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## **NEWS CLIPPINGS**

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Tuesday



*Honor. Patriotism. Duty*

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# OUTRAGE OVER KILLING OF 3RD PRIEST IN LUZON

Fr. Richmond Nilo was shot dead at the altar as he was about to start Mass on Sunday evening in Zaragoza, Nueva Ecija. Malacatang and other groups condemned the murder and culture of impunity in the country.

By **Armand Galang**  
 @armandgalangINQ

ZARAGOZA, NUEVA ECIJA —Isabelita Paraton was seated in the third row at Nuestra Señora de la Nieve Chapel, a few meters from the altar, when Fr. Richmond Nilo stepped out to

start the 6 p.m. Mass on Sunday at Barangay Mayamot here.

Around 50 parishioners waited for the 44-year-old priest while he fixed his garments.

Then chaos erupted as shots rang out.

The churchgoers found Ni-

lo's bloodied body lying on the floor, near a tarpaulin bearing the lyrics of the Mass hymn "Papuri sa Diyos" (Glory to God).

"Father Nilo walked to the altar and was just standing there when shots were fired. We did not see who fired a gun be-

cause we all dropped to our knees in fright," said Paraton, Mayamot village chair.

Then she heard people wailing, "Si Father, si Father binari!" (Father Nilo had been shot)" she said.

The attack shocked residents who said Nilo, parish

priest of St. Vincent Ferrer Church, had never been controversial like Fr. Mark Ventura and Fr. Marcelito Paez, both activists.

Ventura, 37, was murdered after celebrating Mass in Gattaran town, Cagayan province, on April 29. Paez, 72, was killed

in an ambush on Dec. 5, 2017, in Jaen town, Nueva Ecija province.

Nilo was president of the College of the Immaculate Conception in Cabanatuan City before he was given the Zaragoza assignment. He also served as financial administrator

## FROM A1

of the Diocese of Cabanatuan

### Culture of impunity

The diocese condemned the murder and the "escalating violence and culture of impunity in the country, even against helpless clergymen."

"No priest, and no human being for that matter, deserves to be killed with utter brutality, disrespect and impunity," Cabanatuan Bishop Sofronio Bancud said in a statement.

"Priests, however imperfect, are God's gifts to His Church and we are duty-bound to respect them "as ambassadors for Christ," Bancud said.

"To kill a priest then for whatever motive or cause is not only unchristian and inhuman; it is also un-Filipino," he added.

In Maracañang, presidential spokesperson Harry Roque said the culture of impunity had become a problem even before President Duterte came to power.

Asked whether Mr. Duterte's criticisms of the Church could have encouraged some people to kill priests, Roque said there was no "empirical basis" for this.

### Top priority

He said the administration would give top priority to the investigation of Nilo's death.

"If you kill a priest you are not only violating the right to life but the right to practice one's faith," Roque said at a press briefing on Monday.

Philippine National Police Director General Oscar Albayalde said the Central Luzon regional police office had activated a special task group to look into the killing.

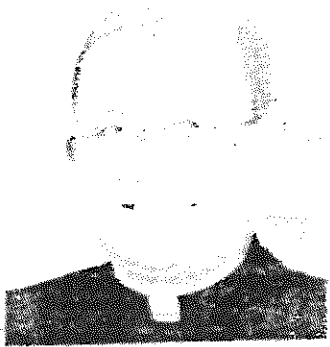
Albayalde maintained that the attacks on the three priests should be treated as isolated incidents.

"But this is the first time that I encountered someone shot at the altar. We cannot understand why," he said, referring to Nilo.

### CBCF terribly disturbed

The Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines (CBCF) also expressed alarm over the spate of killings of priests.

"We are deeply saddened and terribly disturbed that an-



Fr. Richmond Nilo

other priest was brutally killed ... We strongly condemn this outrageously evil act," said the CBCF president, Dayao Archbishop Romulo Valles.

Valles appealed to the police to find Nilo's killers.

Cubao Bishop Honesto Ongtioco said the killing of priests in the country would not stop the Church from speaking the truth and proclaiming the Gospel.

"St. Paul was behind bars and was chained but continued his proclamation of the good news," Ongtioco said.

Witnesses said the gunmen might have shot Nilo through the grided chapel window.

### Playful, cheerful

Paraton described the priest as "kind, playful and cheerful."

He had been helping people by donating vegetable seeds and farm implements, said Nacita Tagasa, 64, leader of the Barangay Pastoral Council at neighboring Barangay Macarse.

Chief Supt. Amador Corpus, Central Luzon police director who examined the crime scene on Sunday night, could not say if priests were being targeted, given that Nilo did not appear to have any political leanings.

The administration drew Nilo, non-priest, and netizen recently when Mr. Duterte linked Ventura's death to an illicit affair during a talk in Cebu province.

### Ventura killing suspect

A suspected hit man, Arthuro Reynon, was charged with killing Ventura. Albayalde said at a command conference in Tuguegarao City last week.

Reynon, who had been implicated in the 2014 murder of a village headman, was caught hiding in baggao town, Cagayan, Monday after Ventura's murder.

Police, however, have yet to

## WHAT WENT BEFORE

Three priests have been slain over the past six months.

On Dec. 4, 2017, Fr. Marceito "Tito" Paez, 72, was shot dead by motorcycle-riding men while he was driving his vehicle in Jaer town, Nueva Ecija province. He died at the hospital in San Leonard.

Paez, a retired priest who served in the Diocese of San Jose, Nueva Ecija, for 32 years, had facilitated the release of a political detainee.

He was a coordinator of the Rural Missionaries of the Philippines in Central Luzon and had been a political activist since the martial law years under then-President Ferdinand Marcos.

On April 29, 2016, Fr. Mark Anthony Ventura, 37, was gunned down after saying Mass in Gattaran town, Cagayan province.

Ventura was talking with choir members at Barangay Piña Weste gymnasium when two men riding on a motorcycle arrived. One of the men got off and without removing his helmet walked toward the group and shot the priest twice.

The militant group Karapatan linked Ventura's killing to his human rights and antimining advocacies though President Duterte nonchalantly linked his death to an illicit affair during a talk in Cebu on May 20, which drew fire from priests and on social media.

On June 10, Fr. Richmond Nilo of the Diocese of Cabanatuan, 40, was shot by unidentified men at Nuestra Señora de la Nieve Chapel in Zaragoza, Nueva Ecija according to the provincial police.

Nilo was behind the altar getting ready to start Mass when two unidentified men shot him through a window four times.

—INQUIRER RESEARCH

SOURCES: INQUIRER ARCHIVES

arrest those who hired Reynon to kill the priest.

Opposition members of the House of Representatives have condemned the murder of Nilo.

In a statement, Bayan Muna Rep. Carlos Isagani Zarate said "the country's state of impunity has gone berserk." —WITH REPORTS FROM TINA G. SANTOS, CHRISTINE O. AVENDAÑO, JEANNETTE I. ANDRADE AND VINCE F. NONATO IN MANILA, INC.

# China in control of Panatag, say Pinoy fishermen

A Chinese coast guard vessel approaches a banca owned by Filipino fisherman Yoyoy Filzo before getting a portion of the Filipinos' catch. The photo was taken last May 25 by Neajoy Razol, the son of the fisherman.

By ALEXIS ROMERO

China is in control of Panatag or Scarborough Shoal off Zambales and its coast guards are seizing the best catch of Filipino fishermen.

Romel Cejuela, a Filipino fisherman, raised the accusation at

Malacañang in a briefing organized yesterday by presidential spokesman Harry Roque.

"They would check our containers and pick our best catch. We can't do anything," Cejuela said in Filipino.

"We are just trying to get along. Their ships are huge. What can we do as fishermen? If we refuse to

yield, we will end up like crushed cans," he said.

Cejuela said Chinese coast guard personnel would give them noodles, cigarettes and water in exchange for their catch but these are not enough to feed the families of fishermen.

"I feel hard inside, but I have

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# China

From Page 1

to accept it. They are the ones in power there," he added.

Asked who he thinks is in control of Panatag Shoal, Cejuela replied: "Sa tingin ko ngayon, parang Tsina pa rin (I think it's still China)." Cejuela said only small boats are allowed to enter the shoal.

Located 124 nautical miles from the nearest point in Zambales, Panatag Shoal, also known as Bajo de Masinloc, is a traditional fishing area for local fishermen. It is well within the Philippines' 200-nautical mile exclusive economic zone.

A UN-backed arbitration court in The Hague, which invalidated Beijing's nine-dash-line claim over nearly the entire South China Sea, declared Panatag a common fishing ground, with no country having sovereignty over it.

The Chinese have also created an artificial island on Panganiban or Mischief Reef off Palawan and fortified it. Beijing has ignored the arbitral court ruling that awarded the Philippines sovereign rights

over the reef.

China started occupying Panatag on April 10, 2012, when surveillance ships from Beijing prevented the Philippine Navy from arresting Chinese poachers who had harvested endangered marine species.

The Philippines under former president Benigno Aquino III filed diplomatic protests over the incident but was ignored by China.

Months after Duterte assumed office in 2016, officials said China allowed Filipino fishermen to fish in the shoal because of improved ties between Manila and Beijing.

However, a TV network released last week a video showing members of the Chinese coast guard taking away the catch of local fishermen. Roque said the incident happened last month.

## No harassment?

Even if the Chinese were getting part of their catch, Cejuela said he does not consider the act a form of harassment.

"I would like to clarify that they are not harassing us. They are just insisting that they get the fish we caught. We did not totally understand each other,"

Cejuela said.

"We are just getting along with them. They might drive us away again if we refuse to give them our catch," he added.

Cejuela said an incident of harassment happened in December, when the Chinese confiscated the Filipino fisherman's spear gun.

"Inagawan sila ng pana, may dala silang sandata noon, pero hinai naman sila tinutukan (The Chinese took away their arrow. The Chinese had weapons but they did not point the weapons at the Filipinos)," he said.

A reporter asked Cejuela to elaborate on the incident but Roque stopped him, saying the question had been answered.

Cejuela urged the media not to sensationalize reports about Panatag Shoal as he expressed fears that China might bar Filipinos again from fishing in the area.

"We might not be able to enter Panatag Shoal again. Our families would go hungry again," he added.

He also urged the government to ask China to limit the actions of its coast guard in the area. "If they approach us, they should just wait for the fish we will provide them," he said.

The catch seized recently by the Chinese cost about P4,000, he added.

Another fisherman, 46-year-old Yoyoy Rizol, also talked about Chinese bullying at Panatag in an interview with The STAR in Infanta, Pangasinan. He said Chinese coast guard on rubber boats approached them and got some 25 kilograms of their catch. The incident happened last May 25.

Roque said the actions of the Chinese coast guard were "unacceptable" but insisted that the conditions of Filipinos at Panatag Shoal are better than during the previous administration.

He claimed that the Philippines had already informed China about the harassment of Filipino fishermen as far back as December.

"We cannot accept this situation. We will fight for the rights of our fishermen because we have an agreement (with China). We expect China to comply with the agreement. They (Chinese coast guard) should not seize even a kilo of fish (from Filipino fishermen)," Roque said.

"But the fishermen said our policy, which involves talking

with China, is better because it allowed them to fish again," he added.

Throughout the briefing, Roque kept repeating that Filipinos can now fish at the shoal because of the Duterte administration's move to seek warmer ties with China.

He said the Chinese had refused to leave Panatag Shoal after Aquino deployed Navy ship *BK- Gregorio del Pilar* in the area.

"The Chinese are there but the fishermen from Masinloc and other areas are now allowed to fish," he added.

Asked if Filipino fishermen deserve better, Roque replied: "Of course they deserve better, that's why we are taking steps to address the issue with the Chinese. We have addressed this issue to the Chinese and we are demanding that the Chinese take steps to stop the coast guard from doing these acts."

The Philippine Coast Guard (PCG), through acting spokesman Captain Genito Basilio, admitted they only have one vessel - *BRP Simdangan* - patrolling the waters between Panatag Shoal and Kalayaan Island in Palawan.

The *Simdangan* is a 44-meter multi-role response vessel.

When fishermen do not see any PCG vessel at Panatag "it is because it was in Kalayaan Island," Basilio said.

A vessel of the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR) would sometimes assist the PCG in patrolling Panatag Shoal.

"If it is the wish of the President that we increase the number of our Coast Guard ships in the West Philippine Sea, then we would deploy more ships to the area," Basilio stressed.

"We are cautious because we might be adding more strain to the situation if we would put additional ships in the area. We have to recognize that President Duterte has a good rapport with Chinese President Xi Jinping," he added.

He also recalled one fisherman saying they'd rather see the area clear of any PCG ship to avoid tensions with the Chinese.

Meanwhile, Vice President Leni Robredo renewed yesterday her call for the administration to continue asserting the country's sovereignty in the West Philippine Sea. - With Helen Flores, Evelyn Macaliran, Eva Visperas



# GOLEZ, FORMER NAT'L SECURITY ADVISER; 71

By Frances Mangosing  
@FMangosingINQ

Former National Security Adviser Rollo Golez spent his last hours on Monday defending the Philippines' sovereignty in the South China Sea.

In an interview on dzRH radio early on Monday, which he also posted live on his Facebook page, Golez, a former Philippine Navy officer and member of the House of Representatives, urged the Duterte administration to be transparent in its dealings with China, following a series of aggressive moves by Beijing in the South China Sea, including deploying weapons on reefs claimed by Manila in the Spratly Islands and landing long-range bombers on Woody Island in the Paracel archipelago, from where the country is within the planes' fighting range.

Golez also spoke about the Filipinos' concerns over the landing of a People's Liberation Army Air Force transport plane last week in Davao City, President Duterte's hometown.

ABS-CBN said ANC was supposed to interview Golez early Monday about the South China Sea dispute, but the interview fell through because Golez "felt unwell."

Golez died hours later, according to his son, Parañaque Vice Mayor Rico Golez. He was 71.

## True patriot

"We lost a true patriot. He was an indefatigable defender of the West Philippine Sea," acting Chief Justice Antonio Carpio said in a text message, using the local name of the waters within the Philippines' 370-kilometer exclusive economic zone in the South China Sea.

"He embraced lawfare as a peaceful means of asserting our sovereign rights in the West Philippine Sea. His death strengthens our resolve to carry on," Carpio said.

The Armed Forces of the Philippines mourned the death of the former naval officer, who was also a graduate of the US Naval Academy in Annapolis, Maryland.

In a statement, Col. Edgard Arevalo, spokesperson for the military, said Golez was "a sailor, a patriot, and a public servant whose contributions to the Filipino nation and its people extended throughout his lifetime."

Sen. Francis Pangilinan, president of the opposition Liberal Party, remembered Golez as a "true freedom fighter, being one of the few solid voices defending the country's territorial rights."

Indomitable

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# 'DND had no prior knowledge of Chinese plane landing'

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By MICHAEL PUNONGBAYAN

The country's defense chief had no prior knowledge of the landing and refueling of a Chinese military aircraft last week in Davao City.

"I only learned about it when the plane had already landed. Somebody informed me," Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana told reporters yesterday at Camp Aguinaldo in Quezon City.

But he stressed the Chinese military transport aircraft did not land in Davao City without notice or prior coordination with concerned authorities.

He said the foreign plane coordinated with the Civil

Aviation Authority of the Philippines (CAAP), which is "the agency in charge of our airspace." He explained there was nothing wrong if the Department of National Defense and the Department of Foreign Affairs had not been informed of the landing.

"So there was coordination to land in Davao to refuel," he added, noting that the Chinese aircraft was en route from Australia and there was nothing unusual with foreign planes landing in the country to refuel.

Sen. Panfilo Lacson said he wanted to know if protocols had been broken in the incident.

The senator said a request to land must first be made through proper diplomatic channels before such is forwarded to the DND for action.

"If these protocols were followed by the Chinese military aircraft, there is no reason why our concerned agencies should not make public the same," Lacson said.

He warned that being silent or vague on the issue would only raise more questions.

"If such protocol was not observed, and worse, if our concerned officials were not even aware until such Chinese military aircraft had already landed, then we acted like a province of China rather than an independent and sovereign state," Lacson said.

In a press briefing, Lorenzana also said China is unlikely to invade the country despite its military buildup in the West Philippine Sea.

"I don't think China will invade us," he told reporters in reaction to a statement from former national security adviser Norberto Gonzales over the weekend urging the government to prepare a contingency plan for a possible Chinese invasion.

Lorenzana said wars of conquest are a thing of the past.

"Even if China is a superpower, it's never been its habit to invade other countries. Even in their heyday during ancient times, when they were powerful in Asia, they had never seized lands," he said in a mix of Filipino and English.

He added Vietnam and the Korean peninsula were closer to China but did not get invaded.

The Chinese, Lorenzana maintained, "are trying their best to become also a good and respectable superpower so I don't think they will invade the Philippines."

On President Duterte's controversial statement that the military would oust him if

he sends them to their death defending the West Philippine Sea, Lorenzana explained the commander-in-chief only meant he did not want them to get massacred.

But he stressed the soldiers follow the chain of command and would always obey orders to defend the country.

"If given orders, we always follow. It's our culture," Lorenzana, a former Army officer, pointed out.

## No order to stop patrol

He said President Duterte is an intelligent person and has a deep grasp of the situation, hence his diplomatic handling of the West Philippine Sea situation.

He also reiterated there was no order from Duterte for the military to stop patrolling the West Philippine Sea, contrary to claims by Magdalo Rep. Gary Alejano.

Lorenzana also said he is thankful the country is now reaping the fruits of Duterte's prudent handling of the maritime dispute after the previous administration's "mismanagement" of the issue.

He said trade with China was in a moribund state when Duterte assumed the presidency in 2016 and the Panatag (Scarborough) Shoal was off limits to Filipino fishermen.

"Now, we sell our bananas there, they buy all our bananas. Their tourists here have doubled," Lorenzana said.

"We can fish there and our troopers are no longer harassed, except in one very isolated incident at Ayungin Shoal," he said.

"So is that mismanagement? We have managed it very well through the President's leadership. It's not mismanagement," he said. "It's the previous administration which mismanaged it."

- With Paolo Romero, Pia Lee-Brago

# AQUINO MISMANAGED PH SEA DISPUTE WITH CHINA, SAYS DEFENSE CHIEF

By Jeannette I. Andrade  
@jiandradeINC

Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana on Monday insisted that President Duterte was handling the Philippines' maritime row with China in the South China Sea very well compared with the Aquino administration, which he said "mismanaged" the dispute.

Speaking to reporters after flag-raising rites at the Depart-

ment of National Defense in Camp Aguinaldo, Lorenzana said "everything went chaotic" in the dispute under the Aquino administration.

He pointed out that before the Duterte administration took over, the Philippines had no trade with China. Chinese tourists were not coming in. Filipinos could not fish at Panatag (Scarborough) Shoal, and Filipino troops were being ha-

arrassed by the Chinese in the Spratly Islands.

## 'Very isolated incident'

"Today, we sell our bananas there (China) and they buy our bananas. Tourists have doubled and we can fish there. Our troops are no longer being harassed, except for that very isolated incident at Ayungin (Second Thomas Shoal)," Lorenzana said.

He was referring to the ha-

arrassment of a Philippine Navy restocking mission to the Filipino garrison on the BRP Sierra Madre at Ayungin Shoal on May 11.

Referring to a claim by Magdalo Rep. Gary Alejano, Lorenzana denied demoralization in the military because of the President's weak response to China's militarization of the South China Sea.

He said Mr. Duterte never ordered the military to stop pa-

trolling the West Philippine Sea—waters within the country's 370-kilometer exclusive economic zone in the South China Sea—as claimed by Alejano.

Lorenzana also said the military was still verifying reports that Chinese coast guards were stealing Filipino fishermen's catch at Panatag Shoal.

Some of the complaining fishermen were in Malacañang on Monday. INC

LORENZANA:

## Aquino 'mismanaged' West PH Sea dispute

IT was the previous administration that mishandled the dispute in the West Philippine Sea (South China Sea), not the Duterte administration, Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana claimed on Monday.

In a news conference after a flag-raising ceremony at Camp Aguinaldo in Quezon City, Lorenzana insisted that the handling of the Aquino administration led to the "chaotic" dispute.

"We have managed it very well through the President's leadership. The one who mismanaged it was the previous administration wherein everything went chaotic," he told reporters.

Lorenzana noted that when President Rodrigo Duterte assumed the presidency, the dispute between Manila and Beijing was close to boiling point.

"What we saw when we assumed is that we had no trades with China, they were not purchasing our products and there were no Chinese tourists going here. We were also not able to fish within Scarborough (Panatag) Shoal and (the Chinese) were harassing our troops back then," the Defense chief explained.

"Now, they buy all our bananas, the tourists here have doubled, and we can fish there (at Scarborough)," he added.

The only harassment incident that happened under the Duterte administration was the hovering of a Chinese helicopter over Philippine Navy troopers aboard a rubber boat, which was on a supply mission to Ayungin (Second Thomas) Shoal. It was an "isolated case," he said.

"So, is that mismanagement?" Lorenzana asked.

### China will not invade PH

Lorenzana also downplayed talk that China was out to invade the Philippines, an idea floated by former defense secretary Norberto Gonzales.

"You know, although China is a superpower, it is not in their culture to invade other countries even in ancient times," Lorenzana said.

"So, I don't think they will invade and they are trying their best to become also a good, respectable superpower (country)," he added.

Lorenzana said it would be best if the Philippines stuck to diplomatic options in addressing the issues surrounding the West Philippine Sea.

"We will use diplomacy. War is hard power while soft power is talking to the Chinese," Lorenzana noted.

Meanwhile, a multi-sectoral group

on Monday said the crisis in the West Philippine Sea can be resolved if the Philippines and China will enter into a joint exploration and development in the contested waters.

Former House Speaker Jose de Venecia, advisory board chairman of the Philippine Council for Foreign Relations (PCFR), noted that a joint exploration agreement would not only help maintain peace but would also lessen the dependence of countries in Southeast Asia or Middle East crude.

De Venecia made the proposal before members of the Chinese think tank, the China Center for Contemporary World Studies (CCWS), during their meeting held in Makati City.

"We would like to take advantage of your presence in the Philippines to suggest through the PCFR proposal for a joint exploration and joint development of the South China Sea," de Venecia told the members of the CCWS led by Jin Xin, director general of the CCWS.

The CCWS is involved in the field of research on international situation, political party politics, political system in foreign countries, China's foreign strategy, socialist theories, social and political trends, and comparative studies in development modes.

De Venecia explained that instead of importing oil from the Middle East, the Philippines and China could begin drilling oil wells in the WPS and supply their own markets.

"Why do we need to import oil when right in our own backyard in the South China Sea and east Philippine sea we have the great potential where we can immediately drill wells? In addition,

The former speaker said other claimants like Vietnam can join the venture.

"Initially it will be between the Philippines and China and will be immediately joined by Vietnam so it will become a tripartite agreement," he said.

Malaysia and Brunei can also join in the venture, he added. "It will be exciting," de Venecia said. He welcomed the proposal.

He maintained that China has provided great importance to the WPS issue and Chinese President Xi Jinping had said that claimant countries should solve their differences and make the area a sea of peace and friendship.

"We believe that mankind still has a lot of room to explore in terms of exploration of oceans as well as other resources and we surely can enhance our cooperation in those regards," he added.

DEMPSEY REYES AND  
JEFFERSON ANTIPORDA

# Noy 'mismanaged' China sea tack

By Mario J. Mallari



LORENZANA

The Aquino administration "mismanaged" the government's approach to the West Philippine Sea (WPS) dispute that President Duterte has intended to restore good relationship with China. Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana said yesterday.

The Duterte administration merely inherited the WPS conflict from the previous administration, he added.

Lorenzana said when Mr. Duterte assumed office in June last year, tension between Beijing and Manila existed while trade with China was greatly reduced to almost zero.

He added Chinese tourists mostly avoided the country and Filipino fishermen cannot venture into Scarborough (Panatag) Shoal. Government troops deployed in the area were also harassed, he added.

"Now, we sell our bananas there, their tourists here have doubled, we can fish there and our troops are not harassed except in that isolated incident in Ayungin Shoal," Lorenzana said.

"Is that mismanagement?, we have managed it very well through the President's leadership," said Lorenzana.

"For me, that is not mismanagement. The one that mismanaged was the previous administration dahil nagkagulo-gulo rito dahil mismanaged (every

thing was in disarray since it was mismanaged)," the defense chief added.

Tension erupted between the Philippines and China after a standoff at the Panatag Shoal in 2012 when Filipino troops attempted to apprehend a Chinese fishing vessel caught poaching off Zambales.

Former President Aquino, however, ordered the withdrawal of Philippine ships in the area two months after, to end the standoff but the Chinese vessels had remained until now.

The Aquino government subsequently filed a case against China before the United Nations (UN)-backed Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA) on the territorial dispute.

In 2016, the PCA ruled in favor of the Philippines but Mr. Duterte decided to set it aside for the moment while restoring relations with Beijing as part of his independent foreign policy.

### Soldiers morale very high

Lorenzana also belied claims by Magdalo party list Rep. Gary Alejano that there is demoralization in the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) due to the Duterte administration's handling of the WPS issue.

"Go to the field, our troops are in very high

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morale they are doing their best to protect our country. Now the West Philippine Sea issue is another issue but within AFP, our soldiers morale is high," stressed Lorenzana.

Alejano claimed demoralization was caused by the supposed order by the President to stop patrolling the WPS.

Lorenzana and AFP Chief of Staff Gen. Carlito Galvez Jr. belied Alejano's information supposedly sourced from senior military official.

"He (Duterte) did not even hint that they (AFP) stop patrolling that's why we are (conducting) regular (patrols) there," Lorenzana said.

#### Plane landing not unusual

Lorenzana also doused any irregularities in the June 8 landing of a Chinese cargo plane in Davao City.

While he admitted that he learned of the landing after the fact, Lorenzana said the Chinese plane made prior coordination with the Civil Aviation Authority of the Philippines (CAAP) for the stopover.

"They (Chinese) have coordinated (their intention) to land in Davao to refuel then (fly) en route to Cairns, Australia... upon its return it will refuel again, that's the arrangement. So nothing unusual there, other countries do that also, landing to refuel," Lorenzana said.

Lorenzana also stressed that there is no need for a Mutual Defense Treaty (MDT), similar to the agreement with the United States, for the aircraft of other

countries to have stopping over in the country.

"MDT or no MDT, if they need to refuel they can also refuel... in fact, we can refuel to other country when it is necessary but we will have prior coordination, that's what they (Chinese) did," he said.

#### No longer US-focused

Senate President Vicente Sotto III also defended Mr. Duterte's policy of maintaining friendly ties with China despite recent reports about Chinese Coast Guard elements boarding boats of local fishermen.

"The President is the architect of our foreign policy. We are no longer US-focused. We are now gearing towards friendly ties with all nations," he said.

The Senate leader said the Philippines' association with the United States in the past made the country among the targets of Japan during the Second World War.

"No country wants to go to war. That is why we are exhausting all possible means to avoid it from happening," said Sotto.

He also appealed to media and the public "not to swallow everything that doomsayers say."

Magdalo partylist Rep. Gary Alejano has repeatedly claimed that Malacanang issued a directive to the AFP to cease patrols in WPS, which Executive and defense officials denied.

Alejano, a former Marine officer, stood by his claim saying it came from his sources in the military.

Sen. Panfilo Lacson also called for more transparency on the report of the landing of a Chinese military plane at Davao

International Airport.

The reported landing of Ilushin II 76 operated by the People's Liberation Army came amid purported harassment of Filipino fishermen in the Scarborough Shoal by Chinese Coast Guards.

"First, there are strict internationally accepted standard protocols to be followed before a state aircraft, and I assume more so in the case of a foreign military aircraft is allowed to use our country's airspace," he said in a text message to the Daily Tribune.

"For one, a request through proper diplomatic channels is made beforehand, and the same is forwarded to the defense department who will either approve or reject such request," said Lacson.

If such protocols were followed by the Chinese military aircraft, the senator said there's no reason why the concerned government officials should not make public the same.

"Being silent or vague on this issue will only raise more questions. What could be worse is if they did not observe such protocol, or were not even aware until such Chinese military aircraft had already landed. Then, we have acted like a province of China rather than an independent and sovereign state," he said.

Palace officials and Philippine Air Force (PAF) Tactical Operations Group in Southern Mindanao commander Lt. Col. Richie Pabilonia claimed that the Chinese military plane only refueled and its landing had a diplomatic clearance.

#### No harassment on fishermen

Presidential spokesman Harry Roque, meanwhile, confirmed a report that Chinese Coast Guard personnel seized the catch of Filipino fishermen in the Ayungin shoal in May in violation of an agreement between the two nations allowing Filipinos to fish there.

Roque refused to describe the latest incident as harassment, adding the Chinese Coast Guard gave the Filipino fishermen noodles, cigarettes and water in exchange for their catch.

The fishermen, who appeared with Roque in the news briefing, said they were powerless to stop repeated seizures by the Chinese.

"The (Chinese Coast Guard personnel) board our boats, look at where we store the fish and take the best ones. We cannot do anything because their huge vessels are there," said Romel Gejuela, one of the fishermen.

"We have addressed this issue to the Chinese and we are demanding that the Chinese take steps to stop the coast guard from doing these acts," Roque told reporters.

"That is unacceptable. That is why we informed the Chinese we will not allow fish to be taken from our countrymen," he added.

Duterte's administration rejects criticism that its response to Chinese activities in the botly-contested waters has been weak.

Duterte's aides have said previously the Philippines is taking "all diplomatic action" to protect its claims while insisting it would not anger China by engaging in "megaphone diplomacy".

Manila, which has pursued trade deals and investment from China, instead holds regular talks with Beijing on the dispute.

# PH tells China: Don't seize Filipinos' fish catch

By **Christine O. Avendaño**  
@10avendanoINQ

The Philippines on Monday demanded that China stop its Coast Guard from confiscating the catch of Filipino fishermen in the West Philippine Sea, calling the practice "unacceptable."

The demand, aired by presidential spokesperson Harry Roque, followed reports that Chinese coast guards were confiscating the best part of Filipino fishermen's catch at Panatag Shoal, a rich fishing ground off Zambales province in the West Philippine Sea, waters within the country's 370-kilometer exclusive economic zone in the heavily contested South China Sea.

China seized Panatag—internationally known as Scarborough Shoal—from the Philippines in 2012 but the UN-backed Permanent Court of Arbitration, ruling in 2016 in favor of the Philippines in the country's challenge to Chinese claim of sovereignty over nearly all of the South China Sea, declared the shoal did not belong to any party in the territorial disputes in the strategic waterway.

## Confiscation confirmed

China ignored the ruling and blockaded Panatag, although it allowed Filipinos to fish at the shoal under an agreement with the administration of President Duterte who, instead of demanding respect for the UN tribunal's decision, put it on the



**FISHERMEN'S STORY** Presidential spokesperson Harry Roque presents some of the fishermen from Masinloc, Zambales, who narrated their encounter with Chinese Coast Guard personnel at Panatag Shoal, during Monday's press briefing in Malacañang. —JOAN BONDOC

back burner in exchange for aid, loans and investments.

Roque confirmed reports that Chinese coast guards seized the catch of Filipino fishermen at Panatag in May in violation of the agreement.

"[Filipino fishermen] deserve better, that's why we are taking steps to address the issue with the Chinese," Roque told reporters.

"We have addressed this issue to the Chinese and we are demanding that the Chinese take steps to stop the Coast Guard from doing these acts," he said.

"That is unacceptable. That is why we informed the Chinese we will not allow fish to be taken from our fishermen," Roque said.

Roque also confirmed that Foreign Secretary Alan Peter Cayetano had spoken with Chi-

were among the fishermen quoted in the television news report about the May incident at Panatag.

Cejuela told reporters that China controlled Panatag, although it allowed Filipinos to fish at the shoal.

He said Chinese coast guards were not harassing Filipino fishermen at the shoal, but were "insistent in getting some of our catch."

The coast guards always picked the best fish that cost up to P4,000 and sometimes they came twice, he said without specifying whether the second call came on the same day or some other time during the fishermen's usually weeklong stay at the shoal.

## Gov't help

Cejuela said the fishermen wanted to ask the government to help in stopping the Chinese coast guards from confiscating their catch.

But fishermen from Infanta town in Pangasinan province want the government to assert Philippine ownership of Panatag Shoal.

"The solution there is for our government to assert our ownership of the shoal, which is within the [370-km] exclusive economic zone [of our country]," said Jowe Legaspi, a boat owner and council member of Barangay Cato in Infanta, where most of the fishermen live.

Legaspi was referring to Roque's announcement that the

nese Ambassador to the Philippines Zhao Jinhua about the May incident at Panatag.

"I also spoke to Ambassador Zhao... and he assured me that this was not a policy of China and that Beijing was investigating the incident and if this was proven, [the Chinese government] will penalize the Chinese Coast Guard," he said.

## Three victims

Roque presented to reporters three of the fishermen from Masinloc, Zambales, who lost their catch to Chinese coast guards in May—Rommel Cejuela, Delfin Egana and Jerry Dric.

He said he represented the three fishermen in a case that he filed against China in the UN human rights office in 2015 after the Chinese blockaded Panatag Shoal.

Cejuela, Egana and Dric

confiscation of the fishermen's catch by Chinese coast guards had been referred to Zhao.

"While Malacañang's action is good, it is a temporary solution to abuses committed by Chinese patrols in the area," he said.

Legaspi said he did not agree with Roque's claim that the Chinese coast guards were not harassing the fishermen.

#### 'That's harassment'

"They just open the boxes where the fishermen's catch is kept and they choose the expensive ones. That's harassment," he said.

Members of the activist group Akbayan, on Monday carried baskets of dried fish to the Chinese consulate office in Makati to protest the "robbery and harassment" committed by Chinese coast guards against Filipino fishermen at Panatag Shoal.

The activists also slammed Cayetano for playing down the Chinese's bullying by saying some Filipino fishermen were selling their fish or exchanging them for goods carried by the coast guards.

"[The] fishermen have already given their testimony. Does he not have any faith in his fellow Filipinos?" said Ruperto Alerosa, chair of Pambansang Kalipunan ng mga Samahan sa Kanayunan whose members joined Akbayan in the protest.

—WITH REPORTS FROM MATTHEW REYSIO-CRUZ, GABRIEL CARDINOZA AND AFE INO

# PH to China: Stop taking fisher's catch

THE Philippines on Monday demanded that China stop confiscating the catch of Filipino fishermen in the disputed South China Sea, calling the practice "unacceptable."

The remarks by President Rodrigo Duterte's spokesman were a rare public rebuke from Manila, which has taken a non-confrontational approach with Beijing over the resource-rich waterway.

China controls several reefs in the sea including Scarborough (Panatag) Shoal, which Beijing seized from Manila in 2012 and which is just 230 kilometers (143 miles) from the main Philippine island

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## CATCH FROM A1

# PH to China:

of Luzon. China claims almost the entire resource-rich sea, through which \$5 trillion in trade passes annually, despite competing partial claims from Brunei, Malaysia, the Philippines, Taiwan and Vietnam.

Duterte's spokesman Harry Roque on Monday confirmed a report that Chinese Coast Guard personnel seized the catch of Filipino fishermen in Panatag Shoal in May in violation of an agreement between the two nations allowing Filipinos to fish there.

"We have addressed this issue to the Chinese and we are demanding that the Chinese take steps to stop the coast guard from doing these acts," Roque told reporters.

"That is unacceptable. That is why we informed the Chinese we will not allow fish to be taken from our countrymen."

The Chinese embassy in Manila did not immediately respond to Agence France-Presse's request for comment.

Duterte's administration rejects criticism that its response to Chinese activities in the hotly-contested waters has been weak.

China in May reportedly deployed anti-ship cruise missiles and surface-to-air missiles on the Spratly Islands and flew nuclear-capable bombers to a base in another disputed part of the sea.

Duterte's aides have said previously the Philippines is taking "all diplomatic action" to protect its claims while insisting it would not anger China by engaging in "megaphone diplomacy."

Manila, which has pursued trade deals and investment from China, instead holds regular talks with Beijing on the dispute.

On Monday, Roque refused to describe the latest incident as harassment, adding the Chinese Coast Guard gave the Filipino fisherman noodles, cigarettes and water in exchange for their catch.

The fishermen, who appeared with Roque in the news briefing, said they were powerless to stop repeated seizures by the Chinese.

"The (Chinese Coast Guard personnel) board our boats, look at where we want the fish and take the best ones. We cannot do anything because their huge vessels are there," said Romel Cejuela, one of the fishermen.

## 'China controls shoal'

"Personally, I think it is still China [that] controls [Panatag Shoal]," said Cejuela, one of the fishermen featured in a report on a television program last week. Video showed members of the China Coast Guard taking the catch of three fishermen in the shoal.

The Philippines does not have any vessel patrolling the waters, Cejuela said.

"Their (China's) boats are always there, we always see it. That means it is like they are still in control [of the shoal]," Cejuela said.

Cejuela also bared that bigger ships or "mother ships" were not allowed to reach the fishing ground. Only smaller boats were allowed to enter the shoal, he said.

Once they filed their smaller boats, they took the catch to their mother ship and returned to the shoal to fish again, he explained.

Cejuela confirmed that members of the China Coast Guard usually receive their catch, amounting to around P4,000 in exchange for cigarettes, packets of noodle and water worth less than P200.

"I think this is unfair. It is like, 10 cigarettes, water and noodles, it will be amount to P200. For us, we are just contented that this is what we get to eat," Cejuela said.

Cejuela then asked the government to protect them from the Chinese.

"We are scared that if we deny them of the fish, we will not be allowed to enter Scarborough. Once they are aboard our boat, they will open our container," Cejuela said.

"What we want the government to do is to limit [the China Coast Guard] from going near us and taking our fish," Cejuela said. AFP AND RALPH U. VILLANUEVA

# Demands stop to unacceptable acts vs fishermen

By Vito Barcelo, Macon  
Ramos-Araneta  
and Maricel V. Cruz

THE Philippines  
on Monday  
demanded that  
China stop confiscating  
the catch of Filipino  
fishermen in the  
disputed South China  
Sea, calling the practice  
"unacceptable."

The remarks by President Rodrigo Duterte's spokesman were a rare public rebuke from Manila, which has taken a non-confrontational approach with Beijing over the resource-rich waterway.

China controls several reefs in the sea including Scarborough Shoal, which Beijing seized from Manila in 2012 and which is just 230 kilometers from Luzon.

China claims almost the entire resource-rich sea, through which \$5 trillion in

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"We have addressed this issue to the Chinese and we are demanding that the Chinese take steps to stop the coast guard from doing these acts," Roque told reporters.

"That is unacceptable. That is why we informed the Chinese we will not allow fish to be taken from our countrymen."

The Chinese Embassy in Manila did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Duterte's administration rejects criticism that its response to Chinese activities in the hotly contested waters has been weak.

China in May reportedly deployed anti-ship cruise missiles and surface-to-air missiles on the Spratly Islands and flew nuclear-capable bombers to a base in another disputed part of the sea.

Duterte's aides have said previously the Philippines is taking "an appropriate action" to protect its claims while insisting it would not anger China by engaging in "megaphone diplomacy."

Manila, which has pursued trade deals and investment from China, instead holds regular talks with Beijing on the dispute.

On Monday Roque refused to describe the latest incident as harassment, adding the Chinese Coast Guard gave the Filipino fishermen noodles, cigarettes and water in exchange for their catch.

The fishermen, who appeared with Roque in the news briefing, said they were powerless to stop repeated seizures by the Chinese.

"The [Chinese Coast Guard personnel] board our boats, look at where we store the fish and take the best ones. We cannot do anything because their huge vessel are there," said Romel Cejuela, one of the fishermen. He said the fish taken from them by the Chinese Coast guard was worth P4,000.

Roque said the incident was considered "unacceptable" and there is a need for China to dis-

discipline its "erring" personnel.

He said President Duterte and Chinese President Xi Jinping had agreed when the two leaders met that Filipino fishermen can fish in the disputed region. "Without the President ordering [it], [Foreign] Secretary Alan Cayetano on his own has relayed the information to Ambassador Zhao, and this was divulged publicly," Roque said.

Roque said he was present when Cayetano informed Zhao of the incident in an event that marked the 43rd anniversary of the establishment of the bilateral ties between the Philippines and China.

"Zhao assured the Philippine government that it will investigate the alleged confiscation by the Chinese Coast Guard of the fish caught by small Filipino [fishermen]," Roque said.

"The Philippine government will be relying on the word of Chinese President Xi that the Chinese government will not harass Filipino fishermen in the West Philippine Sea," he added.

Scarborough Shoal is located 124 nautical miles from Zambales, and falls within the 200-nautical mile Exclusive Economic Zone of the Philippines.

This means that while other countries have freedom of navigation, only the Philippines has sovereign rights over the maritime resources in Scarborough Shoal.

The International Permanent Court of Arbitration's 2016 ruling nullified China's historical claims over the island. China has since rejected the decision and continues to patrol the area.

Senate President Vicente Sotto III said the government must exhaust all possible diplomatic means to settle the issue.

In a text message to reporters, Sotto noted that the President is the architect of our foreign policy.

"We are no longer United States-focused. We are now gearing towards friendly ties with all nations," said Sotto.

He noted that we became target of Japan during the Second World War due to our friendship with the US.

"The same day the Pearl Harbor was bombed by the Japanese, it was also the same day the Japanese bombed Baguio and Clark. Almost 1 million died in that war. They fought within our backyard," he said.

Sotto also appealed to the media not to swallow everything the doomsayers say.

Senator Paolo Benigno Aquino IV said if Malacañang will not side with the Filipino people on this issue, then the Senate can take the lead in defending the country.

Aquino lamented that China continues to harass our fishermen, militarize the seas and threaten the country's sovereignty.

He said a strong and independent Senate can and should investigate all the country's dealings with China, especially when the rights and livelihood of Filipinos are at risk.

"If continued, this defeatist mentality will just lead to even more abuses," he said of the administration's soft approach toward China.

The Liberal Party has slammed the Duterte administration for again taking an apathetic stance on the harassment and theft by Chinese coast guard instead of filing a protest.

It said this was made worse by the government-sponsored "troll machinery" that attacked the hapless fishermen and painted them as liars.

"For these fishermen to be called liars and paid hacks by internet trolls is something so outrageous," said the Liberal Party. The party's vice-president Erin Tanada said fishermen in the country live a hand-to-mouth existence with little help from the government. Abused by the Chinese in the high seas, he noted that these fishermen were left without their catch and now attacked by their own government's propaganda machinery.

"These Filipino fishermen can expect nothing from a morally bankrupt administration, led by the President and his spokesman, Harry Roque, who are both China fanatics," he said. "It's clear that China violated the rules in the traditional fishing grounds. The Duterte administration should show it is not a pushover and take action to protect the interest of the Filipino fishermen," he further stated.

Senator Gregorio Honasan underscored the need to verify and discuss internally Magdale Party-list Rep. Gary Alejano's claim that Malacañang has ordered the military to stop patrolling the West Philippine Sea.

He said Alejano's claim, which he said came from a "high-ranking official" of the military, should be verified and coordinated with authorities.

A leftist lawmaker on Monday called on the administration to take concrete action to protect Filipino fishermen from harassment and illegal confiscation of their catch.



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# China in control of Panatag Shoal, fishers say; Beijing denies harassment

By GENALYN D. KABILING

China still holds the "power" over Panatag Shoal even though Filipinos have regained access to the fishing ground, local fishermen said during a press conference in Malacanang. Romel Cejuela, one of three fishermen who complained about some Chinese Coast Guard personnel who seized a portion of their fish catch in Panatag, said China has

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## China in control...

◀ 1

deployed coast guard ships in the shoal but there was not a single vessel from its Philippine counterpart.

"It's difficult to accept but you'll try to take it because they have the power over the area," Cejuela said in Filipino when asked about the China coast guard's seizure of their catch.

"They are there. They are guarding the area. The Philippines has no vessel present there... We've seen their ships there. It means they are now apparently in control of the area now," he added.

### No harassment

But China has assured the Philippines it has no policy of harassing Filipino fishermen in Panatag Shoal and has started an investigation into the incident.

Chinese Ambassador to the Philippine Zhao Jianhua gave the assurance as he revealed that an investigation into the incident will be conducted.

"I was assured by the Ambassador that this is not the policy of China. Beijing has started an investigation," Roque said in Filipino during a Palace press briefing.

"If the allegations of the fisherman are proven, there will be penalties that will be imposed on the Chinese Coast Guard," said Roque, who brought along three fishermen from Mansinloc,

Zambales who complained about the Chinese coast guard's action to the press conference.

Cejuela and fellow fishermen Delfin Egana and Juny Drio from Masinloc joined Presidential spokesman Harry Roque in his Monday's press conference at the Palace. They were expected to meet President Duterte if his schedule permits within the day.

Roque previously served as the fishermen's lawyer in filing an appeal to the United Nations to compel China to respect the rights of Filipinos in the traditional fishing ground at Panatag in 2015.

Cejuela, speaking to reporters, admitted that he does not consider the incident with the Chinese Coast Guard as harassment since they were not attacked or harmed.

But he said the fishermen were opposed to the Chinese Coast Guard personnel boarding the ship and taking their prime catch every time they sail at Panatag. He admitted that the foreigners sometimes offered noodles, cigarettes, and water in exchange for the fishes estimated at ₱4,000.

Cejuela said the fishermen could not block the foreign coast guards from taking their catch due to concerns they might not be allowed to fish in the area again.

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# China still has control over Scarborough Shoal?

BY JOCELYN MONTEMAYOR

SCARBOROUGH Shoal (Banaga Shoal) appears to be still under the control of China, a Filipino fisherman who were among those reportedly harassed by the Chinese in the area said yesterday.

The alleged harassment occurred despite an agreement between President Duterte and

Chinese President Xi Jinping that Filipinos would be allowed access to the rich fishing ground.

President's spokesman Harry Roque yesterday presented four-cha-three of the fishermen from Masinloc in Zambales, Delfin Egar, Kommit Cejuela, and Jerry Drio said some members of the

See CHINA > Page 16

## CHINA

Chinese Coast Guard patrolling the Scarborough area have taken some of their catch.

The fishermen have submitted sworn statements about the incidents in Scarborough to Roque for turn-over to the Department of Foreign Affairs.

Scarborough Shoal is within the Philippines' exclusive economic zone. It is some 224 nautical miles off Zambales.

China and Taiwan also claim Scarborough Shoal.

In April 2012, China obtained control over the shoal after a standoff with the Philippine Navy, and started harassing Filipino fishermen.

Filipino gained access to the area again during this administration after President Duterte visited China last year.

In a briefing in Malacañang yesterday, Egar, Cejuela, and Drio said Chinese Coast Guard personnel decide on which vessels would be allowed access to the area, and these are usually the smaller fishing boats.

They also said Chinese Coast Guard vessels are always in the area but they have not seen any vessel from the Philippine Coast Guard or the Philippine Navy.

"We might be ngayon, parang Tsina, na muna. In my view, it's still China, which has control over the area," said Cejuela but added the situation may be better as they have access to the fishing ground unlike

in the past when they were totally barred from entering the area.

Li Col. Isagani Nato, spokesman of the AFP Northern Luzon Command, said there are no Navy ships in the Scarborough area but said the Coast Guard regularly sends ships for patrol missions.

Asked why the AFP is not sending Navy ships there, Nato said "It's operational matter but when it comes to law enforcement, it's the Coast Guard that should respond."

In a May 18 interview in Camp Aguinaldo, AFP Northern Luzon Command chief Lt. Gen. Emmanuel Salamat said there are no Philippine ships at the Scarborough Shoal but Filipino fishermen can fetch fish at the shoal.

"We don't want a confrontation, that's why we are not sending ships there," said Salamat.

"The situation is different. We don't want a confrontation. We abide by the peaceful means of settling our dispute. We allow bilateral engagements to work," he said.

Salamat said the military just monitor the situation there, through aerial patrols.

Cejuela was among fishermen who complained about alleged harassment from China during the Aquino government. He said since Duterte's talk with Xi in 2017, the fishermen have at least been able to fish again at the lagoon.

He said their only hope is that the Chinese Coast Guard would refrain from taking their catch, so

they provide for their families. He said that Chinese get the bigger and good fish, which sell for a higher price in the market.

He also said Chinese Coast Guard personnel would give them water, cigarettes and noodles in exchange for their catch, but those are not enough to offset their loss. He said the items they receive from the Chinese are worth about P200 but the fish they get would be worth about P4,000.

He said they could not do anything because "silang parang may power ngayon dinan (they appear to be the ones in power over there)," Cejuela said.

GMA TV network recently showed a video of some supposed members of the Chinese Coast Guard boarding a Philippine fishing boat and getting some of the fish caught by the fishermen at the Scarborough shoal.

The fishermen said similar incidents happened in December 2017 and again in May this year.

Roque, echoing statements made Sunday by Foreign Affairs Secretary Alan Peter Cayetano, said the Philippines has talked with Chinese officials about the incidents. He said the December incident was discussed with China sometime in February through the Philippine-China bilateral mechanism while the most recent incident was brought to the attention of Chinese Ambassador Zhao Jianhua by Cayetano. — *With Victor Reyes*

## Harassment of Pinoy fishers denounced

**By Camille P. Balagtas**

SENATOR Richard Gordon said it is high time that our government protested the alleged harassment that Filipino fishermen are getting from Chinese coast guards patrolling the area in the Panatag or Scarborough Shoal.

Gordon condemned the harassment of the fishermen fishing at the Panatag Shoal as they complained that Chinese coast guards in the area are getting some of their catch.

Recently, too, a Chinese chopper hovered over a rubber boat on a supply mission for Philippinesoi-

diers in Ayungin Shoal.

Gordon said the government should lodge a protest, adding that the Chinese coast guards are preying on the helpless fishermen who are merely trying to make a living.

"We are freedom-loving people. These are marginalized people. Why are you doing this to the poor people who are just trying to make a living? This is what makes being friends with China nowadays difficult," he said.

The senator also said the Chinese leadership should exercise extreme control over their forces that are engaged in so-called patrol activities at the area, which is a com-

mon fishing ground for all the claimants.

Bajo de Masinloc or Panatag Shoal is a disputed territory claimed by the People's Republic of China, the Republic of China (Taiwan), and the Philippines.

"The actions of the Chinese coast guards are more like the mulcting practices of rogue law enforcers victimizing helpless people. The Chinese leadership must exercise extreme control over their so-called patrol activities at this common fishing ground so that they won't resort to thievery. They are no different from the pirates of the olden times who prey on helpless victims," Gordon said.

# PH demands China stop taking fishermen's catch

THE Philippines on Monday demanded that China stop confiscating the catch of Filipino fishermen in the disputed South China Sea, calling the practice "unacceptable".

The remarks by President Rodrigo Duterte's spokesman were a rare public rebuke from Manila, which has taken a non-confrontational approach with Beijing over the resource-rich waterway.

China controls several reefs in the sea including Scarborough Shoal, which Beijing seized from Manila in 2012 and which is just 230 kilometres (143 miles) from the main Philippine island of Luzon.

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"That is unacceptable. That is why we informed the Chinese we will not allow fish to be taken from our countrymen."

The Chinese embassy in Manila did not immediately respond to AFP's request for comment.

Duterte's administration rejects criticism that its response to Chinese activities in the hotly contested waters has been weak.

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"The (Chinese Coast Guard personnel) board our boats, look at where we store the fish and take the best ones. We cannot do anything because their huge vessels are there," said Romeo Cenela, one of the fishermen.

AFP

# China to take action on PH fishing issues

By **EFREN MONTANO**

ON the eve of Philippine Independence, Malacañang yesterday said it has already brought to China's attention the reported confiscation of Filipino fishermen's catch by the Chinese Coast Guard in Panatag (Scarborough) Shoal, and that Beijing has promised action.

"We are not taking this sitting down," said Presidential Spokesperson Harry Roque at a press briefing in Malacañang.

"Kinu-confirm ko po na nakapag-usap na po si [Foreign Affairs] Secretary [Alan Peter] Cayetano at [Chinese] Ambassador Zhao [Jianhua] tungkol sa insidenteng ito," he said.

He was reacting to a Reuters Notebook documentary showing Chinese Coast Guard personnel boarding the boats of Filipino fishermen to get their best catch.

Roque said he has also talked with Zhao and that the Chinese ambassador had told him that China is already looking into the matter.

"In-assure ako ng ambassador na hindi ito polisiya ng Tsina, na nag-iimbestiga ang Beijing, at kung mapapanayan ang mga akasabi ng mga mang-ingisda ay may kaparusahang ipapatay dito sa mga Chinese Coast Guard na ito," he said.

Roque also refused to call the confiscation of fish catch by the Chinese Coast Guard as harassment.

"I would not say it's harassment," he said. "You know what harassment is during the time of Presi-

dent [Benigno] Aquino [III]. Water canons were used against them (Filipino fishermen). They were rammed, they were targeted by live guns. Wala na po 'yan."

He stressed that unlike during the previous administration, Filipino fishermen are now allowed to fish in Scarborough Shoal, a traditional fishing ground within the Philippines' 200-nautical-mile Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ).

"Napakadami na ulit na mangingisda doon na mga Filipino," he said.

Describing the incident, which happened last May, as "unacceptable," Roque said there is a need for China to discipline its personnel.

"Kung may bugok na Coast Guard sa Pilipinas, may bugok din sa Coast Guard sa Tsina," Roque said. "So kinakailangan disiplinahir ng Tsina 'yung mga bugok na nangunguha ng isda."

During the briefing, Roque presented the three fishermen whose catch were

seized by the Chinese Coast Guard last May. A former lawyer, Roque said the three were his former clients when they filed a complaint against China in 2015.

One of them, Rommel Sejuela, said only Filipino fishermen or board small boats are now allowed to fish in Scarborough Shoal.

Rommel also said the Philippine Coast Guard is not patrolling Scarborough Shoal, but added that they prefer it that way to avoid tension.

The Filipino fishermen from Masinloc town in Zambales said China remains to have control over the shoal, dictating the movement of vessels with its fleet of coast guard ships in the area.

Rommel said Chinese coast guard personnel continue to block access of bigger Filipino fishing vessels to the shoal's lagoon, where most of the best marine resources in the area can be caught.

He said Filipinos are still allowed by the Chinese to

enter the lagoon, but only using smaller fishing boats.

He said this was not the case when he started fishing in Scarborough in early 2000s.

He said the absence of Filipino authorities in the shoal may be better after all, as he said another standoff between the two countries might trigger China to bar Filipino fishermen from the area once again.

"Mabigat sa halagohan kaya pili mong tanggapin kas, sila ang may power ngayon d'yan," Sejuela said.

He also sought government help in stopping Chinese coast guard personnel from getting their catch. He said some Chinese coast guard men would sometimes give water, cigarettes and food in exchange for their catch, but he said these were not enough to offset their loss.

"Sometimes I would sit over the cooler where my best catch is stored. The Chinese coast guard personnel would ask me to move," he said.

# Rody's independence message: Defend democratic ideals

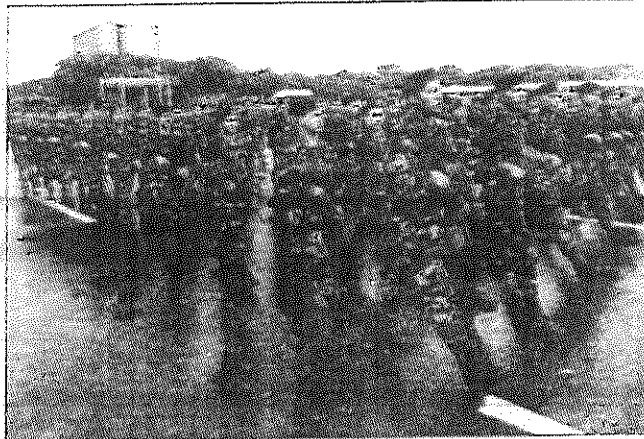
By ALEXIS ROMERO

President Duterte is urging Filipinos to defend democratic ideals and to aspire for meaningful change as the Philippines celebrates today the 120th anniversary of the proclamation of its independence.

Duterte said the "patriotic fervor" shown by the

village officials in Rosario, Cavite.

"May the solidarity and heroism exhibited by our ancestors fuel our desire to spur meaningful and lasting change in our communities as we collectively battle the social ills of corruption, illegal drugs and criminality that impede our progress as a nation," Duterte said in his



Members of the Armed Forces and Philippine National Police rehearse for the 120th Independence Day parade at the Quirino Grandstand in Manila yesterday. MIGUEL DE GUZMAN

Philippines' forefathers had freed the country from colonial subjugation and proved to the world that Filipinos stand united as the pioneer of republican democracy in Asia.

Duterte will lead Independence Day rites at the Emilio Aguinaldo Museum in Kawit, Cavite.

Aguinaldo, widely acknowledged as the first Philippine president, proclaimed the country's independence from Spain from the window of his house in Kawit, Cavite on June 12, 1898.

Vice President Leni Robredo will lead the 120th Independence Day commemoration at Rizal Park in Manila.

After the Rizal Park event, Robredo will preside over the mass oath taking of new

Independence Day message.

"Inspired by the sacrifices of those who have bravely stood before us, may we also find the courage to defend our cherished democratic ideals now and in the years to come," he added.

"By cherishing the sovereignty that is borne out of the sweat and blood of our heroes, we stand firm and unwavering in our conviction to create a brighter and better future for all Filipinos, regardless of their status in life," the President said.

Duterte, who has repeatedly spoken against the colonial rule of Spain and the United States in the Philippines, reiterated his promise to improve the quality of life of Filipinos. — With Helen Flores, Edith Regalado



**'Phi lost a patriot'**

Acting Chief Justice Antonio Carpio joined the mourning over the passing of Golez.

Carpio said the nation has lost "a true patriot" in Golez due to his role in defending the country's rights in the West Philippine Sea.

"He was an indefatigable defender of the West Philippine Sea. He embraced lawfare as a peaceful means of asserting our sovereign rights," he said.

Carpio added that Golez's passing should strengthen and inspire the nation's resolve to fight for its rights in the West Philippine Sea.

The Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) also expressed its condolences to the Golez family.

"He was a sailor, a patriot and a public servant whose contributions to the country and its people extended

throughout his lifetime," AFP spokesman Col. Edgard Arevalo said in a statement.

"He will be remembered for his keen insights founded on his knowledge of military history and strategy, national security and geopolitics," he added.

Born in Lobo, Romblon on Jan. 9, 1947, Golez studied in public schools and later entered the Philippine Military Academy and the US Naval Academy in Annapolis, Maryland, where he graduated with honors in 1970.

He obtained his Master in Business Administration from the University of the Philippines, where he was valedictorian of his class.

After serving in the Navy, he was appointed postmaster general after which he joined protests against the late strongman Ferdinand Marcos.

- With Delon Porcalla, Edu Punay, Michael Punongbayan

# PH to acquire submarines

BY DEMPSEY REYES

**T**HE Philippines is set to acquire submarines in line with the Armed Forces of the Philippines' (AFP) modernization program, Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana said on Monday.

"We are looking at [South Korea and Russia and other countries [as source of the submarines]."

Lorenzana told reporters after the flag raising ceremony at Camp Aguinaldo in Quezon City.

He explained that the produc-

tion of the submarines would take five to eight years.

"If we will order right now, it will be delivered on the third horizon or once the term of President [Rodrigo Duterte] ends," Lorenzana pointed out.

He said the Philippines needs submarines to secure its territories, adding that neighboring nations such as Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore and Vietnam have submarines.

"We are the only ones that does not have it," Lorenzana said.

Under its modernization program, the military has acquired landing dock vessels for the Philippine Navy such as the BRP Tarlac (LD-601) and BRP Davao del Sur (LD-602) and three frigates.

The Air Force meanwhile acquired 12 FA-50 fighter jets.

Lorenzana said for the "second horizon" of the modernization program, the country will acquire navy ships, helicopters, planes and equipment for the Philippine Army. *AG*

## PH to buy new submarines

DEFENSE Secretary Delfin Lorenzana yesterday said the defense and military establishment is eyeing to acquire submarines under the modernization program of the Armed Forces.

Lorenzana, in an interview in Camp Aguinaldo, said they are eyeing Russia and South Korea as among the possible sources of the submarines. Lorenzana said the purchase of submarines is programmed under the Horizon 3 phase of the AFP modernization plan, which is projected to commence implementation in 2023.

The AFP is still in the process of implementing Horizon 2, which provides for the acquisition of assets such as multi-role fighters for the Air Force and additional frigates for the Navy.

The Horizon 2, with a funding of nearly P300 billion, was approved by President Duterte last month, a military source said. It will start implementation this year up to 2022.

"I think the submarines are in the Horizon 3 but we are already looking now...We are looking at Korea and Russia and other countries (as the possible sources)," Lorenzana said.

"The construction of a submarine takes five to eight years, sometimes it takes 10 years. Even if we order under the third horizon, they would be delivered after the term of the President (Duterte)," he also said.

Lorenzana said the submarines will complement modern equipment already acquired by the military. "We need them for our security. Our neighbors have submarines already. Malaysia, Indonesia, even Singapore, which is a small country, and Vietnam. We're the only one lacking (submarines)," he added. — *Victor Reyes*

# Sandiganbayan affirms 55-year jail terms vs AFP-RSBS lawyers

BY PETER J. G. TABINGO

THE Sandiganbayan Seventh Division has affirmed the conviction of two former legal officers of the Armed Forces of the Philippines-Retirement and Separation Benefit System (AFP-RSBS) and a property broker on multiple charges of graft and falsification of public documents over the alleged fraudulent purchase of six lots in Jaro and Pavia, Iloilo City in 1996 and 1997.

In a 12-page resolution, the anti-graft court denied the motions for reconsideration filed by the three, saying they failed to raise valid grounds to justify the grant of their appeal.

"The presence of all the elements of the crimes charged justified the conviction of the accused. As no meritorious or cogent reasons were given for the modification, much

less reversal of the challenged Decision is not warranted," the Sandiganbayan said.

Associate Justice and Seventh Division chairperson Ma. Theresa Dolores C. Gomer-Estrada penned the ruling, with associate Justices Sarah Jane T. Fernandez and Bayani H. Jacinto concurring.

In its assailed decision on February 9, 2015, the court said the prosecution presented sufficient evidence to establish the guilt of Memrado Enrique Bello, former AFP-RSBS Legal Department head; Manuel Satuito, AFP-RSBS Legal Department Documentation Division head; and private defendant Mirvilar Casana, broker and vice president of Grand Manor Iloilo Realty Corp.

They were convicted of five counts of graft for which they were each meted total jail terms

of 30 years and five months to 50 years and six counts of falsification of public documents punishable by imprisonment of 25 to 48 years combined.

The court also imposed additional penalties of lifetime ban from further employment in government against Bello and Satuito and fines totaling P30,000 for all three defendants.

During trial, prosecutors submitted copies of two sets of deeds of sale covering the properties acquired by the AFP-RSBS, one showing a higher acquisition cost signed between the pension fund officials and the previous owner, and another with a much lower valuation bearing only the lone signature of the former property owner.

Prosecution witnesses testified that the unilateral deeds of sale were the ones submitted to the Bureau of

Internal Revenue, resulting in lower capital gains taxes imposed, thereby short-changing the government.

The bilateral deeds of sale remained in the folders of the AFP-RSBS Legal Department, contrary to the requirement that they should have been reviewed for validity and regularity before being forwarded to the BIR and the Registry of Deeds.

Between the two sets of documents, the Sandiganbayan noted a discrepancy of more than P40 million.

In finding the two public officials guilty the court cited their "silent but potent acquiescence" which allowed the fraud to succeed.

It gave little weight to the claim of Bello and Satuito that they were not directly involved in the transactions since the Iloilo land purchases were reportedly entrusted to the Real Estate Department.

VIOLATION OF COMMUNITY PACT

# RESPECT PEACE ZONE, SAGADA FOLK TELL MILITARY, NPA

By Karlston Lapniten  
@karlstonlapnitenINQ

BAUKO, MOUNTAIN PROVINCE—War was supposed to be taboo in the popular tourist town of Sagada, which its leaders had declared a peace zone in 1989 after three youngsters were killed in the crossfire between soldiers and New People's Army (NPA) rebels.

But while the government and the NPA recognized the community decision, both camps had accused each other of violating it.

A skirmish on June 5 on Mt. Sipitan in the village of Aguid was a breach of the peace zone by rebels who had set up camp near the area, according to Senior Supt. Allen Odden, Mountain Province police director.

A team of policemen was ambushed by 50 rebels when they investigated reported sightings of armed men on Tuesday. The clash left a policeman, PO2 Henry Dion, dead and 11 others wounded.

### Rebel community

Odden said evidence suggested some residents might be linked to communist rebels in the area.

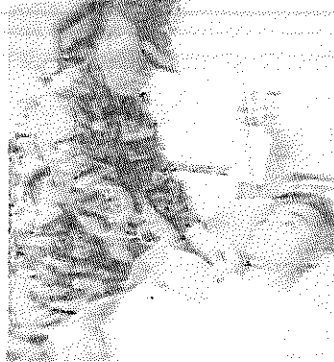
Supt. Joseph Bangcorawayan Cayat, who was among the wounded, said the police operation was prompted by a tip from civilians.

Cayat, a native of Sagada, said parts of Aguid had been turned into a training ground of rebels from nearby villages and towns.

Policemen, who pursued the armed men, also said they saw foreigners fleeing from Mt. Sipitan.

The NPA Leonardo Pecos Command, which operates in Mountain Province and Abra, claimed responsibility for the ambush.

Its spokesperson, Magna



**BRAVERY** PO1 Jake Pa-at, who was wounded in a clash with communist rebels in Mountain Province, receives a medal for bravery from Chief Supt. Rolando Nana, Cordillera police director. —KARLSTON LAPNITEN

Udyaw, said the attack was "a message" for the police and military not to enter "our areas."

### Expedient excuse

Rebels also blamed the government for "using the peace zone as the expedient" excuse for defeats suffered by police and military.

"They are the ones violating this one-sided declaration," said a June 6 statement of the NPA Cordillera People's Democratic Front.

"The people of this place know fully well that there was never a time that the area had been spared from combat operations," it added.

Caught in the back-and-forth accusations were Sagada residents who demanded that the peace zone be honored.

"Have mercy on the people. We want peace. Sagada has been tarnished again," said Francis Degay, whose son-in-law, a soldier, was killed in a clash with NPA in the village of Antadao in 2014.

"Where has the peace zone gone?" he said. INQ

## Tribal chief defects from NPA, forges peace covenant with gov't

By MIKE U. CRISMUNDO

CAMP DATU MAKAPANDONG, Awz New Leyte, Prosperidad, Agusan del Sur - A tribal chieftain, who defected from the New People's Army (NPA) entered into a covenant with the government and Philippine Army (PA), in an effort to end the insurgency problem in his area. Capt. Erick Wynmer F. Calulot, Civil Military Operations Officer of the Army's 1003rd Infantry (Raptor) Brigade, 10th Infantry (Agila) Division, on Monday said.

In a statement sent to The Manila Bulletin Sunday night, Calulot said Datu Gibang Apoga of the Manobo-Langilan tribe, the acknowledged founder of "Salugpungan Tuno Igkatuno" in the border areas of Caraga region, Compostela Valley (ComVal) and Davao del Norte provinces, voluntarily gave up himself to the Army's 56th Infantry Battalion (56th IB) at 9 a.m. on Saturday and vowed to closely coordinate for peace and development program of the

government.

"As a gesture of genuine desire to finally support the government, Datu Gibang, an influential leader of an organization affiliated with the NPAs in the said provincial borders, along with his subordinate leaders, officially freed themselves from the clutches of the terrorists, and sealed a peace covenant with the top area commanders of the 1003rd Brigade, the 56th IB, the local government of Talaingod and the provincial government of Davao del Norte at Sitio Nasilaban, Barangay Palma Gil of said town," Calulot said, in a statement.

During the peace covenant ceremony, the 1003rd "Raptor" Brigade CMO officer said the tribal chief, believed to be the chairman of an underground movement organization in Talaingod, turned-over his M16 Armalite rifle to Brig. Gen. Ernesto C. Torres Jr., commanding general of the 1003rd Brigade.

"There were 500 other tumads who witnessed the historic event," Calulot said.

The Chief Executive Assistant of Speaker Pantaleon D. Alvarez, Edwin Jubanib, also witnessed the event.

"Together with the LGUs and LGAs, we will continue doing confidence-building measures to solidify the counterinsurgency gains in this undertaking," Torres said, referring to the multiple efforts the Army has undertaken in order to ensure lasting peace in Davao region.



'NOT PART OF NPA, NOT UNDER SURVEILLANCE'

# EastMinCom clears Antonio Toledo

BY DEMPSEY REYES

**T**HE military's Eastern Mindanao Command has cleared Baha'i spiritual leader Antonio Toledo of any involvement in the communist rebellion, belying claims made by his daughter Drei Toledo in a four-part personal narrative in *The Manila Times*.

Lt. Gen. Benjamin Madrigal Jr., EastMinCom commander, said military forces had no information on Mr. Toledo's alleged involvement with the New People's Army (NPA).

"We have not received any report of the involvement of Mr. Toledo in communist-terrorist activities," Madrigal said in a statement to *The Manila Times*.

"It is very unfortunate that the military organization has to be dragged in this issue," he added.

Journalist and researcher Drei

Toledo claimed that his father, whom she identified as 'Ka Tonyo,' had installed a bravo antenna and a high-water tower tank at their house in Cagayan de Oro City, supposedly to intercept military communication.

Madrigal explained that a bravo antenna is a mere "amateur radio antenna," used for radio frequency spectrum for purposes of non-commercial exchange of messages, wireless experimentation, self-training, private recreation, "radiosport" and emergency com-

munications, among others. "These radios operate on a high-frequency (HF) spectrum," he told *The Manila Times*.

"The military has discarded the use of HF radios for more advanced, encrypted communications necessary for interface with internet and computer systems," Madrigal also said. "An HF radio [cannot] interfere [with], much less monitor military communications."

Maj. Ezra Balagtey, EastMinCom spokesman, said that based on information from military forces in Cagayan de Oro City, Antonio Toledo was not on the list of NPA members under military surveillance.

Toledo had denied all the claims made by his daughter Drei, including having a mistress in the NPA named "Ka Linda" and ordering the NPA "Sparrow" unit to kill her.

"First, I am not a terrorist. Secondly, I am not with the New

People's Army or NPA... I am not a part of a communist group. I never was," he said in an interview last week.

"It was very disturbing. That is a public statement in a national newspaper. It is patently false," Toledo added. "I am not with the CPP-NPA or NDF. I cannot order to anyone in the CPP-NPA-NDF [to kill her]," he said.

Contrary to his daughter's claim that he was jobless, Toledo said he was involved in a network marketing company called Forever Healthy Product Inc. He said he even used some of his products on Drei when she was sick after covering the Marawi war.

"I am a senior citizen. I'm 64 years old and I am into networking with Forever Healthy Product Inc. That includes what I used to help Drei recover when she got sick in Marawi," he said.

# Reds abduct soldier, CAFGU amid peace talks

By Mario J. Mallari

Amid talks of the resumption of formal peace talks between the government and the National Democratic Front of the Philippines (NDFP), communist New People's Army (NPA) abducted on Sunday an Army soldier and a militiaman in Davao Oriental province, the military said yesterday.

Capt. Victor Inting Jr., spokesman of the Army's 10th Infantry Division (ID), identified those abducted and now being held as hostages as Cpl. Johannes Parreno, a member of the Alpha Company of the 28th Infantry Battalion (IB), and Didno Malibay, a member of the Citizens Armed Forces Geographical Unit (CAFGU).

Inting said that Parreno and Malibay had just facilitated the distribution of school supplies to students of Tubaon Elementary School at around 5 p.m. Sunday when they were abducted along Purok Manga, Barangay Dawan in Mati City.

"The NPA rebels established a hasty roadblock posing as military men and held them hostage. The rebels left the area after 30 minutes bringing the soldier and CAFGU with them," Inting said.

"The incident caused panic and fear among the residents who immediately informed the unit of

the situation," he added.

The 28th IB immediately launched focused military operations to rescue Parreno and Malibay.

The military tagged members of the NPA's PBC-6 operating in Davao Oriental province as behind the kidnapping.

"The abduction of members of the AFP in non-combat status is a clear manifestation of their desperation and violates the

*'...this act  
exemplifies  
the NPA as  
the true peace  
spoilers'*

provisions of the Comprehensive Agreement on the Respect for Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law and this act exemplifies the NPA as the true peace spoilery," Lt. Col. Miguel Ramon, commander of 28th IB, said.

Ramon warned the rebel group not to do actions that would show them as peace spoilery and affect the peace negotiations.

The latest abduction happened while peace panels of the government of the Philippines and the NDFP, the political wing of the NPA, are preparing for the resumption of the formal peace talks by July.

# NPA rebels kidnap soldier, militiaman

BY VICTOR REYES

AN Army soldier and a government militiaman were abducted by members of the New People's Army on Sunday afternoon, the military said yesterday.

Capt. Rayboy Ibanes, spokesman of the Army's 701st Brigade, said soldiers from the 25th Infantry Battalion have been deployed to conduct search and rescue operations for the victims, Cpl. Johannes Parreño and Caigo Cimera, Armed Force Geographical Unit Davao Malibay, both assigned with the 25th IB.

"We are monitoring the area and at the same time conducting pursuit operation," Ibanes said.

Ibanes said the government troopers were seized around 5 p.m. in Sitio Pisingan barangay Buso, where the rebels had set up a road block.

Parreño and Malibay, both unarmed and on civilian clothes, were aboard a motorcycle on their way back to their patrol base in barangay Taguibo, also in Mar Gray when they were intercepted by the insurgents, who are believed to be members of the NPA's Pulang Bagan Command 6.

"They have just facilitated the distribution of school bags. While returning, they were abducted by the NPAs," Ibane said.

The victims had assisted in the

distribution of bags at the Tubacon Elementary School in Tarragona town in Davao Oriental, a school undertaking that was done in collaboration with ABS-CBN.

28th IB commander Lt. Col. Miguel Ramon said the military has already coordinated with a "neutral group" to negotiate the release of Parreño and Malibay.

"Once we got the confirmation (of the abduction), we immediately launched a rescue operation, a focused military operation, to rescue our two personnel," Ramon said in a phone interview.

Ramon appealed for the victims' release, and urged the rebels "not to carry out similar drastic actions" that would adversely affect peace negotiations between the government and communist groups.

Ramon said it was "unfortunate" that the rebels abducted the two personnel while there are ongoing efforts to revive the peace talks.

Government and communist negotiators are trying to revive formal peace talks, which was terminated by President Duterte in November following a series of rebel attacks on government forces.

"This exemplifies that they are the real peace spoilers. They abducted our unarmed personnel who were already off duty at that time," Ibanes said. (P. 2)

## Sundalo, Caigu dinukot ng NPA

Isang sundalo at isang miyembro ng Caigu ang binihag ng tinatawag na 20 mga armadong rebeldeng New People's Army (NPA) sa naganap na karahasan sa Mati City, Davao Oriental kamakalawa ng hapon.

Kinilala ang mga kinidnap na sina Corporal Johannes Parreño, miyembro ng Army's 28th Infantry Battalion (IB) at ang CAFGU na si Dindo Sagavno Malibay, kasapi ng Army's 72nd Cadre Battalion.

Sa ulat, sinabi ni Captain Rayboy Ibanes, Spokesperson ng Army's 701st Infantry Brigade, dakong alas-5:30 ng hapon nang mangyari ang pagbihag sa mga biktima sa Cross-

ing Pising, Purok Dalia sa Mati City.

Sa imbestigasyon, ang dalawa ay nakasuot ng damit sibilyan at lulan ng motorsiklo patungo sa kanilang base sa Brgy. Tagulbo ng lungsod nang harangin sa inilatag na checkpoint ng mga armadong rebelde sa nasabing lugar.

Natukoy naman na ang grupo ng Pulang Bagani Command 8 sa pamumuno ng isang aliyas "Ka Jec" ang nasa likod ng pagbihag sa mga biktima.

Nagsasagawa na ngayon ng hot pursuit operation ang tropa ng militar upang hiligtag ang mga binag. (Joy Santos)

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INCUBATED

## MILF DISOWNS TEXT MESSAGES WARNING OF GOV'T 'SECRET WAR'

DAVAO CITY—The Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) has disowned text messages alerting people about a supposed "secret war" by the government against Muslims.

In a statement, the MILF said it never issued such a warn-

ing. The text, attributed to peace panel chair Mohagher Iqbal, said the government was preparing to arrest Moros and would launch an all-out war against the MILF after trashing the proposed Bangsamoro Basic Law.

"Don't believe anything in

this text message... There is no truth to this," the MILF said.

One social media user said he did not think that a Muslim was behind the text, noting spelling errors in the words "Al-lah" and the greeting "Assalamu Alaikum." —ALLAN NAWAL INQ

12

A12

# 20,000 flee air, ground strikes vs BIFF rebels

## AFP says 15 gunmen slain in operations in 3 towns in Maguindanao, N. Cotabato

By Edwin Fernandez  
ginquirerrmindanao

COTABATO CITY — About 20,000 people fled their homes in remote villages of at least three towns in Maguindanao and North Cotabato provinces following an air and ground assault by military forces against Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF) gunmen, reports from the AFP command. The BIFF, a Muslim militant group, is the government of Mindanao's chief enemy.

The deserted communities included those within territories claimed by the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) in the towns of Sik Pandaran and Pagalungan in Maguindanao and Pikit in North Cotabato.

Tahira Kadantongan, first disaster risk reduction and management officer, said that in her town alone, at least 10,000 people from the villages of Bulok, Talitay, Bago, Bayan Barongis and Rajamuda left their homes when the military conducted airstrikes and ground assault against BIFF gunmen near Agusan.

### Fear

Kadantongan said no civilian community was hit in her town but residents were forced to leave out of fear.

"They feared for their lives they hurriedly left their barangay after they took their early morning meal in preparation for the day's fasting," she said.

The ARMM's Humanitarian Emergency Action and Re-



DISPLACED: Evacuees from remote villages of Pikit town in North Cotabato seek shelter at an Arabic school compound in the town center as the military pursues Moro rebels in their community — FERDINAND LABRERA

ponse Team (ARMM-TRAPT) said it sent relief workers to Pagalungan where there is a high death toll.

Maria Ina, a heavy arms BIFF commander, said relief food had been given to evacuees from the village of Sidal Bulok and had to be taken to shelter at the Pagalungan community market.

The military said the civilian area was targeted in what it called a "surgical" airstrike and ground operations against BIFF gunmen, led by former Arakanah alias Commander Bungos.

### Casualties

Brig. Gen. Cirinto Sorolana, commander of the 6th Infantry Division (ID), said at least 15

BIFF gunmen were killed, 14 others were wounded in operations conducted in the Pivlas area surrounding the towns of Maguindanao and North Cotabato.

A report from Reuters said between 60 and 100 BIFF men were in the vicinity when the assault began.

"We were able to destroy medical supplies and explosive devices, factories in southern Mindanao and this is a big loss to them," Sorolana said.

He said the BIFF casualty figure was based on reports that the military had been getting from the ground. He said a soldier was reported wounded or killed in the operations.

"We have no casualties. The

enemy fatalities were verified," said Capt. Arvin John Encinas, spokesperson for the strike.

"The strike was surgical and the targets are specific and contain civilian areas," he added.

Gen. Sorolana said BIFF spokesperson disputed the report, saying there were no casualties on their side. "We are not affected by the operations," he said.

### Bomb expert

Gen. Sorolana said Capt. Harold Cabanog, commander of the Army's 3rd Bombardment Battalion, had soldiers attacked Ustadz Anwar, a 22-year-old trained bomb expert and his wife, Asnaya, 20.

"The suspects threw their weapons and a BIFF soldier was in the water when we landed at their escape routes," Cabanog said.

Anwar is known as Abu Qudus, a bomb expert in the group, Cabanog said.

He said soldiers also recovered a 9mm rifle and an M16 rifle from the suspects.

According to reports of evacuated residents near MILF bases in the three towns, Sorolana said the operation had been properly coordinated with the MILF.

"We ease the fear of our people and assure them that strict procedures were undertaken and deliberately planned by the military, giving due concern to the safety of the civilian populace," he said.

—WITH REPORTS FROM JEFFREY MAITEM, JULIE ALIPALA, KARLOS MANLUPIG AND REUTERS. INQ

# 'Foreign militants among dead in air strikes vs BIFF'

By JOHN UNSON

**MAGUINDANAO** - The military is validating reports that foreign militants were among those killed in air strikes against the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF) on Sunday.

Local officials, who refused to be identified, said they received reports that four of the 15 fatalities are foreigners.

The air strikes and ground offensive in Barangay Pagalungan in this province and at the border of General Pendaran and Lambayong towns in Sultan Kudarat targeted BIFF bomb makers Taib Dinggo and Abu Walid, who were reportedly trained by slain Malaysian terrorist Zulkifli bin Hir, alias Marwan.

Police have yet to confirm reports that Dinggo was among the fatalities.

Quoting residents who fled their homes at the height of the military operation, members of municipal peace and order councils said at least 10 of the fatalities were BIFF men.

"It was a calibrated law enforcement activity... to weaken

the capability of a group known for using IEDs (improvised explosive devices) to kill innocent people," Brig. Gen. Cirilite Sobejana, 6th Infantry Division (ID) commander, said.

Sobejana said they learned of the presence of BIFF men in the area after receiving reports from barangay and local government officials.

He said personnel of the Special Action Battalion of the Sultan Kudarat police participated in the operation.

Suspected BIFF bomb maker Ustadz Anwar Ali, 22, and his wife Asnaya, 21, were arrested while trying to escape from a suspected BIFF bomb factory destroyed in the air strikes.

## Thousands displaced, classes suspended

Around 7,000 residents were displaced in the military

offensive. They are staying in evacuation centers in Barangay Pagalungan in Pikit and several barangays in Lambayong and General Pendaran.

Classes in Pagalungan, Datu Montawal, Rajah Buayan and General Pendaran in this province were suspended yesterday for security reasons.

Authorities expressed concern that the BIFF would avenge their losses by launching retaliatory attacks targeting civilians.

## MILF support

The military said the operation against the BIFF was conducted in "full coordination" with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front Coordinating Committee on the Cessation of Hostilities (MILF-CCCH), according to the Office of the Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process (OPAPP).

"The operation was successful, resulting in the eradication of identified IED factories," OPAPP said.

Follow-up operations are ongoing to ensure that the terrorists are confined in the area, it added.

## Coordinating team

The OPAPP noted that Maj. Gen. Dato' Mohd Nazir Bin Maim Mami, head of mission of the 13th Mindanao International Monitoring Team, presided over a meeting of representatives of the MILF and government CCCHs, MILF Ad hoc Joint Action Group, 6th ID, 602nd Infantry Brigade and 7th Infantry Battalion following the military offensive.

The government agreed to create a team to discuss cooperation between government and MILF forces against terrorism.

"It was also agreed that the MILF ceasefire mechanism will inform evacuees that they should keep calm and return to their respective communities because they are not the target of the operation," OPAPP said.

- With Edith Regalado, Jose Rodol Clapano

# 16 killed, 8 wounded in BIFF lair assault

BY DEMPSEY REYES AND JULMUNIR I. JANNARAL

**C**AMP SIONGCO, Awang, Datu Odin Sinsuat, Maguindanao: The air strikes launched by the military's Joint Task Force Central (JTFC) killed 15 members of the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF) and an Army soldier, and wounded eight other bandits at the Liguasan Marsh area in Maguindanao.

Camp Siongco Logistics spokesman of the 6th Infantry Division said. He told *The Manila Times* that the bandits traded fire with troops from the 33rd Infantry Battalion (IABT) but were outnumbered in about an hour of fighting on Sunday.

The assault resulted in the surrender of terrorists, bomb expert Ustad Muhammad Anwar Omar, 34, and his wife Asmayi Ali, 20.

The soldiers confiscated a 7.62-caliber sniper rifle and

7.62mm-caliber M4 Carbine from the suspects.

He also added that with the killing of 15 Islamic State-inspired BIFF terrorists and the arrest of bomb expert Anwar via the JTFC successfully dismantled the identified improvised explosive device (IED) factory located in the southern Liguasan Marsh area.

Brig. Gen. Cirilito Sobejana, 61st Air Commando, said targets of the air strikes are BIFF bomb

makers, noting that they have spread out in Central Mindanao.

"It was the same group [we are targeting] since we have objectives such as clearing the area so when the approach against [the terrorists] was opened one of our soldiers was hit and died," he said.

"We are determined to neutralize more BIFF members in the vicinity of Liguasan Marsh to bring peace to Central Mindanao," Sobejana added.

Troops hoisted the Philippine flag near the 33rd IABT camp in the Liguasan Marsh after the assault.

Meanwhile, 1st Lt. Joseph Cabunoc, 61st Air Commando, confirmed the presence of foreign terrorists in an area overlapping with several bandits in the area during the operation.

"There are a reasonable number of foreign nationals, so Indonesian was reportedly recruited but we are still extracting it," Cabunoc said in a text message.

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# 15 BIFFs killed, bomb expert nabbed

By FRANCIS L. WAKEFIELD

**F**ifteen suspected members of the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF) were killed, and eight others were wounded when combined elements of the military and police raided their lair in Maguindanao that also resulted in the arrest of the group's bomb expert and his wife.

The Army's Sixth Infantry Division, led by Brig. Gen. Cirilito Sobejana, spearheaded the counterterrorist operations against the Dawlah Islamiyah Toraike Group in the boundary between Pagalungan and General Salipada K. Pendatun, Maguindanao.

Backed by Philippine Air Force (PAF) air assets, ground troops of the Army's 33rd Infantry Battalion led by Lt. Col. Harold M. Cabunoc, 4th Special Action Battalion led by Police Supt. Darwin Padla, and 61st Division Reconnaissance Company led by 1st Lt. Ruel Fortuna, stormed the terrorist's lair in the Liguasan marsh.

The terrorists traded fire with the 33rd IB troopers but were outmaneuvered after about an hour of firefight, prompting two terrorists to surrender.

Cabunoc identified them as Ustadz Anwar Ali, 22, and Asnaya Ali, 20. The soldiers confiscated a Cal 50 Sniper Rifle and a Cal 5.56mm M4 Carbine from

the suspects.

"The suspects threw their weapons and improvised bombs into the water when we blocked all their escape routes. Ustadz Anwar is known as Abu Omar, a bomb expert in the group," Cabunoc said.

Sobejana has directed his troops to cordon off all escape routes as another group pursues the remnants of the elusive terrorist group.

"We will not allow these terrorists to spoil the peace in Central Mindanao. We will protect the people against those who espouse violent extremism," Sobejana, who is the concurrent Joint Task Force Central Commander, said.

"We ease the fear of our people and

assure them that safety procedures were undertaken and deliberately planned by JTFC giving due concern to the safety of the civilian populace," he added.

Sobejana said appropriate coordination has been made with the MILF CCCH and the targeted areas were confined to locations far from the local communities.

"I am very determined to defeat these threat groups and prevent them from doing terroristic activities to bring about peace in Central Mindanao. We urge the continued support and cooperation of our people in the communities to hasten the attainment of peace and development," Sobejana said. //

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## 15 BIFF men killed; bomb expert arrested

PIKIT, Cotabato—Composite government troops and the extremist Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters clashed on Sunday, leading to the capture of a bomb expert and the killing of 15 suspected terrorists in South Liguasan

Marsh, the military said Monday. Brig. Gen. Cirilito Sobejana, commander of the Sixth Army Infantry Division in Maguindanao, said the military accounted for the 15 terrorists killed, eight wounded and the arrest of a bomb

expert and his wife after a pre-dawn raid on the terrorists' lair.

Sobejana said the operation backed by a satellite-guided air strike resulted in the destruction of a workshop producing  
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improvised explosive devices run by the Daesh-inspired terrorists.

A "Daesh-inspired" group is one that is influenced by the social media-based propaganda and recruitment activities of the Islamic State group.

Military field reports identified the arrested bomb expert as Ustadz Anwar Ali, 22, who surrendered with his wife Asnaya Ali, 20, after an hour-long encounter.

Sobejana credited the 33rd Infantry Battalion under Lt. Col. Harold M. Cabunoc, the Fourth Special Action Force Battalion led by Police Supt. Darwin Padla, and the 61st Division Reconnaissance Company under First Lt. Ruel Fortuna.

"The terrorists traded fire with the 33rd Army Infantry Battalion troopers, but they were out-manuevered after about an hour of firefight," Sobejana said.

Sobejana, a rare Valor awardee for gallantry in a past engagement, said the soldiers had also confiscated a cal. 50 Sniper Rifle and cal. 5.56mm M4 Carbine from the extremists.

He showed satellite-generated images of the target and the final blow of an air strike in cross-axes of precision to prevent unnecessary casualties on non-combatants, Nash B. Maulana and Francisco Tuyas

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# Ongoing military offensives target 3 foreign militants

**By Mario J. Mallari**

Three foreign militants are among the targets of the ongoing military assaults against the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF) at Liguasan Marsh in Maguindanao province, the military said yesterday.

Brig. Gen. Cirilito Sobejana, commander of the Army's 6th Infantry Division (ID), said that one of the three foreigners is an Indonesian who was wounded during the military assault.

"There were three foreign nationals but we could not (ascertain their identities)...there was one wounded Indonesian,"

Sobejana said.

Unfortunately, Sobejana said that one soldier was killed during the operation.

Sobejana said the operations were continuing as of Monday, vowing there would be no let-up in the offensive until the capability of the BIFF to mount bombings and other terrorist

activities have been degraded.

"The firefight is ongoing because what we are doing is sustained (operation). We will not stop, we will sustain this one because we have already cornered them," Sobejana said.

He, however, said that the soldiers were experiencing stiff resistance from the terrorists

who were on a defensive position.

The military launched an operation against the BIFF on Sunday at the Liguasan Marsh — destroying the rebels bomb factory facility and killing 15 BIFF fighters.

The assault was backed by artillery and aircraft, however,

the terrorists were attempting to fend off the advance of the soldiers.

Sobejana vowed he will use all available assets to finish off the rebels there.

Residents living near Liguasan Marsh have fled their homes in order to avoid getting trapped in the firefight.

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## Soldier dead in clash with BIFF in Maguindanao

BY VICTOR REYES

FRESH fighting between government troops and members of the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters broke out yesterday at the Liguasan marsh in Maguindanao, where the military bombed and destroyed the group's bomb-making factory a day earlier.

A soldier and a BIFF member died in the fighting, said Brig. Gen. Cirilino Sobejana, commander of the Army's 6th Infantry Division.

Sobejana said troops were clearing a BIFF outpost when the firefight broke out at around 12:30 p.m. yesterday. As of 4 p.m. yesterday, operations were ongoing.

"There are three more objectives which we wanted to clear. During the assault on one of the targets, our approach was exposed, leading to the death of one of our men," he said.

Sobejana said the body of the slain BIFF member was not re-

covered.

On Sunday, 15 BIFF members were killed in an assault on a BIFF bomb factory in the same area but no body has been recovered.

"We have yet to recover any (enemy body) because of the ongoing fighting. It's hard to expose our troops just to recover the bodies," said Sobejana.

Eight other BIFF men were injured while two others were captured.

Lt. Col. Harold Cabunoc, commander of the Army's 35th Infantry Battalion, said a second bomb factory was seized by his men during last Sunday's operation at the Liguasan marsh.

Cabunoc said the BIFF members at the second bomb factory escaped after throwing away their weapons and improvised bombs in the water. He said his battalion only recovered a sniper rifle and carbine rifle in the area. *1/1*

## BIFF bombmaker, wife surrender in Maguindanao

A BOMB MAKER of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS)-linked Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF) and his wife surrendered to government forces after their bomb-making factory in Maguindanao was destroyed in airstrikes on Sunday.

Philippine Army (PA)

6th Infantry Division (ID) spokesman Capt. Arvin John Encinas identified the couple as 22-year-old Ustadz Arwar Ali and his wife Asnaya, 20.

Encinas said the military airstrikes also resulted in the killing of 15 BIFF members and wounding of eight others.

Around 2 a.m. on Sunday, a military helicopter gunship backed by artillery fire and ground troops launched an operation on BIFF targets at the borders of Tagalungan and Gen. Salipada K. Pendatur towns in Maguindanao.

The operation destroyed the BIFF IED factory located at the vast Liguasan marshland area in Maguindanao.

The assault troops were composed of soldiers from the 33rd Infantry Battalion led by Lt. Col. Harold M. Cabunoc, 61st Division Reconnaissance Company led by 1Lt. Ruel Fortuna, and the Philippine National Police's Fourth Special Action Battalion led by Supt. Darwin Padla.

After the fierce gunbattle, Ali and his wife surrendered by throwing their weapons in the water when all their possible escape routes were blocked by government troops.

Recovered from the couple were a .50 Barrett sniper rifle and an M4 Carbine rifle.

Zaida de los Reyes

## Bomb maker, wife give up as military airstrike destroys BIFF bomb factory

A BOMB maker of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS)-linked Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF) and his wife surrendered as government forces destroyed their bomb factory in an airstrike operation on Sunday that left at least 15 persons killed in Maguindanao.

Army 6th Infantry Division (ID) spokesman Capt. Arvin John Encinas identified the couple as Ustadz Anwar Ali, 22, BIFF bomb maker, and his wife Asnaya, 20.

The operation also resulted in the killing of 15 members of BIFF and wounding of eight others.

Reports reaching Camp Aguinaldo said that at around 2 a.m., a military helicopter gunship, backed by artillery fire and ground troops, launched a "surgical" operation on BIFF positions on the borders of Pagalungan and Gen. Salipada K. Pendatun towns in Maguindanao.

The operation destroyed the BIFF IED factory located in southern part of the vast Liguasan marshland area of Maguindanao.

The assault troops composed of soldiers belonging to the Army's 38th Infantry Battalion led by Lt. Col. Harold M. Cabunoc, 61st Division Reconnaissance Company led by Lt. Ruel Fortuna and the Philippine National Police's Fourth Special Action Battalion led by Supt. Darwin Padla.

The team assured that the BIFF members were confined in a specific area during the operation to prevent

a possible takeover to nearby towns.

After the fierce exchange of fire, Ali and his wife surrendered to authorities by throwing their weapon into the water when all their possible escape routes were already blocked by government troops.

Recovered from the couple were a cal. 50 Barrett sniper rifle and an M4 Carbine rifle.

Enidsa Usio Reyes-Palanca

## Airstrike: 16 BIFF utas, 2 arestado

Patay ang labing-anim miyembro ng Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF) sa ikatlong airstrike at wesak operation ng militar sa kuta ng mga terorista habang nagrepto naman ang isang pumaghinainang notary na bomb expert at misis nito sa lalawigan ng Maguindanao kamakailawa.

Ayon kay Brig. Gen. Cirilito Sobejana, Commander ng Army's 6th Infantry Division (ID), deklarang alas-5:00 ng umaga nang simulan ng security forces ang assault operation sa kuta ng BIFF sa hangganan ng Pagalugan at SA Pundatun ng

**Nina JOY CANTOS** at **RHODERICK BENEZ** lalawigan na tumagal nang halos isang oras.

Sa nasabing operasyon ay napatay ang 16 BIFF habang wala pa ang nasagutan sa mga ito habang tuluyan ring naiansag ang pabrika ng Improvised Explosive Device (IED) ng mga ito at nakarekober din ng mga bombe.

Kiniiala naman ni Army's 33rd Infantry Battalion (IB) Lt Col. Herold Gabunoc ang naaresto na sinasabing isang bomb expert na si Ustadz Anwar Ali, 22, at ang misis nitong si Ashaya Ali, 20, na nakumpiskanan ng

isang cal. 50 sniper rifle at isang cal. 5.56-MM M4 carbine.

Samantalang ipinag-

utos naman ni Sobejana ang pagpapaigting pa ng operasyon ng tropa ng mga sundalo laban sa BIFF at ipinaitoron na rin ang exit points ng mga ito



# 16 BIFF PATAY SA AIR STRIKE

Labing-anim miyembro ng Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF) ang napatay sa isang air strike at assault operation ng tropa ng pamahalaan sa kanilang kuta sa Maguindanao kamakalawa.

Sa ulat ni Brig. Gen. Cirilito Sobejana, Commander ng Army's 6th Infantry Division (ID), magalas 5:00 ng umaga nang

simulan ng security forces ang assault operation sa kuta ng BIFF sa hangganan ng Pagulungan at SK Pendaran ng lalawigan at masa 16 BIFF ang napatay habang wala ang nasugatan sa mga teroristang grupo at nalansag din ang pabrika ng improvised Explosive Device (IED) ng Dresh-inspired terrorists na mga BIFF at nakareload din ng

mga bomba. Ang operasyon ay binaback-up ng ground troops ng Army's 33rd Infantry Battalion (IB) sa pamumuno ni Lt. Col. Harold Cabunoc, 4th Special Action Battalion sa pamumuno naman ni Supt. Darwin Padla at 61st Division Reconnaissance Company sa pamumuno naman ni Lt. Ruel Fortuna na sinalakay ang

kuta ng BIFF sa Liguasan Marsh sa lugar.

Tumagai ng halos isang oras na bakbakan bago nagsisuko ang dalawang terorista na kinilalang sina Ustadz Anwar Ali, 22 at misis nitong si Asnaya Ali, 20, na nakumpiskahan ng isang cal. 50 sniper rifle at isang cal. 556 MM M4 carbine. *Jay Santos, Rhoderick Bebez*

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## Muslim group seeks to restore BBL provisions

THE Bicameral Conference Committee of Congress should restore essential provisions stricken off the Bangsamoro Basic Law by lawmakers, a broad-based coalition of Bangsamoro civil society organizations said.

On Sunday, the Consortium of Bangsamoro Civil Society Organizations has conducted a series of consultations with varying sectors of peace stakeholders for a tri-people's alliance to call on Congress to restore provisions either deleted or were toned-down.

Lawyer Naguib Sinarimbo of the United Nations Development Program field unit in Mindanao said that if the government succeeds in changing the 1987 Constitution, there have to be changes also on the BBL.

But the Senate version deleted the provision of the BBL on the conduct of periodic plebiscite every five years for possible changes in the law in the next 25 years.

Sammy Maulana, CBCSO secretary general, said a manifesto for the cause in Congress would be the least that they would want to come up with, aside from rallies, before members of Congress meet for the Bicameral Committee Conference in mid-July to pass the substitute BBL into law.

Sinarimbo said Section 11 Article XII of the BBL reduces to only 50-50 the sharing of tax revenues, fees and charges collected in the Bangsamoro, whereas the original BBL provision based on the CAB is 75-25 in favor of the Bangsamoro.

# DFA updates diplomatic group on PH rights issues

**By CRISTINA LEE-PISCO**

AS part of preparations for the 38th Session of the United Nations Human Rights Council that will be held starting this month, the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) updated members of the diplomatic community on human rights-related issues in the Philippines.

Foreign Affairs Undersecretary for Policy Enrique A. Manalo recently held a fol-

low-up briefing on human rights, the first of which was held on March 5.

"It aims to foster better dialogue with Philippine counterparts, promote greater transparency, and update them on relevant government programs that are in line with the Duterte administration's people-oriented agenda and its implementation of the country's international human rights commitments," Manalo said.

Relevant data were presented to the diplomatic community, such as the number of anti-drug operations conducted from July 2016 to May 2018, which totaled 91,465; the number of drug personalities arrested, which was 14,336; and the number of drug personalities who have died in the course of anti-drug operations, which was 4,379.

The ICAU also presented RehabNasyon, and the government's overall strategy in attaining its vision of a drug-free Philippines by 2022. The ICAU, for its part, emphasized the government's holistic and balanced approach to address the problem of illegal drugs.

Assistant Secretary Kristoffer James Purson

of Task Force Bangon Marawi shared the rehabilitation plans of the Philippine government in Marawi City, a year after it was occupied by terrorists.

He mentioned that the task force has consulted 34 clans in 13 clusters for the rehabilitation process, and that the task force commissioned a study on land resource management.

The NCDA, through its Officer-in-Charge Carmen Zubanga, presented the latest developments and government initiatives to mainstream disability in public policy and promote greater social inclusion for Persons with Disabilities (PWDs).

In line with the Philippines' implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) and its reporting in September 2018 to the CRPD, the NCDA highlighted the implementation of various government policies to uphold the rights of PWDs.

The NCDA also mentioned some challenges in improving the conditions of PWDs in the country, such as the unavailability of reliable disability data and insufficient assistive services and technology as well as service providers.

# Who wants a showdown with China?

**O**NLY fools. But that's exactly what some critics of President Rodrigo Duterte apparently want by castigating him for not taking a stronger stance against China amid reports that the Asian superpower not only landed nuclear-capable strategic bombers and deployed anti-ship cruise missiles in the disputed Spratly islands in the South China Sea but also harassed Filipino fishermen in the Scarborough (or Panatag) Shoal.

Leading the charge is Magdalo party-list representative Gary Alejano—an ally of PNoy and staunch Duterte critic. Sen. Antonio Trillanes—who previously filed two impeachment complaints against Duterte.

Alejano has been needling Duterte over the government's alleged inaction to prevent the alleged harassment of Filipino fishermen at Scarborough Shoal and nearby waters. He has also resurrected his claim that Duterte ordered government troops to stop patrols in the disputed waters of the South China Sea, which was vehemently denied by Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana.

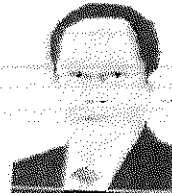
"For the record, there is no such order coming from the Commander in Chief. As a matter of fact, our maritime and aerial patrols continue..." confirmed AFP Public Affairs Office Chief Col.

Edgar Arevalo.

Judging by his pronouncements, it seems what Alejano wants is for the Philippine Navy to station patrol boats in the vicinity of Scarborough, ready to face down the Chinese Coast Guard if they attempt to harass Filipino fishermen in the area. Such a move, however, may trigger a confrontation between Philippine and Chinese troops. It's happened before and it ended with the Philippines losing permanently control of a traditional fishing ground for Filipino fishermen.

I'm sure Alejano is aware of it because the incident transpired during the watch of his former patron, PNoy.

For decades the Philippines had control over Scarborough Shoal as part of its economic exclusive zone. That ended on April 10, 2012 when troops from the Philippine Navy warship BRP Gregorio Del Pilar boarded a Chinese fishing vessel and attempted to arrest the fishermen who had illegally collected corals, giant clams and live sharks. Chinese maritime surveillance ships blocked the arrest, fueling a three-month standoff that eventually saw Philippine Coast Guard vessels withdrawing from the lagoon. Chinese Coast Guard vessels have been occupying Scarborough Shoal since. It was only



**FLIPSIDE**  
**ATTY. DODO DULAY**

after Duterte mended bilateral relations with China, that Filipino fishermen were again given access to its rich fishing grounds.

So, why is Alejano blaming Duterte for the current plight of Filipino fishermen in Scarborough Shoal when it was his old boss, PNoy, who lost it to the Chinese in the first place? Obviously, if we retained control of the lagoon, our fishermen would not be encountering problems in the area now.

Alejano also takes issue with Duterte's muted response to the reported weaponization of Chinese-occupied reefs in the Spratly. He says China's missiles were located as close as 13 nautical miles from Pag-asa Island, the largest Philippine-controlled territory in the disputed region. The Magdalo congressman warns that China's deployment of nuclear-strike capable bombers on the artificial islands in the South China Sea – with a 3,500 kilometer combat range – present a clear and present danger to the country.

The way I see it, Alejano's pronouncements is mere political grandstanding. It's either that, or

he does not understand the geopolitical realities in the South China Sea. As a former military officer, Alejano ought to know that China does not need to deploy missiles in the Spratlys if it really wants to target our military installations. China's current arsenal of ballistic missiles is capable of hitting any point in the country without ever leaving the mainland.

Its Dongfeng-26 (DF-26), the world's longest-range conventionally armed ballistic missile, with a range of 3,000-4,000 kilometers, has been developed principally for precision attack of distant, fixed land targets; in particular, the Guam airbases and port facilities. More recently, China unveiled its "doomsday" device—the Dongfeng-41 (DF-41) intercontinental ballistic missile—a hypersonic (Mach 25) multiple warhead nuclear bomb that can hit targets anywhere on the globe, including the United States.

China is building up military capabilities on the contested reefs primarily for defensive purposes while projecting power to counter US influence in the region. The Chinese surface-to-air missiles (SAMs) installed on the disputed reefs are mainly weapons with a limited range of 124 miles, meant to shoot down incoming enemy planes. The location of its weaponized reefs is

By Dulay A6

## ■ DULAY FROM A5

# Who wants

also defensive in that it gives China the ability to block access from Taiwan or the Philippines to its submarine bases on the mainland.

Whether China's defensive posture in the disputed reefs turns into an offensive one remains to be seen. One thing is sure though. If it does, we cannot rely on the Americans to defend the country's exclusive economic zone (EEZ) in the South China Sea. The US-Philippine alliance has been put to the test twice before and it failed

miserably. The first time was when China occupied Mischief (or Panganiban) Reef in 1995, and the second, during the Scarborough Shoal standoff in 2012.

I recall that when the Mischief Reef dispute erupted in February 1995, the Clinton administration refused to lift a finger saying: "The US takes no position on the legal merits of the competing claims and is willing to assist in the peaceful resolution of the dispute." The Americans brokered a deal in the Scarborough Shoal conflict that ended with Philippine troops leaving the lagoon and the Chinese military staying behind

and taking control of the disputed shoal.

Clearly, the US will not risk war with a nuclear state over some rocks and reefs where its core interests are not at stake. As Duterte correctly pointed out, "America will never die for us" in case of a conflict in the Spratlys or Scarborough Shoal.

This means we have to fend for ourselves if we are to peacefully resolve the South China Sea issue without giving up our rightful claims. And to my mind, the president's pragmatic approach to China remains, for the moment, the best strategy, given today's fluid geopolitical and economic conditions.

# Will there be war with China? Let's hope not

**BY RICARDO SALUDO**  
Columnist

**R**ECENTLY, two defense experts from opposite sides of the world spoke of war with China.

In Washington, Admiral Philip Davidson, the new chief of the Pacific Command in Hawaii, wrote to the US Congress that with its three man-made islands in the

» SaludoAS

# Will there be war with China? Let's hope not

Spratlys. "China is now capable of controlling the South China Sea in all scenarios short of war with the United States."

Then, in Manila, Arroyo-era Defense Secretary and National Security Adviser Norberto Gonzales raised the possibility of Chinese invasion. "China does not have a history of invading other countries, but it is not averse to using military might to settle territorial conflicts," he wrote to Rappler. "A Chinese invasion is not unthinkable."

Gonzales cites a possible Beijing concern over President Rodrigo Duterte ending his term in 2022, which may then lead to a new leadership hostile to China. If there were an invasion, he predicted that "within hours, the Chinese can destroy most of the country's defense facilities and probably some of our cities."

Let's assess these comments and see if they hold water. Today, we look at the invasion scenario, and next Tuesday, war prospects in Asia.

In this assessment, it's crucial to set aside biases and leanings for or against certain countries, so one can coldly weigh the geopolitical, security, and other factors in play.

## Will the Chinese invade?

Gonzales cited Beijing's fear of Duterte's successor reversing his friendship with China. Can it happen?

Well, it did when then-President Benigno Aquino 3rd ended his predecessor Gloria Arroyo's cordial relations with Beijing.

Arroyo had eased tensions by, among other things, quietly dealing with Chinese fishermen caught in the Philippines exclusive economic zone. But Aquino did the opposite sending a navy frigate to arrest Chinese fishermen in Panatag



REPUBLIC SERVICE

RICARDO SALUDO

(Scarborough) Shoal, which he lost in the ensuing confrontation with China in April 2012.

To counter Chinese encroachment, Aquino forged the Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement (EDCA) in 2014, to escalate American military deployment in the country and give US forces access to our bases.

President Duterte has stalled EDCA implementation, rightly fearing that US forces in the country would attract foreign attack. Indeed, if America had facilities in the archipelago, they would have been threatened by North Korean leader Kim Jong-un in his 2016-2017 brinkmanship with the US over his nuclear and ballistic weapons.

## The Philippine threat to China

So, will China invade if it looks like the next administration would revive EDCA and allow the Philippines to become a platform for the 60 percent of US naval assets Washington wants to move to the region under its Pivot to Asia policy?

From our country, nuclear-capable cruise missiles can strike most of China and all of the South China Sea, where vital commodities pass, including 80 percent of Chinese oil imports. Indeed, fear of the US military buildup in the Philippines probably led the People's Liberation Army to turn reefs into man-made islands ready for PLA use.

That the US aims to use Philippine bases in conflicts elsewhere in Asia

can be gleaned from its first EDCA facility at the Cesar Basa Air Base in Pampanga, closest to potential flashpoints in Korea, Taiwan, and the Senkaku/Diaoyutai islands, held by Japan but also claimed by China.

The Pampanga facility is not as helpful as other bases earmarked under EDCA, especially where the Philippines needs US assistance most: maritime frictions in the Spratlys, to which the Puerto Princesa air base is closest; and disaster relief in the Visayas and Mindanao, where Cebu and Cagayan de Oro are best situated.

If EDCA can provoke Chinese attack, why doesn't President Duterte abrogate it? He can do that on his own, since EDCA is not a treaty, but an executive agreement, as the Supreme Court had long affirmed.

Maybe Duterte is keeping EDCA as an option, even allowing some construction, to serve notice he can let US forces in if the Chinese move too aggressively. For now, though, China relations are solid, while EDCA is stalled.

## Attack, maybe; invasion, no

But if the Philippines does let US forces deploy massively, China will respond.

For starters, there will be warnings about harboring forces threatening China. Economic pressure comes next. Chinese aid, credit, and investment will dry up, and trade restrictions will multiply. So might curbs on overseas Filipino workers, including more than 120,000 in Hong Kong.

The PLA can escalate deployment in waters around the Philippines, even the Pacific, including Philippine Rise. Meanwhile, cooperation on such concerns as drugs, transnational crime, and piracy might grind

to a halt. And China's immense diplomatic clout, as the leading trading partner and funding source of most nations, could further put the squeeze on the Philippines.

This scenario is not speculation; the US did worse to Cuba for half a century after the island nearly hosted Russian nuclear missiles in 1962. Don't expect easier treatment if we bring in American forces capable of nuking China and blocking its access to oil and gas — a war strategy urged by the 2016 US Army-sponsored RAND think-tank report, "War with China: Thinking Through the Unthinkable."

The report also warned that primary wartime targets would be American aircraft carriers and air bases in Asia. That would include facilities in Cebu, Cagayan de Oro, Puerto Princesa, Basa Air Base, and Fort Magsaysay in Nueva Ecija, if EDCA goes ahead.

Will Beijing mount an invasion, too, as Washington tried but failed in Cuba?

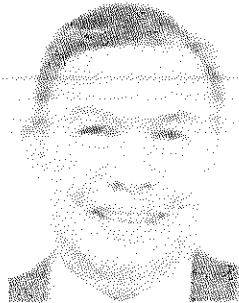
No, mainly because America and its allies would wage full-scale war to prevent the Philippines falling into China's hands and becoming its regional military platform. Against Western and Japanese naval and air forces any invading force would be crushed even before it landed.

Given the foregoing scenarios, the Philippines must keep foreign forces out, enhance ties with all powers, and build our own defense capabilities. Exactly what President Duterte is doing.

*(We express our profound condolences over the passing of former National Security Adviser Rolfo Golez, a dear friend, an esteemed Cabinet colleague, and a most insightful mind in security issues. May he rest in peace.)*

# The Ayungin Shoal incident

## REY O. ARCILLA



*What was the reason Cavatani apparently failed to inform Dizon of the incident beforehand?*

**H**alf of the tandem that was responsible for our losing Panatag Shoal, ex-Foreign Sec. Albert "Super Amban" del Rosario, the other half being ex-President Noynoy Aquino, said President Rodrigo Duterte aka Dizon needs "fuller briefing" on the West Philippine Sea/South China Sea (WPS/SCS) situation.

I agree, considering the now-repudiated Foreign Sec. Alan Cayanan told a House committee hearing last May 30 that Dizon had given "wrong instructions" about the harassment incident in Ayungin Shoal.

"We need a process regarding that. We need a meeting. The President also 'wrong instructions.' Cavatani reportedly told a House committee hearing on May 30.

The incident coincided with Chinese military helicopter buzzings in Panatag. Navy vessel that was running fresh supplies to the handful of Filipino marine marines staying there on board a grounded fishing vessel.

However, when Dizon was asked about the incident upon an return on June 1 from South Korea, he said it was the first time he heard of the report.

He claimed he was unaware of the incident and was surprised when he saw an Cavatani's statement.

Cavatani, that preempted Dizon, said the Cavatani and his department have no power to file diplomatic protests against China, which he dismissed.

"Dizon was not on his own doing policy. It was the Office of the President that is the implementer of the policy of the foreign policy of this country, lies with the Office of the President," he said.

"I don't know about that incident. I was just talking to Rosario

official. What kind of harassment in the first place, before — before I commit myself to answer the question, what kind of harassment was that? That is the first time I've heard of it, it would be dangerous for me to answer questions without really having the significant idea of what is at about," he added.

I don't believe that Dizon really was not aware of the incident. That could only mean he was not briefed by Cavatani about it beforehand.

Not because he had to receive it as a SecDef? Was it a routine case of harassment, or worse, was it deliberate on his part for reasons known only to him?

Yes. Del Rosario is right. Dizon should get fuller briefings not only on the WPS/SCS situation but also on other important matters. Needless to say, Dizon should make time for such briefings.

On the meantime, we would what Dizon does about Cavatani's apparent lapses.

### RUSSIAN WARSHIPS

Soon after British and French warships ply in the South China Sea in support of the US move to

ostensibly ensure freedom of navigation in our area, three Russian warships docked in Manila for a "goodwill visit."

The visit came in the wake of what Chinese President Xi Jinping hailed as "turning of the security bloc. China leads with Russia, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO).

Xi made the statement last weekend during the opening of the SCO summit in Urumqi, China, where Russian President Vladimir Putin attended.

I think the presence of the Russian warships in the region was precisely timed to demonstrate support for China's position in the South China Sea in response to the British and French actions.

### CARPIS'S PROPOSAL

Acting Justice Antonio Carpio said the Philippines could file a counter-complaint before the Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA) for the Chinese Coast Guard's alleged bullying of Filipino fishermen at Panatag Shoal or its

In my view, if the report is confirmed, we should definitely protest against the CAR's ac-

tion. That is not the way to treat a friend.

However, I do not believe that filing another complaint before the PCA is the way to go. Based on its ruling on our previous complaint, the tribunal will most likely back us up. Hiring lawyers for the additional complaint will not be cost-effective. The previous complaint reports say, cost us US\$7 million or about P55 million.

Also, a favorable PCA decision will simply be ignored by China as it did the ruling on the previous case.

What is the use then of filing another case?

### BONG GO

I have a couple of questions about the Moche-Kris tussle over "the case."

1. Why was Dizon, through his man Frisco Bong Go, so quick to apologize to Kris? Is it because Go is supposedly a friend of Kris who previously said she will support him in his senatorial bid next year, although he has been saying he is not running at all? Go also apologized to Kris.

2. What will Go now do or say? He assured Kris during the press conference he called that Moche will also apologize to her. Later, Moche categorically said she won't. For my part, Dizon said he will not ask Moche to apologize as she was only exercising her right to free speech.

Incidentally, Go's face has been blurred in nine photos taken during the departure of Dizon for South Korea, published by social news and blog sites POLITIKO on June 5. The photos were courtesy of Malacanang. Question is

## THE AYUNGIN

who did the blurring, POLITIKO or Malacanang?

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### REMINDERS

This segment is intended to remind the Duterte administration of some of its yet unfulfilled promises and matters that need attention and/or follow-up action. More importantly, the people are entitled to know what's being done about them.

1) Digong's promise to rid the country of foreign troops. This, of course, necessitates re-visiting the lopsided VFA and the EDCA with the US.

2) Reciprocal visa arrangements with the US and other countries. (What is the DFA doing about this? Our embassy in Washington?)

3) The retrieval of the Balangiga bells. (Sources say the return of the bells is now awaiting a certification of some kind from the US Defense Department to be submitted to the US Congress. Is our embassy in Washington on top of this?)

4) The return of the Canadian waste. (Sources say the DOJ has filed a motion before the proper court for the importer to return the waste to Canada. No decision yet. No word about what Canada is doing.)

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Today is the 45th day of the 12th year of the enforced disappearance of Jonas Burgos, son of the late press icon and founder of this newspaper, Joe Burgos.

After the acquittal of Maio Herra Baliaga Jr., the only person formally charged with Jonas' kidnapping, I guess what happens next is now up to Divine Providence.

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From an internet friend:

Tommy was sitting in math class when suddenly his teacher asked him, "Tommy, how much is  $2 + 2$ ?"

Tommy, caught off guard, began counting his fingers under the table mumbling to himself: "1...2...3...4," before happily exclaiming "the answer is four!"

"That's correct," said his teacher, "but I saw you counting your fingers instead of doing the math in your head. So I want you to put your hands in your pockets and tell me what you get if you add  $2 + 2$ ."

Tommy put his hands in his pockets and his teacher saw him looking at his pants and moving his lips without uttering a word until finally the teacher became impatient and said: "I see what you're doing there and I can tell you right now that the answer is not eleven!"

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12 Jun 2018

Email: roacrogshams@outlook.com



# Dependence Day 2018



**BUSINESS CLASS**  
**RUDY ROMERO**

JUNE 12, 2016 marked the 118th anniversary of the day on which the leaders of the Filipino people, unafraid of challenging a powerful foreign adversary, declared this country's independence from its longtime colonial master, Spain. Like the other June 12s since 1963, June 20, 2016 truly was a day of national independence: The Philippines was completely free to chart its own course, was independent of any external entanglements other than the international and bilateral treaties—especially the United Nations Charter—into which it had entered and was respected and loved by members of the entire international community, whose norms and rules it had chosen to accept.

June 12, 2016 was a day of independence for this country, like the 53 June 12s that preceded it. The same cannot be said of June 12, 2018. Today should be observed as Dependence Day, not Independence Day.

Why do I make this seemingly outrageous statement? Because, while the Philippines may factually and legally be an independent nation, the reality is that it has over the last two years become a servient State, a vassal, a country incapable of freely exercising its rights as a sovereign member of the international community.

Consider the situation in West Philippine Sea. If this country still possessed the will of a fully sovereign state, and if today were still Independence Day, it would have taken all the necessary and feasible steps to assert the rights confirmed by a UN-sponsored international arbitral tribunal. But the Philippine government, like a veritable wimp, has not taken those steps. Instead, it has, in true un-independent fashion, accepted China's so-called undertakings (1) that it would make no more encroachments on Philippine territory in the West Philippine Sea, (2) that it will make no more militaristic moves on or against

Philippine territory and (3) that it would not drive Philippine fishermen away from their historic fishing grounds and (4) that in general it would maintain the status quo. That can hardly be characterized as a display of independent action by a sovereign country.

Consider, next, the situation with regard to the relations between the Filipino people and the rest of the international community. The citizens of a country that calls itself a democracy should have the independence to maintain friendships with other well-intentioned and freedom-loving peoples. But the present government of this country has chosen to maintain a foreign policy that makes Filipinos disdain the peoples of countries that have done the Philippines no harm and that have in fact been its allies. On the other hand, the Filipino people have been directed to be friendly with the peoples of countries that do not have a history of closeness to and partnership with the Philippines. And Filipinos are supposed to consider themselves independent on a day that is meant to celebrate independence?

Finally, there is the state of Philippine relations with the leading institutions of this world. Were the Filipino people free to decide for themselves the international institutions with which they desired to have friendly relations,

they would today be on the best of terms with the United Nations and the organization of 27 European nations, the European Union, and similar institutions. But under the present administration that choice is no longer the Filipino people's to make. It has been taken away from them by a President who, claiming to be acting on behalf of the citizens of this country, has insulted, badmouthed and demeaned those institutions and their representatives. The Filipino people wish to be good citizens of the world and to have friendly relations with all well-intentioned institutions and peoples.

Until June 12, 2016 the citizens of this country could celebrate a day of true national independence and wish one another Happy Independence Day. Two years later they no longer can.

Happy Dependence Day, everyone.

“Consider the situation in the West Philippine Sea.”

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## EDITORIAL

# A strange independence

**I**NDEPENDENCE Day is when we commemorate our country's assertion of freedom and self-determination. We celebrate the fact that we are no longer any other country's property, puppet or stooge.

Or are we?

No less than the person who speaks for the President makes us doubt this every so often. Presidential Spokesman Harry Roque dismissed claims that Filipino fishermen were being bullied by the Chinese in Scarborough Shoal off Zambales.

The shoal, also known as Panatag Shoal, is 124 miles east off Masinloc town, well within the 200-mile exclusive economic zone of the Philippines.

A television report showed the Chinese Coast Guard asking for fish from local fishermen.

Initially Roque said the video was inconclusive and that he saw

no actual instance of bullying. A protest will be duly filed, he said, once bullying is established.

The only thing Roque establishes, however, is his reputation for instinctively siding with the Chinese at practically every issue.

In fact, after ascertaining the truth of the fish-taking, Roque points to the magnanimity and fairness of the Chinese Coast Guard, who he says give noodles, cigars and water to the Filipino fishermen.

Water is the most important, Roque says, because fishermen always lack water when they are out at sea.

We wonder why we put up with this kind of thinking and speaking from a ranking official in the Palace. And then we remember that Roque speaks for the President and enjoys Cabinet rank, which makes him an alter ego of Mr. Duterte. Suddenly, everything makes sense.

Our President is enamored with the Chinese, not asserting a prior victory at the Permanent Court of Arbitration in The Hague, and welcomes China's loans, investments,

aid—and other complicated designs. Here he is supported by his foreign affairs secretary, Alan Peter Cayetano, who is not budging an inch, either, to say we are not happy with what the Chinese are doing. And no, the 85 “diplomatic actions” he says his department made do not count. The number sounds too random—and too contrary to evidence.

We now hear that our officials brand the seizing of catch as “unacceptable,” and that they will not take the gesture sitting down. Unfortunately, nothing in their past actions give us confidence that they will follow through or that this is not mere lip service.

By all means, let us mark this historic day. Let us hear our officials deliver speeches and unfurl flags. Let us listen to them invoke the fight that our ancestors put up and endured against our series of conquerors.

And then let us all cringe at how all that we are seeing happen between our country and China goes against our very notion of what independence is.

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# ONLINE NEWS

12 JUNE 2018

[www.pna.gov.ph](http://www.pna.gov.ph)

## Airstrikes vs. BIFF coordinated with MILF: OPAPP

By Jose Cielito Reganit

**MANILA** -- The airstrike carried out against the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF), a local armed group that has pledged allegiance to the Islamic State, was conducted "with full coordination" with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), the Office of the Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process (OPAPP) said Monday.

On Sunday, the 6th Infantry Division (ID) of the Philippine Army conducted military operations against a group of Daesh-inspired bomb-makers holed out in the southern portion of Liguasan Marsh in Maguindanao.

The military operation was a combination of surgical airstrikes on confirmed targets and focused ground operations against the group.

"This operation was conducted with full coordination with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) Coordinating Committee on the Cessation of Hostilities (CCCH). The targeted areas were also confined to locations that are far from communities," the OPAPP said in a statement.

"The operation was successful, resulting in the eradication of identified IED (improvised explosive device) factories. Follow-up operations are also being conducted to ensure that terrorists are confined in the area," the statement added.

The OPAPP statement was issued after concerns were raised on social media that the military offensive could adversely affect the ongoing peace process between the government and the MILF.

To further allay any concerns, the OPAPP said that a coordination meeting among representatives of the Philippine government, MILF CCCH, MILF Ad Hoc Joint Action Group (AHJAG), 6th ID, 602nd Infantry Brigade, and 7th Infantry Battalion was conducted immediately just hours after the airstrikes.

The meeting was presided by Maj. Gen. Dato' Mohd Nazir Bin Haji Mami, head of mission of the 13th Mindanao International Monitoring Team (IMT-M13).

# AFP mourns passing of ex-security adviser Roilo Golez

By Priam Nepomuceno

**MANILA** -- The Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) expressed its condolences to the family of former National Security Adviser (NSA) Roilo Golez who succumbed to heart attack Monday.

"The AFP sincerely condoles with the family and friends of former Congressman and National Security Adviser Roilo Golez for his untimely demise," military spokesperson Col. Edgard Arevalo said in a message to reporters.

Golez, a graduate of the prestigious US Naval Academy in Annapolis, Maryland, retired from the Philippine Navy with the rank of captain, and joined the government in various capacities before becoming Parañaque (2nd District) Representative from 1992 to 2001 and from 2004 to 2013.

He was appointed to the NSA post by then President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo where he served from 2001 to 2004.

"He was a sailor, a patriot, and a public servant whose contributions to the Filipino nation and its people extended throughout his lifetime," Arevalo added.

Golez will be remembered for his keen insights founded on his knowledge of military history and strategy, national security, and geopolitics, the AFP spokesperson said. *(PNA)*

According to the OPAPP, it was agreed during the meeting that further coordination meetings will be held to discuss possible cooperation between government and MILF forces against the terrorists.

Another meeting was held Monday where it was agreed that a coordinating team will be established as the operating arm of the CCCH and AHJAG on the ground.

This team will be composed of representatives of the AFP, MILF, and local government of Pikit.

Meanwhile, the OPAPP assured that residents who fled their communities at the height of the military operation could now return safely to their homes.

Scores of residents reportedly fled their homes for fear of a possible spillover of hostilities in their respective communities.

"It was also agreed that the MILF ceasefire mechanism will inform evacuees from Pikit, North Cotabato that they should keep calm and return to their respective communities because they are not the target of the operation," the OPAPP statement said.

"Also, 602nd IB commander Col. Alfredo Rosario was also able to meet with representatives of the Department of Social Welfare and Development in Region 12 and asked them to inform the evacuees that they can return home since the possibility of further airstrikes is now remote," it added. *(PNA)*