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TABLE OF CONTENTS

26 JUNE 2018

Weather Forecast- http://pagasa.dost.gov.ph/weather/daily-weather-forecast		
Page Nr.	Title	Source
NATIONAL NEWS		
1-2	Ombudsman indicts Abaya over MRT deal	Phil. Star p.1
3-4	Palace defends Du30's God rant	PDI p.A1
AFP/ SECURITY RELATED NEWS		
5-6	US defense chief seeks less contentious visit with Chinese	PDI p.A8
7	Palace: Rody won't change SCS policy	Phil. Star p.1
8	President will not apologize for policy of friendship with China	Mla. Bulletin p.2
9	Mattis visits China amid Korea talks	Mla. Times p.B6
10	'Aquino militarized West PH Sea'	Mla. Times p.A2
11	Aquino blamed for China militarization in SCS	Mla. Standard p.A2
12	Roque has a new version of the Panatag takeover	Malaya p.B1
13	2 teenagers drown in San Ildefonso	Mla. Bulletin p.5
14	PAF gets 2 planes from Indonesia	Mla. Bulletin p.2
15	PAF acquires 2 new light lift planes	Tribune p.13
16	Retired AFP official named DND asec	Malaya p.B2
17	AFP: DU30 told Reds can't be trusted	PDI p.A5
18	Rights group calls for Phi's removal from UNHRC	Phil. Star p.6
19	OPAPP to consult public on talks with Reds	Phil. Star p.7
20	6 cops killed in misencounter with Army soldiers	Phil. Star p.1
21	Army men kill 6 cops in 'misencounter'	Mla. Standard p.A1
22	6 cops killed by soldier in mis-encounter in Samar	Malaya p.B1
23	6 cops dead in Army-PNP 'misencounter'	Tribune p.3
24	Police vs Army: 6patay, 9 sugatan!	Ngayon p.9
25	6 pulis patay, 9 sugatan sa Army	PM p.2
26	AFP: Reds' strength dwindling	Tribune p.1
27	NPA burns roadwork equipment in Zambales	Mla. Bulletin p.5
28	NPA burns equipment in Zambales town	Mla. Times p.A7
29	Transport strike cripples 3 Bicol provinces	Mla. Times p.A7
30	Government cautioned on forging truce with communists	Malaya p.B4
31	8 soldiers wounded in Sulu clash with Abus	Phil. Star p.12
32	ASG sub-leader captured in Sulu	Mla. Bulletin p.7
33	Twin blasts injure 8 soldiers, 6 civilians	Mla. Times p.A7
34	8 troops hurt in Sulu blast	Tribune p.12
35	Radio station employee shot dead in Marawi	Mla. Bulletin p.7

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

EDITORIAL/OPINION/COMMENTARY

36	Drug-test officials before school kids	Phil. Star p.8
37	From dragon poker to whisperer	Mla. Times p.A6
38-39	What's wrong with Bello and Robredo?	Tribune p.5
40	Sison's 'worst nightmare'	Tribune p.5

ONLINE NEWS

41	6 cops killed, 9 wounded in alleged misencounter with Army in Samar	www.gmanews.com
42	6 policemen killed, 6 more hurt in Samar misencounter	www.inquirer.net
43-44	Samar 'misencounter' kills 6 cops, wounds 9 others	www.pna.gov.ph

Ombudsman indicts Abaya over MRT deal

Mar, Abaya, 7 others cleared of plunder

From Page 1

By ELIZABETH MARCELO

The Office of the Ombudsman has ordered the filing of a graft case against former transportation secretary Joseph Emilio Abaya and 16 others in connection with the P4.25-billion contract awarded to Busan Universal Rail Inc. (BURI) for the upgrade and maintenance of the Metro Rail Transit Line 3 (MRT-3).

In an 88-page consolidated resolution dated May 3, 2018 approved by Ombudsman Conchita Carpio-Morales on June 21, the ombudsman said its special panel of investigators found probable cause to charge Abaya and 16 other respondents with violation of Section 3 (e) of Republic Act 3019 or the Anti-Graft and Corrupt Practices Act.

In the same resolution,

however, the ombudsman dismissed the plunder complaint against Abaya and his predecessor Mar Roxas "for lack of probable cause."

Also cleared of plunder charges were seven other former Cabinet officials during the previous Aquino administration: Florencio Abad (budget), Cesar Purisima (finance), Jericho Petilla (energy), Mario

Turn to Page 2

Montejo (science), Voltaire Gazmin (defense), Rogelio Sirugson (public works) and Arsenio Balisacan (economic development)

All the Cabinet secretaries were named in the plunder complaint for being then members of the Government Procurement Policy Board. The complaint was filed in November last year by the Department of Transportation (DOTr) represented by its undersecretary for legal affairs and procurement Reinir Paul Yebra, legal services director Giovanni Lopez and lawyer Mark Steven Pastor.

The ombudsman said the complainants "adduced no evidence showing that either Roxas or Abaya, or any of their co-respondents" had amassed, accumulated or acquired ill-gotten wealth of at least P50 million, the threshold amount of public funds for a crime to be considered as plunder.

The ombudsman said there was also no evidence to prove that at least P50 million of the funds for the MRT-3 upgrade and maintenance were diverted to the possession of Roxas or Abaya, or to any of their co-respondents.

Graft vs Abaya, et al.

On the other hand, the ombudsman has found merit in the graft complaints filed last year by the DOTr and several progressive groups, including the Anti-Trafo Movement, Bagong Alyansang Makabayan (Bayan), Bayan Muna party-list and Train Riders Network.

The ombudsman said its investigation revealed that Abaya conspired with other then officials of MRT-3 and of the Department of Transportation and Communications (DOTC, now DOTr) in giving unwarranted benefit, advantage or preference to BURI by awarding to it the contract totaling P4,251,900,000 despite the firm's "lack of eligibility and qualifications" to carry out the long-term project.

"In sum, the Busan JV (Joint Venture) was not technically, legally and financially capable to undertake the MRT-3 long-term maintenance contract. Despite its being unqualified, the contract was still awarded to it by the DOTr in violation of Section 53 of the Revised Implementing Rules and Regulations of RA 9184 (Government Procurement Reform Act) which requires that in negotiated procurement, the procuring entity should negotiate with a technically, legally and financially capable supplier, contractor or consultant," the ombudsman's resolution read.

The P4.25-billion contract included maintenance of the MRT-3 system for three years; general overhauling of 43 units of light rail vehicles; total replacement of the signaling system and additional maintenance works.

The ombudsman said it was on Dec. 21, 2015 when the MRT-3 Bid- and Awards Committee (BAC) issued a resolution recommending the awarding of the entire project to Busan JV.

The contract was signed by DOTC, MRT-3 and Busan JV on Jan. 7, 2016.

Busan JV was then composed of five firms – Edison Development and Construction, Framat Mercantile Inc., TMI Corp. Inc., Castan Corp. and BURL.

The ombudsman said the records showed that the contract was already awarded to Busan JV even before its incorporation. It added that instead of submitting a valid joint venture agreement (JVA), Busan JV was allowed to simply submit a Certificate of Registration of BURI as a Special Purpose Company (SPC).

"The action becomes even more suspect as it was respondent DOTr Assistant Secretary for Procurement (Camille) Alcaraz who wrote the Securities and Exchange Commission to facilitate the registration of Busan JV as an SPC," the ombudsman said.

BURL, according to the ombudsman, is a totally different entity that lacked at least 15 years of continuous experience required for the project.

The ombudsman said BURI's "ineptitude" to implement the project was highlighted by the Commission on Audit in its 2016 Consolidated Annual Audit Report, in which the COA said the "DOTr still failed to provide the riding public with a safe and comfortable transport system even with the procurement and delivery from August 2015 to January 2017 of 48 new LRVs, (which) remain unoperational due to glitches in the power supply and signaling system."

The COA report also showed that the MRT-3 encountered 2,619 incidents of rain removals, 63 incidents of service interruptions and 586 incidents passenger loadings for 2016, an increase of 19.81 percent, 26 percent and 163.96 percent, respectively, from 2014.

The three-year contract was supposed to end in January 2019 but it was ordered terminated by the DOTr on Nov. 6 last year.

"There is a given authority and responsibility to Abaya as DOTr secretary to regulate the acts of the DOTr officials responsible for the procurement of the MRT-3 long-term maintenance contract and he cannot simply evade such responsibility by invoking reliance on his subordinates, especially considering

that the subject contract is one with a scope and magnitude affecting a big portion of the commuting public in Metro Manila, with an accompanying financial impact on the coffers of the government amounting to more than P4 billion," the ombudsman's resolution read.

"By allowing the award of the contract to the Busan JV despite the attendant glaring irregularities, Abaya deliberately ignored applicable laws, rules and regulations and standard operating procedures, falling short of or disregarding the required competence expected of him in the performance of his official functions," it added.

Aside from Abaya, ordered charged with graft before the Sandiganbayan were former transportation under-secretaries Edwin Lopez (operations), Rene Limcaoco (planning/head of negotiating team), Catherine Jennifer Gonzales (procurement and administration/vice head of the negotiating team), as well as former DOTC-MRT-3 general manager Roman Buenafe, assistant secretary for procurement and BAC chair Camille Alcaraz, former BAC vice chair Ofelia Astrera and BAC members Charissa Eloisa Opuencia, Oscar Bongon and Jose Rodante Sabayle.

Also ordered charged were BURI incorporators Eldon Ferdinand Uy, Elizabeth Velasco, Belinda Tan, Brian Velasco, Antonio Borromeo, Jun Ho Hwang and Elpidio Uy.

'Unfortunate'

In a statement, Abaya's spokesperson Enricka Gonzalez said the former transportation secretary has yet to receive a copy of the resolution.

"We have received the news through media that the Office of the Ombudsman has decided against former DOTC secretary Jun Abaya and his team. We find this decision unfortunate, considering that Sec. Jun clearly laid out his defense against the poorly crafted and unsubstantiated complaint filed by the DOTr," Gonzalez said.

"Secretary Abaya will consult with his lawyers once they receive an official copy of the decision about his next course of action," she added.

'It's about time'

Malacañang welcomed the indictment of Abaya, saying someone should be held accountable for the suffering commuters.

"It is about time and we appreciate that. If you recall, if no one is charged we will release the documents one-one," presidential spokesman Har Roque said at a press briefing in Cayan de Oro.

"But since the ombudsman has made a decision, it is about time someone faced accountability, especially for the corruption of funds allotted for the MRT that is causing suffering to commuters he added.

Meanwhile, Sen. Grace Poe, who chairs the Senate committee on public services that investigated the anomalous MRT maintenance contracts, welcomed the findings of the ombudsman.

She said the ombudsman's decision would boost "the fight to make erring public officials accountable for the failure to exercise the highest degree of diligence in the performance of the duties."

The senator said the findings were consistent with the conclusion of the report submitted by her committee, which observed "the badges of negligence and inactions of the DOTr officials led by Abaya indicating insensitivity, callous indifference and acts disadvantageous to the commuters, to the Filipino public and to the government with regard to the malfunction problem of the MRT."

"These cases are a reminder to everyone that graft is a serious offense. While we lament that the same is bailable, let this be a lesson to everyone in government that every public officer has accountability for each and every contract that they enter into behalf of the Filipino people," Poe said.

Bayan also welcomed the ombudsman's resolution.

"We filed the complaint in November 2017 on behalf of commuters and taxpayers. These maintenance contracts involving what we alleged are unqualified providers were partly to blame for the sorry state of the MRT-3," Bayan secretary-general Renato Reyes said.

"We are still a long way from achieving justice for commuters and taxpayers but we hope that the case will lead to genuine accountability," he added.

Reyes said the Duterte government should also examine the policy of privatizing the train system, its functions and maintenance, adding, "This has been routinely abused by both government officials and private groups to the detriment of the commuters and taxpayers."

— With Alexis Romero, Paolo Romero, Rhodina Villanueva, Rudy Santos

PALACE DEFENDS DU30'S GOD RANT

Justifying President Duterte's 'God is stupid' remark that many consider blasphemous, Malacañang officials say it's a matter of freedom of religion and freedom of speech.

**By Christine O. Avendaño
and DJ Yap**
@Team Inquirer

President Duterte was expressing a "personal belief" when he called God "stupid," Malacañang said on Monday amid public uproar over what many denounced as a "blasphemous" rant.

One senator called Mr. Duterte

"evil" and his remark blasphemous, while other lawmakers hoped the President would atone for his sins, apologize and stop distracting the public from pressing issues with his rants.

"That's his personal belief. Individuals are entitled to their personal beliefs. That's the nature of freedom of religion," presidential spokesperson Harry Roque said in Cagayan de

Oro City, responding to the furor over Mr. Duterte's comment.

"I think the President has a personal spirituality but that is up to him, and there is no need for one to interpret it," Roque said in a TV interview.

The Palace official tried to place the President's remark in context by saying it could have arisen from his traumatic experience of sexual mo-

lestation at the hands of a priest when he was in high school.

"This is an issue that the Church should face and it must be really that by chance the victim is a President," said Roque, who called for an investigation of abuses by priests.

Speaking in Davao City on Friday, Mr. Duterte questioned the basis for belief in God and the concept of the original sin.

A2

FROM A1

"Who is this stupid God? You created something perfect and then you think of an event that would destroy the quality of your work. How can you rationalize that God? How can you believe him? So now we're all born with an original sin. Even in the womb, we already have sin. What kind of religion is that?" he said.

Sen. Antonio Trillanes IV said he was joining the nation "in expressing outrage against Mr. Duterte's verbal attack against Christianity and God himself."

Mr. Duterte practically spat on the faithful in a country that is predominantly Roman Catholic, Trillanes said.

"It is the height of arrogance of power not only to disrespect and spit on an individual's faith

but also to act as though he is a god," he said in a statement.

"It should be clear now to everyone that Duterte is one evil man," he added.

In reaction, Roque said: "Trillanes appears fixated on identifying devils on Earth. I guess he's now the ghost buster."

Crossing the line

Sen. Panfilo Lacson on Sunday suggested that Mr. Duterte had crossed the line with his harsh comments about God. He said he hoped the President would be forgiven and be made to account for all his sins.

"May my God forgive him and make him atone for all his sins," Lacson, an administration ally, said in a statement.

Sen. Risa Hontiveros said what was objectionable about the President's comments was not only that it insulted the Catholic faith, but that "it has



Harry Roque

nothing to do with government programs and with policy."

"These are just stream-of-consciousness ramblings and rantings . . . [that] distract us from burning issues," Hontiveros said over ANC.

Apology

She said it seemed Mr. Duterte made the comments to

deflect attention from recent controversies facing his administration, including "priest killings, extrajudicial killings, corruption and incompetence."

Sen. Sherwin Gatchalian said he was confident that Mr. Duterte would apologize once he realized that his words had hurt many Catholics.

Activist priest Robert Reyes urged Catholic bishops to adopt a stronger stance on attacks against the Church.

Pastoral letter

"He (Mr. Duterte) has proven himself to be a murderer. There is no more time. He is a murderer. He is a blasphemer. He has declared war against the Catholic Church," Reyes told reporters during the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines' commemoration of the abolition of the death penalty.

The Brotherhood of Chris-

tian Businessmen and Professionals (BCRP) issued a pastoral letter expressing concern about Mr. Duterte's rants.

"These should not be allowed to pass without our community taking a stand for our Lord Jesus Christ and for the Catholic Church to which we belong," it said.

A Christian pastor called for a sober discussion.

Panelo defense

"Is the President denouncing the idea that there is a God? I don't think so. Is he confused as to the idea of who God really is? That's an obvious yes. Does his confusion stem from a bad experience with religion and wrong doctrines taught him while growing up? Yes. So given those things, how do we help him? That's for everyone of us to decide," Destiny Church senior pastor Leo Carlo Panfilio said on Facebook.

Chief presidential legal counsel Salvador Panelo said Mr. Duterte's remarks were not blasphemous.

"He didn't call God stupid. What he said was the theory of creation as expounded by the writers of the Bible is a stupid proposition," Panelo said in a statement.

"That's a personal thing to him. You mean to tell me a President will be divested of his right to express his own opinion on matters of religious and politics? I don't think so," he said.

In October 2016, five months after he was elected to the presidency, Mr. Duterte spoke of how improbable his victory was, given that he had no financial resources and a national political machinery: "I tend to believe now that it was God who gave it to me." —WITH REPORTS FROM JULIE M. AURELIO, TINA G. SANTOS AND JODEEA A. AGONCILLO INQ

FOCUS ON MORE STRATEGIC SECURITY ISSUES

US DEFENSE CHIEF SEEKS LESS CONTENTIOUS

VISIT WITH CHINESE

EIELSON AIR FORCE BASE, ALASKA—Defense Secretary Jim Mattis laid out plans for a less contentious, more open dialogue with Chinese leaders as he travels to Asia, less than a month after he slammed Beijing at an international conference for its militarization of islands in the South China Sea.

Speaking to reporters on Sunday en route to a stop in Alaska, Mattis avoided any of the sharp criticism of China that he had voiced recently.

Instead, he insisted that he was going into the talks with Chinese leaders without any preconceived notions, adding he wanted to focus on larger, more strategic security issues.

According to officials, a key topic of the discussions later this week will be the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula and the role China can play, considering its long-standing friendship with North Korea.

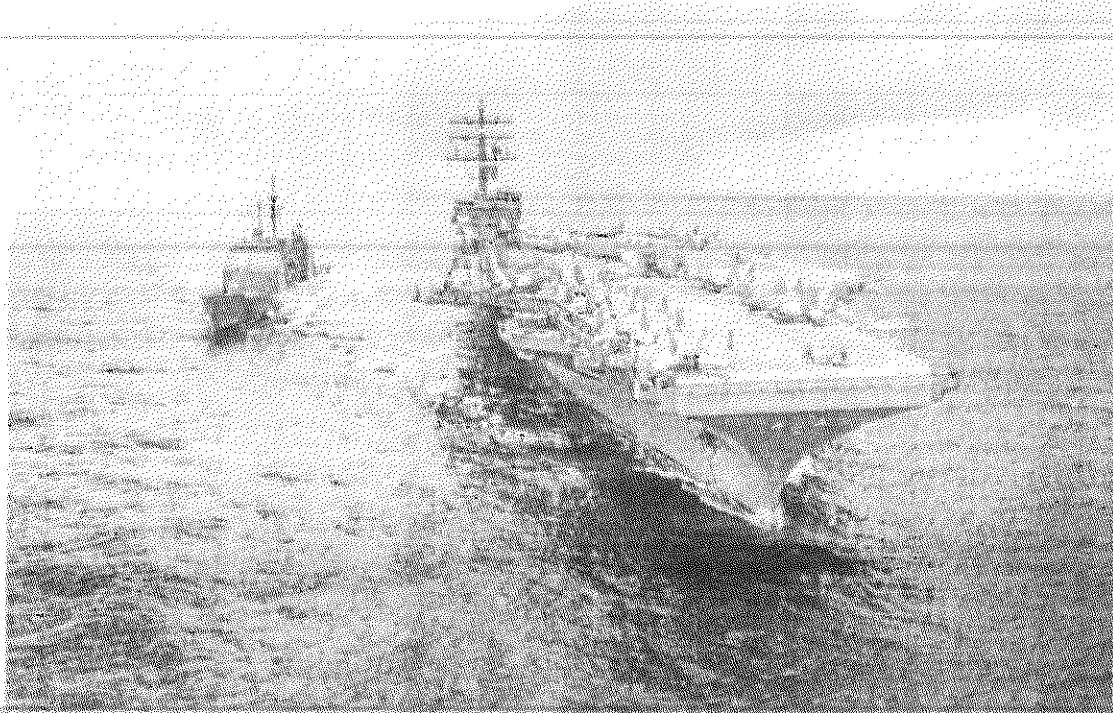
"I want to go in right now without basically poisoning the well at this point. I'm going there to have a conversation," Mattis told reporters on his plane.

"I do not want to immediately go in with a certain preset expectation of what they are going to say. I want to go in and do a lot of listening," he added.

Mattis' more diplomatic tack reflects the US administration's recognition of China's crucial influence on Korea as negotiations move ahead to get North Korea to abandon its nuclear program.

US-China irritants

One senior US official said that while Mattis would willing-



REFUELING IN PH WATERS The USS Antietam, a Ticonderoga-class guided-missile cruiser, pulls alongside the USS Ronald Reagan, the US Navy's forward-deployed aircraft carrier, during a refueling on Thursday in the Philippine Sea. —AFP

ly lay out America's position on China's military buildup in the South China Sea and other points of contention, the Pentagon chief didn't want to open the conversations with "the irritants."

Instead, the goal is to have higher quality talks about the two countries' military relationship, according to the official, who spoke on condition of anonymity.

Last month, however, Mattis abruptly disinvited China from a multinational exercise in the Pacific that will begin in a few days—in retribution for Beijing putting weapons systems on man-made islands in the South China Sea.

And days later, he publicly threatened "much larger consequences in the future" if the militarization continued.

Missile deployment

China recently has deployed antiship missiles, surface-to-air missiles, electronic jammers and other equipment on the Spratly Islands, and landed a bomber aircraft on Woody Island.

China says it is within its right to build up defenses on islands in the South China Sea that it believes are its sovereign territory.

Many nations fear that Beijing will use the construction on the islands to extend its military

reach and potentially try to restrict navigation in the South China Sea.

It's all but certain the Chinese will raise those issues with Mattis, as well as Beijing's long-held opposition to increasing US contacts with Taiwan. China claims the self-ruled island as its territory.

Focus on North Korea

For the United States, however, North Korea will be a primary topic in the talks with senior Chinese leaders.

And while the United States would like to see China use its influence to reinforce the denuclearization negotiations with North Korea, it also wants Bei-

jing to remain committed to enforcing sanctions against Pyongyang, as part of the pressure campaign.

China also is pleased that the United States has suspended any major military exercises with South Korea as part of the nuclear negotiations.

Mattis said on Sunday that the Pentagon canceled two Marine military exchanges as well as the larger Ulchi Freedom Guardian exercise this fall, because the defense department considered them consistent with what President Donald Trump and North Korean leader Kim Jong-un had agreed on at the summit about two weeks ago.

The United States has also long been frustrated that China doesn't share much information about any war scenarios or other contingencies it has in place in the event of a conflict on the Korean Peninsula or the collapse of the North Korean government.

By improving its relationship with Beijing, Washington believes it could better prepare for any problems and be able to coordinate more effectively with the Asian giant.

7th trip to Asia

This is Mattis' first trip to China, both personally and as defense secretary.

Mattis has traveled to Asia seven times during his 17-month tenure as defense secretary, and this marks his third visit so far this year.

In addition, Mattis will travel to South Korea and Japan to meet with his defense counterparts as well as other national leaders. —AP

Palace: Rody won't change SCS policy

By ALEXIS ROMERO

There's no way President Duterte will change his policy on the West Philippine Sea or apologize for it, his spokesman said yesterday, at the same time blaming the previous Aquino administration for triggering the militarization of Panatag (Scarborough) Shoal.

"When we had a confrontation with the Chinese, they drove us away from Panatag. Let's not forget it was president Aquino who militarized it. He sent the Navy so the Chinese never left," Roque said in Filipino at a press briefing in Cagayan de Oro City.

He was referring to a standoff at Panatag Shoal in 2012 that ended up with China taking control of the shoal and preventing Filipinos from fishing in the area.

Navy ship *BRP Gregorio del Pilar* was trying to accost Chinese poachers when it was stopped from doing so by Chinese surveillance vessels.

Roque was commenting on acting Chief Justice Antonio Carpio's chiding the President for insisting that asserting the Philippines' sovereignty over the West Philippine Sea would only divide the nation.

Duterte is being criticized for not challenging China's aggressive moves in the West Philippine Sea. In his speeches, Duterte had

Turn to Page 3

Palace From Page 1

repeatedly voiced his aversion to antagonizing a powerful China. He said confronting China militarily would surely result in a massacre of Filipino soldiers.

Carpio insisted Filipinos asserting the country's territorial rights have never called for a war with China.

Carpio, in a speech before graduating students of the University of the Philippines National College of Public Administration and Governance last Friday, also cited the need to "resist any and all attempts to weaken the nation" in defending its national territory and maritime zones.

"The President would not apologize for that (policy). If we use violence just like what president Aquino did, which led to the occupation by the Chinese of the Panatag... a military conflict would ensue and that is what we are trying to avoid," Roque said.

The shoal, a traditional fishing ground, is situated 124 nautical miles off Zambales and is within the Philippines' exclusive economic zone.

China claims about 90 percent of the South China Sea while the Philippines, Vietnam, Malaysia, Brunei and Taiwan have overlapping claims.

China's claim was voided by an international arbitral tribunal in 2016 but the Chinese government has refused to recognize the ruling. The tribunal's decision stemmed from a complaint filed by the Aquino administration contesting China's "excessive" and "exaggerated" claim.

Roque said Duterte's policy has led to bilateral cooperation with China, which is now providing military and development aid to the Philippines.

Roque also insisted that international law does not bar Chinese aircraft from landing in the Philippines.

"All aircraft, provided that they asked for a permit, are allowed to refuel. I do not know of any prohibitions in the International Law that bars Chinese planes from using airports if they are allowed by the host country," the spokesman said in Filipino.

Last Saturday, a Chinese plane again landed in Davao City to refuel but officials claimed all local protocols were observed. The landing happened two weeks after a Chinese military aircraft landed in the city.

Tell the people

President Duterte should tell the public if his administration has special arrangements with China regarding the refueling of its aircraft, a party-list lawmaker said.

"Why do Chinese military aircraft refuel in President Duterte's hometown in Davao City amid the West Philippine Sea dispute and lack of any military agreement with China?" asked Anakpawis party-list Rep. Ariel Casilao in a statement yesterday.

Casilao said "Davao City is becoming a logistical hub for China."

He urged the people to "actively protest the transforming of the country as Chinese military base in the region" and

press Duterte "to disclose his arrangements and concessions

with the foreign superpower."

— With Ding Cervantes

President will not apologize for policy of friendship with China

By ARGYLL CYRUS B. GEDUCOS

Malacañang said President Duterte is not apologizing for his decision to be friendly with China claiming that the policy is said to be one of the solutions to resolve the dispute in the South China Sea.

Presidential Spokesperson Harry Roque made the statement after Supreme Court Acting Chief Justice Antonio Carpio said that war was never

an option whenever the Philippines asserted its sovereignty in the West Philippine Sea.

In a press briefing in Cagayan de Oro, Roque said that the use of force against China will only lead to a military misunderstanding with the Asian giant.

The Palace official also said that President Benigno Aquino III's decision to deploy the Navy to the Scarborough Shoal is the main reason why

Chinese forces are also there and never left.

"The President will not apologize for that. If we will use force like what President Aquino did, it will only result in a military understanding and that is what we are trying to avoid," Roque said in Filipino.

He appealed to critics to let President Duterte express his sentiments on the issue as after all, he is the chief author of the country's foreign policy.

MATTIS VISITS CHINA AMID KOREA TALKS

ETHELSON AIR FORCE BASE, United States: US Secretary of Defense James Mattis will make his first visit to China this week amid rising tensions between the two countries but also a deep need for Beijing's support in nuclear talks with North Korea.

Mattis told reporters Sunday (Monday in Manila) he wants to "take measure" of China's strategic ambitions after it positioned weaponry on disputed islets in the South China Sea and is seeking to project its military power deep into the Pacific.

But in a four-day trip that will also include South Korea and Japan, the Pentagon chief also hopes to confirm China's commitment to pressuring North Korea to give up its nuclear weapons, after historic talks between President Donald Trump and Kim Jong Un in Singapore.

Mattis has visited Asia seven times in his 17 months since becoming defense secretary, but not China. He has yet to meet the new Chinese defense minister, Wei Fenghe.

The United States, China, Japan and South Korea "have a common goal. The complete, irreversible and verifiable denuclearization of

the Korean peninsula," Mattis said.

In Beijing From Tuesday to Thursday, Mattis will meet with senior Chinese defense officials.

He said the talks in Beijing seek to scope out China's long-term strategic intentions and determine possible areas of military-to-military cooperation.

Then he will travel to Seoul for talks with his South Korean counterpart Song Young-moo, followed by a stop Friday in Japan to see

defense chief Itsunori Onodera.

Those meetings are aimed at reassuring both allies that Washington's regional defense commitment remains unchanged after Trump unexpectedly announced on June 12 that the US would suspend a major joint military exercise in South Korea following his meeting with Kim.

The visit to China comes amid bilateral strains that cross multiple sectors. The Trump administration is challenging China on trade, theft of

industrial secrets, and cyber threats.

In the defense sector, China's decision to position military hardware in built-up atolls in the South China Sea has sparked new security concerns throughout Southeast Asia.

Signaling Washington's displeasure, in May the Pentagon disin- vited China from the 2018 Rim of the Pacific Exercise, in which some two dozen navies train together for mostly civilian missions. **AFP**

'Aquino militarized West PH Sea'

BY RALPH U. VILLANUEVA

IT was the administration of President Benigno Aquino 3rd that first militarized the West Philippine Sea (South China Sea), which led to the heightened Chinese presence in the disputed waters, Malacañang said on Monday.

In a news briefing in Cagayan de Oro City, Palace spokesman Harry Roque Jr. cited the move of President Rodrigo Duterte's predecessor to deploy the country's biggest warship to Panatag (Scarborough) Shoal in 2012 to block Chinese vessels from the rich fishing area.

"Just to be realistic, if we will use violence like what Aquino did, which is the reason behind the Chinese presence in the Panatag [Shoal] — the deployment of the Navy ship — will result in a military standoff that we are dodging," Roque said.

"Let us not forget that it was [former] President Aquino who first militarized [West Philippine Sea] when he brought the Philippine Navy [there]. That is why the Chinese never left the Scarborough," Roque said.

Roque said Duterte would not apologize for his softer approach

against China and stand by his pronouncements that war would break out if the Philippines took a hard-line approach on the dispute.

"The [issue on the] disputed islands, we have to resolve this through diplomacy and we cannot have diplomacy if you are fighting the side that you need to talk to in order to resolve the disputed islands," Roque added.

Roque's statement came after Acting Chief Justice Antonio Carpio said remarks criticizing Duterte's constant warning that

fighting for the country's sovereignty in the West Philippine Sea would lead to war with China.

Carpio, during the graduation ceremony of the University of the Philippines National College of Public Administration and Governance on Friday, said the President's statements were divisive.

Roque said: "[The President] is an author of the foreign policy. His consistent position is we will not give away any territories and we will not fight."

Critics of the Duterte government's

stance on the sea dispute want the President to insist on the United Nations-backed Permanent Court of Arbitration ruling that thrashed China's "nine-dash claim" on the entire South China Sea in July 2016.

The ruling declared that Filipino fishermen should enjoy fishing rights at Panatag Shoal and that the Spratly Islands, as well as the Panaganiban (Mischief) Reef, Ayungin (Second Thomas) Shoal and Recto Bank, are all within the 200-nautical-mile exclusive economic zone of the Philippines. AV

Aquino blamed for China militarization in SCS

MALACANANG on Monday continued to blame the "militarization" of the South China Sea on former President Benigno Aquino III as it defended President Rodrigo Duterte's decision to be friendly with China to resolve the dispute over the area.

Presidential Spokesman Harry Roque said the situation in the West Philippine Sea or South China Sea would not have worsened had Aquino not sent the Philippine Navy's biggest warship to ward off Chinese poachers in Scarborough Shoal or Panatag Shoal in 2012.

President Rodrigo Duterte has been criticized for his friendliness to China despite the latter's aggressive moves in the West Philippine Sea.

He has said antagonizing China over the dispute will bring the Philippines no good as

it cannot counter Beijing's military might.

He can declare war on China but the Filipino soldiers will only be massacred by the well-equipped Chinese soldiers.

"Why will I go to war for a battle that I cannot win?" Duterte has repeatedly said in his speeches.

Roque said sending a Philippine Navy ship to Panatag shoal would only antagonize the Chinese and would only lead to another argument.

"Let's not forget that it was President Aquino who first militarized the area by sending the Navy, that's why the Chinese won't leave the place now," Roque said.

Panatag Shoal or Scarborough shoal was the site of a 2012 standoff between the Philippines and China. The standoff erupted when Manila sent its biggest warship to chase off Chinese poachers.

China gained effective control of the shoal after Manila withdrew its vessel. It then started blocking Filipino fishermen from the shoal.

Malacañang has assured the Filipinos that Duterte will raise the country's legal victory in the international tribunal court against China at the proper time.

Duterte said he made the correct step in the sea dispute with China that allowed Filipino fishermen to fish in the disputed region.

Meanwhile, Roque said the Palace allowed a Chinese aircraft to land in Davao to refuel.

"All aircraft, provided they ask for a permit, are required to refuel. There is no law that prohibits a Chinese plane from using airports if they are allowed by any country," Roque said. **Vito Barcelo**

Roque has a new version of the Panatag takeover

BY JOCELYN MONTEMAYOR

FORMER President Benigno Simeon Aquino III, not China, started the militarization at the Panatag or Scarborough Shoal, presidential spokesman Harry Roque Jr. said yesterday.

Roque said the Aquino government's deployment of a warship to chase Chinese poachers off the shoal resulted in China's permanent deployment of forces in the area, and in the deprivation of fishing grounds of Filipino fishermen for years.

"If we use force like what President Aquino did when the Chinese were at Panatag — when he sent a Navy ship — it would only result in a military war that we are trying to

avoid," he said.

Scarborough, called by Filipinos as Panatag Shoal and by the Chinese as Huangyan Island, was the site of a standoff in 2012 between the Philippines and China.

The standoff erupted when Manila sent its biggest warship to chase off Chinese poachers. The Navy ship later withdrew and was replaced by a vessel from the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources.

Acting Chief Justice Antonio Carpio last week said the President's frequent warning that fighting for the Philippines' sovereign rights in the West Philippine Sea/South China Sea could result in a

See ROQUE ► Page B6

ROQUE

war with China is one of the ideas that divide and weaken the nation.

Roque, however, said the President repeatedly assured that he is not giving up the Philippine territory to China or anywhere else.

"His consistent position is we will not give up any territory, we will not fight. Because when we fought before, it was clear, we were driven away from Panatag. It will not be erased, we should not forget that it was President Aquino who first militarized that because he brought the Navy there that led to China's continued occupation of the Scarborough or what we call Panatag," he said.

The Aquino administration raised the issue against China's territorial claims before an international arbitral tribunal in 2013.

In 2016, the international court invalidated China's nine-dash line and said that Panatag Shoal is the traditional fishing ground for the Philippines and China.

Roque stressed that Duterte, as the chief architect of the country's foreign policy, should be allowed to do his job.

He said Duterte will not apologize for his policies on China and for pursuing friendship with the Chinese, adding that setting aside an international arbitral ruling for now and pursuing friendship is the current solution to the dispute.

2 teenagers drown in San Ildefonso

By FRANCIS T. WAKEFIELD

Army troops from the military's Northern Luzon Command (NOLCOM) retrieved on Saturday the bodies of two teenagers who apparently drowned in Garlang River, San Ildefonso town in Bulacan.

Lt. Col. Isagani Nato, NOLCOM spokesman, identified yesterday the two drowning victims as Nathaniel Frias, 15, a local resident, and Erica Caycedo, 14, who was from Novaliches, Quezon City.

Nato said the drowning of the victims was called to their attention by one Roberto Valdisno of San Ildefonso Municipal Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council (MDRRMC).

Investigation into their drowning was being handled by the local police.

• **PAF gets 2 planes from Indonesia**

The Philippine Air Force's (PAF's) capability especially in performing HAAR (humanitarian assistance and disaster response) and security efforts is expected to be further boosted with the formal acceptance of two NC2121 Light Lift Fixed Wing Aircraft from Indonesia. PAF Spokesman Major Arabelle M. Galing Jr. said the two aircraft will be formally accepted, blessed, and turned over to the PAF in a simple ceremony which will be held at Hanston Hangar, Air Force City, Clark Air Base, Pampanga, at 1 p.m. today with Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana as the honored guest. The aircraft were acquired from PT Dirgantara Indonesia as part of the Light Lift Fixed Wing Acquisition Project under the AFP Modernization Program. (Francis T. Warefield)]

PAF acquires 2 new light lift planes

By Mario Mallari

The Philippine Air Force (PAF) will formally accept today two new light lift aircraft purchased from Indonesia as part of its ongoing modernization program.

Maj. Aristides Galang, PAF Public Information Office chief, said that Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana has been invited as guest of honor in the acceptance, blessing and turnover of two NC212i from PT Dirgantara Indonesia.

The ceremony is set at 1 p.m. today at the Haribon Hangar inside the Clark Air Base in Pampanga.

The NC212i aircraft can be used strategically for producing artificial rain, maritime patrol and coast guard patrol.

It can also be utilized for the following missions: passenger and troop transport, cargo/logistic transport, anti-smuggling control, immigration control, search and rescue, paratroop dropping, and medical evacuation.

Compared to the previous NC212, the new model has

a carrying capacity of 28 passengers, a digital avionic and next generation autopilot. It features a ramp access, next generation navigation and communication system, as well as, cheaper operational cost.

Moreover, the said aircraft is capable of taking-off and landing on unpaved runway - perfect for the Rancudo Airfield on Pagasa Island.

The acquisition of the NC212i was part of the PAF's ongoing capability upgrade under the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) Modernization Program.

The PAF already acquired a squadron of FA50s from South Korea and C290s under the first phase of its modernization program or Horizon 1.

Under the P300 billion Horizon 2 of the AFP Modernization Program, the PAF has listed additional squadron of fighter jets and light and medium lift aircraft for acquisition. } }

President Duterte has already given the go signal for the AFP list under Horizon 2, including submarines and additional frigates for the Philippine Navy.

Retired AFP official named defense asec

PRESIDENT Duterte has named retired Armed Forces operations chief Angelito de Leon as new assistant secretary of the Department of National Defense.

The President signed the appointment papers of De Leon last June 21 but Malacañang only released it yesterday.

He replaced Raymond Jose Quilop, an appointee of former President Benigno Aquino III who resigned last year.

De Leon, who retired from the AFP in October 2017, is a member of Philippine Military Academy (PMA) Class of 1984.

He served as AFP operations chief and in several posts in the Philippine Army, including commander of the 7th Infantry Division of the Philippine Army in Central Luzon.

Malacañang also released the appointment papers of Gregorio Angelo Villar who was named new assistant secretary at the Office of the President, and Antonio



DE LEON

Molano Jr. as assistant secretary of the Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH).

Villar served as deputy director general of the Philippine Information Agency prior to his appointment while Molano served various positions in the DPWH including regional director for Central Luzon. — Jocelyn Montemayor

AFP: Du30 told Reds can't be trusted

By Jeannette I. Andrade
@jandradeINQ

Short of discouraging peace talks with communist rebels, the Armed Forces of the Philippines on Monday said the Communist Party of the Philippines-New People's Army was using the peace process only to "regroup, convene and recruit new members."

AFP spokesperson Col. Edgard Arevalo said, though, that it was still up to the Commander in Chief whether to proceed with peace negotiations.

He said the military had already briefed President Duterte about the rebels' "losing streak" and their practice of using lulls in combat to regain strength.

At a press briefing on Monday in Camp Aguinaldo, Arevalo advised the public to remain "vigilant and critical" of the communist rebels' desire for a truce.

The rebels, Arevalo said, were "merely advancing their armed struggle." "They will never abandon it," he said.

"We're talking about sincerity here," Arevalo said.

"If we want real peace we will stop fighting, talk peace and we will not boost our strength," he said. INQ

Rights group calls for Phl's removal from UNHRC

By RHODINA VILLANUEVA

A group of human rights activists is calling for the removal of the Philippines from the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) and for it to initiate an international fact-finding mission in the country.

Karapatan, through its secretary-general Cristina Palabay, said these actions are needed in the light of the government's stubborn refusal to acknowledge its accountability on the numerous killings resulting from the war on drugs, the counterinsurgency program Oplan Kapayapaan, and the declaration of martial law in Mindanao.

The group made the call in the light of worsening trends

on human rights and people's rights violations under the Duterte government and after the release of a joint statement of 38 states, led by Iceland, on human rights in the Philippines.

Karapatan also documented in the past two weeks the killing of three peasant leaders and illegal arrest of at least seven individuals, including volunteer teachers of a Lumad school and a peasant activist in Mindanao.

"Fake surrenders were staged by the military, while they continue to terrorize residents whom they tag as NPA supporters," Palabay said. "We call on the international community to continue its support for the Filipino

people's calls and campaigns against the tyrannical rule of Duterte. Such forms of international solidarity are most needed by the growing number of victims of this murderous regime."

In San Fernando, Pampanga, the peasants' group Kilusang Magbubukid ng Pilipinas (KMP) warned yesterday that the amendments to the Human Security Act or Republic Act 9372 would worsen the human rights situation and put the entire country under virtual martial law.

"House Bills 7141 and 5507 are twin bills that will complete Duterte's de facto Martial Law. The proposed amendments will only make worse an already bad law. The

Human Security Act must be junked altogether," KMP said in a statement adding that "these bills will put an end to human rights and civil liberties as we know it."

The group noted that the proposed amendments "want blanket authority and full force against what it categorizes as terrorism."

It stressed that the proposed amendments "are dangerous because it will allow for the proscription of individuals and organizations as terrorists and seizure of assets without trial; criminalization of mere membership or intended membership in proscribed organizations."

Meanwhile, Davao Archbishop Romulo Valles, also the

Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines (CBCP) president, said they are depending on the Philippine National Police (PNP) to protect the citizenry, including priests, as he reiterated his objection to priests arming themselves in the light of the killing of Frs. Marcelino Faez, Mark Ventura and Richmond Nilo.

The PNP reported that from the period of June 2017 to June 2018 there were 188 Catholic priests and 58 ministers, preachers and pastors who applied for permit to carry firearms.

But running priest Fr. Robert Reyes challenged church leaders to go beyond issuing pastoral statements and become more visible in ar-

reas where killings have taken place so people would feel the presence of their prelates more.

He believes that Manila Archbishop Luis Antonio Cardinal Tagle should not just issue pastoral statements but "should be seen in areas where a shepherd is needed to guide their sheep."

"It is no longer a time to reflect, to pray, to study. The content of the pastoral letters of Cardinal Tagle is to 'let us pray, let us fast, let us study, let us ring the bell'. They (bishops) have been doing that. I am not saying that that is wrong, but it is not enough," Reyes said.

- With Ding Cervantes, Evelyn Macairan



OPAPP to consult public on talks with Reds

By JOSE RODEL CLAPANO

The Office of the Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process (OPAPP) will conduct public consultations during the three-month review of all agreements between the government and the National Democratic Front (NDF).

"We'd like also to avail of this period to engage the public," OPAPP chief Jesus Dureza said in an interview with ABS-CBN last week while

he was in Norway to attend the Oslo Forum.

Dureza emphasized the importance of these consultations.

"If we keep it secret and spring it on the public suddenly – backchannel, without informing them first... they will start asking questions and may not even support (the peace talks)," Dureza said in a mix of English and Filipino.

"We can reveal everything that we tackled and then talk about it in pub-

lic consultations so the public will understand why," Dureza added.

Dureza also noted ongoing engagement with overseas Filipino workers (OFWs), involving them in the peace process.

"There are about 10 million OFWs all over the world. They are big agents of growth because they provide great support to our economy," Dureza said.

"We have a concept and a way of how we can involve our OFWs – we

call them the 'peace ambassadors,'" Dureza added.

Dureza said these "peace ambassadors" are the best people to relay information to other Filipinos.

"They are hoping to bring the message of peace to their own family, neighborhood, to fellow Pinoys and especially to the communities where they live," Dureza said.

Dureza added that "peace ambassadors" were also installed during previous rounds of peace talks in

Italy, the Netherlands and Norway.

"(Peace ambassadors) will become recipients of regular updates on the peace work in the Philippines. After that, we'd like to expect feedback from them," Dureza said.

"Our 'peace ambassadors' are very active. Some of them are giving feedbacks already, so that's one way of getting cohesive action from the public," Dureza said. – Gilbert Bayoran, Bebot Sison Jr., Michael Punongbayan 7



6 cops killed in misencounter with Army soldiers

By EMMANUEL TUPAS

Six police officers were killed and nine others were wounded after a mistaken encounter with Army soldiers in Sta. Rita, Samar yesterday.

Chief Supt. Mariel Magaway, Leyte region police director, confirmed that six policemen with the rank of police officer 1 were killed in the incident that occurred in the hinterlands of Barangay San Roque at around

9:20 a.m.

The dead and wounded policemen belonged to the Regional Mobile Force Battalion 8.

Magaway declined to identify the casualties as their families have yet to

be notified of the deaths.

"They were conducting combat operations as part of their training when they were attacked," he said.

An initial police report said an

Turn to Page 7

6 cops From Page 1

Army lieutenant and 16 enlisted personnel from the 87th Infantry

Battalion opened fire at the policemen.

The firefight lasted for 20 minutes and ended when reinforcements

from the police arrived.

It was only then that the soldiers realized their mistake.

Magaway could not say if the

soldiers mistook the policemen for New People's Army rebels.

"We are conducting an investigation with our counterparts from the

military to find out what exactly happened," he said.

It is unclear if the soldiers also suffered casualties.

Army men kill 6 cops in 'misencounter'

By Ronald O. Reyes

AT LEAST six young police officers were killed and nine others injured in what security sources initially described was an "ambush incident" by army troops on Monday in the backwoods of Sta. Rita in Samar.

Reports said the incident happened mid-morning between members of the Philippine National Police 805th Mobile Company, Regional Mobile Force Battalion and the 87th Infantry Battalion, Philippine Army based in Calbiga, Samar.

There was no immediate reaction from either the national headquarters of the Philippine National Police nor the Army in Metro Manila.

A media source, who refused to be identified as he was not in an official position to divulge the information, said the "ambush incident" of PNP personnel was "perpetrated" by the soldiers when the police were "conducting minor combat operation" in the area.

Next page

Army...

From A1

Killed in action were PO1 Phil J Rey Mendigo, PO1 Edwin P. Ebrado, PO1 Wynnell S. Noromor, PO1 Rowel Reyes, PO1 Julie Y. Escalo, and PO1 Julius R. Suarez.

Wounded in action on the PNP side were PO1 Romulo Cordero, PO1 Elmer F. Pan, PO1 Chris Angelo A. Pialago, PO1 Jaime G. Galoy, PO1 Rey C. Barbosa, PO1 Jonel C. Gonzaga, PO1 Rommel Bagunas, PO1 Janmark K. Adones, and PO1 Roden T. Goden.

However, a separate report received from the Sta. Rita Municipal Police Station said police conducting "patrol heading towards Sitio Canunay, Brgy. Rosal of said municipality, same was waylaid with volume of fire by an undetermined number of unidentified armed men which prompted the former to return fire to defend themselves."

"Initial investigation conducted disclosed that the opposite side who initiated the firefight were elements of one section of Charlie Company, 87th IB, PA, 8ID led by 1st Lt. Orlando M. Casipit Jr. composed of 16 enlisted personnel," the report added.

In the meantime, the officers in the regional police headquarters in Camp Ruperto Kangleon in Paló, Leyte are in a closed-door conference.

With Francisco Tuyay

6 cops killed by soldiers in mis-encounter in Samar

BY RAYMOND AFRICA
AND VICTOR REYES

SIX policemen died yesterday while nine others were wounded when they were ambushed by soldiers while on a routine patrol in Sitio Lanoy, Barangay San Roque, Sta. Rita, Samar yesterday morning.

Reports reaching the Eastern Visayas Police Regional Office said members of the 1st platoon, 805th company of the Regional Mobile Force Battalion 8 led by Chief Insp. Don Archie Suspene were returning to their home base when they were fired at. It was later learned that the attackers were soldiers from the Charlie Company of the 87th Infantry Battalion, 8th Infantry Division of the Army led by 1st Lt. Orlando Caspit Jr.

"It's a mis-encounter. Initially sapnuikan yung pulis (the police were shot at)," said 8th ID commander Maj. Gen. Raul Farnacio.

He said the soldiers were conducting operations when they apparently mistook the policemen as New People's Army rebels.

"There was an unfortunate incident that transpired today where a platoon... that has been operating in the area for the last six days had a chance-encounter with a PNP unit in the area of Villareal, Samar," he also said.

A police official from the Eastern Visayas said Suspene's group, which was composed of around 30 men, were on a three-day combat mission in Barangay San Roque in Sta. Rita town in search for communist rebels and were returning to their home base in Sitio Canunay, also in Barangay San Roque, when they were ambushed.

The official said the policemen were passing through an open field when the incident happened at around 9:20 a.m.

"Our troops are in full combat

uniform when attacked so there is no need for them to have counter signs. We also don't know of any grudge between the two groups. They do not know each other," the official said.

"They (soldiers) suddenly opened fire without giving at least a warning or at least accost our men, that's why they did not suffer any casualties," the official added.

Reports said the firefight ended after 20 minutes when the soldiers were able to identify that they were firing at policemen.

The identities of the slain policemen were withheld as their families have not been informed of the incident.

The wounded were brought to the Eastern Visayas Medical Center.

Farnacio said it is hard to distinguish "who you are up against" when soldiers are "in a highly-vegetated area."

"There was a skirmish, meet-

ing engagement actually, frontal (engagement). The ones who were quick to react fired the first shots. They were able to occupy the high ground," Farnacio said of the soldiers.

"We are still conducting an investigation to determine how these two groups came close to each other," he also said.

He said the two sides traded fire from a distance of about 30 to 50 meters. Farnacio described the incident as a "mis-encounter."

He said he and Eastern Visayas regional police head Chief Supt. Mariel Maniego Magaway ordered a joint investigation.

"As we sincerely condole with the families of our brothers in the PNP, we assure the bereaved families that appropriate actions will be taken if there be any lapses committed in either side. This is to ensure that the incident will not happen again," said Farnacio. ^{h1}

6 cops dead in Army-PNP 'misencounter'

By Mario Mallari

Six members of the Philippine National Police (PNP) were killed while nine others were wounded in an apparent "misencounter" between Army troops and PNP forces in Samar province yesterday.

Initial report from Chief Supt. Mariel Magaway, director of the Police Regional Office 8 (PRO-8) showed that the "misencounter" erupted at around 9:27 a.m. along Barangay Sta. Rosa in Villareal town.

Report showed that separate elements of the PNP's 805th

Regional Mobile Force (RMF) and the Army's 87th Infantry Battalion when the firefight erupted.

The "misencounter" resulted in six PNP personnel killed and nine wounded.

Killed in action were PO2 Rowel Reyes, PO1 Phil Rey Mendigo, PO1 Edwin Ebreto, PO1 Eudel Normar, PO1 Julie Escalo and PO1 Julius Suarez.

Wounded were PO1 Romulo Cordero, PO1 Elmer Pan, PO1 James Galoy, PO1 Rey Barbosa, PO1 Goner Gonzaga, PO3 Roden Guden and three others.

There was no reported casualty on the Army side.

According to Maj. Gen. Raul Farnacio, commander of the Army's 8th Infantry Division which has operational supervision over the 87th IB, said that the troops had been operating in the area for five days before the incident.

Farnacio said that the 87th IB troops were operating against a band of communist New People's Army (NPA) rebels there.

The Army general said he is saddened by the incident.

PRO-8 has already activated a special investigation task group (SITG) to conduct a probe of the matter. 3

Police vs Army: 6 patay, 9 sugatan! *Misencounter sa Samar*

Anim na pulis ang nasawi at siyam pa nilang kasamahan ang nasugatan makaraan ang trahedyo ng misencounter sa pagitan ng mga elemento ng pulisva at militar na kapwa tumu-

tugis sa mga rebeldeng New People's Army sa iblibh na lugar sa Brig. Sta. Rosa, Villareal, Samar kahapon ng umaga. Sa report ni Chief Supt. Mariel Magaway, director ng Police Re-

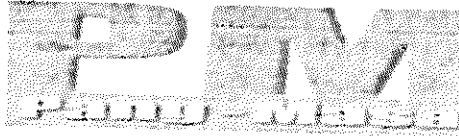
gional Office (PRO) 8, dakong alas-9 27 ng umaga habang nagsasagawa ng combat operation ang tropa ng 805th Regional Mobile Force (RMF) at Army's 87th Infantry Battalion

NI JOY CANTOS
(IB) nang makasagupa ang mga rebeldeng komunista sa lugar. Sa panig ni Philippine Army's 8th Infantry Division (ID) Comman-

der Major Gen. Raul Farnacio, limang araw nang nagsasagawa ng operasyon ang tropa ng militar laban sa linatayang mahigit 20 teroristang NPA. Gayundaman, nagkaroon ng miskomunikasyon habang kasagsagan ng engkuwentro kaya mismong ang tropa ng militar at mga pulis ang nagkabakbakan sa lugar.

Nabatid na ang mga pulis ay tatlong araw na ring nagsasagawa ng operasyon sa lugar laban sa mga terorista na sumunod sa tropa ng militar. Kinilala ang mga nasawi na sina PO1 Phil Rey Mendigo, PO1 Edwin Ebreto, PO1 Wendel Normar, PO2 Rowel Reyes, PO1 Julie Es-galo, PO1 Julius Suarez

Ang mga nasugatan ay sina Romulo Cordero, PO1 Elmer Pan, PO1 James Galoy, PO1 Rey Barbosa, PO1 Goner Gonzaga, PO3 Roden Guden at tatlong iba pa na pawang isinugod sa pagamutan para matapatan ng lunas. Bumuo na ng Special Investigating Task Group upang imbesigahan ang madugong engkuwentro.



Misencounter...

6 PULIS PATAY, 9 SUGATAN SA ARMY

Nasawi ang 6 pulis habang 9 ang nasugatan sa naganap na misencounter sa pagitan ng militar sa liblib na lugar sa Brgy. Sta Rosa, Villareal, Samar kabapon ng umaga. Sa report ni Chief Supt. Mariel Magaway, Director ng Police Regional Office (PRO) 8, dakong alas --

9:27 ng umaga, labang nagsasagawa ng combat operation ang tropa ng 803th Regional Mobile Force (RMF) at Army's 87th Infantry Battalion (IB) nang makasagupa ang mga rebeldeng komunistista sa lugar. Gayunman, nagkaroon ng mis-komunikasyon

NI JOY CANTOS kaya't nismong ang tropa ng militar at mga pulis ang nagkabakbak. Sa panig naman ni Army's 8th Infantry Division (ID) Commander Major Gen. Raul Parnacio, limang araw nang nagsasagawa ng operasyon ang tropa ng militar laban sa tinatayang

mahigit 20 NPA rebeld habang ang mga pulis ay tatlong araw na ring nagsasagawa ng operasyon sa lugar na sumunod sa tropa ng militar. Sa nasabing misencounter ay anim na pulis ang nasawi at siyam naman ang nasugatan sa mga ito. Gayunman, hindi muna

tinukoy ng mga opisyal ang pagkakatilantan sa mga nasawi at nasugatang pulis dahil sa opat na kailangan pa ang itong impormahan ang kamulang mga pamilya. Samantalang bunga nito ay bumuo na ng Special Investigating Task Group upang imbestigahan ang insidente. 2

AFP: Reds' strength dwindling

By Mario J. Mallari

The strength of the communist New People's Army (NPA) has dwindled in the past two years, resulting in the surrender of 6,659 members of the radical movement, the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) reported yesterday.

The gains against the insurgents were the result of the military's focused operations against NPA rebels and the Duterte administration's integration program, Armed

Forces of the Philippines (AFP) spokesman Col. Edgard Arevalo said.

Arevalo, citing latest AFP data, said from Jan. 1, 2017 to yesterday, the AFP has recorded a total of 681 encounters with the NPAs in various parts of the country that were all initiated by the military.

Law enforcement operations resulted in the arrest of 59 guerillas, while 68 were killed. A total of 736 firearms were seized during these skirmishes.

The 6,659 NPA regulars who

surrendered were made up of guerillas, cadres and supporters.

"The continuous surrender of NPA members is indicative of the organization's dwindling strength," said Arevalo.

Arevalo said more NPAs are also willing to surrender due to the Duterte administration's integration program which includes livelihood assistance.

The President had dined with former NPA rebels in Malacanang at least twice. He also sent some amazons to Hong Kong.

The AFP also noted a

dramatic downtrend in NPA-initiated atrocities since 2017.

Drastic fall in atrocities

Arevalo said last year, the AFP recorded a total of 455 incidents perpetrated by the communist rebels.

In the first half of this year, the military has listed only 112 incidents.

From 77 arson incidents in 2017, the military said only 18 happened this year while abduction perpetrated by NPAs also went down from 25 in 2017 to only one.

The report cited no intimidation incidents this year

from two last years in the first half of 2018. Cases of ransacking fell from six to three, while no instances of roadblocks were reported during the period from two.

These are clear indications that we are winning in our focused tactical intelligence and civil military operations particularly in north eastern Mindanao where there is the bulk of NPA," said the AFP spokesman.

NPA burns roadwork equipment in Zambales

By **FREDDIE C. VELEZ**

CAMP AQUINO, Tarlac City — Remnants of the New People's Army (NPA) swooped down on the construction site of the Capas-Botolan Road Project in Zambales and torched two heavy equipment units last weekend.

Lt. General Emmanuel B. Salamat, military Northern Luzon Command (NOLCOM) chief, said the communist NPA terrorists' setting fire to one backhoe and one payload loader last Saturday in Sitio Oraan, Barangay Cabatuan in Botolan, was a sabotage of the government's "Build, Build, Build" program.

The equipment were being used for the construction of the road that will give motorists easier access to the different towns of Tarlac and Zambales.

Salamat had sent out troopers from the 3rd Mechanized Infantry Battalion (3MIB) to go after the guerrillas and file charges against them. □

Nationinbrief

NPA BURNS EQUIPMENT IN ZAMBALES TOWN

CAMP AQUINO, Tarlac City: Members of the New People's Army (NPA) on Saturday afternoon burned down engineering equipment in the mountainous area of Botoian, Zambales. The NPA rebels, operating in the boundaries and isolated *barangay* (villages) of the province, set ablaze a backhoe and a pay-loader in Sitio Oraan, Barangay Cabatuan in Botoian town. The armed group was later seen retreating to uninhabited area of the village after the incident. The torched equipment were being used in the construction of the Capas-Botoian Road Project that will give travelers easier access to and from the different towns of Tarlac and Zambales. Its construction will also provide commuters a shorter route and a more inexpensive travel than if they used the Subic-Clark-Tarlac Expressway. "The government is doing its utmost in building communities, through its Build-Build-Build Program but these communist NPA terrorists continue to sabotage government and private projects and vehemently harass investors who do not submit to its extortion demands," Lt. Gen. Emmanuel Salamat said.

PT PATRICK ROXAS

Transport strike cripples 3 Bicol provinces

LEGAZPI CITY: The one-day public transportation strike stranded commuters in Albay, Camarines Sur and Camarines Norte provinces on Monday.

Ramon Rescovilla, deputy secretary general of the Concerned Drivers and Operators (Condor-Piston) in Bicol, spearheaded the rally, joining with the region-wide transport strike opposing the total phase out of old jeepneys and the implementation of the Train Law.

The militant groups also called on President Rodrigo Duterte to repeal the Train Law and push through with the peace talks with the National Democratic Front (NDF).

Ramon Piel Abcede, Department of Education regional director, said during the Regional Peace and Order Council meeting on Monday that the man-made disaster (strike) affecting the students is different from Mayon volcano's natural eruption.

The transport strike affected more than 500,000 learners in both private and public stu-

dents in Albay province alone," Abceda said.

Classes in the cities of Legazpi, Tabaco and Ligao, as well as in 11 towns were cancelled because of the strike.

Legazpi City Mayor Noel Rosal ordered the suspension of classes in all levels in public and private schools to ensure the safety of the students in the region's capital and university belt area.

In Daraga town, Mayor Carlwyn Go Baldo, also suspended classes in all levels in anticipation of the 24-hour transport strike.

Rescovilla said the transport strike in Albay totally paralyzed transportation in the city as it drew 100 percent participation of local jeepneys plying routes across the province. UV Express drivers plying routes in Albay, Camarines Sur and Camarines Norte also joined the strike.

Tricycles in Legazpi City, Ligao, Tabaco in Albay took advantage of the strike, charging exorbitant fares.

RHAYDZ B. BARCIA

Gov't cautioned on forging truce with communists

BY VICTOR REYES

THE Armed Forces yesterday said a ceasefire with the communist New People's Army should be thoroughly studied, noting the insurgents have been taking advantage of the truce, and the peace talks in general, to regroup and recruit.

"Based on our record and from interviews with rebels who surrendered, they are using the peace talks to regroup and recruit new members," AFP spokesman Col. Edgard Arevalo told a press briefing in Camp Aguinaldo.

"We should be careful because while they are saying they are sincere in the peace talks, at the back

of their mind is their real intention which I earlier said," he added.

President Duterte has ordered the postponement of the resumption of the formal peace talks, originally set this Thursday, so he could review a stand-down agreement to be implemented by both sides.

The stand-down agreement, which is a form of a ceasefire, was agreed on and subsequently signed by government and National Democratic Front of the Philippines (NDFP) during back-channel talks held in the Netherlands on June 6 to 9.

Jose Maria "Joma" Sison, NDFP chief political consultant and founder of the Communist Party of the Philippines, earlier accused

Duterte of trying to "kill" the peace process by postponing the resumption of formal talks and for ordering the review of the stand-down agreement.

Arevalo said the military supports the government's efforts to attain a just and lasting peace. However, he said, the talks should benefit the Filipino people and not those with vested interest.

Arevalo also said there are now about 3,900 NPA rebels throughout the country. In January, the military said the NPA strength was around 3,700 men. The NPA membership increased despite the surrender of 666 rebels since January this year. About 6,000 NPA supporters have also surrendered this year.

"After all these surrenders, our record shows that their group is composed of 3,900 (men) or close to 4,000," said Arevalo.

Arevalo also said there has been a decline in NPA atrocities, including arson and abductions, this year.

Arevalo said the military recorded 112 NPA atrocities from January to June 25 this year, compared to 455 incidents for the entire 2017.

Also, Arevalo said focused military operations also led to 681 armed encounters with NPA rebels from January 2017 to June 25 this year. "These are all AFP-initiated," said Arevalo of what he said were the "successful" operations against the rebels. B6

8 soldiers wounded in Sulu clash with Abus

ZAMBOANGA CITY - Eight soldiers were wounded in an encounter with Abu Sayyaf bandits in Patikul, Sulu on Saturday.

Lt. Col. Gerry Besana, Western Mindanao Command spokesman, said personnel of the First Scout Ranger Battalion clashed with around 40 bandits led by Almujeer Jada and Sonny Boy Sajirin in Barangay Bangkal at about 2:40 p.m.

Besana said the wounded soldiers were brought to a hospital at Camp Bautista in Barangay Bus-bus, Jolo for treatment.

The military said the bandits also suffered casualties, citing bloodstains on their escape route.

Besana said war materiel, including an improvised explosive device, were recovered at the scene.

Meanwhile, Suaib Hayudini, alias Enteng, a suspected follower of Abu Sayyaf leader Radullan Sahiron, was arrested in Barangay Walled City, Jolo on Sunday.

Chief Superintendent Graciano Mijares, Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao police director, said the arrest was based on warrants for kidnapping and serious illegal detention and kidnapping with frustrated murder issued by courts in Metro Manila and Jolo in 2003.

Sahiron was tagged in the kidnapping of 10 Europeans, nine Malaysians and two Filipinos at a resort on Sipadan island in 2000. The captives were held in Sulu for five months and freed by batches after the alleged payment of hefty ransom.

- Roel Pareño, Cecille Suelto Felipe

ASG sub-leader captured in Sulu

By NONOY E. LACSON

ZAMBOANGA CITY -- A senior Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) sub-leader, who had a P600,000 bounty on his head, was arrested while eight soldiers were reportedly wounded when an Improvised Explosive Device (IED) exploded during a clearing operation at an encounter site in Patikul, Sulu.

Sulu Provincial Police Office Director Sr. Supt Pablo Labra identified the ASG sub-leader as Suaib Hayudini who was arrested by police authorities Sunday noon near a money transfer remittance center in the town proper of Jolo in Sulu.

Wanted "dead or alive", Hayudini is facing charges of kidnapping with ransom, and kidnapping with murder and frustrated murder.

He was in the Department of National Defense (DND), Department of the Interior and Local Governments (DILG) most wanted personalities with

an offer of P600,000 for his capture.

Labra said Hayudini had two standing warrant of arrest -- the infamous kidnapping in Sipadan Beach Resort in Malaysia in 2001, and the 2001 Balobo massacre incident in Basilan province.

In a related development, at least eight soldiers were wounded when an IED exploded during a clearing operations conducted at an encounter site with the ASG in Barangay Bangkal, Patikul, Sulu about 2:40pm, June 23.

The wounded soldiers are now confined at the Kuta General Teodulfo Bautista Station Hospital in Busbus, Jolo, Sulu, according to Joint Task Force - Sulu (JTF Sulu) Commander Brig. Gen. Divino Rey Pahayo. 7

Twin blasts injure 8 soldiers, 6 civilians

MORE than a dozen soldiers and civilians, including children, were injured in separate blasts in Sulu and Compostela Valley in Mindanao over the weekend, military authorities said.

Military troops in hot pursuit of the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) bandits in Patikul, Sulu accidentally stepped on a cable that triggered an improvised explosive device (IED) to explode wounding eight soldiers, the military's Western Mindanao Command (WestMinCom) said on Monday.

Lt. Col. Gerry Besana, WestMinCom spokesman, said the blast occurred in Barangay Bangkal in Patikul where the soldiers were in hot pursuit against the ASG bandits following heavy clashes on Saturday.

The soldiers are now confined at the Gen. Teodulfo Bautista Hospital in Busbus, Jolo town.

Quoting a report from Brig. Gen. Divino Rey Pabayo, Joint Task Force (JTF) Sulu commander, Besana members of the 1st Scout Ranger Battalion led by Lt. Col. Samuel Yunque clashed with about 40 bandits under Abu Sayyaf sub-leaders Almujer Yaddah, Sonny Boy Sajirin Ellam Hasirin in Bangkal village, leaving an undetermined number of ASG dead.

On Sunday morning, a clearing operation was conducted when the accidental blast happened

after a soldier stepped on a cable attached to the IED. Numerous firearms and war material were also recovered, Besana said.

"Troops were able to maneuver and take advantage, pushing the bandits to scamper to different directions after the 30-minute firefight," Besana added.

He said the soldiers, whose unit is part of JTF-Sulu, have intensified their operations against the Abu Sayyaf.

Lt. Gen. Arnel dela Vega, WestMinCom chief, said "We are continuously intensifying the conduct of focused military operations, in coordination with the local governments and the people of Sulu, to neutralize the terrorist group."

Meanwhile, police said a powerful explosion wounded at least six people, among them three children, in Compostela Valley, a known stronghold of communist rebels.

It was not clear whether it was an act of terrorism.

Two women and a teenager were also injured in the explosion and police said it is still investigating the explosion after pieces of mangled aluminium containing traces of gunpowder were recovered at the blast site.

Police have tightened security patrol in the town. A7

AL JACINTO AND
JULMUNIR I. JANNARAL

8 troops hurt in Sulu blast

By Mario J. Mallari

Eight military personnel were wounded after an improvised explosive device (IED) they recovered from the Abu Sayyaf Group accidentally exploded in Sulu, a task force commander yesterday said.

Brig. Gen. Divino Rey Pabaya, Joint Task Force Sulu commander, said the explosion occurred while soldiers were conducting clearing operation following a firefight with ASG bandits last Saturday in Barangay Bangkal, Patikul town.

"The IED that accidentally exploded was among the war materiel the troops recovered following the clash with around 40 Abu Sayyaf bandits led by sub-leaders Alimjer Yaddah, Sonny Boy Sajim and Ellam Hasirin in Barangay Bangkal, Patikul," Pabaya said.

He added the wounded troops belong to the Army's 1st Scout Ranger Battalion.

The military official said the soldiers are now recuperating at the Kuta General Teodulfo Bautista Station Hospital in Barangay Busbus, Jolo, Sulu.

Meanwhile, Western Mindanao Command head Lt. Gen. Ariel de la Vega said the troops will continue to exhaust all means to contain the bandits and limit their movement.

"We are continuously intensifying the conduct of focused military operations, in coordination with the local government and the people of Sulu, to neutralize the terrorist group," de la Vega added. 12

Radio station employee shot dead in Marawi

By HOMITA L. ERMAC

ILIGAN CITY - Police authorities in Marawi City are still facing a blank wall in trying to solve the fatal shooting of a government radio station employee last June 23 in Aggie Village in Barangay Cadayonan inside the Mindanao State University (MSU) campus.

Supt. Jamal Adiong, Marawi city police chief, identified the victim as Jessie M. Cano, 50, who was an administrative aide at DXSO 99.7FM Radyo Pilipinas Marawi.

According to Adiong, Cano was on his way home from the market when an unidentified gunman shot him four times in the back with a 9 mm caliber pistol.

The police surmised that the victim could have been liquidated for suspicion being an intelligence asset because he was also an Army reservist.

"Baka po napagkamalan na member ng intel nitong mga bumabalik na IS (Islamic State) kasi nga Army reservist sya. (He might have been mistaken for an intel operator by returning IS because he is an Army reservist)," Adiong said.

The Butuan police chief also pointed out that IS remnants have resorted to assassination-style attacks, much like the Sparrow unit of the New People's Army (NPA), in carrying out their attacks.

"Pero iyong IS hindi po sila umaatake ng malakihan, ang ginagawa nila ngayon ay parang sparrow katulad ng NPA (The IS no longer engage in large scale attacks. What they're doing now is Sparrow-like attacks like the NPA). Having said that, they are targeting intelligence units," Adiong said.

POSTSCRIPT

FEDERICO D. PASCUAL Jr.

Drug-test officials before school kids

Before subjecting grade school children to drug tests, the government better conduct first mandatory drug screening of ranking officials in all branches - from Malacañang, the judiciary, the Congress, the military and the police, etc., down to the mayors.



Elective and appointive officials should lead by example instead of looking down and proposing that school children from Grade 4 and above pass the tests as proof that they are not into narcotics. If youngsters could be suspected of drug abuse, why not their elders?

It was a good thing Education Secretary Leonor Briones argued against the planned mandatory drug-testing of students and suggested that any screening be random. She said tests should hew to existing laws, including the Comprehensive Dangerous Drugs Act of 2002.

The original plan of mandatory testing at P200 per student would have cost the government reportedly around P2.8 billion, an amount that could be put to better use under a well-thought-out priority plan.

Based on its own computation, the Alliance of Concerned Teachers said the mandatory drug testing for about 20 million students and over 700,000 teachers nationwide would cost the government as much as P4 billion.

The DepEd already initiated last year discreet drug-testing of some 1,300 officials and personnel at its central office, 3,800 in the regions, 26,000 in the divisions, as well as 10,000 teachers and 21,000 high school students, to determine the effectiveness of prevention programs.

The drug-testing of all ranking officials now being suggested by some sectors before that of young students could be conducted by a composite group led by the Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency under the supervision of the Office of the President.

Drug-free officials should have no fear of a testing that is as transparent as a Red Cross blood donation. If some officials demur for legal, medical, religious or whatever reason, the public can make their own conclusion.

As a preliminary feeling out, private media could possibly help gauge the attitude of affected officials by asking them individually a Yes-or-No question if they are willing to undergo a drug test. Reporters can insert that one quick question in their interviews.

The responses can then be collated, tallied and published for the record - *a la* survey results - as they come in. The officials may choose to explain, but what counts is their Yes or No answer.

Those who should be asked if they are willing to take a drug test must include the President, the Vice President, Cabinet members, SC/CA justices, RTC judges, senators, congressmen, governors, mayors, AFP/PNP generals/colonels, officers and board members of government-controlled firms, the Bilibid prisons director, jail wardens, and PDEA officers.

• Priests should not arm themselves

Priests who have applied for, or have obtained, licenses to possess and permits to carry firearms should reconsider. Their superiors should order them to return quickly the licenses and properly dispose of the deadly weapons.

Those who fear for their lives in these violent times should be reminded that a gun, which is designed to maim or kill, does not befit a man of God. Pistol-packing priests are the antithesis of their fellows who would embrace martyrdom for their faith.

Christ himself, while being arrested in the garden of Gethsemane, admonished Peter (when he drew his sword, swung and cut the ear of the servant of the high priest leading the posse) to put away the sword. The weapon was totally unnecessary.

Years of handling firearms and seeing them used in various situations have convinced me that a sidearm will not save a person - be he a priest or a president - from a determined assassin who has the means, the motive and the opportunity to kill.

Senior Supt. William Señoron, chief of the PNP Civil Security Group, reported last week that some priests have either applied for a gun permit or are renewing their licenses. At least 246 requests for licenses from prelates have reportedly been filed.

With everybody arming themselves against unknown or imagined assailants, we would end up with a sort of arms race that nobody wins except those who want precisely to sow fear and take advantage of the ensuing confusion.

This reflex reaction recalls recent suggestions for the arming of teachers on some US campuses scared by the spate of mass shootings in schools. Pistol-packing teachers are not the proper response to that type of madness - in the same way that gun-toting padres will not deter paid assassins.

Manila Archbishop Luis Antonio Cardinal Tagle has asked the faithful to pray for priests and others "whose lives have been taken by persons without conscience." He also asked for prayers for government officials for them to look after the welfare and safety of the citizens.

The cardinal said: "We pray for all the people in our beloved country - that we may all be courageous in our faith, steadfast in our belief and resolute in the face of evil threats. Lock the lips and restrain the arms of those who shatter peace and foment hatred that lead to violence." 8

From dragon poker to whisperer

Last of 2 parts

SINCE he began fishing in the Scarborough Shoal in 2000, they were operating freely there, said one of the fishermen presented by Presidential Spokesman Harry Roque in a June 11, 2018 press briefing. Then April 2012 happened: a seven-week naval stand-off between China and the Philippines ensued as a result of the miscalculation and poor conflict management by the Aquino-Del Rosario foreign policy regime. The Scarborough Shoal remained inaccessible to our fishermen until Duterte changed our country's approach to China — from being a dragon poker to its whisperer.

The incident in the Scarborough Shoal could have been better managed if the Aquino administration already strengthened the bilateral consultation mechanism and continued the confidence-building we had with China. The Philippines vs. China arbitration decision on jurisdiction released in October 2015 tells the story of how our country seemed to have rejected China's offer to do that.

On January 14, 2012, Undersecretary Erlinda Basilio of the Department of Foreign Affairs and her Chinese counterpart, Assistant Foreign Minister Liu Zhenmin, had a consultation meeting.

In that meeting, the Philippines proposed the Association of South-east Asian Nations (Asean) Zone of Peace, Freedom, Friendship, and Cooperation as an actionable framework to address China's nine-dash line claim. We also insisted on multilateral talks, which would include Asean countries, not all of which have anything to do with the territorial conflict in the South China Sea. One of the agenda of our country is for the Philippines and China to define which areas are disputed and non-disputed.

China expressed some worry that non-bilateral mechanisms "will only add to the mistrust" between the Philippines and China. It repeated its position: "It is



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our long-standing position that the dispute in the South China Sea should be properly resolved among parties directly involved through peaceful negotiations." As a counter-offer, China invited the Philippines "to start negotiations... in a bilateral way and take stock of the current dispute and problem," and for the two countries to start discussing "the establishment of a China-Philippines maritime consultation mechanism or resume the confidence-building mechanism."

Instead of exerting efforts to find the middle ground, which by the way is the purpose and essence of diplomacy, this is what Basilio said: "As enunciated by our Foreign Minister when he met with Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi, they agreed then to keep the matter to rest, to put the matter to rest because obviously, the Chinese position, is diametrically opposed to the Philippine position."

So, after explaining the divergent positions of the Philippines and China, Basilio just said: "Let's leave it at that but as our Foreign Minister has always stressed that we set that aside, we set the West Philippine Sea issue aside..."

Three months after that meeting between Basilio and Liu, the Scarborough Shoal incident happened. If we had an established bilateral mechanism with China, it could have been activated to de-escalate the incident. And if there were confidence-building measures prior to the incident, China and the Philippines would have already developed a sufficient level of trust necessary to make the bilateral mechanism work. Aquino would not have resorted to backdoor diplomacy headed by a senator whose history is in

conflict escalation.

Even during the previous administration, there was already an opportunity to be a dragon whisperer. But its foreign policy regime resorted to poking the dragon.

Duterte started turning the situation around the moment he won as president, before his inauguration.

As reported by "Aksyon News 5" on May 25, 2016, Zhao Jinhua, China's Ambassador to the Philippines, said that during his meeting with Duterte, the latter "raised the issue [of Filipino fishermen] to [him], personally." Zhao's impression of Duterte was "he cares about the poor people — the fishermen." And as confirmed by the fishermen that News 5 interviewed at the time, the Chinese Coast Guard no longer chased them away.

Duterte's rapprochement with China deepened when he led a *de-tente* (easing of hostility) mission to China in October 2016. One of the fruits of that mission was the establishment of a bilateral consultation mechanism, which was activated during the Scarborough incident this year.

Reacting to that incident, Zhao said: "In English there is a saying, 'Even in the best regulated families, accidents happen.' So, we always have bad apples but if we have bad apples, you know what I'm going to do, I'm going to throw into the South China Sea and feed to the fish."

This statement shows that the bilateral consultation mechanism is actually working. Instead of China just downplaying or ignoring the incident, as it had during the previous administration, the Chinese ambassador released a strong statement, categorizing some of their citizens as "bad apples" that should be thrown into the sea and be fed to the fish.

So, what changed between the Aquino administration and the Duterte administration? Simple: The latter knows what it's doing.

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What's wrong with Bello and Robredo?

Labor Secretary Silvestre Bello III and the purported vice president, Leni Robredo, are again in the news.

The news media reported last week that Bello wants to be appointed Ombudsman. If he were to have his way, Bello wishes to succeed the outgoing incumbent, Conchita Carpio-Morales, who is expected to retire from office very soon. There was also the news report that Bello has personally asked President Rodrigo Duterte for the post.

It was revealed, however, that Bello is not qualified for the post of Ombudsman because there are administrative cases currently pending against him in, ironically, the Office of the Ombudsman. Under the rules of the Judicial and Bar Council (JBC), the constitutional body which screens candidates for Ombudsman, one who has pending administrative cases in the Office of the Ombudsman cannot be appointed to that office.

Most certainly, Bello must have been aware that there are pending cases against him in the Office of the Ombudsman when he openly sought appointment as Ombudsman. Being so, he must have also been aware that he was disqualified for the position. So why did he express interest in the post of Ombudsman when he knew he is disqualified? Is Bello certain that before Morales steps down from office soon, the aforesaid cases against him will be dismissed? Does Bello know something the public, the JBC and the President do not know?

Right now, Bello's quest for appointment as Om-



THE SCRUTINIZER
Victor Avecilla

budsman is suspect. Under ideal circumstances, that should be enough reason to disqualify Bello for the post, even if his administrative cases are dismissed, because nobody should be appointed Ombudsman under suspicious circumstances. An Ombudsman with plenty of "baggage," so to speak, is the last thing the country needs if it wants clean and credible government.

The Ombudsman matter aside, Bello appears to have taken credit for negotiating a bilateral agreement between Manila and Kuwait City, which calls for the safety and the better treatment of Filipino workers in Kuwait, domestic helpers in particular. That agreement prompted President Duterte to lift the total ban he had earlier imposed against the deployment of Filipino domestic helpers to Kuwait after a Filipina domestic helper was murdered in that barbarous Middle East country during Bello's watch last year. Anyway, the hard work was done not by Bello, but by the president's adviser on overseas Filipino workers.

By the way, Bello has not yet identified that mysterious, secretive woman who kept on whispering to him while he was answering questions during a congressional hearing held in relation to the treatment of Filipino workers in Kuwait. If Bello wants to be Ombudsman, he cannot surround himself with mysterious, secretive individuals.

Last week, Leni Robredo, the purported vice president of the nation, appeared in a television news program

to say that she is alarmed that the Filipino people are no longer shocked about scandals in the government. She went on to insinuate that there are so many anomalies in the Duterte administration, so much so that the people are used to hearing about such anomalies.

Observers noted that Robredo kept on smirking during the interview, and that by doing so, she was unwittingly indicating that she was happy with the scandals and anomalies. Perhaps Robredo was pleased with the scandals and anomalies, because she thought that by discrediting Duterte, the viewing public will consider her as a worthy alternative to the president.

Robredo is grossly mistaken in attributing the anomalies in government to President Duterte. Even assuming for the sake of argument that there are anomalies in the government, it does not necessarily follow that those anomalies are attributable exclusively to the president.

Chief Justice Maria Lourdes Sereno was unseated by the Supreme Court after a finding that Sereno never validly qualified for the post. In resisting her ouster by the highest court of the land, by the very tribunal vested by the Constitution with the exclusive power to state what the provisions of the Constitution mean, and through a time-tested process allowed by law, Sereno did her best to publicly discredit and demean the Supreme Court. Sereno used words that portrayed the justices as stooges of Malacañang - accusations which Sereno should not have used if she were to comport herself within the ethical standards governing the legal profession. Robredo probably

forgot that Sereno was an appointee of President Benigno Aquino III, and not of President Duterte.

Robredo also lamented during the interview that public confidence in the Supreme Court was eroded when the Supreme Court unseated Sereno as chief justice. The "vice president" conveniently failed to state, though, that it was Sereno who almost single-handedly discredited the Supreme Court to the people - in violation of legal ethical standards.

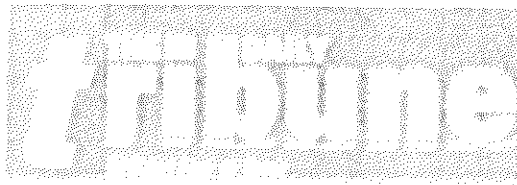
During the administration of President Aquino III, Senator Antonio Trillanes IV made several secret trips to Communist China, with the permission of Aquino III, supposedly to discuss the status of islets in the West Philippine Sea which belong to the Philippines but which Beijing insists on taking. It was learned that in 2012, Trillanes advised Aquino III to withdraw all Philippine troops stationed at Panatag Shoal in the disputed islets, on the mistaken assumption that Communist China will reciprocate.

Upon Trillanes' advice, Aquino III ordered the withdrawal of all Philippine troops from the shoal. Communist China, however, kept its troops in the disputed area. As a consequence, the communist Chinese currently occupy the shoal, in open violation of Philippine sovereignty.

Trillanes is a devoted follower of Aquino III. He is a sworn enemy of President Duterte. That debacle at Panatag Shoal is not the fault of Duterte.

The next time Robredo has plans to attack the Duterte administration on television, she should review the historical record first.

"She thought that by discrediting Duterte, the viewing public will consider her as a worthy alternative to the president."



Sison's 'worst nightmare'

Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) founding chair Jose Maria Sison slammed as a waste of taxpayers' money President Rodrigo Duterte's approval of the second phase of the military's modernization program.

Reacting to Sison, Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana on Sunday said the exiled CPP leader was only afraid for the already outnumbered and outgunned New People's Army (NPA), the armed component of the CPP, and its political wing the National Democratic Front of the Philippines (NDFP).

Under Horizon Two, the Armed Forces of the Philippines, specifically the Army, would be better equipped to handle internal threats including the NPA and extremist elements in Mindanao like the Maute Group, which held Marawi City for five months.

Mainly effected during the past dispensation, Horizon One saw the AFP acquire three second-hand Del Pilar-class frigates, 12 FA 50 trainer fighters of limited capabilities and two strategic sealift vessels.

Those frigates acquired under Horizon One, with their fire control systems and missiles removed before being shipped to the Philippines, are next to useless

unless they are retrofitted with missile systems.

If Horizon One left much to be desired, Horizon Two would really give the AFP some teeth.

For land battles, the Army would be equipped with towed and self-propelled howitzers, multiple launch rocket systems, armored recovery vehicles, fire support vehicles, tactical radios, ground mobility equipment, and night-fighting capability, among others.

The Army needs more modern armored vehicles if it is to have total control of the battlefield. In Marawi, the extraction of pinned down infantry became problematic because of the vulnerability of thinly armored personnel carriers to rocket propelled grenades.

Said Lorenzana of Sison: "He would prefer that our soldiers are ill-equipped so that his (NPA) fighters will have an advantage." Lorenzana, though, may be giving the NPA too much credit as it is already a spent force with many of its members having surrendered or have died in battle.

AFP officials correctly termed its modernization program, at least insofar as Horizon Two is concerned, as Sison's "worst nightmare." And why not? Imagine the AFP having night-fighting capabilities too against internal threats while the NPA can only fight during daytime.

Concept News Central

ONLINE NEWS

26 June 2018

6 cops killed, 9 wounded in alleged misencounter with Army in Samar

Published June 25, 2018 6:53pm
By MARLLY ROME BONDOC, GMA News

Six police officers were killed while nine others were wounded following a suspected misencounter on Monday morning in Villareal, Samar, Police Regional Office 8 director Chief Superintendent Mariel Magaway said.

At 9:27 a.m., Magaway said elements of the 805th Mobile Company, Regional Mobile Force Battalion 8 were conducting minor combat operations when it was fired upon by the elements of the Philippine Army's 87th Infantry Battalion in Barangay Sta. Rosa.

"Sabay nag-conduct ng combat operation ang PNP at AFP kaya nagkaron ng encounter,"
Magaway said.

A Special Investigation Task Group has already been formed by the PNP.

GMA News Online has sought comment from the military, but has yet to receive a reply as of
posting time. — RSJ, GMA News

www.gmanews.com

6 policemen killed, 6 more hurt in Samar misencounter

By: Joanna Ballaran - Reporter / @JoannaBINQ

INQUIRER.net / 07:46 PM June 25, 2018

Six policemen were killed and six more were wounded in a misencounter between police and military forces in Samar, the Philippine National Police (PNP) said Monday.

According to a spot report from Police Regional Office 8, the incident happened on Monday at 9:27 a.m. at Brgy. Sta. Rosa in Villareal, Samar.

The casualties, troops of the 805th Mobile Company of the Regional Mobile Force Battalion 8, were ambushed by members of 87th Infantry Battalion while conducting minor combat operations in the area. /jc

www.inquirer.net

Samar 'misencounter' kills 6 cops, wounds 9 others

By Sarwell Meriano June 25, 2018, 11:45 pm



The misencounter site a few minutes after the firefight in San Roque village, Sta. Rita, Samar that killed six policemen and wounded nine others. (photo shared in FB page of police officer Lope Irasga Cebreros III)

TACLOBAN CITY – Six junior police officers were killed while nine others were wounded in a misencounter Monday morning between patrolling cops and soldiers in San Roque village, Sta. Rita, Samar, the Philippine Army reported.

Army's 8th Infantry Division spokesperson, Capt. Francis Agno, said 17 soldiers of the 87th Infantry Battalion based in Calbiga, Samar "incidentally engaged" in a clash with a team from the 805th Company of the Philippine National Police Regional Mobile Force Battalion.

Both teams were conducting patrol in Sitio (subvillage) Lunoy, San Roque village past 9 a.m.

"After the skirmishes, 1st Lt. Orlando Casipit, Jr. and his troops discovered that the unit involved in the encounter belongs to the PNP unit under Chief Insp. Don Arhie Suspiñe who also operated on the same location," Agno said in a statement issued late Monday night.

Killed and wounded during the encounter are all junior police officers of one of the PNP's elite force trained in anti-insurgency operations. No one was hurt from the military.

"A joint, thorough and impartial investigation is being conducted even as we assure the public that your Army and PNP are fully cooperating to shed light on the incident," said Major Gen. Raul Farnacio, commander of Army's 8th Infantry division.

"The whole 8ID family extend our condolences to the bereaved families of those who died in the armed engagement. Rest assured that this unfortunate incident will not hamper the working relation of your Army and PNP in the region." Farnacio added.

The casualties have been identified but the names are yet to be officially released pending notification of their next of kin.

The PNP Eastern Visayas regional office has not yet issued any statement on the incident.

Sta. Rita has been identified as one of the areas in the region infested by the New People's Army. The town is just 30 kilometers away from Tacloban, crossing the San Juanico Bridge. *(PNA)*

www.pna.gov.ph