it obvious that his freedom is in exchange for mine?" the jailed senator said.

Speaking to reporters before her hearing on a supposed contempt of congressional summons, De Lima suggested Marcelino was only being used by the government against her.

"I suspect that a deal has been struck that he testify against me," she said. "Too bad, I thought he was a man of honor, of integrity."

"It must have been irresistible ... or an overwhelming (sense of) fear," she said.

The Philippine National Police Drug Enforcement Group said the dismissal of the drug charges against Marcelino would set a bad precedent for law enforcers.

In a statement, the PNP-DEG said the DOJ resolution was "unacceptable."

"This group is wary that the said decision lays a dangerous precedent on the drug operations being conducted by law enforcement agencies," it added. INQ



De Lima

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Marcelino freed, vows to testify vs Leila

By JAIME LAUDE

A day after he was ordered released, Marine Col. Ferdinand Marcelino declared he is ready to testify against detained Sen. Leila de Lima and other key personalities involved in illegal drugs.

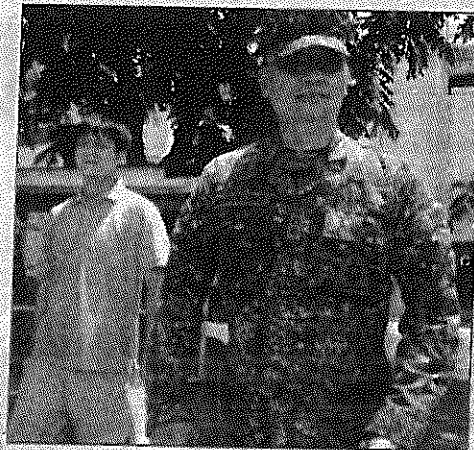
Dressed in full Marine uniform, Marcelino stressed in a news conference at Camp Aguinaldo that he was sacrificed by his superiors who reaped the fruits of their success in the war against drugs.

"I will only tell the truth," Marcelino said when asked if he would appear as a witness against De Lima.

Chinese Yan Yi Shou joined Marcelino in the press conference, slamming the police and the Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency (PDEA) for blowing his cover.

Yan said he was a government informant when he was arrested with Marcelino during a covert mission.

Marcelino virtually confirmed the statements of his lawyer Chief Public Attorney Persida Rueda-Acosta who earlier revealed that he is willing to



Marine Lt. Col. Ferdinand Marcelino and Chinese Yan Yi Shou leave Camp Aguinaldo in Quezon City yesterday.

MICHAEL VARCAS

testify against detained De Lima on her alleged involvement in the illegal drug trade.

De Lima was detained on charges of drug trafficking for her alleged involvement in the illegal operations of convicted drug distributors at the National Bilibid Prisons.

For her part, De Lima said Marcelino was most likely subjected to overwhelming pressure by the administration to implicate her in the illegal drug trade.

"By now, I am so used to this regime's habit of blaming the whole illegal drug industry on me as the supposed number one drug lord, while it continues to have nothing to show for its drug war in terms of cutting off the source from China and prosecuting the real Chinese drug lords," De Lima said in a handwritten statement.

Dangerous precedent

The Philippine National Police-Drug Enforcement Group (PNP-DEG) said the dropping of charges against Marcelino and Yan set a "dangerous precedent."

"The PNP-DEG is wary that the decision lays a dangerous precedent being conducted by law enforcement agencies," DEG spokesman Supt. Enrico Rigor said.

– With Evelyn Macairan, Emmanuel Tupas, Marvin Sy, Paolo Romero

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Moro fronts to sign agreement for BBL

BY JERRY N. ADLAW

THE central committee of the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) and the top brass of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) have concurred that all agreements signed with the Government of the Philippines (GPH) will be consolidated and signed under one peace agreement as decided in the recently concluded Bangsamoro Coordination Forum (BCF) held in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia.

Muslimin Sema, chairman of the MNLF Bangsamoro Peoples Congress, told *The Manila Times* that both the MNLF and MILF harmoniously arrived at the decision to consolidate all the documents from the GPH-MNLF September 2, 1996 peace agreement, the GPH-MILF Framework Agreement (FAB), the Comprehensive Agreement on Bangsamoro (CAB) and the Bangsamoro Basic Law (BBL) to be signed only under one agreement.

Sema said the BCF meeting arrived at a decision to craft a law that will signify one unified legislative

proposal for the GPH to decide a just and fair solution for the Bangsamoro people in Mindanao.

Organization of Islamic Cooperation secretary-general Yousef Al-Othaimen, invited the two Bangsamoro factions to come up with one decision reconciling all agreements they signed with the GPH.

MNLF founding chairman Nur Misuari was unable to attend the BCF meeting in Jeddah pending approval of his petition for the extension of his temporary pass in connection with the rebellion case he is facing. But Misuari reportedly does not recognize the agreements

forged by the MILF signed with the administration of former president Benigno Aquino 3rd.

Sema said Misuari only recognizes the September 2, 1996 agreement, insisting on an independent Islamic state rather than consolidating the peace pact into one decision.

He added that Misuari wanted to keep his position as MNLF chairman but the front's central committee agreed they would adhere to the charter policy under which Hatimil Hassan was elected replacing Misuari in 2005. In 2008, Sema became the second MNLF chairman with Yusoph Jikiri replacing him in 2012 up to the present.

Sema also said that the peace and development agenda which the government aims to consolidate is the 1996 Final Peace Agreement and the CAB with enabling law that will include 42 consensus points as agreed upon by the MNLF, MILF, government and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC).

The Philippine government had signed peace agreements with the two Moro revolutionary fronts: the

1996 Final Peace Agreement (FPA) which is a continuation of the 1976 Tripoli Agreement and the 2014 Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro (CAB), from the 2012 Framework Agreement on the Bangsamoro (FAB)

The MILF and MNLF faction under Jikiri, are now working together in crafting the draft Bangsamoro Basic Law (BBL) under the Bangsamoro Transition Commission.

The OIC which brokered the 1976 and 1996 peace agreements maintained that the 1976 Tripoli Agreement and the 1996 Final Peace Agreement (FPA) "continue to formulate the basis of any settlement of the conflict."

The OIC facilitated the talks between the Philippine government (GPH) and the MNLF which has an observer status in the OIC since 1977.

The MNLF-Misuari faction seeks to amend RA 9054, while the MILF-MNLF under Jikiri are working under the BTC to draft a law that would pave the way for a new autonomous political entity named Bangsamoro, to replace the ARMM.

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The message behind Año's appointment

There's more than meets the eye in President Duterte's surprise appointment of Gen. Eduardo Año, chief of staff of the Armed Forces of the Philippines, as secretary of the Department of Interior and Local Government.

Earlier, there were speculations that former senator Ferdinand Marcos Jr. was a serious contender for the top DILG post because of Mr. Duterte's perceived close relations with the Marcos family. Take note that shortly after Mr. Duterte assumed the presidency, he quickly made good his campaign promise to have the remains of the late president Ferdinand Marcos buried in the Libingan ng mga Bayani. And in two trips overseas, he included Marcos Jr.'s sister, Ilocos Sur Gov. Imee Marcos, in his official entourage.

The appointment of Marcos Jr. to the DILG would have been a political bonanza for the former senator and losing vice presidential candidate in 2016. Being administrator of the country's local government units as well as of the Philippine National Police would have given him the national exposure necessary if he decides to make a bid for the presidency in 2022.

But by choosing Año rather than Marcos Jr. or any other person with a political background, the President appears to be indirectly sending the message that he does not want the DILG to be used as a platform for the pursuit of political ambitions.

Because the DILG is at the forefront of the President's war on drugs, he apparent-

COMMENTARY

RAUL J. PALABRICA

ly wants to make sure that its leader has the experience and the *cojones* to go after drug pushers who will not hesitate to kill if their livelihood is threatened.

Besides, to be effective in going after local government officials suspected of involvement in the illegal drug trade, the DILG head should not be influenced by political ties or aspirations that may affect his or her objectivity. Also, the President cannot risk giving the task of accomplishing one of the major pillars of his administration—the elimination of illegal drugs in the country—to someone who has not held a national administrative position or has no experience in running a huge bureaucracy like the DILG.

The appointment of a veteran military officer to oversee the operations of the PNP may be interpreted as the President's subliminal expression of disappointment with the state of discipline in the country's principal law enforcement agency. Note that when he announced the appointment of Año, he made reference to the policemen who were earlier arrested by a special PNP unit for the kidnap for ransom of a couple in Makati. He said he wants Año to restore discipline in the police force.

By entrusting that mission to the traditional "adversary" of the PNP, the Presi-

dent was, in effect, telling PNP Director General Ronald dela Rosa that he has not, despite being the country's top cop for 11 months, been able to cleanse it of undisciplined and corrupt policemen.

Apparently, the President does not think the PNP can do effective housecleaning and has called on an outsider to do the job. That was a virtual slap on the PNP chief's face.

Año may have to apply some rules of military discipline to the PNP, which for decades was an integral part of the military establishment as the Philippine Constabulary, until it was converted to a civilian organization in 1991.

In times past, the President's action would have been considered an expression of lack of confidence in the affected party and would have triggered the latter's immediate resignation from office. Apparently not so for Dela Rosa who, in an effort to put up a brave face, welcomed the idea of taking orders from a soon-to- retire military officer who is expected to institute military-inspired reforms in the PNP.

Let's keep our fingers crossed that the President made the right decision to appoint a retired military officer to oversee the operations of a department that is often the only symbol of the government in remote municipalities.

Raul J. Palabrica (rpalabrica@inquirer.com.ph) writes a weekly column in the Business section of the Inquirer.

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AT GROUND LEVEL

SATUR C. OCAMPO



Extrajudicial killing of rights defenders

Sixteen years ago, alarmed over the rising incidents of extrajudicial killing of persons engaged in defending and promoting human rights in Latin America, Asia, Africa, and the Middle East, an independent advocacy group founded Front Line Defenders (FLD) in Dublin, Ireland. Its specific aim: to protect human rights defenders facing risks to their lives or safety as they work non-violently for “any and all” of the rights enshrined in the United Nations’ Universal Declaration on Human Rights. Such defenders or HRDs are engaged in a broad range of political and social activism for the rights of the poor, for the environment, etc.

This week Front Line Defenders focuses attention on the Philippines. In an article it published on May 16, titled “President Duterte must no longer turn a blind eye to the fate of human rights defenders,” FLD cites extrajudicial killing as the gravest threat facing Filipino activists. Outside of the Americas, it notes, “the Philippines has already become the most dangerous country in the world in which to be a human rights defender, in terms of the number of reported killings.”

FLD’s sharp comments were based on the outcome of the United Nations Human Rights Council’s third-cycle Universal Periodic Review of the country’s human rights situation last May 8.

Between the second-cycle UPR (of 2012) and the recent 2017 review, there was an almost threefold increase in the number of UNHRC member states that showed concern over activist killings. In the 2012 UPR only four countries raised the issue on attacks and killings of human rights defenders: France, Ireland, Norway, and the United Kingdom, which submitted five official recommendations. In the May 8 review,

however, 11 member states called for the establishment of a protection mechanism for HRDs, saying the Philippine government “should provide a safe and enabling environment” for their work. The 11 nations are: Denmark, Estonia, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Luxembourg, Norway, Poland, Slovakia, Ukraine, and the United Kingdom.

In 2012, FLD points out, the Philippine government (then under the Aquino administration) accepted the recommendations on protecting HRDs from EJK and enforced disappearance (ED), its delegation having committed, during the review, to address these problems. However, it merely acknowledged the recommendation pertaining to cooperation with the UN special rapporteur on the situation of HRDs.

Despite these assurances, EJKs and “targeted attacks” on HRDs have continued, said FLD. And in its 2017 report to the UNHRC, the Duterte administration didn’t even mention the risks facing them or any measure it had taken for their protection. That omission demonstrates “how little progress has been made in implementing the recommendations over the past five years,” it added.

Some member states also raised the “dire need” to recognize the “positive and legitimate work” accomplished by the local defenders of human rights, reflecting increased international aware-

ness of the dangers that they have faced in recent years. Prior to the 2017 review, FLD had submitted a stakeholders' report recommending that the government protect HRDs by taking "effective action" to: 1) investigate and end the killings; 2) cease judicial harassments (overt surveillance, filing of trumped-up charges); 3) review restrictive laws; and 4) recognize the positive and legitimate role of human rights defenders in society.

Since 2012, FLD observes, there has been a marked deterioration in the rule of law, deeply affecting the ability of HRDs to carry out their work. The organization attributed this to the prevailing climate of impunity, the administration's pursuance of the so-called drug war, and President Duterte's hostile rhetoric against HRDs and civil society members. It warned against creating "a situation in which the killing of HRDs is seen as an acceptable state response."

What's the Philippine record on the extrajudicial killing of human rights defenders?

In a recent letter to Michel Forst, the UN special rapporteur on the situation of HRDs, Karapatan conveyed the following data: 474 HRDs were killed during Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo's presidency (2001-2010); 139 during the succeeding Aquino administration; and 33 so far under Duterte (from July 2016 to April 30, 2017). All together, 646 human rights defenders were slain over a 16-year period.

Of the 33 HRD killings recorded under the Duterte administration, 15 happened in the first two months of 2017. Most of those targeted in the recent spate of EJKs were defending peasant rights to land, indigenous people's rights, and the preservation of the environment. In a recent statement, Karapatan says at least 55 peasants and indigenous tribal members had been killed as of April 30 (presumably including the 33 HRDs), citing AFP attacks in the provinces of Quezon, Batangas, Pangasinan, Bohol, and Masbate.

In its May 16 article, FLD decries the fact that although 45 of 47 UNHRC member states have urged the Duterte government to investigate and stop the killings in its "war on drugs," its delegation failed to make any commitment to stop the killings or to conduct independent investigation and hold the perpetrators accountable. The HRD extrajudicial killings weren't even part of the picture.

"Now that the lethal environment facing HRDs has come under international scrutiny," FLD asserts, "the Duterte government must put an end to these killings (and) properly address as a matter of urgency" the recommendations by the UNHRC member states and civil society organizations.

Expect the international community and civil society organizations to keep up the pressure on the Duterte government to confront its human rights record. In September, the government is due to make its official response to the member states' recommendations during the UNHRC 36th regular session in Geneva.

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