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NEWS CLIPPINGS

18 July 2018

Wednesday



Honor. Patriotism. Duty

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Honor. Patriotism. Duty

People's initiative eyed for 2019 'no-el'

No re-election for Duterte

People's

By JESS DIAZ
and DELON PORCALLA

If the Senate will not agree to postpone next year's elections, Speaker Pantaleon Alvarez and his allies may initiate a people's initiative so voters can directly propose a constitutional amendment that will stop the 2019 polls.

In a radio interview, Alvarez said he hoped senators and congressmen could agree on scrapping the midterm elections in May next year to give lawmakers more time to work on the proposed constitution that would pave the way for a federal system of government.

If not, he said citizens supporting federalism may resort to the people's initiative mode of proposing a charter amendment to postpone the elections.

"That can be done, we have already studied that alternative,"

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he said.

He had announced his preference for the cancellation of the midterm elections in 2019 so Congress could focus on the proposed federal Constitution.

Senate President Vicente Sotto III initially agreed that lawmakers could constitutionally approve a law on postponement, but later changed his statement when Sen. Francis Escudero warned him that delaying the balloting beyond May next year could violate the Constitution.

Opposition congressmen have said President Duterte's senator-allies ousted Aquilino Pimentel III as Senate president and replaced him with Sotto because the latter was agreeable to a 2019 "no-elections" scenario, while Pimentel was against it.

Under the Constitution, a people's initiative is the third mode of proposing Charter change. There is a law on how to conduct such initiative, which requires a minimum number of voter-petitioners in every legislative district whose identities and signatures would have to be verified by the Commission on Elections.

During the Arroyo administration, a supporter of then president Gloria Macapagal Arroyo, lawyer Raul Lambino, launched an initiative to usher in a parliamentary system of government. The effort was later abandoned.

Still an Arroyo ally, Lambino now heads the Cagayan Economic Zone Authority based in Sta. Ana, Cagayan. He is one of several Arroyo allies appointed by President Duterte to juicy government posts.

In his radio interview, Alvarez insisted on no-el in 2019. "If we really want to amend the Constitution, this (no-el) is the most practical way of doing it to achieve our goal. We must have focus to allow extensive debate and deliberations and ensure that we would have a good draft of the proposed

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new constitution," he said.

He expressed doubt Congress would have the time to draft a new charter if next year's polls were not postponed.

He said lawmakers would be saddled with work after the opening of their third and last regular session next Monday, since they would be deliberating on the proposed national budget for 2019 and other measures, and would be filing their certificates of candidacy for next year's elections in October. He all cited congressional breaks on Ali Souls' Day and Christmas as well as the start of the campaign period in February or March.

Moreover, some lawmakers have voiced the need for a more vigorous information drive on federalism.

"The survey will serve as a challenge for us to continue intensifying the information drive about federalism that is key for progress in the countryside," House Deputy Speaker Raneo Abu (Batangas) said.

Fellow Deputy Speaker Gwen Garcia agreed. "Perhaps it is really a challenge to the House leadership to now disseminate as far and as much as possible, as much public information and public education in regards to this shift to a federal form of government." Parañaque Rep. Gus Tambunting believes it is now the "job of the consultative committee and Congress to frame the issues correctly, to provide avenues for discourse so that the people can make an informed choice."

Camarines Sur Rep. LRay Vilafuerte also said the public should be educated about the issue.

"Local executives can kick off the information drive. Federalism is best for the country as the government is already familiar with this setup and can easily identify which areas require improvements," the former three-time governor stressed.

"The information campaign on federalism should be intensified further so that the government would have enough time to educate the people about how this progressive form of government would be most beneficial for them," the Bicolano lawmaker said.

Who will benefit

The Senate, for its part, started scrutinizing the proposed federal constitution drafted by the Concom.

The Senate committee on constitutional amendments resumed its hearings yesterday into various Charter change proposals.

Also pending in the committee, chaired by Sen. Francis Pangilinan, are three other measures—a proposed Senate joint resolution calling for amendments to the economic provisions of the 1987 Constitution; a proposed Resolution of Both Houses calling for a constitutional convention to proposed amendments to the Constitution; a resolution calling on the Senate to convene into a constituent assembly; and an approved House resolution also calling on both chambers of Congress to convene into a constituent assembly.

"Is there really a public clamor for Charter change? If so, where is the evidence? Is federalism the only way to bring more development to the provinces?" Pangilinan asked at the start of the hearing.

"Why is Charter change being pushed? Who will benefit from this? Is term extension and no elections part of the agenda behind Charter change? Who will benefit from it the most?" he remarked.

The senators found issues in the Concom draft, including on division of powers between the national government and the proposed regional governments.

Sen. Paolo Benigno Aquino IV asked retired chief justice Renato Puno, chairman of the Concom, whether the body discussed the scenario where only one chamber of Congress can start the process of amend-

ing the Constitution.

Puno replied that under the Concom's draft, the voting of the Senate and the House of Representatives should vote separately if the two chambers will convene into a constituent assembly.

Some House leaders earlier said the chamber can push through with proposed amendment even without the Senate.

Sen. Sonny Angara, for his part, questioned the apparent inconsistency in the draft constitution, which disallowed any alteration of the proposed federal system but at the same time allows the government to form or abolish federal regions.

Angara also questioned possible ambiguities of the tax provisions of the draft constitution.

Rosario Manasan of the Philippine Institute of Development Studies said having a federal system does not mean the government will be decentralized with the regions having more powers, citing the cases of Canada, Germany, Indonesia and Malaysia, which all have federal governments.

Manasan also warned setting up a federal system will cost an additional P55 billion as the Concom proposes additional supreme courts, regional legislatures, higher number of senators and congressmen and many new offices.

"It (cost) will have to come from the pockets of taxpayers," Manasan said.

She said the amount would go to the salaries of regional governors and vice governors, additional senators per region, additional members of the judiciary and their staff, as well as operating expense of their offices.

In the same hearing, University of the Philippines political science professor Gene Lacza Pilapil described the draft constitution as "twin horrors" and a "reverse power-grab."

He said the Concom proposal would effectively remove Vice President Leni Robredo from office after its transitory provisions reflected President Duterte's request to cut short

factors overriding any institutional design logic," Pilapil said.

Real motive

For militant lawmakers, the rush to establish a federal government through Charter change could be a ploy by some incumbent officials to have their term extended and facilitate the opening of the economy to foreign control.

"We are warning those pushing for self-serving Charter change: the message is very clear - better stop it now, or face the peoples' wrath. The bold writings are very clear on the wall: a majority of our people are opposed to Charter change and this is bound to grow as more of its provisions are exposed as anti-people and will only further the self-serving interests of the present elitist system," Bayan Muna Rep. Carlos Zarate said yesterday.

He said Cha-cha also aims to open the economy "to foreign control and plunder."

He vowed that he and his militant colleagues would "expose the vested interests behind this Cha-cha."

Recent Social Weather Stations (SWS) survey showed 67 percent of Filipinos opposed to Cha-cha and the proposed shift to a federal system of government.

Zarate's militant colleagues Antonio Tinio and France Castro of Alliance of Concerned Teachers said the administration should expect more Filipinos to go against Cha-cha.

"As we expose more of the vested interests behind this Cha-cha, the Duterte administration should expect more Filipinos to oppose it and the federal system of government," they said in a joint statement.

"The ordinary Filipino does not want this shift to a federal system of government. The Filipino people need land, job security, low prices of basic goods and services, and higher wages, policies that the draft constitution fail to provide," they added.

In particular, Tinio and Castro criticized a provision in the envisioned federal charter that they said would allow foreigners to practice their profession in the country.

"Opening the practice of profession to foreigners will not only throw out Filipino professionals, it will also lead to worse deregulation in the af-

fect industries and establishments, and increase the cost of their services to the Filipino people, especially basic social services like health and education," they said.

Protect Filipino jobs

They said the Constitution should "protect Filipino professionals like nurses, doctors, lawyers, teachers, engineers, and architects and many others for the development and advancement of our society."

"We must all oppose the proposed Charter change and federal system of government of the Duterte administration. It affects the poor, the professionals, workers, and farmers and will only benefit the politicians and the ruling elite," they added.

Amid concerns over lawmakers' true motive for vigorously pushing for Charter change, the consultative committee (Concom) tasked to review the 1987 Constitution has formally included a provision in the draft federal constitution effectively prohibiting President Duterte from seeking reelection in the May 2022 polls.

The prohibition is contained in Article XXII Section 2.

The proposed charter also stated that Duterte and Vice President Leni Robredo will have to vacate their posts on June 30, 2022. The elections under the new charter will be held on the second Monday of May 2022.

The President will call for the election of a transition president and vice president within six months from ratification of a new charter.

Presidential spokesman Harry Roque Jr. said this reinforces the President's statement that he is not interested in extending his term.

"We thank the consultative committee for accommodating the President's request to provide for an elected transition president," Roque said.

Concom spokesman Ding Generoso, meanwhile, announced yesterday the release of the "official final copy" of a federal charter and declared that "all other copies in circulation, electronic or printed, official or not, are superseded by this copy." Supposed final copies of the draft charter appeared online days before the Concom presented the document to Duterte. -With Robertzon Ramirez, Christina Mendez, Paolo Romero

his and her term in the event the draft is ratified in a plebiscite next year.

"These are twin horrors in constitutional engineering and are classic cases of brute political

DRAFT CHARTER CUTS TERMS OF DU30, LENI

By Dona Z. Pazzibugan
@dpazzibuganINQ

President Duterte's and Vice President Leni Robredo's terms would not only be cut but they would also be barred from seeking reelection under the pro-

posed federal Constitution.

According to the revised draft of the proposed Charter released on Tuesday, Mr. Duterte has to call elections for a "transition president" and a "transition vice president" within six months of the peo-

ple's ratification of the new Constitution in a plebiscite.

The revision to the transitory provisions of the so-called Bayanihan Constitution drawn up by Malacañang's consultative committee states that Mr. Duterte's and Robredo's term

will not be extended beyond June 30, 2022, and that they cannot seek reelection in the May 2022 elections.

The 22-member committee headed by former Chief Justice Reynato Puno revised the transitory provisions on Mr. Du-

terte's request.

Last week, Mr. Duterte asked the Puno committee to cut his term and provide for the election of transitional leaders who will oversee the shift to federalism during the next four years, or up to 2022.

Mr. Duterte endorsed the original draft submitted by the committee on July 9, but said, according to presidential spokesperson Harry Roque he wanted to step down before the end of his term, because he was old and tired.

FROM A1

On Tuesday, Malacañang thanked the Puno committee for accommodating the President's request.

Roque said the revision should not to rest speculation that Mr. Duterte had ulterior motives in pushing for federalism.

"We thank the consultative committee for accommodating the President's request to provide for an elected transition president," Roque said in a statement.

"This should allay all fears that the President has other motives for wanting to shift to a federal form of government," he added.

According to the new draft

the transitional president and vice president, who have to be elected together, would serve the remainder of Mr. Duterte's and Robredo's terms until June 30, 2022.

The revision, however, does not bar Mr. Duterte and Robredo from running as transitional leaders.

Transitional body

"The Vice President may run if she wishes to, but not the incumbent President," consultative commission spokesperson Conrado Generoso told reporters on Tuesday, ahead of the commission's appearance in a Senate public hearing.

The transitional president would chair the proposed Federal Transition Commission.

which would formulate the plan and promulgate all orders for the establishment of a federal government and the governments of the federated regions by 2022.

The transitional president will appoint 10 regular members, while the transitional vice president, Senate president, House speaker and the country's past presidents will be ex-officio members.

During the transition, all government officials under the 1987 Constitution will "continue to hold office unless removed by reason of reorganization."

Permanent government employees who are terminated as a result of the restructuring will be given separation or retirement pay or considered for

transfer to other government posts.

Temporary government employees are not guaranteed transfer or separation pay since the proposed Constitution merely says they will "be given such benefits as may be provided in the transition plan."

The Puno committee has proposed to transform the present 17 regions and the defunct Negros island region into federated regions, despite recommendations for only eight to 12 federated regions so these would be economically viable.

Federal capital

The National Capital Region, where government decision-making powers and economic activity have been centralized,

would be a federated region.

Generoso earlier said another body should do a "deeper and more comprehensive study" of the financial side of the shift to federalism because the Bureau of Internal Revenue provided only estimates of the possible revenues for each of the 16 regions.

The committee has proposed giving a bigger share of the national revenue, which reached around P3 trillion last year, to the federated regions.

In its proposed power-sharing and revenue-sharing setup, the committee estimated that each region will control an average P60 billion in revenue.

The bulk of the national revenue, however, will go to the federal government. — WITH A REPORT FROM JULIE M. AURELIO (INQ)

Rody: Not yet time to raise SCS with China

By ALEXIS ROMERO and CHRISTINA MENDEZ

It's not yet time to discuss the country's maritime dispute with China, President Duterte said yesterday as he stressed he would rather allow the Asian giant "sufficient period to sort things out" first.

He said he is counting on Beijing's fairness and that Filipinos would eventually recognize China as a "good neighbor."

Duterte has been drawing flak for copying up to China despite the latter's provocative activities in the West Philippine Sea including its building of island fortresses and harassment of Filipino fishermen.

He has also refused to pressure China into complying with a ruling of an international arbitral tribunal invali-

dating Beijing's vast maritime claim and reaffirming Manila's maritime entitlements.

"I'm sure that in the end, China will be fair and the equity will be distributed," the President said in remarks at the Maestranza in Intramuros where he led the groundbreaking for the China-funded Binondo-Intramuros bridge yesterday. Another Chinese-funded bridge project, the Estrella-Fantaleon bridge, will connect Makati and Mandaluyong.

"I cannot talk about - well, elaborate these things now. They are in the blueprint. But in the days to come, we would realize that China after all is really a good neighbor," he added.

"We have promised to deal with the problem from the President himself. President

Xi of the People's Republic of China, that we will discuss this at some other time, as China has to deal with individually bilateral relations and issues," he said.

Duterte's pronouncement came on the heels of a Social Weather Stations (SWS) survey showing eight of 10 Filipinos expressing belief the government should not just let China expand its presence in the West Philippine Sea.

In his remarks, Duterte said the two countries are talking about a "concerted effort" to "develop" but did not elaborate. The President previously said he was open to a joint exploration with China in the South China Sea, even suggesting that the two countries adopt a "60-40" sharing deal.

China claims about 90 percent of the South China Sea

President Duterte leads the groundbreaking ceremony of the Two China Aid and Bridge Project in Intramuros, Manila yesterday. Among those with him are (from left) Public Works Secretary Mark Villar, Executive Secretary Salvador Medialdea and Chinese Ambassador Zhao Jianhua. AP/ROSALES

The Philippines, Vietnam, Malaysia, Brunei and Taiwan also have overlapping claims. China has built structures, including military facilities, on Kagitingan (Fiery Cross), Panganiban (Mischief), Zamora (Subi), Burgos (Gaven), Kennan (Hughes), Mabini

(Johnson South) and Calderon (Cuarteron) Reef, areas off the province of Palawan.

The President has repeatedly warned that insisting on the Philippines' maritime claims would create "trouble" and that a war with China would only result in a "massacre" of

Filipino soldiers.

His officials have denied he has abandoned the Philippines' claims, saying the President is just pursuing non-contentious aspects of Manila's relationship with Beijing such as economic cooperation.

2 - With Evelyn Macairan

China research ship docks at Davao port

By JAIME LAUDE
and EDITH REGALADO

suspicion over the real purpose of its visit.

A Chinese research and surveillance ship dropped anchor

Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana and Navy spokesman Commander Jonathan

Rody: Not yet time to raise SCS with China. See Page 2.

at the Sasa wharf in Davao City on Monday night, raising

Zata quickly clarified that *Yuan* Turn to Page 2

China

From Page 1

Wang 3 made a port simply for routine replenishment of supplies and provisions.

"There was prior coordination made by Chinese ambassador Zhao Jianhua with Department of Foreign Affairs Secretary Alan Peter Cavetano. The docking was given ap-

proval," Lorenzana, who is currently in Canberra, Australia, said in text message to defense reporters yesterday.

Lorenzana is one of six keynote speakers at the 4th Australia Security Summit, which opened yesterday.

Zata said there's nothing

unusual about the Chinese ship's port call as foreign warships and civilian vessels had made similar visits.

He added that it's not the first time that Chinese vessels had docked in Davao, citing port calls in April of a Chinese destroyer, a frigate and a supply vessel also at Sasa wharf. The *Yuan Wang 3* will be in Davao City until tomorrow morning, said Zata.

"From the diplomatic clearance that we got, it will be (in Davao) until the morning of 19th," Zata said.

The vessel reportedly has enormous satellite capabilities, and is believed to be under the control of People's Liberation Army (PLA) General Armaments Department (GAD).

Last month, two large Chinese military cargo and transport planes landed at the Davao International Airport in a span of less than two weeks - purportedly to refuel.

Magdalo Rep. Gary Alejano said the docking of a Chinese research and surveillance ship at Sasa wharf is something Filipinos should be worried about.

"We should be concerned," Alejano said, as he revealed the ship's first port call in Davao was in 2011. He claimed its crew then barred local media and officials from the Bureau of Customs from boarding the vessel.

Banners 'vicious attack'

By Jovic Yee
@jovicveeINQ

Chinese Ambassador Zhao Jianhua on Tuesday described as a "vicious attack" on now warm relations between the Philippines and China the emergence of banners declaring the Philippines a Chinese province, which were apparently a take on a joke made by President Duterte.

"The Philippines has never been a part of China," Zhao said at the sidelines of groundbreaking rites for two bridges being funded by the Chinese government. "Not now, or ever."

Last week, a number of banners bearing the words "Welcome to the Philippines, Province of China" were seen hanging from several foot-bridges along major thorough-

fares in the capital.

The stunt came on the eve of the second anniversary of the Philippines' arbitral victory over China on the West Philippine Sea dispute.

Enemies of government

Presidential spokesperson Harry Roque earlier assailed the "gimmick," which he said was perpetrated by "enemies of the government."

The banners appeared to be a take on a joke made by Mr. Duterte on Feb. 19 during the anniversary of Chinese Business Club.

"If you want, just make us a province, like Fujian," the President said at the gathering.

"Province of Philippines, Republic of China," Mr. Duterte said to applause and laughter from his mostly Chinese-Pil-

ipino audience.

Zhao said while China did not take offense on the banners, he admitted it was "bad for the bilateral relations" between China and the Philippines.

It was also an affront to the Duterte administration's foreign policy, he said.

Mr. Duterte has repeatedly praised China for helping without interfering in Philippine internal affairs unlike the United States, a traditional Philippine ally.

On Tuesday, Mr. Duterte was with Zhao for groundbreaking rites for two bridges donated by the Chinese government—Binondo-Intramuros Bridge and Letrella-Pantaleon Bridge.

Zhao said his government was building the bridges "for free." INQ *AY*

Chinese envoy: PH will never be our province

THE Philippines will never be a province of China, Chinese Ambassador to the Philippines Zhao Jianhua said on Tuesday.

Zhao made the statement as he dismissed as "vicious attack" against relations between the Philippines and China the unauthorized display of red banners tagging Manila as Beijing's province.

"The Philippines has never been [a] part of China... Not now, not ever," Zhao told reporters in an interview in Manila.

"It's a kind of vicious attack, not only on the relations between the two countries, but also on the independent foreign policy pursued by President [Rodrigo] Duterte and his administration," he said.

Red banners with the phrase, "Welcome to the Philippines, Province of China" were spotted at footbridges along Quezon Avenue, Philena, and Welcome Rotonda, all in Quezon City, and Pasay City.

Envoys A2

ENVOY FROM A1

Chinese envoy: PH will never be our province

among other locations. The presence of the tarpaulins coincided with the second anniversary of the Philippines' victory over China in a case that Manila filed before The Hague-based

Permanent Court of Arbitration. China has refused to acknowledge the landmark ruling and continues to claim almost the entire South China Sea (West Philippine Sea).

Duterte has been criticized for his soft stance on the dispute with China, but has promised to bring up the arbitral ruling with Beijing within his term.

He previously joked that he wanted the Philippines to be a province of China.

"Gusto ninyo gawain na lang ninyo kaming pali Philippine province of China, eh 'di wala tayong problema

[If you want you can make us your province. Fujian and the Philippine province of China, and we would have no problem]," Duterte told Filipino-Chinese businessmen in a speech in February.

Malacañang has accused the "enemies of the government" as the ones behind the banners.

When asked if the banners were offensive to the Chinese government, Zhao said, "I don't think it is offensive, but it is bad."

The Chinese Ambassador was in Intramuros, Manila, to attend the groundbreaking rites for the Binondo-Intramuros bridge, a project funded by China.

Meanwhile, Zhao dismissed claims that the Philippines may fall into a debt trap by accepting Chinese loans to finance massive infrastructure projects of the Duterte admin-

istration. "Actually, there has never been a debt trap. It's all based on mutual agreement," he said.

Zhao clarified that the projects, particularly the two bridges in Manila, financed by the Chinese grants will be built for "free."

"You're going to use some Chinese soft loans to finance some infrastructure projects. That is simply the decision by your government to use the soft loans and the infrastructure projects will be undertaken by a Chinese company through limited bidding process," he said.

"There is no mention or no avenue for ownership, your government will own all those projects. So there will be no question of putting yourself in debt. I think your economic team is smart enough," Zhao added.

CATHERINE S. VALENTE

Sino envoy hits out at province of China banner

By Rey Requejo and Evalea Casaljay

THE Chinese Ambassador to the Philippines said Tuesday that satirical banners portraying the country as a province of China was an attack on Filipino-Chinese relations.

"It's kind of a vicious attack. It is bad for the bilateral relationship and it's also bad for the Filipino people," said Chinese Ambassador Zhao Jianhua.

Next page



Sino...

From A1

His remarks followed news that a Chinese research vessel docked in Davao City Monday night to be "refurbished."

The Navy said the Yuan Wang 5, a Chinese research vessel used for tracking and support of satellite and intercontinental ballistic missiles, docked in Davao City at 9:40 pm on Monday.

A Navy spokesman, Commander Jonathan Zata, said the visit was "routine" and there was nothing unusual about it.

"They are here for a replenishment, as granted by the diplomatic clearance issued by higher authorities. This is a routine ship visit similar to any other foreign ship wishing to call on our ports," Zata said.

The satirical banners, which said "Wel-

come to the Philippines, Province of China," were strewn over several pedestrian walkways on July 12, the second anniversary of a UN tribunal's decision favoring the Philippines in its territorial dispute with China over the West Philippine Sea.

On Tuesday, Zhao said "the Philippines can never be any part of China... not now, not ever."

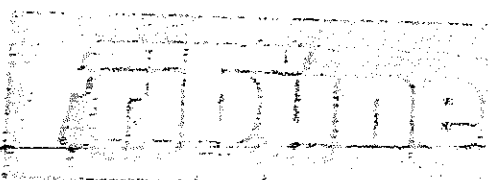
The Palace had accused "the government's enemies" of being behind the banners.

Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana also confirmed the arrival of the Chinese vessel in Davao.

"Yes. We know about it. The Chinese ambassador wrote to the Secretary of Foreign Affairs [Alan] Cayetano that it would be docking in Davao to refurbish, and it was allowed to do so," Lorenzana told the online news service Rappler.

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Rody bridges PH-China divide

"These will spur vibrant economic activities."

By Angie M. Rosales

President Rodrigo Duterte yesterday expressed confidence the territorial issues between the Philippines and China will be resolved soon as

promised by Chinese President Xi Jinping himself. Duterte disclosed the commitment given to him by Xi during a recent visit to the People's Republic of China where they discussed, among other things, the friendship and cooperation

between the two governments. "We have promised to deal with the problem... that we will discuss this at some other time," he said during the groundbreaking ceremony of the *Turn to page 2*

From page 1

Binondo-Intramuros Bridge and Estrella-Pantaleon in Intramuros, Manila.

Duterte expressed confidence China will be "fair and that equity will be distributed" although he said he cannot elaborate on what he and Xi talked about.

"In all of these discussions, China never asked for any, not even one square (meter) of real estate in this country," said Duterte.

He said China's geopolitical position is critical to that country but that there are concerted efforts to resolve issues.

The President was obviously referring to a joint exploration with China in the West Philippine Sea for offshore oil and gas resources, which both countries claim, without needing to address the touchy issue of sovereignty.

Expansive claim

Critics have warned such move can jeopardize the 2016 arbitration ruling which had invalidated China's expansive claim to the WPS which it calls South China Sea.

Duterte thanked the Chinese government for helping the Philippines bankroll the two bridges as part of the administration's ambitious Build,

Build, Build program.

"Allow me to express my appreciation to China for its generosity in funding the construction of these two bridges. As a friend, China has once again proved that it intends to join us in achieving lasting progress by addressing traffic congestion in Metro Manila," he said.

"Indeed, the construction of these bridges will not just connect these very strategic areas but will also contribute to our quest to spur vibrant economic activities through an efficient and reliable road transportation network," Duterte said.

30 months

The President directed the Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH) and other concerned agencies to ensure that the construction of these bridges will be finished within 30 months or earlier.

"As an important part of our Build, Build, Build Program, I expect you to fast-track the implementation and execution of these bridges, as well as all other major infrastructure projects already in the pipeline," the President said.

One of the bridges will replace the existing structure connecting Estrella Street in Makati to Barangka Drive in Mandanayong.

Duterte confident China will be fair

BY JOCELYN MONTEMAYOR

PRESIDENT Duterte yesterday said China never asked for or anything from the Philippines in exchange for its assistance.

The Duterte government is being accused of being soft with China which has been giving loans and grants to the Philippines, despite China's military build-up and other activities in disputed areas in the South China Sea.

Aside from China and the Philippines, other countries claiming parts of the South China Sea are Brunei, Malaysia, Taiwan, and Vietnam.

The President made the statement following a Social Weather stations survey showing 80 percent of Filipinos are dissatisfied with government's supposed inaction on China's activities in disputed areas in the South China Sea, and the display of tarpaulins in some thoroughfares in Metro Manila last week, which said, "Welcome to the Philippines, province of China." The tarpaulins appeared on the second anniversary of a decision of an international court that invalidated China's nine-dash line claim.

Duterte said that in his talks with Chinese President Xi Jinping, they

agreed to focus on cooperation instead of the territorial dispute.

"I just like to tell everybody that in all of these discussions, China never asked for any, not even a one square of real estate in this country," Duterte said at groundbreaking ceremony of the "Two China Aid and Bridges Project: Binondo-Intramuros Bridge and Estrella-Pantaleon Bridge" in Intramuros in Manila.

Duterte said China and the Philippines have a "concerted effort" but declined to elaborate. He assured Filipinos that the "problem" between the two countries would be discussed "at some other time."

Duterte said China should be allowed time to deal with its "bilateral relations and issues."

"So allow China, we will allow them the sufficient period to sort out things and I'm sure that in the end China will be fair and the equity will be distributed. I cannot talk about, well, elaborate on these things now. They are in the blueprint. But in the days to come, we would realize that China, after all, is really a good neighbor," the President said.

Duterte has said the Philippines and China are looking at a joint oil

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and gas exploration in the disputed areas. Agencies like the Department of Energy have been involved in the discussions with China.

The President, during the event, thanked China for its generos-

ity and continuing support to the Philippines as he acknowledged the benefits of the bridges project which is expected to help address the traffic congestion in Metro Manila, increase the transportation capacity of Pasig River, and eventually contribute to local tourism due to the improved view

of the river area.

Duterte also directed the Department of Public Works and Highways and other agencies involved in the "Build, Build, Build" infrastructure program of the administration to expedite not just the construction of the Binondo-Intramuros and the Es-

trella-Pantaleon bridges but also the other projects that are already in the pipeline, to improve connectivity and mobility.

Chinese Ambassador Zhao Jianhua assured Filipinos that Chinese aid and loans granted to the country would not lead to a "debt trap" for the Philippines.

Palace slams Sinophobes

MALACAÑANG on Tuesday said only those afflicted with Sinophobia would find the 'routine' docking of a Chinese survey ship in Davao City questionable.

The dictionary defines "Sinophobia" as a fear or dislike of China, or the Chinese people and their language or culture.

In a statement, Palace spokesman Harry Roque II said any country that is friendly with the Philippines may dock as it pleases.

"All ships from countries with whom the Philippines maintains friendly ties may dock at our ports. Chinese survey ships, just like US warships, may dock at our ports," Roque added.

"Only those afflicted with Sinophobia will find the routine incident

objectionable." AS

SINOPHOBES FROM A1

Palace

objectionable," he said.

The Philippine military on Tuesday confirmed that the Chinese vessel docked in Davao City, the hometown of President Rodrigo Duterte.

Commander Jonathan Zata, Navy spokesman, said the Chinese ship arrived in Davao City at 8:14 p.m. on Monday.

"They are here for a replenishment as granted by the diplomatic clearance issued by higher authorities. This is a routine ship visit similar to any foreign

ship wishing to call on our ports," Zata told reporters in a text message.

"It's completely routine, nothing unusual about the visit," he said.

Before the two Chinese aircraft landed in Davao City to refuel.

Malacañang downplayed the landing, saying it sees no problem with it.

"No problem with that for as long as they [Chinese] procure all permits," Roque said in a text message on June 24 after the second Chinese plane landed in the city.

"[The second landing is the] same as [the] first [landing]. Refueling stop. All licenses, permits and protocols issued and observed," he added.

Duterte has taken a visibly softer stance in disputes against China compared to his predecessor Benigno Aquino III, despite Beijing's militarization of the South China Sea (West Philippine Sea).

The United Nations' Permanent Court of Arbitration threw out China's "nine-dash claim" to the entire West Philippine Sea in a ruling in The Hague on July 12, 2016.

The ruling also declared that Filipino fishermen should enjoy fishing rights at the Panatag Shoal and that the Spratly islands, as well as the Panganiban (Mischief) Reef, Ayungin (Second Thomas) Shoal and Recto Bank are all within the exclusive economic zone of the Philippines.

RALPH U. VILLANUEVA

PH Navy ships join maritime training

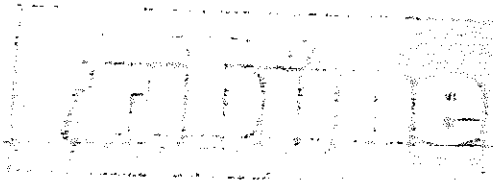
The Philippine Navy's BRP Andres Bonifacio and BRP Davao Del Sur sailed out to join more than 50 other warships and aircraft in the At Sea Phase of the Rim of the Pacific (RIMPAC) Exercise 2018 in Honolulu, Hawaii.

In a statement, the Philippine Navy said Filipino sailors began the first day of the At Sea Phase with serialized trainings which included visit board, search and seizure (VBSS); gunnery exercise (GUNNEX); replenishment at sea, and combined anti-submarine and anti-air warfare exercises.

It was during the Replenishment At Sea (RAS) serial with US Navy Ship (USNS) Brashears that the banner "We Love Philippines. Good to See You Kababayan" was seen by the crew of the Andres Bonifacio on the port side of the American vessel. (Francis Wakefield) 2

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Navy: Chinese ship in Davao restocking

The Philippine Navy expressed no concern over the docking of the Chinese vessel Yuan Wang # in Davao City on Monday.

Navy Spokesman Cmdr. Jonathan Zata said on Tuesday the ship is in the city to replenish its stocks.

According to Zata, the ship arrived 8:14 p.m. on Monday and will stay in the country until July 19.

"They are here for replenishment as granted by the diplomatic clearance

issued by higher authorities," Zata said.

"This is a routine ship visit similar with any other foreign ship wishing to call on our ports," Zata added.

"It's completely routine, nothing unusual about the visit," Zata said.

It is not uncommon for foreign sea vessels, including warships, to dock momentarily in the Philippine ports. The country's waters are attractive stopover ports for foreign vessels in need of stock being an archipelago.

"We had Chinese warships calling on our ports in the past. We treat them the same as with any other warships from other countries," Zata said.

Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana echoed Zata's remarks.

"Yes. We know about it. The Chinese Ambassador (Zhao Jiannuan) wrote to the SFA (Secretary of Foreign Affairs Alan Peter) Cayetano that it would be docking in Davao to refurbish and it was allowed to do so," the defense

chief said.

Malacanang, through Presidential Spokesman Harry Roque, said: "All ships from countries with whom the Philippines maintains friendly ties, may dock at our ports. Chinese survey ships, just like US warships, may dock at our ports."

"Only those afflicted with sinophobia will find the routine incident objectionable," he added.

With Angie Rosales and PNA

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Chinese ship docks in Davao

BY VICTOR REYES

A CHINESE research vessel docked in Davao City Monday night, the fourth to visit the country during the time of President Duterte who is seeking improved relations with the Chinese.

Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana said the vessel, Yuan Wang 5, docked at the President's hometown on the request of Chinese Ambassador Zhao Jianhua, who wrote to Foreign Affairs Secretary Lejarza Peralta Cayetano saying the ship will dock in Davao to refuel and it was allowed to dock.

Navy spokesman Commander Jonathin Zam said the ship arrived in Davao City at 6:14 p.m. Monday and will stay until tomorrow morning.

"They are here for replenishment. This is a routine ship visit similar to any other foreign ship visiting our ports," he said.

The last visit was in April last year when guided missile destroyer Chang Chun, guided-missile frigate Jin Zhou, and replenishment ship Chao Hu docked in Davao City for a goodwill visit.

Zam said the Chinese ship that arrived Monday is "not a Navy ship, not a Coast Guard ship either."

The ship is assigned with the China Launch and Tracking Control which is subordinated to the People's Liberation Army General Armaments Department, he said.

On June 8, Chinese transport plane Hxushin H-76, en route to New Zealand, landed at the Davao City airport for refueling. The same plane landed again on April 25, also for refueling, on the way back to China. **B2**

China is locked in a territorial dispute with Philippines, Malaysia, Vietnam, Brunei and Taiwan, over the Sprath Islands, a chain of islands and reefs in the South China Sea or West Philippine Sea.

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July 2018

• Rebel guns dug up in Sorsogon

CAMP NAKAR, Quezon — The military unearthed high-powered firearms in Barangay Manias, Sorsogon City recently, following the surrender of three communist rebels, the Southern Luzon Command (SOLCOM) reported. Lt. Gen. Danilo Pamonag, SOLCOM commander, said an M-16 Armalite and a Carbine .30-caliber rifle buried in the ground was located through the help of the rebels who had surrendered earlier. For their help, Pamonag assured that surrenderers will be enrolled in the Enhanced Comprehensive Local Integration Program, or E-CLIP, the latest program of the government that provides shelter, employment, and livelihood for the rebel returnees. (Danny J. Estacio)

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ICRC donates medical supplies to military hospital in Mindanao

MEDICAL supplies and tetanus vaccines to help treat soldiers wounded in recent clashes in Maguindanao province in Central Mindanao were donated last week by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) to the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) Camp Siongco Station Hospital.

Camp Siongco Station Hospital (CSSH) is attached to the 6th Infantry Division of the Philippine Army in Awang, Datu Odin Sinsuat, Maguindanao.

It assisted at least 30 soldiers wounded from June to July in the armed clashes between the military and Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF).

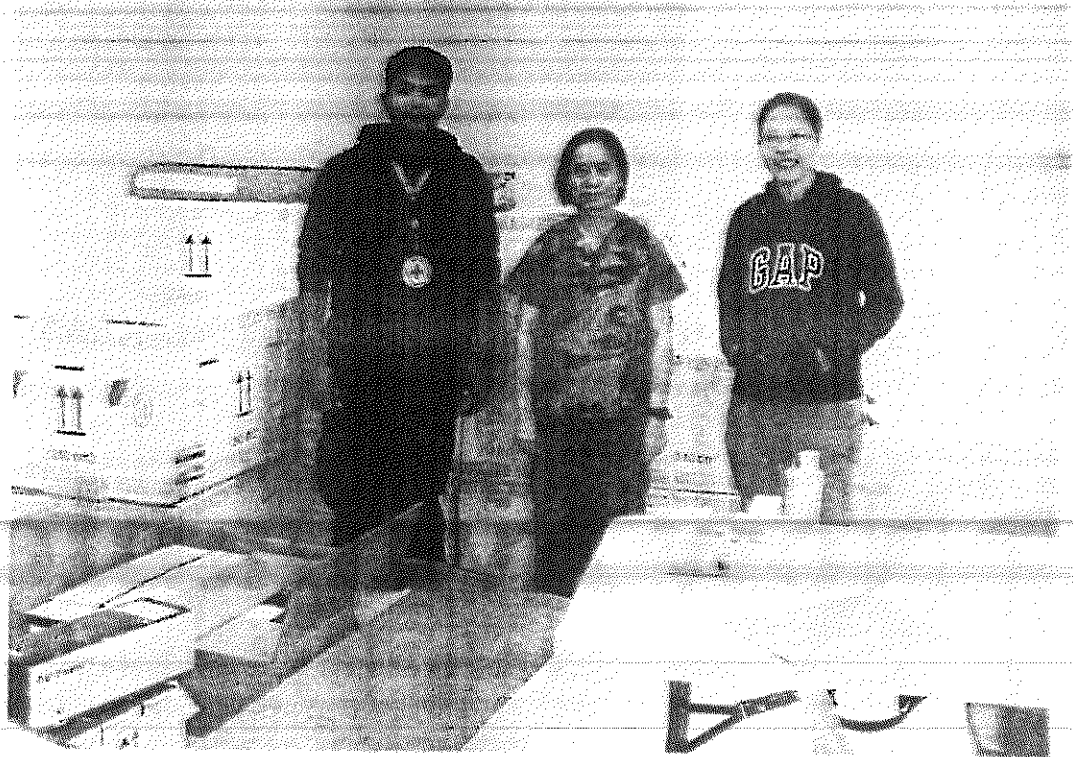
Lt. Col. Himaya Matas, chief of hospital of the CSSH, expressed the AFP's appreciation for the medical supplies, which are sufficient to treat 10,000 people in the next three months.

"Weapon wounds are some of the most complex injuries to treat and operate on. Wounded fighters who stop taking part in the clashes, regardless of which side they are on, are no longer considered as combatants. They are thus protected by international humanitarian law [IHL] and should receive proper medical care," Meher Khatcherian, head of the ICRC office in Cotabato, said.

"It is the authorities' responsibility to provide such care in an impartial manner, but the ICRC may support whenever the situation requires it," he added.

The ICRC regularly supports five public hospitals in conflict-affected areas of Mindanao through quarterly donations of medicines, vaccines and medical supplies.

It also provides ad hoc as-



HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE (From left) JC Pagaling, health field officer of the International Committee of the Red Cross in Cotabato, facilitates the ICRC's donation of medical supplies to Camp Siongco Station Hospital through Lt. Col. Himaya Matas, chief of hospital, and Maj. Jeremie Villamor, surgeon. CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

sistance to civilian and military hospitals during crises situations.

In May, the ICRC donated medical supplies to the Camp Navarro General Hospital in Zamboanga City and recently provided medical supplies to the Pagayawan rural health unit and Unayan hospital in Lanao del Sur where clashes took place in June.

The ICRC is a neutral, impartial and independent humanitarian organization whose exclusively humanitarian mission is to protect the lives and dignity of victims of armed conflict and other situations of violence and to provide them with assistance, regardless

of their political affiliation.

It has a mandate to promote

knowledge and respect of IHL or the law of armed conflict. *AJ*

Central Luzon cops on duty on SONA Day

THE Central Luzon Police Regional Office has placed on standby 410 of its men to help the main police force in keeping Batasan complex safe and secure as President Duterte delivers his third SONA on Monday.

Chief Supt. Amador Corpus, regional police chief, said the policemen from the regional mobile force battalion in Nueva Ecija, Pampanga, and Tarlac will be on standby on July 22.

Corpus said aside from augmentation troops, two platoons and one Quick Reaction Team were also organized, ready to deploy as the need arises. A platoon consists of 30 to 50 men.

"Our personnel are reminded to observe maximum tolerance and ensure they respect the human rights of protesters as they are again expected to hold rallies when the President delivers his third SONA," Corpus said.

He also assured that communities in the region will still be

guarded despite the deployment of some of his men in the SONA.

The Central Luzon police regional office has always been sending augmentation troops during SONA and other national events as part of over-all security preparations of the PNP to guarantee that no eventualities may happen during said activities.

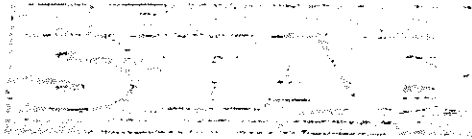
The National Capital Region Police Office earlier said it will deploy more than 1,000 cops which will mostly concentrate at the vicinity of Batasan complex.

NCRPO director Chief Supt. Guillermo Eleazar said the policemen will be augmented by around 1,000 more men from the Armed Forces, local government units, Metro Manila Development Authority, and the Bureau of Fire Protection.

He said coordination has made with the Commission on Human Rights to send representatives to closely monitor the police's activities come SONA day. — *Raymond Africa*

5 sundalo nalason sa kabute

TIGUEGARAO CITY, Cagayan - Limang sundalo ng Philippine Army ang isinugod sa hospital matapos na pinatayalaang nalason sa kinaing kabute sa kanilang kampo sa Sitio Tincon, Brgy. Labean, Bucloc, Abra kahapon. Kinilala ng Chief Insp. Carlo Lacuata, tagapagsalita ng Cordillera Police ang mga isinugod sa Rural Health Unit na sina Sgt. Leo Latorno Jr., 39; Cpl. Rence Molina, 40; Cpl. Peter Dela Cruz, 26; Pvt. Kenneth Cuello, 23; at Pvt. Aris Buensejo, 27, pawang sa 24th IB. Ayon sa report, nakaramdam ng magdamag na pagsusuka, pagkanilo, pananakili ng tiyan at pagtatae ang mga biktima matapos kainin ang mga kabuteng ligaw na kinuha sa kabundukan at nilantakan sa nagdaan nilang hapunan. (Inobserbahan pa rin sila sa hospital.)
(Raymund Catindig/Joy Centos)



DILG to construct more processing centers for rebel surrenderees

By CECILLE SUERTE FELIPE

The Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG) will construct more processing centers or halfway houses for rebel surrenderees, as well as its other programs for former rebels, in preparation for the planned localized peace talks.

DILG officer-in-charge Eduardo Año stressed the communist insurgency will not hinder their efforts to address the urgent needs of former rebels who decided to rejoin mainstream society.

"We are hopeful for the success of the localized peace talks in light of the announcement of the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) that they would rather oust the President than talk peace. We will

never give up on peace, so we are preparing for the return of communist rebels in any way we can," he said.

A halfway house is a temporary residence that serves as the processing center for former rebels. This could be a new structure that is established in provinces or highly urbanized cities that have expressed the need for such facility.

"These former rebels are risking everything by surrendering and we want to make sure that government is there every step of the way in their journey towards healing and reintegration in the society. Halfway houses are where their new life begins," Año said.

He said local government units would be allocated financial assistance from the En-

hanced-Comprehensive Local Integration Program (E-CLIP) for the construction of the halfway houses that will serve as venue for "rehabilitation and healing sessions, and education and skills training activities."

DILG has recently issued a memorandum circular spelling out the criteria for selecting local government unit in the program.

"A halfway house will serve as a reintroduction of former rebels to society. Here we will try to equip them through skills training. This is the reason why we will select the LGU that will be our partner in training," Año explains. Año also mentioned that each halfway house will be allotted P5 million, which can only be accessed after complying with the procedural require-

ments to include a complete assessment of the provincial, highly urbanized city government, signing of a memorandum of agreement and submission of a project proposal and supporting documents.

"Interested LGUs, being the implementing partners, must be able to comply with all of the requisites provided by the DILG guidelines, for as much as we want to cater to all applications, we are still dealing with public funds," Año said.

Nine provinces were already granted P5 million each as implementing partners, which was used to construct processing centers at Kalinga, Mountain Province, Masbate, Negros Oriental, Northern Samar, Sarangani, Sultan Kudarat, South Cotabato and North Cotabato. |4

P5M for rebel 'halfway house'

By Jaymee T. Gamil
@JGamilJNQ

The Department of the Interior and Local Government is offering up to P5 million in grant to every province, city or village willing and qualified to build a "halfway house" or "processing center" for former or surrendered rebels.

In a press statement on Tuesday, DILG officer in charge Eduardo Año said under his recently issued Memorandum Circular No. 2018-105, the financial assistance would be for the construction and operation of facilities

to "serve as a venue in rehabilitation and healing sessions and education and skills training activities" of former rebels.

The P5-million grant, however, can only be delivered after the local government unit complied with strict requirements listed by Memorandum Circular No. 2018-105.

Local talks

Nine provinces had already been granted P5 million each to construct the processing centers—Kalinga, Mountain Province, Masbate, Negros Oriental

Northern Samar, Sarangani, Sultan Kudarat, South Cotabato and North Cotabato, the DILG said.

Año said the construction of the processing centers was partly in preparation for the national government-proposed localized peace talks between local government units and local units of the communist New People's Army (NPA).

"We are hopeful for the success of the localized peace talks in light of the announcement of the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) that they would rather oust the Presi-

dent than talk peace," Año said.

"We will never give up on peace, so we are preparing for the return of communist rebels in any way we can," he added.

Communist leaders had rejected the government plan to hold talks with local rebel units instead of negotiating with National Democratic Front of the Philippines, the umbrella organization of underground leftist groups that included CPP and NPA.

Leftist groups said the proposal was just a "money-making scheme." INQ

'Localized peace talks aimed to isolate Joma'

By JOSE RODEL CLAPANO

The government's localized peace negotiation is aimed to isolate National Democratic Front chief political consultant and Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) founder Jose Maria Sison from revolutionaries, the NDF national council said last Monday.

"Localized peace talks are a vain attempt to isolate (Sison) from the mass of revolutionaries, because of the crucial role he plays in the (negotiations). It could hardly be a coincidence that the latest vilification (against Sison) has come on the eve of the Duterte regime's issuance of its guidelines on the localized talks," said the NDF statement on its website.

Calling the localized talks a worn-out tactic of past administrations, the NDF said these have failed because revolutionaries – their armed wing New People's Army (NPA) – oppose the form of negotiation.

"Localized talks are a classic divide and rule tactic. The idea is to hoodwink local CPP leaders and NPA commanders into agreeing to local ceasefire arrangements, and later on induce them to surrender," the NDF said.

NDF claimed that the NPA National Operations Command has exposed the fakery in these mass surrenders by pointing out that ordinary civilians, ex-guerrillas and even paramilitary elements are presented as surrenderees so that high-ranking military officials could pocket the millions of pesos in funds allocated for this program.

"Regional CPP leaders and NPA commanders fully support the NDF negotiating panel in the peace negotiations with the government. The CPP, NPA and other allied organizations of the NDF are of one mind that the peace talks must address wholly the social, economic and political roots underlying the armed conflict," the NDF said.

NDF said regional revolutionary forces are already issuing statements repudiating the Duterte administration's localized peace talks scheme.

"Only deluded minds like those of Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana and his band of militarists are desperate enough to make another stab at this failed and worthless tactic," the NDF said.

'Daydreaming'

Localized peace talks are absurd and stupid, Sison said last Monday.

"You are daydreaming if you think that you can divide and disintegrate the united nationwide armed revolutionary movement led by the (CPP) by trying in vain to stage so-called localized peace talks," Sison said.

Sison added that localized peace talks are "little zarzuelas (musical plays) staged by the military and local peace and order councils for (psychological war) purposes and for pocketing public funds in the name of fake surrenders."

The NDF chief negotiator said Duterte and Lorenzana should admit that "you have all along been sabotaging the (peace negotiations), canceling and terminating these so often due to your failure to reduce them to mere surrender negotiations."

Sison concluded that Duterte has never been interested in pursuing sincere and serious peace negotiations with the NDF, citing the President's repeated termination of the talks.

"He was merely play-acting when he said he would like to make peace with the people's revolutionary movement and become the first left and socialist president of the country," Sison said.

After Duterte assumed office, Sison said, the President withdrew his promise to grant amnesty and release all political prisoners.

"In violation of The Hague Joint Declaration of 1992, he kept on making preconditions amounting to the surrender of the revolutionary forces," Sison said.

Blame game

Meanwhile, blaming the assassination of local government officials on the NPA is meant to hide the real culprits and justify nationwide martial rule, the NDI national council said.

"The Duterte regime is making these ridiculous accusations in a futile attempt to muddle what Duterte himself had already impliedly admitted when he said mayor Antonio Hallil of Tanauan City was killed because of his involvement in the illegal drug trade," the NDI said.

The NDI added that the Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency has also made disclosures that some of the mayors and vice mayors killed were on the government's list of narco-politicians.

"The growing number of local government officials getting killed - the 12th to date being the vice mayor of a Tawi-Tawi town - is clearly part and parcel of the Duterte regime's brutal campaign against illegal drugs that has already killed more

than 20,000 people," the NDI said.

The NDI claimed that earlier in the campaign "the police had even engineered the gangland-style murder of Albuera mayor Rolando Espinosa Sr. right inside his jail cell and boasted about it."

"But not only is the Duterte regime trying to hide its hands in these killings, it is making the NPA the scapegoat in a convenient scenario-building scheme to justify the imposition of nationwide martial law," the NDI added.

NDFP: Localized talks a divide-and-rule tactic

BY DEMPSEY REYES

THE National Democratic Front of the Philippines (NDFP) on Tuesday stood pat on its rejection of localized peace talks proposed by the government, describing it as a "divide-and-rule" tactic of the Duterte administration.

In a statement, the NDFP said localized talks were also meant to isolate Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) founder Jose Maria "Joma" Sison.

"Localized talks are a classic divide-and-rule tactic. The idea is to hoodwink local CPP leaders and NPA (New People's Army) commanders into agreeing to local ceasefire agreements and later on induce them to surrender," it said.

"Localized peace talks are also a

vain attempt to isolate NDFP chief political consultant Jose Ma. Sison from the mass of revolutionaries," the NDFP added.

The NDFP, the political arm of the CPP, lashed out at Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana for being "delusional" in thinking that the localized peace talks were "the key to defeating the armed revolutionary movement."

The localized peace talks was an idea floated by Lorenzana and the Armed Forces of the Philippines

(AFP), as an alternative to the national-level talks, following the suspension of negotiations with the NDFP ordered by President Rodrigo Duterte last month.

Localized talks will involve local government officials and members of the NPA, the CPP's armed wing, who are willing to yield to authorities.

The NDFP has been claiming that recent surrenders of NPA members were fake.

"The localized talks will be riding on the AFP's bogus claims that NPA guerillas and their supporters are feeling the heat of military operations and are surrendering in droves," it said.

"But the most important reason why localized peace talks have never succeeded is because the NPA, led by the CPP, is strong and united organizationally," the NDFP added.

"The CPP, NPA and other allied organizations of the NDFP are of one mind that the peace talks must address wholly the social, economic and political roots underlying the armed conflict," it said. "It is starkly clear to them that these problems cannot be addressed through localized peace talks and piecemeal reforms."

Responding to the NDFP statement, the military on Tuesday mocked Sison.

"If the localized talks is something that Joma thinks will not succeed, then why is he even bothered? Just leave it as it is if it really can't solve anything," said Col. Noel Detoyato, military public affairs chief, in a text message to *The Manila Times*.

"Just relax, Joma, we don't need your advice. By the way, how is your homecoming plan going?" he added. *HR*

Army cadre, CAFGU killed, one wounded in Agusan ambush

By **MIKE U. CRIVELLO**
 and **MALU CADELINA MANAR**

BUTUAN CITY - An Army cadre and a member of CAFGU Active Auxiliary (CAA) were killed while another CAA man was critically wounded when an undetermined number of Communist New People's Army Terrorists (CNTs) ambushed them at Kilometer 13, Sitio Hinandayan, Barangay Camagong, Nasipit, Agusan del Norte.

In an initial report, S/Sgt. Sahare Jamjahare, cadre of Mimbahande Patrol Base, 23rd IB, Philippine Army based in Mimbahande Barangay Camagong, and CAA Totong Salaygay, were both declared dead on arrival at Butuan Doctors Hospital here and Nasipit District Hospital in Nasipit, Agusan del Norte, respectively.

Another CAA member (identity temporarily withheld) is still recuperating from his bullet wounds in an undisclosed hospital here for security reason. He was reported to be in critical condition at press time.

The unarmed victims were on board

a single motorcycle called "Habal Habal" on their way to their patrol base when they were waylaid by the CNTs at about 5 p.m. on Saturday in Km. 13 Sitio Hinandayan, Barangay Camagong of that same town.

As of press time, elements of 23rd Infantry Battalion, along with the Agusan del Norte Police Provincial Office and Nasipit Municipal Police Station are still pursuing the perpetrators, who are believed members of the Guerilla Front Committee 4-A of the CPT-NPA, Northeastern Mindanao Regional Committee.

No plot to kill

In Kidapawan City, the regional unit of the New Peoples' Army (NPA) in Southern Mindanao has denied the military's allegation that they are into "purging" members in North Cotabato who will yield to the government.

Ka Dencio Madrigal, spokesman for the NPA's Valentine Palaminc Regional Operations Command - Far South Mindanao (VPROC-FSM), considered as an "utter fabrication" the recent claim of 19th IB commander Lt. Col. Erick

Paraso that the rebels are threatening to conduct summary execution of members who surrendered to the government.

Paraso said that there are still more NPA guerillas in North Cotabato who are willing to give up the fight in the mountains but were afraid of the possible ramifications. One of the clear consequences, he explained, is death.

Madrigal said that Paraso is just "creating stories" to hide the issues of the military's alleged continued threatening of civilians who are accused as NPA members or supporters.

More terrorists yield

More CNTs laid down their arms, availed of the government's livelihood program, and pledged to support its peace and development program, regional Army spokesperson 1Lt. Tere Ingente said on Tuesday.

The chief of Public Affairs Officer of the Army's 4th Infantry (Diamond) Division (4th ID) cited the surrender of two armed CNTs to the 8th Infantry (Dependable) Battalion (8th IB) on last Friday in Impasug-ong, Bukidnon province.

Army cadre, CAA member utas sa ambush

BUTUAN CITY - Isang Army cadre at isang miyembro ng Catgu Active Auxiliary (CAA) ang napatay habang isa pang sugatan nang tambangan ng hindi mabilang na Communist New People's Army Terrorists (CNTs) sa Kilometer 13, Sitio Hinandayan, Barangay Camagong, Nasipit, Agusan del Norte, base sa ulat na ipinarating sa police at military headquarters dito nitong Martes.

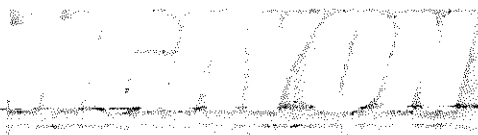
Sa inisyal na ulat, sina S/ Sgt. Sahare Jamahare, cadre ng Mimbahande Patrol Base, 23rd Inf. Philippine Army sa Mimbahande Bgy., Camagong, at CAA Totong

Salagay ay kapwa dead on arrival sa Butuan Doctors Hospital dito at sa Nasipit District Hospital sa Nasipit, Agusan del Norte, ayon sa pagkakaunod.

Patuloy namang nagpapagaling ang isa pang CAA member, hindi pinangalanang, sa isang ospital dito. Ito ay kasalukuyang kritikal.

Base sa report, sakay ang mga bikuma sa Habal-Habal, patunge sa kanilang patrol based nang makaagkay-ventro ang CNTs sa Km. 13 Sitio Hinandayan Bgy. Camagong, bandang 5:00 ng hayon nitong Sabado.

Mike U. Crismundo



3 CAFGU prary

sa NPA ambush

NORTH COTABATO

Bumulaala ang tatlong mga kasapi ng Citizen Armed Force Geographical Unit o CAFGU matapos tanbi- ngan ng mga pinaniniwa- laang miyembro ng New People's Army o NPA sa bayan ng Nasap. Kouse- del-korte niyang Sandoz.

Baray sa mga n- Senior Insp. Cesar Pineda, mga ng kasapi Mindaog Force dead-on-arrival sa Nando District Hospital sa Tandang Silyagan habang dinas- naman sa isang parte sa buwan ang kasapihan niyang sa Corporal Behar Jamjshere ngunit binawa- din ng buhay niyang Sandoz. Inabaw niyang matatag kasamang si Edwin Man- dahinog nitong Lunes ng maging araw.

Avon sa pulitika, pahalil- nan ng bala ng hindi ka- kilalang mga salamin ang mga biktima habang sakay ng habal-habal ng mga Sandoz.

Sinisilip ng pulitika ang "paghinigant" na maging motibo sa krimen dahil sa may kaaway umang ang ise sa tatlong biktima. (Pho- rick Bofisat)

DILG to build processing centers for former rebels

BY ROY D.R. NARRA

THE Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG) will build more processing centers or halfway houses for rebel surrenderees in preparation for the planned localized peace talks.

Local Government Secretary Eduardo Año said the building of halfway houses is necessary as the government hopes to reintegrate former communist rebels into society.

"We are hopeful of the success of the localized peace talks in light of the announcement of the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) that they would rather oust the President than talk peace. We will

never give up on peace, so we are preparing for the return of communist rebels in any way we can," Año said.

He said interested local government units (LGUs) would be given financial assistance from the Enhanced-Comprehensive Local Integration Program (E-Clip) for the construction and development of halfway houses.

The E-Clip is the DILG's financial as-

sistance program for rebels surrendering to the government.

Based on Memorandum Circular 2018-105, the DILG will prioritize giving funds to LGUs with a high number of enrolled former rebels, those without a halfway house or whose halfway houses need renovation or expansion.

The Armed Forces of the Philippines earlier claimed that 7,346 former rebels have surrendered to the government.

Malacañang said last week that President Rodrigo Duterte would issue an order allowing localized peace talks.

Exiled CPP founder Jose Maria "Joma" Sison rejected the idea of local peace talks and questioned the authenticity of the military's claim that thousands of rebels have surrendered.

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NPA lured 5 Manobo teens to join armed struggle - AFP

By FRANCIS WAKEFIELD

Five young members of the Manobo tribe in Bukidnon were lured by promises of jobs in Metro Manila last year but found themselves become reluctant members of the New People's Army (NPA).

"This only shows that Indigenous People (IP) and other minority groups are continuously being exploited by the Communist Terrorist Groups (CTG) to regain their ranks," said Lt. Col. Isagani Nato, spokesman of the Armed Forces (AFP)-North Luzon Command.

On July 5, the five teenagers surrendered to the military with the assistance of the local community in Licuan Baay, Abra.

Three of the surrenderers are 16-year-old while two others are

17 and 15, according to Nato.

They were interviewed by joint elements of Joint Task Force (JTF) "KAUGNAY" and the local police.

The 16-year-olds were turned over by the Licuan-Baay Municipal Police Station (MPS) to the Army's 24th Infantry Battalion (241B) for proper disposition and medical examination.

The two minors, on the other hand, were turned over to the Department of Social Welfare and Development Office (DSWDO) for appropriate social intervention.

Nato said the five teenagers were recruited by a certain Jeffrey Mandagit in August of last year to go to Manila to work as piggy caretakers.

They boarded a passenger ship from Cagayan De Oro to Manila

and upon arrival at the port were fetched by Mandagit and brought to University of the Philippines Diliman Campus in Quezon City.

Nato said the teens were obliged to join mass protests in Manila in September with a promise that they would get the job within the week.

The promise was not fulfilled.

In October, the teens were sent to Abra with the promise of jobs in Bangued.

Instead, they were brought to an NPA camp and became a full-time fighters.

They proceeded to an undisclosed barangay in Abra in November and spent a month providing security to their political officers, according to Nato.

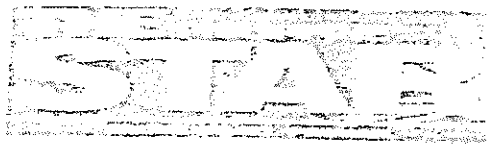
Nato said their activities in Abra included attending cultural pre-

sentation, commemoration of the death of prominent comrades and training, while their comrades and political officers conducted meetings and planning activities, including tactical offensives against selected targets.

"Their revelations manifest the illegal utilization of the young Indigenous People (IP) recruits in different mass mobilization, mass works being taken advantage by the legal and left-leaning organizations of the CPP-NPA-NDF," Nato said.

"With the Local Government Units (LGUs) and through Local Peace Initiatives, NoLCon will continue to encourage more NPA members to abandon their armed struggle and give them the opportunity to live peacefully again with their families," he said.

8



ACROSS THE COUNTRY

Maute leader's wife nabbed

GENERAL SANTOS CITY - The wife of the new leader of Maute militants was arrested in Barangay Apopong in this city at around 6 a.m. on Monday.

Nahsan Pundog is the wife of Owaida Marchombsar, who is also known by his aliases of Abdulmajid and Abu Dar.

The arrest followed the killing of Navij, also surnamed Pundog and a suspected Maute bomb expert, in an encounter in Barangay Uhaw, which also left a police officer wounded.

Marchombsar assumed leadership of the Maute group after siblings Omerkhayam and Abdullah Maute were killed in clashes with soldiers in Marawi last Oct. 16.

Marchombsar along with around

50 remaining Maute members are believed holed up in the jungles of Lanao del Sur.

- John Unson

WAR

MAUTE HEAD'S WIFE NABBED,

ON TERROR

BOMBER KILLED IN GENSAN RAID

GENERAL SANTOS CITY—Authorities here on Monday arrested the wife of the new head of Maute terror group in an operation that also killed a suspected bomb expert.

Chief Supt. Marcelo Morales, police regional director, said Nafisah Pundug, wife of Owadiah Marohombas Abdulmaid, aka Abu Dar, was arrested during a raid by the police and military.

Dar had assumed leadership of Maute after its founding leaders, Omarikayam and Abdullah Maute, were killed in Marawi last year.

Military intelligence officials believed Abu Dar also replaced Isnilon Hapilon as Islamic State (IS) emir in Southeast Asia after Hapilon was also killed in Marawi.

Bomb maker

Morales said Nafisah was "undergoing interrogation." "She did not resist arrest and she did not deny being wife of Abu Dar," Morales said.



Chief Supt. Marcelo Morales (standing), regional police director, views the body of Najib Calimba Pundug, a Maute member and alleged bomb expert, who was killed during a raid in General Santos City on Monday. —CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

The raiding team killed Najib Calimba Pundug, aka Najib Hussein, a suspected bomb maker, during the operation to arrest Nafisah in the

village of Fatima.

A pistol, bomb-making materials, two hand grenades, an IS flag and a white car were found in the house.

Najifah Pundug Macaraya, Nafisah's sister, admitted that Najib was, indeed, a Maute member.

"We have been telling him to surrender," Najifah told reporters after she and six others were also arrested for alleged obstruction of justice.

"I just will not surrender, please stop coming here," Najifah, 35, a teacher, recalled telling her younger brother.

Appeal ignored

"I repeatedly appealed to him to reform and live a normal life and have mercy on his children, to no avail," she added.

Arrested with Nafisah were Fatima Macasindel, 29; Naida Anna Calimba Pundug, 22; Sir Nenasahinda Calimba Pundug; Sarahina Calimba Pundug, 60; and Mohammad Nail Calimba Pundug, 25.

Sgt. Aldrin Gonzales, speaking for the regional police and neighbors in Fatima were unaware of the suspects' pres-

ence in the village until Monday's raid.

Kalli, a neighbor, said he saw the slain bomb maker come and go in the village and was unaware he was wanted by the law.

Najib was in the Department of Defense Arrest Order No. 1 as a high-value target.

Cop wounded

The raiding team was out to serve the arrest warrant but as the law enforcers entered the house, Najib opened fire with a .45-caliber pistol, wounding a police officer, according to Morales.

Police returned fire and killed Najib.

PO2 Jerry Fee, of the Regional Mobile Force Battalion and raiding team leader was hit four times and is now recuperating in a hospital.

Morales vowed that police would continue the hunt for terrorists in the region and save innocent lives. —EDWIN O. FER-

NANDEZ INQ

Maute bomb expert killed, cop hurt in GenSan raid

BY YAS D. OCAMPO

GENERAL SANTOS CITY - An alleged "bomb expert" of the Islamic State-inspired Maute terror group was killed while a police officer was wounded in an operation at a village here early Monday.

Chief Supt. Marcelo Morales, Region 12 police director, identified the slain suspect as Najib Calimba Pundug alias Najib Hussein, who was reportedly a close associate of the new Maute leader, Owayda Benito Marohombas, alias Abu Dar.

Colonel Adonis Bajao, commander of Joint Task Force (JTF) GenSan, the Inter-Agency Group composed of personnel from JTF GenSan and Regional Mobile Force (RMF), the Philippine National Police Office 12 served a Warrant of Arrest issued by the Judicial Branch 11 in Malabang, Lanao del Sur for serious detention and kidnapping against

the suspect when he resisted and shot one of the law enforcers, prompting the arresting team to shoot back that led to his death.

"He tried to throw a grenade but it was fortunate that he was neutralized in time by the operating team," he told reporters.

Recovered at the scene were a 9-mm Glock pistol, two grenades, cellular phones, several bomb-making materials and a black flag of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria or ISIS.

PO5 Fec, who is a member of the RMFB-12, sustained four gunshot wounds but was already declared in stable condition before noon by attending doctors at the GenSan Medical Center.

Morales said the operation mainly targeted Pundug, who was reportedly involved in the five-month siege of Marawi City by the Maute terror group last year.

Pundug, who managed to escape and resettle in the city, was named in the martial law arrest order for murder, possession of explosives, kidnapping, and illegal detention charges.

Prior to the operation, Morales said intelligence operatives monitored the presence of Pundug and eventually confirmed it in a series of surveillance operations.

A follow-up operation was conducted by the Inter-Agency Group at about 7 a.m. of the same day that led to the arrest of Nafisa Pundug, wife of Abu Dar and a fugitive who escaped from the Marawi City Jail in 2016.

Pundug has a standing warrant for Criminal Case No. 0450-2017 for violation of Section 3 of Presidential Decree (PD) No. 1865 as amended by Section 1 of Republic Act No. 8516 (illegal possession of blasting cap incendiary device) at her said house in Purok Maunlad, Brgy. Apoong, General Santos City.

Likewise, four other persons were arrested and were charged for violation of PD 1829 (Obstruction of Justice) after they prevented the arrest of Nafisa Pundug. They were identified as: Nafah Pundug Macaraya, 35; Famida Amer Macasindel, 29; Naica Amina Calimba Pundug, 23; Silitie Nashibah Calimba Pundug, 37; and Saramina Calimba Pundug, 60.

On the other hand, a certain Mo-hamad Naif Pundug, 23, brother of Najib Pundug alias Najib Hussein will be charged with illegal possession of explosives (hand grenade) after the arresting team found in his possession one fragmentation hand grenade.

The six suspects are currently undergoing medical examination and subsequently, will be brought back to the Police Station 7 of General Santos City for further legal procedures and processing. (With a report from PNA)

• ICRC gives med supplies

Medical supplies were recently donated by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) to the Armed Forces of the Philippines' (AFP) Camp Siongco Station Hospital (CSSH) in Maguindanao. According to ICRC, medical supplies such as tetanus vaccines were sent last week to help treat wounded soldiers in the recent clashes in Maguindanao province, central Mindanao. CSSH is attached to the 6th Infantry Division of the Philippine Army in Awang, Datu Odin Sinsuat, Maguindanao. From June to July, it has assisted at least 30 wounded soldiers since the armed clashes between the military and Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF) occurred. Lieutenant Col. Himaya Matas, CSSH hospital chief, expressed gratitude towards the donated medical supplies, saying "[such] are sufficient to treat 10,000 people in the next three months." (Jel Santos)

Duterte, Mahathir reaffirm their countries' ties

PRESIDENT Rodrigo Duterte seeks to bolster the country's defense and security ties with Malaysia after meeting with Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad on Monday, Malacañang said.

In a statement, the Palace said Duterte and Mahathir "renewed and reaffirmed the long-standing brotherhood and friendship between the Philippines and Malaysia."

"President Duterte likewise renewed the commit-

ment to further strengthen defense and security cooperation at the bilateral and regional level," it added.

Special Assistant to the President Christopher "Bong" Go said the bilateral meeting lasted an hour, which happened a day after Filipino ring icon Manny Pacquiao captured the World Boxing Association welterweight belt from Argentine boxer Lucas Matthysse in a match held at the Malaysian capital Kuala Lumpur.

The Palace said Duterte discussed the need to address terrorism, violent extremism, and transnational crime such as piracy, armed robbery at sea, and the illegal drug trade in the region.

"President Duterte expressed appreciation for Malaysia's sustained support for the quest for just and lasting peace and development in Mindanao," it said.

The Philippines and Malaysia have Memoranda of Understanding on

the Establishment of a Joint Commission for Bilateral Cooperation, and on Defense Cooperation, signed in 1993 and 1994, respectively.

In June 2017, foreign affairs and security officials from the Philippines, Indonesia, and Malaysia conducted a trilateral meeting to discuss how to address extremism, aiming to establish mechanisms to boost intelligence and information sharing. In a statement, the three countries said they were

also exploring socio-economic programs to address the roots of terrorism.

It happened during the course of the five-month long Marawi crisis, where the ISIS-linked Maute group was believed to be working with foreign terrorists including Indonesians and Malaysians.

The Palace added both leaders stressed the impor-

tance of working closely together bilaterally and at the Association of Southeast Asian Nations "to achieve shared aspirations of greater peace, progress and prosperity for the Philippines and Malaysia, and greater stability and security in the region."

Duterte also thanked Malaysia for its "sustained support for the quest for just and lasting peace and

development in Mindanao," the Palace said.

Malaysia played a third party facilitator in the government's peace talks with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front which culminated with the signing of an agreement that became the basis for the crafting of the proposed Bangsamoro Basic Law being pushed by Duterte.

EMontano

**MNLF kumander,
kasama dedo sa 'tandem'**

Isang kumander ng Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) kasama ang kasabang matatagpuan sa pagbabalik ng mga suspek na sakay ng isang motosiklo kahapon ng umaga sa harap ng Hall of Justice, National Highway, Midsayap, North Cotabato.

Itinatala ang mga masawang sina Danu Lumambok Mananimbong, kumander ng MNLF sa Benayan, Coma.

Batay sa ulat, dakong aras-10:00 ng umaga ay nakatayo ang dalawang biktima sa harap ng pasali ng justice hall nang umunipol ang isang motosiklo na kung saan ay pinaghabasil ang dalawang biktima ng backender -Rhoderick Befic-

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AU

BBL REGIME

**6,000 ARMM
EMPLOYEES
DEMAND JOB
SECURITY**

By Frinston Lim
@inquirermindanao

COTABATO CITY—Roughly 6,000 employees of the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) are asking to be absorbed into the incoming government under the Bangsamoro Basic Law (BBL).

In a statement released to local media on Monday, the employees, who belonged to the infrastructure, economic and government sectors of the ARMM, said they too could contribute in the new Bangsamoro government and should not be left out in the BBL.

Equal protection

They demanded equal protection and security of tenure under Section 1, Article III—the Bill of Rights—of the 1987 Constitution and Republic Act No. 6656, or the security of tenure law.

Under the reconciled version of the BBL, only ARMM employees in the education, health, and social welfare sectors would be retained once the ARMM is abolished to give way to the new autonomous Bangsamoro region.

Experienced and trained

The statement said the affected workers were experienced and trained to uphold the standards and systems in the ARMM regional government, which had been reformed in recent years to be an efficient and effective structure.

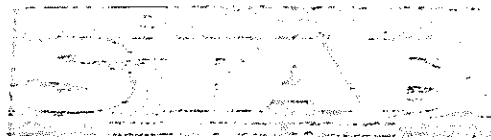
"The nonabsorption of the ARMM employees will hamper the smooth transition of the [regional government] to the new Bangsamoro government, along with the socioeconomic development of the Bangsamoro in the long term," it said.

Part of the region

The affected personnel are as much a part of the Bangsamoro region as those working in the basic social services sector who would be retained in the new government, it added. **FL**

Once passed, the BBL effectively abolishes the ARMM, threatening the jobs of thousands of ARMM employees. **INQ**

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Revitalized BBL to help dissuade Muslims from joining IS

By DELON PORCALLA

The new Bangsamoro in the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao—the law from which the proposed Bangsamoro Basic Law (BBL) originated—will not only provide independence to all Muslims, but will also deter them from joining terrorist groups like the Islamic State (IS), proponents said yesterday.

“Let’s give peace a chance. We fought very hard and long for this political solution, let’s give it a chance. *Kaya sa tingin ko, ito na ang isa sa mga solutions na mawawalan ng ang extremism sa mga kapatid natin doon sa region.* (That’s why for me, this is one of those solutions that will eradicate extremism among our fellowmen in that region),” Senate Majority Leader Juan Miguel Zubiri said yesterday.

“It’s a win-win solution that (Muslims) are presenting to the BBL. *Kasi sila na mismo* (Even they themselves), the imams now and the leaders of the communities, will tell them: don’t join (the IS),” the chairman of the Senate panel for the bicameral conference committee told

journalists.

“Because now, we have a genuine chance to improve our plight and so *hain ang magiging* (that will be the) solution to the recruitment of IS, *na ipang taumbayan nila mismo ang magasabi na* (that the citizens themselves will say) it’s not necessary. Extremism is not necessary,” Zubiri explained.

The new measure, which would probably be signed by President Duterte on July 25 when he delivers his third State of the Nation Address (SONA) will be known as “An Act providing for the Organic Law for the Bangsamoro and the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao.”

This amends – not repeals – the current ARMM law so as to “keep it constitutionally compliant” on the basis that the 1987 Constitution provides for the ARMM as enacted during the time of the late president Cory Aquino in the late 1980s and early ‘90s.

The senator repeated that the Duterte administration is eyeing a plebiscite by November for possible ratification, and if rati-



Zubiri

fied, the President can appoint members of the Bangsamoro Transition Authority either by December or January 2019.

If BBL loses in the plebiscite, nothing will be lost, though, since “our government will stay, will remain” and that the Mindanao setup “will revert to the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao.”

The biggest challenge for them, though, is how to muster support for the peace measure.

“There should be a campaign process here. The Office of the

Presidential Adviser on Peace Process together with the sectors involved here should do a massive campaign for its approval *kasi sayang naman* (because it'll be a waste)," Zubiri said.

"Napakaganda ng panukalang ito pero mabigyan ng pansin ang mga kababayan natin sa (it's a good proposal so that attention can be given to our fellowmen in the) Bangsamoro region. This will address the problems of poverty, lack of educational support, address the problem of fiscal autonomy," he explained.

Misleading information on federalism

Meanwhile, the Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG) cried foul over alleged misleading information spreading about federalism, amid growing awareness on the administration's campaign for constitutional reform.

Interior Assistant Secretary Jonathan Malaya cited the recent Pulse Asia survey on the increasing public awareness on constitutional reform, which he said indicated that

more people nationwide know about the proposals to change the 1987 Constitution.

"I am not surprised over the deluge of misinformation circulating today about federalism. Now that awareness is spreading, there have been attempts from some groups to counter our efforts by spreading misleading information on the proposed constitutional reform," he said.

"Upon closer inspection, the Pulse Asia survey actually showed that more people nationwide know about the proposals to change the 1987 Constitution," he added.

Awareness on constitutional reform has increased to 55 percent in June from 49 percent in March, according to survey results released the other day.

"This is clear evidence that our public awareness efforts have been gaining traction and yet we have just begun," Malaya said, adding that the consultative commission (Concom) just submitted its draft federal constitution to Duterte last month.

"In fact, we just began our

federalism roadshow last month in Dumaguete City so the fact that awareness has already increased since the last survey is encouraging to us. However, we still have a lot of areas to cover," he said.

While the survey revealed a positive trend on awareness, Malaya lamented the way Pulse Asia crafted the rest of its survey questions as it leads to misleading information on the people's support for federalism.

"The survey stated that 69 percent know little or nothing about the proposed federal system of government. And that's understandable because the Concom just finished its draft federal model. But to claim that a majority oppose federalism when only 69 percent understand it is not only contradictory but also illogical," he said.

"The questions in the survey were crafted in such a way that made it seem that Filipinos are vehemently against federalism... the survey did not even show whether or not people are actually for or against federalism," he added. 14

- With Cecille Suerte Felipe

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BICAM MEET

QUESTION STALLS BBL APPROVAL

By Vince F. Nonato
@VinceNonatoINQ

Should the proposed Bangsamoro Basic Law (BBL) repeatedly mention that laws enacted by the autonomous region's parliament must be "subject to national law?"

This question came up at the last minute, just as when the Senate-House conference committee was aiming to finalize the draft of the measure on Tuesday afternoon.

The conferees failed to clear the bill because of the objection raised by stakeholders led by the Bangsamoro Transition Commission (BTC).

Work on the measure will continue on Wednesday.

Asked why the conference committee could not finish its task within the targeted time, House Majority Leader Kocojin Fariñas, the group's cochair, said the deliberations got extended because of "due diligence out of our desire to come up with a better output."

FROM AT

The wording was so important that BTC Chair Ghadzali Jaafar, earlier in the day, told reporters: "If that will happen, we will also change our opinion regarding the Bangsamoro Basic Law."

Later, Senate Majority Leader Juan Miguel Zubiri explained that the BTC members were "ficklish to the issue that continuously mention the word 'national laws' in each and every paragraph in each and every article."

Although Zubiri played down the significance of such a wording, he said the lawmakers agreed to just mention this qualification under the "general principles and policies" of the measure.

Even with the reduced mention in the draft BBL, Zubiri noted that Section 20, Article X of the 1987 Constitution mandates that the regional laws should be

"subject to the provisions of this Constitution and national laws."

"It's not very important, but it is a cause of concern to some members of the BTC. We've resolved it now," he told reporters on the sidelines of the closed-door deliberations in Mandaluyong City.

After this resolution came about, Jaafar told reporters: "I'm satisfied, 100 percent."

He said the BTC was initially worried that "we would have problems with the parliament in the Bangsamoro" had the measure been peppered with the phrase, although he did not specify these concerns.

Inland waters

The final deliberations on the measure was also aimed at dealing with another contentious provision: the administration of the region's inland waters such as Lake Lanao.

The Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro—the final peace deal signed in March

AL OF BANGSAMORO BASIC LAW BY CONFERENCE COMMITTEE



Ghadzali Jaafar —EDWIN BACASMAS



Miguel Zubiri —EDWIN BACASMAS

2014 by the government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF)—as well as the version passed by the House granted the Bangsamoro region "exclusive powers" over the inland waters.

But Zubiri on Tuesday told reporters that inland waters would likely be placed under "comanagement" with the national government, especially as Lake Lanao's hydropower supplies 30 percent of the energy

needs of the entire Mindanao. Instead, a 50-50 revenue-sharing scheme would be implemented when in the use of inland waters, similar to the proposals for the use of fossil fuels.

'Good' quality

Asked if the ETC was satisfied with the compromise, Jaafar replied in the affirmative.

Mohager Iqbal, chair of the MILF peace panel, said the Mo-

ro rebel group expected alterations "for the betterment of the bill" and saw the quality of the proposed BBL as good.

"We are looking forward to an enhanced bill," Iqbal told the Inquirer by phone.

"The totality of the bill as expected is not 100 percent but I would rate it as 85 percent," he said.

But the Bangsamoro Insider Mediators, a group of civil society organizations awaiting the final text of the measure, called on Congress to be faithful to the concessions made under the 2014 peace agreement.

Power plants

"This is about self-determination and should never be the determination of those who have committed injustices against us, much less by those who have nothing but ill will and prejudice against us," Shallah Allian said in a press briefing.

Allian said the inland waters should be exclusively governed

by the regional government without distinction whether it be a source of energy or not."

Drieza Lininding noted that historically, the governments of Lanao del Norte and Iligan City have gotten much of the hydropower revenue despite lying outside the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao—instead of the Moro province of Lanao del Sur where the lake is located.

This was because the power-generating plants were located in Lanao del Norte and Iligan City.

"Radical groups and extremism occur because of the unequal policies," Lininding said.

Other provisions that the groups wanted to be restored include the holding of periodic plebiscites to determine if other areas wanted to join the Bangsamoro, and the delimitation of the Bangsamoro waters to 22,224 kilometers from the coastline. —WITH REPORTS FROM

JULIE ALIPALA, KRISTELA DANIELLE BOO AND ANNA PATRICIA CAMPOS INQ

BARMM to replace ARMM via BBL

By ALI G. MACABALANG

COTABATO CITY – The Bicameral Conference Committee of the 17th Congress has agreed on abolishing the 28-year-old Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) and creating in its stead the Bangsamoro in ARMM or BARMM ostensibly to preempt possible legal question before the Supreme Court.

With their separate versions of the Bangsamoro Basic Law (BBL) approved last month, the Senate and the House of Representatives named the new entity as "Autonomous Region for Bangsamoro" and "Autonomous Region in Bangsamoro" or ARB for short, respectively. Initials reports from both chambers showed.

Allied civil society organizations (CSOs) pushing for the BBL, posted on Monday on Facebook a copy of the working draft of the joint panel showing the preamble of the measure being reconciled for submission to the President on or before the delivery of his third State-of-the-Nation Address (SONA) on July 23.

"The name of the political entity under this organic law (BBL) shall be known as the Bangsamoro in the autonomous region in Muslim Mindanao, herein after referred to as Bangsamoro." Section 2 of the Article 1 of the draft preamble states:

Before and during the BBL plenary deliberations in both chambers of Congress, lawyers allied with the crafters of the 1987 Constitution revealed their intent to question its enactment before the Supreme Court.

It was learned that one of the bases in the planned legal petition was the 17th Congress' inclination to replace ARMM with a new geo-political entity without the term "Muslim Mindanao," which is enshrined in the 1987 Constitution.

Any act of scrapping such term would require an amendment in the Constitution, according to prospect petitioners. House Speaker Pantaleon Alvarez earlier stated that as a lawyer himself, he foresees possible legal question on such aspect.

With the retention of the term "Muslim Mindanao" in the new political entity called BARMM or Bangsamoro for short, Ghazali Jaafar declared on Monday the readiness of the proponents to defend the constitutionality of the BBL.

Jaafar, chair of the Bangsamoro Transition Commission (BTC) that crafted the BBL, also downplayed as "rhetoric and academic" the complaints of the ARMM's 24 legislators against an extension in the BTC operation as caretaker in the first two years of transition of ARMM to the succeeding entity.]]

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July 2016

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Jaafar: Limited parliament clout could doom BBL

THE Bangsamoro Transition Commission (BTC) will withdraw its support to the Bangsamoro Basic Law (BBL) if it will restrict the authority of Bangsamoro Parliament to enact laws.

BTC Chairman Ghazali Jaafar made the position amid the ongoing Bicameral Conference Committee discussions on the proposed

BBL which will abolish the existing Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) and replace it with Bangsamoro Region.

"They keep on saying that our [Bangsamoro] parliament should legislate laws always in accordance or in adherence to the national law. We don't agree with that," Jaafar said

in a chance interview.

"If everything will remain unchanged, [we'll support it]. But if they keep on changing it (draft BBL), we might change our opinion," he added.

Jaafar earlier said the proposed BBL was not watered down even if the Bicam panel decided to adopt

the House version which provides that the inclusion of the six Lanao del Norte municipalities and 39 barangays of North Cotabato in the Bangsamoro Region will only materialize if their respective mother province approves of it via a plebiscite.

Under the BTC version, these
▶ BBL A2

BBL FROM A1

Jaafar: Limited parliament clout

places can join the Bangsamoro Region via a plebiscite and without the approval of their respective mother province.

Before the start of the deliberations, the Bicam panel vowed that the BBL will be compliant with the 1987 Constitution.

Under the 1987 Constitution, autonomous regions should be created in Muslim Mindanao and in the Cordilleras "consisting of provinces, cities, municipalities, and geographical areas sharing common and distinctive historical and cultural heritage, economic and social structures, and other relevant characteristics within the framework of this Constitution

and the national sovereignty, as well as territorial integrity of the Republic of the Philippines."

Likewise, the 1987 Charter provides that the President will maintain general supervision over autonomous regions "to ensure that laws are faithfully executed."

"In performing our duties, we should be guided with constitutionality. The Constitution is the supreme law of the land [and] sets both the latitude and delimitations of what we can incorporate in the BBL," Senate Majority Leader Juan Miguel Zubiri said in his opening statement.

"We have to be guided by the Constitution because anything we

do here will surely be questioned," House Majority Leader Rodolfo Fariñas of Ilocos Norte added.

No final version

The Bicam panel was not able to approve the final version of the measure on Tuesday.

The panel, jointly presided by Zubiri and Fariñas, had been conducting meetings since July 9 to reconcile the versions of the BBL.

Zubiri earlier said that they expect the final version of BBL to be approved by July 17.

He said among the issues that were raised during the meeting was the removal of the phrase

"national law" which was often mentioned in the draft version.

"So we agreed just to have one general provision that says that it is within the context of the 1987 Constitution, the national law and this organic act," he said. "It is not very important but it is a cause of concern some of the members of the BTC (Bangsamoro Transition Commission) and we resolved it."

As for the control on inland waters, particularly lake Lanao, Zubiri said that the parties agreed that it would be co-managed and the sharing would be 50-50.

They also agreed to adopt the provision assigning the Bangsamoro waters in the Sulu Sea and the Moro Gulf to extend up to 19 kilometers.

LLANESCAT, PANTI AND
JEFFERS ON ANTIRORDA

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House, Senate to ratify bicam-approved BBL

By Maribel V. Cruz

SENATORS and congressmen are expected to ratify the final draft of the proposed Bangsamoro Basic Law when the 17th Congress opens its third regular session on Jan. 16.

House majority leader and House Speaker Rep. Rodolfo Percut said the bicameral conference committee approved version of the BBL will be submitted to the President for his consideration. Percut is the head of the House of Representatives conference committee on the BBL.

The joint congressional panel was expected to approve a final version of the BBL Tuesday—that is, "conditional" and acceptable to all parties concerned. The House's session was suspended in 2015 until 2017 when the 16th Congress passed Senate Bill 1737.

The President's imminent BBL signing into law next week will give him the power to appoint the members of the Bangsamoro Transition Authority this December, according to Senator Juan Miguel Zubiri, head of the Senate con-

tingent head of the bicameral conference committee on the BBL.

The BBL proposes to replace the autonomous region in Muslim Mindanao. The newly created Bangsamoro region shall be called the Autonomous Region in Mindanao.

"But ARMM will be retained should the creation of BAKMM lose in the plebiscite," Zubiri said at a news conference during Tuesday's bicameral conference committee meeting held at Eder Shangri-La Hotel.

Zubiri said the expected approval of the BBL will "be the day that God has made for all of us, especially Mindanao, although it's a rainy day, it is sunny in Mindanao."

"And we look at it as a sign that finally we'll be able to end this long-drawn problem of conflict in the island of Mindanao. Hopefully with this law,

peace will reign for long period of time for their children and their children's children," she said.

Zubiri said the first election of BAKMM could be held simultaneously with the 2022 presidential election.

He said Congress leaders are hopeful that the Moro Islamic Liberation Front will support the bicameral conference committee-approved measure as they have made every provision of the proposed law acceptable to the concerned party.

"The MILF has already said that it will accept about 80 to 90 percent compliant with the peace agreement signed in 2014. I am happy with that. We cannot get everything, sometimes what we want may not be conditional," said Zubiri.

Deputy Speaker and Batangas Rep. Ranec Ago welcomed the progress of the BBL to address the peace and order problem in Mindanao.

"Only proper legislation can surely bring developments in Mindanao as it offers solution to the peace and order concern there," said Ago.

President Rodrigo Duterte earlier threatened a step down should Congress fail to approve the BBL.

With PICA **RE**

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House vows more quality bills

By Maricel V. Cruz

THE House of Representatives is keen on passing "more quality legislation" aimed at uplifting the socioeconomic condition of the people as Congress' Third Regular Session opens on July 23, in time for President Rodrigo Duterte's State of the Nation Address.

House Deputy Speaker and Cebu City Rep. Gwendolyn Garcia said the 17th Congress under Speaker Pataleon Alvarez had productive first and second regular sessions where 120 measures were passed.

"We expect that number to increase further as we have already ratified a few bicameral conference committee reports and there are several measures that remain unacted on by bicameral conference committees," Garcia said.

Garcia added several of the priority measures had been identified by the administration in the common legislative agenda as agreed on by the Legislative Executive Development

Advisory Committee.

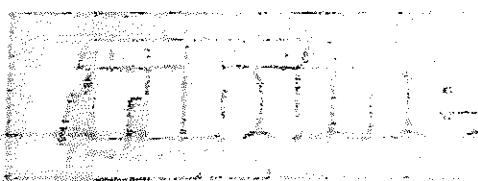
"There are a few more measures in this list that are still pending before the respective House committees and we are optimistic we could fulfill our commitment to approve these during the Third Regular Session. There could be some additional items in our legislative agenda that may be identified after the President's SONA," Garcia said.

One of the last measures the House approved before adjourning sine die last May 30 was the proposed Bangsamoro Basic Law.

"The approval of BBL is an affirmation of our support to the President who believes the legislation is crucial to securing lasting peace in Mindanao which is now facing threats from Islamist extremists. The BBL bill is currently under deliberation by the bicameral conference committee and we expect to ratify it by July 23 to be presented to President Duterte on the same day for his signature," Garcia added.

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July 2018



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Zubiri wants BBL vote ASAP

By Mario Mallari

Senate Majority Leader Juan Miguel Zubiri yesterday expressed hopes that a plebiscite for the approval or disapproval of the proposed Bangsamoro Basic Law (BBL) may be scheduled this November.

"Looking at the plebiscite hopefully by November this year, if it's ratified," Zubiri told reporters in the sidelines of the bicameral committee meeting at EDSA Shangri-La.

If approved in the plebiscite, Zubiri said President Duterte can appoint members of the Bangsamoro Transition Authority (BTA) by December or January 2019 that will oversee the transition from the current Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM).

Asked what if the BBL fails to get the people's nod, Zubiri said "ARMM government remains. Nothing changes."

Zubiri said that the bicameral committee discussed the co-management of bodies of water and energy production between the national government and the new Bangsamoro political entity and the transitory provision.

The senator said there was no resistance on the proposed co-management of the zones of cooperation like the Sulu Sea and parts of the Moro Gulf.

"I think it's an acceptable solution to both sides. I think both sides will agree to that," said Zubiri, who is leading the Senate contingent to the committee.

On the other hand, Zubiri said there will definitely be problem if the zones are left only to the national government to manage.

Zubiri said that under the transitory provision, a PTA will be created to oversee the smooth transition from ARMM to the new Bangsamoro political entity.

"That the transition team will take over. We want to make sure that there will be no gap when the President signs this. Because once the President signs this, technically there will be vacuum," said Zubiri.

The bicameral committee has yet to come up with the final and approved copy of the reconciled BBL version yesterday and is set to meet again today at the Senate.

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November plebiscite eyed for BBL ratification

SENATE majority leader Juan Miguel Zubiri yesterday said the plebiscite for the ratification of the proposed Bangsamoro Basic Law (BBL) may be held in November this year.

Zubiri, co-chair of the bicameral conference committee reconciling the Senate and the House of Representatives versions of the measure, said once the BBL is ratified through a plebiscite, President Duterte can set up the Bangsamoro Transition Authority (BTA).

"We're looking at a plebiscite hopefully by November of this year for ratification," Zubiri told reporters during a break in the bicameral conference.

"Once (the BBL) is ratified, the president can appoint members of the BTA by December or January at the latest of 2019," he said, adding parliamentary elections may be held in 2022 along with the

national elections.

Asked if the proposed BBL is not approved in the plebiscite, Zubiri said the current Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) set-up will remain. "We will revert to ARMM, nothing changes," he said.

The bicameral panel adjourned last night without approving the final version of the proposed legislation. The panel will meet again today for the last round of committee discussions after which signing of the final bicameral version is expected in the afternoon.

House majority leader Rodolfo Fariñas said the bicameral panel has been holding marathon meetings to reconcile conflicting provisions in the House and Senate versions so the final copy will be ready for ratification by the two houses of Congress.

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during the morning session on July 25 and allow President Duterte to sign it into law hours before his third State of the Nation Address (SONA) at four in the afternoon of the same day.

INLAND WATERS

During yesterday's bicameral meeting, Zubiri said lawmakers agreed that inland bodies of water in the Bangsamoro region that are used for energy production, like Lake Lanao, will be co-managed by the regional government and the national government.

Zubiri said he will propose that the secretary of the Department of Energy and the Chief Minister of the bangsamoro government form a body to help co-manage Lake Lanao.

Zubiri said all other inland bodies of water not used to produce energy, will be under the control of the Bangsamoro regional government.

In both the Senate and House versions of the measure, the preservation and management of the inland bodies of water will be under the territorial jurisdiction of the Bangsamoro government.

But the Senate version has a provision that Moro and non-Moro indigenous people will retain their right to govern, preserve, manage and control the resources found in inland waters within the ancestral domains.

The House version on the other

hand, states that waters providing energy to power generating plants are exempted from the jurisdiction of the Bangsamoro government.

The senator said the decision on the co-management of inland waters took into consideration economic and security concerns.

"We must put biases aside and must look at the Bangsamoro government as a partnership development not as an agency that will hamper development in the region. I believe that co-management will be ideal," he said.

Aside from the provision on inland bodies of water, Zubiri said the bicameral panel likewise discussed the transitory provisions in the proposed BBL.

"Technically, there will already be a vacuum (in the leadership). We want to make sure there will be a smooth transition from the regional government of ARMM to the Bangsamoro Transition Authority," he said.

The first elections for the Bangsamoro parliament to which the powers of the Bangsamoro regional government are vested, will be held in 2022.

Zubiri said the BTA will be the governing body in the region while it transitions from the ARMM government to a parliamentary government.

The BBL will be the enabling law for the 2014 Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro (CAB) signed between the Aquino administration and the secessionist group MILF. — Wendell Vigüita and JP Lopez

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MILFs and MNLFs to join PNP under BBL – Zubiri

By **VANNE ELAINE P. TERRAZOLA**

Former soldiers of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) and Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) will be allowed to join the ranks of the Philippine National Police once the proposed Bangsamoro Basic Law (BBL) is signed into law.

Senate Majority Floor Juan Miguel

Zubiri said Monday that the PNP would relax its requirements for individuals who wish to join the Bangsamoro police when the proposed BBL is enacted.

"There will be hiring there — we put a like a sort of sweetener to the deal — that the former soldiers of the MILF, MNLF will (be allowed to join the PNP)," Zubiri, a main sponsor of the BBL said.

"The combatants of the MNLF and MILF can join the PNP because we waived the requirements for height, weight, and educational requirement," he added.

The proposed BBL, he said, contained provisions that MILF and MNLF fighters who wanted to enter into the PNP recruitment program will be waived from its physical qualifications.

MNLF and MILF recruits will be given a 15-year period to fulfill the educational requirement, Zubiri noted.

Zubiri, however, made clear that the groups "did not ask" for their inclusion to the country's police force. 12

CTALK
CITO BELTRAN

Good news or bad news?

What do you want first: the good news or the bad news?



That was the feeling I got as I listened to our guests on Agenda at OneNewsPh (SignalTV) regarding provisions and features of the BBL or Bangsa Moro Basic Law that has now been named the BOL or BangsaMoro Organic Law alongside the proposed draft constitution for federalism in the Philippines.

I started out being neutral or in the middle, then became optimistic and supportive then ended up remembering a quotation from Jean Baptiste Karr who said: "The more things change - the more they stay the same."

As far as the BBL/BOL vision is concerned, the quick summary is that the law will channel more money to the Bangsa Moro Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao or BARMM. It will place the MILF as the majority and controlling party. Once they have their parliament in place in Cotabato they will then move forward to establishing an Islam based society and self determination. More likely than not, this will establish a BARMM or Mindanao for "Mindanaoans" or Muslims of Mindanao.

The biggest challenge or concern will probably center on whatever policy of "integration" or "co-existence" the majority MILF or the BARM parliament could develop in order not to scare away threaten or turn off "non-Muslims." The next and more immediate challenge along the lines of integration is how the ruling majority or leaders of BARMM or Muslim Mindanao could convince all the warrior/tribal based groups to think as "Citizens of BARMM" and not as tribal enemies. Third and probably the biggest threat to the future of BARMM is to insure complete transparency, public accountability and divine wisdom in receiving billions upon billions of pesos like never before, prioritizing expenditures and making sure that there is just, if not equal, distribution of wealth and opportunities for all, not just for the Muslims in their territory but also non-Muslims. More men have failed because of success and these important points would be where the BARMM should rise or fall.

I never thought I would see a veteran warrior get "Boo-laga" but I did. While we're all pleasantly discussing the features and cross impact of the proposed draft constitution for federalism on the BBL/BOL, our other guest Atty. Michael Yusingco went out of his way to advise Chairman Chazal Jaafar that the draft constitution gives Congress the power to create or dissolve "federalized regions," even the very special

Bangsa Moro Autonomous Region. I later heard in the live coverage of the Senate hearing on the draft constitution that Congress will have the exclusive power to dissolve or create as long as it does not create more than the 16 "federated states." The BARMM and CAR were not mentioned and that now has the attention of Congress because this could complicate things as far as the BBL/BOL proposed law is concerned. I expect that after the initial "Boo-laga," Chairman Jaafar will rush to his colleagues in the consultative committee to stonewall the congressional power to dissolve the BARMM or enshrine its permanent existence into law if not the constitution.

With half the year over, I guess it is safe to say that statistically speaking, the local automotive industry is in a worrying state of affairs and much of it is being blamed on TRAIN 1. Although many people bought cars in advance late last year, the seven-month slump or dip in vehicle sales for 2018 has started to be noticed by head offices in Japan, Korea etc. where regional executives are demanding and pressuring Philippine offices to explain the "unbelievable" or the unexplainable drop in sales month after month. After investing billions of pesos in car assembly plants, auto parts manufacturing plants, we can understand the shock and disbelief of regional officials why their local offices and agents can't sell!

While the first quarter drop in sales maybe a result of "Pre-TRAIN 1" purchases, the subsequent dismal performance from March to July are all being blamed to TRAIN related inflation, particularly added taxes, high prices of fuel as well as other priority or prime commodities.

Most people might shrug off the matter until we all hear about production plants reducing production and operations, reducing work shifts from two down to one, redundancy programs being put into place in factories as well as sales headquarters. Next thing we will hear will be cutbacks in employee benefits or programs. By the last quarter of 2018, it will be a serious concern to learn how many vehicles will be forecasted for local production or imported for sale in the country because this will tell us what will happen to the local auto industry in 2019 and how much lost revenues and jobs the government has to take responsibility for due to inflation triggering taxation. It has happened before both here and abroad several times in recent history. The difference is that in modern countries, governments dutifully recognize when laws or taxes meant to benefit the nation can disrupt or impair certain industries, and responsibly respond by way of government intervention, reduced taxes to save jobs, temporary aid or direct assistance to manufacturing plants.

I would advise the current administration particularly those in the DTI, DOF and DOLE to carefully monitor and seriously consider the possibility of reduced productions in the manufacturing sector because that is where many jobs are now at risk. Don't wait to see the fire before you ring the bell, prepare now, save jobs later!

Frenemies

Just recently, Foreign Affairs Secretary Alan Cayetano announced that leaders of the 10-member Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and China would begin negotiations in August for the crafting of a Code of Conduct (CoC) on the South China Sea.

While conceding that all parties are still facing challenges on the substance of the CoC, Cayetano said the Philippines was keen on pushing for a substantial document.

China's claims in the South China sea are being contested by four ASEAN members, namely Brunei, Malaysia, Philippines, and Vietnam, as well as Taiwan.

HIDDEN AGENDA



MARY ANN LL. REYES

The ASEAN foreign ministers and China, as early as 2002, have signed a declaration on the conduct by the parties in the South China Sea, while last year their foreign ministers adopted a framework of the CoC that will facilitate the work for the conclusion of an effective Code on a mutually agreed timeline.

China was ASEAN's largest trading partner in 2016 and remained the region's fourth largest external source of foreign direct investment. They aim to increase their two-way trade to \$1

trillion by 2020.

But together with its economic importance, China, which claims almost the entire South China Sea, has reclaimed a number of disputed reefs and has put up military features over the past few years, thereby increasing tension in the region.

Given China's military might (its defense budget for 2018 would reach over \$170 billion) and its insistence that it owns these disputed areas by historic right, there is always that danger that any other claimant which will try to push its own claim will have to be ready to fight it out.

Whether one country has a better claim than the other is not something anybody would want fought out in the battlefields.

Vietnam tried to adopt a hardline approach in 1988 when it established its presence in areas surrounding Johnson South Reef (Mabini Reef), which is also being claimed by China, the Philippines, and Taiwan. The Chinese Navy sent military ships and ground forces to Johnson Reef. Both sides opened fire on each other, leading to the deaths of 64 Vietnamese soldiers and the wounding of countless others. China even took nine Vietnamese soldiers as prisoners. It took three years for relations to normalize between the two countries after that bloody encounter.

Vietnam has since resorted to diplomatic means and mass protests to assert its maritime claims against China. In 2014, tensions flared up anew between the two countries when China moved an oil rig into disputed waters in the South China Sea. Protests broke out across Vietnam.

Last June, there were mass protests at an industrial park in Vietnam's Tien Giang that was being built supposedly for Chinese investors. The anti-China protests led to about 100 people arrested. The protests actually began in Ho Chi Minh City, where workers opposed government's plan to set up three new special economic zones that would allow 99-year concessions, and thus practically hand over, Vietnamese land to what they suspected to be predominantly Chinese business interests.

One good lesson that we can learn from all these is that while the Vietnamese people continue to protest Chinese incursions into the disputed waters, the Vietnamese government has tried to maintain good relations with China.

As a result, bilateral trade between Vietnam and China is expected to reach a record of \$100 billion this year. Vietnamese exports to China have also experienced a significant yearly increase of 61.5 percent to over \$35.46 billion, helping to reduce Vietnam's trade deficit with China to \$22.76 billion last year from \$28 billion in 2016.

News reports from Vietnam have also revealed that China is among Vietnam's largest trade partners and also among its 10 biggest sources of foreign direct investments, with Chinese

registered investment capital in Vietnam amounting to \$12.7 billion US dollars last year.

Just like Vietnam, the Philippine government under President Duterte appears to be taking a more pragmatic approach to its maritime dispute with China.

Duterte and President Xi Jinping have committed during a bilateral meeting to ensure stability in the disputed territory and advance cooperation in offshore oil and gas exploration in that area.

Cayetano was then quoted by media as saying that the two sides are finding a common legal framework to conduct joint exploration and surveys in the contested waters, while Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi told reporters that the two countries would in a prudent and steady way, advance cooperation on offshore oil and gas exploration.

The Xinhua News Agency of China has also quoted President Xi as saying, after his meeting with President Duterte, that the disputed waters should be a sea of cooperation and friendship, and proposed a joint exploration between China and the Philippines at an appropriate time.

Our government sees the need to conduct this joint exploration fast considering that Malampaya, our source of liquefied natural gas, will be running out by 2030 while our demand for power has been rising.

The sad reality is that while the West Philippine Sea has huge oil and gas deposits just waiting to be tapped and developed, we do not have the financial capability to shoulder the mammoth cost needed for its exploration and development.

Experts suggest that a joint exploration arrangement between the Philippines and China, so long as these are covered by commercial agreements, is legally acceptable. After all, our Constitution allows the government to jointly explore and develop the country's natural wealth with foreign-owned corporations provided that the former retains full control and supervision of these resources.

Joint explorations are nothing new. If not for its partnership with Shell Philippines Exploration BV, our Department of Energy would not have been able to develop and operate the Malampaya natural gas facility. The Malampaya consortium for the 2002-2013 period alone has remitted a total of P173.28 billion to the government as its share from the net proceeds from petroleum operations.

According to studies, the resource potentials covered by the petroleum service contracts in the West Philippine Seas are much larger than the Malampaya gas field.

UNRAVELING

Filipino-Chinese must step up to help the country



B. GETSY TIGLAO

AMID the racist tirades that are being hurled by the pro-US opposition against China and the Duterte administration, it is time for the Filipino-Chinese to step up and be part of the conversation. As citizens of this country, the Filipino-Chinese have a crucial role to play in promoting harmony and understanding between differing cultures.

Most of the top Philippine tycoons, the country's richest people, are of Chinese ethnicity, including Henry Sy, John Gokongwei, Lucio Tan, Tony Tan Caktiong, George Ty, Andrew Tan, and Ramon Ang. Many of them were born in Xiamen, Fujian province, while others were the sons of Chinese immigrant parents, but all are now Filipino citizens.

I hope these Filipino-Chinese tycoons will start speaking up, which will help counterbalance the bias and racism being promoted by the opposition against China and the Chinese people. They owe it to the Philippines, the country where they built their wealth, to help stop this bigotry and ensure that we can join the ranks of rich and developed nations in Asia.

There are millions more Filipinos from the lower to middle classes who are ethnically Chinese but now identify as Filipino, with some not even bothering to learn Mandarin or Hokkien, and speak only Pilipino and English. Some of our nationalist heroes also had Chinese ancestry, notably Jose Rizal whose great-great grandfather was from Fujian.

Together with organized groups such as the Association for Philippines-China Understanding, the Filipino-Chinese community can also help counter the racist stereotypes that are being promoted by the anti-Duterte bloc by engaging in constructive dialogue and undertaking community service projects.

The criticism against the Chinese in the Philippines stems from their perceived wealth and exclusionary activities as they network among themselves and even live in Chinese-dominated enclaves such as Binondo (some say, also Greenhills). If one knew more about the history of the Chinese in the Philippines, specifically the regular pogroms undertaken against them during the Spanish era, one will understand why the Chinese often kept to themselves.

The Spaniards, who were threatened by the huge number of Chinese in the Philippines, had initiated pogroms or organized killings in 1586, 1603, 1639, 1662, and 1686 (these are the documented ones, scholars say there could be more). One of the bloodiest was the Sangley pogrom where 20,000 Chinese were killed by Spanish soldiers, together with conscripted Japanese and Filipinos. (Sangley actually comes from the Chinese word sang-lei or seng-li meaning merchant.)

During the bloody Chinese pogroms, many left Manila to settle in new areas in Central Luzon, and even sailed as far away as Visayas and Mindanao, to carve new lives away from the cruel Spaniards and friars in cities that became Cebu and Cagayan de Oro.

Recently, we've witnessed the dirty tricks and black propaganda being resorted to by the opposition as it continues in its plan to destabilize the government. They hung red banners in foot bridges around the city with the message "Welcome to the Philippines, Province of China." This was a horrible, unpatriotic act, and those who did it should be ashamed of themselves for demeaning the country.

These anti-Duterte groups are promoting their racist anti-China platform in order to destroy the government's efforts to have friendlier ties with China, a new economic superpower that is now helping us grow to become an upper middle-income nation (we're on track; this will happen by 2019).

Contrast their acts of betrayal with those of a concerned ordinary Filipino who removed the tarpaulin from the foot bridges because he said it was wrong and was sowing discord and confusion. This was nationalism in action: he understood in his heart and mind that the nation would suffer if the lies continue unchallenged. We salute his patriotic act.

As to the cowards who placed those banners, they are suffering from the huge political blowback following their dirty trick. Everyone hated what they did. They underestimated the revival of nationalism under the Duterte administration, which started June 30, 2016, when Filipinos saw the newly proclaimed President wearing proudly on his lapel the Philippine flag (instead of the American hand-me-down symbol, the yellow ribbon).

Don't believe the Western media propaganda that nationalism is a bad thing. As a matter of fact, the Asian dragon and East Asian tigers developed precisely because they adopted nationalist business and economic policies. Their businessmen and citizens were also fierce nationalists who invested in strategic industries that will benefit their countries most.

Here in the Philippines we have remained undeveloped because we allowed the US to dictate much of our political and economic policies for decades. We also sold all our vital industries, even public utilities, to foreign private interests following the Western idea of "privatization is a good thing." It's not that's why we have the most expensive electricity rates in the world, the slowest Internet, because the profit-oriented private sector controls them, instead of the State.

The stupid dependence on the US ended when Duterte declared that we now have an independent foreign policy where we are friends with all countries, China, Russia, and US included, who are willing to help us. Majority of Filipinos supported Duterte's new policies, which are now bearing fruit with the rise in economic growth and inflows of foreign direct investments (up 27 percent in first quarter 2018).

The opposition in our country is so outmoded they are still operating with a "colonial mentality." Their illusion is that the US will again save the day by helping us go to war with China, ignoring that this is now a multipolar world where power has shifted to specific regions, alliances, and nations other than America.

Our Filipino-Chinese tycoons realized early on that China, our prosperous neighbor with the biggest market in the world, is the key to economic growth in the Asian region. For instance, Sy's SM has already built seven malls in China, including Xiamen, Jinjiang, Chengdu, Suzhou, Chongqing, and Zibo, Tianjin.

With their resources, the Filipino-

Chinese tycoons could have an important role to play in the Philippines' economic development. They should come out of their shells and become active citizens; real patriots who will help this reform-oriented government lift millions of people out of poverty.

The Sys, Gokongweis, Angs, and others should initiate a dialogue with President Duterte on how best they can usher in sustainable industrialization and export-oriented growth. I have more faith in the Filipino-Chinese tycoons than in the Spanish-mestizo rich who are known to be partial to the hacendado clans of old, and prefer to keep the status quo where the poor remain poor.

The opposition keeps harping about that Hague arbitral ruling. That is the most expensive and useless ruling ever. It's not enforceable; it was "arbitration" without the other party present. This wasn't even a court ruling, and even if it was, who is going to compel the other party to heel? The US? In your dreams. The US didn't even ratify the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea. China is one of their major trade partners, not to mention a huge creditor of theirs. By convincing the Aquino administration to file a case against China, the US played us like fools. 12

Dialogue, diplomacy, and negotiations are the strategies that are now being implemented by the government with regards to the South China Sea disputes. This is the smart option, not the "I want to go to war and I hate the Chinese" stance of the opposition.

China is an economic success story. Through their new capitalist system done the Chinese way, they were able to lift out of extreme poverty 800 million Chinese. That is equivalent to eight Philippines. We can do this, too, if everyone will do their part to help and not destroy.

Editorial

BBL reaches the finish line

A NEW era is set to dawn on Muslim Mindanao with the impending approval of the basic law creating the Bangsamoro autonomous region after years of false starts and legal setbacks.

There is ample reason to be confident that the proposed Bangsamoro Basic Law (BBL) will hurdle challenges, legal or otherwise, and not go the way of its predecessor, the Arroyo-era Memorandum of Agreement on Ancestral Domain or MoA-AD.

The MoA-AD, which sought to establish a "Bangsamoro Juridical Entity" without going through Congress, was declared unconstitutional by the Supreme Court in 2008.

This time, the BBL is shaping up to be the product of legislative-executive consensus, with the concurrence of the Bangsamoro Transition Council led by the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), which signed a peace deal with the Aquino administration in 2014.

By going through the legislative mill, the BBL promises to be more effective in addressing the roots of the Moro conflict and achieving peace in Mindanao through greater self-rule, compared with the existing Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM).

The national government will yield 60 specific powers to the Bangsamoro region, including the setting up of shariah circuit, district, and high courts that will have jurisdiction on personal, family and property cases as well as minor criminal offenses.

This will make the Bangsamoro region more potent than the existing ARMM, a failed exercise in autonomy because its umbilical cord remained attached to the national government.

The Bangsamoro region will also have enough means to develop its economy, with its powers of taxation and block grants of P60 billion to P70 billion from the national government.

This will be on top of the internal revenue allotment, or the share of national tax collections, received annually by provinces, cities, municipalities and villages.

The BBL is already in the final stages of bicameral deliberations, after Malacañang intervened to break a deadlock over the measure's territorial provisions last week.

The MILF is to be commended for agreeing to the provision in which six Lanao del Norte municipalities and 39 villages in North Cotabato will be incorporated into the Bangsamoro region if voters in their "mother units" or provinces approve it in a referendum.

This is a significant concession as it could reduce the Bangsamoro territory. There are questions on the legality of the inclusion of the six towns and 39 villages in the ARMM, which, following legal precedent, would be settled by province-wide plebiscites.

Another significant concession is the provision prohibiting the Bangsamoro government from procuring firearms, ammunition and explosives under its annual appropriations law.

The MILF's patience throughout the entire process is admirable. It could have bailed at any point given the tediousness of the legislative process, but instead made it an opportunity to affirm its commitment to peace and willingness to abandon violent struggle.

President Rodrigo Duterte is also to be commended for sticking to his promise to "shepherd" the BBL to passage, as shown by last week's Palace intervention.

The formal signing of the BBL into law will be historic as it begins the process of correcting centuries of injustice to the Moro people. Filipinos will look back to this period in the nation's history in which democratic processes and institutions prevailed over decades of fighting.

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SWS lies in its polls vs China and govt policy

BY RIGOBERTO TIGLAO
Columnist

The 'Yellows' old reliable, the Social Weather Stations, is at it again, disseminating falsehoods disguised as public opinion, underlining propaganda through its interview questions themselves. Its recent poll on our territorial dispute with China was widely

reported by media, with the TV network GMA-7's article on it headlined: "81 percent reject govt's 'do nothing' policy on West-Phil. Sea — SWS."

I initially thought it was just another of that network's usual anti-administration spin. But that was the angle of nearly all media outlets, which, it turned out, merely

* Tiglao A6

TIGLAO FROM A1

echoed the SWS' own press release, which was headlined: "4 out of 7 Phils. now repudiate government's policy of allowing Chinese intrusion in the West Philippine Sea."

That assertion is a total lie. That is not the government policy. The SWS itself in its poll questions did not identify it as the current government policy, only enumerating it among five options in dealing with our territorial dispute with China.

SWS' yellow hue is revealed as it has been the 'Yellows' propaganda task to claim that President Duterte's policy is to allow Chinese intrusion, which it is not.

Presidential Spokesman Harry Roque Jr. hit the nail right on the head when he pointed out the absurdity — or stupidity — of SWS report: "100 percent of all Filipinos, not just 81 percent of them, should oppose inaction on the maritime dispute"

Same stance as others

Duterte's policy on the South China Sea territorial dispute has simply been what other claimants (mainly Vietnam, Malaysia, Taiwan) have adopted since the issue worsened in the 1980s. Duterte's policy reversed President Aquino's stance of antagonism towards China. Duterte and other claimants' position can be summarized as follows:

Protest through diplomatic venues and through media China's claims, fortify what territories you control. Despite the territorial dispute, strengthen ties with China in order to take advantage of its colossal trade, private investments, and state loans — as Vietnam has been doing despite its battle with China in 1974 over the Paracel Islands in which it lost 60 soldiers with three of its ships sunk or damaged.

SWS lies in its polls vs China and

govt policy



**RIGOBERTO
TIGLAOG**

But don't act as the US' propagandist shrieking to portray China as an imperialist in Asia. And most of all, don't go to war with the superpower — or seem to move towards it, as President Aquino did in 2012 when he sent the Navy warship BRP Gregorio del Pilar to Panatag Shoal to arrest Chinese fishermen. (He withdrew it the day after when told of his boo-boo.)

One major policy of other claimants is also to limit their dispute to a bilateral one, and not get the US nor any other third party involved, as Aquino did when he begged for US intervention in the Scarborough stand-off in 2012 and asked the Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA) at the Hague to intervene.

SWS is lying when it claims that the Duterte government's policy is inaction. Would SWS define as action the deployment of the Philippine Navy to forcibly remove Chinese fishing and civilian vessels out of Panatag, or dismantle its facilities on Mischief and other reefs?

The SWS even blatantly lied in its preface to its poll queries to anger its respondents against China.

Lie No. 1. The SWS in its introduction to its questions read to respondents, claimed: "In 2016, the international arbitral tribunal decided in favor of the Philippines... China is the only nation in Asia that does not recognize nor accept this decision." (Emphasis mine)

That is not true.

In Asia only Japan which usually follows the American line in



Same propaganda aim, different approaches, but in the same period. (Wor vitriolic anti-Duterte blogger Jover Lauri, who put up the tarpaulin.)

international relations and which has a more serious territorial dispute with China involving the Senkaku islands, supported the award. All other Asian countries issued only vague statements that the disputes in the South China Sea should be settled peacefully.

Despite the undiplomatic demands of Aquino's foreign affairs secretary Alberto del Rosario, the Asean refused to issue a statement supporting the arbitration award. Taiwan even vehemently protested the award, since the Permanent Court of Arbitration ruled that the Taiping island it had transformed into a scuba dive resort with a five-star hotel and an airport is just a "rock."

Only the US and Australia — which don't have any claim or hold territory in the South China Sea — asked China to abide by the award. The European Union simply "acknowledged" the award but emphasized it doesn't take sides in territorial disputes of other countries.

(For an entity that pretends to be part of the academe, the SWS didn't even fact-check its statements. There no such thing as "International Arbitral Tribunal." It was the Permanent Court of

Arbitration based in the Hague (that issued the arbitration award.)

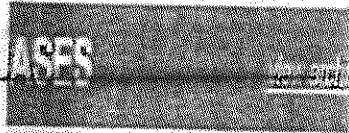
No island

Lie No. 2. The SWS in its questionnaire says: "China continues to aggressively claim and illegally intrude into the islands in the West Philippine Sea. Its aggressive actions include constructing infrastructures in some islands in the waters of the West Philippine Sea." Who wouldn't be angry at China with such an assertion?

That's a patent lie though. The infrastructure China has built in the area are all on the seven reefs it has occupied, which before would be submerged during high tide. China is making do with what it has. Sadly, our government don't seem to have the means to do that, so President Estrada ordered grounded a rusting World War 2 ship at Ayungin Shoal to serve as our "infrastructure."

China in fact is the only claimant country in the South China Sea that doesn't occupy an island, with Vietnam having the most islands, and the Philippines running second. There has been no island in the South China Sea — certainly not

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nan in yellow is alleged to be the

our Kalayaan group of islands — into which China has intruded into before or after the award.

Here, the SWS again demonstrates its dark art of manipulating a poll to produce the results it wants to. After painting China as a villain in its preface to its poll questions — that “it has been condemned by an international tribunal, that it is intruding into islands in the West Philippine Sea” — it asks its respondents to reply to the question: “Do you trust China?”

That’s just like: “Your neighbor is a land-grabber. How much trust do you have in him?”

Yet it is even astonishing that after painting China as the villain in Asia, 18 percent reported it has “much trust.” SWS of course cleverly didn’t have a category of “some trust” or “little trust.”

In contrast to SWS’ portrait of Filipinos distrusting China, the respected US-based Pew Research Center’s poll of 2,500 Filipinos in November 2017 reported that from 43 percent in 2015, 67 percent of Filipinos favor a strong economic relationship with China. From 41 percent, only 28 percent favor “being tough with China on territorial disputes.”

SWS agenda

The only valid aspect of the SWS poll is its findings on what to do with regard to our territorial dispute with China. As one would expect, 73 percent thought that we should have direct, bilateral negotiations with China while 74 percent think the issue be brought before international organizations for diplomatic negotiations. Of course, in line with its real agenda, the SWS didn’t ask respondents if they think Aquino’s move to bring China to court was a good idea.

The SWS real agenda? As has been the Yellow strategy, to portray public opinion as being against Duterte for his policy of strengthening our country’s ties with China despite our territorial disputes.

It doesn’t seem coincidental that SWS released its garbage a few days after another kind of garbage appeared — a tarpaulin put up in a pedestrian overpass trying to rouse Filipinos against Duterte by the announcement, “Welcome to the Philippines, Province of China.”

Both tactics are designed to block Duterte’s policy towards China, which would distance us away from decades-old vassalage to the US, which the Yellows want to maintain ever since they captured power in 1986.

SWS should be transparent and disclose who funded its anti-Duterte, anti-China poll. Could it be the billionaire who was the foreign secretary who lost Scarborough Shoal to the Chinese because he trusted the US too much, or worse, *misheard* what the US operatives told him?

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EDITORIAL

We will not be pushed around

ADMINISTRATION officials like to point to the strong mandate that President Rodrigo Duterte won in the last election as a way of claiming that most Filipinos support his advocacies—such as his tough stance on crime and his support for a federal system of government.

There are several pitfalls in associating Mr. Duterte's election win in 2016 and his policies, of course.

First, despite his landslide victory, Mr. Duterte was not a majority president by a long shot, winning only 39 percent of the vote. This means that while a large plurality supported the causes he promoted during the presidential campaign, by no means did a majority support him or those advocacies.

Second, not all of his policies today were clearly spelled out during the campaign.

For example, Mr. Duterte famously said during his campaign that he would take a jetski to the Spratly islands that China now occupies and plant the Filipino flag and tell the Chinese to choose between fistcuffs and guns.

Even then, candidate Duterte rejected war against China as suicide. "What am I, stupid? We'd all get killed," he said at the time in Filipino. But he was clearly portraying himself as being more assertive against China's claims.

In April 2016, he said if he were elected president, he'd make sure the UN arbitral tribunal votes in favor of the Philippine claim on the Spratlys, and refuse to honor any adverse decision.

A bare few months later, as President, Mr. Duterte did the very opposite of what he said and refused to use the tribunal's favorable decision as leverage against Beijing.

Instead, he launched a policy of appeasement with the Chinese in the hopes of garnering increased investments and loans and negotiated more contentious issues such as Philippine sovereignty, to bilateral talks that have been long on platitudes and short on results.

Worse, in the face of continued Chinese militarization, Mr. Duterte's spokesman became an apologist for the Chinese, defending the Chinese Coast Guard for confiscating the catch of Filipino fishermen near the Scarborough Shoal, a territory that is well within the Philippines' exclusive economic zone.

Now the children have come home to roost.

The latest Social Weather Stations

survey show that eight out of 10 Filipinos disapprove of the way Mr. Duterte's administration is managing the country's territorial dispute with China over the West Philippine Sea.

The survey of 1,200 adults interviewed from June 1 to 30 showed that 81 percent said it was not right for the administration "to leave China alone with its jeffering ore and military presence in the claimed territories."

Eighty percent also believed the country should improve its defense in the disputed territories and strengthen its military capabilities, particularly in the Navy.

The results of the SWS survey came days after the proliferation of scurrilous banners in parts of Metro Manila implying the Philippines has become a province of China, a harsh indictment indeed of a policy Mr. Duterte never articulated when he was running for office.

We have no issue with pursuing amicable ties with the Chinese, as long as we do so as free France and equals. We have no problem with rapprochement—but we certainly do not want to pursue the "friend or foe" position.

Mr. Duterte may have read incorrectly when he was still a candidate, and should begin acting like he still does now that he is President. To paraphrase one of our world leaders: "I know how to be right and reasonable, but we will not be pushed around."

Quality House legis assured

The House of Representatives will double its efforts to produce more quality legislation in the 3rd Regular Session of the 17th Congress to uplift the lives of Filipinos.

Deputy Speaker Gwendolyn Garcia said that under the leadership of Speaker Pantaleon Alvarez, the House had productive first and second regular sessions during which 120 measures were passed.

"We expect that number to increase further as we have already ratified a few bicameral conference committee reports and there are several measures that remain unacted on by bicameral conference committees," Garcia said.

She admitted though that several of the priority measures the administration identified by the Legislative Executive Development Advisory Committee (LEDAC) are still pending.

"We are optimistic we could fulfil our commitment to approve these during the 3rd Regular Session. There could be some additional items in our legislative agenda that may be identified after the President's SoNA (State of the Nation Address)," Garcia said.

One of the last measures the House approved before adjourning sine die last May 30 was the proposed Bangsamoro Basic Law (BBL).

"The approval of BBL is an affirmation of our support to the President who believes the legislation is crucial to securing lasting peace in Mindanao which is now facing threats from Islamist extremists," said Garcia.

"The BBL bill is currently under deliberation by the bicameral conference committee and we expect to ratify it by July 25 to be presented to President Duterte on the same day for his signature," Garcia added.

The House also expects to receive the administration's proposal for the 2019 General Appropriations Act shortly after the SoNA.

"With the budget deliberations expected to take up the bulk of our time for the remaining months of 2018, the House faces a huge challenge in approving the pending priority legislations," she said.

"But as the House had shown in the past two regular sessions we possess the determination and the will to fulfil our responsibility to pass meaningful laws to bring about change in the lives of our people," Garcia said.

Aside from passing the priority administration measures pending at the House, Garcia said one of the biggest challenges they face is the amendment of the 1987 Constitution for a shift to a federal system of government.

The Consultative Committee (ConCom) tasked to prepare a draft Federal Constitution has completed its job and submitted the draft to President Duterte.

Last week, the Speaker formally received a copy of the draft Federal Constitution from the members of the ConCom led by former Supreme Court Chief Justice Reynato Puno.

"But let me note the position of Speaker Alvarez and the House leadership that the work

of the ConCom is merely recommendatory. Such position is in accordance with the 1987 Constitution which prescribes only three modes of amending the Charter, namely, through a Constitutional Convention, through Congress acting as a constituent assembly, or through the so-called people's initiative," Garcia said.

The House had passed a joint resolution to convene Congress into a constituent assembly.

It is Congress acting as such that would determine the final draft of the federal charter to be presented to the Filipino people for ratification, she stressed.

Alvarez said the House leadership would have to revisit its present timetable to find out how to attend to the lawmakers' legislative duties, particularly the consideration of the 2019 budget and the task of amending

the Constitution given the additional complication posed by the mid-term elections in 2019.

2 heads better

“Rody and Mahathir met last Monday to discuss cooperation on issues.

The 93-year-old Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad's return to power provided a positive outlook to the region, particularly within the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean) which he nurtured during his previous term.

His victory brought the same measure of confidence to Malaysia as the triumph of President Rodrigo Duterte did to Filipinos in the 2016 polls.

Rody would not want himself called among Asia's strongmen but it is in this league that successful leaders like Mahathir and the late former Singapore Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew, who are contemporaries, belong.

Mahathir and Lee engineered the development of their respective countries from Third World to First World.

Mahathir was prime minister from 1981 to 2003 while Lee led Singapore from 1959 to 1990.

Many are now comparing Rody to both leaders in employing political will to achieve development goals for the country, including a determined effort to stamp out crime and the drugs problem.

Similar to Rody, Mahathir has been hounded by rights groups and international media in his previous term because of his manner of handling human rights.

The two met last Monday to discuss cooperation on issues now confronting the region, primarily the threat from Islamic State (IS) and the persistent irritation from the conflicting claims on the South China Sea.

Mahathir brings extreme respect which will be valuable in negotiating with China on the maritime friction.

The meeting between

DU30

Rody and Mahathir happened a day after both leaders cheered the victory of Sen. Manny Pacquiao who knocked out Argentinian challenger Lucas Matthysse.

Malaysian media said Mahathir usually shuns violent spectacles such as boxing matches, indicating that his viewing the Pacquiao fight was a concession to Rody.

Mahathir is apparently on a mission to weld the Asean stronger as a community after initially meeting Indonesian President Joko Widodo to confirm the two countries' close alliance on regional security.

Malaysia, Indonesia and the Philippines have indicated plans to strengthen a regional military cooperation starting with aerial and maritime surveillance programs against extremist groups.

“
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Mahathir also received visits from Singaporean Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong and Brunei's Sultan Hassanal Bolkiah.

A litmus test for both Mahathir and Duterte and the rest of the Asean would be the November summit where a code of conduct for South China Sea is expected to be finalized.

The meeting between the two leaders resulted in an agreement to curb the spread of extremism and terrorism in the region.

Malaysia will also pursue its role as partner of the country in the peace and development programs in Mindanao.

The Philippines will also secure a more committed assistance in fending off the IS terror threat.

Rody indicated to Mahathir the need to address terrorism, violent extremism, transnational crimes such as piracy and armed robbery at sea and the persistent problem on the illegal drugs trade.

The main concern of both leaders was ensuring that another IS adventure will not happen in the region.

Last year, militants led by acknowledged IS regional leader Isnilon Hapilon held a five-month siege of Marawi City that ended after security forces killed Hapilon.

IS-linked Malaysian and Indonesian fighters continue to pose threats in Mindanao as they are believed to have settled in areas near Marawi City.

Rody likely also consulted the Malaysian leader on the peace process with Muslim rebels, particularly on the push for the Bangsamoro Basic Law (BBL).

Malaysia brokered the peace negotiations between the Philippine government and Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) which resulted in the drafting of the BBL.

A strengthened partnership between the Philippines and Malaysia is expected with the reemergence of Mahathir who has shown a similar leadership style as that of Rody.

The Asean's potential in solving the problems facing the region, from the South China Sea conflict to the IS threat, will get a super boost with the Duterte-Mahathir tandem.

ONLINE NEWS

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Army, NegOcc city partner for construction of P2.3-M hanging bridge



GROUNDBREAKING CEREMONY. The groundbreaking and laying of time capsule for the PHP2.3-million steel hanging bridge in Barangay Buenavista, Himamaylan City, Negros Occidental to be constructed by the Philippine Army's 542nd Engineer Construction Battalion with funding from the local government unit. (Photo courtesy of 3rd Civil Military Operations Battalion.)

BACOLOD CITY -- The Philippine Army's 542nd Engineer Construction Battalion (542nd ECB) is building another local government unit (LGU)-funded PHP2.3-million steel hanging bridge in Himamaylan City, Negros Occidental.

The 3rd Civil Military Operations (CMO) Battalion said on Facebook on Sunday that the construction of the bridge at Sitio Cabagal in Barangay Buenavista will start after the groundbreaking and laying of time capsule held on Friday.

The 80-meter bridge will connect five sitios in the village, including Cabagal, Malo, Palay, Vito and Universal, whose residents mainly rely on farming for livelihood.

Most of them earn a living from planting sugarcane, corn, rice and vegetables.

The project, located about 10 kilometers from the city proper, is expected to be completed in November this year.

The steel hanging bridge in Barangay Buenavista is the third to be constructed by the 542nd ECB in Himamaylan located in southern Negros. The first two are in Barangay Carabalan and in Barangay Mahalang.

Councilor Emmanuel Castro, on behalf of Mayor Agustin Ernesto Bascon, expressed the city government's appreciation of the continued assistance of the 542nd ECB.

"We are thankful to the 542nd ECB because this is the third time that they are building a steel hanging bridge," Castro said in a statement.

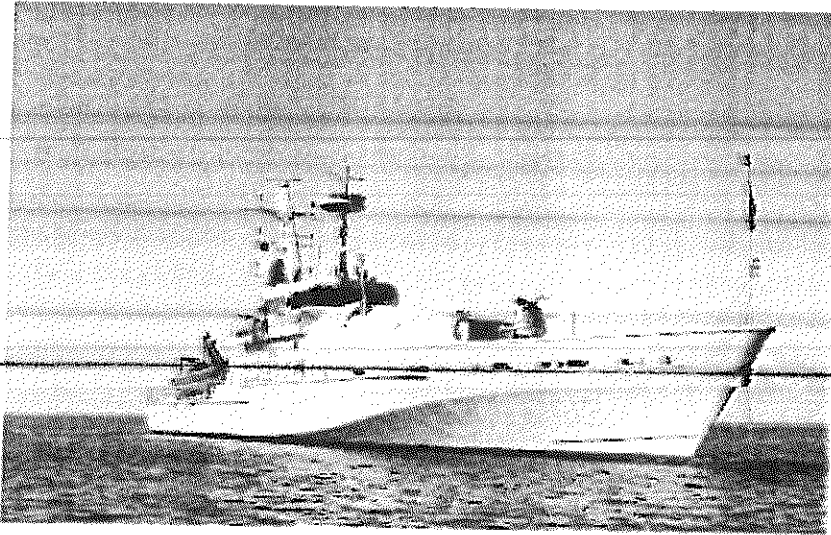
Major Arvin Cabantug, executive officer of 542ECB, said the project is a symbol of "peace and development" dedicated to the people of the beneficiary-barangays.

The partnership is a fulfillment of the social responsibility essence of the Armed Forces of the Philippines' Development Support and Security Plan "Kapayapaan."

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

Buenavista village chief Harry Higgins witnessed the groundbreaking and laying of time capsule, with about 70 residents together with Cabantug, personnel of the 3rd CMO Battalion led by Captain Ariel Castro and Himamaylan City Police Station headed by Chief Inspector Antonio Benitez and some city government employees.

PH, Aussie navies to hold maritime security activity in Palawan



PH-AUSSIE COMBINED MARITIME SECURITY ACTIVITY: The Her Majesty Australian Ship (HMAS) Wollongong, one of two Royal Australian Navy (RAN) patrol ships that arrived in Puerto Princesa City for the 10-day 4th iteration of the Maritime Security Activity with the Naval Forces West of the Philippine Navy. (Photo courtesy of the Royal Australian Navy)

PUERTO PRINCESA CITY, Palawan – Two Australian navy patrol boats arrived here Monday to participate in a Maritime Security Activity (MSA) to enhance training, interoperability, and cooperation against terrorism and kidnapping within Palawan's water lanes.

Captain Cherryl Tindog, chief of the Public Affairs Office (PAO) of the Western Command (Wescom), said the Royal Australian Navy (RAN) patrol boats will participate in the combined MSA with the Naval Forces West, Philippine Navy (Navforwest, PN) until July 25.

The activity aims to enrich the two navies' interoperability and cooperation in dealing with terrorism and kidnapping activities in water lanes that are of common interest to Australia and the Philippines.

The RAN ships – Her Majesty Australian Ship (HMAS) Ararat and Wollongong Armidale-class patrol boats – will perform side-by-side activities with BRP Ramon Alcaraz (FF 16), and BRP Simeon Castro (PC 374).

"There will be aboard ship training activities, maritime patrols, discussions on threats relating to maritime security, and others relevant to keeping areas of common interest safe," Tindog said.

She said the continuing conduct of joint activities such as the MSA with other navies has helped the country in preventing kidnappings and terrorism in the maritime domain.

She further expressed that there is nothing for Palawenos to worry about even with the mention of terrorism and kidnapping that the joint maritime security activity aims to address.

"Hindi dapat matakot ang public kasi the usual sila na ginagawa under MSA pagdating natin sa ganyang sitwasyon, alam ng Navy natin ang gagawin nila. (The public has nothing to worry about because they are what are usually discussed in MSA, so that when we get to the situation, our navy knows what to do)," she said.

This year's PN-RAN MSA will hold interoperability exercises on Naval Communication System, planning, individual shipboard training, maritime surveillance, and search and rescue. The PN-RAN MSA 2018 is the 4th iteration of the said bilateral activity.

The activity kicked off with an opening ceremony at the Naval Station Apolinario Jalandoni Covered Court with **Capt. Carlos Sabarre PN (GSC), deputy commander of the Navforwest** as the guest of honor.