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Friday



*Honor. Patriotism. Duty*

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# INFLATION HITS 5.2%, ABOVE GOV'T TARGET

STORY BY BEN O. DE VERA

The rate of increase in the prices of basic goods and services surged to a five-year high in June, raising prospects the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas will raise interest rates for the third time this year.

A2

## FROM A1

By Ben O. de Vera  
@bendeveraINQ

Inflation picked up faster than expected to 5.2 percent year-on-year in June, the highest in more than five years, due to costlier food and "sin" products, the government reported on Thursday.

The Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas (BSP) vowed to get the inflation rate back to its 2-4 percent target range amid increasing pressure for more interest rate hikes than the two made this year. (See story in Business, Page B1)

The Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) reported that June's faster inflation was "primarily brought about by higher annual rate posted in the heavily weighted food and nonalcoholic beverages index at 6.1 percent."

June's consumer price index was above the 4.8 percent forecast in a Reuters poll of economists, bringing the average inflation rate to 4.3 percent in the first half of the year.

### 'Manageable'

Socioeconomic Planning Secretary Ernesto Pernia told a news conference that the June inflation rate was "rather unexpected."

"Most observers and analysts did not expect inflation to spike in this manner," said Pernia, who is also head of the state planning agency National Economic and Development Authority (Neda).

He said, however, that he believed the six-month average

inflation rate of 4.3 percent remained "manageable."

Malacañang said the faster inflation rate was "not something to worry about."

Presidential spokesperson Harry Roque said the rise in inflation was due to "money going around," such as the spending on the administration's infrastructure program.

He also cited the greater spending power of the people as a result of tax reforms, and free tuition in state colleges and universities.

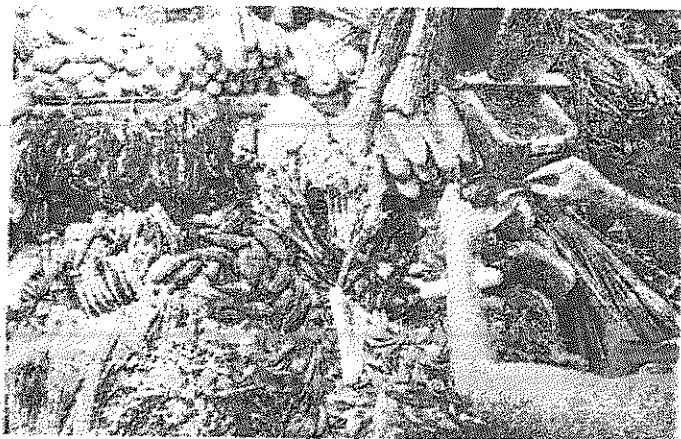
PSA data showed that prices of alcoholic beverages and tobacco climbed 20.8 percent in June; housing, water, electricity, gas and other fuels, 4.6 percent; furnishing, household equipment and routine maintenance of the house, up 3 percent; transport, up 7.1 percent; communication, up 0.4 percent; and education, up 4 percent.

### Third rate hike

Last month's inflation print marked the fourth month that the pace of price increase was faster than the BSP's 2-4 percent comfort range for this year and next, leaving the door open for a third interest rate hike this year.

Rising inflation, blamed on the enforcement of the Tax Reform for Acceleration and Inclusion (TRAIN) Act starting January, a weak peso and firmer global oil prices, has prompted the central bank to raise interest rates in May and June.

The TRAIN law raised the ceiling on tax-exempt income, but imposed excise on oil products despite the value-added



**HIGHER PRICES** The government's latest bulletin announcing a 5.2-percent inflation rate in June will likely trigger a fresh round of increases in vegetable prices at Q Mart in Quezon City. Consumer price index last month was above the 4.8-percent forecast in a Reuters poll of economists. —JAM STA. ROSA

tax on fuel and slapped higher taxes on tobacco, alcohol and other so-called sin products.

Under the TRAIN law, the excise on cigarettes rose to P32.50 per pack effective Jan. 1 from P30 a pack last year.

Also, excise slapped on alcoholic drinks go up every year under the Sin Tax Reform Law of 2012.

#### Food prices

Starting July, the excise on cigarettes will further rise to P35 per pack, as required by the TRAIN law.

Improved tax compliance by Mighty products, now owned by Japan Tobacco International, had also been blamed by the Department of Finance (DOF) for pushing cigarette prices higher, as correct tax payments elevated the brand's retail prices.

The food-alone index rose 5.8 percent in June, due to price increases in rice (up 4.7 percent); corn (up 14.1 percent); other cereals, flour, cereal preparation, bread, pasta and other bakery products (up 2.4 percent); meat (up 5 percent); vegetables (up 8.6 percent); sugar, jam, honey, chocolate and confectionery (up 3.9 percent); and other food products (up 3.1 percent).

At the end of the first half of the year, headline inflation averaged 4.3 percent, beyond the government's 2-4 percent target range.

Headline inflation in the National Capital Region picked up faster by 5.8 percent in June from 4.9 percent in May, while the rate outside Metro Manila climbed to 5.1 percent from 4.6 percent in the previous month.

Pernia said inflation could

peak in the third quarter and taper off in October.

But he told reporters later that the government was still "hoping that the peaking happened already, then maybe plateau in the next quarter" as more rice imports arrive to bring down domestic prices, while global oil prices begin to soften as an increase in production in Russia and Saudi Arabia make up for the sanctions imposed on major producers Venezuela and Iran.

#### Rice imports

Neda Undersecretary Rosemarie Edillon said that "if oil prices were taken out as a driver of inflation, we see moderation of inflation."

As for rice prices, Edillon said the first shipments of the National Food Authority's rice imports had arrived "so it will ease another driver of inflation."

On Monday, economic managers conceded that inflation would likely breach the target for 2018, as they adopted the BSP's forecast of 4-4.5 percent for the entire year.

While keeping the 2-4 percent inflation target for the period 2018-2020, the Cabinet-level Development Budget Coordination Committee jacked up its projected rate of increase in prices of basic goods for this year from the earlier forecast of 2-4 percent during its previous meeting in April.

For the period 2019-2022, the yearly inflation forecasts were kept at 2-4 percent. —WITH REPORTS FROM CHRISTINE O. AVENDAÑO AND REUTERS INQ

# Rody can run again under Charter draft

*Up to 8 years more possible*

By JANVIC MATEO

President Duterte may serve as the country's Chief Executive until 2030 should he decide to run for re-election under the proposed charter for the federal government envisioned by his administration, according to a member of the consultative committee (Concom) that drafted the proposed federal charter.

Julio Teehankeo, chairman of the Concom's sub-committee on political reforms, said there is no ban prohibiting Duterte from seeking the presidency under the proposed federal constitution.

"It's like a reboot. It's a reset," Teehankeo told "The Chiefs" aired on Signal TV's *One News* last Wednesday.

"Their term will end in 2022. There's no ban. They can run under a new constitution," Teehankeo added, referring to Duterte and Vice President Leni Robredo.

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## Rody From Page 1

In the proposed federal charter, all elected officials will have a term of four years, with one possible re-election.

The president and vice president will be elected in tandem, preventing instances when the top two highest officials come from different parties.

Should the new constitution take effect in 2022 at the end of his present term, Duterte will be allowed to run for a fresh four-year term and then another re-election for a term that will end in 2030.

Teehankee clarified, though, that there will be no term extension for any official during the transition to the proposed federal government.

Duterte, 73, has previously dismissed reports of his plan to stay in power, at one point promising to step down should a new constitution take effect.

Critics have warned that the proposed shift to a federal form of government would allow Duterte to extend his presidency.

### Political reforms

Their proposed federal charter will introduce new reforms to the political system in the country, according to Teehankee.

Two senators will come from each of the proposed federated regions, which will be governed by local officials under a parliamentary system.

Regional governors and vice governors will not be directly elected, but instead be chosen by members of the regional assemblies composed

of representatives elected by the people.

Teehankee said the composition of the Federal House of Representatives will be increased to 400, with 160 seats allocated to a proportional representation system that will replace the party-list system.

For the first three electoral cycles, he said half of the 160 seats would be reserved for five identified marginalized sectors: peasants, workers, urban poor, indigenous cultural communities and fisherfolk.

"These sectors can either form their own sectoral party or coalitions among these five sectors, but they have the entire 80 seats to themselves (for the first 12 years). The rest will be open to other sectors," Teehankee said.

"The objective really of proportional representation is to encourage party-building," he added.

### Political dynasty, party switching

Teehankee said their proposed charter also includes a self-executing provision banning political dynasties up to the second degree of consanguinity and affinity.

Elected politicians will also have to give up their seats should they decide to change political parties.

Guest candidacies, or the practice of politicians running in different slates as guest candidates, will also be prohibited.

The Concom also intro-

duced a democracy fund system that will allow the public to provide tax-deductible contributions to political parties they support.

"We have introduced a reform package in order to address party politics in this country," Teehankee said.

"We have prepared a set of political reforms which is a non-negotiable prerequisite before we embark on this great journey toward federalism," he added.

### Draft not yet available

Teehankee said no draft copy of the proposed federal charter has been released to the public yet, as he noted that they would have to submit it first to the President this Monday.

"There are no nefarious or any conspiratorial reasons why we are hiding it," he said.

"In fact, we would want to circulate and disseminate the draft to everyone and we would like everyone to read it and really find out what it's all about," he added.

The Concom member said the proposal to shift to federalism would address some problems currently faced by the country, including inequality in the development of regions.

"Federalism is based on the principle of self-rule and shared rule. It's shared rule, not shared sovereignty. Some individuals, some sectors have the notion that it's going to break the country into mini-republics. No, that's not (what) we're looking at," Teehankee said.

"We are going to give everyone, the regions, an equal opportunity, the wherewithal to actually craft their own development," he added.

### 'Trojan horse'

Meanwhile, Christian Monsod, one of the framers of the

1987 Constitution, yesterday questioned the Duterte administration's push for a change into a federal form of government, saying this might just be a "Trojan horse" for the President's possible intention to perpetuate his term beyond 2022.

Speaking at a democracy forum organized by the Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism (PCIJ) in Pasig City, Monsod said the draft constitution for a federal form of government, which the 22-member Concom approved on Tuesday, provides no clause prohibiting Duterte from seeking a second term.

"But if (Duterte) wants to stay in power beyond 2022, the only legal way to do it is by Charter change, with a new constitution that allows him to run again... In other words, the question is: is federalism a trojan horse to stay in power?" Monsod said.

Monsod was able to obtain a copy of the Concom's draft constitution from "reliable sources" and a review of it showed there is no provision prohibiting the current president and vice president of the country from running for a second term in May 2022.

Monsod said that under Section 5 of the draft constitution, the first national, regional and local elections for the federal form of government shall be held on the second Monday of May 2022, and the elected officials which shall include the president, vice president, regional senators, district representative, proportional party representative and regional and local officials shall assume office at noon on June 30, 2022.

Monsod pointed out that while Section 6 of the draft constitution states that the term of the current president and vice president "shall not be

extended" after June 30, 2022," there is no explicit prohibition on (Duterte's) running on the second Monday of May 2022 under the new constitution."

### **CHR 'not enthusiastic'**

In a related development, another Concom member was bothered by the negative response of the Commission on Human Rights (CHR) when it allegedly declined to have prosecutorial powers.

Fr. Ranzilio Aquino told The STAR that the CHR's alleged refusal to accept prosecutorial powers bothers him, as he wanted it to become a stronger commission when he proposed to give it prosecutorial powers.

In the current set up, Aquino explained that the CHR only submits findings of its investigation to the Department of Justice (DOJ), which is not bound by the mandate of the human rights commission.

Aquino said the DOJ then conducts its own preliminary investigation and afterwards decides whether or not to file charges against the parties involved — one thing that he wanted to avoid in the federal form of government.

"I wanted the CHR to conduct its own investigation and the power of the CHR to tackle the information in court, and so I am bothered. Why does it seem that the CHR is not enthusiastic about my proposal?" he said.

Aquino's statement stemmed from the CHR's response during a meeting with Concom members sometime in April when the human rights commission allegedly said that prosecutorial powers would only complicate things.

"The question is who will watch the watchdog?" CHR chairman Luis Gascon said during the meeting with the Concom.

But as far as Aquino is concerned, the CHR's response and alleged refusal to assume prosecutorial powers is not fair, as it should be included in the federated charter.

### **More questions than answers**

The proposed new charter presented to soldiers yesterday at Camp Aguinaldo brought more questions than answers to members of the uniformed services.

The proposed charter was presented at the Armed Forces of the Philippines Offices Club to the soldiers by panel members led by retired Army general, lawyer Ferdinand Bocobo and retired Navy commodore Rex Robles.

Case in point was the changing of the provision in the proposed statutes that saw the removal of the Armed Forces of Philippines (AFP)'s principal functions as protector of the people and the state.

No less than AFP chief Gen. Carlito Galvez Jr. noticed it, specifically pointing out the inclusion of the phrase in Article 1 of the new statutes' "historic rights and legal title."

"We don't have any problem here, considering that the AFP is very professional. But for me, the provision declaring the AFP as protector of the people and state is already a pride for us soldiers that the communist has long wanted removed," Galvez said.

Galvez was reacting to Bocobo briefing soldiers that the government will be assuming the function in order to prevent military mutineers from exercising this right illegally.

Bocobo, however, stressed that the AFP is part of the government and will function as such in any eventuality. — **With Elizabeth Marcelo, Robertzon Ramirez, Jaime Laude**

J



# PH can invade China in 4001, jokes Duterte

By Julie M. Aurelio  
@JMAurelioINQ

President Duterte is adamant that a war over disputed features in the West Philippine Sea is impossible at this time, but jests that the Philippines might be in a position to invade China after two thousand years.

In a speech during the 117th anniversary rites of the Office of the Solicitor General in Pasay City on Tuesday night, the President reiterated that going to war with China would only result in a massacre of Filipino troops.

"I'm playing with cards, I can do nothing about China, so let's set it aside. But in the year 4001, we're tough by then. Let's invade China and get oil [in the West Philippine Sea]," he said in Filipino.

### Beijing's sweeping claims

The Philippines is entangled in a territorial dispute with China over isles and reefs in the area, despite an international court's ruling rejecting Beijing's sweeping claims.

The President has repeat-

edly said he would not take aggressive steps against China.

"What can I do about China? At this time, none. Aggression? Impossible. It will be a massacre. Before I can launch a plane, it will already be targeted. We have no capability. We have to admit that we cannot launch a war with China," Mr. Duterte said.

### Even a few shots

He added that the Philippines would not dare fire even a few shots.

"If I start to make trouble there by just firing a few shots, it will grow into something big which might not really be good for us," he said.

Recalling his talks with Chinese President Xi Jinping, Mr. Duterte said he bared his plans to "dig [for] oil" in the West Philippine Sea. But Xi told him they should focus instead on cooperative ventures such as joint oil exploration.

Mr. Duterte said he would still consult Congress on the legality of the proposed cooperative ventures. INQ AD

## Phl claims vs China maybe in 4001 - Rody

By ALEXIS ROMERO

If the Philippines cannot assert its maritime claims now, maybe it can do so in 4001.

President Duterte has claimed that there's nothing much the Philippines can do about its maritime row with China, saying a war with the Asian superpower would only result in a "massacre" of Filipino troops.

But Duterte said in jest that things may change in 2,000 years.

*"Pag year 4001, tigas na tayo, invade natin 'yung China, kunin natin 'yung oil natin. By that time, i-straw mo, wala na. Maski bunbon (In the year 4001, we will be strong and we will*

invade China and seize our oil. By that time, nothing will be left, not even sand)," the President said during the 117th anniversary of the Office of the Solicitor General in Pasay City last Wednesday.

*"Eh pasupladuhan lang, number one ako diyan. Pero alam ko din hindi ko talaga kaya. Ipapasubo ko lang itong bayan ko (We can choose to snub each other. I'm number one in terms of that. But I know we cannot do it. I will just drag my country into a mess). Not good. It's not good really to go to war now,"* he added.

Duterte said China could target a Philippine plane even before it is launched. He also

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believes that aggressive behavior would not solve the dispute.

"That's geopolitics actually. *Naglalaro ako ng baraha dito. wala man rin akong magawa. dito muna 'yang China* (I am playing my cards. I cannot do anything. We leave it at that for now)," he said.

Critics have accused Duterte of being too soft on the Phil-

ippines' maritime dispute with China, which is claiming about 90 percent of the South China Sea. They claimed that the Duterte administration is not doing enough to assert the Philippines' claims in the South China Sea because it is getting military and development aid from China.

Officials have denied this, saying Duterte would not give up even an inch of Philippine territory in the South China Sea.

# More land titles for military camps in Western Visayas

By TARA YAP

ILOILO CITY — The Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) will be issuing more land titles intended for military camps in Western Visayas.

DENR Regional Director Jim Sampulna said DENR Secretary Roy Cimatu, who is a former Armed

Forces chief of staff, gave orders to expedite the issuance of land titles to all military facilities.

The issuance comes less than a year after DENR awarded its first military camp land title in Western Visayas: the 10.3-hectare Camp Jizmundo in Banga town, Aklan.

Together with DENR Assistant Regional Director for Technical

Services Livino Duran, Sampulna recently met with officers from eight military camps.

The Philippine Army's 3rd Infantry Division (3ID) and DENR are also planning to go after syndicates that sell fake titles to military lands.

"This is to also protect the interest of the AFP (Armed Forces of the

Philippines) from encroachment, usurpation, illegal occupation and adverse claims of ownership made by public and private entities," Sampulna said.

Hector Garrido, chief of the regional DENR's Licenses, Patents and Deeds Division (LPDD), briefed military officers on the requirements for special land titles.

Portions of camp sites, including 3ID's headquarters in Jamidan town, Capiz, and the one in Mambusao town still eye special land titles.

The other sites are in Iloilo City; the towns of Calinog, Dingle and Miag-ao in Iloilo; and the towns of Candani and Murcia in Negros Occidental. 12

## ConCom removes AFP 'protector' role

BY VICTOR REYES

THE Consultative Committee (ConCom), tasked to review the 1987 Constitution, yesterday presented to the Armed Forces the salient points of the draft Federal Constitution, including the removal of the "protector of the

people" role of the Armed Forces, which rightist groups invoke when launching coups

A ConCom member, retired Army general and lawyer Ferdinand Bocobo, presented the amendments, specifically those

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#### CONCOM

involving the security sector.

The amendments were introduced during a consultation held in Camp Aguinaldo. Hundreds of officers and enlisted personnel attended the event, including Armed Forces chief Gen. Carlito Galvez.

Bocobo said civilian authority remains supreme over the military at all times in the draft constitution.

He said government, not the Armed Forces, is really the protector of the people.

The body also introduced in the proposed constitution the surveillance warrant, which will be on top of the arrest and search warrants, "to protect unnecessary unreasonable surveillance."

Bocobo said he objected to the provision because this may limit the function of the defense sector.

"What we proposed here is the requirement of surveillance

warrant can be applied and can be served after the actual surveillance. We don't need to apply and conduct (surveillance) because it will hinder our job... We can do that (surveillance) and apply the warrant later," he said.

In the national territory provision, Bocobo said the proposed draft constitution returned the phrase "historic right and legal title," which he said may result in the revival of the claim over Sabah.

Also, Bocobo said the Philippines, consistent with the national interest, will adopt and pursue a policy of freedom from weapons of mass destruction (from nuclear weapons in the 1987 constitution) in its territory.

He said the draft constitution gives the President power to declare a state of war in the absence of Congress. It said Congress shall have the sole power to declare the existence of war.

Also, the rank of military officers subject to confirmation by the Commission on Appointments will be major general/rear admiral and up. The old constitution requires CA confirmation for those ranked colonel and up.

Bocobo said the President is empowered in the draft constitution to declare martial law in times of "lawless violence," in addition to the two grounds cited in the 1987 constitution which are invasion and rebellion.

"We supported that lawless violence can also be a ground to declare martial law. What is the meaning of lawless violence? Two meanings, specific one is terrorism and one is violent extremism," he said.

Galvez said he is opposed to the removal of the "protector of the people" role of the AFP in the proposed constitution. He said the military takes "pride" being the protector of the people and the state

On the proposed surveillance warrant, Galvez said this may set back military operations and result in the dismissal of cases against suspects.

House opposition leader Rep. Edcel Lagman (LP, Albay) slammed the "belated" regional consultations on the proposed federal constitution, saying it is meant to force the people to support the proposed changes of the ConCom.

He said copies of the draft constitution have not been distributed and circulated to enable local officials to formulate their analytical comments even as they are ordered to bring their respective delegations to support the convention.

Constitutionalist Christian Monsod warned that the Duterte administration's push for a shift to federalism might be used as a smokescreen to keep him in power. - With Jocelyn Montemayor, Wendell Vigilia and Peter Tabingo

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## Mayors' murder probed for destabil link

By Rey E. Requejo and Francisco Tuyay

THE Department of Justice and the Philippine National Police have shifted gear to try to resolve the killings of two mayors—one from Batangas and the other the next day in Nueva Ecija—only this week, with authorities looking at all angles available to investigators.

The DoJ has tapped the National Bureau of Investigation to determine the possibility that the killings of Tanauan City Mayor Antonio Halili and General Tinio, Nueva Ecija Mayor Ferdinand Bote were part of a grand plot to destabilize the Duterte administration.

Justice Secretary Menardo Guevara said he had ordered the NBI to investigate this angle

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## Mayors'...

From A1

after the Palace brought up such possibility.

"The NBI will look into the possibility of a bigger scheme in these killings—to destabilize the government," Guevarra said in an interview.

"The NBI will look at all possible angles because we have to leave no stones unturned," he added.

Authorities probing the killing of Halili have outlined another possible motive into the case, this time a land dispute between the slain mayor and a "retired general" prior to the shooting incident.

Malacañang, meanwhile, denied claims the killing of Halili was state-sponsored.

Presidential Spokesperson Harry Roque said allegations the government was behind the mayor's killing remained an "unfounded" speculation considering that police had not thus far completed their probe.

The land dispute issue cropped-up as probers were digging deeper into the Halili slay during a flag-raising ceremony at the grounds of the Tanauan city hall Monday morning.

In Camp Crame, Philippine National Police Chief Oscar Albayalde said they were looking at

the land dispute issue between Halili and

a ranking official he merely described as a "former general" as another motive, though probers were not discounting the motives on illegal drugs and political angle.

He could not say if the retired general was a police or a military man.

Guevarra issued the order after Roque said the successive murders of Halili and Bote could be perpetrated by certain groups to "erode confidence in the President."

"We continue to adhere to the rule of law and consider the recent killings of high-profile figures as an attempt to erode confidence in the President, whose main platform of governance rests on fighting crimes," Roque said.

This developed as the Armed Forces of the Philippines revealed that communist rebels were planning to oust Duterte by October as they expressed support for the total termination of peace negotiations.

AFP spokesman Col. Edgard Arevalo revealed the ouster plot was allegedly contained in documents recovered by soldiers and confirmed by testimonies of communist rebels who have surrendered.

Nonetheless, Guevarra assured that the NBI would look into other possible angles, including the reported link of the illegal drug trade to the killing of Halili.

With Macon Ramos-Araneta, Pearl Gajunera and Patricia Marie Cabela

# New gov't conditions dim talks with Reds

By Jeannette I. Andrade  
@jiandradeINQ

The government has set new conditions for the resumption of peace talks that are likely to be rejected by the communist rebels, including holding negotiations in the country, dimming the prospect of a settlement of the nearly 50-year-old insurgency under President Duterte.

"The doors for the resumption of peace talks with the NDFP (National Democratic Front of the Philippines) are still open," presidential peace adviser Jesus Dureza said in a statement on Thursday.

In addition to holding the talks in the Philippines, rather than abroad as has been done since 1992, Dureza said the resumption would be subject to other "wishes of the President."

The other conditions were no power-sharing or a coalition government with the communist rebels, a stop to their revolutionary tax collection, and a ceasefire agreement requiring the New People's Army (NPA) encamped in designated areas.

### Local initiatives

Dureza also said that while



**NPA ENCAMPMENT** One of the government conditions announced by presidential adviser on the peace process Jesus Dureza (left) for the resumption of peace talks with communist rebels is a ceasefire agreement requiring the encampment of New People's Army fighters (right) in designated areas. —DENNIS JAY SANTOS

both sides awaited the resumption of formal talks, local officials could initiate peace negotiations with insurgents in their areas.

The conditions were finalized in a meeting with top military and police officials on Wednesday night, Dureza said.

The rebels have repeatedly rejected holding talks in the country and their position has been affirmed in a 1995 agreement under then President Fidel Ramos to negotiate in a neutral country while giving security and immunity guarantees to negotia-

tors of both sides and their staff.

In response, the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) said Dureza's statement that the doors remained open for the talks "is an outright lie" intended to smokescreen the government's repeated termination of the negotiations.

The CPP said Mr. Duterte formally ended the peace talks through a presidential proclamation last November. This was followed by another proclamation last December declaring the CPP and NPA terrorists or-

ganizations. Both proclamations have not been rescinded.

By demanding to hold talks in the Philippines, "Duterte is driving another nail to completely shut down the NDFP-GRP peace talks," the CPP said, adding that the condition was "unacceptable and unworkable for the NDFP."

### Martial law conditions?

"By completely shutting the door to the negotiations, Duterte is laying down the conditions for imposing martial law or a general crackdown, use the terror pro-



scription against the CPP and NPA against his critics and dissenters against his tyranny, and push Charter change for pseudo-federalism to perpetuate himself in power," the CPP added.

Presidential spokesperson Harry Roque said there was no such intention.

"The President has no plans to declare nationwide martial law. He has said it would be problematic," Roque said.

He also said Norway, which had been brokering the talks, could still help "any which way they want" but no longer as third-party facilitator.

But Dureza said Mr. Duterte had "expressed his wish that Norway continues as facilitator in the event peace talks are resumed.

#### Sison statement

In a separate statement, CPP founding chair Jose Maria Sison, the chief political consultant for the NDFP in the talks, said they would consider returning to the negotiating table only if Mr. Duterte revokes his two proclamations, respects all accords reached by the two sides since 1992, and agrees to holding the talks in a foreign neutral venue.

He denied that the rebels

had demanded a coalition government or that the rebels had a three-year plan to oust the President by October this year, referring to a claim by Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana, which he dismissed was "a mere fabrication."

The rural-based insurgency, which has raged since 1969, has left about 40,000 combatants and civilians dead, hampered security and economic development in the impoverished countryside for nearly half a century.

The NPA reached a peak strength of about 25,000 in the mid-1980s, but its ranks have since thinned due to surrenders, battle casualties and splits in the communist movement in the 1990s.

The military has estimated that only about 4,000 guerrillas were left, but a recent military statement seemed to contradict that figure. <sup>AB</sup>

Military spokesperson Col. Edgard Arevalo last week said the NPA had lost 7,531 fighters, most of them by surrendering to the government, in the first six months this year. —WITH REPORTS FROM DELFIN T. MALLARI JR., JULIE M. AURELIO, FRINSTON LIM, FATE COLOBONG, JANNA GAYLE AGUS AND AP INQ

# Doors still open for peace talks — Dureza

By JOSE RODEL CLAPANO

The doors are still open for peace talks, Presidential Adviser

on the Peace Process Jesus Dureza said yesterday.

But Dureza was quick to add that the communist rebels must stop collecting revolutionary taxes in order for the talks to proceed.

"The doors for the resumption of peace talks with the NDF (National Democratic Front) are still open. However, this is subject to the following wishes of the President," Dureza said.

He said that aside from stopping the New People's Army (NPA)'s collection of revolutionary taxes, President Duterte wanted no coalition government with the communists.

He said the President also wants the talks to take place in the country.

"There will be no coalition government. There will be a stop in the collection of the so-called revolutionary tax. The venue of the talks will be local. There will be a ceasefire agreement in which armed NPA members are encamped in designated areas," Dureza said.

Presidential spokesman Harry Roque Jr. said the President made clear his directives that the government's doors will remain open for the peace talks during the joint command conference with the Philippine National Police and the Armed Forces of the Philippines last Wednesday.

"The President said that the doors remain open for the peace talks between the government and the CPP-NPA as long the conditions are met that the (talks) will be in the country; (the NPA will) cease to collect revolutionary taxes; that the leaders and members will be encamped in an area during the talks. During this time, the government will take care of the needs of the CPP-NDF-NPA leaders and members.

"So, if the CPP-NPA will abide with these conditions, the peace talks will continue," Roque said in a press briefing at Malacañang.

The Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP), on the other hand, claimed Dureza lied in his statements that the doors are still open for peace negotiations.

The CPP branded Dureza's statements as "a desperate PR stunt."

The CPP said Dureza's statements do not make any mention of Duterte's issuing Presidential Proclamation 360 on Nov. 23, 2017 which formally terminated peace negotiations with the NDF.

"This proclamation has never been rescinded. Just a few weeks ago, Duterte also derailed efforts to resume talks by cancelling its scheduled resumption," the

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CPP said.

NDF peace panel chairman Fidel Agcaoili earlier said the rebels did not demand a coalition government. The CPP said Duterte's insistence to hold the peace talks in Manila is non-negotiable.

Dureza said that in the meantime, localized peace arrangements may be pursued by local government units with the insurgents in their respective areas of responsibility. "This way forward in the stalled peace talks was decided following the consolidation of various positions expressed during the command conference ... in Malacñang," Dureza said. Dureza said the President also expressed his wish that Norway continue as facilitator in the event peace talks are resumed.

Roque added the government will support localized peace talks with the rebels.

Roque said the Cabinet's security cluster will meet again on July 12 to finalize the guidelines for localized peace talks.

The Department of National Defense (DND) is also supporting the holding of localized peace talks with the communist guerrillas.

Defense spokesman Arsenio Andolong said that for the past 50 years, the government has been reaching out to the CPP-NDF leadership to solve the country's insurgency problem peacefully but nothing happened.

"Instead of talking to these people in the Netherlands, it's better we'll do it (peace talks with the local NPA leaders) here in the Philippines for us to really know and resolve the concerns of those who have gone astray," Andolong said.

CPP-NDF leaders in the Netherlands under the leadership of Jose Ma. Sison had been insisting the peace talks be conducted on neutral ground outside of the Philippines.

In pushing for the localized peace talks directly with the NPA, defense and military officials said the CPP-NDF will be disenfranchised.

"This will render them (Sison and Agcaoili) irrelevant," a senior intelligence official said.

Meanwhile, three NPA rebels were killed by government forces in Jose Panganiban, Camarines Sur yesterday.

Capt. Joash Pramis, spokesman for the Army's 9th Infantry Division in Bicol, said fighting broke out when troops encountered the rebels in a remote area in Barangay Sta. Cruz. - With Alexis Romero, Jaime Laude, Celso Amo, Emmanuel Tupas, Artemio Dumlao

## Palace: Door for peace talks with Reds remains open

By ARGYLL E. GEDUCOS

The Duterte administration is keeping its doors open to a possible

resumption of the peace talks with the communist group.

Presidential spokesman Harry Roque made the statement almost a

week after Sison said that the Reds would no longer talk peace with the government under the leadership of President Duterte, and ▶2

### Palace: Door for...

would instead support efforts to oust him.

In a Facebook post, Roque said that the government is willing to hold peace talks with the Communist Party of the Philippines-New People's Army-National Democratic Front (CPP-NPA-NDF) as long as they adhere to the conditions earlier laid down by the President.

The government will demand that peace talks with communist rebels shift from Europe to the Philippines and the insurgents are encamped in designated areas during the negotiations.

"The door for peace talks remains open provided that PRRD's conditions are met: [it will be held] in [the] country, no collection of revolutionary tax, no hostilities, NPA fighters to remain encamped, and no coalition government," Roque posted Wednesday night.

He added that localized peace talks may be pursued by local government units provided that they do not concede any aspect of governance.

The Palace official also said that localized peace talks should be pursuant to guidelines to be agreed upon by the Cabinet cluster on security.

Roque was posting live social media updates from the ongoing joint command conference with the Armed Forces of the Philippines

(AFP) and the Philippine National Police (PNP) Wednesday evening.

In his Palace press briefing Thursday, Roque said that President Duterte still has not changed his mind about pursuing peace in the country.

"So patuloy pa rin ang paghangad ng kapayapaan ng ating Presidente, pero hindi naman po pwede na sila pa ang magdidikta kung paano tayo makakarating sa kapayapaan (The President still dreams of peace, but we cannot allow the communist group to dictate to us how we should get there)," he said.

Roque also said that during the joint command conference, they were briefed on the different agreements that the government has entered into with the communist group. He said that even after the said briefing, Duterte stood by his decision to have the peace negotiations in the country.

#### Localized peace talks

Roque is not optimistic that Sison's statement will influence the rebels on the ground, after the CPP founder said that the communist group will not agree that the peace talks will be held in the Philippines.

According to the Palace official, Sison's pronouncements will not affect the government's pursuit for localized peace talks.

"Tutuloy tayo sa localized peace talks. Matitignan natin kung ang tao na parang 30 anyos na atang wala sa Pilipinas ay may impluwensya pa sa (We will proceed with the localized peace talks. We'll see if someone who has been out of the Philippines for I think 30 years will still have influence on the) troops on the ground," Roque said.

According to Roque, the Cabinet cluster on security will meet on July 12 to finalize the guidelines for the

localized peace talks.

#### Norway's participation

Roque said Norway can still participate in the talks as third-party facilitator

"Well, hindi ko po alam kung ano magiging partisipasyon nila. But sinabi ko na po 'yan noong una kong (I don't know what will their participation be but as I said in an earlier) press briefing and I was very clear - all parties who have been involved can continue to help in whatever way they want to help. They're welcome to." Roque said.

The Palace official also said that Duterte did not dispute the idea that Norwegians can still be the third-party facilitator during the peace talks between the government and the CPP-NPA-NDF.

"Let's just say that the President did not dispute that the Norwegians can be third party facilitator. But there was no outright statement that they will continue to be third party facilitator," Roque said.

"Anyone can help in the process that they want. If the Norwegians can help in localized peace talks, they're more than welcome to do so... Iba naman po ang venue sa kanilang tulong (The venue is a different issue from their help), which we continue to appreciate," he added.

In a press briefing earlier this week, Roque blamed Sison for the failed peace talks between the government and the communist rebels.

"Hindi po kasalanan ng gobyerno na hindi natuloy ang peace talks. Si Joma Sison po ang umayaw. Tayo po'y mga Pilipino, ang sinasabi po ng Presidente, dito tayo mag-usap ng kapayapaan (It is not the government's fault that the peace talks did not push through. Sison was the one who backed out. We are Filipinos, the President said we should talk peace here)," he said. (With reports from Francis T. Wakefield and The Associated Press)

## Peace talks with Reds still open – Dureza

PRESIDENT Rodrigo Duterte's peace adviser on Thursday said the door to peace talks between the government and the Communist Party of the Philippines-New People's Army-National Democratic Front

of the Philippines (CPP-NPA-NDFP) is still open.

In a statement, Jesus Dureza expressed hope that the negotiations could still be revived, as long as the government's demands are followed — no

to a coalition government, no to collection of so-called revolutionary tax and no talks outside the Philippines.

The government also wants a ceasefire agreement

►TalksA2

## Peace talks with Reds

and a restriction of members of the NPA to designated camps.

The CPP quickly shot down Dureza's statement that the peace negotiations are still open, calling it an "outright lie."

"This is a desperate PR [public relations] stunt to obscure the fact that the GRP [Government of the Republic of the Philippines] has repeatedly terminated the talks and make it appear that it is the NDFP [that] closed its doors," it said in a statement.

The NDFP is an umbrella group that counts the CPP and the NPA as members.

The CPP noted that Dureza's statement did not mention a proclamation issued by the President last year that formally terminated the peace talks.

It said Proclamation 360 was never revoked, adding that Duterte had "derailed efforts" in resuming the peace negotiations by canceling the proposed dates of the talks which would have been on June 28 to 30.

The President terminated the peace talks in November last year after signing Proclamation 360.

Two weeks later, he also signed Proclamation 374, which declared the CPP and its armed wing, the NPA, as terrorist groups.

"Dureza laid down Duterte's condition that in the event that the negotiations do resume, they should be held in a local venue," the CPP added.

"By making this demand, Duterte is driving another nail to completely shut down the NDFP-

GRP peace talks," it said, reiterating that insisting that the talks be held in the Philippines would be "unacceptable and unworkable" for the NDFP.

In a joint command conference on Wednesday, Dureza said the President was hoping that Norway would still facilitate the peace talks once they resume and that the communists and local government units will hold localized peace negotiations.

The Cabinet cluster on security is set to meet next Thursday to formulate guidelines for the localized negotiations.

The cluster is headed by Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana, with Foreign Affairs Secretary Alan Peter Cayetano, Interior Secretary Catalino Cuy, Justice Secretary Menardo Guevarra, Executive Secretary Salvador Medialdea, Cabinet Secretary Leoncio Evasco Jr., National Security Adviser Hermogenes Esperon and Dureza as members.

The Department of National Defense (DND) said it was standing by its recommendation for localized talks instead of negotiations on a national level.

DND spokesman Arsenio Andolong said the DND and the Armed Forces of the Philippines believe that peace would move forward if the localized negotiations were pushed by the LGUs.

Lorenzana and the military had mulled recommending the termination of the peace negotiations for good.

**RALPH U. VILLANUEVA  
AND DEMPSEY REYES**

# Rody orders localized peace talks

BY JOCELYN MONTEMAYOR AND VICTOR REYES

PRESIDENT Duterte has given the go ahead for the pursuit of localized peace talks with communist rebels while remaining open to negotiations with the Communist Party of the Philippines-New People's Army-National Democratic Front of the Philippines (CPP-NPA-NDFP) provided that they comply with Duterte's conditions.

Presidential spokesman Harry Roque, Jr. and peace adviser Jesus Dureza, in separate statements, said the President issued the directive during the joint Armed Forces of the Philippines-Philippine National Police (AFP-PNP) command conference in Malacañang Wednesday night.

Roque said local government units may now pursue localized talks as long as they do not enter any into agreements on governance.

He said the appropriate guidelines would be issued by the Cabinet cluster on security, which will meet on July 12.

Dureza said the doors for the resumption of peace talks with the NDFFP are still open but

subject to the "wishes of the President," which include no talks about a coalition government, holding of peace negotiations in the Philippines, stopping the collection of revolutionary tax, and having a ceasefire agreement "in which armed NPA members are encamped in designated areas."

"This 'way forward' in the stalled peace talks was decided following the consolidation of various positions expressed during the command conference convened by President Rodrigo Roa Duterte last night in Malacañang. The President also expressed his wish that Norway continues as facilitator in the event peace talks are resumed," he added.

Roque said Malacañang would no longer comment on any statements issued by CPP founding chairman and NDFFP consultant Jose Maria Sison, whom he said is "completely irrelevant" now that the talks have been cancelled.

Sison previously said it was impossible to hold localized peace talks and that the CPP-NPA-NDFFP would rather wait for the next administration to talk peace.

He also said the communist group may just join other groups that are out to oust Duterte.

Sison belied allegations by top government security officials that the communist movement has hatched a plan to oust President Duterte from power.

He said the plot was a "mere fabrication" to justify a nationwide martial law to suppress critics, opponents and the "broad masses" who oppose Duterte's "reign of greed and terror."

Sison specifically blamed Defense Secretary

Sec RODY > Page B2

## RODY

Delfin Lorenzana, Interior Department officer-in-charge Eduardo Año and National Secretary Hermogenes Esperon, Jr.

"The militarists Lorenzana, Año and Esperon are obviously misrepresenting the three-year plan of the CPP Central Committee to strengthen the CPP ideologically,

politically and organizationally," said Sison.

However, Sison said Duterte "is on the path of being ousted," not by the CPP-NPA alone, but by so-called "patriotic and democratic forces" and by the growing number of disgruntled Armed Forces and PNP officers.

"Most likely Duterte would be ousted by a combination of mass

actions by the broad united front and the withdrawal of support from Duterte by AFP and PNP officers and men as in the ouster of Marcos and Estrada in 1986 and 2001," he said.

The CPP, in a statement, also said government's demand to hold the peace talks in the Philippines is another blow to the peace process.

"He (Duterte) knows fully well that the demand to hold talks in the Philippines is unacceptable and unworkable for the NDFFP (National Democratic Front of the Philippines), unless he thinks the NDFFP will be negotiating only to surrender the Filipino people's aspirations and give up all its revolutionary principles," the CPP said.

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# Palace: Peace process still on

By Angie M. Rosales

Peace negotiations with communist rebels are still on, despite the communist group's leadership's reluctance to sit down and talk peace just so that the conditions set by President Rodrigo Duterte are met.

With or without the participation of Jose Maria "Joma" Sison, founding chairperson, of the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) and other officials from the National Democratic Front of the Philippines (NDFP), Malacanang said localized peace talks are to be pursued, Presidential Spokesperson Harry Roque said.

"Yesterday, we were briefed on the different agreements that were entered into and he (President) struck by his decision - (that) 'I'm Duterte) open to peace talks, but it has to be conducted here, and under the conditions that the president has imposed,'" Roque said.

Presidential peace adviser Jesus Dureza added in a statement that the doors for resumption of peace talks with the NDFP are still open.

"This is, however, subject to the

following wishes of the President: that there will be no condition government; a stop in the collection of the so-called revolutionary tax; local venue of talks; ceasefire arrangement where armed NFAs (New People's Army) are encamped in designated areas.

## Localized talks possible

"In the near-time, localized peace arrangements may be pursued by the local government units with their local insurgents in their respective areas of responsibility,"

*"He doesn't see why the talks have to be held abroad."*

Dureza said. This "way forward" in the stalled peace talks was decided following the consolidation of various positions expressed during the command conference convened by the President Wednesday night in Malacanang, he said.

"The President also expressed his wish that Norway continues as facilitator in the event peace talks are resumed," Dureza said.

Roque hastened to clarify that there was no change in the position

of the President on the resumption of the peace negotiations saying that the Duterte merely asked for time to review all the talks in the past and was surprised when the CPP-NDF insisted that it will be held in Norway.

"He doesn't see why the talks have to be held abroad," Roque said, adding that the so-called conditions laid down by the President are reasonable.

Localized peace talks will be pursued instead and some local government officials are already engaged in it resulting in the surrender of rebels, particularly in Davao, he said.

Insofar as Norway is concerned, the Norwegians can still help in any which way they want, Roque said.

"I just don't know what will be their participation. Let's just say that the President did not dispute that Norwegians can be a third party facilitator. But there was no outright statement that they will continue to be a third party facilitator. Anyone can help in the process if they want. If the Norwegians can help in localize peace talks. They are more than welcome to do so," he said.

## Joma sinks to irrelevance

Roque said he is no longer keen on addressing some of Sison's tirades against the Duterte administration, particularly on the matter of the President insisting on the next round of peace talks in the country and not in Oslo, Norway - the third party facilitator.

"I know some of you get frustrated because you always want me to comment everytime Joma Sison says anything. I'm not under compulsion to comment on anything Joma (Sison) says. He's completely irrelevant as far as I'm concerned. So Joma Sison can say anything he wants, that's his opinion; he's even living ten thousand miles away. So I don't see how he can even be relevant," Roque said in a news briefing in Malacanang.

"So excuse me for saying this but it will now be a policy. Dededmahin ko na 'yan si (I will now ignore) Joma Sison, because he ceased to be relevant now that wala na tayong peace talks (now that we no longer have peace talks with them)." 3



# Duterte sets conditions for peace talks

By EFREN MONTANO

THE Philippine government has set conditions yesterday for the resumption of peace talks, among them, that the next round of talks with the Reds should be held in the Philippines.

In a statement yesterday, Chief Peace Adviser Jesus Dureza said "the doors for the resumption of peace talks with the NDFP are still open," but subject to the conditions of President Rodrigo Duterte.

One of Duterte's conditions is for the venue of the talks to be "local" - a demand that the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) has long since dismissed. The National Democratic Front of the Philippines (NDFP), the political arm of the CPP, had said the talks need a "foreign neutral venue in compliance with the pertinent provision in the Joint Agreement on

Safety and Immunity Guarantees."

Aside from a local venue, the other conditions are there will be no coalition government there will be a stop in the collection of the so-called revolutionary tax and there will be a ceasefire agreement in which New People's Army members are encamped in designated areas.

"In the meantime, localized peace arrangements may be pursued by the local government units with the insurgents in their respective areas of responsibility," Dureza said.

Dureza said the Philippine government has decided on these conditions during a command conference convened by Duterte in Malacañang on Wednesday night. (July 4).

"The President also expressed his wish that Norway continues as facilitator in the event peace talks are resumed," he added.

Peace talks were sup-

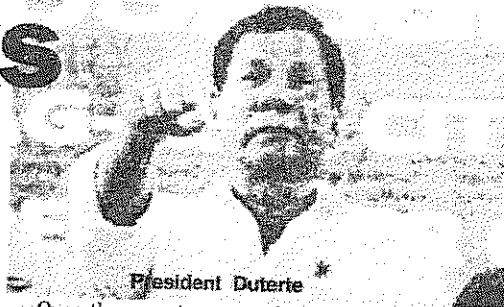
posed to resume on June 25 but the military asked for a 3-month postponement. Duterte agreed, and the NDF accepted his decision.

Concerning another issue, President Duterte said: 'Pag 4001 invade na natin 'yung China.

Duterte maintained that the country cannot afford to go to war with China over Manila-claimed features in the South China Sea.

"Hindi naman natin magiyera, we cannot retake it," Duterte said in a speech at the 117th anniversary of the Office of the Solicitor General in Pasay City.

"That's a geopolitics actually. Naglalaro ako ng baraha dito, wala man rin akong magawa, dito muna 'yang China. 'Pag year 4001, ugap na tayu, invade natin 'yung China, kunin natin 'yung oil natin. By that time, i-straw mo, wala na. Maski bunbon [Cebuano for buhangin or sand]," he added.



President Duterte

Over the recent years, Beijing has taken a more assertive stance in the waters, beefing up its reclamation activities in disputed areas and transformed previously submerged features into artificial islands with multi-level buildings and runways.

China has also deployed military aircraft and installed anti-ship cruise missiles and surface-to-air missile systems on Manila-claimed reefs.

Duterte, however, refused to provoke the Asian power into war and instead pushed for stronger trade and economic relations as well as the conduct of joint exploration of oil and gas in the West Philippine Sea,

the area of the South China Sea being claimed by Manila.

Duterte, meanwhile, directed the Philippine Air Force to expedite the purchase of helicopters.

"I'm giving you until July to produce that production document. I want that helicopters by the end of the year. Mamaya may gulo dito, magkakaharap naman ako niyan," he said.

The military was supposed to purchase from Canada \$233 million worth of Bell 412 choppers but Duterte ordered the cancellation of the deal in February amid the North American nation's concerns the aircraft could be used to fight rebels.

# Gov't insists peace talks with Reds must be held on PH soil

THE Philippine government yesterday set conditions for the resumption of peace talks, among them that the next round of talks with the Reds should be held in the Philippines.

In a statement, Chief Peace Adviser Jesus Dureza said "the doors for the resumption of peace talks with the NDFP are still open" but subject to the conditions of President Rodrigo Duterte.

One of Duterte's conditions is for the venue of the talks to be "local" - a demand that the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) has long since dismissed. The National Democratic Front of the Philippines (NDFP), the political arm of the CPP, had said the talks need a "foreign neutral venue in compliance with the pertinent provision in the Joint Agreement on Safety and Immunity Guarantees."

Aside from a local venue, the other conditions are: there will be no coalition government, there will be a stop

to the collection of the so-called revolutionary tax and there will be a ceasefire agreement with the New People's Army encamped in designated areas.

"In the meantime, localized peace arrangements may be pursued by the local government units with the insurgents in their respective areas of responsibility," Dureza said.

Dureza said the Philippine government has decided on these conditions during a command conference convened by Duterte in Malacañang on Wednesday night. "The President also expressed his wish that Norway continues as facilitator in the event peace talks are resumed," he added.

Peace talks were supposed to resume on June 28, but the military asked for a three-month postponement. Duterte agreed, and the National Democratic Front, the political wing of the CPP involved in the negotiations, accepted his decision.

**EMontano**

## REGIONS BRIEFS

### 3 NPA rebs killed in CamNorte clash

IRIGA CITY—At least three suspected communist rebels were killed in a clash with government soldiers in Jose Panganiban town, Camarines Norte province, on Thursday, military reports said. Capt. Joash Pramis, public affairs chief of the Army's 9th Infantry Division (9ID), said soldiers recovered four rifles and two homemade bombs at the clash site in Barangay Sta. Cruz. He said the firefight broke out in Sitio Banasi at 6:30 a.m. and lasted for about an hour. No soldier was wounded in the clash. Among the firearms recovered by government troops were M16, AK47 and M14 rifles, a grenade launcher and two improvised explosive devices, Pramis said. Col. Ferozaldo Paul Regencia, 9ID spokesperson, said more than 80 rebels had surrendered to the military in the Bicol region. Regencia assured rebels planning to surrender that local governments, the Department of Social Welfare and Development, and the Department of the Interior and Local Government would help them.

—MAR ARGUELLES AND STEPHANIE FLORIDA *MP*



## ACROSS THE COUNTRY

### 3 NPA rebels killed in Camarines Norte

LEGAZPI CITY – Three New People's Army (NPA) rebels were killed in an encounter with soldiers in Jose Panganiban town in Camarines Norte yesterday.

An AK47, two M16 rifles, an M14, a rifle grenade and two improvised explosives were recovered from the rebels who retreated after an hour of gunfight, according to Capt. Joas Pramis, 9th Infantry Division public affairs officer.

Pramis said government troopers clashed with an undetermined number of communist guerrillas in Sitio Banas,

Barangay Sta. Cruz at about 6:30 a.m.

Pursuit operations for the rebels are ongoing.

3 - Celso Amo, Cet Dematera

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### 3 NPA rebels killed in CamNorte clash

CAMP ANGELES, Camarines Sur - Three suspected members of the New People's Army (NPA) were killed in a clash with troopers of the army's 9th Infantry Brigade (9IB) yesterday morning in Jose Panganiban municipality, Camarines Norte.

Captain Joash Pramis, 9th Infantry Division (9ID) spokesman, said the encounter broke out at 6:30 a.m. and lasted for almost an hour in Sitio

Banasi, Brgy Sta Cruz, Jose Panganiban.

Pramis said the three slain rebels have not yet been identified, while no one was hurt on the side of the government.

After the clash, soldiers from Charlie Company of the 9IB collected one AK-47 rifle; two M-16 rifles; one M-14 rifle; a grenade launcher and two improvised explosive devices (IEDs). (Ruel Saldico and Niño Luces) 9

## 3 NPA rebels killed in Cam Norte firefight

GOVERNMENT soldiers killed three members of the New People's Army (NPA) following a firefight in Jose Panganiban town in Camarines Norte yesterday morning, the military reported.

Capt. Joash Pramis, spokesman of the Army's 9th Infantry Division based in Camarines Sur, said the operation also resulted in the recovery of rebel war items, including two improvised explosive devices.

Pramis said troops from the 9th

Infantry Battalion were conducting combat operations when they clashed with the rebels at around 6:30 in the morning in barangay Sta Cruz.

The rebels, belonging to the Bicol regional party committee, retreated after a one-hour firefight. Pramis said pursuit operations were still ongoing against the insurgents as of Thursday afternoon.

During clearing operations, government troops recovered three

bodies of still unidentified rebels, four high-powered firearms, two improvised bombs, radios, cellular phones, a netbook and personal belongings at the encounter site.

No one was reported killed or injured on the military side.

"This operation was based on a series of information that the 9th ID received about their (NPA rebels) presence," Pramis said.

He said the rebels were possibly out to conduct extortion activities

in Paracale town, also in Camarines Norte, where mining companies operate.

He added the encountered rebels may have also been planning attacks, based on the improvised bombs that were recovered. 13 ✓

"They usually use these (improvised bombs) in the conduct of tactical operation. We may have preempted a planned attack, we prevented them from conducting atrocities," Pramis said. — *Victor Reyes*

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## 3 Reds killed in CamNor encounter

By ZAIDA DELOS REYES

**THREE** members of New People's Army (NPA) were killed in an encounter with government forces yesterday morning in Camarines Norte.

Capt. Jo-ash Pramis, spokesperson of the Army's 9th Infantry Division, said the identities of the slain rebels were not yet available as of press time.

The encounter occurred at 6:30 a.m. at Bgy. Sta. Cruz, Jose Panganiban town.

Accordingly, troops from the 9th IB were on patrol in the area when they encountered the rebels belonging to Larangan 1 ng Komiteng Probinsyang Uno ng Bicol Regional Party Committee.

The firefight lasted for almost an hour that resulted in the killing of three rebels and the recovery of four high powered firearms, including two improvised explosives, assorted ammunition, communication equipment, including radios, cellphones, notebooks and personal belongings. After the incident the rebel fled.

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# High-level coordination to stop misencounters

Coordination at the highest should be done to prevent a "misencounter," similar to what happened between the military and the police that killed six policemen and wounded nine others in Sta. Rita, Samar last June 26, the Palace said yesterday.

Presidential Spokesperson Harry Roque said the preliminary finding of the Board of Inquiry (BOI) showed that the coordination between the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) and the Philippine National Police (PNP) was

"held at such low levels."

"Perhaps next time, the coordination should not be left to low-ranking officials and should actually be conducted at the highest level," Roque said during a Palace press briefing.

He said the "misencounter" was tackled during Wednesday's Command Conference in Malacañang, during which, President Rodrigo Duterte encouraged both the AFP and the PNP to "move on."

"The President is really encouraging both the PNP and the AFP to move on from this incident, to learn from this experience," Roque said.

**Blame no one**  
Although the  
PNP has no  
control

over the decision of the families of the victims. Roque said the President has emphasized that no one should be blamed for the incident.

"But the President said -- this is Murphy's Law: if things will go wrong, everything can go wrong. And this is exactly what happened in the Samar misencounter," he said.

"It's no one's fault. It's both their fault. We'll learn from it. We will have better coordination henceforth, but we offer our condolences to the family of those who were slain," he added.

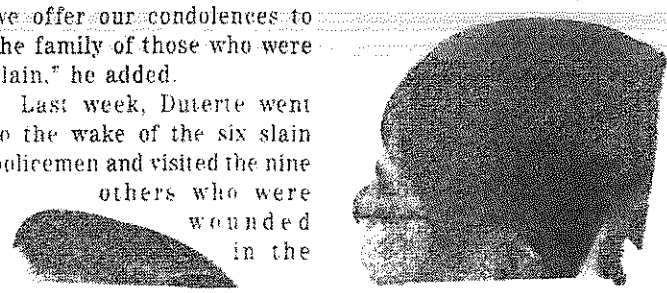
Last week, Duterte went to the wake of the six slain policemen and visited the nine others who were wounded in the

incident in Leyte.

The slain cops were Police Officers 1 Julie Escalo, Phil Jrey Mendigo, Rowel Reyes, Julius Suarez, Wyndell Noromor, and Edwin Ebrado.

Duterte also took full responsibility for the "misencounter," promising that the investigation will continue to determine what really went wrong.

"The President has said that the investigation should continue to avoid these kinds of misencounter," Roque said.





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# INQUIRER

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## Reduced power of Bangsamoro worries Mindanao groups

Final version of Bangsamoro Basic Law is seen to weaken military image of MILF, say groups

**By Jigger Jerusalem  
and Divina Suson  
@inquirermindanao**

MARAWI CITY—Civil society groups in Mindanao expressed alarm over Congress' version of the Bangsamoro Basic Law (BBL), which reduced the power of Bangsamoro, the proposed political entity set to replace the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao, in the peace agreement between the government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front.

The groups, whose members and supporters gathered at Jamiatu Muslim Mindanao quadrangle at Barangay Matampay here on Wednesday, called on Congress to make sure that the final version of BBL jibed with what was agreed upon in the Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro.

This would prevent the possible rise of breakaway groups that would "capitalize" on the Moro people's dissatisfaction over the fate of the peace accord, they said.

### Peace rally

More than 18,000 people, some of them bearing placards which read, "Peace, not war," "Original BBL" and "BBL BTC (Bangsamoro Transition Commission) version," attended the peace rally here on Wednesday.

The groups, which included Ranaw Multisectoral Movement, Coalition of Moro Youth Movement, Ranao Confederation for Peace, and Bangsamoro

Moro women from Lanao del Norte and Lanao del Sur provinces join groups urging Congress to strengthen the proposed Bangsamoro, a political entity that will replace the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao. —RICHEL UMEL



National Movement for Peace and Development, also called on Congress to pass the original version of the BBL.

Hundreds of families, who were displaced during the Marawi City siege and were still staying in the evacuation centers and tent cities, also joined the peace rally.

In a statement, the groups said the new BBL version in Congress already deviated from the version drafted by the Bangsamoro Transition Commission.

They said the latest version would only create a "weak mirror image" of the ARMM, the political entity it was to re-

place, supposedly to strengthen Moro autonomy.

#### Meaningful autonomy

"We note sadly that both houses [of Congress], should they persist in their revisions, will fail to replace the weak autonomous government with a strong autonomous government. We fear that the resulting autonomy law for the Bangsamoro will lose the essence of meaningful autonomy," they said.

The groups appealed to members of the bicameral conference to consider restoring the deleted or transferred power of the Bangsamoro autonomous government.

They highlighted six points in their appeal, among them, for Congress to restore the original version of the BBL on inland waters, which should be placed under the exclusive power of the Bangsamoro.

They also wanted Congress to restore the original provisions of House Bill No. 6475 on the power of the Bangsamoro government to regulate power generation, transmission and distribution that would be operated exclusively in the Bangsamoro and not to be connected to the national transmission grid.

They also wanted the original provision of the bill on the share in the national taxes col-

lected in the Bangsamoro and on the provision on the periodic plebiscite.

"In the event that it is impossible to restore the original provision of the bill on the core territory of Bangsamoro, (we ask Congress to) adopt the version of the Senate on the provision of core territory, particularly on the six towns of Lanao del Norte, so that it would no longer require the consent of the whole province," they said.

"We ask Congress to reconsider the wisdom of building a strong autonomy for the Bangsamoro as the only key to achieve national peace and solidarity," they added.

#### 'Decent, noble gesture'

The groups said strong autonomy should not be viewed as threat to national sovereignty but as the "most decent and noble gesture" to allow a sovereign people to live as a "self-governing entity" within the sovereignty of Philippine state.

"Together, we cannot afford another 'failed experiment,'" they said, referring to the ARMM. "If we do not build a strong autonomy, but merely add or change a thing or two weak provisions to an entity that might as well be the same old ARMM, we will only be courting disaster," they said.

"We cannot afford to unjustly frustrate a long-hopeful, long-suffering people and not expect to see them take extreme violent actions," they added. INQ *ATD*

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INTENSIFIED MILITARY OPERATIONS

## ARMY LIEUTENANT, 13 BIFF REBELS KILLED

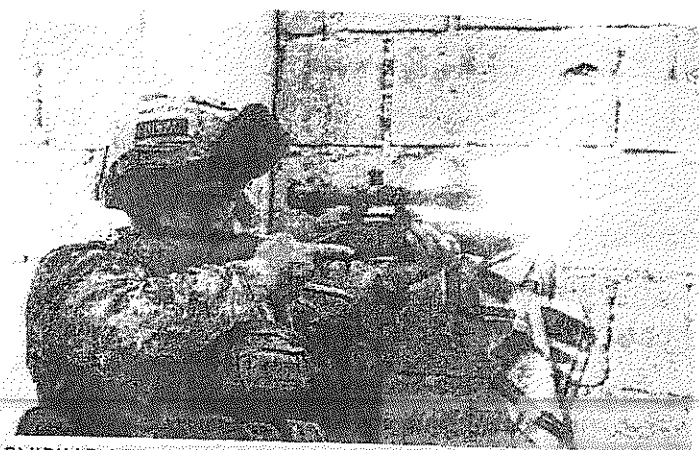
### IN MAGUINDANAO CLASH

By Edwin O. Fernandez  
@inquirermindanao

CAMP SIONGCO, MAGUINDANAO—An Army lieutenant and a senior leader of an Islamic State-linked Moro rebel group were killed in clashes in Maguindanao province on Wednesday, raising the death toll to 21 rebels and two soldiers since fighting erupted on Sunday.

Second Lt. Junibert Zonio, of the 40th Infantry Battalion, died from gunshot wounds he sustained when his platoon engaged at least 15 heavily armed rebels from the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF) at Barangay Pidsandawan, Mamasapano, Maguindanao.

Capt. Arvin Encinas, spokesperson for the Army's 6th Division, said Zonio had been serving in the Army for just a year.



**SNIPING AT REBELS** An Army sniper belonging to the 2nd Mechanized Infantry Division trains his sights on rebels belonging to the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters in Maguindanao province. —REUTERS

"His wife was already notified," Encinas said.

**Rebel leader wounded**  
He said a senior BIFF leader

was believed to have been seriously wounded in the clash. Troops recovered the rebel's bloodstained firearms, he added.

A soldier was also killed in clashes in Datu Saudi Ampatuan town, Maguindanao, on Monday.

Zonio led troops from the 40th IB in blocking BIFF fighters fleeing from Army offensives in Datu Shariff Saydona, Maguindanao.

About 13 rebels were also killed in the clash, including a subleader identified as Mah Nanding, alias Commander Marrox, who was believed to be involved in the murder of 44 police officers from the Special Action Force in Mamasapano in January 2015.

#### 14 firearms

"The number of BIFF killed was based on two-way radio conversations we intercepted from enemy side and from civilians and local officials," Encinas said.

He said ground troops re-

covered 14 firearms and the body of a BIFF fighter at Barangay Pidsandawan.

The firearms included four M-16s, three M-14s, two carbines, one Garand rifle, one Ultimax and three 12-gauge shotguns.

#### Body parts littered the ground

Citing reports from the field, Encinas said body parts littered the encounter site. He said the body parts could be from slain BIFF fighters who were carried away by their fleeing comrades.

Encinas said 15 other Army troopers had been wounded so far in the gun battles.

On Wednesday, four roadside improvised bombs were found and disarmed by Army ordnance experts in the boundary of Barangay Sepaka, Datu Paglas, and Barangay Pidsandawan, Mamasapano, as government troops were conduct-

ing clearing operations.

The military operation began during the weekend, targeting BIFF leader Abu Turaipe, whose faction had pledged allegiance to Middle East-based jihadi group Islamic State.

#### Escape

Turaipe was believed to have escaped.

The BIFF is a splinter of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), the main Moro separatist group in Mindanao that signed a peace deal with the government.

Insisting on a separate Islamist state in Mindanao, the BIFF rejected the peace accord and went on fighting while the MILF worked with the government toward the establishment of a new, bigger Moro region on the island with greater autonomy. —WITH A REPORT FROM JEFFREY MAITEM INQ

# 13 BIFF fighters, 2 soldiers slain in Mindanao clashes



**MAGUINDANAO CLASHES** - Soldiers from the Army's 2nd Mechanized Infantry Division take positions during clashes with members of the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters in Maguindanao Wednesday. The Islamist militant group tried to take over a town hall, triggering the fighting. (Reuters)

By **NONNOY E. LACSON**

**ZAMBOANGA CITY** - Thirteen Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF) gunmen and two soldiers were killed as clashes between government troops and the Muslim rebels entered its 5th day Thursday.

The Joint Task Force-Central (JTF-Central) said that 14 other soldiers were wounded while an undetermined number of BIFF gunmen were also hurt in the latest clashes.

JTF Central Commander Brig. Gen. Cirilito Sobejana said that among the slain enemies was Commander Marrox, the BIFF brigade commander of the Karialan Faction. Marrox was a known bomber and one of the prime suspects in the Mamasapano, Maguindanao clash which resulted in the death of 44 police commandos from the ▶2

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## 13 BIFF fighters...

◀1

Special Action Force (SAF) on January 23, 2015.

Marrox was also held responsible for the ambush of troops from the 40th Infantry Battalion a year ago and atrocities in Rajah Soliman and adjacent municipalities, Sobejana said.

In last Wednesday's clashes, 2Lt. Junibert Zunio of the 40th Infantry Battalion and a senior leader of BIFF were killed.

Zunio died after sustaining bullet wounds when his platoon engaged about 10 BIFF gunmen in a firefight in Barangay Pidsandawan, Mamasapano town.

Zunio led soldiers from the 40th IB in blocking BIFF gunmen fleeing from JTF-Central offensives in Datu Shariff Saydona, also in Maguindanao.

Last Monday, a soldier was also killed in clashes in Datu Saudi Ampatuan town.

Sobejana also reported that troops from the 2nd Mechanized Battalion were fired upon by more or less 10 members of the BIFF under the Karialan Group while they were conducting zoning operations at Dapiawan Elementary School, Barangay Dapiawan, DSA, Maguindanao, at 6:55 a.m. Thursday.

Troops immediately established their defensive positions and returned fire.

As of press time, the firefight continues, Sobejana reported.

### Help from China

Meanwhile, President Duterte is inclined to seek military assistance from China rather than the United States if a full-blown war against terrorists erupts in Mindanao.

The President said he could rely on China's help since it is closer to the Philippines, and he expressed doubts the United States would rush to the country's aid.

"If there is a full-blown war fighting in Mindanao, saan ako mag hingi ng tulong? [Where should I ask for help?] America? You think their men in the boots would come here? Ang layo nun [It's too far] and even the shipment," Duterte said during the 117th anniversary of the Office of the Solicitor General last Tuesday.

"Sino ang makatulong sa atin sa armas? Well, China. Ang pinakamalapit. Pag naubusan na akong bala, naubusan na ako lahat, dito ako sa China, hindi ako pupunta ng America [Who can help us with arms? Well, China is the closest. If I run out of bullets, I run out of everything, I'll go to China. I won't go to America]," he said.

Duterte recalled that the government recently tried to purchase weapons from the US but the sale was halted due to the opposition by some lawmakers. "The President and Congress seem to be in parity, not co-equal. They are really in parity of powers," he said. (With a report from Genalyn D. Kabling)

## 8 killed in military operations vs BIFF

**SHARIFF AGUAK, Maguindanao:** The Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) on Thursday continued to launch military operations against the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF) in Central Mindanao, particularly in Maguindanao, where eight of these bandits were already killed as clashes escalated.

The Joint Task Force Central under Brig. Gen. Cirilito Sobejana said the AFP is now gaining advantage over the BIFF in Central Mindanao in the past two days as fighting went on in Maguindanao.

Four of the fatalities were killed in an encounter with troops from the Army's 40th Infantry Battalion in Barangay Pidsandawan, Mamapasano town, on Wednesday morning.

The soldiers were on their way to the village to check on the presence of gunmen, reportedly led by BIFF senior commander Nanding Mama, when the bandits opened fire at them.

Four of Mama's followers--identified as Usop, Banding, Kamensa and Udtog--were killed in the encounter that lasted two hours.

Local leaders reported that four other bandits identified only as Sarip, Munda, Norodin and Faisal were wounded in the firefight.

Soldiers seized several firearms and improvised explosive devices (IEDs) believed left behind by the bandits.

On Tuesday, four suspected BIFF bandits--Ali Tudon, Alamid Yusop, Kalon Benzar and Murshid--were also killed in an encounter with a joint Army and police forces in Datu Paglas town.

Two soldiers and a militiaman

were wounded in the firefight with the bandits, who reportedly tried to take control of the town.

The encounter broke out as the military and the police were responding to a report about a group of gunmen led by BIFF leader Abu Solaiman in Barangay Poblacion.

Army Corporal Millard Bacatan and militiaman Musa Kalim were injured when a 40mm grenade projectile exploded near them during the firefight in Sitio Mupak.

Private Allan James Cabildo sustained a bullet wound in the lower torso as he and his companions were advancing toward the enemy position.

Soldiers from the Army's 33rd Infantry Battalion (33rd IB) and Special Action Force commandos from the Sultan Kudarat and Maguindanao provincial police launched the offensive after local officials failed to convince the bandits to leave the town.

Solaiman and his followers retreated toward the border of Datu Paglas and General Pandatun towns, bringing with them their wounded comrades, identified as Odin, Guiday and Kalid.

Lt. Col. Harold Cabunoc and his men from the 33rd IB recovered improvised explosive devices planted along the road leading to where Solaiman's group was spotted a day before.

The clashes started on Sunday with a military offensive meant to drive away a group of BIFF bandits spotted in Barangay Pamanlian in the town of Shariff Saydona Mustapha.

**JULMUNIR I. JANNARAL**

## BIFF commander, 12 men die in 5-day CenMin FMO

A COMMANDER of the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF) and 12 of his men were killed in a five-day focused military operations (FMO) in Central Mindanao against the ISIS-inspired terrorists.

Lt Gerry Besana, spokesperson of AFP-Western Mindanao Command said that on the fifth day of the operation, the terrorists ambushed the troops belonging to 2nd Mechanized Battalion of Philippine Army while conducting zoning operation yesterday morning in Dapiawan Elementary School in Bgy. Dapiawan, DSA, Maguindanao.

The incident triggered an encounter, killing Commander Marrox, Brigade Commander of Karaitan BIFF faction, and a known bomber and one of the suspects in the killing of SAF 44 in Marasapano.

He also led the ambush of troops from the 40th IB last year.

Marrox also led in sowing terror in Aguak, Pagatin, Datu Saudi, Mamasapano and Datu Salibo or SPMS box.

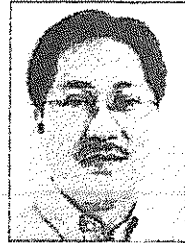
On the government forces, 14 soldiers were wounded and two others killed.

Zaida delos Reyes



GOTCHA

JARIUS BONDOC



Make West Philippine Sea a peace park – earth lawyer

China is destroying Philippine coral reefs, a world-renowned Filipino environment lawyer laments. Spawning grounds for the world's fish need saving. The powerful neighbor must answer for the ruin, says UN-honored Counselor-at-Environmental Law Tony Oposa. Too, Manila can head a global movement to make disputed South China Sea an Asian Marine Peace Park. It can start by declaring the West Philippine Sea portion of the SCS a Philippine Peace Park.

Oposa, a champion of water conservation and cleanup, proposed the marine park in a letter this week to President Rody Duterte. His plea comes amid reports of China's fishing militia crushing corals in food-rich Scarborough Shoal off Luzon. Also, of China's Coast Guard seizing Filipino fishermen's catch outside the 150-square-kilometer zone. In 2013 China concreted seven Philippine reefs into island-fortresses. A UN court ruled that China marred marine ecosystems and escalated tensions.

Oposa had won a Supreme Court case to compel national agencies, cities, and barangays to un-pollute Manila Bay. In his letter, sent through presidential spokesman Harry Roque, he warns Duterte against China's "money trap." Excerpts:

"Tinahod nga Nong Digong, amahan sa atong nasod (Respected Elder, Father of the Nation), maayong buntag (good day).

"I write as an ordinary citizen, perhaps speaking also for many others, to congratulate you and say daghang salamat for your strong political will. It took guts to finally clean up that un-flushed toilet bowl called Boracay.

"On behalf of other concerned citizens, I thank you for declaring 50,000 hectares of the Philippine (aka Benham) Rise a marine protected area. Mabuhay ka, Nong Digong.

"May your tribe increase among Filipino mayors. By the way, there is a law requiring that at least 15 percent of seawaters of every coastal town or city must be devoted as fish sanctuary (itloganan sa isda). But like many Philippine laws, it languishes in the sickbed of non-compliance.

"The example you set in the Philippine Rise may well spark positive energy to save Philippine Seas.

"Your handling of the Marawi Crisis also tested your leadership. You handled it well. Dakong pasalamat sa katauhan. (A big thank you from the people).

"Please Take Care. Mr. President, a word of advice to the wise. The government of China will not invade us and take us by force. That is too messy. And too costly.

"China is buying us. That is much easier. And cheaper. Considering how cheap our politicians are, the government of China will soon hold our country's levers of power. And we will be in their very deep debt, having mortgaged to them the heart and soul of our nation.

"For China the global game of politics is played by power of profit. Money is their only god. It may be the only cultural value left in them after the Cultural Revolution uprooted China's great culture.

"Making friends with our neighbors is good policy, especially with powerful ones.

"Beware of Gifts. But our sucking

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up to China is too much. We seem to be mortgaging our national and natural treasures. We are going into deathly debts – debts that we and future generations of Filipinos will have to pay one day, and pay very dearly. We are selling the very soul of our beloved Filipinas – *akong pinang-ga* (Philippines, my love). To many it looks like we are not even selling ourselves. We are being given away for free. Thrown in as added benefit is the favorite Filipino salted fish paste, *bagoong* in Tagalog, *ginamos* in Bisaya.

"Mr. President, China comes with many gifts, including loans with high interest and crushing conditions. Many things come from China, the world's factory.

"By the way, from where does much of the Philippine supply of *shabu* come?

"Please be careful with China, Mayor Duterte. By stroke of luck you now hold power ... for the next four years. During your watch, you can make a difference. What kind of difference will that be? For Boracay, Philippine Rise, etc., it is a good and positive difference.

"But this policy of appeasement and heavy indebtedness to China must be thought through one hundred times one hundred.

"These seeming gifts have a hidden rope. That rope will lasso our country's neck in crushing debt. The experience of Africa and Sri Lanka is your Exhibit A. Please take a moment to seek the advice of international relations specialists – including International Law expert Harry Roque. From them you will see what is happening to the countries that fell for China's Money Trap.

"*Hinay-hinay* (Take it easy), *Senyor Presidente*. We will not only be strangled by China, they will even spit on us.

"*Coral Reef Destruction*. The destruction of our coral reefs by the Chinese government is unacceptable. There must be a way to hold them to account for this destruction. We have no quarrel with the people of China, where we have many friends. We may have different eyes and tongues, but we all belong to the human family. The problem is with their government.

"As a win-win proposition, may we respectfully suggest that the Philippines spark a global movement to declare the disputed South China Sea the Asian Marine Peace Park. We can begin by declaring the West Philippine Sea as the Philippine Peace Park. Scientific studies show that this area is the breeding ground for fish throughout the world (*itloganan sa isda ... para sa tibook kalibotan*).

"Again, Mr. President, *dakong pahalipay ug palakpakan* (congratulations and applause) for your political will in Boracay and Philippine Rise. *Mabuhay ka.*

"(Signed), Antonio A. Oposa Jr., Filipino

"Copy furnished: Secretary of Finance Carlos Dominguez, Secretary of Foreign Affairs Alan Cayetano."

\* \* \*  
Catch *Sapol* radio show, Saturdays, 8-10 a.m., DWIZ (882-AM).

*Gotcha* archives on Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/pages/Larius-Bondoc/1376602159218459>, or The STAR website <https://beta.philstar.com/columns/134276/gotcha>

★

PUNCHLINE

# Stronger Air Force, country; Federal Constitution in — DU30



By FRED M. LOBO

**P**RESIDENT Duterte has announced a ₱139-billion upgrade for the Philippine Air Force (PAF) to improve air assets and ensure a stronger and safer country.

Time for better planes, helicopters, and wider air patrol of Philippine territory.

\*\*\*

President Duterte's designated Consultative Committee (Con-Com) has approved the draft Federal Constitution which seeks to create 18 federated regions in the country.

Powers and resources to be distributed among them. And no more Imperial Manila.

\*\*\*

Speaking at the 71st anniversary of the Philippine Air Force (PAF), Duterte said air defense surveillance radars, utility aircraft and unmanned aerial vehicles have been acquired to augment existing air assets this year.

Additional air equipment and modern machinery welcomed.

\*\*\*

"We will continue to face challenges as we realize our shared vision of a stronger and safer Philippines. It is therefore vital to innovate and invest in strategies and technologies that will allow our forces to perform their duties safely and effectively," Duterte stressed.

Yes to a better-performing Air Force.

\*\*\*

"In order to further develop a modern, adequately equipped border security force, the government is currently

working on the implementation of the Second Horizon of the Revised AFP Modernization Program by 2022 with 16 projects for the Philippine Air Force worth over ₱139 billion already in the pipeline," the President added.

Time for better equipment and effective border patrol.

\*\*\*

Duterte recognized the PAF men and women for their service, sacrifice and commitment to safeguard the nation and defend Philippine sovereignty and territory.

Time to honor PAF's unsung heroes.

\*\*\*

The President specifically commended the Air Force for their contributions to territorial defense, counter-terrorism and internal security, international defense and security engagement as well as humanitarian assistance and disaster operations.

"We have proven that with unity, cooperation and a determined spirit, we can make our nation strong and our defense impregnable," he said.

\*\*\*

Duterte cited the military's collaborative efforts in reclaiming Marawi City from the clutches of terror groups and bringing order and stability in the country.

"Be assured that we will remain steadfast in supporting the Philippine Air Force as we implement the necessary reforms that will enable you to become effective agents of genuine and lasting peace," he assured.

\*\*\*

Meanwhile, the 22-member Consultative Committee voted to unani-

mously approve the draft Federal Constitution at the Philippine International Convention Center (PICC) in Pasay City.

The draft has 21 articles compared to only 18 in the 1987 Constitution.

\*\*\*

The body, which worked over four months, said they will submit the draft to President Duterte on or before July 9, in time for his State of the Nation Address (SONA) on July 23.

Expect federalism to reverberate in DU30's SONA and thereafter prior to people's ratification.

\*\*\*

Under the proposal, the federal republic would be comprised of separate regions for the Bangsamoro and the Cordillera, the 15 other administrative regions in the current set-up, and additional Negrosanon federated region.

To ensure least disruptive transition, Con-Com said it decided to stick with current regional configuration.

\*\*\*

With the exception of the Bangsamoro and Cordillera federated regions (which will have different structures and additional powers), the other 16 regions will be headed by a regional governor and a deputy regional governor, to be elected by a regional legislative assembly.

Half of the regional legislative assembly members will be elected as representatives of component provinces, and independently chartered or highly urbanized cities, while the remaining half will be filled by representatives of political parties who obtain a certain number of votes during the regional elections.

# Useless move



**FRONTLINE**  
Ninez Cacho-Olivares

**H**e floats the ouster move scenario, then denies it.

This is why Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) founder, aging Joma Sison, is no longer credible among his own communist groups, armed and aboveground.

Reacting to President Duterte's statement of postponing peace talks, Sison said in a TV interview the commies no longer want peace talks and will instead join up with several movements planning to

oust Duterte.

The other day, the spokesman for the Philippine military force confirmed the ouster threat of communist rebels is real, and this is based on documents obtained from surrendered members of the New People's Army (NPA).

Yesterday, Sison denied such a plan, saying it is not true the CPP has a three-year plan to oust Duterte, from 2016 to October 2018, while pointing to the chiefs of Defense, Interior government, and the National Security Adviser as having "misrepresented the three-year plan of the CPP Central Committee to strengthen the CPP ideologically, politically and organizationally."

Sison slammed these officials, saying "the so-called October ouster plan of the CPP, NPA and NDFP is a mere fabrication of Duterte and his militarist adjutants to carry out a fascist coup against the 1987 Constitution under the guise of pushing charter change for federalism." He also accused them of "using the commies and their armed fighters as scapegoats for imposing martial law nationwide and anti-terrorism to suppress all critics, opponents and the broad masses of the people who oppose and fight Duterte's reign of greed and terror."

Sison is truly out of step with the times and the majority of Filipinos, but that's what he gets for saying the CPP is now moving together with the critics of Duterte, such as the Catholic bishops and the Evangelicals and the usual yellows who have been salivating for a power grab while bringing up the martial law bogey again.

This really makes one wonder: are they afraid of martial law or is it a question of bringing up the public fear of martial law to egg Duterte into declaring martial law nationwide?

It is more likely these critics of Duterte want him to declare martial law nationwide since they are into reliving the Marcos martial law years. The communists, the clergy, the religious, the student activists, the "mosquito media" were those who all got together to oust Marcos and his government. They seem to believe a declaration of martial

law nationwide will get the Filipinos angry and ready to join ouster moves.

What the commies, being out of touch with reality—as they still dream of the return of the old Marcos days, when Sison and his commies gained in popularity and strength, with even innocents led to slaughter by Sison—don't get is the Duterte martial law is much too benign for anyone who is not member of a rebel force to fear.

*"Sison is truly out of step with the times and the majority of Filipinos."*

Freedoms certainly have not been lost. There is no censorship in the media. Filipinos are free to travel. Protests are not being stopped by the authorities. What, then, are the critics crabbing about and injecting the martial law scenario when this no longer works under the Duterte government?

The military today appears to be credible when it discloses the commies have a plan to oust Duterte by October.

But even without that disclosure by the military, it was getting pretty clear what they want — the usual out of power and influence destabilizers, such as the highly political bishops and their priests; nuns who might as well shed their habit as they seem to do nothing but engage in political ousters of duly elected leaders though constant protests, criticisms, false accusations; the yellows; its crooks who fear being charged and detained for their crimes with their Ombudsman protector gone; the student activists whose brains are being dulled as they prefer to concentrate on their protests against government instead of their studies and more.

DOH

But if these groups think that Duterte can be ousted by October, they will be very

**P8.5-B**  
**BHS**

disappointed because despite Sison's claim there are elements in the military and police forces that are disgruntled, these so-called forces are evidently allied with the red, white and yellow groups. But they are hardly a force.

**P3.5-B**  
**DENGVAXIA**  
**IMMUNIZATION**  
**DRIVE**

They should remember what happened to the military rebel leader, Antonio Trillanes, and the Magdalo partylister Gary Alejano, who believed they could topple then President Gloria Arroyo. So who in the military and even his claimed supporters followed him?

These Reds, Yellows and Whites and their anti-Duterte media, otherwise known as the yellow media, really should try another tack, like getting their candidates elected the democratic way, else, charges and detention await them.

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# Cease talks



THE Philippine government is going to cease talking peace with the Communist Party of the Philippines of Jose Ma. Sison.

The Armed Forces of the Philippines got the word from President Rodrigo Duterte that talking with the CPP/National Democratic Front is useless, adding that local government units would just deal with the insurgency problem and the New People's Army. The move, according to those following the on-and-off negotiations in the Norwegian capital of Oslo, were heading nowhere.

President Duterte has urged CPP leader Joma Sison to come home and hold the talks in Manila with the promise of safe passage and conduct while here with his peace panel. Sison rejected the offer leaving the President no choice but to scuttle the talks.

A recent survey showed that 90 percent of Filipinos were in favor of scrapping the talks with the Reds who with their armed wing, the NPA, are now engaged in extortion of businesses in rural areas, robbery and kidnapping for ransom.

"It's just a waste of money every time the government sends its team to Oslo," said the President. Recall that

Joma Sison came home for the peace talks in 1986 when then-President Cory Aquino ascended to power after the fall of Ferdinand Marcos. But the talks with the late Rep. Ramon Mitra as head of the government panel failed and Sison immediately left for his exile in Utrecht, the Netherlands.

In a statement issued in Utrecht, Sison said that despite Duterte's avowed independent foreign policy, he continues a neo-colonialism path to perpetuate Philippine dependence on the United States.

A meeting between Trump and Duterte is being set up sometime this year. This was according to US Ambassador Kim Sung who made the statement during the Fourth of July celebrations at the US embassy in Manila. Trump and Duterte met at the sidelines of the Association of Southeast

Asian Nations summit in Manila last November.

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Meanwhile, in the wake of a series of killings that included three priests, Tanauan, Batangas Mayor Antonio Halili and General Tinio, Nueva Ecija Mayor Ferdinand Botc, the League of Provincial Mayors requested a dialogue with President Duterte. Fearing for their lives, the mayors are seeking protection from the executive branch.

In the Senate, Senator Panfilo Lacson called on the government for tougher gun control following the high-profile

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## Palace eyes 'localized' peace talks with Reds

07:29 PM July 05, 2018

The government is eyeing localized peace talks, Malacañang said on Thursday after the resumption of talks with the communist rebels was postponed.

"Ang alternatibo na pupuwedeng ipatupad ng gobyerno ay iyong localized peace talks,"

Presidential Spokesperson Harry Roque said in a Palace briefing.

Roque, however, said the localized peace talks should not concede any aspect of governance.

"There will be a meeting of this Cabinet cluster on July 12 to finalize the guidelines for localized peace talks," he said.

The Palace official said the prospect of localized peace talks has been luring in surrenderers from the communists.

"I know that local government officials have been conducting localized peace talks resulting in surrenders, that's why bulk of the surrenderers that we have particularly in the Davao Region, is a result of negotiations between the fighters themselves and the local government units," he said.

### Criticizing Joma

Meanwhile, Roque criticized exiled communist leader Jose Ma. Sison and called him "irrelevant" now that the peace talks were suspended.

"I'm not under compulsion to comment on anything Joma says. Now that peace talks are not being held, he's completely irrelevant as far as I'm concerned," Roque said.

"Joma Sison can say anything he wants, that's his opinion; he's even living ten thousand miles away. So I don't see how he can even be relevant," he added.

### Command conference

The issue on the peace talks, Roque said, were discussed during the joint command conference of the Armed Forces of the Philippines and the Philippine National Police.

During the conference, Roque said Duterte was not closing its doors on the resumption of peace talks but insisted that the conditions imposed by President remain.

Duterte had earlier postponed the resumption of peace talks scheduled in June. — **Carol Balita, INQUIRER.net Intern**

## **Army lieutenant, 13 BIFF killed in Maguindanao clash**

By: Edwin O. Fernandez - @inquirerdotnet

Inquirer Mindanao / 06:36 PM July 05, 2018

CAMP SIONGCO, MAGUINDANAO — An Army lieutenant and a senior leader of IS-linked Moro rebel group were killed in clashes Wednesday in Maguindanao province, raising the death toll to 21 rebels and two soldiers since fighting erupted on Sunday.

2Lt. Junibert Zunio of the 40th Infantry Battalion, died from bullet wounds after his platoon engaged about 15 heavily armed Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF) in Barangay Pidsandawan, Mamasapano town, Maguindanao.

A soldier was also killed on Monday in clashes in Datu Saudi Ampatuan town.

Zunio led soldiers from the 40th IB in blocking BIFF fighters fleeing from Army offensives in Datu Shariff Saydona, also in Maguindanao.

About 13 BIFF rebels were also killed in the clash, including its sub-leader identified as Mah Nanding alias Commander Marrox, who was believed to be involved in the murder of Special Action Force soldiers now known as SAF 44 in 2015.

“The number of BIFF killed was based on two-way radio conversations we intercepted from enemy side and from civilians and local officials,” Capt. Arvin John Encinas, spokesperson of the 6th Infantry Division, said in a radio interview.

Encinas said ground troops recovered from the Pidsandawan encounter one dead BIFF rebel and 14 firearms that include four M-16 Armalite rifles, three M-14 rifles, two carbines, one Garand rifle, one Ultimax and three 12-gauge shotguns.

Citing reports from the field, Encinas said body parts litter the encounter site and could be those from slain BIFF rebels whose remains were carried by fleeing bandits.

He said 15 other Army troops were wounded so far in the gun battles.

On Wednesday, four roadside improvised bombs were found and disarmed by Army bomb experts in the boundary of Barangay Sepaka, Datu Paglas, and Barangay Pidsandawan, Mamasapano, as government troops were conducting clearing operations.



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### **3 suspected rebels slain in Camarines Norte clash**

**By: Mar S. Arguelles, Stephanie Florida - @inquirerdotnet**

Inquirer Southern Luzon / 10:52 AM July 05, 2018

IRIGA CITY – Three suspected members of the New People’s Army (NPA) were killed in a firefight with government soldiers in Jose Panganiban town in Camarines Norte province Thursday morning, the military said.

Capt. Joash Pramis, spokesperson of the Army’s 9th Infantry Division, said soldiers were on patrol at 6:30 a.m. when they engaged in a fierce firefight with an undetermined number of communist rebels at Sitio (sub-village) Banasi, Barangay (village) Sta Cruz.

The firefight lasted for almost an hour and led to the killings of the three still unidentified rebels and the recovery of two M16, AK47 and M14 rifles, a grenade launcher and two improvised explosive devices, Pramis said. No one was hurt on the government’s side.

Army troops were pursuing the other rebels who escaped after the clash, Pramis said.

### **Army officer dead in gunfight with BIFF in Maguindanao**

**By: Jeoffrey Maitem - @inquirerdotnet**

Inquirer Mindanao / 10:45 AM July 05, 2018

GENERAL SANTOS CITY — A junior officer of the 40th Infantry Battalion conducting a clearing operation in a remote village of Mamasapano on Thursday was killed in an ensuing firefight with a militant Moro group linked to the Islamic State, a senior military official said.

Captain Arvin Encinas, spokesperson for the Army’s 6th Division, said he could not yet disclose the identity of the slain soldier as they still had to inform the family.

He told the Inquirer the junior officer was among the soldiers conducting a clearing operation in the village when they ran into members of the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF).

Encinas said a separate fighting erupted around 7 a.m. in the village of Dapiawan in the nearby town of Datu Saudi Ampatuan, also in Maguindanao province, though there was no reported casualty from either side.

The military assaults against BIFF guerrillas began during the weekend, supposedly targeting BIFF leader Abu Turaibe, whose faction had pledged allegiance to the IS.

But Turaibe was believed to have escaped again.

## **Gov't wants NPA rebels 'encamped' in fixed areas for peace talks**

Associated Press / 10:45 AM July 05, 2018

MANILA, Philippines — The Philippine government will demand that peace talks with communist rebels shift from Europe to the Philippines and insurgents encamped in designated areas during the negotiations to peacefully settle one of Asia's longest-raging insurgencies.

Presidential adviser Jesus Dureza said Thursday that New People's Army (NPA) guerrillas would also be asked to stop collecting so-called "revolutionary tax" from companies and demanding to be part of a future coalition government.

President Rodrigo Duterte's conditions were finalized in a meeting with top military and police officials late Wednesday. They're seen as likely to be rejected by the guerrillas, who fear that holding talks in Manila would expose them — including their Europe-exiled leaders — to military surveillance and harassment.

The low-level, rural-based rebellion, which has raged since 1969, has left about 40,000 combatants and civilians dead, hampered security and economic development in the impoverished countryside for nearly half a century. The military estimates that about 3,900 Marxist insurgents continue to wage the insurgency.

"The doors for the resumption of peace talks ... are still open," Dureza said in a statement.

Dureza said the president still wishes Norway to continue brokering the broader talks, but added that "in the meantime, localized peace arrangements may be pursued by the local government units with the insurgents."

When he took power in 2016, Duterte resumed peace talks with the rebels but canceled them last year to protest continued guerrilla attacks on troops. He also signed an order declaring the rebel group a terrorist organization, a label the insurgents have opposed. The United States has also designated the rebels as terrorists.

After preliminary talks, both sides agreed to a new temporary cease-fire on June 21, with peace talks to resume a few days later in Norway, which has been brokering the decades-long negotiations. But Duterte delayed the resumption indefinitely to allow public consultations, antagonizing the communist rebels.

Last week, communist rebel leader Jose Maria Sison, who founded the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) and is based in the Netherlands, said the insurgents can no longer hold peace talks with Duterte's administration and that it is better to help oust him and negotiate with his successor. Other rebels, however, said that Sison's recommendation would still have to be approved by other communist leaders.

Mr. Duterte shrugged off Sison's threat and said he was ready to continue fighting the insurgents.

"If they're not willing to talk to me, that's fine. I have no problem so we continue with the war. Anyway, we've been there for 50 years," Duterte told reporters. /kga