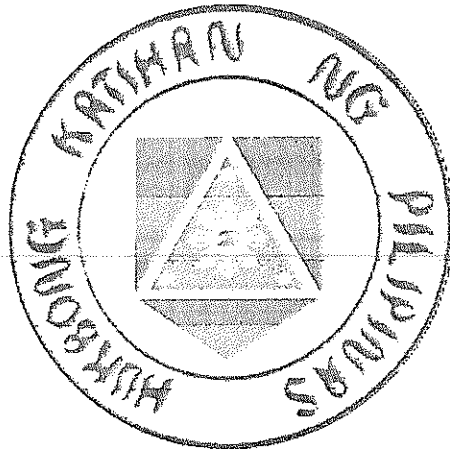


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NEWS CLIPPINGS

14 June 2018

Thursday



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PESO SINKS TO 53.23:\$1, WEAKEST IN 12 YEARS

BY DAXIM L. LUCAS

Expectations of an interest rate hike in the United States and weaker trade data released by the government sent the local currency against the greenback on Wednesday. Monetary officials will meet next week to set policy.

FROM A1

By Daxim L. Lucas
@daxINQ

The peso fell to its weakest level against the US dollar in 12 years on Wednesday as traders digested dovish statements of central bank officials that made financial markets uncertain about another interest rate hike next week to help cap local consumer prices.

At the same time, investors also unloaded the peso and shifted to the dollar without waiting for the outcome of a US Federal Reserve meeting where markets expected the world's most influential central bank to raise its own interest rates for the second time this year.

Weakest since 2006

The peso opened Wednesday's trading session weaker at P53 to the dollar, from the previous trading session's close of P52.887.

The local currency dropped

to as low as P53.26 in afternoon trading before closing at P53.23, the weakest since June 29, 2006, when it hit P53.55 to the dollar.

Total volume was heavy with \$773.17 million changing hands, compared to \$653.1 million on Monday.

BDO Unibank chief strategist Jonas Ravelas said the peso's weakness was due to the "prospects of a rate hike in the US this week" as well as the weaker trade data released by the government last week.

Higher interest rates in the United States make dollar-denominated investments more attractive to fund managers compared to peso-denominated securities.

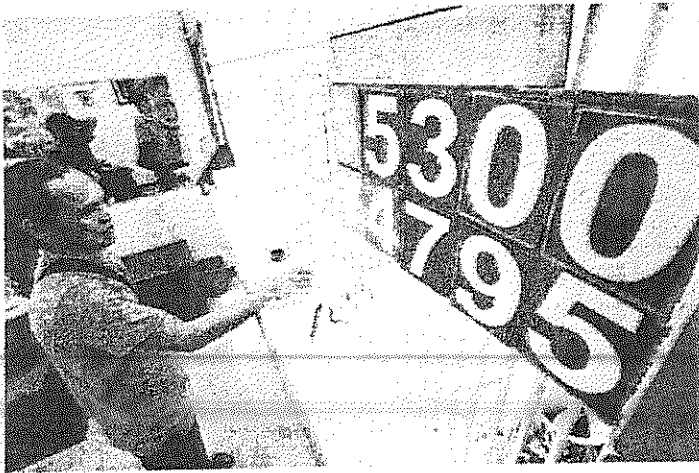
Inflation driver

Asked to comment on the peso's weakness, Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas (BSP) Governor Nestor Espenilla Jr. said the Monetary Board "will be evaluating a very rich and broad range of information at its policy meeting next week."

A weak currency aggravates inflation, as it takes more pesos

to buy the same amount of goods and services from overseas, especially for oil products and raw material imports.

The inflation rate currently stands at 4.6 percent, brought to that level in May by a spate of price increases induced by the enforcement of the Duterte administration's Tax Reform for Ac-



PESO-DOLLAR TRADING A customer transacts with a money changer in Manila. The peso opened at 53 to the US dollar in Wednesday's trading session, dropping to 53.26 before closing at 53.23. —RICHARD A. REYES

celeration and Inclusion (TRAIN) Act in January, which amplified the effects of a sharp rise in world crude oil prices in recent weeks.

The TRAIN law raised the ceiling for tax-exempt income, but imposed an excise of P3 per liter for kerosene, P2.50 per liter for diesel and bunker fuel, and P1 per kilogram for liquefied

petroleum gas (LPG).

The law also imposed an excise of P7 per liter for unleaded premium gasoline, naphtha, regular gasoline and pyrolysis gasoline.

The fuel imposts kicked up the prices of basic goods, leading to agitation for a raise in the minimum wage among labor groups and the introduction of legislation in the House of Representatives that would set a uniform base pay nationwide.

The Department of Finance said, however, that the tax hikes contributed only 0.4 percent to the current inflation rate.

Potential drivers

Omitting his usual statement that the BSP was ready to act in case of worsening inflation, Espenilla said "recent developments on inflation and economic activity are key inputs but these are certainly not the only consideration."

"We'll be examining closely all the potential drivers of future inflation through the various transmission channels as affected by global develop-

ments, expectations formation, and uncertainty," he said.

"It's a fairly complex environment that we need to navigate," he added.

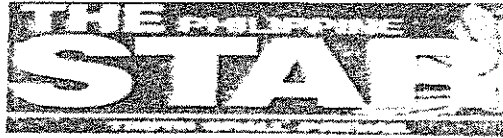
Espenilla's neutral comments came on the heels of BSP Deputy Governor Diwa Guinigundo's statements that the country's five-year-high inflation rate was easing, based on the latest data, which showed month-on-month price increases moderating.

Given the dovish inflation picture being painted by the central bank, an investment strategist for HSBC said the banking giant now expected the BSP to refrain from hiking interest rates until the third quarter of 2019.

The US Fed will announce its decision on interest rates on Thursday.

The BSP, on the other hand, will have its policy-setting meeting on June 20—moved a day earlier from the original June 21 schedule—after having hiked its key overnight rates by 25 basis points during its May 10 session. INQ

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Rody won't stop TRAIN

By CHRISTINA MENDEZ and JESS DIAZ

Suspending or scrapping the Tax Reform for Acceleration and Inclusion (TRAIN) law will undermine the delivery of basic services, President Duterte said yesterday as he defended the implementation of the controversial tax measure, widely blamed for soaring prices of commodities.

Duterte made the statement at the signing of a memorandum of agreement (MOA) on free education between the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) and state colleges and universities.

P53 to \$1: Peso skids to 12-year low. Story on B1.

"This is why we have made it a priority to make quality education affordable and accessible to all," Duterte said.

"The problem is funding. So we had this meeting with the Cabinet, all of us. And we were talking about so many things that government could do or could not do," he said.

Proponents of a rollback in the hefty fuel excise tax under TRAIN have stressed that the tax measure accounts for only a small percentage of total revenue collection projected for 2018 so its implementation can be suspended amid galloping inflation.

Duterte echoed the stand of Education Secretary Leonor Briones, who justified the need for the government to strictly collect taxes to cover the tuition for students enrolled in public schools and colleges.

"The single solitary voice was Leonor Briones. She said that the people must pay their taxes. They have to pay for the government to work.

Turn to Page 6

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Rody

From Page 1

There is no other way where we can raise the money for the needs of Filipino people except through taxes," Duterte said.

He said the signing of the MOA "is a crucial step in helping young Filipinos fulfill their dreams of becoming productive members of our country's workforce through academic degrees and technical or vocational training."

At the event, Duterte also recognized Congress, CHED, TESDA and other state universities and colleges, local universities and colleges, technical vocational institutions and other partners "for making this exclusive dream - elusive dream rather - free quality tertiary education for all - a reality."

For Rep. Carlos Zarate of Bayan Muna party-list, the Supreme Court (SC) should immediately decide on the petition to stop the TRAIN.

He criticized the SC for being quick to remove its own chief justice but slow in deciding

cases affecting people's welfare.

Zarate said the SC justices decided Solicitor General Jose Calida's quo warranto petition against the appointment of ousted chief justice Maria Lourdes Sereno "with inordinate speed in two months."

Calida filed the petition on March 5 and the case was decided on May 11, he said.

On the other hand, the high court has been sitting for months and years on many public interest cases filed by Bayan Muna and other concerned groups and private citizens, he said.

Zarate said one of the pending cases is his group's petition against TRAIN, which was filed on Jan. 11, a few days after the law was enacted.

He said Bayan Muna and other groups questioned the "anti-poor and regressive" provisions of TRAIN.

"TRAIN imposes a heavier burden on the poor than the rich," he said.

Aside from what it describes as constitutionally questionable provisions of the law, Bayan Muna also claims that the House of Representatives approved the tax reform bill as contained in a conference committee report without the required quorum.

Fewer than 30 members were in the session hall when a vote on the measure was taken, the group said.

However, Isabela Rep. Rodolfo Albano III, one of 12 House members sitting in the Commission on Appointments, said the SC, in resolving the procedural issue, would go by the journal of proceedings during the session when the chamber voted on the TRAIN bill.

"The journal reflects the presence of a quorum. There is no showing that this was questioned. Therefore, the House validly ratified the conference committee report on the bill," he said.

Bayan Muna chairman and former representative Neri Colmenares said there are

other cases filed by his group that are pending in the SC.

He said the oldest is the petition questioning the Arroyo administration's agreement with China for a joint maritime survey of the West Philippine Sea, which was filed on May 22, 2008.

"Ten years later, the Supreme Court has not decided on Bayan Muna's petition to disallow China's access to our territorial sea through a supposed joint exploration with the government," he said.

On Jan. 6, 2015, he said, Bayan Muna filed a complaint against a fare increase imposed by Metro Rail Transit-3 and Light Rail Transit.

"Yet, until now, the SC has not decided on this issue and the fare increase continues to be imposed until now but the service did not improve," Colmenares stressed.

He pointed out that other petitions asking the tribunal to require telecommunications companies and power distributors to refund "illegal charges" have also remained unresolved.

FISH CATCH SEIZURE

DUTERTE TELLS CHINA TO PROBE COMPLAINTS OF PH FISHERMEN

By Christine O. Avendaño and Gabriel Cardinoza @Team_inquirer

President Duterte skipped diplomatic channels and went directly to Ambassador Zhao Jianhua to relay to China his concerns over the confiscation of Filipino fishermen's catch by Chinese coast guards at Panatag Shoal, presidential spokesperson Harry Roque said on Wednesday.

Speaking in a radio interview about the discussion between Mr. Duterte and Zhao during Independence Day rites in Kawit, Cavite province, on Tuesday, Roque said that given the chance, the President would have gone directly to Chinese President Xi Jinping to remind him that they had an agreement on free access by Filipinos to Panatag Shoal.

Mr. Duterte told Zhao that China should investigate the Filipino fishermen's complaints against the Chinese coast guards, Roque said.

"The President said everything should be done to stop this kind of situation," he added.

Probe going on

Zhao told reporters in Kawit on Tuesday that the fishermen's complaints were being investigated and that China would "discipline" the erring coast guards.

He said initial investigation by both sides showed that what was going on at Panatag Shoal was some sort of "barter trade," with the Filipino fishermen exchanging fish for goods carried by the Chinese coast guards in the area.

Assistant Foreign Secretary Elmer Cato traveled to Infanta, Pangasinan province, on Wednesday and met with about a hundred fishermen from the villages of Cato, Bayambang, Poblacion, Patima and Batang for a discussion of the problem.

Not all are complaining

It appeared that while there were fishermen who were protesting the coast guards' behavior, there were others who willingly dealt with the Chinese.

A fishing boat skipper accused some fishermen of bartering their fish for Chinese wine and cigarettes.

Cato village captain Charlito Maniago said some fishermen would hide their high-value catch as the Chinese approached but others just gave up their fish and "they never complained." INQ

PH NOT VULNERABLE TO CHINA MILITARY ATTACK, SAYS FORMER SOLGEN

By Melvin Gascon
@melvingasconINQ

The Philippines does not have to go to war and it will not be vulnerable to an attack by China even if Filipinos assert their rights in the West Philippine Sea, according to former Solicitor General Florin Hilbay.

The Philippines, however, faces the risk of losing its claims in the sea altogether by doing nothing, Hilbay said on Tuesday.

"The President keeps on saying he does not want to go to war. But neither is China. The President is sounding the alarm, but it seems he is the only one alarmed by it," he said.

Not vulnerable to attack

Despite having a weak military, the Philippines cannot be considered vulnerable to foreign aggression, Hilbay said.

He cited the Philippines' Mutual Defense Treaty with the United States, under which the two countries were obligated to come to each other's aid

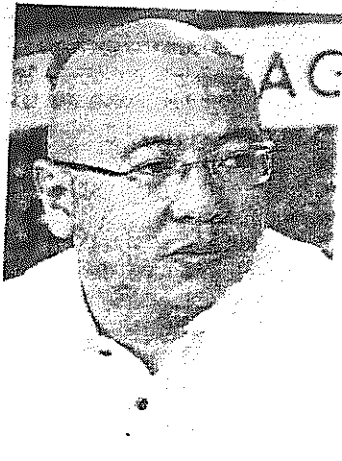
in the event of invasion.

There is also the Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement (Edca) between the two countries that allows the United States access to Philippine military bases, where it can preposition troops and equipment, he said.

"Besides, it is not that easy for China to go to war. The West Philippine Sea is a trade route that involves around \$5-trillion business in the Southeast Asian region," he said, using the local name of the waters within the Philippines 370-kilometer exclusive economic zone in the South China Sea.

Countries can assert their territorial integrity without going to war, he said, citing the "good example" set by Vietnam, which has managed to continually protest the incursions of China into Vietnamese waters despite being under "existential threat."

Hilbay was the lead lawyer on the legal team that successfully argued the Philippines' challenge to China's claim to nearly all of the South China Sea in the UN-backed Perma-



Florin Hilbay

Permanent Court of Arbitration in The Hague.

Arbitral ruling

The tribunal ruled in July 2016 that China's sweeping claim had no basis in international law and that the Philippines had sovereign rights to fish and explore for resources in the West Philippine Sea.

But President Duterte, who came to power shortly before the decision came down, set

the ruling aside, preferring to mend fences with China and woo it for aid, loans and investments.

China has plied the Duterte administration with aid and pledges of investment and proceeded to build military bases on Philippine reefs in the Spratly archipelago that it has seized and turned into artificial islands.

Acting Chief Justice Antonio Carpio, also a member of the Philippine team in the Hague arbitration, has been prodding Mr. Duterte to protest China's militarization of the West Philippine Sea, but the President has refused, claiming that insisting on sovereignty could lead to a war that he could not win.

Thief's benevolence

Hilbay expressed disgust at the Duterte administration's setting aside the Philippines' Hague victory, especially criticizing the President's decision to go into joint exploration and development with China in the West Philippine Sea.

The former top government

lawyer called the proposal "false benevolence of a thief."

"Only a thief would ask and agree to share with another's property," Hilbay said.

By agreeing to joint development with China, he said, the Philippines had effectively waived its right to assert its sovereignty in the West Philippine Sea.

Hilbay lamented how the situation in the West Philippine Sea had shifted from a "rights regime" to a "permission regime."

"Before, our fishermen were free to use the [West Philippine Sea] as their fishing ground and assert their right over it; now, they have to ask permission from the Chinese to be able to fish [there]," he said.

According to Hilbay, Filipinos should apply to the maritime dispute the "whole nation" approach, where policies are made based on the collective decisions of the different government agencies.

"The President may be the chief architect, but he is not the entire construction company," he said. INQ

DFA urged to bare 100

protests filed vs China

By PAULO ROMERO

Lawmakers yesterday called on Foreign Affairs Secretary Alan Peter Cayetano to make public the so-called hundreds of diplomatic protests filed by the government against China for

its violations of Philippine sovereignty. The lawmakers from the minority bloc led by Senators Franklin Drilon and Risa Hontiveros made the call to Cayetano, saying they are skeptical of his claim that the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) has filed 50 to

100 protests against China's aggressive maritime claims.

They said Cayetano's disclosure of protests would temper the growing public indignation over the apparent lax and subservient attitude of the Duterte administration toward China.

"I didn't know that we've been assertive of our rights. Maybe I'm not reading newspapers enough or listening to the radio but I was surprised that we've filed 100 protests, which I find hard to believe," Drilon said.

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DFA From Page 1

Drilon and Hontiveros also pressed the Duterte administration to file a diplomatic protest against China following the Panatag (Scarborough) Shoal incident where the Chinese coast guard seized the catch of Filipino fishermen.

"Maybe just a little more courage is needed and I'm requesting Secretary Cayetano to file a protest. We must protect our right over that area, especially given the favorable ruling that we had," Drilon said, referring to the 2016 ruling of the UN arbitral tribunal.

Hontiveros renewed her call for an "audit" of the administration's foreign policy by the Senate to include the listing of all protests filed by the DFA.

Robbery and piracy

Sen. Panfilo Lacson said the arbitral ruling had declared Panatag Shoal as a rock that generates no exclusive economic zone and therefore officially a free fishing area among the claimant countries.

"The acts perpetrated by the Chinese coast guard crew are nothing but crimes of robbery or piracy," Lacson said.

But since the Philippines has reportedly lodged a diplomatic protest and China in turn committed to investigate and punish those liable, Lacson called on critics to wait for the outcome.

"I think it is an overreaction by the critics of the administration who want no less than putting our country on war footing with China over something that does not merit such response," Lacson said.

"It may be prudent to await the feedback of the Chinese government on the outcome of their investigation and the corresponding disciplinary action they would take against the concerned coast guard personnel," he said.

Presidential spokesman Harry Roque had said the incident was in violation of an agreement between China and the Philippines allowing Filipino fishermen at the shoal.

The Chinese foreign ministry, however, said it is allowing Filipinos to fish in Panatag Shoal "out of goodwill."

Nonetheless, Chinese officials gave assurance an investigation is underway over the incident.

But to Vice President Leni Robredo, such gesture is a

virtual slap in the face.

"To me when you say you're allowing it 'out of goodwill' is a big slap in our face, a big insult to all of us," Robredo said.

Robredo said the Duterte administration is "too soft" when it comes to handling the incursions into Philippine-claimed territories.

"We need to make our voice strong, we need to strengthen our protest. If we indeed filed a protest, it should be in strongest terms for it to be noticed," she said.

Robredo said the Philippine government should assert its maritime rights by strengthening its presence in the West Philippine Sea

"Some were saying that the government pulled out (the military) patrolling the West Philippine Sea but the government has denied it. But whatever it is, we need to strengthen our presence in the West Philippine Sea," she said.

For his part, Sen. Antonio Trillanes IV said the incident broke out due to the absence of maritime patrols on the part of the Philippine Navy or Coast Guard (PCG).

Trillanes said maritime patrols were done regularly even before the present administration.

Trillanes claimed the infor-

mation that he and Magdalo party-list Rep. Gary Alejano received about the order to stop the maritime patrols came from several senior officials of the Armed Forces of the Philippines.

Based on the information they received, Trillanes said the order to stop the patrols came as early as last year.

He said there are no exclusive economic zone (EEZ) patrols whatsoever at Panatag Shoal in spite of the fact that the country now has new vessels precisely for this purpose.

If the PCG cannot conduct these patrols, then Trillanes said the Navy could do this since they are deputized by the PCG.

Trillanes, a former Navy officer, recalled how Panatag Shoal was part of the areas he and his colleagues regularly patrolled because there was no prohibition to do this.

He pointed out the Panatag Shoal is a common fishing ground and maritime sanctuary so fishermen from any nation are free to fish there.

Whenever vessels are caught in the middle of bad weather in the open seas, then they could also take shelter there without any problem, Trillanes said. — Marvin Sy, Helen Flores, Jaime Laude

Gov't inaction blamed for fish row with China

A FORMER Foreign Affairs assistant secretary and ambassador on Wednesday blamed the government for the reported harassment of Filipino fishermen in Scarborough or Panatag Shoal.

Alberto Encomienda, a maritime affairs expert, said the government's "neglect" in protecting the Philippines' coastal fisheries, particularly Pangasinan and Zambales, "forces" the country's fishermen to go to Scarborough Shoal, located 124 nautical miles west of Zambales province.

"Why do they have to go and risk life, limb and health 200 nautical miles from their home coastal base in order to fish for their families' sustenance and a little for their town market? It just doesn't make sense," Encomienda told a forum in Manila.

He made his statement even as Senate Minority Leader Franklin Drilon on Wednesday called on Foreign Affairs

Secretary Alan Peter Cayetano to take a tougher stance against China and file a protest following Chinese coastguards' harassment of Filipino fishermen in Scarborough Shoal last month.

Drilon said he believed there was enough evidence to file a protest before the Chinese government.

"It was reported in the media. So maybe just a little courage and I ask Secretary Cayetano to file a protest," Drilon said in a statement.

Another opposition senator, Risa Hontiveros of Akbayan, slammed the "insensitive" conduct of Chinese Ambassador to the Philippines Zhao Jianhua during the Independence Day rites at the

Aguinaldo Shrine in Kawit, Cavite.

But an administration ally on Wednesday rallied behind the government's position on the incident in Scarborough Shoal.

Parafiaque Rep. Gus Tambunting said "the current stand of the Philippine government is not to aggravate the situation in Scarborough shoal."

Tambunting, chairman of the House of Representatives' committee on games and amusement, said the Duterte administration's diplomatic handling of the issue upheld the rights of the fishermen over the contested waters.

"This has clearly helped our fishermen as they can now fish when they previously were not able to," Tambunting said.

Encomienda was responding to the Chinese Coast Guard's "harassment" of Filipino fishermen by reportedly taking some of their catch in Scarborough Shoal, considered a common fishing ground for the Chinese, Filipino and Vietnamese. **Macon Ramos-Araneta and Maricel V. Cruz**

Duterte vows to tackle Filipino fishermen's plight with Xi

By GENALYN D. KABILING

President Duterte will raise his concern about the plight of Filipino fishermen in Panatag Shoal in case he meets Chinese President Xi Jinping again, Malacañang said Wednesday.

Presidential spokesman Harry Roque said the President would assert the government's stance against any oppression of the local fishermen sailing in Panatag before his Chinese counterpart.

Roque noted the President has already called for a probe on the alleged seizure of catch of local fishermen by Chinese coast guards during his recent encounter with Chinese Ambassador Zhao Jianhua.

"We don't tolerate the extortion of fish from our nationals and that's what the President raised the matter before the ambassador. The President no longer relied on diplomatic channels and personally discussed the matter with the ambassador," Roque in Filipino over government radio.

"And if there will be an opportunity, the President will go straight to President Xi because our nationals must not be oppressed," he added.

Roque said the President does not want a repeat of the incident in Panatag when a portion of fishermen's catch was reportedly taken by the Chinese. He noted that fishermen have access to Panatag Shoal since it is recognized as a traditional fishing ground.

Vice President Leni Robredo, meanwhile, found "insulting" to all

Filipinos the claim of China that it has allowed Filipino fishermen to fish in Panatag Shoal in the West Philippines Sea "out of goodwill."

"That's a big slap to us. It's a big insult because why do we have to seek permission in your own [territory]... that belongs to our country," Robredo said in Filipino at the sidelines of her Metro Laylayan visit to Sto. Niño, Tanay, Rizal.

Robredo, a lawyer, asserted again the country's rights in line with the 2016 Hague ruling that upheld the exclusive rights of the Philippines over the resources within the West Philippine Sea.

"The ruling of the Arbitral Tribunal stated the fishing ground is within our exclusive economic zone, that our fishermen have the exclusive rights to fish there. Why do we need permission from China?" Robredo asked.

But acting Chief Justice Antonio T. Carpio, a member of the Philippines' arbitration team in the Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA), said the Philippines cannot invoke sovereign rights over Panatag Shoal since the 2016 decision of the Arbitral Tribunal did not settle the dispute with China for lack of jurisdiction.

He said the arbitral ruling clearly stated that Filipinos have the right to fish in the Panatag Shoal together with Chinese fishermen. 10

"The ruling says that Scarborough (Panatag) Shoal is a traditional fishing ground of Filipino and Chinese fishermen. So both can fish there," Carpio said.

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2

Rody to raise fish row to Xi

By Angie M. Rosales
and Mario J. Mallari

President Rodrigo Duterte will raise to Chinese President Xi Jinping the Chinese Coast Guard's (CCG) reported seizing of Filipino fishermen's catch in the Panatag (Scarborough) Shoal, presidential spokesman Harry Roque said yesterday.

Two days ago, Roque met with three fishermen from Masinloc, Zambales who appealed to the government to discourage Chinese Coast Guard personnel from taking their catch in exchange for water, noodles and cigarettes.

One of the three fishermen from Zambales, Romel Sihuela, said last Monday that although he did not consider the taking of their catch as harassment, he would prefer that the CCG wait for them to voluntarily give them fishes instead of forcibly taking these from them.

Since he had difficulty speaking in English, Sihuela said CCG personnel must have assumed that taking their fish in exchange of goods was acceptable.

"We want to clarify that there was no harassment that took place. What happened was they forcibly took our fish because we could not understand each

"If given the chance, the President will go straight to President Xi because we cannot allow our citizens to be abused," Roque said on radio.

Roque said Duterte is currently awaiting results of the investigation but noted that he is not merely relying on China's promise of friendly arrangements in relation to sea disputes.

"The President is not just relying on diplomatic channels, he himself has spoken to Chinese Ambassador to the Philippines Zhao Jianhua," Roque said.

Duterte got the chance to talk to Zhao last Tuesday during the commemoration of the country's

120th Independence Day at the Aguinaldo Shrine in Kawit, Cavite.

Zhao earlier had assured Duterte the Chinese government is investigating the matter and will discipline erring personnel in accordance with their own regulations.

2016 deal guarantees Pinoy to fish in Shoal

Roque said in 2016, Duterte and Xi have agreed on opening the Shoal for Filipinos.

"The President and President Xi have an agreement to allow fishing rights there," Roque said.

other," Sihuela said.

"If they want to ask for fish, we hope that they don't just hop onto our boats and look for fish. They can just wait until we give some to them," he added.

Communication problem may have caused rift

It's no big deal. Senate President Vicente Sotto III said on Chinese government's pronouncements that it's an act of goodwill on their part in allowing Filipino fishermen to fish in Scarborough Shoal.

Sotto, along with other colleagues, however, acknowledged

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Rody to raise fish row to Xi

From page 1

the Chinese government's efforts in looking into the charges of alleged harassment by their Coast Guard personnel on Filipino fishermen.

"It's just noise on both sides. Let it go. Let's not make a big deal out of it. It might be the result of a communication problem," he said.

The Senate leader was referring to the statement of China's foreign ministry spokesperson Geng Shuang who said China has made appropriate arrangement for local fishermen to fish in its own waters out of goodwill and such policy remain unchanged.

Sen. Panfilo Lacson said such statement is obviously posturing though expressed in bad taste.

"There's definitely an act of goodwill on China's part. The Philippines or Vietnam when nobody owns that rock that generates no EEZ (exclusive economic zone) called Scarborough Shoal, to borrow the words used in the arbitral ruling, which also ruled the area is a free fishing zone," he said.

From the perspective of the United Nations (UN) arbitral tribunal, in its ruling two years ago, the Scarborough Shoal has been declared officially a free fishing area among the claimant countries.

"The acts perpetrated by the Chinese Coast Guard crew are nothing but crimes of robbery or piracy," he said.

Lacson noted that the Philippines, through the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA), has already lodged a diplomatic protest and China responded through Chinese Ambassador Zhao Jianhua by committing to investigate and punish those liable for any offensive acts.

"I think it is an overreaction by the critics of the administration who want no less than putting our country in way footing with China over something that does not merit such response," he said.

"It may be prudent to await the feedback of the Chinese government on the outcome of their investigation and the corresponding disciplinary action they would take against the concerned Coast Guard personnel,"

Lacson said.

Senate Minority Leader Franklin Drilon made a belated call to Foreign Affairs Secretary Alan Peter Cayetano to pursue a diplomatic protest even as Malacanan and the concerned fishermen themselves claimed there's no harassment that took place.

"I think there's enough evidence. It was recorded in media so Sec Cayetano should have the will to file a protest. We must protect our right over that area especially given the favorable ruling that we had," he said.

Drilon also put into question Cayetano's claim of 100 diplomatic protests filed by the government against China in the past two years.

"I won't believe that we have been assertive of our rights," Drilon said as he scoffed at the Cabinet official's pronouncements.

Amid the tension created by the supposed incident involving CCG preying on Filipino fishermen, the military's Northern Luzon Command (Nolcom) will be gathering folks in Zambales today for a consultative forum.

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Duterte to raise PH fishers' plight with Xi

President Duterte will raise his concerns on the plight of Filipino fishermen in Panatag or Scarborough Shoal in case he meets Chinese President Xi Jinping again, Malacañang said yesterday.

Presidential spokesperson Harry Roque said the President would assert the government stance against any oppression of local fishermen sailing in Panatag before his Chinese counterpart.

Roque noted the President has called for a probe on the alleged

seizure of local fishermen's catch by the Chinese Coast Guard during his recent encounter with Chinese Ambassador Zhao Jianhua.

"Hindi po namin kinukunsinti ang pangongotong ng isda sa ating mga kababayan, at 'yan po'y pinarating na ng Presidente mismo natin sa kaalaman ng Ambassador. Hindi na po umasa ang Presidente sa diplomatic channels, at siya na po mismo ang nakipagusap sa Ambassador," he said over government radio. "At kung may

pagkakataon siguro eh, didiretso na ni Presidente 'yan kay President Xi dahil talaga namang hindi puwedeng inaapi ang ating mga kababayan," he added.

Roque said the President does not want a repeat of the incident in Panatag in which a portion of the fishermen's catch was reportedly taken by the Chinese. He noted that Filipino fishermen have access to Panatag Shoal since it is recognized as a traditional fishing ground. **(Genalyn D. Kabiling)**

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Military holds dialogue with Zambales fishers

THE military's Northern Luzon Command (Nolcom), along with the provincial government of Zambales, will initiate a consultative dialogue on Thursday with fishermen within the coastlines of the province and the Scarborough (Panatag) Shoal.

The dialogue comes after Chinese coast guards reportedly harassed Filipino fishermen in Scarborough Shoal, taking their catch after boarding their boats in the disputed area.

The Scarborough Shoal lies within the country's 200-nautical-mile exclusive economic zone (EEZ).

A United Nations-backed tribunal invalidated the nine-dash line claim of China in the disputed South China Sea (West Philippine Sea) in 2016, also declaring the Scarborough Shoal as a "traditional fishing ground" of the Philippines, China, Vietnam and Taiwan.

Lt. Col. Isagani Nato, Nolcom spokesman, on Wednesday said the forum, which would be held in Iba, Zambales, would be an opportunity for the fishermen to air their concerns to the military and local government units (LGUs).

"We also have to raise their maritime awareness, as well as that of the LGUs," Nato told reporters in a message.

Earlier this week, Malacañang spokesman Harry Roque Jr. presented the three fishermen who were harassed by the Chinese coast guards.

The fishermen aired their side in a news briefing in the Palace, with Roque

refusing to recognize the incident as a form of harassment by Beijing.

But according to Nato, the Nolcom and the local government of Zambales would also want to hear the stories of the fishermen.

"The revelations made through interviews may not be comparable with directly engaging the people and the community. Nolcom also needs to engage the LGUs for collaborative efforts in addressing the concerns," he said.

Nato added that the dialogue with the fisherfolk was also aimed at promoting Safety of Life at Sea or Solas and raising awareness of communities in upholding sovereignty over maritime areas under Nolcom.

The dialogue will be led by the Nolcom through the Area Task Force North of the National Task Force West Philippine Sea.

Nolcom is in charge of securing the Panatag Shoal, Philippine (Benham) Rise and Batanes Islands.

The military's Palawan-based Western Command (WesCom), meanwhile, is in-charge of securing the Kalayaan Island Group (Spratly Islands).

This group includes Pag-asa (Thitu) Island, Ayungin (Second Thomas) Shoal, Rizal (Commodore) Reef, Parola (North-east Cay) Island, Lawak (Nanshan) Island, Kota (Loaita) Island, Patag (Flat) Island, Panata (Lankiam Cay) Island and Balagtas (Irving) Reef.

DEMPSEY REYES

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Robredo: China's 'goodwill' statement an insult to Filipinos

BY ANGELA LOPEZ DE LEON

VICE President Leni Robredo yesterday said it was "a big insult" and a "slap on the face" of Filipinos when China said it is allowing Filipino fishermen to fish in Panatag Shoal "out of goodwill."

She asked why Filipino fishermen would need to secure permission to fish in Philippine seas.

In a statement last Tuesday, the Chinese Embassy in Manila said China has made arrangements for the Philippine fishermen to fish in the disputed waters "out of goodwill."

The Embassy issued this statement in reaction to a media network video showing some Chinese Coast Guard personnel taking the catch of some Filipino fishermen at the Panatag Shoal.

China obtained control of the Panatag or Scarborough Shoal, which is within the Philippines' exclusive economic zone, after a stand-off with the Philippine Navy in April 2012.

Robredo said such pronouncements from China make it appear that Filipinos have to ask for permission to fish in the country's waters, which is insulting.

She noted that while the Philippines need not put up a fight against China, it should still come up with a stronger stance amid allegations Chinese harassment.

Robredo said the Philippine government is "too soft" in dealing with China's incursions of the Philippines' waters.

Robredo suggested tighter security patrol in the area by increasing the presence of Philippine Coast Guard and the military personnel.

A Filipino fisherman presented to media in Malacañang on Monday said China appears to be in control of the Scarborough Shoal because it has vessels patrolling the area.

According to fisherman Rommel Ceiuela from Masinloc in Zambales, the Chinese vessels also decide which fishing boats could enter the area.

The Armed Forces is set to hold a dialogue today

ROBREDO

with fishermen from Zambales.

"We have to get their sentiments, air their concerns for us to assist them in bring issues to concerned agencies," said AFP Northern Luzon Command spokesman Lt. Col. Isagani Nato said.

"We also have to raise their maritime awareness," added Nato on the purpose of the dialogue which will be held in Iba town, which is about 124 nautical miles from the shoal.

Told that the fishermen have already declared they want secu-

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rity from Chinese harassment, Nato said: "The revelations made through interviews may not be comparable with directly engaging the people and the community."

Chinese Coast Guard personnel have harassed Filipino fishermen at the shoal twice last month - one on May 20 and the other on May 28. Philippine authorities are conducting investigation on the incidents.

Chinese ambassador to the Philippines Zhao Jianhua said the Chinese government is also investigating the matter, adding the personnel will be punished if they committed a wrongdoing - *With Victor Reyes*

MILITARY TAPS TASK FORCE TO STRENGTHEN SECURITY IN BICOL

LEGAZPI CITY—The Armed Forces of the Philippines this week activated the Joint Task Force (JTF) Bicolandia to facilitate effective military response to disasters and further enhance security in the Bicol region.

"The formal activation of the Joint Task Force Bicolandia is a clear indication of our persistence to usher in the best improvements for the AFP," said Gen. Carlito Galvez Jr., AFP chief of staff, during Monday's ceremony at Barangay Puro here.

"(It) is a concrete step that we have taken to further fortify

the quest of the AFP, particularly the Southern Luzon Command (Solcom), to bring and sustain peace and security in the Bicol region," he added.

Land, air, sea assets

The task force will combine and integrate the AFP's land, air, and naval capabilities to secure the region's six provinces, including the island provinces of Masbate and Catanduanes.

Tapped to head the joint task force is Maj. Gen. Jesus Mananquil Jr., 9th Infantry Division commander.

The task will fall under the

direct command and supervision of the Solcom, headed by Lt. Gen. Danilo Pamonag, and will be composed of the 9th Infantry Division, the region's tactical operations group, and the naval forces in Southern Luzon.

Emergency situations

According to Galvez, JTF Bicolandia "will perform the vital task of protecting from security threats the region's budding economic landscape, vast agricultural sector, and popular tourist hubs, as well as orchestrating joint operations in response to emergen-

cy situations."

Col. Noel Detoyato, AFP public affairs office chief, said JTF Bicolandia would facilitate easier coordination for synchronized military operations and faster response in the Bicol region.

According to Legazpi City Mayor Noel Rosal, chair of the Regional Peace and Order Council, the military's presence in Bicol is important to protect government programs and infrastructure projects in the region. —REPORTS FROM JEANNETTE ANDRADE, MICHAEL JAUCIAN AND DELFIN MALLARI JR. INQ

MILITARY OPERATIONS VS BIFF

**MILITARY ACTIVATES TASK FORCE
BICOLANDIA VS THREAT GROUPS**

GEN. CARLITO GALVEZ JR., the chief of staff of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP), activated Joint Task Force (JTF) Bicolandia in Legazpi City on Monday to address insurgency and other security threats in the Bicol Region. Maj. Gen. Jesus Manangquil, commander of the Bicol-based 9th Infantry Division, on Tuesday said the task force will facilitate the "synergy of efforts" and unite the commands of the Philippine Navy, Philippine Army and Philippine Air Force in Bicol. "The JTF is primarily designed to address insurgency concerns. It is also organized to coordinate disaster response operations especially during typhoons and Mayon Volcano eruptions," Manangquil said in a text message to reporters. The task force will be headed by Manangquil and will be under the direct command and supervision of Lt. Gen. Danilo Pamonag, commander of the Southern Luzon Command (Solcom). It will be in charge of securing all six provinces of the Bicol Regions and the offshore island provinces of Masbate and Catanduanes. JTF-Bicolandia will consist of the 9th ID, the Air Force's Tactical Operations Group 5 and the Naval Forces Southern Luzon. Galvez said the task force was formed to support the Bicol Region Development Plan, which calls for sustaining all undertakings in the region through good governance, peace and security measures, land use management, improved productivity in the public and private sectors and adaptation to disaster risks and climate change. Col. Noel Detoyato, AFP public affairs chief, said even if the number of communist rebels in Bicol has decreased, the military is still considering the small number as threats. "One or two people can create chaos," Detoyato added. **A7 DEMPSEY REYES**

NO KADAMAY TAKEOVER THIS TIME

By Melvin Gascon
@melvinalgascon

Members of an activist group in Montana staged a sit-in protest outside the police and public defender's buildings in Helena, frustrated by the police but were drawn away by the police.

About 500 members of the Montanan Homeless Association (MHA) a

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KADAMAY MEMBERS FAIL TO TAKE

OVER 'IDLE' HOUSING UNITS IN RIZAL

FROM A1

local chapter of the militant Kalipunan ng Damayang Mahihirap (Kadamay), stormed the La Solidaridad-Avilon Zoo housing project, in what housing officials said was an attempted takeover of vacant units at the site.

Most of the association members who went to La Solidaridad were women, some pregnant or mothers with children in tow, who sought shelter from rain outside the subdivision, said Supt. Pablito Naganag, Rodriguez police chief.

The group claimed there were around 700 of them, more than the police estimate of only 100.

Congress resolution

Kadamay, which was behind the takeover of government housing projects in Pandi town, Bulacan province, and Rodriguez last year, said they only meant to assert their rights to decent housing as stated in the Congressional Joint Resolution No. 2 (JR No. 2).

Police reported the Kadamay members had dispersed by early afternoon, according to Elsie Trinidad, spokesperson for the National Housing Authority (NHA).

Kadamay denied its mem-

bers tried to take over of housing units intended for members of the Armed Forces of the Philippines and Philippine National Police.

But the group said the AFP-PNP housing project had been left idle for the past five years.

'Bantayang Bahay'

"That's why it's called 'Bantayang Bahay' because we only meant to guard our rights over the houses," said Kadamay national chair Gloria Arellano.

The NHA denied Kadamay's claims, saying the housing units that the group tried to overrun in Rodriguez had already been awarded.

These, however, may be unoccupied because their owners, mostly police officers, are deployed to other areas, Trinidad said.

She, however, did not say how many of the 715 houses had been awarded or actually occupied.

Kadamay said its members merely staged a "peaceful protest" to assert their right to shelter and to condemn the "continuing flaws" of the Philippine housing program.

They expressed concern over the delays in the implementation of JR No. 2, which mandated the NHA to distribute unawarded, unoccupied or relinquished housing units intended for enlisted military men, police, jail

and fire personnel.

"At its core, Kadamay says that there are still so many idle houses and so many homeless, even with the joint resolution already in place, the poor are left unheard and victims to the ploys of those in power," Arellano said.

JR No. 2, which was signed by senators and congressmen, on May 9 gave the NHA 60 days to formulate implementing rules



STREET DEBATE An owner of one of the units in the La Solidaridad-Avilon Zoo housing project for police and military personnel argues with members of the militant Kalipunan ng Damayang Mahihirap who tried to take over the site on Wednesday. —EDWIN BACASMAS

and regulations for the houses.

Landfill scavengers

Arellano said that even before the signing of JR No. 2, MHA and Kadamay members, most of them scavengers in the nearby landfill, had long applied for the units at the NHA.

They submitted all the required documents and have gone back and forth talking with the NHA for over a year, she said.

She said the municipal government was giving priority to some people who were not even poor or a resident of the town.

Kadamay alleged that the NHA and the local governments of Rizal had been using idle housing sites supposedly for "political patronage and leverage," while allegedly delaying on purpose the granting of applications for the homeless.

Rodriguez Mayor Cecilio

Hernandez said the local government was only given "10 percent" of the total housing units at its disposal, but the selection of the beneficiaries remained mainly the responsibility of the national government.

Flooded shanties

The delay in the implementation of JR No. 2 has been aggravated with the onset of the rainy season this month, flooding many of temporary homes of the informal settlers, Kadamay said.

The group also complained about the allegedly high amortization rates imposed on their members for houses that had been awarded to them.

The NHA has complied with the directive of the President, and was in the process of finalizing the guidelines, according to Trinidad.

But based on NHA screening process, many of the Kadamay members would be disqualified, as some of them were found to be either financially capable of owning a house, or do not belong to the poorest sector, she said.

"We found out that some of those who earlier applied for separate housing units were actually entitled to just one unit. Some were even renting out their declared houses," Trinidad said. —WITH A REPORT FROM MARICAR CINCO INQ

Kadamay members storm Rizal housing project

Around 500 members of the militant group Kalipunan ng Damayang Mahihirap (Kadamay) tried to occupy a housing project for soldiers and police officers in Rodriguez, Rizal yesterday.

Senior Superintendent Lou Evangelista, Rizal police director, said the Kadamay members arrived at the La Solidaridad Estate Homes in Barangay San Isidro at around 5 a.m.

"They held a rally, but they did not occupy any house... They dispersed at around 2:30 p.m.," Evangelista said.

At a dialogue with Kadamay members, Evangelista and representatives of the National Housing Authority (NHA) said the beneficiaries of the housing project have started paying for their units.

Kadamay chairperson Gloria Arellano said the

housing units have been idle for more than five years and should be given to the poor.

Some 6,000 families were awarded housing units in a government project in Pandi, Bulacan which they occupied in March last year.

However, the NHA said it had validated reports that at least 600 housing units awarded to Kadamay members were put up for rent. There were also reports that some recipients sold their houses or applied for units in another government project.

NHA officials said they would be more alert in guarding housing projects targeted by Kadamay.

- Cecille Suerte Felipe, Romina Cabrera

Kadamay does it again, storm Rizal housing

RODRIGUEZ, Rizal: Tension broke early on Wednesday when more than 200 members of the informal settlers' and urban poor group Kadamay attempted to occupy vacant housing units allocated for members of the military and police in a government socialized housing project in Barangay San Isidro in Rodriguez, Rizal.



FOR THEIR SECURITY A resident builds a barricade outside their home in Rodriguez, Rizal, in preparation for the occupation of the group Kadamay on Wednesday. PHOTO BY DJ DIOSINA

Local police and civil disturbance units (CDUs), led by the town chief of police Supt. Pablito Naganag, immediately secured the area and defused tension between the aggressive Kadamay members and Barangay San Isidro and homeowners association officials.

As local police force and *barangay* (village) officials pacified the parties, they also coordinated with the homeowners in prodding Kadamay members who "invaded" the unoccupied housing units to vacate the houses, since these units had been awarded to the rightful housing beneficiaries.

Rodriguez Police chief Pablito Naganag said the protesters ar-

rived on jeepneys while others crossed the river to reach the site.

The protesters circled the compound and carried a copy of Joint Resolution 2 supposedly signed by President Rodrigo Duterte on June 9, and urged National Housing Authority (NHA) chief Christopher Guevarra to reward them the houses.

They also went to the town hall to protest and hold a dialogue with the mayor.

"The distribution of houses follows a process, with the NHA in charge. But that area is fully booked," Naganag said.

Homeowners explained that they were among the early beneficiary occupants of some 700 socialized housing units, while other

rightful owners were expected to settle in as soon as documents and the proper turnover procedures were completed.

They denounced the forcible occupation of the vacant units by the aggressive Kadamay members without the necessary documents pursuant to socialized housing occupancy guidelines.

The homeowners' association members explained that housing unit awardees like them must comply with the process on documentary requirements and payment terms and could not just barge into a vacant unit and claim it.

NHA community relations division representative Chris Guevarra, who was on site, said all the housing units had been awarded to qualified

beneficiaries and belied claims by the Kadamay members that these were still available to them.

Gloria Arellano, chairman of the Kadamay group, said in a media interview that some members had applied for housing units through the Rodriguez local government unit and the NHA.

"We are holding a rally to force them to act on our requests," Arellano said.

The Kadamay members who had barricaded the San Isidro housing site were those who applied for relocation based on a supposed Palace resolution to be signed by the President to provide affordable housing units to the poor, she said.

PNA AND ATHENA LUCASAN

Kadamay strikes anew

Members claim being manipulated

By Merrowen Mendoza

The notorious house grabbers called *Kalipunan ng Damayang Mahihirap* (Kadamay) struck again yesterday after at least 500 Kadamay members forced their way into a housing project for the Armed Forces of the

Philippines (AFP) and the Philippine National Police (PNP) in Barangay San Isidro, Rodriguez, Rizal and briefly occupied the area.

Members of the urban poor group, however, reportedly left the area after they failed to enter the housing units, as police officers on patrol

intervened and warned Kadamay members that they will be charged with trespassing.

Kadamay also pulled off a similar stunt last year, as the group forcefully occupied vacant housing units in Pandi, Bulacan.

President Rodrigo Duterte later on ordered the govern-

ment to give the vacant units to the urban poor organization.

Kadamay's activities were, however, tainted as recent reports surfaced that some of its members are already fed up after accusing the group's officials of manipulating them.

At least 300 Kadamay members, recently, broke their silence and brought into open the alleged corrupt practices of the pro-urban poor organization.

The group's former members said they have had enough of being forced to join protest actions which

were mostly aimed against the President.

But the worst part, they claimed, was that Kadamay officials have turned them into milking cows.

"Yung sinisingil po kami ng 150, 200, 300, makapag rally lang po. Hindi libre,

Turn to page 2

Kadamay strikes anew

From page 1

kami pa pa ang mababagdad natin (We are being charged P150, P200, P300 to be part of a rally. Those are not free, we are the ones who had to pay.) Jeffrey Ariz, one of the leaders of a breakaway group.

Initial reports said the intruders, who identified themselves as members of the urban poor organization, tried to occupy the empty housing units in the 1A area of the National Housing Authority (NHA) project at the La Solidaridad Estate Homes in Barangay San Isidro.

A former president of the Barangay San Isidro Homeowners Association said the group tried to enter another portion of the housing complex, project called the 1B area a few weeks after successfully occupying a housing project in Pandi, Bulacan.

Kadamay held repeated takeover attempts

The earlier attempt failed after residents of the building

area who are former and active members of the AFP and the PNP barred them from entering.

The alleged Kadamay members were able to enter the 1A area yesterday because all of the units were unoccupied.

With Kadamay in the attempt to take over the housing units were members of the Montalban Homeless Alliance (MHA), who are urging the NHA to give the units to MHA members who are living in landfills in Montalban.

"Isang taon na kami ng mga homeless dito at lumalapit sa NHA at sa LGU para makipag dialogo pero kahit ngayon may batas na para patibhan ang mga tiyagwang na pabahay na ito, wala silang tugon (We have been homeless for one year and had sought to dialog with the NHA and the local government unit (LGU) but despite a law to distribute unoccupied housing projects, they have not entertained us)" Lilybeth Gelit, spokesperson for MHA, said.

The Kadamay Pandi, Bulacan chapter denied Ariz's allegations, saying he was

stripped of being a Kadamay official after he was caught acting as an "agent" in the illegal sale of vacant housing units in Pandi.

"Hindi tinolerante ng organisasyon ng Kadamay ang ganitong mga tawag nagtitirapag at nitatagap ang batas (Kadamay does not tolerate those who break off from the group while violating the law)," said Kadamay Pandi, Bulacan chairperson Pat Tupas.

The Kadamay also belied reports of the faction numbering to 300, saying the group only lost 20 members due to a "small organizational matter" involving the frustrated former leader.

Split blamed on expelled leader

In an earlier statement, Kadamay blamed the split in its organization to Ariz, an "expelled" local leader who raised serious allegations against Kadamay mainly concerning the handling of

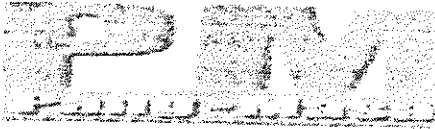
its members in the occupied houses."

It alleged that Ariz's "frustration with the entire process of gaining entry passes for the occupied areas" has prompted him to "conspire" with the National Housing Authority (NHA) to "discredit" Kadamay.

Still, Kadamay said the accusations have failed to convince "tens of thousands" of its members in Pandi, Bulacan, to leave the group.

"All in all this is still a small organizational matter. If these accusations were really as harmful and widespread as he claims then why haven't the tens of thousands of members of Kadamay in Pandi and nationwide already jumped ship?" it said.

"At its core, the around 20 members (not 300 as erroneously reported) who have joined Ariz in slandering Kadamay, still represent the dissatisfaction with the current housing schemes that Kadamay is pushing to change," it added.



KADAMAY SUMALAKAY NG PABAHAY

Muli na namang sumalakay ang tinatayang nasa 500 miyembro ng Urban poor group na Kadamay nang agawin ang pabahay para sa mga pulis at sundalo sa Barangay San Isidro, Rodriguez, Rizal, kahapon ng umaga.

Nabatid na dakong alas-3:00 ng madaling-araw nang salakayin ng grupong Kadamay na

militante lulan ng 5 jeep at ilang motorsiklo ang mga bakanteng pabahay na walang gate at inangkin ng mga ito.

Subalit, dakong alas-2:30 ng hapon ay umalis din ang Kadamay sa mga bahay na kanilang sinalakay.

Magugunita na noong nakalipas na taon ay inokupa rin ng grupo ang

isang housing project para sa mga sundalo at pulis sa Pandi, Bulacan at para wala nang gulo ay ibinigay na lamang ito ni Pangulong Rodrigo Duterte ang mga bahay sa kanila.

Subalit, nagbabala ang Pangulong Duterte na huwag na ulit gagawin ang kanilang ginawa. *-Mer Layson-*

Pabahay para sa mga sundalo, pulis inokupa ng Kadamay

Nagdulot ng takot sa mga residente ang ginawang paglusob ng tinatayang nasa 500 mi-yembro ng urban poor group na Kadamay sa 1A housing project para sa mga sundalo at pulis sa Barangay San Isidro. Rodriguez, Rizal, kahapon ng umaga.

Dakong alas-5:00 ng madaling-araw nang pasukin ng militanteng grupo na sakay ng 5 jeep at

ilang motorsiklo ang mga bakanteng pabahay na walang gate at inangkin ng mga ito.

Bago ito, sinubukan din ng grupo na okupahin ang 1B area ngunit hindi sila nagtagumpay.

Matatandaang una ng inokupa ng Kadamay ang pabahay sa Pandi. Bulacan, kung saan hinayaan na lang silang manatili doon ni Pangulong Duferte para maiwasan ang guio.

Pero binalaan sila ng Pangulo na hindi na ito dapat pang mautil.

Gayunman dahil sa pinakahuling pagsalakay ng Kadamay, nababaha-hala ang ilang residente na lumabas ng bahay at baka ang kanilang tirahan naman ang pasukin ng grupo.

Dakong alas-2:30 ng hapon ay nilisan din ng grupo ang naturang lugar. (Mer Layson)

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AFP vows to bring peace to Mindanao

Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) Chief of Staff Gen. Carlito Galvez Jr. has committed to Muslim leaders on Tuesday night to bring peace in Mindanao as he assured the military's full support to the rehabilitation of Marawi City.

Acting as guest of honor and speaker during an interfaith dinner hosted by the National Commission of Muslim Filipinos (NCMF) held in Camp Aguinaldo on Tuesday night, Galvez said his long-years in the battlefield in Mindanao helped him understand better the situation there.

Now as AFP chief, Galvez committed to exert efforts to bring peace in Mindanao.

Understanding achieves respect

"Being a soldier, sometimes you need to use force but in my years of experience, I believe that it is only through understanding that we can achieve respect, it is only through understanding that we can achieve trust, and

it is only through understanding that we can love each other," Galvez said.

"I will pledge to devote myself in bringing peace in Mindanao," he added.

At the same time, the AFP vowed full support to the rehabilitation of Marawi City, considered as the most important Islamic City in Mindanao, which was ruined by the five-month siege laid by Islamic State-inspired terrorists last year.

"I will bring back very good military officers in Marawi who have hearts for the Maranaos," said Galvez.

The interfaith dinner was attended by different religious organizations, government agencies and other groups that are all working for peace and are fighting violent extremism.

Director Kim Edres, of the NCMF, spearheaded the gathering in partnership with the Multi-Sectoral Advisory and Action Group (MCAAG) of the

Joint Task Force National Capital Region, which serves as the guide of the Command towards good governance and performance excellence.

One of the sponsors of the Iftar and Interfaith Dinner is the Integrated Center for Development (ICAD) Foundation, a Pil-Turkish Group that promotes peace and understanding in communities.

Last year, ICAD Foundation also donated cows to internally displaced families located in different evacuation centers in Lanao del Sur as a result of the Marawi Siege.

Also present was ¹²Amina Rasul, president of the Philippine Council for Islam and Democracy.

"On behalf of all the soldiers, sailors, airmen and marines, I thank you for making the AFP a part of this celebration. We will always be ready to support and participate in peace endeavors such as this," said Galvez.

Mario J. Mallari

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VOLLEYBALL

PAF scatters Army

Air Force, after recovering from a third-set stumble, turned back Philippine Army, 25-23, 25-17, 27-29, 25-20, yesterday to boost its semifinal bid in the men's division of the Premier Volleyball League Reinforced Conference at The Arena in San Juan City.

Failing to close out the match early, the Jet Spikers regrouped in time and pounced on the Troopers in the fourth frame to pick up their first win in the round-robin phase for the final two semis berths.

Fauzi Ismail starred for Air Force with his unstoppable kills, firing 18 spikes to finish with 21 points, while hard-hitting Howard Mojica had 16 points including 15 from the attack line.

Army dictated the tempo in the third frame with skipper Benjaylo Labide and Patrick John Rojas in front of the charge, stealing the set despite Air Force's unyielding attacks.

But the Jet Spikers launched a big fourth-set comeback with Ismail and Mojica torching the net from all angles and PAF never looked back. (Kristel Satumbaga)

**PVAO marks 73rd year
of Battle of Bessang**

THE historic Battle of Bessang Pass, the greatest victory scored by Filipino guerrillas against the mighty Japanese Imperial Army in World War II, will be commemorated with elaborate ceremony in Ilocos Sur on Thursday at the site where the battle occurred 73 years ago.

President Rodrigo R. Duterte has designated Defense Secretary Lorenzo N. Lorenzana to represent him during the anniversary celebration at Bessang Pass, Ilocos Sur, according to retired Brig. Gen. Resty Agullar, chief of Veterans and Historical Division of the Philippine Veterans Affairs Office, in Camp Aguinido.

It was in Bessang Pass, the strategic mountain fortress in Ilocos Sur occupied by the Japanese during the Second World War, that Filipino guerrillas mounted a series of attacks that lasted for almost six months from Jan. 1, 1945 until June 14, 1945 when the Japanese forces were crushed.

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Military-NPA ceasefire starts June 21

By Jeannette I. Andrade
@jiandradeINQ

Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) founding chair Jose Maria Sison confirmed on Wednesday that a stand-down, or a preliminary ceasefire agreement, has been reached by the peace panels in back-channel talks in the Netherlands.

In a statement to reporters on Wednesday, Sison said the informal talks between the government and communist rebels were successful and formal peace negotiations were scheduled to resume on June 28 in Oslo, Norway.

"Stand-down means stay where you are and do not shoot at the other side," Sison said.

Presidential spokesperson Harry Roque said Malacañang would leave it to presidential peace adviser Jesus Dureza to comment on Sison's statement.

Delayed schedule

According to Sison, the chief political consultant to the National Democratic Front of the Philippines (NDFP) in the talks, communist New People's Army (NPA) guerrillas and government troops would be ordered to stand down on June 21.

He explained that a plan to declare a ceasefire on June 14 had been postponed "because of the delayed court permission for the six NDFP consultants to surface and travel."

He was referring to Benito Tiamzon, believed to be the CPP chair, and five senior CPP



Jose Maria Sison

leaders—Rafael Baylosis, Alan Jazmines, Randal Echanis, Vicente Ladlad and Adelberto Silva—who had petitioned two separate Metro Manila courts to be allowed to travel to Europe as early as June 3.

Last week, the courts gave the six NDFP consultants permission to travel overseas.

"The stand-down agreement is an act of mutual goodwill to stimulate the resumption of formal peace talks. It is also to prepare for the coordinated unilateral ceasefires, which are a more advanced form of ceasefire," Sison said.

Bilateral ceasefire plan

After the government and the rebels declare their separate unilateral ceasefire, the negotiating panels may push for a bilateral ceasefire, depending on the outcome of the peace talks.

The Armed Forces of the

Philippines public affairs office chief, Col. Noel Detoyato, expressed optimism that the stand-down agreement would enable formal negotiations and lead to a peaceful settlement of the 49-year-old communist insurgency.

In a statement, Detoyato said the military "will always support the peace efforts of our government and we believe that this will pave the way toward a peaceful resolution of the decades-old challenge that peace-loving Filipinos has been longing for."

Defense Secretary ^{A2} Delfin Lorenzana earlier expressed skepticism about the rebels' sincerity, saying the CPP and the NPA might not abide by the terms of the stand-down accord.

Lorenzana claimed the rebels might use the temporary truce for recruitment and expansion of their areas. —WITH A REPORT FROM CHRISTINE O. AVENDAÑO INQ

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'CEASEFIRE' TO START JUNE 1 - JOMA

A "STAND-DOWN" agreement between the government and the National Democratic Front of the Philippines (NDFP) will begin next week in line with resumed formal peace talks between the two sides in Oslo, Norway, exiled Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) founder Jose Maria "Joma" Sison

► Joma AB

■ JOMA FROM A1

'CEASEFIRE' TO START JUNE 1

said on Wednesday.

This agreement was approved on the heels of "successful" backchannel talks between negotiating panels of the Duterte administration and the NDFP in The Netherlands held last week, according to Sison.

"Successful. Ask the GRP [Government of the Republic of the Philippines] negotiating panel [and] please wait for the joint GRP-NDFP announcement," he told reporters in an online interview, when asked about the results of the informal talks.

The backchannel talks between the government and the communist rebels began on June 6 where the two sides discussed the drafting of the Comprehensive Agreement on Social and Economic Reforms (Caser).

Sison had said if the backchannel talks turned out to be fruitful by approving the Agrarian Reform and Rural Development (ARRD) and the National Industrialization and Economic Development (NIED) provisions of Caser, the stand-down agreement between the two parties would be declared.

The agreement will be implemented on June 21 instead of June 14, with the CPP founder noting the court's "delayed" permission for the six NDFP consultants to travel to Oslo.

The formal peace talks will take place June 28 to 30 in the Norwegian capital, Sison said.

The six consultants who were allowed to travel are Benito Tiamzon, Rafael Baylosis, Alan Jazmines, Randal Echanis, Vicente Ladlad and Adelberto Silva.

The stand-down agreement would be the first phase of the bilateral ceasefire between the forces of the government and the Left on the ground.

The agreement is "an act of mutual goodwill to stimulate the resumption of formal peace talks. It is also to prepare for the coordinated unilateral ceasefire, which is a more advanced form of ceasefire," Sison said.

"Stand-down... means stay where you are and do not shoot at the other side," he added.

Sison had explained that the agreement would evolve into a coordinated unilateral ceasefire (CUC) upon approval of an interim peace agreement and all provisions under Caser.

Once it turned into a CUC or the second phase of the cessation of hostilities, the two panels will declare a bilateral ceasefire, pending outcome of the formal peace negotiations.

With the limited timeline for the stand-down agreement, Sison argued that the agreement cannot be referred to as a ceasefire, saying it is only a "form" of it.

"The stand-down [agreement] is only a form of a ceasefire," he noted.

The Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP), meanwhile, believes that the agreement would "pave the way" for a peaceful resolution of the communist insurgency.

"Your AFP always support the peace efforts of our government and we believe that this will pave the way toward a peaceful resolution of the decades-old challenge that peace-loving Filipinos have been longing for," Col. Noel Detoyato, AFP public affairs chief, said.

Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana however said he wants to be enlightened on the stand-down agreement, pointing out that the armed wing of the CPP, the New People's Army, might not obey it.

Ceasefire deal with Reds on hold—Joma

A STAND-DOWN agreement supposed to be simultaneously announced by the government and the Maoist rebels on Thursday has been delayed for a week to allow the government to ensure the participation of several consultants in the peace talks, Jose Maria Sison said Wednesday.

The founder of the Communist Party of the Philippines said most of these consultants of the National Democratic Front of the Philippines were expected to be cleared before Friday to join the talks.

"The stand-down will begin on June 21, a full week ahead of the June 28 resumption of formal talks in Oslo," Sison told ABS-CBN News.

He made his statement even as President Rodrigo Duterte again reassured Sison of his safety in the Philippines even if the peace talks failed and that he would escort him to the airport to fly back to the Netherlands alive.

Duterte reiterated his invitation to Sison to come to the Philippines to resume the peace talks and said he would shoulder the cost of his plane ticket and hotel accommodation here.

"Should the peace talks prevail, then we would be lucky and I would thank God for it. But if not, I tell you that I will escort him to the airport and I will see to it that he will fly out alive," Duterte said in his speech during the oath-taking of village officials in Pampanga.

"I don't know about Sison, but I'm ready to give him the privilege of coming home. He does not have to worry about his safety," Duterte said.

The government and the rebels were initially set to announce a stand-down deal on Thursday, two weeks ahead of the formal negotiations.

Vito Barcelo

Stand down deal delayed 1 week

By Elmer Navarro Manuel and
Mario J. Mallari

The peace process between the government and the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) stalled anew yesterday as the stand down agreement that the government was supposed to announce with Maoist rebels simultaneously was delayed for a week.

The delay, according to CPP founder Jose Maria Sison, was to allow government to ensure the participation of several consultants in the peace talks, and that most of these consultants of the National Democratic Front of the Philippines (NDFP) are expected to get clearance before Friday in time for the talks.

"The stand down will begin on June 21, a full week ahead of the June 28 resumption of formal talks in Oslo," said Sison in a television interview.

Both sides were initially set to announce a stand-down deal today, two weeks ahead of formal negotiations but Sison, who joined backchannel talks in The Netherlands last week, said the government sought the new schedule "to have more time for effecting the release" of six NDFP consultants.

The consultants include Rafael Baylosis, who was detained earlier this year after negotiations bogged down; Benito Tiamzon, Adel Silva, Alan Jazmines, Randal Echanis and Vicente Ladlad.

Ladlad and four others have to secure clearance as they could also be arrested since their bail was cancelled in connection with a government petition with the court to tag the CPP and its armed wing as terrorist organizations.

Consultants needed for 'polishing' work

Sison stressed that consultants were "needed for the polishing" of the coordinated unilateral ceasefire deal which will form part of the interim peace agreement to be signed on June 28.

The CPP founder narrated that the two sides would spend June 15 to 18 to "polish" the two other components of the interim accord which include agreements on agrarian reform and the nationalization of certain industries.

"The stand-down agreement precludes government forces and the rebels from committing any offensive action or operation against combat-

ants and civilians," Sison said.

Also in the deal was the provision that both sides will also "stay where they are" and "take an active defense mode," and the agreement will then be replaced by a clearer and more binding coordinated unilateral ceasefire deal once formal talks resumed.

Mr. Duterte also invited Sison to return home and take part in the resumption of the peace talks. Duterte then had a change of heart to give the talks another chance.

The police and military leaderships also vowed to support fully the stand-down agreement but stressed the CPP-New People's Army (CPP-NPA) should abide by the pact.

Ceasefire should be bilateral

"If that will bring peace to our country then why not," Philippine National Police (PNP) chief Director General Oscar Albayalde said.

Albayalde stressed the need for the communist group's fighters to abide by the agreement.

"If there will be a ceasefire agreement, it should be bilateral not one-sided, not only suspension of military and police operations," Albayalde said.

"Our government is doing every-

thing to attain lasting peace and get rid of the conflict which has been going on for six decades," he added.

Albayalde cited previous experiences when the communist group only took advantage of the ceasefire by strengthening their capability and intensifying recruitment.

"We have to at least follow what was agreed on—you cannot throw a punch while the other side is not throwing a punch. That is how we see the sincerity on both sides. We in the government are really sincere in offering peace," Albayalde said.

Col. Noel Detoyato, chief of the Armed Forces of the Philippines-Public Affairs Office, said the 135,000-strong military will support all of the government's peace initiatives.

"Your AFP will always support the peace efforts of our government and we believe that this will pave the way towards a peaceful resolution of the decades old challenge that peace-loving Filipinos have been longing for," Detoyato said.

Earlier, Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana had questioned the sincerity of the CPP-NPA in the peace talks - citing efforts by the communist group to regain their lost territories in the rural areas when guns fall silent.

“

“If there will be a ceasefire agreement, it should be bilateral not one-sided, not only suspension of military and police operations.””

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Palace on Joma claim: No 'stand-down' deal yet

**BY VICTOR REYES
AND JOCELYN MONTEMAYOR**

PEACE negotiators from government and the communist group have agreed to implement a "stand-down agreement" starting Thursday next week as an act of goodwill for the resumption of formal peace talks, according to Jose Maria "Joma" Sison, founder of the Communist Party of the Philippines and chief political consultant of the National Democratic Front of the Philippines,

who said the agreement was reached during the back-channel talks held last week.

But Peace Adviser Jesus Dureza said government is still finalizing its position on the proposed stand-down agreement with the CPP-NDFP-New People's Army.

"Hindi pa namat na-finalize (We have not yet finalized) on the government side. Will let you know," Dureza said in a text message when asked about the agreement. He did not elaborate on the proposed pact,

saying the government panel is still in a meeting.

Sison, who has been on self-exile in the Netherlands since the late 80s, said the back-channel talks were "successful." He declined to give details, saying a joint statement is due to be issued by the government and the NDF.

Pressed on the agreement, Sison said: "(It will be on June 7), instead of June 14, because of the delayed court permission for the six NDFP

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PALACE

consultants to surface and travel."

Sison was referring to communist leaders Benito Tiamzon, Rafael Baylosis, Alan Jazmines, Randal Echanis, Vicente Ladlad, and Adelberto Silva who were recently allowed by a Manila court to travel abroad to take part in the talks.

"One week stand-down before the June 28-30 formal peace talks in Oslo (Norway)... A stand down is a form of ceasefire... The stand down agreement is an act of

mutual goodwill to stimulate the resumption of formal peace talks," said Sison, replying to questions sent through Facebook messenger.

"It is also to prepare for the coordinated unilateral ceasefire which are a more advanced form of ceasefire. Stand-down means stay where you are and do not shoot at the other side," Sison also said.

Col. Noel Detovato, chief of the AFP public affairs office, said there is yet no instruction from higher authorities for the Armed Forces to implement the stand-

down order.

Sison earlier said the stand-down agreement will become a coordinated unilateral ceasefire when an interim ceasefire agreement is approved by both sides.

He said the coordinated unilateral ceasefire will advance to a bilateral ceasefire once the Comprehensive Agreement on Social and Economic Reforms, one of the substantive agendas in the talks, is signed.

Also, Sison has said the bilateral ceasefire will also depend on

the amnesty and release of all political prisoners.

President Duterte ordered government negotiators in April to work towards the resumption of the talks which he terminated in November last year amid series NPA attacks on civilian and military targets.

President Duterte recently suggested anew that the NPA members confine themselves in a camp or a peace zone while peace talks are ongoing, and refrain from bringing firearms when they go out in public

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'Rebel free' tag on Pangasinan urged

By Mario J. Mallari

The Army's 702nd Infantry Brigade and the Pangasinan Provincial Police Office (PPO), in a joint recommendation, endorsed the declaration of Pangasinan, one of the biggest provinces in the country, as "insurgency free."

The government continues to gain ground against the New People's Army (NPA) in Pangasinan with 22 rebels returning to the fold of the law.

Maj. Gen. Felimon Santos, commander of the Army's 7th Infantry Division (ID), said declaring the province free from armed rebels can spur its further development.

Santos also attributed the success of the campaign to public support and the government's peace and security efforts.

"An insurgency-free province means that there is already a very favorable peace and order condition which were verified by the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) and Philippine National Police (PNP) deployed in the area," Santos said.

"The declaration of the province as insurgency free is necessary to further spur its unhampered march towards progress while keeping the commitment of the Philippine Army and PNP to continue its effort in sustaining and preserving peace and order in the province," he added.

In Bicol, no less than Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) Chief of Staff Gen. Carlito Galvez Jr. welcomed 22 NPA rebels who surrendered.

Galvez met with the rebel-returnees, led by NPA platoon leader Jeffrey Benzon, at the headquarters of the Army's 903rd Brigade.

The military said latest report indicated that 70 percent of the NPA regular members in Bicol have already surrendered.

"The current trend of NPA surrenderors in the Bicol area accounts to 70 percent of their total strength in Bicol. We encourage others to follow. It is not a shooting war that will bring us peace in this area," Galvez said.

"Peaceful and compassionate efforts is the best alternative to ending this decades-old security challenge. Congratulations for making the bold decision of ending your armed struggle. Welcome back fellow Filipinos," he added.

"An insurgency-free province means that there is already a very favorable peace and order condition"

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Military, police say Pangasinan is insurgency-free

Philippine military and the police yesterday asked the provincial government of Pangasinan to declare the province as an insurgency-free area.

The proposal was made by the Army's 7th and 8th Brigades and Pampanga's 1st and 2nd Divisions, the official police office in the province held at the provincial capitol building in town yesterday morning.

Col. Catherine Hapin, spokesperson of the Army's 7th Infantry Division, said a recent assessment of the province's peace and security status showed the strength of the New People's Army (NPA) in the province has already at the "insignificant level."

"It's already in the insignificant level. It's not totally zero, but it's still being proactive but it's already at the insignificant level that this can no longer influence the community," Hapin said in a phone interview.

"Once insurgency-free, more investment will be expected to put up business there in Pangasinan. That's one of the benefits of this formal declaration," Hapin said.

Capt. Jesus Ramos, civil military operations officer of the 702nd Brigade, said that "NPA rebels have been monitored to be still operating in Pangasinan as of last year."

Ramos said there have so far been no sightings of rebels in the province.

"The rebels are no longer showing up because the residents are already against them, reporting to us the rebel presence," he said.

He said the insurgents could have transferred operations to Zamboanga and Nueva Ecija.

Ramos said the recommendation will be deliberated by the provincial council, after which the council resolution endorsing the recommendation will be forwarded to Pangasinan Gov. Amado J. Espino III for approval.

Once formally declared as insurgency-free, Ramos said the PNP will assume the primary responsibility of addressing potential threats by insurgents in the province.

The Army, he said, will play the support role. — Victor Reyes

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MANILA BULLETIN
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Search for abducted soldier, militiaman intensified

By MIKE U. CRISMUNDO

CAMP BANCASI, Butuan City — Army soldiers on Wednesday stepped up their search for a colleague and a member of the Civilian Armed Forces Geographical Unit Active Auxilliary (CAA) who were abducted by suspected New People's Army (NPA) terrorists in Southern Mindanao last Sunday.

Capt. Jerry S. Lamosao, chief Public Affairs Office (PAO) of the Army's Southern Mindanao 10th Infantry

(Agila) Division (10th ID) said field unit commanders operating near the provincial border of Davao Oriental, Surigao del Sur and Compostela Valley (ComVal) have also been ordered to closely coordinate for the all-out search operations for Cpl. Johannes D. Parreño, a member of Alpha Company of the 28th IB, and Civilian Active Auxilliary (CAA) Dindo Malibay of Purok Banahaw, Sitio Sudlon, Barangay Central, of Mati City.

"Maj. Gen. Noel S. Clement, the

commanding general of the Army's southern Mindanao 10th "Agila" Division ordered the command group of the 28th Infantry Battalion (28th IB) to step up their search operation for Parreño, and Malibay," the 10th ID PAO officer said.

"The 10th ID will pursue the perpetrators in accordance with our rules of engagement and existing laws until justice is served," said Lamosao, in a phone interview with The Manila Bulletin.

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PROVINCIAL BITS

NPA role in slay probed

Davao City — Police investigators are looking into the involvement of the New People's Army (NPA) hit squad in the death of a village leader and driver who were ambushed in Barangay Magtuod, this city on June 7.

City Chief of Police Alexander Tagum in a text message, said the investigation focuses on the involvement of the NPA in the killing of barangay captain Reynaldo Tulang Dumagan of Barangay Talandang, Tugbok District and his driver Ferando Suganod.

Dumagan, his family members were on board a Barangay Disaster vehicle on their way to Davao Airport to fetch a relative when armed men in a red pick-up vehicle opened fire. Dumagan and Suganod died on the spot.

Initial investigation showed that Dumagan received a death threat five days before his death.

Tagum said the Special Investigation Task Group (SITG) formed to probe the incident has one month to submit its findings.

In an interview on Friday, Undersecretary Eduardo Año, officer-in-charge of the Department of Interior and Local Government (DILG), vowed justice for Dumagan. **Lilian C. Mellejor**

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RETURN HOME, AFP URGES VILLAGERS

DISPLACED BY FIGHTING IN LIGUASAN MARSH

CAMP SIONGCO, MAGUINDANAO—A military official has urged residents displaced by government operations against the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF) to return to their communities, saying fighting had gone deeper into the Liguasan Marsh, away from populated areas.

“We ask our people to return home now. It is now safe to return to your communities,” said Brig. Gen. Cirilito Sobejana, commander of 6th Infantry Division, on Wednesday, addressing more than 30,000 residents in six towns in Maguindanao province and Pikit town in North Cotabato province.



FIGHTING SHIFT Soldiers pursue members of the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters deeper into the Liguasan Marsh.—CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

MILF coordination

The death toll in the continuing military operation in the vast Liguasan Marsh spanning North Cotabato and Maguindanao rose to 25 as BIFF gun-

men launched attacks in several areas.

Since Sunday's air and ground assaults, military reports said at least 23 BIFF gunmen had died while the govern-

ment lost one soldier. A civilian was allegedly executed by BIFF gunmen in Datu Hoffer town on Tuesday.

Sobejana said areas covered by military operations, even

ordinated with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) to avoid any misencounter in areas under the group's control.

Safe to go home

Tahira Kalantongan, disaster risk reduction and management officer of Pikit, agreed with Sobejana, saying it was safe for the more than 10,000 displaced individuals in her town to return home.

"It would be best if they return home and celebrate the Eid'l Fitr (end of fasting) on Friday in their homes than in evacuation centers," Kalantongan said.

from the first day when air and ground strikes were conducted, were far from populated areas, so there should not have been any displacements.

He said the military had co-

Tim Ambolodto ^{AIC} of the Maguindanao provincial disaster risk reduction and management office said that even if the military had issued a clearance for the return of the residents, Maguindanao Gov. Esmael Toto Mangudadatu still ordered the

distribution of relief goods "so [people] will have something on their table during the Eid."

Other clashes

Capt. Arvin John Encinas, spokesperson for 6th Infantry Division, said that while soldiers were pursuing Islamic State-inspired gunmen in Liguasan Marsh, BIFF members attacked government troops in Datu Unsay and Datu Hoffer towns in Maguindanao, and clashed with soldiers in Midsayap town, North Cotabato.

He said five BIFF gunmen were killed in the Datu Unsay firefight on Monday while a resident was shot dead by BIFF members in Datu Hoffer.

In Midsayap, North Cotabato, two relatives of Mando Mamalupong, a BIFF commander, were killed in a firefight with soldiers on Tuesday. —EDWIN O.

FERNANDEZ INQ

3 BIFF men killed

ZAMBOANGA CITY - The death toll in the clashes between soldiers and members of the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF) this week has risen to 24 as three more bandits were killed in North Cotabato.

Soldiers belonging to the 34th Infantry Battalion were looking for the safehouse of BIFF sub-commander Mando Mamalupong, alias DM, in Sitio Macantal, Barangay Olandang, Midsayap on Monday night when the clash occurred, Brig. Gen. Cirilito Sobejana, 6th Infantry Division commander, said.

Lt. Col. Gerry Besana, Western Mindanao Command spokesman, identified the fatalities as Pinidiza Tumaganta

and Aida Dalgan, Mamalupong's father-in-law and sister-in-law, respectively, and Norman Kanapia.

Besana said an M16 rifle, three hand grenades, an improvised explosive device, a binocular, a caliber .45 pistol, three cell phones, a tablet and various types of ammunition were recovered from the fatalities.

Fifteen militants, four of them foreigners, were killed in air strikes in Liguasan marsh on Sunday. Six other BIFF men were killed in another clash earlier on Monday.

Another encounter occurred in Barangay Limpongo, Datu Hoffer town when BIFF bandits attacked a military detachment at around 9 p.m. also on Monday. - Roel Pareño

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Zambo City-ARMM in dispute over prime property

By ALI G. MACABALANG

COTABATO CITY - The unresolved tussle over a 72-hectare property between the leaderships of Zamboanga City and the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) is causing frayed nerves between the leaders of the two sides.

Zamboanga City Mayor Maria Isabelle Climaco-Salazar claimed that the Duterte government has committed to purchase the disputed Cabatangan property, which has a total area of 71,096 hectares, in what she described as a "very welcome development" that may pave the way for the city leadership to buy the asset after 28 years.

But ARMM Governor Mujiv Hataman expressed shock over the supposed proposal, saying he was not aware of any offer by the national government to buy the Cabatangan property, which has an estimated value of ₱359 million.

Hataman said there has been no intent to sell any part of the property, which the ARMM government inherited from its predecessor, the defunct Autonomous Region in Western Mindanao (ARWM).

He pointed out: "I want to know who

will sell the Cabatangan property. As far as I am concerned, (it) is a property of ARMM and if the good Mayor says the national government is going to buy it, we don't have any information, note or letter on this matter."

"If there is an official letter from the President or the Secretary, we will highly appreciate (and discuss) it," he said.

The governor was referring to Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana, whom Mayor Salazar quoted as telling her thru a text message on June 7 that President Duterte had committed to buy the property.

"We are very pleased to announce I received a text, after an inquiry made last Thursday, from Lorenzana. He said President Duterte said that the national government will buy the Cabatangan property," Salazar told Zambo reporters.

"It is very important that before the passage of the Bangsamoro Basic Law (BBL), these parcels of land are ceded and transferred to the national government as mandated under the Expanded ARMM Law. In turn, the city of Zamboanga is very willing to purchase the same from the national government," Salazar said, recounting her letter to Lorenzana.

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5 die in continuing military operation

MANILA (DPA)—At least five bantais from the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters, a local terror group, under King Metin of Bungos, faction in Maguindanao were killed in a continuing military operation this week.

They were killed in a 35-minute encounter with the troops of 57th Infantry Battalion at around 9:30 in the evening in Brgy. Meta, Datu Unsay, Marautubunao.

A civilian resident relayed an information to the army that the group would mount an attack on the army detachment in retaliation of their setback in the continuing operation in Liguasan marsh.

Two bodies, identified as those of Turman Aber and Mansor Mohammad were recovered during clearing operation while the other bodies identified as those of Yaser Yusop, Meim Talib and certain alias Mamadu were brought by their

conrades to be buried in So Lada in Shariff Aguak Maguindanao.

Also recovered were M16 rifle, M653 rifle, M205 grenade launcher, magazines and ammunitions.

Another encounter transpired in Brgy Limpong, Datu Hoffer of the same province when other BIFF members attacked the military detachment in Brgy Limponce at around 9:00 pm on the same day with no casualties on the government side.

After the exchange of fire, riding mountaineer motorcycle men armed with M16 rifle fired atberately at a civilian community of the same barangay killing Ricky Udas, a resident in the area.

The 601st Brigade Commander Brig. Gen. Diosdado Carreon said the terror activities against military, police, and civilians were pre-empted "due to pro-active measures we have been conducting, with the help of the communities who denounce conflict and violent extremism." Mark Navales

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Beijing must discipline its coast guard

Recently, President Rodrigo Duterte and Chinese Ambassador Zhao Jianhua discussed China Coast Guard's abuses at Panatag Shoal in the West Philippine Sea on June 12 as the nation celebrated Independence Day.

Ironically, Zhao's presence at the celebration of the 120th anniversary of Philippine independence raised eyebrows and drew disapproving comments on social media, although he was just one of the foreign diplomats invited to the event. The controversy that Chinese coast guards are confiscating the catch of Filipino fishermen at Panatag Shoal, a rich fishing ground located 230 km from the coast of Zambales province, well within the Philippines' 370 km exclusive economic zone (EEZ) in the South China Sea is allegedly a controlled area

of China. He even contends that Chinese coast guards were not harassing Filipino fishermen and not confiscating their catch. "It is some sort of barter trade, which has been going on for quite some time," Zhao said, adding Chinese coast guards exchanged food and water for the Filipinos' fish.

The Independence Day this week has been the subject whether we really are free or not as a state away from external threats. The issue in SCS/WPS has been the ideal subject in social media abuzzing with pictures of Zhao talking with Pres. Duterte and Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana, with the caption for one photo noting the "irony" of celebrating freedom in Chinese shackles. The funny thing about the commenters is

that they hype the following statements: "Governor of the Philippines speaking with representatives of President Xi," a commenter said on Twitter.

Meanwhile, I believe the Philippines had brought up the matter with China and demanded Beijing to stop the unacceptable practice. On the allegation that China still controlled Panatag Shoal, we do not follow through that claim from outsiders. We still have it.

Eventually, we can see that China needs to take note of the complaint, and continue investigation on the issue of harassment. Beijing **MUST DISCIPLINE** coast guards who would be proven to have taken fish from Filipinos at Panatag Shoal. - **JUMEL G. ESTRANERO**, defense research analyst and college faculty

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Our ranks are thinning



WITH the passing of former National Security Adviser Roilo Golez, an important voice has been lost in the never-ending debate on how to respond to what China is doing in the South China Sea. A former naval officer who retired from the military service with the rank of Captain, he was one of those who understood what really was at stake with regard to the ongoing militarization of China of the SCS.

With China at our very doorstep, he believed that the country has basically lost the protection of the 600-mile-wide SCS that separates our country from the Asian mainland. Luzon can now be targeted in a matter of minutes.

This was what Roy and I talked about the last time I saw him in a coffee shop on my way home from Manila over a year ago. In contrast to Justice Carpio's concentration on the historical claim of China and the legal implications of the government's policy stance on the SCS, the issue with Roy was more on the security implications of what the administration is doing and the issue of transparency.

Roy was a graduate of the US Naval Academy in Annapolis, Maryland in 1970. He therefore belonged to the batch of officers commissioned into the regular force of the Armed Forces of the Philippines in 1970 from various sources like the US Service Academies, Philippine Military Academy, Australian Army Officer Candidate School, and people like myself who were directly commissioned into the regular force.

I first met Roy when we worked together in the then-Ministry of Transportation and Communications in the early 1980s. He was one of the whiz kids tapped by former President Ferdinand Marcos to run the Postal Service as the Postmaster General. He eventu-

ally retired from the service and then entered politics as a congressman representing one district of the City of Paranaque for many years but he never forgot his military roots and his passing is much too soon.

Two 1970 graduates from US Service Academies have now passed on to the great beyond. The late Major General Andy Floria, the 1970 graduate of West Point and now Roilo Golez. The 1970 ranks are thinning but some of us are still soldiering on. Roy Cimatu is still around as the Secretary of Environment and Natural Resources and Rudy Garcia, his Undersecretary. Egay Galvante is running the Land Transportation Office while Nesty Carolina is with the Philippine Veterans Administration.

"The rest of us soldier on."

This SCS debate has been going on for some time. It continues to simmer every time there is an incident like the Chinese coast guard confiscating the catch of some fishermen in an area that is clearly within our 200-mile exclusive economic zone. There are two sides of the story here. The government led by the President believes that it is better to be friendly with China than confrontational. This stems from the belief that there is no way our country can win a war with China and that in the President's own words, he refuses to send his soldiers simply to be slaughtered in a very one sided war. Quiet bilateral negotiations is also the better way to do it rather than the multilateral approach favored by the last administration.

With regard to exploiting the mineral resources in the area, it is also better to go for joint exploitation even if the mineral resources are in areas that is not contested

territory and clearly belongs to us.

The other side of the argument is led by senior justice Antonio Carpio, Golez and others. Their point is that by acquiescing to what China is doing, we might be losing on a technicality in any future legal battle. This side is also trying to point out that by protesting diplomatically to what China is doing, it does not mean that we are going to or want to go to war, a point which President Duterte inexplicably believes to be the case.

One belief is that it was the fault of the United States that China has occupied the whole of the SCS by not preventing China. The other is the sincere belief that in a shooting war, the President does not believe that Americans would be willing to go to war and die for Filipinos in spite of the fact that the US is a treaty ally. The result is that China has taken over the US as the most influential country currently represented in the Philippines today.

The Chinese Ambassador is now the center of attraction in social events instead of the US Ambassador. China's naval ships have been calling on our ports and just a few days ago, a military transport plane was suddenly allowed to land and refuel in Davao City of all places.

Any significance of this? Senator Panfilo Lacson raised some questions but Secretary Bong Go said that the landing was done with prior coordination.

One thing about the Chinese, they are very smart. They know exactly what they want and know how to go about getting it. They have promised billions of dollars in aid and soft loans to finance our on-going government infrastructure programs but we have not seen anything yet and the conditions of these soft loans have not yet been made public for the sake of transparency.

Our country's geographic location is of vital strategic importance to China because we stand in the way to their march to the Pacific Ocean.

Let us hope therefore that our country's leaders realize this and make the right policy decisions. Otherwise, we might be swallowed by China without even realizing it.

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Ignorance, confusion, deception

AS the opposition exploits to the hilt the China-threat card to delegitimize the Duterte government, I can't help but cringe when I hear some of our officials trying to sound learned by uttering things they don't really understand. Two exemplars of that kind: Magdalo party-list Rep. Gary C. Alejano and Vice President Leni Robredo. Meanwhile, Acting Chief Justice Antonio Carpio has deceived us again.

Recommending that we abandon bilateral talks with China, Alejano has suggested multilateral talks. "We should also resort to a multilateral approach... What China has been doing is that it's pulling the Philippines inside a room, talking bilaterally. All of us stakeholders don't know what they had talked about" (*Inquirer*, June 9, 2018).

Perhaps Alejano thinks that the transition from bilateral to multilateral talks would be just as easy as going out of one room and entering another. He needs a dose of reality to be drunk with a tall glass of education.

The first challenge that Alejano



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must overcome in order to make that transition is the consent of China to enter into multilateral talks. As I've written before, no country can be made to do something without its consent. That imperative can only be overcome by using force against a country from which consent isn't forthcoming. So, what's the plan of Alejano to get China to consent to enter into multilateral talks?

Furthermore, if Alejano thinks that multilateral talks will make the bargaining position of the Philippines against China stronger, he's mistaken. If he thinks the process would be faster through multilateral talks, he's delusional.

The decision-making process in

multilateral talks is often based on consensus, unless the parties to it agreed to a different one, such as majority decision. And any agreement reached through consensus is an agreement that needs the consent of all the parties. Thus, if China disagrees, the agreement won't push through.

In multilateral talks, the Philippines needs to persuade all the parties to agree to what it wants. These parties also have their own interests. They won't join the talks if they don't have their own set of demands that they want to fulfill. So, instead of just bargaining with China in a bilateral discussion, the Philippines will have to bargain with one or more other parties. And in this more complex negotiating context, the Philippines will have to compete with China.

Robredo is another case of a confused politician.

In a forum in Quezon City on June 11, she said: "If China successfully solidifies its presence within its nine-dash line, the Philippines will

lose effective control over its exclusive economic zone (EEZ)...” (GMA News Online, June 11, 2018).

In international law, “effective control” is one of the necessary conditions for acquiring and maintaining title to a territory. The consequence of effective control is the recognition that you have sovereignty over that territory. The EEZ, a recent international law concept that became operational after the UN Convention of the Law of the Sea (Unclos) came into force in 1994, is not part of a country’s territory. Since it’s not part of a country’s territory, the EEZ is not area where a country has sovereignty, of which it has full and absolute control. Thus, there’s no such thing in international law as “effective control” over the EEZ.

Last year, in my column of May 25, 2017 (“The Nicaraguan opinion wishful thinking”), I wrote about how Carpio deceived us in 2015 when he claimed that the United States complied with the International Court of Justice decision on

the case that Nicaragua filed against it in the 1980s. Now, he’s deceiving us about Scarborough Shoal.

On June 12, the *Manila Bulletin* quoted Carpio as saying that “the Philippines cannot invoke sovereign rights over the Panatag or Scarborough Shoal since the 2016 decision of the Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA) did not settle the dispute with China for lack of jurisdiction.”

He’s lying.

Nowhere in the decision can you find that Scarborough Shoal wasn’t outside the jurisdiction of the tribunal. If one reads the decision, the tribunal only found one issue over which it had no jurisdiction because it involves military activities, the stand-off in the Second Thomas Shoal.

The truth is the Philippines *never* asked the tribunal to declare that Scarborough Shoal is within our EEZ and therefore we have sovereign rights over the waters there. The Philippines argued the rights of our fishermen to operate there by using the concept of

“traditional fishing ground.”

These are the *only* things the Philippines asked for the tribunal to decide in relation to Scarborough Shoal; you can find its full list in paragraph 112 of the Arbitral Decision on Merits.

Our arbitration team, which included Carpio, asked the tribunal to declare that:

—“Scarborough Shoal generates no entitlement to an exclusive economic zone or continental shelf;

—China has violated its obligations under the convention to protect and preserve the marine environment at Scarborough Shoal...;

-- China has breached its obligations under the convention by operating its law enforcement vessels in a dangerous manner causing serious risk of collision to Philippine vessels navigating in the vicinity of Scarborough Shoal.”

Why is Carpio lying to us? *AC*

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Is China our new America?

THERE was a time, a vivid memory that still lingers in my mind, when speaking against Americans was seen as an act of ingratitude. Our elders talked about them like saviors descending from heaven, bringing us everything that is good and valued, from democracy to beauty pageants. Spain may have brought us Catholicism, but America brought Hollywood and basketball. And to many, that



ON THE CONTRARY
ANTONIO CONTRERAS

was all that mattered.

We worshipped the color white, even if the skin color of Americans is actually pale gray. We dreamt of going to America, that in our child-

hood banter we squeezed the rind of our native lemon on the eyes of playmates after asking them the question; "*Gusto mong makita ang Amerika?*" (Do you want to see America?)

Indeed, this childhood prank would be aptly symbolic. The acid from lemon rinds burned our eyes, in the same way that the reality of an America painted to us like heaven where pleasure seemed unlimited has also

brought us hell and a heavy painful price to pay.

America was hegemonic in our minds. For a long time, we had to displace and suspend our sense of self-worth if only to become its friend. We never minded being treated like a doormat, or an indicator country to get an idea of where it stands, with us becoming the face of its foreign policy in this part of the world.

► **ContrerasA5**

Is China our new America?

We had to be educated to keep expressing our gratitude for everything it has done for us, while we are taught to be silent and not to speak about its transgressions.

We sent our best and brightest to American universities for advanced degrees. And those who returned like me were expected to help propagate the American hegemony. Fortunately, many of us refused. Instead of being active bearers of American myth-making, we became agents for its interruption and deconstruction.

We may have been ingrates. But I saw the resources spent on me by America as a form of delayed justice, as a kind of payback for those massacred in Balangiga, for those young boys gunned down by American soldiers near their bases allegedly mistaken for wild pigs, and for denying us authorship of our own histories, and robbing us of our authenticity that we had to celebrate basketball instead of sepak takraw as our national pastime.

This is why the independent foreign policy that President Rodrigo Duterte promised became a powerful rallying symbol that made many who did not vote for him decide to eventually support him. The desire to make our country truly free from the dictates of any country was the beacon that made many forget his cursing and his misogyny, and marvel at his audacity to curse President Obama, and tell

America to shove it up the part of their anatomy where the sun never shines. He became the personification of the desire to see a Philippines that will no longer be a doormat of any other country.

This is precisely why it is distressing that while America may no longer be in our minds, the vacuum it left which is supposed to be swept clean by a kind of diplomacy—which I labeled in an earlier column as a form of creative destruction—appears to have a new occupant.

It is one thing to deal with China as a new venue to articulate our independent foreign policy, and for it to become an opportunity for us to chart a new path where we would not be repeating the same obsequiousness we exhibited towards America. Using China as leverage for us to be taken seriously in the region and the world was an attractive proposition.

However, there are indications that China has become our new America.

While China may not have directly colonized us as an imperial power, it is now flexing its muscles in the arena of trade and economic imperialism cast in diplomatic terms, through loans which while easy to access nevertheless come with high interest and risks. Chinese investments are bound to crowd our economy, even as Chinese migrant labor, both professional and otherwise, including

even the criminal, are expectedly not far behind.

And the China hegemony-building project is not even confined to economic and trade matters and focused on infrastructures consistent with its belt and road framework. Like America's Fulbright grants, Chinese universities have offered scholarships to young Filipino scholars to obtain their advanced degrees there. Some Philippine universities now use Chinese universities to benchmark, of all things, our liberal arts programs. Note that these are universities whose curricula are under the control of the state and which do not allow the teaching of some liberal arts concepts and theories.

And it is frightening to see a palpable gesture of acquiescence even among our leaders, the same one that we condemned when this was offered to America.

Shown evidence that our fisherfolk are being harassed by China's Coast Guard in the West Philippine Sea, an act which should instantly merit a strongly worded protest from any sovereign country, our officials instead appear to be more preoccupied justifying China's actions. The focus has shifted to recasting the act of stealing fish to being merely engaged in mutual acts of barter, when the real issue is the exercise of control and supervision of the Chinese Coast Guard

over Scarborough Shoal, over which we have traditional rights.

Authorities are also busy spinning the real story behind the refueling stop of a Chinese military aircraft in Davao. What is painted is a normal routine, when the real issue is whether the appropriate protocol was followed in handling a sensitive matter involving not a commercial flight on an urgent mayday request to land, but a scheduled refueling stop of a military aircraft. It is alleged that CAAP, which technically handles mainly civilian flights, coordinated with the Department of National Defense (DND) before the request to land to refuel was granted. Coordination implies prior notice, yet Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana admits he was only informed about the matter when the plane had already landed.

Sadly, those who criticize President Duterte's China policy are the ones questioned, instead of China's actions. They are labeled as ingrates and troublemakers, the way critics of America were labeled before.

America is no longer in our minds. The promise of a truly independent foreign policy should be reasserted, about which this government should be reminded. We cannot be truly independent if the space vacated by America will only be occupied by China, with our active consent.

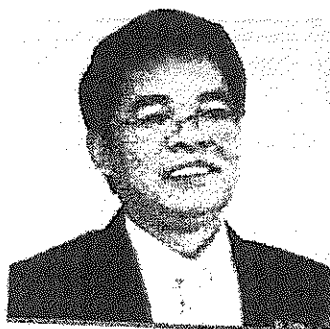
Behind the grim picture

Since last week, the Philippine media scenery, both main stream and social media, has been projecting an end-of-day sort for the country as if the administration's critics' warning of a Chinese invasion is in the offing.

First came the Chinese Coast Guard caught on video seizing the catch of local fishermen. Then came a Chinese military plane landing in Davao to refuel. Incidentally, the twin incidents happened before the country was to celebrate its 120th year of independence.

Of course, the administration's critics were quick to pounce on the issues, accusing President Rodrigo Duterte of being a Chinese lackey. Some imaginative minds even went on to say the Chinese military plane carried military package intended for use in the Philippines.

Firstly, as what both the Philippine and Chinese governments are saying, the Chinese



INSIDE CONGRESS

Charlie V. Manalo

Coast Guard incident is an isolated case. In fact, Chinese Ambassador to the Philippines Zhao Jianhua had assured the Philippine government that the members of the Chinese Coast Guard who were involved in that unfortunate incident would be punished. And we have to take their word for that this time unless we plan to start a war with them as what Magdalo Congressman Gary Alejano had been insinuating although he had since denied this.

How can one forget they had easily raised their white flags even as the first shot had to be fired during their Oakwood Mutiny?

Second, the apprehension of a Chinese invasion following the landing of their aircraft in Davao, well, let's just leave them to the fertile imagination of these critics.

But quite surprisingly, lost in the news of these alleged Chinese "incursions," was the actual assistance extended to us by the Chinese

government.

Last week, Filipino and Chinese officials led the groundbreaking of the P4.37-billion Chico River Pump Irrigation Project, a China-funded project seen to boost rice production.

Also, before the merry month of May ended, China's battery and electric vehicle maker BYD announced on Wednesday that it will provide the Philippines with the first-ever 10 electric buses which are expected to ply Manila's roads by next month.

Actually, two of the 10 electric buses have already been delivered while the rest are expected early in July.

While the acquisition of the all-electric buses is a private undertaking between BYD and Columbian Motors Corporation(CMC), one of the Philippines' largest bus manufacturers, it signifies China's willingness to impart with us their advancement in technology.

And with the all-electric buses, transportation in Metro Manila will be more environment-friendly, more convenient, healthier and safer, and it is much bigger and spacious than the ordinary buses plying the roads of Metro Manila

with its 80-passenger capacity.

Almost at the same time with the arrival of the first batch of the electric buses, BYD inked a deal with the Bataan provincial government to build a monorail transit.

The initial phase of the monorail, extending seven kilometers to the City of Balanga, is expected to ease the traffic congestion and optimize the transportation conditions in the city.

Powered by electricity, the monorail will not only address the traffic congestion but it will also build a green and environmental friendly public transport system.

Unfortunately, these items did not land in major local news outlets. If ever they did, they were not given that prominence as most media outlets feasted on the marketability of the grim scenario the administration's critics have painted.

Only a few brave to delve on the positive side of the picture as to how China, which they have portrayed as a forever villain, had actually been assisting the country as we trek the road to progress and development.

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8

METRO CORNER

HB 6475 Bangsamoro government



By **ERIK ESPINA**

(Conclusion)

“PASSING a law will not solve the problem. They have to be subjugated!”
Advice from a respected/veteran former senator, spoken in confidence.

The recent Independence Day celebration prompts confronting the very thesis of a manufactured Bangsamoro identity and government, contrasted to a traceable narrative of a people who must observe “national unity” as an elevated and preponderant value in maintaining the sinews of our republican heritage and territory. What is our identity as Filipinos worth? Our sense of community as a people, nation, over and beyond, linguistic variances? Our seminal tribal and socio-cultural cleavages the very fodder many colonials exploited. And we have not learned from this?

If we follow this fractious interpretation of history creating a Bangsamoro homeland, to include indigenous peoples skirted from the ideology, they are “Native/Original Filipinos,” then as a sovereign and united people we are riding a slippery slope unravelling national identity by religion and origin (Filipinos, Moros, and Lumads), balkanizing our territory, and deconstructing the republic via sub-states and ancestral/customary lands.

Senate Majority Floor Leader Miguel Zubiri was quoted as stating 150 amendments for the proposed BBL in the Upper House. The House approved version has made substantive amendments, e.g., entire Section 4, Delimitation of the Bangsamoro, deleting 25 years of periodic plebiscite every five years vs. creeping expansion; Art 3, Section 3, Contiguous Territory deleted; Bangsamoro Military Command of the AFP for the Bangsamoro and Sections 17-20 deleted; entire Sections

1-14 in the Public Order and Safety (Art. XI) replaced by Sec. 2 and 3 Nat'l Defense and Security Order and Safety and Coastguard Matters; Art V, Powers of Government Sec. 1., Reserved Powers by the National Government, increased to 20 from 9.

Even the terms have been amended, e.g. Bangsamoro Territory to Bangsamoro Geographical Area, Central Government to National Government, etc. The MILF, however, issued an early warning against water-

ing down the BBL as filament for continued war.

Reality on the ground as per my own research/discussions are that MNLF of Nur Misuari (OIC-recognized) is not on board. The sea-bound Tausugs, Samals, Badjaos, royal houses, etc. and IPs are also resistant to BBL. Not discounting an increasing Non-Muslim population – Ilongos, Ilocanos, Cebuanos in Southern and Northern Cotabato, etc., arming themselves and against the MILF Bangsamoro. 8



Firing Line

Robert B. Roque, Jr.

Independence Day

SEVERAL people were disappointed with the 120th anniversary celebration of our Independence Day last Tuesday in Kawit, Cavite led by President Duterte. They expected the Chief Executive to discuss the country's foreign threats to our independence, particularly China's harassment of our fishermen and navy.

Like many of his speeches, the President first talked about his advocacies against corruption and illegal drugs. He mentioned his efforts for peace with communist rebels. He also talked about the first Filipino hero Lapu-Lapu. These are all good.

What dismayed a number of listeners, however, was his failure to mention the West Philippine Sea issue and the alleged abuses that Filipinos continue to endure in the hands of the Chinese coast guard.

This was much-awaited since our country's recent note verbale against China which contained incidents such as the installation of missiles on Spratlys and the Chinese navy chopper's harassment of a Philippine Navy rubber boat transporting supplies to our soldiers on Ayungin Shoal last May 11.

Apart from this were the recent reports of continued maltreatment of Filipino fishermen by the Chinese coast guard on Panatag (Scarborough) Shoal in Zambales. Patrolling coast guards would regularly board their boats, choose the finest fish among their catch, and obtain as

many as they could without permis-

sion. This was all caught on video which was shown on television.

Some officials assured the fishermen that the Chinese authorities pledged to apply the full force of the law on those who would violate their laws and abuse the Filipinos. Although earlier, reports said some local officials were supposedly irked at the fishermen who chose to inform media.

Bear in mind that if these fishermen are forbidden to speak out their concerns, who in the world could they turn to? Are they fated to remain silent and simply accept the maltreatment?

In spite of the assistance given to the fishermen, our officials clarified that only small boats were allowed to fish in the area, not big fishing vessels.

This is a clear violation of the decision rendered by the international arbitration court saying that Filipinos, Chinese and our neighboring fishermen can catch fish on Scarborough Shoal although the area is within our country's exclusive economic zone (EEZ).

How can we even speak of independence when we have territories that remain under the control of foreigners?

* * *

SHORT BURSTS. For comments or reactions, email firingline@ymail.com or tweet @Side_View. Read current and past issues of this column at <http://www.tempo.com.ph/category/opinion/firing-line/>

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

ONLINE NEWS

14 JUNE 2018

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Army, NPA clash in Masbate town

Inquirer Southern Luzon / 01:11 PM June 13, 2018

LEGAZPI CITY – Army soldiers and suspected members of the New People’s Army (NPA) had an encounter in San Jacinto town in Masbate province early morning Wednesday.

Capt. Joash Pramis, spokesperson of the Army’s 9th Infantry Division, said government soldiers were on combat operation when they chanced upon NPA rebels in Barangay Bagacay around 6:30 a.m.

After the two-minute firefight, the rebels retreated, leaving behind an M635 assault rifle, assorted ammunition, improvised explosive device and a backpack.

Pramis said no casualties were reported on the government side. **MAR S. ARGUELLES**

Soldier killed in clashes with ex-BIFF gunmen in Maguindanao, N. Cotabato

05:19 AM June 13, 2018



MARSH ATTACK A drone shot shows soldiers on boats navigating a section of Liguasan Marsh in search of gunmen belonging to the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters. —CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

CAMP SIONGCO, Maguindanao — A soldier was killed in the military's three-day offensive against gunmen formerly allied with the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF) in the borders of Maguindanao and North Cotabato provinces.

The military on Tuesday confirmed the death of Pfc. Garry Quitar, a native of Pigcawayan, North Cotabato, and a member of the Army's 33rd Infantry Battalion (IB).

Quitar and his fellow soldiers were wading in a portion of the vast Liguasan Marsh when he was hit, said Lt. Col. Harold Cabunoc, 33rd IB commander.

"He volunteered as the point man of the patrol despite the high risks involved in the operations. His bravery will be emulated by the rest of my troops," Cabunoc said.

Brig. Gen. Cirilito Sobejana, commander of the 6th Infantry Division (ID) based here, said the government "lost a gentleman and a warrior" with Quitar's death. "He will never be forgotten," he said.

The military said the operations also resulted in the killing of 15 former BIFF gunmen under the command of Esmael Abdulmalik, also known as Abu Toraife.

Foreigners

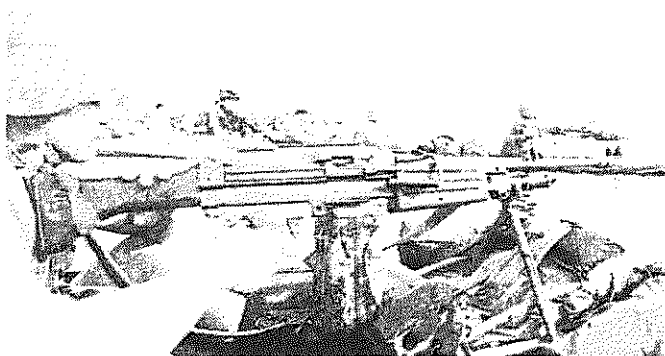
Abdulmalik had recently bolted BIFF to pledge allegiance to the Islamic State, a military report said. He now works with former BIFF commander Esmail Abubakar, known as Commander Bungos, it said.

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

Sobejana said their reports indicated that among the casualties on Abdulmalik's group could be five Indonesians and a Singaporean seen in the area as air and ground operations were being conducted on Sunday.

"They are confirmed to be with the terror group and could be among the 15 fatalities," Sobejana told the Inquirer. "They were our primary targets. We are still validating their identities."

Cabunoc said Abdulmalik's group had moved farther into the vast Liguasan Marsh that he and his men had to wade in chest-deep, murky water to find them.



BATTLE READY Government troops stay alert as they patrol Liguasan Marsh and its tributaries after conducting air and ground strikes in Maguindanao and North Cotabato provinces where BIFF members operate. —CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

"We are adapting in this new battlefield condition through innovations in tactics and equipment. We are drawing lessons from this experience," Cabunoc said.

He said some informants had also told him that Singaporean bomb expert Salahuddin Hassan, also known as Orak, and some foreign jihadists had eluded the bomb run and were still trapped in the area.

Hassan has been the target of military operations in the past after being allegedly involved in several attacks in Central Mindanao.

Separate attack

As the military continued to pursue Abdulmalik's group in Liguasan Marsh, BIFF gunmen attacked the military detachments in Datu Unsay and Datu Hoffer town on Monday night.

Capt. Arvin John Encinas, spokesperson for the 6th ID, said four BIFF gunmen were killed in the attacks, which he said were in retaliation for the military assault against Abdulmalik's group.

Encinas said the BIFF gunmen also shot and killed two residents of Barangay Limpogo in Datu Hoffer.

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

Displacement

Abu Misri Mama, BIFF spokesperson, admitted that their forces were behind the attacks but said only two of their members were killed.

The military operations displaced about 20,000 people from the towns of Pagalungan, Datu Montawal, Raja Buayan and SK Pendatun in Maguindanao, and Pikit in North Cotabato.

Education officials in Maguindanao's second congressional district, including the four towns where the military operations were being conducted, suspended classes starting Monday. More than 1,400 elementary pupils and a few hundred high school students had been affected by the suspension.

Lawyer Rasol Mitmug Jr., education secretary of the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao, said elementary teachers in the four towns had been instructed to help protect their pupils from harm.

Mitmug did not say when classes would resume, but noted that some of the public schools in Pagalungan, Datu Montawal, Raja Buayan and SK Pendatun were being used as evacuation centers. —**Karlos Manlupig and Edwin Fernandez**

Troops told to keep hitting BIFF: AFP official

By Priam Nepomuceno June 13, 2018, 11:56 am

MANILA -- Military units now conducting operations against the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF) in Maguindanao are ordered to keep on hitting the terrorist group.

"(Sustain operations against the) BIFF until *hindi na sila makapag*-conduct ng (they can no longer conduct) counter-offensive and offensive operations," Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) public affairs office chief Col. Noel Detoyato said Tuesday.

He added that this order was given by AFP chief-of-staff Gen. Carlito Galvez, Jr. Also, military commanders are ordered to ensure that every operation will result in the ejection of BIFF in areas where operation are being held.

"*Binigyan niya ang mga commanders ng mga* (He has given commanders) operational goals and standards *na dapat may naki-clear kayo na mga areas* (that there must be areas that are cleared in) every operation, *so ang ginagawa nya dapat may* (so there must be an) extra push towards operations, extra push towards the positive contribution to the AFP mission, ang AFP mission is to clear all security threats, defeat *pero* (but), while it is being done, *meron ding* (there must also be) peace efforts," Detoyato added.

Operations against the BIFF started last June 10 after military units bombed suspected terrorist positions, including an improvised explosive device factory near the Linguasan Marsh, Maguindanao.

Military operations have so far neutralized dozens of the BIFF while wounding an undetermined number. **(PNA)**