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06 June 2018

Wednesday



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GOV'T AID TO POOR URGED AS PRICES SOAR

The inflation rate in May rose to 5.2 percent year-on-year in Metro Manila and to 4.6 percent nationwide, the highest in more than five years, according to the Philippine Statistics Authority.

By Ben O. de Vera, DJ Yap
and Jerome Aning
@Team_Inquirer

As prices of basic goods and services rose nationwide to 4.6 percent in May, a new high in more than five years, lawmakers

on Tuesday prodded the Duterte administration to activate the social welfare component of the Tax Reform for Acceleration and Inclusion (TRAIN) Act.

The component provides discounts and benefits for poor

families and low-wage earners.

In Metro Manila, the inflation rate was even higher, hitting 5.2 percent, according to the Philippine Statistics Authority.

The high inflation rate was mostly driven by increases in

prices of fish and seafood, fuel and lubricants, as well as bread and cereals, according to the National Economic and Development Authority (Neda).

Neda Undersecretary Rosemarie G. Edillon attributed the higher fuel, fish, meat and rice

prices, respectively, to rising international crude prices, declining catch, high cost of feeds, and "market panic" amid reports of supply shortage of cheap grain imported by the National Food Authority (NFA).

Sen. Grace Poe, chair of the

public services committee, wrote letters to Cabinet members, including Finance Secretary Carlos Dominguez III, Labor Secretary Silvestre Bello III and acting Social Welfare Secretary Virginia Orogo, to implement social welfare and

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benefit programs under the TRAIN law

Cash transfers, discounts

In her letter dated June 21, Poe asked the Cabinet members to take steps to release the benefits to the poor including the P300 monthly unconditional cash transfers from vouchers for jeepney drivers, a 10-percent fare discount for the unemployed and minimum wage earners, and a 10-percent discount on NEA rice.

"As swift as we had passed the TRAIN law, it is only right that we immediately implement the mitigating measures, which we have designed for the poor-

es. of the poor," she said.

Without the social welfare component, Poe said she feared that the TRAIN law "would result in more harm than good."

Since Jan. 1, the TRAIN law lacked up or slapped new excise taxes on cigarettes, oil, sugary drinks and vehicles, among other goods, to compensate for the restructured personal income tax that raised the tax-exemption up to an annual salary of P300,000.

Minimum wage

Workers blamed the new tax measure for the soaring prices of basic goods and commodities, prompting the Makabayan bloc of lawmakers to file last week a bill setting a daily minimum wage of P750 nationwide.

The party-list group Trade

Union Congress of the Philippines filed days later another bill that would raise the daily minimum wage to between P576 and P832 to enable workers to keep body and soul together.

In Seoul, Dominguez was quoted by the Department of Finance as saying that the tax law accounted for only 0.1 percentage point of the inflation rate in May.

Dominguez said the government was "fast tracking the release of the unconditional cash transfer for the country's poorest households, along with other social mitigation measures to stay ahead of the temporary elevated inflation rate."

'Disappointed'

Sen. Sherwin Gatchalian, chair of the economic affairs panel, said he was "very disap-

pointed" in the country's economic managers for not immediately implementing the social benefit program despite earlier assurances to the Senate.

"We already put P24 billion in the budget, so that should be implemented. As early as January, the mitigating measures should have been implemented ... and at the latest March," Gatchalian told reporters.

Sen. Bam Aquino, one of four senators who voted against the TRAIN measure in the Senate, said there should be other mechanisms for the rollback of fuel prices on top of the social mitigating measures.

At the House of Representatives, Quirino Rep. Dakila Carlo Cua also called on government agencies to help hasten the implementation of social benefits

included in the new tax law.

Cua, chair of the ways and means committee, said the effects of price increases were more pronounced on the poor.

He noted that during the deliberations on the TRAIN bill, economic managers assured Congress that programs would be in place to help Filipinos cope with rising commodity prices.

Stop TRAIN

Akbayan Rep. Tom Villarin said the "right move" would be to stop the implementation of the TRAIN law and not to wait for runaway inflation to happen or for oil prices to hit \$80 per barrel.

Budget Secretary Benjamin E. Diokno said the country's economic managers were

against putting the brakes on the TRAIN law.

"Suspending the TRAIN law and adopting other band-aid solutions will only have a minimal and short-term impact on inflation and will stifle our growth, further delaying our nation's progress toward becoming an upper middle-income country by 2019, such that around six million Filipinos would be lifted out of poverty by 2022," said a statement issued jointly by Diokno, Dominguez and Socioeconomic Planning Secretary Ernesto Pernua.

Gov. Nestor Espenilla Jr. of the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas said the "inflation outlook continues to be a concern and requires close attention." --WITH REPORTS FROM DAXIM L. LUCAS AND CHRISTINE O. AVENDAÑO INC.

Inflation hits new high

*4.6 percent in May
is highest in 5 years*

By LAWRENCE AGCAOILI and CZERIZA VALENCIA

The rate of increase in consumer prices hit a fresh five-year high of 4.6 percent in May and monetary authorities said inflation remains a concern despite signs it is slowing down.

Last month's inflation – or the rate of increase of consumer prices – was slightly higher than the 4.5 percent recorded in April but lower than the 4.9 percent forecast of the Department of Finance (DOF) and at the lower end of the 4.6 percent to 5.4 percent range projected by the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas (BSP).

BSP Governor Nestor Espenilla Jr. said the inflation outlook requires close attention, as the consumer price index (CPI) in May remained generally high.

"The Monetary Board will

consider what further adjustments are necessary to firmly anchor inflationary expectations and ensure that the inflation target will be achieved in 2019," Espenilla said.

Last May 10, the central bank raised interest rates for the first time in more than three years on higher inflation forecasts due to rising global oil prices and the effects of the implementation of Republic Act 10963 or the Tax Reform for Acceleration and Inclusion (TRAIN) law.

The BSP's Monetary Board

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Inflation From Page 1

lifted benchmark rates by 25 basis points to help arrest potential second-round effects.

Based on the latest assessment of the MB, inflation is seen averaging 4.6 percent this year and 3.4 percent next year.

"There are also signs that inflation is slowing and may be close to peak," he added.

Inflation averaged 4.1 percent in the first five months of the year, slightly higher than the central bank's two to four percent target for this year and next year.

"Still above target but maybe not going to be as bad as some might think," Esperilla said.

He explained that inflation slowed in the National Capital Region (NCR) to 4.6 percent in May from 5.2 percent in April, but still accelerated to 4.6 percent from 4.3 percent in areas outside NCR.

Meanwhile, the BSP chief pointed out month-on-month seasonally adjusted inflation also continued to decelerate to 0.2 percent in May from 0.7 percent in March and 0.3 percent in April.

"It helps that oil prices seem to have peaked and food price inflation is also slowing down," the BSP chief said.

Core inflation, which excludes selected food and energy items, is slightly higher at 3.6 percent in May from 3.5 percent in April.

Speaking from Seoul, Finance Secretary Carlos Dominguez III said consumers should expect a downtrend in the prices of basic commodities after crude prices start to decline in the world market.

Dominguez – along with other officials – was in the entourage of President Duterte in the latter's official visit to South Korea.

Wrong projections

Dominguez admitted that the administration's economic team may have made wrong projections on inflation.

"I guess our projections were

wrong. We always try to project on the conservative side, but I guess our estimates on the effects of these price increases were too much. But it seems to me that the inflation rate is... I hope it's leveling off," he said, citing "a sign of leveling off and probably a dropping."

"As you know, we watched very carefully the prices of fuel and they have been on the downtrend. In fact, the futures market of fuel is – the technical term is in backwardation, the prices of future deliveries of fuel are actually lower than the current prices. So we are seeing that trend going down," he pointed out.

Dominguez also said initiatives of North Korea and the US to engage in talks "are going to calm the markets quite a bit."

"And we hope that the Middle East also will be calmer than what it has been in the past few weeks, so that fuel prices will not be too volatile," he said.

"The projections of all the government economists has been that in the second half of the year inflation should be on the downtrend; in fact the estimate for the inflation for next year is below four percent," Dominguez maintained.

Despite the implementation of TRAIN, Dominguez argued more workers now have higher take-home pay and, in effect, more spending power.

Euben Paracuelles, economist at Nomura Securities Ltd. of Japan, said they expect inflation to further accelerate in the coming months and average 4.6 percent this year due to the impact of the TRAIN law and the impending increase in power rates, among others.

"We believe inflation expectations are likely to rise further, given still-accelerating headline inflation, as evident in rising demand for wage increases," he said.

Nomura sees the BSP raising interest rates by 25 basis points in its next two meetings this month and in August.

ING Bank Manila senior economist Joey Cuyegkeng said the lower-than-expected May inflation could further delay the central bank's tightening.

Cuyegkeng said the arrival of imported rice this month would bring back low-priced subsidized rice to the market and offset other price pressures, while the weaker peso would prevent the full translation of the drop in global oil prices.

"We believe that recent developments would mean that inflation is at or near the peak. These developments also cut the pressure on BSP to hike policy rates this month. However, we still expect BSP to hike policy rates at the June 21 meeting to pre-empt second round effects and stabilize inflation expectations," he added.

"This is slower than expected by the market," said Rosemarie Edillon, undersecretary for policy and planning of the National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA), referring to the inflation figure.

"In fact, even BSP overshot its forecast," she pointed out.

"This was still a bit higher than April 2018 but we are seeing signs of tapering off," she told a press briefing.

For the average household with a P10,000 monthly budget, the latest inflation figure translated to additional expense of P459 in May.

Edillon said the sharp increase in the prices of rice and fresh vegetables is pushing food inflation. Fish production was affected by declining catch while meat production was hampered by the high cost of feeds. Rice prices, meanwhile, were pulled up primarily by market panic triggered by the reduction of the stocks of the National Food Authority (NFA).

Pass rice tariff bill now

This, she said, should convince lawmakers to pass immediately the rice tariffication bill so that domestic rice prices could shrink by half.

"We want to encourage our legislators to fast-track the passage of the rice tariffication bill because Filipinos are paying twice for rice compared with other countries," she said, noting the local price of P38.95 per kilogram for well-milled rice as against the

00

DFA: 85 steps taken to protect territory

By **Dona Z. Pazzibugan** and **Jeannette I. Andrade**
@Team_Inquirer

If the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) is to be believed, the Philippines has "engaged in 85 diplomatic actions" to assert its territorial claim against China's in the West Philippine Sea since President Duterte assumed office nearly two years ago.

Ernesto Abella, foreign undersecretary for strategic communications, claimed that 85 actions were undertaken under the watch of Foreign Secretary Alan Cayetano, who assumed office in May last year.

Content matters

"We asserted our (territorial) rights numerous times in bilateral consultations, in face-to-face meetings and in written documents," Abella said in a statement issued on Monday.

"It is important to understand that in diplomatic engagement, it is the content that matters in whatever form it is conveyed," he added.

No details

He, however, refused to answer reporters' questions on what kind of diplomatic actions were taken, what incidents were covered by the actions and whether the actions were directed at China, which has turned seven islets within the Philippines' exclusive economic zone in the West Philippine Sea into defense outposts with missiles and bomber planes.

The statement came as the administration was under fire from critics and lawmakers due to its official policy of silence on China's aggressive moves to claim the entire South China Sea.

"While some critics may

nitpick, it is important that our gains are not only conserved but that our national interest thrives, as a careful accounting will show," said Abella, without elaborating.

Under the Duterte administration, the DFA has made it a policy not to publicize any actions taken by the government in response to alarming developments in the territorial dispute. **A3**

'We're not capable'

Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana said the Philippines was still incapable of defending its territorial claims.

"At present we don't have any capabilities to even just demonstrate to others that we are capable because we are not capable. We don't have the capital ships," said Lorenzana in an interview with ABS-CBN's "Early Edition." **INQ**

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'Countries should unite vs sea militarization'

BY DEMPSEY REYES

COUNTRIES in Asia should "band together" in voicing out their concerns against China's militarization of the West Philippine Sea (South China Sea), Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana, said Tuesday

"I think what should happen is for the claimants Vietnam, Malaysia, Philippines and Brunei to band together to build a stronger voice to make our wishes heard," Lorenzana said in an interview in Singapore on Tuesday.

"It makes sense, you know, what do the small nations do? They'll have to band together, group together to work. You're not stronger when you're alone," he added.

He was reacting to the statement of US Secretary of Defense James

Mattis who said smaller nations near the South China Sea have a "gap" when it comes to the capability to handle the militarization of disputed islands.

Reports earlier said Beijing had completed its militarization in Philippine-owned reefs in the South China Sea including Mischief (Panganiban) Reef, Fiery Cross (Kagitingan) Reef and Subi (Zamora) Reef.

Mattis had said China's military build-up in the South China Sea

and its deployment of high-end weapons systems in the disputed waterway was designed to intimidate and coerce its neighbors.

"Beijing has deployed a range of military hardware including anti-ship missiles, surface-to-air missiles and electronic jammers across the South China Sea, where it has built islets and other maritime features into hardened military facilities," Mattis said.

China has also landed heavy bombers on Woody Island in the Paracel Islands.

"Despite China's claims to the contrary, the placement of these weapon systems is tied directly to military use for the purposes of intimidation and coercion," Mattis told the Shangri-La Dialogue in Singapore.

He also blasted Chinese President Xi Jinping for reneging on a 2015 promise made at the White

House that Beijing would not militarize the island features in the South China Sea.

Lorenzana echoed Foreign Affairs Secretary Alan Peter Cayetano's statement that when the Duterte administration came in, it was met with problems such as fishermen being banned from fishing in Scarborough Shoal (Bajo de Masinloc). China also stopped buying fruits from the Philippines.

"Within a year, we were able to fish, we can trade normally, our export have resumed, a lot of tourists came in, even doubled," the Defense chief boasted, adding Manila reaped benefits after President Rodrigo Duterte visited Beijing.

Lorenzana said the provisions of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (Unclos) gave more rights to the Philippines in claiming some area in the South China Sea.

DFA: Govt acting on China issue

BY ASHZEL HACHERO

THE Department of Foreign Affairs yesterday said it has taken 85 diplomatic actions to assert the country's right in the maritime territorial dispute with China.

The statement was issued amid criticisms from various sectors about the DFA's silence in the face of Chinese military activities in the South China Sea, including in areas within the Philippine exclusive economic zone.

"We need to underline that since President Duterte assumed office, the

Philippines has engaged in 85 diplomatic actions, 35 of which were undertaken by Secretary Alan Peter Cayetano. We asserted our rights numerous times in bilateral consultations, in face to face meetings and in written documents," said Foreign Affairs Undersecretary Ernesto Abella.

He said the department, contrary to criticisms, has been doing its share to assert the country's right since President Duterte came into power in 2016.

Cayetano was appointed to the DFA in May 2017 replacing Perfecto Yasay who failed to get the nod of the Commission on Appointments.

Abella said that while the DFA respects criticisms, critics should also understand that in diplomatic matters and engagement, it is the content that matters, in whatever form it is conveyed.

"While some critics may nit-pick, it is important that our gains

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DFA

are not only conserved but that our national interest thrives, as a careful accounting will show," he said.

Abella also said the DFA supports President Duterte's policy that the country will continue to fight for its rights in the South China Sea and of Cayetano's statement that the "Philippines will not give up a single inch of territory in the South China Sea."

It will be recalled that in a hearing at the House of Representatives

last week, Cayetano said the DFA has filed "several dozens" of protests, "maybe 50, 100," in connection with Chinese activities, including the construction of military-grade facilities and the installation of weapon systems in the disputed waters.

The DFA chief also clarified that protests come in many forms.

This prompted Magdalo party-list Rep. Gary Alejano to challenge Cayetano, saying that the DFA filed only a single diplomatic protest against China, unlike his claim that the Philippines had filed between 50 to 100 in the last two years.

Alejano said the DFA filed a protest only on May 28 through a note verbale brought to the residence of the Chinese ambassador regarding the harassment by Chinese Navy and Coast Guard ships of a Philippine Navy resupply mission to Ayungin Shoal.

JOIN FORCES

Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana said five claimants to Spratly Islands in the South China Sea, including Philippines, should join forces against China who has militarized the disputed areas.

The five are the Philippines, Vietnam, Malaysia, Brunei and Taiwan.

"What do the small nations do? They'll have to band together, to group together. You know, if we are together, we are stronger," Lorenzana told an interview by the ABS-CBN New Channel, referring to the five claimants.

Lorenzana said the other claimant, referring to China, wants to resolve the dispute bilaterally with the other claimants because they are "weak."

"So I think what will happen maybe or what should happen maybe is for the five claimants...will band together as one and we are stronger voice to make our wish maybe heard by the other claimant there," said Lorenzana.

China has turned aggressive in its claim over the past several years, going as far as conducting land reclamation activities on several reefs it is occupying. The Chinese have built air and naval bases in these reefs.

Lorenzana said the military is not capable of defending its territory. He said the AFP modernization program has to be fast-tracked so the military will be ready for that task.

On whether the government can do more than the usual diplomatic protest against China's aggressive efforts, Lorenzana said: "We cannot. All we do now is protest, diplomatic protest, note verbale and talk to them, dialogue with China."

"There's nothing we can do. if they block our people there from re-supplying our outpost there in Spratlys, then what can we do?" he said. — *With Victor Reyes*

Duterte shops for military hardware

SEOUL – Before flying back to the Philippines last night after a three-day official visit, President Duterte went window-shopping for helicopters and military equipment that may boost the country's air defense system.

Duterte toured a facility that showcased Korea's air as-

sets and military hardware in a bid to see what can be bought to modernize the Philippines' armed forces.

Along with several top government officials, he considered the possibility of buying some units of Surion helicopter, a twin-engine transport utility

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Duterte shops From Page 1

helicopter developed by the Korea Aerospace Industries and the Agency for Defense Development.

Finance Secretary Carlos Dominguez III said there are also talks on the possibility of a joint venture to manufacture small arms in the Philippines, although he was not privy to details. Presidential spokesman Harry Roque Jr. said Duterte and South Korea President Moon Jae-in tackled the issue of security and defense during their bilateral meetings. South Korea, he added, offered to sell two frigates to help modernize the Philippine Navy.

Duterte earlier said he is looking at Korea as an alternate source of helicopters after he cancelled the plan to procure 16 Bell helicopters from Canada.

Meanwhile, lawmakers and defense officials pushed yesterday for legislation to reduce the country's dependence on imported ammunition to prevent a repeat of the near shortage of bullets during the Marawi

siege last year.

At the Senate hearing, officials said the Government Arsenal (GA) produces only 70 percent of the basic ammunition requirements while the remainder – equivalent to around 20 million rounds annually – are sourced from foreign suppliers.

Defense assistant secretary Manuel Felino Ramos said the Armed Forces nearly ran out of ammunition at the height of the battle to recover Marawi City from Islamic State-linked insurgents last year.

"Once we spend all our ammunition, we will be in quandary where to get what we need if we don't produce all our ammunition," Ramos told Sen. Sherwin Gatchalian, chairman of the Senate committee on economic affairs.

He said it was possible that the host government of a foreign ammunition supplier could withhold deliveries to the country under adverse conditions. – Christina Mendez, Paolo Romero

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PH Navy to join world's largest maritime exercise

By **JUAN CARLOS DE VELA**

The BRP Davao Del Sur strategic sealift vessel (LD-602) and the BRP Andres Bombardo Frigate (FF-17), two Philippine Navy ships, are set to join the Rim of the Pacific 2018 Naval Exercises in Hawaii, USA.

The Phil Navy ships arrived in the port of Cebu on Sunday while the Ma-

nyan Navy ship arrived yesterday Monday.

The two ships will join other navies for the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) group sail to RIMPAC 2018. The three ships will join with Indonesian Navy, Japan Maritime Self Defense Force and Royal Australian Navy.

A send-off ceremony for the Philippine Navy and Malaysian Navy will be

held today at the Subicbayne Naval Base in Cebu City as it sails to Hawaii for the RIMPAC 2018, the world's largest international maritime exercise, which is scheduled on June 17 to August 1.

Twenty six countries will participate in the exercise, gathering 47 surface ships, five submarines, 15 national and forces and more than 200 aircraft and 25,000 personnel.

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PH to acquire new technology to fight terror

THE Philippine military will soon acquire facial recognition technology to boost its campaign against terror, according to Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana.

"We are acquiring some technical capabilities, we are looking at facial recognition software so that we can easily track down the bad guys," Lorenzana said in a television interview in Singapore.

He said the acquisition of the new technology is part of the government's drive to enhance intelligence gathering to counter terror

attacks, like the siege in Marawi City last year that left more than 1,000 people dead.

Lorenzana said the Philippines will also purchase more drones or unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs).

Earlier this year, the US government, through its ambassador Sung Kim, donated six ScanEagle drones to the Philippine Air Force.

The drones could detect terrorist activities, piracy and even encroachment of Philippine territories.

Lorenzana had said the drones from Washington can also be

used for the Air Force's conduct of intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR) operations.

But this time, the Defense chief said they will acquire "bigger drones" which will improve the military's intelligence capabilities in counter-terrorism efforts.

"The small drones have powerful signal capabilities, now if our orders for bigger drones The Philippines has intelligence sharing agreements with Malaysia, Indonesia, Brunei Darussalam and Singapore.

Of these countries, only Singa-

pore has advanced signal communications, Lorenzana said.

He recalled that the said countries set up the intelligence fusion in the Malacca Strait, which stopped piracy. **A3**

Lorenzana said he had asked Singapore's Defense Minister Ng Eng Hen if the Philippines could replicate "just a part" of the intelligence fusion.

"[This is] to improve, monitor people coming in and out of Sabah going to the Philippines," the Defense chief said.

DEMPSEY REYES



Seven solons in new 'drug list'

From page 1

nating Agency (NICA), according to Carreon.

"The interagency task force is currently conducting revalidation of the list. But as Director General Aquino stated, we are ready to release the names if so ordered," Carreon told the Daily Tribune.

Carreon said the revalidation is for 'the purpose of law enforcement.'

The PDEA can proceed with the case buildup, or even subject the personalities to operations, if the evidence against them warrant such actions.

In an interview Monday night, Aquino said 91 politicians have been included in the validated 'narco list' of PDEA.

"At any time if the President wishes that this list is disclosed, I'll do it," said Aquino told a television network.

He vowed no sacred cows would be protected.

"Whether you are an ally of the administration or not, if you get involved into illegal drugs it does not matter. You know the President," said Aquino.

No less than President Duterte, who launched an all-out war against the drug menace, had released the initial "narco lists" composed of politicians using illegal drugs or protecting syndicates involved in the illicit trade.

Two incumbent mayors--Albuera, Leyte Mayor Ro-

lando Espinosa and Ozamiz City Mayor Reynaldo Parojinog Sr.-- have been killed in separate police operations in the past two years. Both of them were tagged by the President as drug protectors.

Two lawmakers, however, asked the PDEA to vet information that led to the fresh roster.

Akbayan Rep. Tom Villarin said the PDEA's list should subject the suspects to due process and for appropriate cases be filed against them if warranted.

"Cases should be filed first against concerned solons and others in the list. Regardless of status in life, people should be accorded due process," Villarin said.

Villarin criticized President Duterte's war on drugs.

Administration lawmaker Winston Castelo of Quezon City also told PDEA to be cautious before releasing the names of alleged drug personalities.

"I call on the PDEA to exercise caution. Everyone has the right to be presumed innocent until proven guilty," Castelo, a former stalwart of the Liberal Party, said.

"PDEA should also better bring the matter to proper legal forum. Filing a formal complaint against the concerned lawmakers is the most appropriate thing to do instead of just engaging in publicity," Castelo said.

Seven solons on new 'drug list'

By Mario J. Mallari
and Gerry Baldo

Seven members of the House of Representatives, one of them from Central Luzon, are in the new 'drug list' containing 91 names the Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency (PDEA) is set to reveal on the green light of President Duterte.

The PDEA has validated the involvement of the 91 new high-level suspects in the list submitted to the Chief Executive who has been firm in his war on illegal drugs.

Derrick Carreon,

PDEA information officer, told the Daily Tribune that PDEA Director General Aaron Aquino is still awaiting the President's nod before the names included in the latest 'narco list' is made public.

There is also a re-validation of the list by an interagency task force of the PDEA, Philippine National Police-Intelligence Group (PNP-IG), the Intelligence Service of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (IS-AFP) and the National Intelligence Coordi-

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Reds demand release of 6 political prisoners

By EDITH REGALADO

SEOUL – The Communist Party of the Philippines-National Democratic Front (CPP-NDF) has asked for the release of six political prisoners so that they could join in the continuing peace negotiations, Labor Secretary and chief government negotiator Silvestre Bello III said yesterday.

The six, according to Bello, included couple Benito and Wilma Tiamzon, Vicente Ladlad, Alberto Silva, Larry Baylous and Allan Jazmines.

Bello said the CPP has laid down the condition that those rebel leaders be allowed to participate in the expected resumption of the peace talks.

Bello is proceeding to the Netherlands

for the possible resumption of the long-stalled peace talks with the CPP.

"I am proceeding to the Netherlands for backchannel talks and hopefully, we will be able to come up even with an (interim peace agreement) which will pave the way for the final peace agreement," Bello told The STAR.

President Duterte recently approved

the resumption of peace talks and has given both parties a leeway of two months to come up with a final peace pact.

Bello said he is positive that an interim peace agreement will be forged soon between the two parties. 7

"The (interim peace agreement) is as good as a final peace agreement already," Bello added.

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13

Cop slain, 9 others hurt in Sagada NPA encounter

By RAYMUND CATINDIG

TUGUEGARAO,

Cagayan – A police officer died while nine others were wounded in an encounter with New People’s Army (NPA) rebels on Mt. Sipitan in Barangay Aguid, Sagada, Mountain Province yesterday. 13

A report received by Superintendent Rolando Nana, Cordillera police director, identified the fatality as Police Officer 2 Henry Dion.

Wounded were Senior Superintendent Joseph Cayat, Regional Mobile Force Battalion commanding officer; PO3 Wilfred Manacnis, PO1s Aldrin Bocalan, Clarence Abuan, Antolin Potpoten, Xander Depnag, Jake Paat and Yasser Guzman and PO2 Regie Palome.

Nana said Cayat and his men were conducting security operations when they were attacked by an undetermined number of rebels at around 10 a.m.

Nana deplored the attack, noting that the area was declared a peace zone in Mountain Province.

Pursuit operations for the

rebels are ongoing.

Soldier killed

In Quezon, a soldier was killed and two others were wounded in an ambush staged also by suspected communist insurgents in Lopez town on Monday night.

Pfc. Nilo Rivera Julian was pronounced dead on arrival at the St. Jude General Hospital.

Sgts. Victor Bartocillo and Jonathan Baylar were wounded and brought to the same hospital for treatment.

The victims were with a six-man Army team dispatched to pick up their colleagues who conducted a development project at the boundary of Barangays Cogorin Ibaba and Silang when they were waylaid at around 8 p.m.

The firefight lasted for more than an hour.

Government troopers caught up with the rebels around two kilometers away from the site of the first encounter, triggering another round of skirmishes. There was no reported casualty on the government side.

– With Michelle Zoleta, Jaime Laude, Ed Amoroso

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P19.00 per kilogram in Vietnam.

She said this weighs heavily on consumption, since 72 percent of Filipinos are net consumers of rice. She noted that poor families spend 20 percent of their monthly budget on rice.

The NEDA official also explained that rising international crude oil prices explained the higher inflation figure for electricity, petroleum and fuel for transport. Crude prices have risen by \$22 per barrel since the end of 2017.

"So the increase in domestic oil prices is really externally-generated," she said.

Edillon, noted, however, that international oil prices may ease because the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries or OPEC is now discussing the possibility of increasing output.

NEDA and the Department of Budget and Management (DBM) said the increase in global oil prices beyond the programmed level of \$60 per barrel contributed 0.5 percentage points to the overall inflation rate in May 2018.

Adding other external and domestic factors, the joint contribution to the inflation rate was 0.7 percentage points. The effect of excise taxes on petroleum, sweetened beverages

and tobacco under the TRAIN law remained at 0.4 percentage points, the same as in April.

Budget Secretary Benjamin Diokno said there is still a possibility of further upticks in inflation within the year, especially with the further increase in tobacco excise taxes in July.

But he made it clear the tobacco excise tax is only a small component of inflation.

"We are not ruling out the possibility that there will still be an uptick in inflation," he said. "But we are confident that it will taper off."

Diokno said there is no need to adjust the inflation target of two to four percent for the year as the average year-to-date figure is only 4.1 percent.

The budget chief also dismissed proposals to suspend the implementation of the TRAIN law. He said the TRAIN's effect on prices was only minimal and that suspending the measure would greatly deprive the government of revenues for public investment.

"Suspending TRAIN and adopting other band aid solutions will only have a minimal and short-term impact on inflation and will stifle our growth, further delaying our nation's progress toward becoming an upper-middle-income country by 2019," he explained. — With Christina Mendez

Trooper killed in NPA ambush in Quezon

By **DANNY J. ESTACIO**

LOPEZ, Quezon — An army soldier was killed and two other troopers wounded in an ambush staged by New People's Army (NPA) rebels the

other night in Barangay Cogorin, this town.

Police identified the slain soldier as Private First Class Nilo Rivera Julian, and the wounded as Sergeant Victor Bartocillo and Jonathan Baylar, all of the Philippine Army's 85th Infantry

Battalion (85IB) based in this town. It was learned that the team led by Sgt. Bartocillo was traveling to the 85IB Headquarters in Barangay Villa Principe in Gumaca at 9:25 p.m. when they were ambushed upon reaching Barangay Cogorin, near the boundary

with Barangay Silang. Sgt. Bartocillo and his men returned fire and the gun battle lasted for about an hour before the undetermined number of NPA guerrillas withdrew into the forest. Following the clash, police estab-

lished checkpoints along the roads between this town and Catanauan in a bid to block the passage of the retreating guerrillas. The army hot pursuit operations were still ongoing as of press time yesterday afternoon. 7

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SOLDIER KILLED IN CLASH WITH NPA

A PHILIPPINE Army soldier was killed while two others were wounded during an encounter with members of the New People's Army (NPA) in Lopez, Quezon on Monday night.

Col. Elias Escarcha, commander of the Army's 201st Infantry Brigade, said the firefight happened in Barangay Silang where the 85th Infantry Battalion was supposed to fetch troops who came from a community civic action at about 8:37 p.m.

He said an explosion from an improvised explosive device (IED) along the road met the troops resulting in a 30-minute firefight with the communist rebels.

The fighting resulted in the death of Corporal Nilo Julian, who was declared dead-on-arrival at St. Jude Hospital. Wounded by the IED explosion were Sgt. Victor Bartocillo and Private First Class Jonathan Baylar.

Escarcha said that as troops were reinforcing, another set of clashes ensued when they come across a group of withdrawing communist rebels along Barangay Cogorin in the same municipality at about 9:10 p.m. A7

"No one was hurt from the troops during the second dash but undetermined casualties

from the scampering enemies based on the traces of bloodstains," he said.

In a social media post, Ka Cleo del Mundo of the NPA's Apolonio Mendoza Command in Quezon, claimed responsibility over the attacks.

The offensives, she said, "were in defense of the rural areas" which she claimed are under the territorial jurisdiction of the NPA.

But Maj. Gen. Rhoderick Parayno, commander of the Army's 2nd Infantry Division, noted there was no provision under the 1987 Constitution that provides the communist rebels' jurisdiction over a portion of the Philippine territory.

"The national territory belongs to the people and the government as the people's legitimate representative has the sole authority over it," Parayno said.

He also justified the soldiers' presence in the villages where the clashes happened was for the conduct of a support program for civilians against the communists.

Soldiers recovered one unexploded IED, detonating chords and personal belongings of the rebels at the encounter site.

DEMPSEY REYES

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Soldier killed, 2 hurt in Quezon ambush

By Gemi Formaran

LUCENA CITY — A band of fully-armed men believed to be communist guerillas on Monday night ambushed a group of Army soldiers, killing one of the troopers and wounding two others, on the boundaries of Barangays Cogorin Ibaba and Silang in Lopez, Quezon.

Pfc. Nilo Rivera Julian was killed while Sgts. Victor Bartocillo and Jonathan Baylar sustained bullet wounds, according to reports from the Quezon Police Provincial Office.

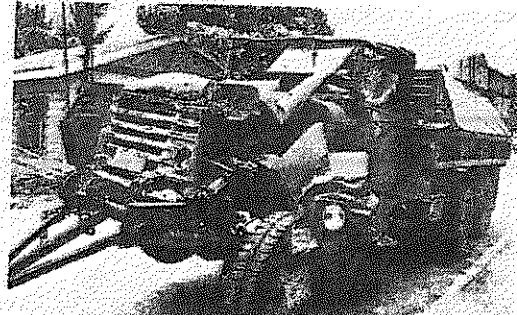
A team of the Army's 85th Infantry Battalion led by Bartocillo was on their way to their headquarters on a military truck when waylaid by suspected New People's Army (NPA) rebels at 9:25 p.m. on Monday.

The soldiers fought the rebels for almost an hour until the insurgents withdrew.

Julian was killed in the exchange of gun fire while the wounded troopers were rushed to St. Jude General Hospital for treatment.

Personnel of the Lopez Police Station and the Regional Mobile Force Battalion immediately put up checkpoints on Lopez-Catanauan road in Bgy. Villahermosa on orders of Quezon police director Sr. Supt. Osmundo de Guzman while another team from the 85th Infantry Battalion was dispatched to track down the fleeing rebels.

The Apollonio Mendoza Command (AMC), through its spokesperson Cleo del Mundo, claimed responsibility for the ambush.



THE ill-fated military truck while being towed from the ambush site.
Photo by Gemi Formaran

ity for the ambush. 13

The AMC operates in Quezon, particularly in the southern part of the province.

Del Mundo said the latest offensive move against the military was in response to the continuing militarization in some villages in the 3rd and 4th districts of Quezon, especially in Lopez town, victimizing civilians, including farmers.

"Bagama't nagbukas ang gobyerno ng Republika ng Pilipinas ng bagong bintana para sa usapang pangkayapapaan, patuloy naman ang pag-atake ng militar sa mga barrio, kaya naglunsad ng pag-atake ang NPA," said Del Mundo.

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Soldier dies, 2 hurt in Quezon clash

By GEMI FORMARAN

LUCENA City -- A band of fully-armed men believed to be communist guerillas ambushed a group of Army soldiers, killing one of them and wounding two others at the boundaries of Bgys. Cogorin Ibaba and Silang in Lopez, Quezon, on Monday night.

During the firefight, Pfc. Nilo Rivera Julian was killed while Sargeants Victor Bartocillo and Jonathan Baylar sustained bullet wounds, according to reports reaching the Quezon Police Provincial Office, here.

A team of the Army's 85th Infantry Battalion led by Bartocillo was on their way to their headquarters aboard military truck when ambushed by the suspected New People's Army (NPA) rebels at 9:25 p.m, the report said.

It said a clash between the two forces ensued and lasted for almost an hour until the suspected rebels finally withdrew to separate directions. ♪

When smoke cleared, the troops rushed the two wounded soldiers to St. Jude General Hospital.

Personnel of Lopez Police Station and Regional Mobile Force Battalion immediately established checkpoints along Lopez-Catanauan Road in Egy. Villahermosa on orders of Quezon police director Senior Supt. Osmundo de Guzman while another team from the 85th Infantry Battalion were dispatched to track down the fleeing rebels.

In a message, the Apollonio Mendoza Command (AMC) thru its spokesperson, Cleo del Mundo, claimed responsibility for the ambush.

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"Bagama't nagbukas ang gobyerno ng Republika ng Pilipinas ng bagong bintana para sa usapang pangkapayapaan, patuloy naman ang pag-atake ng militar sa mga barrio kaya nagiusad ng atake ang NPA," said Del Mundo.

**Sundalo patay,
2 pa sugatan
sa landmine**

Isang sundalo ang nasawi habang dalawa pa ang grabeng nasugatan makaraang sumabog ang itinanim na landmine ng mga pinaghihinalaang rebeldeng New People's Army (NPA) sa naganap na ambush sa Brgy. Silang, Lopez, Quezon nitong Lunes ng gabi. Kinilala ang nasawing sundalo na si Corporal Nilo Julian na idineklarang dead-on-arrival sa St. Jude Hospital sanhi ng tinamo nitong matinding sugat sa nangyaring pag-sabog habang ginagamot sa Saint Jude Hospital ang mga sugatang-sina Sgt. Victor Bartocillo at Pfc. Jonathan Baylar. Ayon kay Army Capt. Patrick Jay Retumban, Spokesman ng 2nd Infantry Division (ID) ng Phi Army, bandang alas-8:37 ng gabi habang lulan ang tropa ng Army's 85th IB ng M-35 truck upang sunduin ang kanilang mga kasamahan na nagsagawa ng community civic action mission sa lugar nang biglang masabugan ng Improvised Explosive Device (IED) na itinanim sa highway. Pinaulanan din sila ng bala ng mga rebelde na nauwi sa 30 minutong putukan. (Joy Cantos/Tony Sandoval)

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Marawi veteran assumes MPD post

A Marawi veteran assumed command yesterday of the 3,500-strong Manila Police District (MPD).

Chief Superintendent Rolando Anduyan of the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao replaced Chief Superintendent Joel Coronel as MPD director.

Anduyan was cited for his rescue of a priest captured by the Islamic State-inspired Maute terrorist group during the Marawi siege last year.

The new MPD chief vowed to boost the campaign against criminals and illegal drugs.

Anduyan was among the police officers who were promoted in line with the revamp implemented by the Philippine National Police recently.

Coronel was named deputy director for administration of the National Capital Regional Police Office.

Rey Galupo

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ALBAYALDE HONORS ELITE PNP-SAF

By Alfred
Dalizon

It may have its share of some highly-embarrassing incidents, the latest of which is the alleged failure of its former officials to distribute P59.8 million in monthly allowance to its troops and the arrest of a female

commando for drug use, but still the country has to thank the Philippine National Police Special Action Force for keeping to their sworn oath to serve and protect the country.

This was made clear by PNP chief Director General Oscar D. Albayalde during the 35th founding anniversary of the PNP's only mechanized fighting unit at the National Capital Region Police Office parade ground in Camp Bagong Diwa in Bicutan, Taguig City where he thanked the SAF for playing a major role in defending and retaking Marawi City from ISIS-inspired Maute terrorists in May last year.

"This single accomplishment is indeed wor-

thy forever and ever for us in the police force. Let us continue to build a better image to wholly gain the trust of the public," said Gen. Albayalde, himself a former SAF commando who formed part of the security of former Defense Secretary Renato de Villa in 1986.

Heavy fighting between SAF troopers and Maute gunmen in Marawi City for five months left four SAF commandos dead and 60 others wounded.

During the SAF anniversary, the PNP chief stressed anew his ongoing program to rid the police force of misfits and scallwags while cracking down on drugs and other crimes. As the "Father of the PNP," the member of Philippine Military Acad-

emy 'Sinagtala' Class of 1986 emphasized that he needs to ensure that the internal cleansing of the police will proceed as planned to preserve the image of the force in the eyes of the citizenry.

"Now, we are facing some trials involving credibility of some officers and personnel, but we will never falter. As the father of the PNP, it is my duty to see everything thoroughly and meticulously as we move to cleanse our ranks," he said.

Gen. Albayalde also cited the PNP-SAF's role in helping arrest the presence of illegal drugs inside the national penitentiary in Muntinlupa City which was exposed during the start of the Duterte administration.

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PNP-SAF training on urban warfare

MORE PNP Special Action Force policemen are undergoing training on urban warfare in the aftermath of the bloody siege of Marawi City by members of the Daesh-inspired Maute Group.

SAF commander Director Noli Taliño made the statement yesterday during the celebration of the SAF's 35th foundation anniversary at the SAF headquarters in Camp Bagong Diwa in Taguig City.

"The SAF is continuously enhancing its capability to match up with the present situations after the Marawi siege. SAF is constrained to conduct more specialized training courses in urban warfare," Taliño said.

He said two SAF battalions - the 2nd Special Action Battalion in Zambales and 5th Special Action Battalion in Zamboanga City - are currently undergoing urban warfare.

SAF personnel were deployed to Marawi City when Maute members laid a siege of Marawi City on May 23, though Army soldiers did most of the fighting, leading to the city's liberation five months later.

Two of the 168 soldiers and policemen who died in the operations against the Maute members were SAF members. The conflict also resulted in the death of 974 terrorists and 47 civilians.

Taliño said there is a need to further train SAF personnel on urban warfare to better prepare them for another attack in urban areas.

He said military and defense officials are not discounting a repeat of a Marawi-like attack but said it may take several years before ter-

rorists can replicate the siege.

SAF has seven battalions but its strength is expected to increase to 13 battalions next year due to ongoing recruitment of new members. A battalion is ideally composed of 500 officers and men.

"The recruitment is ongoing. The first batch will be undergoing commando (training) this month. They will all be well-equipped," said PNP chief Oscar Albayalde, a former SAF commander.

In a television interview, Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana said the military is enhancing its intelligence capability in the aftermath of the Marawi siege.

"In line with that, we are acquiring some technical capabilities. We are looking at facial recognition software so that we can easily track down the bad guys. Also, we're buying some drones or UAVs, unmanned aerial vehicles," said Lorenzana.

The new equipment will be in addition to the Scan Eagle drone donated by the United States last March. ~~BJ~~

"Once our orders for bigger drones come, then it will improve our intelligence (gathering) capabilities," Lorenzana said.

He added, though, that the training of intelligence personnel still needs to be improved because "intelligence capabilities are only as good as your people who manage them, who interpret data."

"We still need human intelligence, people who go down and see the things on the ground with their own eyes and feel what's happening on the ground so they can report to higher headquarters," he said. - *Victor Reyes*

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SAF learned a lot from Marawi siege

By **AARON B. RECUEÑO**

Police commandos will be undergoing various urban counter-terrorism trainings as part of the lessons learned during the Marawi City siege last year.

Director Noli Taliño, commander of the Special Action Force (SAF) of the Philippine National Police (PNP), said the training programs on urban warfare is essential for government law enforcement units like the police commandos as they are the ones who are expected to respond on such a high level of threat.

"The SAF is continuously enhancing its capability to match up with the present situations

after the Marawi siege. SAF is constrained to conduct more specialized training courses in urban warfare," said Taliño in his speech during the 35th SAF anniversary.

SAF is the most elite unit of the PNP. Its personnel is well-trained and well-equipped since its mandate is to do counter-insurgency and counter-terrorism. //

During the Marawi City siege, however, the fighting was mostly done by the Armed Forces but a number of SAF personnel were also deployed and saw action with the Maute Group. At least two SAF commandos died in driving out the Maute Group following five months of fighting.

The BBL mirage

From the way national attention is riveted on the proposed Bangsamoro Basic Law (BBL), one would think it is the be-all and end-all of the Moro cause. In fact, proponents are marketing it as the sum total of the decades-old aspirations of Moros, a panacea to what ails them.

Its passage is a done deal. The bicameral conference committee, touted as the "third house," will meet to reconcile differences in the conflicting versions of the Senate and the House of Representatives. It is in the last stage of the gauntlet, but make no mistake about it, it will be passed in time for presentation as a trophy by the President in his June 30 State of the Nation Address. The mojo of the President has apparently worked wonders again.

But wait, why are the target beneficiaries, the Moros, not in a celebratory mood? Why are the "kulintang" ensembles not being played in Morolandia?

The precise shape of the proposed law is still uncertain. It all depends on the kind of product that will come out of the bicameral mill, and Moros wait with bated breath. They have a well-grounded fear that the draft they painstakingly worked on to reflect the terms of their peace pact with the government will be watered down, if not emasculated, to become a mere ghost of their original proposal.

Their greatest fear is that it might not hurdle the constitutional test, as House Speaker Pantaleon Alvarez had warned. Sen. Franklin Drilon also explained that while he supports the bill, his interpellations will

COMMENTARY

MACABANGKIT B. LANTO

help cleanse it of its constitutional infirmities and prevent giving false hope to the Moros. He recalled the bloody siege of the town of Kapatagan, Lanao del Norte, by Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) mujahideens in 2008, after the Memorandum of Agreement on Ancestral Domain was struck down as unconstitutional by the Supreme Court. *ML*

But Drilon forgets the recent batting record of Malacañang at the Supreme Court when it comes to executive policies brought before the tribunal—martial law, the Marcos burial, etc.

Pessimism over the effectiveness of the BBL on the Moro problem is growing.

Firstly, notice the deafening silence of Nur Misuari of the mainstream Moro National Liberation Front. The present Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) is a product of his peace pact with the government; he has his own formula on how to solve the Moro problem, and that is not through the BBL as framed by the Bangsamoro Transition Commission (BTC).

Because of the expected dominance of one tribe in the governance envisioned by the BBL, other tribes are mutely protesting. They cite the transition provision of the bill identifying the members of the BTC, mostly MILF, as the interim governing

body that will "unlevel" the playing field once elections ensue.

Secondly, the autonomous power to legislate on areas enumerated in the law is curtailed by Section 20, Article X of the Constitution, which provides, *inter alia*, that such regional legislative power is subject to the Constitution and national laws. This was invoked by the Supreme Court in the case of Sema vs Comelec in declaring as unconstitutional a regional law creating a legislative district in ARMM. This provision is a magnet for any enterprising media-grabbing maniac to question every act that may be passed by a Bangsamoro parliament.

Thirdly, all things considered, the extent of autonomous power that the new political entity can wield still depends on who sits in Malacañang. This is the sad reality and dynamics of politics.

Bias and emotions are cousins of politics. If the president is one who empathizes with the historical injustices suffered by the Moros, the Bangsamoro government might have a chance of succeeding. But if he is a bigot masquerading as a statesman, the BBL's promise of autonomy will only be a mirage.

Macabangkit B. Lanto (amb_mac_lanto@yahoo.com), UP Law 1967, was a Fulbright fellow at New York University for his postgraduate studies. He has served the government in various capacities—as congressman, ambassador, undersecretary of justice and of tourism, etc.

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War



FRENCH President Emmanuel Macron was so incensed with American President Donald Trump's latest tariffs on steel and aluminum imports from practically all countries, that he called it "illegal" and practically called it a declaration of "war," recalling how the wars of the previous century began with protectionism in the guise of nationalism.

The G-7 meeting last week saw the US representative, Treasury's Steven Mnuchin confronted by his counterparts over his president's hardening on tariffs.

Bruno Le Maire, Macron's finance and economy minister who was previously the agriculture minister of Nicolas Sarkozy, described the Whistler conference as "a tense and tough G-7... more a G6 plus one than a G7"

Trump's America First policy is closer and closer to being isolationist, and angry trade partners are likely to retaliate. It does look like a trade war is in the offing. That is not good for the world economy. It may give short-term relief for Pittsburgh and Ohio but in the end, the US economy will be negatively affected. There will be disruptions in supply chains all over the world,

"We should focus on improving the economy, alleviating poverty and gathering internal strength."

and that would affect even a developing country like the Philippines, whose economic zones are part, albeit still small, of the global supply chain.

In China recently to press for greater imports of American goods, US Secretary of Commerce Wilbur Ross came out with neither specifics nor a commitment. No joint statement was issued.

Both the US and China appear to have hardened their negotiating stances.

A full-blown China-US trade war is not unlikely.

Is there any advantage for a small country like the Philippines, whose main exports are either fruits or electronic parts which are dependent on imported raw materials and whose value-added is mainly labor? Hardly.

When China, the EU, Canada and others retaliate versus Trump's isolationist economic policies, how do we step in to fill even a part of the imports they will cut from the US of A?

"War" whether it involves arms or economic weapons is never good for anyone. AS

On a positive note, it is good that we will soon have a national ID. It makes life and day-to-day transactions more convenient. It makes government monitoring and statistical measurements both more efficient and transparent.

For years on end, this single personal referencing system has been proposed,

principally by Senator Ping Lacson, but it only became possible, with the opposition this time less strident and confined to the Left, in the time of Duterte.

A lot of things that did not seem possible before are happening now. Change has begun.

Those who keep needling Foreign Affairs Secretary Alan Cayetano for his statements on the West Philippine Sea conflict with China's competing nine-dash line on its South China Sea need to answer a basic question: will "victory" in the Permanent Court of Arbitration ensure compliance by the other side?

And connected to that, can we assume that our long-standing "ally," the United States, would assist us in pressing the "victory" of our claims? Just look at how the Trump administration is thrashing its trading partners now in order to "strengthen" its domestic economy and appease America's business and labor.

Look at how US Defense Secretary James Mattis was less than equivocal at committing military assistance to Asean claimants in the recent Singapore confab, beyond the usual condemnatory words over China's SCS activities.

There are political realities that we have to come to terms with, and President Duterte fully realizes these. The "victory" at The Hague is pyrrhic unless we have the military muscle to confront China. Sad though that realization may

be, it is the painful reality.

Will the United Nations send peace-keeping forces to the South China Sea, where no lives are at stake? Think about what is happening in Syria now, where all the world except Russia condemns the Assad regime, but Syria has not blinked.

Do we expect China to blink, no matter what the UN says, and our Filipino "bravehearts" bellicosely proclaim?

Two generations ago, we had military muscle, enough at least to "invade" Sabah, which the Sultanate of Sulu leased to the British who at that time still ruled the several sultanates they called Malaya. But for political fiddling, we did not use that muscle. Now that Malaysia has become a federation and it has invested enough in a strong military, not to mention a stronger economy, we cannot even press our claim on territory that is truly worth re-claiming.

We can bark and bark all we want, but for as long as our jaws are not strong enough to make our bite fearsome, nothing will come out of all the protestations and confrontational yapping.

Tagalogs have a rather vulgar descriptive for those who proclaim bravery even if they are not ready to fight. It goes beyond "*tapang-tapangan*." They call this false bravery "*tigas t...*".

Focus on improving the economy first, focus on alleviating the poverty of our people; focus on gathering internal strength. Build a strong nation first.

PAGBABAGO

Strengthening multilateralism



By **FLORANGEL ROSARIO BRAID**

THE Consultative Commission appointed by President Duterte to draft revisions on the 1987 Constitution has been at work since February. Those who have gone through the draft would agree that thus far, the draft which is reportedly 75% complete, tackles many of our national priorities and pressing demands of governance. In fact, the Committee headed by former Supreme Court Chief Justice Reynato Puno has performed creditably and way beyond our expectations.

It has come out with responsive provisions on environmental and socio-economic rights, a strengthened Commission on Human Rights, addressed the need for regulating political dynasties and stronger political parties, and harmonized the article in the 1987 Constitution with existing international laws which firms up, among others, the Philippine position with regard to the arbitral ruling on the West Philippine Sea.

It appears that the first draft would be ready for the third State of the Nation Address next month and that the final draft shall have been completed in August when the Congress convenes and organizes itself into a Constitutional Assembly. The Consultative Commission has been meeting five times a week in order to meet the deadline. It has constituted itself into 12 sub-committees which examined each article in the present Charter, identified gaps on the basis of which decisions on new provisions were made.

Except for the fact that all these reforms would be implemented within a federal structure, these reforms would have been ideal for some future time when people say it is time for constitutional change.

Now, the administration is faced with a monumental dilemma – go ahead with federalism and charter change or would it choose to ignore the people who, in the last survey, said they did not want a shift to federalism and any revision of the present Constitution?

A common view not only by many in the country but also in international circles is that the President is moving towards authoritarianism and also away from multilateralism, a trend which, according to Angel Gurria, former foreign minister of Mexico, is the only way forward.

Which means that we must take a turn from the forces of unilateralism and protectionism which are gaining strength in some countries including ours, through international cooperation.

In fact, constitutional reforms envisioned by the Consultative Commission – equitable distribution of wealth, combating climate change, terrorism and security challenges, as well as enforcing sovereignty and territorial rights are best achieved through global cooperation. And there are more, as globalization and the new information technologies that have increased productivity and wealth, have also brought about new challenges including cybersecurity threats and illicit financial transactions. The latter can be addressed through multilateralism

according to Gurria who shows how the combination of our knowledge and experiences through regional cooperation (ASEAN, OECD, etc.) can help achieve inclusive growth.

The recent World Economic Forum (WEF) described 2018 as the year of collaboration and multilateralism. It will hold forums and discussion that would bring together heads of state, government, and international organizations, leaders of business, civil society,

academe, arts, and media to “explore “creating a Shared Future in a Fractured World.”

Gurria reminds us that given the magnitude of the world’s challenges, no country will get far doing it alone – or even bilaterally. It is only in multicultural settings that we will find solutions for today’s complex challenges.

In our country, what appears to be one of the thorniest areas in our

foreign relations is that of the West Philippine Sea. President Duterte rightly states that a country like ours cannot go to war against a giant like China. But we can call on our neighbors in the ASEAN and the international community to help enforce the arbitral ruling so that we can regain what is rightfully ours. 9

My email, florangel.braid@gmail.com

GOVERNANCE MATTERS

Appeasement



By **JEJOMAR C. BINAY**
Former Vice President

THE administration is being pilloried yet again for its perceived inaction and indifference to reports of supposed incursions by China into our territorial waters.

That China is our friend and ally is not the issue. We have deep ties with China that pre-date our relations with other major powers, including the United States. The ties are not only economic, but cultural and familial as well. These are ties that will help us weather any storm in our relationship.

The issue is whether the administration's relations with China have become overly friendly, to the point that it has encouraged these incursions. To some observers, the administration's inaction is tantamount to abandoning our claim to these disputed areas.

When confronted in February about reports of Chinese military activity - particularly the construction of military facilities - in the South China Sea, Malacanang simply dismissed it as old news. The facilities constructed can be seen as a future bequeathal, it said, ours for the taking should we ask China to leave the area.

And lest we forget, Malacanang repeated its mantra: War is not an option.

Yet, just recently, two officials engaged in some semblance of saber-rattling.

The overbearing foreign secretary was reported as telling DFA officials and employees during their flag-raising ceremony - where he also reportedly lectured veteran diplomats on the definition and practice of diplomacy - that the President was willing to go to war with China. A similar statement was made in a breakfast forum by the national security adviser.

And just when you sense a sudden shift in policy direction, the same foreign secretary reiterates the administration's policy of resorting to quiet diplomacy in dealing with China, in contrast, he says, to the vociferous and aggressive tact of the previous administration.

No one reminded the foreign secretary that a few days ago, he was making what can be described as belligerent statements.

The administration is pursuing a policy of appeasement towards China. Our senior officials may decline to use that word, but that is how the public and the rest of the world sees it. And historians will tell you that appeasement offers only fleeting relief. What is sacrificed are long-term interests.

namely security and stability.

Senior officials describe their tact as a more "pragmatic" approach. Angering China, they insist, is pointless since it will only lead to war, something we cannot afford and cannot win.

Yet war is not the only alternative.

We are not bereft of options other than war. We have international and multilateral avenues to pursue our claims or assert our sovereignty, especially when the perception is that it is under threat.

The use of tough language when dealing with other countries is not a pre-condition to asserting our sovereignty. Government may use strong diplomatic language in conveying its position, but it must speak. Silence should never be a policy.

Acquiescing to what observers consider are provocative actions would have far-reaching effects not only on the Philippines but in our region as well. Appeasement may not even deter hegemony, but may even encourage it.

Writing for Foreign Policy, journalist Robert Ricks reminds us that "appeasement is a position of negotiating with a strong state from a position of weakness."

Ricks wrote: "Remember here that appeasement was the 'smart' move because the British thought that if they went to war with Germany, no one else would pitch in (they were basically right) and that for most of the 1930s, they simply weren't strong enough to take on Germany alone (they were basically wrong, because Germany became stronger with each bite). But, as George Orwell put it, the problem was that they were not willing to pay the price either of peace or war, and so they got both."

Appeasement is an admission of weakness, and admitting weakness in times of conflict, according to public mediation expert Patrick Susskind, "is tantamount to colluding with the enemy."

Perhaps it is time for our officials to pause and ask themselves if they are wrong.

No sensible person would advocate war. The Constitution expressly renounces war as a policy instrument, and adopts "the generally accepted principles of international law as part of the law of the land." What is being asked of our government is that it defend and assert what is ours, especially when our claim has been affirmed by an international tribunal. *Q*

We can be assertive without being belligerent. We can be a friend and ally, without losing our dignity as a nation.

jcbinay11@gmail.com

ONLINE NEWS

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6 Army men wounded in battle

June 5, 2018 | Filed under: Regional | Posted by: Tempo Online
By Francis T. Wakefield

Six government soldiers were wounded following an encounter with suspected Communist New People's Army Terrorist (CNTs) in Echague, Isabela on Monday.

Army Captain Jefferson Somera, 5th Infantry Division Spokesman, said the encounter happened at Brgy. Mabbayad, Echague, Isabela at about 5 a.m..

It was learned that troops from the 86th Infantry Battalion were conducting security patrol operations when it encountered more or less 20 communist NPA terrorists.

Somera said the firefight lasted for more or less 20 minutes after which the enemy withdrew towards the Northeast direction of Brgy. Mabbayad.

As a result, six government soldiers were wounded in the firefight while reports are still being verified if the enemy incurred any casualty. Somera said the wounded were brought to Isabela Doctors Hospital and Dr. Ester Garcia General Hospital in Cauyan City, Isabela for treatment.

As of this time, those who were wounded are in stable condition (and recuperating from their wounds)," he said.

www.inquirer.net

NPA claims responsibility for Quezon ambush

By: Delfin T. Mallari Jr. - @inquirerdotnet

Inquirer Southern Luzon / 11:28 AM June 05, 2018

LUCENA CITY – The communist New People’s Army (NPA) claimed responsibility for the attack that left one Army soldier dead and two others wounded in Lopez town, Quezon province on Monday night.

In her Facebook post, Ka Cleo del Mundo, spokesperson of the NPA-Apolonio Mendoza Command, confirmed that communist guerrillas were behind the attack.

A police report said the soldiers were aboard a military truck when a landmine exploded along a road in Barangay Bagong Silang around 8 p.m. on Monday.

The blast was followed by an attack by an undetermined number of rebels, which triggered an exchange of fire.

Del Mundo claimed the rebels had no casualties during the twin battles – against the soldiers aboard the military truck and against the reinforcement team.

According to her, their tactical offensives were in defense of the rural areas, which she said were under the rebel’s territorial jurisdiction.

“Bagama’t nagbukas ang guberno ng Republika ng Pilipinas ng bagong bintana para sa usapang kapayapaan, patuloy naman ang atake nila sa mga baryo ng magsasaka, kaya naglunsad ng kontra-atake ang NPA,” she said.

Del Mundo said at least six remote villages – San Francisco B, San Miguel Dao, Veronica and Jongo in Lopez; Cauayan in Gumaca and Bulagsong in Catanauan, were heavily militarized.

She said the presence of Army soldiers were causing fear among the villagers.

www.pna.gov.ph

SoKor commits to assist Marawi rehab

By Jelly Musico June 5, 2018, 8:56 pm

MANILA -- The South Korean government is committed to assist the Philippines' rehabilitation program for war-torn Marawi City, Finance Secretary Carlos Dominguez said Tuesday.

"The Korean government said that they are committed to assist us in the Marawi rehabilitation program," Dominguez said in a press briefing in Seoul, South Korea.

He said South Korea is just waiting for final plans "so we can ask them exactly what we need from them."

"They did not mention any amount but definitely, I think it's going to be very substantial," Dominguez told Filipino reporters covering President Rodrigo Duterte's three-day official visit to South Korea.

According to Task Force Bangon Marawi (TFBM), at least PHP75 billion would be needed to rebuild Marawi City, which was ravaged by a five-month war between government troops and the Islamic State-inspired Maute Group.

The 2017 Marawi siege had left 167 soldiers, more than 1,000 Maute fighters, and 47 civilians dead. It also displaced 359,000 people.

The TBFM said total damages and losses had reached PHP18 billion, mostly in 24 barangays covering 250 hectares of the most-affected area or ground zero.

Recently, the task force has been negotiating with the Bangon Marawi Consortium, which submitted a proposal amounting to PHP17.2 billion to rebuild the most-affected area.

The contract is expected to come out soon but TBFM clarified that it will be subjected to a Swiss challenge, where other companies can bid to match the consortium's proposal.

The consortium is composed of five Chinese and four Filipino companies.

The TBFM said it will take three years to rebuild the most-affected area.

Dominguez said the Korean government is very supportive of the actions of the Duterte administration.

The President's three-day official visit to Seoul, at the invitation of South Korean President Moon Jae-in, has yielded USD4.9-billion worth of investments, according to Presidential Spokesperson Harry Roque. **(PNA)**