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30 August 2018

Thursday



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Another martial law extension eyed

After Kudarat bombing leaves 2 dead, 36 wounded

By JESS DIAZ

Another From Page 1

Martial law in Mindanao, already extended for one year, may again be extended after Tuesday night's bombing in Sultan Kudarat that left two people dead and several others wounded, Executive Secretary Salvador Medialdea said yesterday.

"It is an option. We are trying to make it as easy as possible, but with what is happening, what are we going to do? We will assess the situation. We will look at it. Anyway, we are still under a state of lawless violence and martial law," Medialdea told reporters at the House of Representatives.

That the Sultan Kudarat explosion happened even with martial law still in effect in Mindanao indicated that there might be a need to extend it, Medialdea said.

"These signs are not good. Lives are in danger. The terrorists may still be there," he said.

Malacañang condemned the bombing and vowed to apply the "full force of the law" against the perpetrators.

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Presidential spokesman Harry Roque said the government is determined to identify those who are behind the bombing attack.

Roque agreed with Medialdea that extending martial law in Mindanao is an option because of last Tuesday's bombing attack.

In May last year, President Duterte declared martial law in Mindanao and suspended the writ of habeas corpus to allow government forces to wipe out the Maute group of terrorists who had seized Marawi City.

The declaration was supposed to be good for 60 days under the Constitution. Before it expired, the President asked Congress to extend it up to the end of December 2017.

Before the December extension ended, Duterte again requested his congressional allies to lengthen it up to the end of this year.

The bomb

Officials said the bomb was concealed in a bag and exploded, leaving at least two

people dead and 34 others wounded during the Isulan town celebration.

Regional police spokesman Supt. Aldrin Gonzalez said the fatalities included a seven-year-old girl identified as Devy Shane Alayon, and Leny Donina Ombrog, 51, who were among the crowd celebrating the Hamungaya Festival.

A civilian told authorities about a suspicious bag left by a man near the gathering, regional military commander Brig. Gen. Cirilito Sobejana said.

The bomb exploded while troops were running after the suspect, who escaped in the confusion, he said.

Gonzales, however, gave a different account and said the homemade bomb was placed on a motorcycle parked in front of a store near a popular night market in Isulan, which was celebrating its founding anniversary.

"The area has been put under control, it's been cordoned and the injured have been taken to the hospital," Sobejana told reporters.

Initial reports said the improvised explosive device (IED) was placed in a tricycle parked along the busy street in Barangay Kalawag, where a crowd was watching the celebration.

The IED was triggered by a mobile phone, officials said.

No group immediately claimed responsibility for the attack but local officials and the military tagged the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters behind the bombing. The BIFF issued a statement denying the attack.

Government forces have been on alert in restive regions in Mindanao in recent weeks due to intelligence reports that Muslim militants, who have sustained battle setbacks in government offensives, planned to carry out bombings in public areas, military officials said.

Last month, a bomb-laden van exploded in a powerful blast in Lamitan, Basilan that killed 11 people, including the suspected foreign militant who drove the vehicle.

'No extension'

Vice President Leni Robredo led several officials in opposing the possible extension



Wounded villagers receive medical attention Tuesday in a hospital after the explosion at a night market in Isulan, Sultan Kudarat. EPA

of martial law in Mindanao.

"There is martial law there, but we have seen in the past months that it didn't prevent violence. There was bombing in Lamitan, and (Tuesday) night in Sultan Kudarat. Terrorist activities continue to happen. So what is the assurance that another extension of martial law could prevent these from happening?" she said.

Robredo urged the administration to carefully study the situation and explore

other options that could be more effective in stopping violence.

National Security Adviser Hermogenes Esperon Jr. said in a text message that he was "not even thinking about martial law."

Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana said it would be "too early" to recommend the extension of martial law following last Tuesday's bombing.

"Of course, it is an option, but too early in the day to

make a recommendation. We'll see what happens in the next several months," Lorenzana said.

Senate President Vicente Sotto III said it was premature to be talking about a possible extension of martial law in Mindanao beyond the end of this year.

Sotto said he does not see the need to extend martial law at this time in spite of the bombing incident in Sultan Kudarat.

"Maybe within a month or two the issue there would be resolved. It is not the time to think and talk about this. There is no necessity," he said.

Bayan Muna Rep. Carlos Zarate said it was too early for Medialdea to float the possible extension of martial law.

"This (Sultan Kudarat bombing) incident even showed martial law's failure in solving the island's security problems. Instead of extending, it should be immediately lifted," he said. — With Alexis Romero, Marvin Sy, Paolo Romero, John Unson, Edith Regalado, Jaime Laude, Roel Pareño, Michael Punongbayan, Reuters, AP

NFA CHIEF FACES GRAFT RAPS OVER RICE FUNDS

STORY BY KARL R. OCAMPO AND MARLON RAMOS

A group has filed a complaint in the Ombudsman against National Food Authority Administrator Jason Aquino for using P5.1 billion meant for buying palay last year to pay part of the agency's huge debt.

FROM A1

By Karl R. Ocampo
and Marlon Ramos
@Team_Inquirer

The head of the National Food Authority (NFA) is facing a graft complaint for using funds meant for buying grain last year to pay off the agency's debts, which resulted in soaring prices of rice and corn.

In the complaint it filed in the Office of the Ombudsman on Wednesday, the Samahang Industriya ng Agrikultura (Sinag) accused NFA Administrator Jason Aquino and NFA accounting manager Gerry Ambrosio of diverting P5.1 billion to servicing the agency's debt.

The fund should have been used to stabilize the price and supply of rice and corn last year as mandated by the General Appropriations Act.

Davao City Rep. Karlo Nograles on Wednesday said the NFA also used this year P5 billion earmarked for buying palay (unmilled rice) to settle its debts.

The amount that Nograles, chair of the House appropriations committee, cited would bring to P10 billion the funds that the NFA used to service its debts over the past two years.

He said Aquino and other

NFA officials may be held criminally and administratively liable for technical malversation.

"This is one of major reasons why we have a rice shortage and why the prices of rice skyrocketed," Nograles told the Inquirer.

"This is very serious because if a state agency like the NFA could get away with diverting money allocated by Congress for a certain purpose, what will stop other agencies from following suit?" he said.

Sinag, an umbrella group of 32 farmers and agriculture groups, filed the graft complaint after the Commission on Audit (COA) found that the NFA had used the funds to pay for maturing loans.

NFA spokesperson Rex Estoperez said the COA did not mention that the grains agency had diverted any of its funds, noting that the auditing body even lauded it "for being prudent enough in utilizing your funds."

Treasury, Landbank, DBP

A COA audit review found that P3.01 billion was deposited in the Bureau of Treasury as payment for a guarantee fee, while P2.09 billion was deposited to the NFA's rice collection savings account (RCSA).

The money from the RCSA was then used to pay Land Bank of the Philippines (Landbank) P1.046 billion and the Develop-



Jason Aquino

ment Bank of the Philippines (DBP) P1.044 billion.

Last year, the NFA reported that it had cut its outstanding debt to P149 billion by the end of October 2017 from a high of P177 billion in 2010.

Undue injury to public

Under the Arroyo administration, the NFA racked up massive debts largely due to its efforts to keep both farmers and consumers happy by subsidizing the farm-gate and market prices of rice.

"The NFA accumulated these loans to finance the implementation of food programs which were not sustainable during those times," Aquino said last year.

Sinag said Aquino and Ambrosio violated the Anti-Graft and Corrupt Practices Act and the Revised Penal Code.

The group said the two caused undue injury to the public and committed technical malversation, the use of public funds different from which they were originally appropriated.

Sinag said the loan payments to Landbank and DEP partly caused the NFA's inability to buy enough unmilled rice from farmers last year, causing the agency to incur a shortfall of 124,969 metric tons of palay during the period.

"The procurement shortfall affected other programs of the NFA, such as rice distribution and buffer stocking, resulting in higher price of rice, unavailability of NFA rice in the market and lower inventory of rice in various NFA warehouses," the complaint read.

Citing prices from the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA), the complaint showed dramatic increases in the prices of rice and corn from March 2017—when the NFA received the P5.1 billion from the Department of Budget and Management—to July 2018.

"The diversion of the funds has clearly contributed to the substantial across-the-board escalation of the prices of rice and corn," Sinag said. "This increase has obviously affected the industry negatively and has caused undue injury to the public in general."

Estoperez said that contrary to what Sinag claimed, the

NFA was not able to procure palay due to its low buying price of P17 per kilogram and not because the fund was channeled into paying debts.

The buying price as of the second week of August was P22.28 a kilo—the highest price recorded by the PSA.

"We really cannot buy because of our buying price, and that made the funds idle. There is no use," Estoperez said.

Resign

"What we did, we used it to pay our maturing loans to save on interest expense under our 'one fund basket' where we keep all our rice collections, sales and even our credit line ... That is, still under the food security program," he added.

Estoperez said the NFA was able to expand its credit line and save money after management used the idle funds.

Sen. Bam Aquino noted that the NFA had touted the importation of 500,000 MT of rice, but many poor families still could not get an adequate supply of the staple.

He called on President Duterte to replace Aquino amid the rice crisis gripping the country.

Sen. Cynthia Villar said the prices of rice in the country had "worsened" during the time of Agriculture Secretary Emmanuel Piñol. —WITH REPORTS FROM LEILA B. SALAVEERRIA AND MAILA AGER INQ



US not excluding China in Indo-Pacific strategy'

The United States' Indo-Pacific strategy is open to any country - including China - and is not meant merely as a reaction to Beijing's Belt and Road Initiative.

"I would say the Indo-Pacific strategy sets up a system that is inclusive. It's for every country. It's not aimed against anybody," Walter Douglas, US Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Public Affairs and Public Diplomacy in the Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs, said at a media briefing.

"It's not meant to exclude any country but rather set up an open, transparent, rules-based system that every country can participate in," he said.

The US Indo-Pacific investment plan is seen as Washington's answer to China's Belt

and Road.

The plan is meant to defend US interests and deepen its engagement in the region as China forges ahead with its own trade and infrastructure investment program, the Belt and Road Initiative.

The senior US official believed that the South China Sea ruling and international law play a role in shaping the US Indo-Pacific strategy.

The United Nations-backed arbitral tribunal based in The Hague ruled that China's nine-dash-line does not have legal basis and that Beijing violated its commitment under the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) when it built artificial islands within the Philippines' exclusive economic zone.

- Pia Lee-Brago

J

PH may join war games

By Kathleen Mae Bulquerin

Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana said yesterday the Philippines will consider sending military observers to Russia in line with its invitation for the country to join its annual military exercise.

The invitation was extended by Russian defense officials to Lorenzana who visited Moscow last week.

"We were invited by them. Every year they always have military training. They have special forces training, ranger, shooting," Lorenzana said, adding they want to see which training will be useful for Philippine troops.

"Maybe next year we'll send (military) observers to determine if we need the training because we have so much to learn from them, especially their forces," the defense chief said.

He added the department is also considering sourcing more weapons from Russia but that they will still look at other countries as suppliers.

Lorenzana met Russian Defense Minister and General of the Army Sergey Shoygu and Deputy Minister Colonel General Alexander Fomin.

Skateboarder Didal gives PH 4th gold; Hidilyn Diaz promoted to PAF sergeant

By NICK GIONGCO

JAKARTA — Roll out the red carpet for Margie Didal, the country's latest Asian Games gold medalist.

Didal ruled the skateboarding street event Wednesday in the co-host city of Palembang to raise the Philippines' medal tally to four by besting Isa Kaya of Japan and Bunga

Nyimas of Indonesia at the JSK Skateboarding Stadium.

The 19-year-old from Cebu earned 30.4 points while Kaya got 25 and Nyimas collected 19.8 ▶ 11

Skateboarder Didal gives... ◀ 1

to join weightlifter Hidilyn Diaz and golfer Yuka Saso and the women's gold team as the country's top performers so far.

"I am so happy that I won the gold," said Didal, who went to school at Lahug High in Cebu City.

The fourth of five children, Didal began skating seven years ago and has since fractured a collarbone and lost a tooth while doing her thing.

In Palembang, Didal didn't break any bone nor lost another tooth.

What she got in return was accolades from the country's top sports officials, led by Philippine Olympic Committee (POC) president Ricky Vargas, who arrived in Palembang from Jakarta just before Didal's feat.

"She is an inspiration to all and we are ecstatic about Margie Didal's victory," said POC president Ricky Vargas, who was with POC chairman Bambo Tolentino when Didal pulled off the biggest win of her career.

"I hope our remaining athletes draw inspiration from her and our other medalists. Laban pa Pinoy," added Vargas.

To prepare for the Asian Games, Didal competed and trained in the US and also had a stint in the UK.

With her accomplishment, Didal stands to get ₱6 million from a mixed of government and private sector funding.

"I will keep the money, share it with the family and start a business," said Didal.

Skateboarding is making its debut here and will also make its first appear-

ance when Tokyo hosts the Olympics in 2020.

Hidilyn promoted

Meanwhile, Airwoman 1st Class Hidilyn Diaz was promoted to the next rank (sergeant) effective Tuesday for winning the country's first gold medal in the ongoing Asiad.

The promotion was based on Special Order Number 475 and subjected to the Enlisted Personnel Promotion System in the Armed Forces of the Philippines, Air Force (PAF) spokesperson Maj. Aris Galang said Wednesday.

Diaz, who won the gold in 53-kg weightlifting category, was also awarded with a plaque of recognition for extra-ordinary and distinguished achievement, along with an Outstanding Achievement Medal with First Bronze Anahaw Leaf.

Aside from these awards, Diaz and two other Air Force weightlifter participants in the Asian Games, Airman 2nd Class Jeffrey Garcia and Airman 2nd Class Nestor Colonia, were given motorcade from Villamor Air Base's Gate One to the Philippine Air Force Gymnasium.

Present during the ceremonies honoring Diaz and her two companions were PAF commander Lt. Gen. Gaileo Gerard Kintanar and Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana.

Hidilyn, a silver medalist in the 2016 Olympics, bagged the Philippines' first gold medal in the Asian Games capturing the women's 53-kg event on the 115 Clean and Jerk categories for a total of 207 kilograms. (With a report from PNA)

290 Subanon integrated into Philippine Army

CAMP SANG-AN, Labangan, Zamboanga del Sur: About 290 indigenous peoples, locally known as Subanon tribesmen, have been integrated into the Philippine Army's First Infantry (Tabak) Division (1st ID) based in this five-hectare mountain camp.

Major Gen. Roseller Murillo, Tabak Division chief, said the Subanons comprise almost half of the newly recruited Christian and Muslim troops who completed a recent four-month Candidate Soldier Course (CSC) of the First ID Training School headed by Lt. Col. Rufino de Leon.

The CSC closing ceremony was held at the 1st ID grandstand.

Murillo said of the 736 new soldier-graduates, aged 18 to 25, who will be given a rank of private, 29 percent have college degrees, 28 percent are high school graduates, 23 percent are college students and 20 percent have finished technical-vocational courses certified by the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (Tesda).

Subanon Timuay leader Jose Macareal, a Multisectoral Group Council official who represented his tribesmen in the graduation rites, advised the new privates to safeguard and utilize their firearms (mostly M-16 Armalite rifles) carefully and as needed "in order to protect our people and to maintain peace and order in Mindanao."

The Subanon chief expressed his gratitude to the 1st ID officers "for considering the enlistment in the Philippine Army of qualified members of his tribe who are also always ready to protect our constituents wherever they are deployed." *AF*

Murillo thanked the parents of the new troops for allowing their sons to enter the military service whose main mission, he said, is "Army core purpose. Serving the people. Securing the Land."

He said the 1st ID covers the entire Zamboanga Peninsula comprised of the provinces of Zamboanga del Norte, Zamboanga del Sur, Zamboanga Sibugay and Misamis Occidental in Northern Mindanao and the component cities of Dipolog, Pagadian, Zamboanga, Dapitan, Ozamiz, Oroquieta and Tangub.

ANTONIO P. RIMANDO

2 dead, dozens hurt in Sultan Kudarat blast

Martial law extension now an 'option,' says Palace exec

BY VICTOR REYES
AND RAYMOND AFRICA

TWO persons, including a seven-year-old boy, died while at least 30 others were injured in a bomb explosion in Isulan town, Sultan Kudarat Tuesday night.

The explosion happened during celebrations of the town's 61st founding anniversary and the Hamungaya Festival, a thanksgiving rite for a good harvest.

The terrorist groups Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters and the Abu

Sayaf are suspected to be behind the attack, said Brig. Gen. Cirilito Sobejana, commander of the Army's 6th Infantry Division based in Maguindanao.

PNP chief Oscar Albaralde said investigators are eyeing a local terrorist group as perpetrator but declined to say which.

"This is one of the threat groups that we are monitoring here in Mindanao, but we really cannot tell as of this time if it was perpetrated solely by the threat group or if they have connections with other threat groups," he said.

With the latest explosion in Mindanao, Executive Secretary Salvador Medialdea said an extension of martial law in the region is now an "option."

"If this is still happening, what are we going to do? Can we just take it sitting down?" he told reporters after attending a budget hearing at the House.

Medialdea said this incident showed that the threat of terrorism remains strong despite martial law in the area.

"Signs like this, it's not good. Lives remain in danger. They're bombing a fiesta,

how would you feel?" he said.

Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana, the martial law administrator, supported Medialdea's statement. "Of course, it is an option. But it's too early in the day to make a recommendation. We'll see what happens in the next several months," he said.

Rep. Carlos Isagani Zarate (PL, Bayan Muna) said the latest bombing "even showed martial law's failure in solving the

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MARTIAL LAW

island's security problems."

He also said that instead of extending martial law, "it should be immediately lifted."

Last month, 11 persons died after a device was detonated in a van in Lamitan, Basilan. The Abu Sayyaf was suspected to be behind the attack.

Presidential spokesman Harry Roque Jr. said President Duterte vowed to ensure all measures would be exhausted to find and punish the culprits.

President Duterte placed the whole of Mindanao under martial law in May last year, right after the Maute terror group attacked Marawi City. The martial law proclamation, which has been extended twice by Congress, will end on December 31 this year. The Marawi conflict ended in October last year.

CASUALTIES

Capt. Arvin Encinas, spokesman of the 6th, said witnesses saw two persons leaving a bag in front of the H and J Marketing, near the town hall, and soldiers were pursuing them when the explosion occurred at 8:30 p.m., killing seven-year-old Devey Shane Alayon and Leni Ombrog, 52.

The PNP said Olayon was from Bagumbayan in Sultan Kudarat while Ombrog is from Barangay Kalawag.

Encinas said the bomb which was placed in a bag, exploded while an Army KM450 truck carrying soldiers was passing by.

If not for the truck, which has metal plate shields on both sides as a protection against ambushes, there would have been more casualties, said Encinas. "Some of the shrapnel were blocked by the truck," he said.

Encinas said there were 34 injured, including Ryan Miguel Batolo, 9; Asnawi Degaosun, 17; T/Sgt. Melchor Capilitan and Sgt. Timjar Hambali, both members of the 33rd Infantry Battalion who were aboard the truck; and Cefgu Nikki John Peranil.

The PNP said there were 36 injured in the blast. It also said the explosion occurred at 8:34 p.m. Tuesday near a used clothing store, in front of J and H Marketing along the national highway in Barangay Kaiawag 3.

It said the IED was planted on a parked motorcycle.

Encinas said authorities are preparing an artist sketch of the suspects, based on the account of witnesses, and the military is coordinating with the PNP in securing a copy of a closed-circuit TV footage of the incident.

BIFF PLAN

Encinas theorized the improvised explosive device (IED) was meant for the soldiers. He said the military earlier monitored a plan by the BIFF to bomb military personnel in Marbel town in South Cotabato but the plan was appar-

ently diverted to Isulan.

"Considering there is a festival in Isulan, they took advantage of the populated area, though we believe their primary target is our security forces," said Encinas.

Sobejana said residents of Isulan are still in fear because of what happened. "That is their (terrorists') intention, to sow terror among the populace... Anyway, we are here in the ground, we are trying our best to bring back normalcy in the area," he said.

Sobejana said the military has poured in additional soldiers to the town to ease the fear of the people and "to build confidence among the people of Isulan."

As to the perpetrators, Sobejana said the military is working on a lead. "We are continuously validating but the likelihood of Abu Sayyaf and Toraype Group (of the BIFF) is very high," he said.

The BIFF operates mainly in Central Mindanao while most members of Abu Sayyaf are based in Sulu and Basilan although the group has conducted bombings in areas outside the two provinces.

The BIFF is composed mainly of former members of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front which forged a peace agreement with government in 2015.

The BIFF, the Abu Sayyaf, and the Maute group pledged allegiance to the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria years ago.

AFP public affairs chief Col. Noel Detorato said the military believes the BIFF is behind the attack.

"They are the ones who have the strongest evil desire to initiate this kind of attacks that victimize innocent civilians and disrupt peace," he said.

FULL ALERT

Albayaalde said government agents have received intelligence reports of a planned bombing in Mindanao but did not specify the exact place and date of the attack.

"The information was always in general terms. In all information as per experience, we really cannot get the specifics. That's why the most important thing to do is validate that information and heighten security in areas prone to terror attacks, especially in places of convergence when there are events like this," Albayaalde said.

To prevent similar attacks, Albayaalde ordered all police regional offices in Mindanao placed on "full alert" status until such time martial law is lifted in the region. He said Metro Manila was placed under "heightened alert" status so that its police forces will be ready to respond immediately in case of eventuality.

Albayaalde said placing the PNP in Mindanao under full alert would mean 100 percent deployment of its men, with all leaves of absences cancelled unless during emergency situations. — *With Wendell Vigilina and Jocelyn Montemayor*

Martial law extension in Mindanao eyed

By Nat Mariano
and Maricel V. Cruz

EXECUTIVE Secretary Salvador Medialdea said Wednesday that extending martial law in Mindanao is an option after a bomb attack killed two people and wounded more than 30 others Tuesday night in Sultan Kudarat.

"It's an option. We're trying to make it as easy as possible to prevent this from happening. But since it's still happening, what else could we do? Should we just sit there?" he told reporters in an ambush interview Wednesday morning.

Medialdea clarified that he would not necessarily recommend an extension of martial law, but considers it an option. *Next page*

Martial...

From A2

"Signs like this [are] not a good sign. Do you want lives and limbs in danger and an explosion during a fiesta? How would you feel?" he said.

Presidential Spokesman Harry Roque condemned the attack.

"Authorities are now investigating the incident and we vow to bring the perpetrators of this brazen attack to justice. We will apply the full force of the law," Roque said in a statement sent to media Wednesday.

The Armed Forces of the Philippines attributed the incident to the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters.

"We believe that the terrorist group BIFF is the primary suspect behind this atrocity. They are the ones who have the strongest evil desire to initiate this kind of attacks that victimize innocent civilians and disrupt peace. If they are fighting for a worthy cause, why are they hurting civilians?" said the AFP in its statement.

In a radio interview, Roque said the BIFF is always at odds with the government's ways on peace talks.

"This group disagrees with the government. We are even hoping that the Bangsamoro Organic Law would bring peace not only to the MILF [Moro Islamic Liberation Front] but also to all the groups involved," said Roque.

"We would look into it because the BIFF previously expressed disagreement with any peace negotiation," he added.

The town of Isulan, the official provincial capital of Sultan Kudarat, was celebrating its Hamungaya Festival when an improvised explosive device detonated Tuesday evening.

The blast occurred in Barangay Kalawag 3 along the national highway where people gathered for shopping.

Isulan police authorities reported that two people died while 37 were injured.

ML extension eyed

Kudarat bombing 'not a good sign'

Davao City has always been on red alert since the Roxas night market attack two years ago

**By Kristina Maralit
and Nananeel Bordey**

The deadly blast in Sultan Kudarat that killed two persons and wounded dozens others Tuesday night prompted aides of President Rodrigo Duterte to state that extending martial law in Mindanao to beyond the end of this year remains an "option."

Executive Secretary Salvador Medialdea said the unrest caused by the bloody incident, which happened a few days after Mr. Duterte expressed his desire of a lasting peace in Mindanao, is "not a good sign."

Mr. Duterte placed Mindanao under martial rule after Marawi City was ravaged by the ISIS-inspired Maute Group in May 2017. It was extended by Congress and will end by 31 December 2018.

Medialdea, after his budget presentation on behalf of the Office of the President, told reporters that the incident

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From page 1

proved terrorism remains a persistent threat.

"These are not good signs. Lives are in danger. You're just at a festival and then you get bombed. How would you feel?" an appalled Medialdea told reporters.

"It's an option. We're trying to make it as easy as possible so that things like this won't happen but it's still happening.

The bombing occurred while residents of Isulan town were celebrating the Hamungaya Festival.

SAP slated as guest

Special Assistant to the President (SAP) Christopher Lawrence "Bong" Go said the President will make sure those behind the deadly bombing will be caught and brought to justice.

Go had been invited to be a guest of honor and speaker for the 30 August festivities but had to decline because of prior commitments.

"We condemn this incident. You can be sure that government will focus on quickly solving this.

Davao City Mayor Sara Duterte-Carpio said the decision on extending martial law in Mindanao rests not solely on the President.

The perpetrators, the terrorists, will be punished," Go said.

He added the government will help the victims of the attack.

"To all victims, government will help you. Our government will do everything to give aid," he said.

As this developed, Go said the authorities are looking into possible suspects but cannot name them yet.

"There are possible suspects but we cannot reveal them yet. That will be done by the police and the military. This is an act of terror and the military and the police are looking at all possible angles," he said.

While police are still investigating the incident, Go cautioned the public against spreading rumors and unverified information that could aggravate the security situation in Isulan.

Guidance from AFP

In a statement, Duterte-Carpio said if the AFP may deem it necessary to extend martial law, then she will give her full support.

An explosion rocked Isulan, Sultan Kudarat on Tuesday at 4:15

What will we do? Do we just sit in one corner?" he said.

Davao City Mayor Sara Duterte-Carpio said the decision on extending martial law in Mindanao rests not solely on the President but also on the military and the police force.

"If in the view of our Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP), the Philippine National Police and the Office of the President there is a need to extend the declaration of martial law in

Mindanao, then we all follow their direction," the Presidential daughter said.

She added the three government institutions "are better informed by the intelligence units."

Medialdea, however, said government will not be so quick to act on extending martial rule and instead will "see how it goes" while the Palace is closely monitoring the situation.

Presidential spokesman Harry Roque Jr., meanwhile, also condemned the deadly blast.

"We condemn in the strongest possible terms the bombing in Sultan Kudarat last night. Authorities are now investigating the incident and we vow to bring the perpetrators of this brazen attack to justice. We will apply the full force of the law," Roque said on radio.

p.m. while the town was celebrating its 7th Hamungaya Festival.

Among those who died were Lenie Ombrog, 52 and Davy Shane Alayon, 7.

Earlier reports quoted Brig. Gen. Cirilito Sobejana, commander of the Army's 6th Infantry Division, as saying that the improvised bomb exploded while several soldiers were chasing the still unidentified bombing suspect.

The AFP has yet to determine the motive behind the blast.

Duterte-Carpio said Davao City remains safe as "the city never lowered its guard after the Roxas Night Market bombing on 2 September 2010 and it will remain on heightened alert."

"Davao City has always been on red alert since the bombing incident two years ago and we never lowered our guard after that incident. And with the bombing incident in Isulan, Sultan Kudarat, all the more that our security forces will be vigilant," she said.

The city government will commemorate the second year of the Roxas Night Market bombing on Sunday.

She said the public's cooperation with security measures is needed to ensure the safety of the people of the city.

"I am asking the public to cooperate with our security measures. There are random checkpoints and some other measures that the Davao City Police Office and Task Forces Davao are doing. I'd like to solicit

everybody's cooperation on this," she said.

2 suspects seen

Capt. Arvin Encinas, Army's 6th Infantry Division's spokesman, said around 8:30 p.m., soldiers noticed two suspicious persons leaving a bag in front of H and J Marketing, a local establishment in Isulan.

"Our troops were conducting mobile patrol and were able to call out these two suspicious persons who left a bag in front of an establishment (H and J Marketing), the two hurriedly left upon being called out by the troops, then suddenly, the IED (improvised explosive device) blasted off, resulting in the deaths of two persons and wounding many," Encinas said.

"They took advantage of the crowded place as their main targets are our security forces," he added.

Luckily, the IED happened to explode as an Army truck was passing by.

A total of three IED were placed near the area. The other IED was placed near a bank while the location of another IED was not verified.

Encinas said the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighter (BIFF) is the most probable perpetrator of the bombing.

He also stressed that it was "part of their retaliation, to create, sow fear in the community."

No BOL backlash

Roque said the government continues to hold partners in the Mindanao peace process in "good faith" following the signing of the Bangsamoro Organic Law (BOL) last 26 July.

BOL, or Republic Act 11054, seeks to establish a new Bangsamoro political entity to replace the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao.

"At present, we would like to maintain good faith with all our

partners there in Mindanao," Roque said.

He added authorities are now investigating the incident noting that the government will apply the full force of the law.

Security act weak

Senate President Vicente Sotto III said the bombing underscored the necessity of the immediate passage of the Human Security Act (HSA) to address terrorism, particularly in Mindanao.

Sotto said the HSA, which is still pending, will complement the recently enacted national identification system in the government's efforts against terrorists and other undesirable personalities.

"It's now obvious that we need to hasten the Human Security Act so that we can strengthen our fight against terrorism," Sotto said.

Currently, Sotto noted the existing security act is the weakest in Asia.

"This is the time to strengthen it. It will be a very good combination with the national ID system which implementing rules and regulations should also be expedited," Sotto said.

Earlier this month, President Duterte signed into law the Philippine System Identification Act or Philsys ID.

For his part, Sen. Bam Aquino expressed his sympathies to the victims of the bombing.

"I condemn this dastardly act," Aquino said.

**Elmer N. Manuel, Mario J. Mallari
and Kathleen Mae Buiquerin**

Martial Law sa Mindanao palalawigin

Ikinokonsidera ng Malacañang ang pagpapalawig ng Martial Law sa Mindanao matapos ang pagsabog sa Sultan Kudarat.

Ayon kay Presidential Spokesman Harry Roque, gaya ng pahayag ni Executive Secretary Salvador Medialdea ay isang option ng Palasyo ang extension ng pag-iral ng Martial Law

sa Mindanao dahil na rin sa twin-bombing incident sa isulan.

Sinabi ni Medialdea sa pagdinig ng House Committee on Appropriations, hindi naman niya irekomenda na ma-extend ang martial law subalit hindi tama na ubuan ang pangyayaring pagsabog sa naturang lugar.

Ang Martial Law na

umiral sa Mindanao ay magwawakas sa Disyembre 31, 2018 matapos palawigin ito ng Kongreso ng ideklara ni Pangulong Duterte ang Martial Law noong May 25, 2017 kasunod ng Marawi crisis dahil sa paghahasik ng terorismo ng ISIS-Maute group. (Rudy Andal/Gemma Garcia)

Malacañang pabor sa Martial Law extension sa Mindanao

Kasunod nang pagsabog sa Sultan Kudarat na ikinasawi ng dalawang katao at pagkasugat ng 36 iba pa ay pabor ang Malacañang sa posibilidad nang pagpapalawig muli sa pag-iral ng Martial Law sa Mindanao.

Ayon kay Presidential Spokesman Harry Roque, katulad ng naunang pahayag ni Executive Secretary Salvador Medialdea ay isang option ng Palasyo ang extension ng pag-iral ng ML sa Mindanao dahil

na rin sa twin-bombing incident sa Isulan, Sultan Kudarat habang nagdiriwang ng kapistahan kamakalawa.

"It's an option. We're trying to make it as easy as possible na walang ano. But kung ganito pa rin ang nangyari, anong gagawin natin? Upo iang tayo diyan" paliwanag ni Sec. Medialdea sa mga reporters matapos dumalo sa budget hearing ng Office of the President sa Kamara kahapon.

"That's ES (Executive Secretary) speaking. Same view," paliwanag naman ni Sec. Roque sa Malacañang reporters kahapon.

Ang Martial Law na umiiral sa Mindanao ay magwawakas sa Disyembre 31, 2018 matapos palawigin ito ng Kongreso ng ideklara ni Pangulong Rodrigo Duterte ang Martial Law noong May 23, 2017 kasunod ng Marawi crisis dahil sa paghahasik ng terorismo ng ISIS-Maue group. -Rudy Andal-

Acquisition of multi-role fighters for PAF may be pushed back

BY VICTOR REYES

DEFENSE Secretary Delfin Lorenzana yesterday said the planned acquisition of multi-role fighters (MRFs) for the Air Force under the military's modernization program within the next four years may be pushed back.

Lorenzana said that while the procurement of a fleet of MRFs are still currently under Horizon 2 of the modernization program, they are studying if this can wait to give way to more helicopters and vessels.

The Horizon 2 was approved by President Duterte last May with an initial funding of P289 billion. The project is being implemented by the DND and the AFP this year up to 2020.

A document earlier released by the defense department said the projects that will be pursued under Horizon 2 are multi-role fighters. A military source said they are eyeing to acquire 12 MRFs.

The acquisition of the MRFs is a step ahead of the acquisition of 12 FA-50 lead-in fighters under Horizon 1. The 12 FA-50s, acquired for P18.9 billion, marked the return of the Air Force to the supersonic age.

"(It's) still part of the later part of the second horizon. But we are closely looking if we can move it to the 3rd horizon in favor of more pressing capabilities," Lorenzana said.

The third horizon of the modernization program is expected to be implemented from 2013 to 2017.

"We just wanted additional medium or heavy lift helicopters," Lorenzana explained on why they are planning to push back the acquisition of the MRFs.

On Monday, Lorenzana said the country may not acquire the MRFs like the F-16s of the United States for now, saying the military is not going into a "dog fight" with China or other countries.

China has turned aggressive in its claims of the disputed areas in the South China Sea over the past years, having turned several reefs into islands that now host air and naval bases.

Sundalo arestado sa pamimilit magdroga

Kalaboso ang umano'y miyembro ng Philippine Army (PA) matapos na ireklamo ng isang babae na pinilit nitong gumamit ng ilegal na droga sa Sta. Cruz, Maynila, kamakalawa.

Kinilala ang suspek na si Private First Class (PFC) Renante Briones, 36, ng 678 M.L. Quezon Street, Barangay Casuntingan, Mandlaque City, Cebu.

Sa ulat mula sa tanggapan ni Police Supt Julius Caesar Domingo, commander ng Manila Police District (MPD)-Sta. Cruz Police Station 3 (PS-3), inaresto si Briones sa loob ng isang lodging inn na matatagpuan sa Rizal Avenue, malapit sa kanto ng Relegio St. sa Sta. Cruz, bandang 10:30 ng umaga.

Sa imbestigasyon ni PO1 Dan Lyndon Cacanindin, bago ang pag-aresto ay nakatanggap ng tawag ang mga tauhan ng Alvarez Police

Community Precinct (PCP) mula sa complainant, di pirangalaran, at isinumbong na pinupilit siya ng suspek na gumamit ng ilegal na droga sa loob ng nirentahan niyang silid.

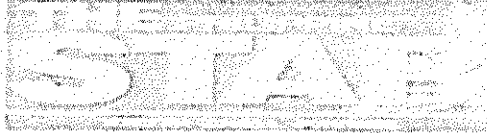
Inatasan ni Police Chief Insp. Roy Augustus Calulot sina PO1 Rhanni Nicdao at PO1 Dharvir dela Rama na rumesponde at nakipagkita sa complainant.

Nang buksan ng babae ang kuwarto ay naaktuhan ng mga pulis ang suspek na may hawak na isang pakete ng umano'y shabu at may drug paraphernalia sa tabi nito.

Matapos na kapkapan ay agad nang binifor ang suspek sa presinto.

Sasampahan si Briones ng kasong paglabag sa Section 11 at 12 ng RA 9165 (Comprehensive Dangerous Drugs Act of 2002).

Mary Ann Santiago



Rody honest on health issues — Sara

DAVAO CITY — President Duterte does not hide matters concerning his health, according to his daughter Mayor Sara Duterte-Carpio.

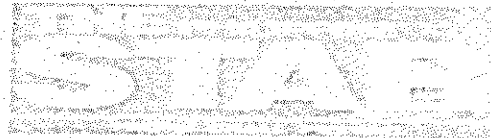
"The President is transparent with his health. You could see that he goes from one place to another in various parts of the country. He is very much around," Carpio said.

Several critics of the President, including Communist Party of the Philippines founder Jose Maria Sison, had earlier claimed that Duterte is dying.

Despite the rumors, Duterte is going on an official visit to Israel from Sept. 2 to 5.

Carpio is reportedly joining her father in the trip.

— Edith Regalado



Negros town cop chief replaced over NPA killings

BACOLOD CITY - The police chief of Isabela town in Negros Occidental has been relieved from his post amid recent killings perpetrated by suspected New People's Army (NPA) rebels.

Senior Inspector Randy Babor was replaced on Tuesday by Chief Inspector Lowell Garinganao, commander of a mobile force company of the Negros Occidental police.

Two barangay officials and a *habal-habal* driver were among those recently killed by NPA rebels in the town.

At least four barangay captains also received death threats from the rebels. [Signature] - Gilbert Bayoran

'I saw everything flying'

Survivor describes chaos after bomb explosion that killed 2 people in Isulan, Sultan Kudarat

By Edwin O. Fernandez
and Jeffrey Maicem
@inquirermindanao

ISULAN, SULTAN KUDARAT — "I saw everything flying," Francis Suerte, 26, said, describing the chaos at a used-clothing store at the time of the bomb blast that tore through a crowd at a night market in Kalawag 3 village here on Tuesday night, killing two people, including a young girl, and wounding 35 others.

"The explosion was very powerful, the ground was shaking, used clothing and everything flying, people were running in different directions," said Suerte, who sustained shrapnel injuries on both legs.

Seconds before he was hit, he said, a militiaman saw a man put a bag under a parked motorbike, only 3 meters from where he stood.

When the militiaman called the man's attention, the man ran away. Other militiamen gave chase, but the man jumped on a waiting motorbike driven by an accomplice and the two sped away.

Pandemonium

Just then, an explosion ripped through the place, felling everyone within 50 meters of the blast site, Isulan Mayor Marites Pallasigue said.

"Pandemonium broke loose and every one near the parked motorbike were yelling for help," said Suerte, a resident of Sen. Ninoy Aquino town in Sultan Kudarat who considered himself lucky because his injuries were not fatal.

"I dropped and crawled my way out of the pile of used clothing," Suerte said. "I saw a girl lying in a pool of blood right after the blast, I think she died," he said in Filipino.

Lenie Ombróg, 52, of Barangay Kalawag, was killed outright, while Davy Shane Alayon, 7, who lived in Bagumbayan town, Sultan Kudarat, died in the hospital on Wednesday morning, said Supt. Aldrin Gonzales, speaking for the regional police.

Among the injured were Sgt. Timjar Hambali and M/Sgt. Jo Capilitan, both of the Army's 33rd Infantry Battalion, and Protestant pastor

Raymund Malves, 60.

"Most of the victims are already out of the hospital," Palasigue said. "Only those with serious leg injuries remain at Sultan Kudarat Provincial Hospital," she added.

She said two of those people were in critical condition.

Malacañang condemned the attack and vowed to bring the perpetrators to justice.

"Authorities are now investigating the incident and we vow to bring the perpetrators of this brazen attack to justice. We will apply the full force of the law," presidential spokesperson Harry Roque said.

Martial law extension

Executive Secretary Salvador Medialdea said extending martial law in Mindanao was an option that the government was considering after the attack in Isulan.

Mindanao has been under martial law since May 2017, when local terrorists who had pledged allegiance to the Islamic State (IS) jihadi group in the Middle East seized Marawi City.

Extended by Congress after the seige to allow the military to deal with the remnants of the Maute and Abu Sayyaf groups that held the city for five months, the declaration would

lapse on Dec. 31.

Senate President Vicente Sotto III said on Wednesday that the attack might be an indication that martial law was not being enforced strictly enough in Mindanao.

Premature

Still, Sotto said it was premature to discuss whether an extension was necessary, despite the violence.

"For all we know, in a month or two, everything that happened there would be resolved already," he said.

Vice President Leni Robredo

opposed an extension, saying martial law had failed to stop terrorist attacks in Mindanao.

"What assurance do we have that an extension would prevent attacks?" Robredo said.

Communist Party of the Philippines founder Jose Maria Sison also opposed an extension, saying the Duterte administration was just looking for a reason to justify the continued enforcement of martial law in Mindanao and attacks on the party's armed wing, the New People's Army (NPA).

In an online interview from exile in Utrecht, the Netherlands,

Sison said NPA fighters would defend themselves against attacks by government forces.

The Philippine National Police went on full alert throughout Mindanao and heightened alert in Metropolitan Manila after the bombing.

The Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), the largest Muslim insurgency group in Mindanao that has signed a peace agreement with the government, condemned the attack in Isulan, which it said had the signature of IS.

"If they look at the kind of signature as well as the way the attack was carried out, it was pointing toward [IS]," MILF chief peace negotiator Mochaguer Iqbal said.

"We condemn it," Iqbal said. "It's the handiwork of bloody minded people and it served no purpose. Those who perpetrated the bombing were peace spoilers."

The blast happened as Isulan celebrated its 61st founding anniversary and a local festival called Hamungaya.

BIFF prime suspect

No one among the local armed groups claimed responsibility for the blast, but IS did, according to the Maryland-based SITE Intelligence Group, which tracks online activities of white supremacist and jihadi organizations.

SITE said the IS East Asia Province claimed bombing Filipino soldiers in Isulan.

Chief Insp. Ronnie Dardo, spokesperson for the provincial police, could not confirm that the attack was carried out by IS, but said police had intercepted information about a possible attack by the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF) in nearby Maguindanao province.

"We believe that the terrorist group BIFF is the primary suspect behind this atrocity," Col. Noel Detoyato, chief of the public affairs office of the Armed Forces of the Philippines, told a news briefing at Camp Aguinaldo in Quezon City.

"They are the ones who have the strongest evil desire to initiate this kind of attacks that victimize innocent civilians and disrupt peace," Detoyato said.

In Isulan, Dardo said two other homemade bombs were recovered and defused at the blast site.

Capt. Arvin Encinas, spokesperson for the 6th Infantry Division, also blamed the attack on the BIFF and said military operations against the group would continue.

Retaliatory attack

"These bomb attacks are part of the BIFF's retaliation against the military for the losses they suffered at the hands of our troops. It is unfortunate that their retaliation did not spare innocent civilians," Encinas said by phone.

He said that since the start of the year, at least 40 BIFF fighters had been killed in clashes with government troops in Maguindanao and North Cotabato provinces, a claim that could not be independently verified in the absence of actual body counts.

In June, Brig. Gen. Cirilito Sobejana, 6th Infantry Division commander, said troops dismantled a BIFF bomb-making facility in Maguindanao province.

Encinas said the BIFF had splintered into three factions each with about 60 fighters.

The faction led by Abu Turaiife has pledged allegiance to IS and is allegedly getting financial support from the jihadi group, he said.

P1-M reward

The two other factions are led by Commander Bongos and Ustadz Karialan, he said.

Abu Misry Mama, spokesperson for the IS-linked faction of the BIFF, said his group was not behind the Isulan bombing.

"We have nothing to do with it. We don't attack civilians," Mama said by phone.

Encinas said Tuesday's attack in Isulan was believed to have been carried out by two fighters from the Bongos faction.

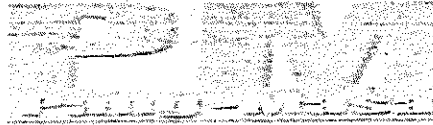
Sultan Kudarat Gov. Pax Mangudadatu offered a P1-million reward for information that would lead to the capture of the perpetrators. —WITH REPORTS FROM CHRISTINE O. AVENDAÑO, JEANNETTE I. ANDRADE, DJ YAP, PATRICKIA ANN V. ROKAS, DELFIN T. MALLARI, JUDY QUIROS AND BONG SARMIENTO INQ

2 lider ng NPA (1) sumuko sa militar

Bountaryong sumuko sa tropa ng militar ang dalawang lider ng mga rebeldeng New People's Army (NPA) sa operasyon sa Brgy. San Rafael, Sitio Maharlika, Bislig City, Surigao del Sur, ayon sa isang opisyal kahapon.

Sa report ng Army's 4th Infantry Division (ID), kinilala ang mga nagsisuko na sina Walden Ayala, alyas Ka Joseph; 21-anyos, Vice Squad Leader ng Squad 2, Platoon 2, Guerilla Front Committee (GFC) 14, Northern Eastern Mindanao Regional Committee (NEMRC) at Ramil Lasimo alyas Ram, 39-anyos, dating commanding officer ng Militia ng Bayan sa Tagbina, Agusan del Sur at isa rin sa mga opisyal ng NPA rebels sa lugar.

Nakumpiska kay Ayala ang isang 5.56mm, M16-A1 rifle, isang steel short magazine na may lamang 10 rounds na bala habang kay Lasimo ay dalawang AK-47 rifle, dalawang steel magazine na may 25 rounds ng bala, isang M16 Colt rifle na may dalawang steel magazine at 40 rounds ng bala at mga subersibong dokumento. (Joy Cantos)



2 NPA lder, sumuko

Sumuko sa tropa ng militar ang dalawang lider ng mga rebeldeng New People's Army (NPA) sa operasyon sa Brig. San Rafael, Sitio Mahabika, Bishlig City, Surigao del Sur.

Kinilala ang mga sumuko na sina Walden Ayala, aiyas Ka Joseph, 21, Vice Squad Leader ng Squad 2, Platoon 2, Guerrilla Front Committee (GFC) 14, Northern Eastern Mindanao Regional Committee

(NEMRC) at Ramil Lasimol ayas Ram, 39, dating Commanding Officer ng Militia ng Bayan sa Tagbina, Agusan del Sur at isa rin sa mga opisyal ng NPA rebels sa lugar.

Nakumpiska mula kay Ayala ang isang 5.56 MM M16A1 rifle, isang steel short magazine na may lamang 10 rounds ammunition.

Habang kay Lasimol ay dalawang AK 47 rifle, dalawang steel magazine

na may 25 rounds ng bala, isang M16 Colt rifle na may dalawang steel magazine at 40 rounds ng bala at mga subersibong dokumento.

Kapwa sumuko sa tropa ng militar kanakailan matapos na mapagtantong mali ang ideolohiya na kaniilang ipinaglalaban at nais na rin nilang magbagumbuhay matapos ang matinding hirap at gutom na dinaranas sa pamumuhay sa kagubatan.

-Joy Santos-

Marawi officials quizzed on low spending, unrecorded cash donations

BY PETER TABINGO

THE Commission on Audit (COA) yesterday bared that less than 30 percent of the P39.7 million cash donations for humanitarian relief operations for displaced residents of Marawi City were spent by the local government as of December 31, 2017.

In a report released last August

10, government auditors said the slow disbursement defeated the purpose of the donations, which was to make easier the plight of the evacuees.

Records showed only P10.26 million or 26 percent of the total amount received was spent, leaving a balance of P29.434 million at yearend.

The sum came from accumulated

cash assistance given by individual donors, private organizations, and various government agencies.

"Considering the purpose of the cash donation which is intended for aid, relief and response services to Marawi evacuees, the low rate of utilization of the donations defeated its purpose," the COA said.

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MARAWI

Aside from slow spending of cash donations, auditors likewise found that cash donations from different sources totaling P11.9 million was not recorded in the city's book of accounts at yearend contrary to the requirement of COA Circular No. 2014-002.

A breakdown of the unrecorded sum showed the money came from the Land Bank of the Philippines (P10.2 million), Sen. Aquilino Pimentel (P1 million), Cadiz City local government unit (P500,000), and the League of City Mayors (P200,000).

The COA said the donations were issued official receipts al-

though these did not appear in the books.

"In the review of the official receipts issued for the receipt of cash donations from various local sources, we have noted that certain ORs involving a total amount of P11,900,000 were not recorded in the books as of December 31, 2017," the audit team said.

As a result, auditors said the city's Cash Accounts and Trust Liabilities-DRRMF (Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Fund) account were understated.

"The City Treasurer admitted the deficiency and explained that the Report of Collections and Deposit for the subject

cash donations was prepared but failed to submit (sic) to the City Accountant," the audit team said.

The City Treasurer said the donations were received in checks and remain intact, and have been deposited in Marawi City's official account in January 2018.

The Marawi siege started on May 23, 2017 and lasted for five months until government troops cleared the city of the last remnants of terrorist fighters from the Maute and Abu Sayyaf groups on October 23, 2017.

Responding to the audit observations, the city government of Marawi explained the P10.26 million was spent as intended on

providing relief goods for the urgent needs of city residents in evacuation centers.

"The remaining amounts were programmed for rehabilitation and recovery programs and other forms of assistance to address the needs of those affected," city officials added.

Likewise, the city government assured the COA it will strictly follow the specific intents of the donors and will provide proper liquidation.

The COA recommended that the city government draw up a Program of Work to ensure that the donated funds will be used efficiently for the benefit of families displaced by the hostilities.

SULTAN KUDARAT BOMBERS HUNTED;

BLAST KILLS 2, INJURES 35

By Nash B. Maulana
and Francisco Tuyay

AUTHORITIES have launched a manhunt for two men believed to have planted the explosives that killed two people, including a seven-year-old girl, at a festival in the town of Isulan in Sultan, Kudarat Tuesday night.

The blast, which also wounded 35 others, was the second deadly bombing in less than a month in the region where Islamist militants have waged a decades-long insurgency.

A man left the improvised bomb in a bag near a grocery store as crowds gathered to celebrate the town's founding anniversary but he and an accomplice escaped, the military said.

"One [man] did the emplacement while the other one [drove] the getaway motorcycle," Brig. Gen. Cirilito Sobejana said, adding that a manhunt was underway.

The attack, claimed by the Islamic State group, is the latest violence in the south, where a long-running Islamist insurgency has left more than 100,000 people dead by government count.

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Sultan...

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Sobejana said it was "highly likely" that the pro-IS Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters plotted the bombing.

A military spokesman said the blast could have been in retaliation for offensives against the BIFF, adding the group had planned bomb attacks in parts of the southern region of Mindanao.

"They want to create and sow terror in the area," regional military spokesman Capt. Arvin Encinas said, adding that two soldiers were among the wounded.

The attack comes less than a month after a van bomb ripped through a military checkpoint on the neighboring island of Basilan on July 31, killing 10 people.

IS claimed responsibility for that bombing as well and authorities believe the man behind the wheel of the explosives-laden van may have intended to target a nearby children's parade.

President Rodrigo Duterte put Mindanao under martial rule until the end of this year after pro-IS militants seized the southern city of Marawi last year.

On Wednesday, Duterte's aides condemned the bombing saying it could prompt the President to extend martial law in the area.

The recent blasts follow the Duterte administration enacting a law to create greater autonomy for the Muslim mi-



Military and police bomb experts look for fragments of a homemade bomb that exploded during a street festival Tuesday night, August 28, 2018 in Isulan town of Sultan Kudarat in Mindanao. Suspected pro-Islamic State militants owned up to the bombing that left two dead and 35 others wounded, nearly a month after the militants also set off a car bomb that left 11 people dead in Basilan. **Mark Navales**

nority in the south and which is hoped will help end the conflict.

The mother of the girl who died in Tuesday's bombing pleaded with authorities for justice.

"I hope they help us and catch the perpetrators," Nezel Alayon said in between tears.

Capt. Arvin Encinas, spokesman of the

Army's 6th Infantry Division, identified the fatalities as Devey Shane Alayon, 7 and Leni Ombrog, 52, both residents of Isulan.

The bombs went off near a row of stalls selling second-hand items hours after the departure of Public Works and Highways Secretary Mark Villar, who was the guest speaker of the annual event. **With Mark Navales, AFP and PNA**

AFP tags BIFF in deadly S. Kudarat bombing

By FRANCIS WAKEFIELD

The Army's 6th Infantry Division Wednesday said that members of the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF) were behind the deadly blast in Isulan, Sultan Kudarat, that left two people, including a seven-year-old girl, dead and 34 others wounded.

In an interview, Capt. Arvin Encinas, spokesman of the Army's 6th Infantry Division, said that based on their initial investigation the BIFF perpetrated the bombing as part of their retaliatory attacks in response to the all-out offensive launched by the military against them.

Encinas said the BIFF took advantage of the ongoing festival taking place in Isulan town which is currently celebrating the 7th Hamungaya Festival as part of the 61st founding anniversary of the town.

"During that time at around 8:30 in the evening while our troops were conducting mobile patrol they accosted two suspicious individuals who left a bag in front of an establishment (H and J Marketing). After being accosted, they hurriedly left with the bomb suddenly exploding, wounding and killing people," he added.

Encinas said fortunately, a KM450 military truck was

nearby and managed to block the shrapnels from the IED that exploded.

"Kung wala 'yung military truck baka mas mahigit pa sa 36 o dalawang patay 'yung naging biktima," Encinas said.

He said two soldiers and a Civilian Armed Auxilliary (CAA) member were among those wounded in the explosion.

"Sa national highway kasi ito. Tamang-tama na pagkadaan ng military truck natin sake sumabog kaya most probably command detonated itong IED na ito dahil tinaon nila na dadaan na iyung military truck natin," he said.

"Like I said, their primary target is our security forces in the area conducting security measures," he said.

Encinas said the IED used in the blast could have been made from an 81mm mortar.

Meantime, A local terror group has claimed responsibility on the bomb attack which Director General Oscar Albayalde, chief of the Philippine National Police (PNP) declined to disclose to name.

"We believe it was a terror attack although it is still being investigated. With that magnitude, it is certainly not accidental," said Albayalde.

"A group has already claimed responsibility and this is not a new

group. This is one of the groups that we have been monitoring especially in the part of Mindanao," he added.

Albayalde said that prior to the bombing, the intelligence community has been receiving reports of possible bomb attack but the details were not specific.

Nevertheless, he said security officials have implemented necessary security measures in order to foil any planned attack by local terror groups.

In fact, he said the festival site where the bomb attack occurred was full of security forces as part of the target-hardening measures on possible bombing targets.

"Kahit siguro ano pang pag-implement ng target-hardening measures nila, nalusutan pa rin dahil pag mga ganyan kapag talagang desidido ang isang criminal groups, talagang gagawa sila ng paraan," said Albayalde.

Initial reports revealed that the bomb was stuffed inside a backpack believed to have been carried by someone who even offered a group of militiamen with fruits.

Civilians then sought the assistance of the present security forces about the bag which was found abandoned later. It was that time that the bomb exploded. (With a report from Aaron Recuenco)

'Salitan ng puwersa' vs ASG, BIFF ipatutupad

Magpapatupad na ng "shifting of forces" ang Western Mindanao Command (WestMinCom) laban sa Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) at Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighter (BIFF).

Ito ang kinumpirma kahapon ni WestMinCom spokesman Lt. Col. Gerry Besana, bilang tugon sa kautusan ni Pangulong Rodrigo Duterte na pulbusin ang dalawang bandidong grupo sa Mindanao.

Aniya, normal routine na lamang sa militar ang impiyentasyon ng "shifting of forces", jalo na kung may tuntutukan itong panibagong operasyon.

Dalawang Philippine Army Brigade, aniya, ang nakadestino sa Sulu kung saan tinututukan ang pagtugis sa mahigit 100 puwersa ng ASG, na pinamumunuan ni Hatib Sawadjaan.

Ayon pa kay Basena, tutulong din ang Marine Forces sa nasabing dalawang military unit.

Dagdag pa niya, sapat ang isang Army Brigade na kasalukuyang nakapuwesto sa Basilan.

Fer Taboy

Albaya admits intel failure in Isulan blast

PHILIPPINE National Police (PNP) chief Director General Oscar Albayalde has admitted that a bombing in Isulan City, Sultan Kudarat on Tuesday resulted from failed intelligence.

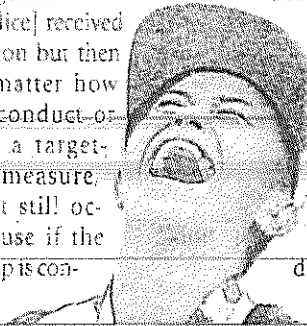
"They [police] received an information but then again, no matter how much you conduct or implement a target-hardening measure, the incident still occurred because if the criminal group is convinced [that

it should] do the operation, they will find ways," Albayalde said in Filipino on Wednesday morning.

He clarified that only general, not specific, information had been received by police intelligence agents.

"Based on experience, you cannot really distinguish the specific. It's always in general terms that there is a group planning a bombing incident; but you don't know

>BlessA8



■ BLAST FROM A1

Albayaalde

where so when you get an [intelligence information], you have to validate it," Albayaalde said.

He vowed to strengthen their intelligence gathering and target-hardening measures especially in parts of Mindanao.

Albayaalde ordered all regional directors in Mindanao to declare full alert status in their areas after the bombing that killed two persons and injured 37 others.

This means that all policemen will have their days off and vacation leaves canceled.

Under the order, police presence, checkpoints and Operation "Sita" will be strengthened.

"This is our response especially that martial law [in southern Mindanao] has not been lifted," Albayaalde said.

He said one group that they have been monitoring in Mindanao has claimed responsibility for the attack, but they are yet to validate it.

The Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP), however, tagged the terrorist Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF) as perpetrators of the Isulan attack.

An improvised explosive device was used in the bombing around 9 p.m. near the Land Bank building.

Isulan City was celebrating the Hamungaya Festival at the time of the incident.

Col. Noel Detoyato, AFP public affairs chief, on Tuesday said the military was coordinating with the provincial police of Sultan Kudarat who are leading investigation of the bombing.

"We believe that the terrorist group BIFF is the primary suspect behind this atrocity," Detoyato told reporters in a news conference at Camp Aguinaldo in Quezon City.

The BIFF has denied involvement in the incident.

Brig. Gen. Cirilito Sobejana, commander of the Philippine Army's 6th Infantry Division,

said they were eyeing the Abu Sayyaf Group and the Dawlah Islamiyah terrorist groups in the attack.

Also on Wednesday, Executive Secretary Salvador Medialdea said the Isulan bombing made the extension of martial law in Mindanao an option.

"[The extension] is an option, but that is there. We are trying to make it as easy as possible without... But if there are cases like this, what will we do? Will we just sit?" Medialdea said in a media interview at the House of Representatives.

"This sign is not good. [There are] lives in danger. There is a feast but there was an explosion. How would you feel?" he added.

Medialdea said recommending another extension of military rule in the region is not necessarily the next move.

In September 2016, President Rodrigo Duterte issued Proclamation 55, which placed Mindanao under a state of national emergency after a bombing in Davao City.

Duterte signed Proclamation 216 on May 23, 2017, which declared martial law and the suspension of the writ of habeas corpus in Mindanao for 60 days in order to stabilize the situation in Marawi City after the terrorist Maute Group tried to take over the city.

The declaration was extended until the end of 2017, then eventually until the end of 2018.

In the past, Duterte said he will not declare a nationwide martial law because it would "divide the nation."

Palace spokesman Harry Roque Jr., also on Wednesday denounced the Isulan incident.

In a radio interview aired over dzRH, Roque said the government would leave no stone unturned to find out the assailants behind the attack.

"We will punish them, we will let them feel the strength of our laws and we will send a message that they cannot do that without being punished," he added.

ROY NARRA, AL JACINTO, DEMPSEY REYES AND RALPH U. VILLANUEVA

41 days



**DUTY
CALLS
FLORENCIO
FIANZA**

SHE may be Supreme Court Chief Justice for only 41 days but newly appointed Chief Justice Teresita de Castro looked radiant and happy—like she were on cloud nine—nonetheless.

We cannot really fault her for acting that way. After all, she has just been given the biggest prize of all.

What could one do in 41 days? Well, she has already been quoted in the papers as saying that she would institute judicial reforms. She was also advised to stay out of politics.

Why don't we just let her enjoy whatever is left of her government service before reaching the mandatory retirement age of 70 years old? With the time that she has left, she will hardly be able to do very much. When she finally retires, there will be plenty of time to evaluate her legacy to the Supreme Court. This is because for better or for worse, she will be remembered as the Supreme Court Justice who became a witness against her former colleague Lourdes Sereno, became her fiercest critique and then sat in judgment and voted to oust her from office in a quo warranto case. People might say that for the sake of delicadeza, Chief Justice De Castro should have inhibited herself in the case. But times have changed.

People might also question why the President appointed someone who will only serve for 41 days. As the President himself said, he was only following seniority. He does not know De Castro nor did he talk to her before the appointment. But any statement from the President would not have satisfied everyone and not stopped the many conspiracy theories as to the real reason for the appointment. We have to accept the statement of the President at face value because whether we like it or not, he has the authority to appoint

anyone he likes so long as that person possesses the minimum qualification. We of course do not know whether history will be kind to the Chief Justice, but that will be for historians to decide. In the meantime, she should just try to enjoy what is left of her term instead of trying to do so much in just 41 days.

It is time that President Duterte and the top man of the National Democratic Front, Jose Maria Sison, stopped their ongoing verbal war on who is healthier between the two of them.

This is not only because their verbal tussle will not solve anything. The people might wonder about what is going on in the minds of the two gentlemen. People might also think that the long-

ers of the NDF, has called the President brethren—and for good reason. As mayor of the City of Davao for 20 years, he was able to strike a deal with the New People's Army to keep Davao free of fighting by clever diplomacy. He told the NPA that they would be safe in Davao City so long as there is no fighting. If there is a President who can strike a peace deal with the NPA, it should be President Duterte. At no time in the past were members of the left given so many senior-level positions in the government than this president. But even with the resignations of many of the leading left leaning senior officials, Leoncio Evasco Jr. is still at the center of power in Malacañang Palace.

We must bear in mind, however, that although the President has sympathized with the NDF on occasion, he is a man with a contradictory personality. He is very capable of changing positions without any problems. Some would even say that he is more to the right than anything else. We will simply have to see which side of his personality will take over with regard to his on-and-off desire to strike a peace deal with the NDF. For communist leader Jose Maria Sison, who is now approaching 80 years, he will really have to think hard whether he will swallow a bit of his pride in order to resume peace negotiations or tough it out and wait for the next administration.

But that is another three years and further away from realizing his revolutionary dreams. No revolutionary leader would want to leave this world without realizing all or part of his revolutionary objectives.

The most cruel thing that can happen to Joma Sison is to depart this world empty-handed, having accomplished nothing for his lifelong struggles. He must reassess his position carefully so that a peace deal with the government can be reached. The two gentlemen must keep their sights on the ultimate prize, which is peace. *RS*

“Supreme Court Chief Justice looked radiant and happy.”

distance rhetorical war is juvenile, not befitting the office of the President of the land and also a veteran communist ideologue and revolutionary. But perhaps it is better to have verbal fireworks than a shooting war. What these two gentlemen should do is to find a way around their differences to finally sit down and talk peace for the sake of the country.

We now hold the distinction of having the longest insurgency in the world. What is clear is that the lives of both men are nearer the end than the beginning—healthy or not. There is therefore a great incentive for both to be able to strike a peace deal. For President Duterte, he would become the President who was able to bring an end to the 50-year communist insurgency. Luis Jalandoni, one of the senior lead-

ONLINE NEWS 30 AUGUST 2018

PH Army steps up online drive to seek recruits

By: Frances G. Mangosing - @inquirerdotnet

INQUIRER.net / 01:06 PM August 29, 2018



SCREENGRAB from www.jointhearmy.ph

The Philippine Army has stepped up its recruitment drive by going digital, a first of its kind in the Armed Forces of the Philippines.

The website www.jointhearmy.ph was launched as part of the Army's goal for an effective recruitment strategy beyond the traditional methods, said Col. Eligien Villafior, director of the Army Personnel Management Center (APMC), who initiated the idea of transforming the headhunting campaign into digital.

"Online is the new trend now. Even some visa applications are digital," Villafior told INQUIRER.net.

Apart from the website, this new form of recruitment aims to amplify its campaign materials through social media like Instagram and Facebook.

"It's a two-pronged approach: First is to convince the people through social media. Once convinced, they should go to the website and we have to make sure it's convenient for them," said Lt. Bala Tamayo, one of the officers tapped by Villafior to conceptualize the website.

'One Army'

The web page also features the Army's new slogan "One Army," which calls for "inclusivity" in a bid to appeal to potential soldiers from various backgrounds.

"The key message is 'One Nation. One People. One Army'... It doesn't matter where you are, what dialect you speak, or what name you call God. You're a part of 'One Army.' There's no New People's Army," Tamayo explained.

The Philippine Army is currently the biggest branch of service in the military with about 94,000 troops. Because the APMC also hopes to reach out to professionals, the applicants could choose from different fields like engineers, medical, and intelligence.

Hopeful applicants will now save time going to recruitment centers by registering online and sending the relevant documents. Once these forms are verified and counter-checked, the aspirants will be notified and will be asked to choose an examination date based on the available schedules.

The website also features a chatbox where applicants could ask their questions and receive feedback from the online admin.

While the registration process may have gone online, the written examinations, interviews and other procedures will still be done manually.

"This is one of the innovations of the Philippine Army, a fast and convenient way of recruitment. This has not been done in so many years. With the initiative of director Col. Villaflor and Brig. Gen. Peter Suchianco (RES), na-realize na ang matagal ng na-envision," said Army chief Lt. Gen. Rolando Joselito Bautista during the launching of the website on Tuesday at Fort Bonifacio, Taguig City.

"We want to get the best and we can reach out more to them with this recruitment," he added. /jpv

www.mewsinfo.inquirer.net

BIFF behind Isulan blast: AFP

By Priam Nepomuceno August 29, 2018, 3:11 pm

MANILA -- The Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) has tagged the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF) in the improvised explosive device (IED) attack that killed two persons and wounded 37 others in Isulan, Sultan Kudarat Tuesday night.

"We believe that the terrorist group BIFF is the primary suspect behind this atrocity. They are the only ones who have the strongest evil desire to initiate this kind of attack that victimizes innocent civilians and disrupt peace," AFP public affairs office chief Col. Noel Detoyato said in a press briefing Wednesday.

He is basing this on the pattern and prior intelligence reports that claimed the terrorists will conduct bombing attacks in the general area of Isulan.

"That they are going to conduct bombings in the general area. Actually general area *lang ang mga* intelligence reports *natin*. So that is why we are on the alert. *Kaya nga may natamaan siya na isang* (That is why it hit a) KM-450 truck *na nasa* (which is in the) vicinity doing mobile patrol *pero hindi na-wounded yung mga sundalong sakay dahil merong* blast protection *yung KM-450* (but the soldiers aboard the KM-450 were not wounded because it has blast protection)," Detoyato emphasized.

The AFP official added that Tuesday's blast is the third for Isulan, adding that the security forces have previously intercepted two attempts, due to timely warning by informants and civilians.

When asked why Isulan is constantly targeted by the terrorists, Detoyato said it is because of the economic improvements in the area.

"Historical *kasi yan* (That is historical). Isulan, historically, *palagi nilang tina-target* (has become their target) because of the economic improvement. (Also, it is) mostly populated by non-Muslim believers. So *nilalagyan nila ng anggulo ng* (They are inserting an angle) of religion that is why Isulan (*ang*) *tina-target nila* (they target Isulan)," he added.

The AFP public affairs office chief declined to give the names of the possible masterminds as operations are still ongoing.

"Right now, we have no particular names *na ire-release* (to release). *di ba meron tayong ongoing* (operations) *laban sa kanila?* (Don't we have ongoing operations against them?)," he added.

Also, the IED composition is still undergoing investigation to determine its exact component, Detoyato stressed.

The AFP official also scored the BIFF for targeting civilians in the Isulan attack.

"*Kung may tunay silang pinaglalaman* (If they are really fighting for something valuable), why victimize civilians? If they are true warriors, come out and face the Armed Forces," Detoyato said.

He added that they are now coordinating with the Philippine National Police in Sultan Kudarat regarding the investigation.

"The AFP will continue to support the local government of Isulan in its security operations in the area to ensure the safety and security of our citizens and maintain peace especially during public activities and celebrations," Detoyato said.

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

In the wake of the IED attack, the AFP official urged all peace-loving citizens in Sultan Kudarat to be vigilant and report to authorities any suspicious individuals or packages to prevent a similar incident from happening.

"Your utmost cooperation is an added strength to our police and soldiers designated to facilitate the security of Isulan and the province of Sultan Kudarat," Detoyato added. **(PNA)**

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