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23 May 2018

Wednesday



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Fuel excise tax may be suspended

By JESS DIAZ and CHRISTINA MENDEZ

As fuel prices soar, Malacañang expressed openness yesterday to the suspension of hefty excise taxes on diesel, liquefied petroleum gas (LPG), kerosene and bunker fuel that is used to produce electricity.

Magdalo party-list Rep. Gary Alejano said that under the Tax Reform for Acceleration and Inclusion (TRAIN) law, the tax on these products must be suspended when the price of crude oil in the world market reaches \$80 per barrel.

Malacañang agreed, with presidential spokesman Harry Roque saying, "We're

ready, if it reaches that price, to suspend the collection of excise taxes on oil products."

He said the departments of finance and budget would be consulted before any suspension, particularly on its impact on certain social services.

"The price of crude oil is reaching a multi-year high of \$80. Brent crude is already at

\$79.35 per barrel, while Dubai crude is at \$74.45," Alejano said yesterday.

Brent crude is extracted in Europe while Dubai crude is produced in the Middle East. Brent is lighter than Dubai. The two are usually used as price benchmarks.

"The movement of crude

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oil prices in the world market is alarming and should be monitored closely, given also the political crisis in the Middle East right now. Being a net oil importer, the Philippines is taking a huge hit from increases in crude oil prices, which are further worsened by the new petroleum excise taxes under TRAIN law," Alejano said.

Since the law's implementation in January this year, he said the total price increase as of last Monday has been P8.07 per liter for gasoline, P8.95 for diesel and P9.15 per liter of kerosene.

He said people are already reeling from increases in the cost of diesel and other oil products and their domino effect on prices of products and services.

Administration officials have admitted that the monthly increases in consumer prices since January were largely due to oil taxes imposed under TRAIN.

TRAIN levied a total of P6 tax on diesel, cooking gas, kerosene and bunker fuel. The levy was spread over three years up to 2020.

This year's first installment of the tax varies on the product. In the case of diesel, it was P2.50 per liter. On cooking gas, it was P1. The remainder of the P6 would be collected next

year and 2020.

On top of the excise tax, the law imposes the 12-percent value added tax based on the new levy. Thus, in January, the total increase in the retail price of diesel was almost P3 per liter.

Alejano and his opposition colleagues are calling on the House of Representatives to review the law and to suspend it in the meantime, while the Makabayan bloc of seven leftist party-list representatives wants it repealed.

Quirino Rep. Dakila Cua, who chairs the committee on ways and means, said he was open to reviewing TRAIN but not to suspending it.

"If you suspend it, that would affect the national coffers. That is not a responsible thing to do," he said.

Administration officials have starting shooting down the review and repeal proposals in both the House and the Senate.

In the Senate, there is a similar review initiative started by Sen. Paolo Benigno Aquino IV.

According to the Bureau of Internal Revenue, taxes on oil products imposed under TRAIN brought in an additional P4.73 billion in the first three months of this year.

Militant groups yesterday

launched a signature drive against the implementation of the TRAIN.

Representatives from Bagong Alyansang Makabayan (Bayan), Bayan Muna and other cause-oriented groups sought the signatures of hundreds of commuters queuing at the MRT-North Avenue station in Quezon City.

Bayan secretary-general Renato Reyes and Teodoro Casiño of Bayan Muna hope to gather enough support for their campaign against the

TRAIN Law before Congress goes on break on June 1.

The groups have yet to set the number of signatures they hope to attain, which Reyes is hoping will convince lawmakers to tackle urgent bills seeking to repeal or suspend the tax measure.

"We hope to submit the signatures we have gathered to Congress next week," said Reyes in a statement.

He urged Congress to scrap the tax reform law, which he said has become a burden for ordinary Filipinos.

Price monitoring

Socioeconomic Planning Secretary Ernesto Pernia called for stronger price monitoring of goods and strict enforcement of sanctions against erring businessmen found to be unjustly

raising prices amid the implementation of the TRAIN Law.

During yesterday's first congressional hearing on the second package of the tax reform program, which deals with the rationalization of incentives for businesses, Pernia acknowledged that the steep rise in inflation in the first four months of the year is in part because of the imposition of higher excise taxes under TRAIN.

But at the same time, he pointed out that it is also a natural occurrence in a rapidly growing economy and increase in demand following higher disposable incomes from the reduction in personal income tax.

Another factor for the rapid increase in prices is profiteering by businesses, such as those who sell old stocks at much higher prices, he said.

"There's also some fraction that can be attributed to profiteering because TRAIN 1 has become a convenient whipping boy, a convenient alibi for those who want to take advantage of the situation to increase prices, even if it is not really warranted," he said during the hearing of the House ways and means committee on TRAIN 2.

Pernia said there is a need to strengthen the price monitoring activities of the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) and to strongly enforce

sanctions on those found luring prices without cause.

"Price monitoring is DTI's job with corresponding sanctions," he said when sought for comment.

Prices of goods and services in the country rose at a faster pace of 4.5 percent in April from 4.3 percent in March and 3.2 percent in April 2017. Out of the April rate, 0.5 to 0.7 percentage points can be attributed to TRAIN.

Finance Secretary Carlos Dominguez III also said TRAIN has been "unfairly blamed" for the elevated inflation rate as rising prices of imported commodities also come into play.

"By our estimates, fully two-thirds of last April's 4.5 percent inflation rate is typical of a rapidly expanding economy. The remaining is due mainly to the sharp increases in key imported commodities specifically oil, the realignment of currency exchange rates and a robust increase in domestic demand," he said.

"At any rate, the inflationary impact of TRAIN is expected to diminish over the next few months," he added.

Dominguez said the government is already implementing the unconditional cash transfer program to cushion the effects of elevated inflation on the poorest households.

During a House ways and means committee hearing, Dominguez told lawmakers the first package of the TRAIN law "continues the process of fiscal consolidation that won us a succession of credit rating upgrades."

"With everyone's continued support of the Comprehensive Tax Reform Program, we expect to be upgraded once more in the upcoming rating periods," he added.

Finance Undersecretary Karl Kendrick Chua, for his part, said pursuing the administration's tax reform program is necessary to maintain the stable and positive outlook assigned by credit rating agencies to the Philippine government.

To recall, credit watcher S&P Global Ratings last month raised its credit outlook for the Philippines to positive from stable, raising the possibility of a rating upgrade for the country on the back of solid economic growth, healthy external position and improvements in policy-making.

Among the factors cited by the S&P was the TRAIN law, which it said would ensure that finances would remain sustainable while addressing the nation's infrastructure needs and chronic underinvestment. - With Christina Mendez, Emmanuel Tupas, Czeriza Valencia, Mary Grace Padin

MARAWI FOLK TO GOV'T: FIND OUR LOVED ONES

One year after the terrorist siege of the Philippines' major Islamic city, hundreds of people remain missing and nobody knows what happened to them and exactly how many they are.

By Divina Suson, Julie Alipala
and Allan Nawal
@inquirermindanao

(First of three parts)

MARAWI CITY—Fatima Lumabao has entertained thoughts of committing suicide in her



MARAWI A YEAR AFTER

fruitless search for her four missing children.

Lumabao said her children—Norhuda, 21; Rasida, 20; Parhana, 12; and Mohammad,

10—went missing after Islamic State-allied gunmen laid siege to Marawi City on May 23 last year and started a five-month war that left more than a thousand people dead.

"What really happened to them? It seems I will never find them," said the 48-year-old

mother of eight.

If they were among the civilians killed, Lumabao said she wanted to find their remains.

"I'm already widowed. It pains me that they went missing and I have not gotten a single word on what happened to them," she said. "[I want to find

my children] so I could give them a decent burial, if indeed they died in the fighting."

Lumabao was in Iligan City buying goods for her small variety store on the day the fighting between government forces and gunmen led by the Maute brothers and the bandit group

Abu Sayyaf's Isnilon Hapilon erupted.

She said Norhuda, who had a cell phone, managed to call her to say she and her siblings were leaving their house at Barangay Basak Malutlut in Marawi. Lumabao eventually lost contact with her daughter.

A4

FROM A1

"When I was heading home, the vehicle I was in could not get through because fighting was going on. I was stranded for hours before we were finally allowed to pass," Lumabao said.

She spent the night of May 23 at Barangay Bangolo. "The following day, I managed to walk to our house. Along the way, I saw bodies. Our house was a shambles. My children were not there," she said.

Lumabao said she left when a Maute gunman told her to leave.

She went to the Lanao del Sur capitol compound in Marawi, where she found her four other children—Rakma, 19; Jamud, 17; Abdul Jamil, 15, and Alejana, 14.

Lumabao said she was hopeful that her four other children survived the fighting, although her village became one of the centers of the conflict.

A year after—nothing

But a year after the siege, none of her four children had shown up.

The military had confirmed that 47 civilians were killed, allegedly by Maute gunmen. Their remains had all been recovered, but none of the bodies belonged to any of Lumabao's missing children.

As the people of Marawi struggle to rebuild their lives, Drieza Lininding, chair of the Moro Consensus Group, saw the

need to take account of what they lost in the war.

But to this day, there has been no clear report or accounting of what happened in Marawi.

"They said more than 100,000 people were displaced. But the figures need validation. There are no clear, validated data we can consider official," Lininding said.

He said one thing that need-

ed to be resolved was the exact number of missing people.

Although the Management of the Dead and Missing (MDM) has buried more than 300 people in a Muslim cemetery and more than 70 families have requested DNA testing at the police office in Iligan City, there is no clear report yet on exactly how many people are missing and how many have been found.

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), which put up a tracing site, said it had received more than 400 requests to find missing relatives since the fighting started.

"The humanitarian issue of 'missing persons' is often overlooked in postemergency situations. The issue of missing people may not be perceived as urgent as the need for food, water or shelter, but it has serious and lingering consequences for families who are still looking for their loved ones, and ultimately on the community as a whole," said Camilla Matteucci, head of the ICRC Protection team in the Philippines.

No investigation

Zia Alonto Adiong, spokesperson for the Lanao del Sur crisis management committee, said the group did not know what happened to the missing.

The MDM, which is under the supervision of the Department of the Interior and Local Government, had stopped giving it reports, Adiong said.

It has been a year after the siege but neither the Senate nor the House of Representatives had launched an inquiry, Lininding said.

"All of them are silent," he said. "There has to be a congressional inquiry, not only for the Maranao but [also] for the families of those who were killed there—the civilians, soldiers and policemen. Their families deserve [to know] the truth."

—WITH REPORTS FROM RICHEL UMEI AND GEOFFREY MAITEM INQ

When representatives of Human Rights Watch visited Marawi, Lininding learned that 3,000 people were trapped in the city's buildings, including the provincial capitol. "Those numbers were based on the distress calls made to their families," he said.

"What the clearing operation did was recover remains that were found on the streets. What

about those trapped inside destroyed buildings?" he asked.

The Armed Forces of the Philippines released a report showing that 1,780 civilians were rescued and more than 900 Maute gunmen were killed in the fighting, but the figures could not be independently verified.

Military records also showed that 168 soldiers and policemen died in battle.

CONFRONTATION WITH CHINA

DUTERTE: I WON'T GO TO WAR I CAN'T WIN

By Christine O. Avendaño
@10avendanoINQ

President Duterte on Tuesday said he had wanted to take "stronger" and "violent" action in asserting Philippine sovereignty in the South China Sea, but realized that such a move would mean great losses for the country in a confrontation with China.

Speaking at the 120th anniversary of the Philippine Navy at Coconut Palace in Manila, Mr. Duterte said he did not want to go to a war that he could not win.

"Whether you accept it or not, that's the reality on the ground," Mr. Duterte said.

Mr. Duterte had long been saying the Philippines did not have military muscle to confront China over their territorial dispute in the South China Sea.

Friendship with China

He had long been saying he preferred friendship with China, which, according to him, is economically beneficial to the Philippines.

That doesn't mean to say, however, that his administration is not doing anything to defend Philippine sovereignty in the South China Sea, according to Malacañang.

On Tuesday, the Palace insisted that the administration was doing something, though it was "not making a big deal out of it."

Opposition lawmakers and acting Chief Justice Antonio

Carpio have called on the government to protest China's deployment last week of long-range, nuclear-capable bombers on Woody Island, in the Paracel archipelago, putting all of Southeast Asia, including the Philippines, within its striking range.

Carpio on Monday also urged the Philippines and other claimants to join forces and oppose China's militarization of the South China Sea.

Asked about Carpio's remarks, presidential spokesperson Harry Roque on Tuesday said: "Let me just say that just because we have not always said anything in that regard does not mean we are not doing anything."

Diplomatic initiatives

Roque said the government was taking diplomatic initiatives, but it was "not making a big deal out of it."

One of those initiatives, he said, was getting the Association of Southeast Asian Nations to issue a statement on the territorial disputes in the South China Sea during its last meeting in Singapore.

Asked for comment on China's statement on Monday that the South China Sea islands it was militarizing were "Chinese territories," Roque said the government would insist on Philippine sovereignty but at the same time move on with its bilateral ties with China.

—WITH A REPORT FROM VINCE F. NONATO INQ 12

Vietnam slams presence of China bomber planes

HANOI—Recent activity by China's strategic bombers in the South China Sea's Paracel Islands seriously violated Vietnam's sovereignty over the disputed territory, Vietnam's foreign ministry said on Monday.

China's People's Liberation Army Air Force said bombers such as the H-6K had landed and taken off from islands and reefs in the South China Sea as part of training exercises last week.

The flights "increase tensions, cause regional instabilities and are not good for maintaining a peaceful, stable and cooperative environment in the East Sea," foreign ministry spokesperson Le Thi Thu Hang said in a statement, using the Vietnamese name for the South China Sea.

Stop militarization

"Vietnam demands that China stop these activities, cease militarization of the area, and strictly respect Vietnam's sovereignty over the Hoang Sa Islands," Hang said, referring to the Paracels.

Hang said the presence of the bombers in the area had an adverse impact on ongoing negotiations between China and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean) on a code of conduct for claimants in the South China Sea.

Sharp contrast

Vietnam's remarks were in sharp contrast to the reaction of the Philippines, seven of whose reefs in the Spratly archipelago had been seized and transformed into military bases by China.

Harry Roque, spokesperson for President Duterte, on Monday expressed "serious concerns" over China's deployment of the bombers but said this did not pose any threat to the Philippines.

The Duterte administration has long tamped down criticism of his refusal to demand Chinese compliance with a 2016 arbitration ruling that invalidated China's claims to virtually all of the South China Sea on historical



Le Thi Thu Hang —AFP

grounds and upheld the Philippines' sovereign rights to its part of the resource-rich waterway.

On Monday, the administration again rejected calls for Mr. Duterte to protest China's deployment of antiship cruise missiles and surface-to-air missile systems on three Philippine-claimed reefs in the Spratlys.

The administration said Mr. Duterte did not see immediate danger to the Philippines because of the "newfound friendship" between the two countries.

China on Monday quickly dismissed concerns over its activities in the South China Sea, saying the "South China Sea islands are Chinese territories."

'Don't read too much into this'

Chinese foreign ministry spokesperson Lu Kang urged other countries not to overinterpret what he called a routine military patrol.

"We hope that relevant parties do not read too much into this," Lu told a daily news briefing.

Vietnam and China have long been embroiled in maritime disputes in the South China Sea.

Besides Vietnam and the Philippines, Malaysia, Brunei and Taiwan also have claims to parts of the South China Sea, which is crisscrossed by sea lanes through which \$5 trillion in global commerce passes every year and where islets, reefs and atolls are believed to be sitting atop vast oil and gas reserves.

—REPORTS FROM REUTERS AND AFP



Sotto vows independent, inclusive Senate

By PAOLO ROMERO

Senate President Vicente Sotto III assured the public yesterday that he would not hesitate to criticize Malacañang on policies that he views as adverse to the people even as he pledged the chamber's support for initiatives that would boost growth and social services.

"If we have to criticize, we will criticize. But we will be cooperative when it comes to legislation that will benefit Filipinos," Sotto told reporters.

Sotto was responding to questions on the chamber's relations with Malacañang after he took over the helm of the Senate from

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Sotto From Page 1

Sen. Aquilino Pimentel III on Monday.

He reiterated that he does not belong to the PDP-Laban that puts him at a distance from the administration and Speaker Pantaleon Alvarez, who belongs to the ruling party.

"As far as politics is concerned, I am independent, we remain independent and I'm glad to keep the leadership of this entire Senate independent," he said.

Sotto said he was open to

supporting the death penalty bill if imposed only on convicted big-time drug traffickers.

He said he was not too keen on the divorce bill but would push for the relaxation on the requirements of annulment of marriage.

Sotto also said he was open to amending the Constitution as long as the Senate and the House of Representatives will vote separately if Charter change will be done through Congress.

He said the Senate will also

be more vocal on China's increasing military activities in Philippine-claimed territories in the South China Sea.

He justified not signing the resolution signed by 14 of his colleagues asking the Supreme Court to review its decision to remove chief justice Maria Lourdes Sereno, saying he does not want to interfere in the workings of the judiciary in the same way he does not want the judicial branch to meddle in the affairs of Congress.

Members of the minority bloc challenged Sotto to be more aggressive in helping ad-

dress the concerns of Filipinos.

Sen. Paolo Benigno Aquino IV said the Senate should press for the suspension of the Tax Reform for Inclusion and Acceleration (TRAIN) law and take a strong stand against China's militarization of the South China Sea.

Aquino also cited the "continued violence and killings in our streets."

"The new leadership must face these challenges head on. They have an opportunity to live up to the historical legacy of the Senate as the last bastion of independence and democracy

in our country," he said.

Despite Sotto's support for the revival of the death penalty, the former executive secretary of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines-Episcopal Commission on Family and Life (CBCP-ECFL) Fr. Melvin Castro welcomed the installation of the new Senate president.

Castro said that except for Sotto's position on the death penalty bill, he believed the new Senate president would be able to protect life.

"I personally am glad that Sen. Tito Sotto was elected Senate president. Except for

that particular issue on the death penalty, he is generally pro-life," said Castro.

"I believe divorce and the SOGIE (Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity and Expression) bills would not prosper under his term," he added.

The Death Penalty Bill is still pending before the Senate.

Sotto has been vocal about his support on the passage of the measure. Last year, he clarified that the punishment of death should only be imposed on convicted high-level drug traffickers. — With Evelyn Macairan, Marvin Sy

Palace won't antagonize China over SCS - Roque

Malacañang would rather not antagonize China over its expanding military presence in the South China Sea and West Philippine Sea as it sees the need to maintain good bilateral relations without compromising Philippine sovereignty.

"There are two options - let

China denies 'militarizing' SCS. See Page 12

us antagonize China again or let's insist that we are not giving up on the territory. Let us assert our rights over the vast oceans within our exclusive economic zone, but at the same time moving on with our bilateral relations."

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Palace From Page 1

presidential spokesman Harry Roque said yesterday.

"Both countries have vowed to work on areas which we can agree on," he said. "Where we can agree we agree, where we can't, we set aside our differences in the meantime."

President Duterte himself, in remarks yesterday at the commemoration of the 120th anniversary of the Philippine Navy, said there is no need to be aggressive in dealing with China.

"It has something to do with my desire to defend but at the same time not to make any move that would be destructive to the nation. I cannot afford at this time to go to war," the President told a gathering of Navy officers and personnel.

"I cannot go into a battle which I cannot win and it would only result in the destruction and probably a lot of losses for our Armed Forces," Duterte added.

Roque, meanwhile, taunted acting Chief Justice Antonio Carpio for asking executive officials to file a formal protest against China's deployment of heavy bombers to one of the

artificial islands in the South China Sea.

"So, I ask Justice Carpio, I appreciate your nationalism but come on, look at the statements that we just made, by insisting on ASEAN's statement, aren't we asserting and working with other countries with similar claims? All other claimants are from ASEAN," he added.

Roque reiterated that the government - through the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) - had already notified Beijing of its concern over the landing of the bombers on Woody Island in the Paracel Islands.

"Let me just say that, just because we have not said anything in that regard, does not mean we are not doing anything. That's covered by what the DFA says, that we can't publicly announce what we are doing, but you know it goes without saying that that possibility is there," Roque said.

Roque maintained that DFA's effort should prove "that we're quietly working with our ASEAN neighbors.

especially those with similar claims and an overwhelming number of us in fact within ASEAN have claims."

The DFA clarified it has already taken diplomatic action on the matter in "appropriate language" relayed through diplomatic channels.

Brunei, Malaysia, Taiwan and Vietnam also have overlapping claims in the South China Sea.

File protest now

Carpio said the Duterte administration should immediately take action against China's militarizing the South China Sea and West Philippine Sea as doing nothing could be misinterpreted as acquiescing to the Asian power's "creeping invasion."

In a statement yesterday, the most senior Supreme Court magistrate expressed alarm over the recent deployment to Woody Island of H-6K long-range bombers capable of carrying nuclear-armed cruise missiles.

"Failure to formally protest means the Philippines is acquiescing or consenting to the militarization, and worse, to the claim of China that all the islands, waters and resources

within the nine-dash line form part of Chinese territory," Carpio warned.

"The failure to formally protest China's militarization and creeping invasion makes the Philippines a willing victim of China's third warfare strategy — acquiescing to China's claim without China firing a single shot," he pointed out.

"This Chinese strategic bomber can land and take off on any of China's three-kilometer military grade runways on Mischief (Panganiban) Reef, Subi (Zamora) Reef and Fiery Cross (Kagitingan) Reef," he said. "All three reefs are within the Kalayaan Island Group of the Philippines."

He explained that the Philippines has sovereignty over Zamora Reef and Kagitingan Reef as well as exclusive sovereign rights over Panganiban Reef as earlier declared by a United Nations-backed arbitral tribunal.

The magistrate maintained that the militarization of the Spratlys and the Paracels is part of China's "Three-Warfare Strategy" to control the South China Sea for economic and military purposes.

He said China is planning to construct more air and

naval facilities and introduce nuclear-armed strategic bombers — as what it is doing now — to intimidate other claimant states into accepting Beijing's nine-dash line.

"China's third warfare strategy is to display its overwhelming military superiority to force other claimant states into submission without China firing a single shot," he said.

Carpio stressed that filing another formal protest with the Permanent Court of Arbitration is the best way to deal with China's provocations.

"Any self-respecting sovereign state will immediately formally protest such encroachment on its sovereignty and sovereign rights. The Philippines must do no less. A formal protest is recognized by the United Nations Charter as a peaceful and legitimate response," he pointed out.

United front

Carpio also suggested that the government coordinate with other claimant states and other concerned states in resisting China's militarization of the South China Sea.

"Failure to coordinate, and to harness world opinion to

support the arbitral ruling, will be handing over to China on a silver platter the West Philippine Sea," he warned.

Vice President Leni Robredo, for her part, reiterated her call for the Duterte administration to file a diplomatic protest against China's aircraft deployment.

Robredo, however, erroneously referred to the site of the landing as being in the West Philippine Sea.

"Reports that there were Chinese aircraft with nuclear-strike capability in our islands are very alarming. Aside from this, we are also concerned about China's conduct of landing and takeoff exercises in the West Philippine Sea using their long-range bombers," Robredo said in Filipino.

"We urge the Department of Foreign Affairs to file a diplomatic protest in light of these developments. This would allow us to express our strong opposition against China's actions," she said.

Robredo said the Filipino people expect the Duterte administration to defend the country's territories — **Christina Mendez, Helen Flores, Jess Diaz, Jaime Laude, Pia Lee-Brago**

China denies 'militarizing' allegations in SCS

BEIJING – Beijing hit back Monday at allegations it was "militarizing" the South China Sea after landing bombers at an airbase in the contested waters, accusing Washington instead of raising tensions with its own military footprint.

China on Friday for the first time landed several combat aircraft – including the long-range, nuclear strike-capable

H-6K – at an island airfield in the sea, triggering international concern.

The move prompted immediate criticism from the US, with a Pentagon spokesman condemning China's "continued militarization of disputed features in the South China Sea."

But China rejected concerns that the deployment had raised tensions in a region home to

vital global shipping routes.

"The South China Sea islands are Chinese territories," foreign ministry spokesperson Lu Kang told a regular briefing.

Lu said moving the bombers into the area was "part of the normal training for the Chinese military" and that the US "sending its own warships and planes to the region... poses a danger to other countries."

Friday's takeoff and landing drills took place on Woody Island, according to Washington think-tank Center for Strategic and International Studies.

The island is home to China's largest base in the Paracel Islands, which are also claimed by Vietnam and Taiwan.

Hanoi slammed the drills and demanded Beijing "immediately cease" its military moves in the

area, the foreign ministry said in a statement to AFP Monday.

The exercises "seriously violated Vietnam's sovereignty... raising tensions (and) destabilizing the region," it said.

Vietnam has long traded barbs with its communist neighbor over competing claims in the sea but tensions have risen in recent weeks.

Earlier this month Hanoi

told Beijing to remove military equipment from the Spratly islands after CNBC reported it had installed anti-ship and surface-to-air missiles.

Soon after, the Vietnamese unit of Russian oil firm Rosneft said it started drilling in a part of the sea also claimed by China. Beijing responded by asserting its sovereignty over the area. 12

– AFP

'Protest China's militarization'

By REY O. PANALIGAN

Acting Chief Justice Antonio T. Carpio has urged the government to "formally protest the increasing militarization of the South China Sea by China."

In a statement, Carpio cited the recent introduction by China on Woody Island of the H-6K long range bomber that can carry nuclear-armed cruise missiles.

"This Chinese strategic bomber can also land and take-off on any of China's three-kilometer military grade runways on Mischief Reef, Subi Reef and Fiery Cross Reef. All three reefs are within the Kalayaan Island Group of the Philippines," he said.

Carpio pointed out that the failure of the government to formally protest "means the Philippines is acquiescing or consenting to the militarization, and worse, to the claim of China that all the islands, waters and resources within the nine-dashed line form part of Chinese territory."

He said that "a formal protest is necessary to preserve our sovereignty over Fiery Cross Reef, which is a high-tide elevation."

VP weighs in

Vice President Leni Robredo also expressed "serious concern" yesterday over deployment of long-range Chinese bombers in the South

China Sea and urged the government to file a diplomatic protest against China.

"Nakasaad sa ating Saligang Batas na ipinagbabawal ang presensiya ng anumang sandatang nuklear sa kahit na saang lugar sa Pilipinas (Our Constitution prohibits the presence of any nuclear weapons anywhere in the Philippines)," she said.

Cooperation for now

However, the government prefers to avoid antagonizing China despite concerns raised about its increased military buildup in the South China Sea.

Presidential Spokesman Harry Roque said that while the government has not given up its ownership of the West Philippine Sea, it has chosen to set aside "contentious issues" with China and focus on other areas of cooperation for now.

"We have two options: Antagonize China or stand firm that we will not give away our territory. We will uphold our right in the sea that's part of our exclusive economic zone but at the same time moving on with our bilateral relations," Roque said in Filipino at a Palace press briefing.

"Regardless of what happens, no territory will be given up. We will defend our right and sovereignty we'll move on issues that we can agree upon and set aside contentious issues for now," he added.

The Philippine government earlier said it does not consider China a threat to national security, but has expressed serious concern over the presence of its bomber aircraft in one of the islands of the South China Sea.

Manila also renewed the call for non-militarization and self-restraint in the South China Sea to prevent the escalation of the territorial conflict.

China's denial

Last Monday, Beijing hit back at allegations it was "militarizing" the South China Sea after landing bombers at an airbase in the contested waters, accusing Washington instead of raising tensions with its own military footprint.

A Pentagon spokesman had condemned China's "continued militarization of disputed features in the South China Sea."

But China rejected concerns that the deployment had raised tensions in a region home to vital global shipping routes.

"The South China Sea islands are Chinese territories," foreign ministry spokesperson Lu Kang told a regular briefing.

Lu said moving the bombers into the area was "part of the normal training for the Chinese military", and that the US "sending its own warships and planes to the region... poses a danger to other countries." (With reports from Raymund F. Antonio, Genalyn D. Kabiling, and AFP)

'PRESERVE SOVEREIGNTY OVER KALAYAAN REEFS'

File protest vs China – - Carpio

BY WILLIAM B. DEPASUPIL

ACTING Chief Justice Antonio Carpio has called on the Duterte government to take diplomatic actions against China's increasing militarization of the South China Sea, also known as the West Philippine Sea.

"Failure to formally protest means the Philippines is acquiescing or consenting to the militarization, and worse, to the claim of China that all the islands, waters and resources within the nine-dashed line form part of Chinese territory," said Carpio in a two-page statement.

He expressed alarm over recent reports that China had deployed its H-6K long range bombers that could carry nuclear-armed cruise missiles on Woody Island, the largest of the disputed Paracel Islands in the South China Sea, which is being contested by Vietnam and Taiwan.

Carpio pointed out that the Chinese strategic bombers could also land and take off on any of China's three-kilometer military grade runways on Mischief Reef, Subi Reef and Fiery Cross Reef, which are all within the Kalayaan Island Group of the Philippines.

"A formal protest is necessary to preserve our sovereignty over Fiery Cross Reef, which is a high-tide elevation. A formal protest is also necessary to preserve our sovereignty over Subi Reef which the arbitral tribunal at the Hague ruled forms part of the territorial sea of Pag-Asa Island," Carpio said, referring to the United Nations-backed arbitration court ruling won by the Philippines against

China in July 2016.

A formal protest is also necessary to preserve the country's exclusive sovereign rights over Mischief Reef, which, the arbitral tribunal ruled, forms part of the exclusive economic zone of the Philippines.

Carpio said China's militarization of the Spratlys and the Paracels is part of China's "Three-Warfare Strategy" to control South China Sea for economic and military purposes.

The strategy, he pointed, aims to show China's overwhelming military superiority to the Philippines and other claimant-states to force them into submission without firing a single shot.

"China's construction of huge

air and naval bases, and now the introduction of nuclear-armed strategic bombers, are all designed to intimidate into submission other claimant states, including the Philippines, to accept the nine-dashed line as China's national boundary in the South China Sea," he added.

"Any self-respecting sovereign state will immediately formally protest such encroachment on its sovereignty and sovereign rights. The Philippines must do no less. A formal protest is recognized by the United Nations Charter as a peaceful and legitimate response," Carpio further said.

He also called on the government to coordinate with other

claimant states, as well as other states that see a threat to freedom of navigation and overflight, in resisting China's militarization of the South China Sea.

"Failure to coordinate, and to harness world opinion to support the arbitral ruling, will be handing over to China on a silver platter the West Philippine Sea," he said.

In its nine-dash line map submitted to the United Nations, China claims 90 percent or four-fifths of the disputed area, including territories that clearly belong to the Philippines based on the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (Unclos), which give the Philippines sovereign rights over a 200-mile exclusive economic zone.

Carpio, VP tell gov't: File protest with China

BY ASHZEL HACHERO
AND JOCELYN MONTEMAYOR

ACTING Chief Justice Antonio Carpio and Vice President Leni Robredo yesterday urged government to file a formal protest with China over its deployment of long-range, nuclear-strike capable bomber planes in the disputed South China Sea.

Carpio said China's latest action is a "creeping invasion" and an encroachment on the Philippines' sovereignty.

By not filing a protest, he said, the Philippines is consenting to the militarization of the area, and

worse, to Beijing's claim that all the islands, waters and resources within the nine-dash line, form part of Chinese territory.

President Duterte reiterated he wants to "assert" the Philippines' claims but he does not want any violence.

"It has something to do with my desire to defend but at the same time not to make any move that would be destructive to the nation. I cannot afford at this time to go to war. I cannot go into a battle which I cannot win and it would only result in the destruction and probably a lot of losses for our Armed Forces," Duterte said at

the ceremonies for the 120th anniversary of the Philippine Navy.

"I really want to do something to assert. But you know, when I assumed the presidency, there was already this ruckus in the West Philippine Sea -- it used to be China Sea. And because, in my simple calculation, in every common sense that's available to me, I would have taken a stronger but probably a more violent way of doing it. And I said in my own estimation, it would be a great loss to the nation and probably end up losing a war," he added.

Duterte has said he is not giving up the Philippine claim and would

take up the territorial dispute with China at the right time within his term.

Robredo said the increased Chinese militarization of the South China Sea poses a threat to Philippine interests in the West Philippine Sea and to the security of the region.

She also said the country's security should not be compromised while the government is pursuing diplomatic talks with China over the territorial row.

Carpio said the Chinese H-6K long-range bombers deployed on

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CARPIO

Woody Island, which is part of the Paracel Islands in the South China Sea, can also land and take off on any of the three-kilometer, military grade runways China built on Mischief, Subi, and Fiery Cross reefs, which are all within the Kalayaan Island Group, also known as Spratly Islands.

China has also deployed anti-ship and anti-aircraft missiles on the three reefs.

The Paracel islands are being claimed by China, Vietnam, and Taiwan.

Mischief (local name Panganiban), Fiery Cross (Kagitingan), and Subi (Zamora) reefs are occupied by China but are being claimed by the Philippines.

China, Vietnam, Taiwan, the Philippines, Malaysia, and Brunei,

have competing claims in the South China Sea.

"A formal protest is necessary to preserve our sovereignty over Fiery Cross Reef, which is a high-tide elevation. A formal protest is also necessary to preserve our sovereignty over Subi Reef which the arbitral tribunal at the Hague ruled forms part of the territorial sea of Pag-asa Island. Moreover, a formal protest is also necessary to preserve our exclusive sovereign rights over Mischief Reef which the arbitral tribunal ruled forms part of the exclusive economic zone of the Philippines," Carpio said.

Pag-asa Island is part of the Kalayaan Island Group.

Carpio was part of the country's legal team that won the case in 2016 before the Netherlands-based Permanent Court of Arbitration

against China's excessive claims in the disputed waters.

STRATEGY

Carpio said China's militarization of the Spratlys and the Paracels is part of its "three-warfare strategy" to control the South China Sea for economic and military purposes.

He said China's construction of huge air and naval bases, and now the introduction of the bomber planes, are all designed to intimidate into submission other claimant states to accept the nine-dash line.

Carpio said China also aims to display military superiority to force other claimant-states into submission without China firing a single shot.

"The failure to formally protest China's militarization and creeping

invasion makes the Philippines a willing victim of China's third warfare strategy -- acquiescing to China's claim without China filing a single shot," he said.

"Any self-respecting sovereign state will immediately formally protest such encroachment on its sovereignty and sovereign rights. The Philippines must do no less. A formal protest is recognized by the United Nations Charter as a peaceful and legitimate response," he added.

Carpio also suggested that the Philippines coordinate with other claimant countries, as well as other states that see a threat to freedom of navigation.

"Failure to coordinate, and to harness world opinion to support the arbitral ruling, will be handing over to China on a silver platter the West Philippine Sea," he said.

— With Angela Lopez de Leon

China rejects charges of sea 'militarization'

BEIJING, China—Beijing hit back Monday at allegations it was "militarizing" the South China Sea after landing bombers at an airbase in the contested waters, accusing Washington instead of raising tensions with its own military footprint.

China on Friday for the first time landed several combat aircraft—including the long-range, nuclear strike-capable H-6K—at an island airfield in the sea, triggering international concern.

The move prompted immediate criticism from the US, with a Pentagon spokesman condemning China's "continued militarization of disputed features in the South China Sea."

But China rejected concerns that the deployment had raised tensions in a region home to vital global shipping routes.

"The South China Sea islands are Chinese territories," foreign ministry spokesperson Lu Kang told a regular briefing.

Lu said moving the bombers into the area was "part of the normal training for the Chinese military," and that the US "sending its own warships and planes to the region... poses a danger to other countries."

Friday's takeoff and landing drills took place on Woody Island, according to Washington think-tank the Centre for Strategic and International Studies. *Next page*

China...

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The island is home to China's largest base in the Paracel Islands, which are also claimed by Vietnam and Taiwan.

Hanoi slammed the drills and demanded Beijing "immediately cease" its military moves in the area, the foreign ministry said in a statement to AFP Monday.

The exercises "seriously violated Vietnam's sovereignty... raising tensions (and) destabilizing the region," it said.

Vietnam has long traded barbs with its communist neighbor over competing claims in the sea but tensions have risen in recent weeks.

Earlier this month Hanoi told Beijing to remove military equipment from the Spratly islands after CNBC reported it had installed anti-ship and surface-to-air missiles.

Soon after, the Vietnamese unit of Russian oil firm Rosneft said it started drilling

in a part of the sea also claimed by China. Beijing responded by asserting its sovereignty over the area.

China claims almost all the South China Sea and has built a string of artificial islands in contested areas since 2013, installing an array of airbases, radar systems and naval facilities.

The Philippines, Taiwan, Brunei and Malaysia have competing partial claims.

The Philippines, which has largely backed off from the sea dispute under President Rodrigo Duterte, said Monday said it was taking "appropriate diplomatic action" over the bomber exercises.

Analysts said China's latest move is a bold power play to bolster its territorial claims while rivals are divided and the US distracted by North Korea.

The steady buildup of military assets in the waterway—believed to have significant oil and natural gas deposits—allows China to "influence its weaker neighbors in peacetime," said Bonnie Glaser, a China expert

at the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington.

"Through the use of a large number of law enforcement ships, for example, it can pressure Vietnam and the Philippines not to unilaterally extract energy in waters that China claims jurisdictional rights," she said.

"In wartime, China's military assets on these islands will increase the risk to the US of intervening militarily."

Despite the rhetoric, experts say little has been done to prevent China from solidifying its vast maritime claims.

Beijing has managed to weaken regional resistance by courting some members of the 10-nation Association of Southeast Asian Nations.

While US warships have conducted "freedom of navigation" operations near Chinese-claimed features, they have not deterred Beijing.

The bombers were deployed while US President Donald Trump is focused on preparing for a summit with North Korean leader

Kim Jong Un next month.

"I think there is an obvious political motivation for the timing," said Euan Graham, director of the international security program at the Australian think tank the Lowy Institute.

"Because the US is mainly engaged in the North Korea files... there is a window of opportunity where the US reaction is likely to be restrained."

China's foreign ministry has repeated denials that the region was being militarized, saying the islands belong to Beijing and the bombers were conducting "normal training."

The latest exercises were "largely symbolic" and not a significant military development, Graham said.

To deploy from Woody Island, China would have to install logistics infrastructure to operate aircraft, refuel them, store weapons and house crews, he said.

"Just landing an aircraft doesn't make it an operational space," Graham said. **AFP**

Palace asserts: No territorial claim on SCS given up

By Rey E. Requejo

MALACANANG on Tuesday assured the public that the Philippines will not give up any of its territorial claims in the West Philippine Sea amid China's militarization of the contested area.

"Right now, our position is still the same: whatever happens there, no territory will be given. We will assert our rights and sovereignty on the maritime territory that is part of our exclusive economic zone," Roque said in a Palace media briefing.

Roque said the Hague-based Permanent Court of Arbitration decision is evi-

dence of the country's sovereign rights on the islands and its maritime claims within the exclusive economic zone.

The tribunal ruled in 2016 that China's nine-dash line map, which covers nearly the whole of South China Sea, has no legal basis.

Roque earlier said the Philippines had serious concerns over reports that China has landed combat aircraft, including a long-range H-6K bomber at an airfield of one of its reclaimed island in the South China Sea.

China has denied the militarization allegations, saying the movement of the bombers was just part of the normal Chi-

nese military training in the South China Sea which Beijing claimed "are Chinese territories."

Roque said the Philippines, through the Department of Foreign Affairs, is already addressing the deployment of Chinese military assets in the WPS.

"I cannot understand why you are saying that we are not doing anything. It is not publicly announced by the DFA but we are doing something [on this issue]," Roque said.

He said the country is "quietly working" with its Association of Southeast Asian Nations neighbors, particularly

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Palace...

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those with similar claims like Malaysia, Vietnam and Brunei to address the issue.

"We have already a common statement by insisting on Asean statement," Roque said, referring to the Asean Declaration calling for China to heed on the non-militarization of the WPS.

Roque said the Chinese military activities in the disputed territory will also be discussed in the Bilateral Consultative Mechanism meeting between the Philippines and China "probably" in June.

"But at the same time, we are moving on with our bilateral relations in which we can agree on something that is agreeable and set aside contentious issues for now," he said.

Roque said when China built the artificial islands in the WPS, "we all know that it will be used for military bases and not for tourist attractions."

He said President Rodrigo Duterte has repeatedly said that what is happening in the WPS is a standoff between China and the Philippines' longstanding ally, the US.

"We will not join them but of course, we are concerned because we are also using the sea [WPS] for our livelihood," Roque said.

Vice President Leni Robredo on Tuesday called on Foreign Secretary Alan Peter Cayetano to file a diplomatic protest against China.

Robredo disputed President Rodrigo Duterte's view that the deployment of long-range bombers on Woody Island was no threat to the Philippines.

"That is security threat to the Philippines and the entire region because of the continued establishment [of China's] structures at the islands there. Our Constitution prohibits the presence of any nuclear weapon in any part of the Philippines," she said.

Acting Chief Justice Antonio Carpio also called on Malacañang to take action on the increasing militarization of China of the disputed areas in the South China Sea, which was branded as a "creeping invasion."

In a statement released to the media on Tuesday, Carpio expressed alarm on the reports about the recent deployment by the People's Liberation Army Air Force of China of H-6K long range bomber that can carry nuclear-armed cruise missiles on Woody Island.

Carpio said that the government must formally protest such action of China that he believed was an "encroachment on its sovereignty and sovereign rights."

"Failure to formally protest means the Philippines is acquiescing or consenting to the militarization, and worse, to the claim of China that all the islands, waters and resources within the nine-dashed line form part of Chinese territory," Carpio added.

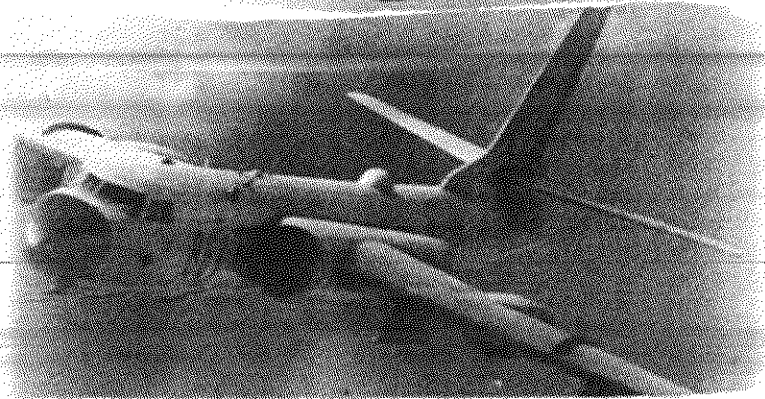
A spokesman for the Armed Forces of the Philippines, Col. Edgard Arevalo, said Philippine maritime and air patrols off the West Philippine Sea were ongoing despite the Chinese buildup.

"We continue to conduct air and maritime patrols in those areas and we feed everything that we monitor to our national leadership," he said.

Arevalo also assured the public that the military will never renege on its constitutional obligation to help secure and defend the country's territorial integrity.

With Rio N. Araja, PNA

Beijing's South China Sea bombers fly in the face of protests



China's brazen landing of nuclear-capable bombers on an island in the disputed South China Sea is a bold power play to bolster its territorial claims while rivals are divided and the US distracted by North Korea, analysts say.

China attracted diplomatic protests after long-range H-6K bombers carried out landing and takeoff drills at an unidentified island airstrip on Friday. Earlier reports said the bombers had the landing at the Paracels which Vietnam claims ownership.

But Beijing has long brushed aside such condemnation, denying it was militarizing the region even though it has installed an array of airstrips, radar systems and naval facilities on a string of islands it

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has reclaimed in contested areas since 2013.

The planes are believed to have landed on Woody Island, China's largest base in the Paracel Islands which is also claimed by Vietnam and Taiwan, according to Bonnie Glaser, a China expert at the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington.

An H-6K long-range strategic bomber deployed to Woody Island could reach almost the entire South China Sea and many countries surrounding it, according to a CSIS analysis.

The steady buildup of military assets in the waterway — believed to have significant oil and natural gas deposits — allows China to "influence its weaker neighbors in peacetime", Glaser said.

"Through the use of a large number of law enforcement ships, for example, it can pressure Vietnam and the Philippines not to unilaterally extract energy in waters that China claims jurisdictional rights," she said.

"In wartime, China's military assets on these islands will increase the risk to the US of intervening militarily."

Earlier this month China deployed anti-ship cruise missiles and surface-to-air missiles on the disputed Spratly Islands off the Philippine coast, CNBC reported, citing sources close to US intelligence.

Beijing claims virtually all the South China Sea and has ignored partial counter-claims from the Philippines, Vietnam, Taiwan, Brunei and Malaysia.

The Pentagon condemned Friday's bomber drills as a sign of "continued militarization" of disputed islands while Vietnam said the move violated its sovereignty and raised tensions in the region.

The Philippines, which has largely backed off from the sea dispute under China-friendly President Rodrigo Duterte, said it was taking "appropriate diplomatic action".

'Largely symbolic'

Despite the rhetoric, experts

say little has been done to prevent China from solidifying its vast maritime claims.

Beijing has managed to weaken regional resistance by courting some members of the 10-nation Association of Southeast Asian Nations.

While US warships have conducted "freedom of navigation" operations near Chinese-claimed features, they have not deterred Beijing.

The bombers were deployed while US President Donald Trump is focused on preparing for a summit with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un next month.

"I think there is an obvious political motivation for the timing," said Euan Graham, director of the international security program at the Australian think tank the Lowy Institute.

"Because the US is mainly engaged in the North Korea files... there is a window of opportunity where the US reaction is likely to be restrained."

China's foreign ministry has repeated denials that the region was being militarized, saying the islands belong to Beijing and the bombers were conducting "normal training".

The latest exercises were "largely symbolic" and not a significant military development, Graham said.

To deploy from Woody Island, China would have to install logistics infrastructure to operate aircraft, refuel them, store weapons and house crews, he said.

"Just landing an aircraft doesn't make it an operational space," Graham said.

It would be more significant if and when China starts flying combat aircraft to the Spratlys, he said, because that would bring northern Australia into missile range.

Submarine bastions

Nearly a third of global trade passes through the South China Sea and Beijing has bigger commercial and military ambitions for this strategic sea area, said William Choong, a senior fellow at the International Institute for Strategic Studies in Singapore.

China could create an air

defense identification zone to spot incursions into its claimed sovereign airspace, something it did in the East China Sea in 2013 amid a dispute over the Senkaku islands with Japan, Choong said.

Beijing could also establish a base for nuclear submarines as the deep waters around the Spratlys "provide a good hiding place", he said.

Despite the looming threat, the international community — including India, Japan, the US and Australia — has failed to achieve a united front against China's island-building spree, Choong said.

"Apart from the freedom of navigation missions and the strong rhetoric, the US hasn't been able to corral together a coalition of the willing, to effectively to get China to stop the militarization of the South China Sea."

Philippines won't give up claims in WPS, Palace assures

Malacañang on Tuesday assured that the Philippines will not give up any of its territorial claims in the West Philippine Sea (WPS) amid China's alleged militarization of the highly-contested area.

"Right now, our position is still the same: whatever happens there, no territory will be given. We will assert our rights and sovereignty on the maritime territory that is part of our exclusive economic zone," Roque said in a Palace media briefing.

Roque said the Hague-based Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA) decision is evidence of the country's sovereign rights on the island and its maritime claims within the exclusive economic zone (EEZ).

According to the PCA's 2016 verdict, China's nine-dash line map which covers nearly the whole of South China Sea has no legal basis.

Roque has said that the Philippines expresses serious concerns over reports that China has landed combat aircraft, including a long-range H-6K bomber at an airfield of one of its reclaimed island in the WPS.

China has denied the militarization allegations, saying the movement of the bombers was

just part of the normal Chinese military training in the South China Sea which Beijing claimed "are Chinese territories".

Roque said the Philippines, through the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA), is already addressing the deployment of Chinese military assets in the WPS.

"I cannot understand why you are saying that we are not doing anything. It is not publicly announced by the DFA but we are doing something (on this issue)," Roque said.

He said the country is "quietly working" with its Association of Southeast Asian Nation (Asean) neighbors, particularly those with similar claims like Malaysia, Vietnam and Brunei to address the issue.

"We have already a common statement by insisting on Asean statement," Roque said, referring to the Asean Declaration calling for China to heed on the non-militarization of the WPS.

Roque said the Chinese military activities in the disputed territory will also be discussed in the Bilateral Consultative Mechanism (BCM) meeting between the Philippines and China "probably" in June.

"But at the same time, we are moving on with our bilateral relations in which we can agree on something that is agreeable and set aside contentious issues for now," he said.

Roque said when China built the artificial islands in the WPS, "we all know that it will be used for military bases and not for tourist attraction".

"And for Chinese perspective, they will use to defend themselves because the US aircraft is there," he said.

He said President Rodrigo Duterte has repeatedly said that what is happening in the WPS is a standoff between China and the Philippines' longstanding ally, the US.

"We will not join them but of course, we are concerned because we are also using the sea for livelihood," Roque explained.

With AFP and PNA

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INQUIRER

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SC upholds protection for "Red lawyer"

The Supreme Court has upheld the special judicial protection granted by the Court of Appeals to a human rights lawyer who had accused the police and military of harassing her for providing legal services to political detainees. In a May 11 decision, the Supreme Court's First Division agreed that lawyer Maria Catherine Dannug-Salucon was able to justify her request for the writs of habeas data and amparo after state security agents labeled her as a "Red lawyer." The court said the killing of Salucon's paralegal assistant, William Bugatti, in March 2014 was enough reason to believe her claim that her life was in danger. —MARLON RAMOS

Duterte urged to lift martial law in Mindanao

THE opposition Liberal Party on Tuesday urged the government to lift the martial law decree imposed on Mindanao, claiming it was preventing Marawi City from healing the wounds inflicted by the Maute attack last year.

In a statement, the erstwhile ruling party pointed out that the congressional hearings on the President's martial law declaration revealed that there was no rebellion in Mindanao that warranted the extension of

the decree to December 2018.

Threats of a rebellion are present, but do not qualify as the Constitution only provides for martial law in the presence of a rebellion or an invasion, it said.

The party also said the government should "put their money where their mouth is" and focus more on providing 26,000 permanent shelters for Marawi citizens.

So far, only 1,000 temporary shelters have been built for the

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Duterte urged to lift

affected communities, it claimed.

It also noted that the presence of two Chinese contractors – China State Construction Engineering Corp. and China Geo Engineering Corp. – in rehabilitation efforts, as the two Chinese companies were blacklisted by the World Bank in 2009 for allegedly violating regulations and for supposed corruption.

'70% of Marawi back to normal'

Malacañang however expressed satisfaction with the efforts to rehabilitate Marawi City, saying majority of the residents were back in the war-torn city.

In a news conference, Palace

spokesman Harry Roque Jr. said the government was ahead in the provision of temporary and permanent shelters for Marawi residents displaced by fighting between the military and local terrorists.

"The good news is, as far as the residents are concerned, 70 percent of the residents have gone back to their homes. That is under a year's time. We are even ahead of schedule in terms of rebuilding of the communities," he said.

The government aims to build a total of 6,400 temporary shelters and 2,500 permanent shelters to be given to the poorest and most conflict-affected Marawi residents, he said.

Col. Romeo Brawner Jr., deputy commander for Joint Task Force

Ranao, said on Tuesday that 70 percent of the whole city had "returned to normal."

Moreover, 85 percent of the city has been cleared of bombs, which will pave the way for developers to enter the main battle area and start rehabilitation.

Roque said President Rodrigo Duterte was slated to visit Marawi City to mark the first anniversary of the attack.

Duterte declared Marawi liberated in October last year after government troops killed terrorist leaders Isnilon Hapilon and Omar Maute following a five-month armed conflict.

More than 1,000 people, mostly terror fighters, died amid the clashes.

Over 100,000 children remain displaced in Marawi City, a year after the siege, the United Nations Children's Fund or Unicef reported on Tuesday.

Never again

Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) Gov. Mujiv Hataman said that what happened to Marawi City, the lone Islamic City of the Philippines, on May 23, 2017 should not happen again.

The center of Marawi City, once a melting pot of different histories, cultures, and beliefs has been reduced to rubble, he said.

Because of this, Hataman said the rest of the constituents of the ARMM, where Marawi City is a component city, should stand united.

"We must stand united with our brothers and sisters, as we have done in response to every threat our people have faced," Hataman said.

**WITH JULMUNIRI.
JANNARAL, CATHERINE S.
VALENTE, ARIC JOHN SY CUA
AND DEMPSEY REYES**

More than 600 Army soldiers honored, get promoted

By Mario J. Mallari

In honor of their heroism in liberating Marawi City last year from the hands of the Islamic State-inspired terrorists, more than 600 Army soldiers were pinned with their new ranks yesterday—a day before the first anniversary of the siege.

Lt. Col. Louie Villanueva, Army spokesman, said a total of 641 enlisted personnel were donned with their new ranks during ceremony at the Army Headquarters in Fort Bonifacio.

Of the number, 36 are ranked master sergeants, 98 are technical sergeants, 103 are staff sergeants, 193 are sergeants and 211 are corporals.

"The number of promotees recognized today is just part of the large promotion of 4,252 soldiers this year. They will be promoted for their contribution in the fight to liberate Marawi," Villanueva said.

During the donning of ranks, the said soldiers were given honor and recognition for their sacrifices during the government's campaign to free Marawi City from the ISIS-inspired Maute group and Abu Sayyaf led by Isnilon Hapilon and the dreaded Maute brothers.

The Marawi City siege started May 23, 2017 when government troops attempted to arrest Hapilon but his group, composed of combined members of the Abu Sayyaf and Maute groups resisted and occupied vital installations in the Islamic City.

However, it was later found out that Hapilon's group had long been planning to occupy Marawi City and establish an Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) caliphate.

Hapilon was tagged as the emir or leader of the ISIS in southeast Asia.

A total of 165 soldiers and cops sacrificed their lives during the hard fought urban battle while a total of 1,465 Army soldiers were wounded in action.

On the other hand, more than 900 terrorists, led by Hapilon and Ottoh, Mati, Abdullah and Omarkhayam Maute, were killed during the five-month siege.

"To our Marawi troops, I know the countless challenges that you have grappled with day in, day out while you were in Marawi, including the uncertainty of returning home safe from deployment to be in the arms of your families again," Defense Undersecretary Cardozo Luna said.

"I admire your courage for having fought with such challenges while you also endure and fought the physical war. The valor and resilience that you have displayed present the finest values of the military and the Filipino people," he added.

For his part, Army chief Lt. Gen. Joselito Bautista also honored the sacrifices of the Army soldiers during the war.

"You put your lives on the line and you did not fail your country all in the name of service," Bautista said.

PH to receive 2 Cobra choppers from Jordan

BY JOCELYN MONTEMAYOR

PRESIDENT Duterte yesterday said the Philippines is set to receive two cobra helicopters from Jordan that is expected to beef up the country's drive against terrorism.

Duterte made the announcement during the 120th anniversary of the Philippine Navy at the Coconut Palace grounds.

Duterte was late for the event by more than an hour because he was reviewing an electronic mail sent to him by National Security Adviser Hermogenes Esperon Jr., who was in Jordan, asking for approval and authorization to receive the two helicopters.

"Jordan is giving us two Cobra helicopters. Those things that we cannot really afford maybe in my term," he said, adding the Philippines and Jordan have a common problem — terrorism.

Reports said aside from the two Cobra attack helicopters Jordan is also donating several M113 Armored Personnel Carrier.

The President recalled that he had to swallow an insult from a high-ranking international human rights official because he is the brother of the Jordan king. United Nations Human Rights Council chief Zeid Ra'ad al-Hussein, a prince in Jordan, earlier this year said Duterte may need to undergo a psychiatric evaluation following his "unacceptable" remarks against some UN officials, including a member of the UN rapporteur who was accused of being connected with local communist terrorists.

Duterte said he was prepared to answer the official but was advised by Esperon to just shut up.

The President said he wanted to talk more about his policy against terrorism and geopolitics but was pressed for time and instead promised to discuss it either over breakfast or a boodle fight.

Duterte thanked the Navy for its role in the liberation of war-torn Marawi City, and for fulfilling its

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PH

mandate of protecting and defending the country's territories, and its participation in the counter-terrorism, and disaster relief operations.

He also recognized the sacrifices, dedication and professionalism of the members of the Philippine Navy.

"It was only last year when we celebrated the Philippine Navy's anniversary during the Marawi siege. Then, we honored the heroic efforts of the men and women of the Navy and Marines in the liberation of Marawi. Today, we once again honor them as we make significant progress in the rehabilitation and reconstruction of that city. To the brave soldiers and marines of our Navy, you have made the Filipino people proud and continue to do so with gallantry in defending our sovereignty in our territorial waters, particularly in the West Philippine Sea," he added.

He committed to continue to support the uplifting and improvement of the professional and personal wellbeing of the Navy and the Armed Forces in general as he reiterated his commitment to the realization of the Second Horizon of the Revised AFP Modernization Program that included P77 billion worth of project for the Navy.

"We are indeed excited — we live in exciting times for our Armed Forces as we further enhance the capability of our Navy. Since the beginning of this administration, I have exerted efforts to upgrade your equipment and artillery," he said, noting that under his administration, the Navy now has additional units of TC90 aircraft, multi-purpose assault crafts and a strategic sealift vessel, among others.

Navy chief Vice Admiral Robert Empedrad said the Navy is rising from the state of "obsolescence," citing the assets acquired and being

acquired under their modernization program.

During the Navy's 120th anniversary, Empedrad said the Navy was "one of the most powerful navies" in Asia after the World War II but became "one of the weakest" even in Southeast Asia six decades later.

Empedrad said other countries upgraded their naval capability "while the Philippine Navy went to obsolescence."

"It's sad to note that through time, we failed to sustain that strong maritime heritage of our forefathers, let alone lose it. The big question is why?" he said.

He said the Navy is "slowly regaining our maritime character as a nation and our vision of becoming a strong and credible Navy, that our maritime nation Philippines will be proud of by year 2020, is very well crafted."

"Be that as it may, we are still too far behind compared to other navies in the region," said Empedrad, adding that with Duterte's support, "our dream will soon become a reality."

He cited several projects being undertaken under the Navy's modernization program, including the recent acquisition of their first missile system that were fitted on three multi-purpose attack craft and the acquisition of five patrol aircraft from Japan.

Empedrad said the Navy is due to receive a Pohang-class corvette from South Korea during the third quarter of this year while two anti-submarine warfare helicopters with torpedoes are due to be operational by May next year.

"Finally, two missile frigates will be delivered in 2020," said Empedrad, referring to the warships that are currently being built by the Hyundai Heavy Industries of South Korea for P18 billion. —
With Victor Reyes

IN BRIEF

SC issues ruling
on writ of amparo

THE Supreme Court has sustained the ruling issued by the Court of Appeals that granted the petition for the issuance of the writs of amparo and habeas data in favor of a human rights lawyer who claimed that he is being tagged as "Red lawyer" by law enforcers.

In a 21-page decision, the SC's First Division through Associate Justice Lucas Bersamin dismissed the petition filed by officials of the Armed Forces of the Philippines and the Philippine National Police seeking the reversal of the appellate court order.

The high court ruled that the appellate court did commit error in giving weight to lawyer Maria Catherine Dannug-Salucon's proof even if it supposedly consisted of circumstantial evidence and hearsay testimonies.

Salucon, who is a member of the National Union of People's Lawyer in the province of Isabela, filed a petition for writs of habeas data and amparo in April 2014 before the CA after she received information that she was placed under surveillance by the military and tagged as a "Red lawyer." Rey E. Requejo *R*

Cotabato bombing plot foiled, then hushed up

By Nash B. Maulana

COTABATO CITY—City officials have asked state authorities in a martial law anti-terrorism operation to disclose the circumstances of an unidentified suspect arrested in a foiled bomb attack, designed to yield a series of explosions in Barangay Kalanganan II here.

City Mayor Cynthia Guiani-Sayadi said Tuesday she appealed to the police, the military and to Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana that more information about the arrested man should be made available to local authorities.

On Monday, Guiani-Sayadi also implicitly confirmed the arrest, saying: "If it wasn't for the prompt action of the [composite personnel of] CIDG [Criminal Investigation and Detection Group], the City PNP [Philippine National Police] and the AFP [Armed Forces of the Philippines], several lives could have

been lost, had the bomb exploded."

But residents said local police have remained mum even a week after the authorities subjected the man to a warrantless arrest—as a terror suspect—which is part of the state's martial law powers in effect in Mindanao.

The suspect had reportedly planted packs of improvised explosive devices in the fishing village of Kalanganan II, one of the hotly contested barangays in the recent barangay and Sangguniang Kabataan elections.

Human rights advocates, among them

Christian clerics comparing the present martial law with the one during the Marcos era, have opposed President Rodrigo Duterte's declaration of martial law, which he even extended twice in less than a year.

Most locals, however, have said they felt relatively safe with the new martial law.

The arrest has remained mysterious, as the man's name, his circumstances and whereabouts had not been disclosed yet, while being under interrogation.

Authorities traced the suspect from police leads provided by his alleged cohort, who had earlier surrendered to village authorities and admitted to being part of a plan to terrorize the barangay and SK polls last May 14 by planting bombs on specific points in that village.

It was not known if the suspects were hired by any candidate to perpetrate the crime. *BU*

Truce, amnesty for Reds OK'd

LUCENA CITY—A senior communist rebel leader said back channel talks between his group and government negotiators had resulted in "major points" of agreement, including one that would have rebels and the government separately but simultaneously declare a ceasefire alongside a general amnesty proclamation for rebels by Malacañang.

Jose Ma. Sison, Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) founder in exile in the Netherlands, said he was optimistic the talks would succeed because there have been "many major points of agreements" already.

Coordinated

"That is the basis of my optimism," said Sison, who is now serving as senior consultant to peace negotiators of the National Democratic Front of the Philippines (NDFP), an umbrella group of underground organizations involved in the protracted war against the government.

He said coordinated ceasefire declarations would be



REBEL IN JAIL A general amnesty for communist rebels would cover Rafael Baylosis, a ranking rebel leader, who is currently detained at the Philippine National Police headquarters in Camp Crame. —JOAN BONDOC

signed together with the amnesty proclamation and sections on agrarian reform and industrialization of the Comprehensive Agreement on Social and Economic Reforms (Caser).

Caser is considered to be the most important agreement being worked out by both panels in the negotiations.

"That is already the consensus of the two sides," said the

79-year-old rebel leader.

Sison said the New People's Army, armed wing of CPP, and the military would rest their guns shortly before formal negotiations start to generate trust between the negotiating panels.

"The stand down agreement is meant to simulate the atmosphere for peace negotiations two weeks before resumption," he said.

'Kinks'

He said the agreement would involve a joint monitoring committee "with more elaborate terms to ensure" that the ceasefire lasted.

He admitted that there were still some "kinks" that presented a challenge to negotiators. A7

"I cannot say what the kinks are" before these are ironed out by negotiators, Sison said.

President Duterte, on May 4, ordered Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process Jesus Dureza to resume talks with NDFP in two months. —DELFIN T. MALLARI JR. INQ

MARTIAL LAW COMPENSATION

JOMA SAYS HE'LL DONATE
PART OF P1.2M TO LAWYERS

LUCENA CITY—Exiled communist leader Jose Ma. Sison said he would donate a substantial portion of the compensation he received as martial law victim to lawyers who had helped him in the past.

In an online interview on Tuesday, Sison said he received P1.2 million "for my torture" and other violations of his rights by the regime of the late dictator Ferdinand Marcos.

"I will be donating a substantial part to a group of public interest lawyers who have helped me since a long time ago," said Sison, Communist Party of the Philippines founder who had gone into exile in Utrecht, the Netherlands.

He did not say how much of the P1.2 million he would donate.

But he said he and his wife, Julie de Lima, who also received P1.2 million in compensation for Marcos victims, would "keep a certain amount as an emer-

gency fund for medical and funeral expenses so that we shall not be a burden to the living."

Separate list

Julie, according to Sison, has her own "list of people to share the windfall with."

Sison was captured by government forces on Nov. 10, 1977.

During his detention, he was tortured and put in solitary confinement.

Sison and his wife, who was also detained and tortured, were released on March 5, 1986, after the fall of the Marcos dictatorship.

The Human Rights Victims Claims Board had approved 11,103 of at least 75,730 compensation claims.

Compensation amounts ranged from P176,000 to P1.76 million. Funds were to be drawn from P10-billion of the Swiss bank deposits seized by the government from the Marcoses.

—DELPINT MALLARI JR. INQ A7

Sisons get P2.4M, eye return to PH

EXILED communist leader Jose Maria Sison and wife Julie have received compensation from a Philippine government claims board as victims of the Marcos Martial Law regime.

In a television interview, Sison said the payment, P1.2 million each for him and his wife Julie, or a total of P2.4 million, was sent via bank transfer to Julie's account.

In a separate interview with *The Manila Times*, the Communist Party of the Philippines founder said it was "highly probable" for him to return to the Philippines within the term

►ReturnA2

■ RETURN FROM A1

Sisons get P2.4M

of President Rodrigo Duterte, noting there were only a "few kinks" that needed to be fixed before the resumption of the scrapped talks.

He said the fifth round of peace negotiations between the government and the National Democratic Front of the Philippines (NDFP), the party's political arm, could resume in June.

"It is highly probable within the last week of June," Sison told *The Manila Times* in an online interview.

"There is a basis to be optimistic in that the resumption of formal talks will occur next month and that there shall be an interim peace agreement," Sison added.

Sison said the peace agreement might include a ceasefire declaration, amnesty and the arrangement of Agrarian Reform and Rural Development and National Industrialization and Economic Development sections under the Comprehensive Agreement on Social Economic Reforms (Caser).

"It shall take only a month in July to finish and approve the entire Caser," Sison said.

In April, Duterte directed Peace Adviser Jesus Dureza to prepare for the resumption of the stalled talks with the communists.

DEMPSEY REYES

Sison, wife receive P2.4M in reparation as ML victims

BY VICTOR REYES

COMMUNIST party founder Jose Maria Sison said he and his wife, Julie, received P1.2 million each from the government in reparation as victims of martial law during the Marcos dictatorship.

Interviewed by ABS-CBN in the Netherlands where he is on a self-exile since the 1980s, Sison said more than the amount, what counts is the Philippine government's acknowledgement of the human rights abuses.

"The remittance has been made

to the bank account of Julie. So we are instant peso millionaires. I think she got P1.2 (million) and I got P1.2 million," Sison said.

Thousands of martial law victims during the Marcos years started receiving the monetary reparation about two weeks ago. The fund came from the P10 billion Swiss bank deposits recovered from the Marcoses.

Presidential spokesman Harry Roque said Sison and other victims of human rights violation during the martial law years deserve the reparation given them in recogni-

tion of the sufferings and human rights violation they suffered.

Roque added the P2.4 million given to Sison and his wife is not connected with efforts to resume peace negotiations with the Communist Party of the Philippines-New People's Army-National Democratic Front of the Philippines (CPP-NPA-NDFP).

"It is not related to the peace talks, they are really victims of martial law. And the Palace is happy that the victims have started

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SISON

to receive the checks because the concept of reparation, grant of compensation is important because their rights have been violated during the martial law period," he said.

Sison and his wife were arrested and tortured during the martial law years. They went on exile in the

Netherlands after being released by the administration of President Corazon Aquino.

"On the case of my brother who was killed...he got P1.79 million," said Sison.

Sison explained why the human rights case against the Marcoses was brought to a US court and not before a Philippine court.

"The human rights case against Marcos in the US is good. It may appear, 'why go to a foreign country?' But even the Cory Aquino government could not handle the case so we have to go to the US," said Sison.

The Human Rights Victims' Claims Board (HRVCB) has started the distribution of checks and compensations to the verified victims, and their heirs, of human rights violations during the martial law period last week. The HRVCB said 11,103 victims had been verified and found eligible for compensation.

The grant of compensation stemmed from Republic Act 10368 titled "An Act Providing For Reparation And Recognition Of Victims Of Human Rights Violations During The Marcos Regime, Documentation Of Said Violations, Appropriating Funds Therefor And For Other Purposes" that was signed by the President Benigno Aquino III on February 25, 2013.

"All along our motive was to put on record, legally and judicially...But whatever is the amount (reparation), the important thing is the Philippines accepted that violations of human rights occurred, recognized... That's very important," he said.

On the House of Representatives' approval of a bill that seeks to abolish the Presidential Commission on Good Government, Sison said: "I think that's a bad decision." The measure seeks to transfer the PCGG's responsibilities to the Office of the Solicitor General.

Sison noted that not all of the ill-gotten wealth of the Marcoses had been recovered, saying: "What had been recovered from the Marcoses is only a fraction of what they stole." — *With Jocelyn Montemayor*

Joma, wife to receive P1.2m each as victims of martial law

FROM fugitives to millionaires

Jose Ma. Sison, founder and long-time leader of the Communist Party of the Philippines and wife Julie de Luna, will receive a windfall of P1.2 million, as reparation from the government as human rights victim during the martial law years.

Sison said he was told that he and his wife will receive P1.2 million each for their detention and torture by government agents under the then late dictator Ferdinand Marcos.

"The remittance has been made to the bank account of Julie. We are instant peso millionaires. She got P1.2 [million] and I got P1.2 [million]," the 79-year-old Sison said.

Sison has been in exile in The Netherlands since 1987.

"Whatever is the amount, the important thing is that the Philippine government accepted that violations of human

rights occurred," he added.

Reparation is guaranteed under a landmark law in 2013 which "heroism and sacrifices" of human rights victims under Marcos.

But according to Lina Sarmiento, head of the Human Rights Victims' Claims Board, only 14 percent of the total 75,749 claimants will receive reparation because the others failed to prove that they were victims of gross human rights violations.

The money for martial law victims came from the P10-billion Swiss bank deposits recovered from the Marcoses. Interest from the said amount will be used to put up a museum.

The Presidential Commission on Good Government has recovered P170 billion or about \$3.4 billion in ill-gotten wealth including jewelry, art, and other assets from the Marcos family. *Mo*

SOGANUB'S ORDEAL

PRIEST'S LESSON: BE CALM IN THE FACE OF DEATH

By Edwin O. Fernandez
@inquirermindanao



NORALA, SOUTH COTABATO—Eight months since his escape from terrorist captivity, Catholic priest Teresito Soganub still wants to return to Marawi City, where he served as vicar general of the local prelature and parish priest for more than 10 years.

But his family and doctors and superiors in the Catholic Church discourage him from going back.

The soonest he could return to Marawi, he was told, would be after a few years or "by the time my posttraumatic stress depression is gone."

"My experience was not an ordinary ordeal but an extraor-

dinary ordeal that needs extraordinary time for healing, rest and prayers," Soganub said.

116-day captivity

For 116 days last year, the parish priest based at St. Mary's Cathedral and a group of hostages faced death every day at the hands of Maute group and Abu Sayyaf terrorists who seized Marawi to establish a province for the Islamic State (IS) jihadist group in Southeast Asia.

In an interview in November last year, Soganub spoke of how he initially feared being killed by his captors, especially when he and 12 other hostages were lined up in the middle of a basketball court at the plaza in Barangay Bangolo.

"I thought they would execute us. The 13 of us and about



Fr. Teresito Soganub —RICHEL UMEI

50 armed men were the only ones in the plaza," he said.

But the gunmen did not harm them, he said.

Soganub said airstrikes and stray bullets also frightened him during his captivity. The fear of being killed in the cross-

fire during military operations against the terrorists continued to hound him, he said.

During the *Inquirer* interview on May 10, Soganub recounted how two convent boys at St. Mary's Parish were separately killed by stray bullets. They were carrying bullets and supplies for the gunmen on the front lines, not far from Bato Mosque.

The mosque and St. Mary's Cathedral, where he and several other church workers had been taken, were just a block away.

Dismantling bombs

He said the gunmen gave him tasks, the most difficult of which was dismantling unexploded bombs as huge as an acetylene tank from the airstrikes using a hacksaw.

"I told them it might explode

if I tampered with it, [but] they said, 'No, it will not explode. We are here beside you. If you die, we all die,'" he said, quoting one of the gunmen.

"I was trembling the first time but later it became easy," he said.

The gunmen used the powder and shrapnel from the bombs to make improvised explosive devices and rigged Bato Mosque with them.

He said Bato Mosque was the gunmen's central base and it was there that the hostages, whose number grew every day, were held.

"[Brothers] Omar and Abdullah [Maute] and Isnilon (Hapilon) were there most of the time. We were also kept there to take care of food supplies and cooking," he said.

"There were foxholes and they created running trenches so we can move from one building to another," he added.

Hapilon, the so-called "emir" of IS in Southeast Asia, and the Maute brothers were killed in the fighting.

Escape

Soganub and Dansalan College teacher Lordvin Noblesa Acopio escaped on Sept. 16, 2017.

"The trauma is very deep but I have to face this trauma," he said.

"If there is one lesson I learned, it is to be calm even in the face of death," he said.

"One should remain calm, should not show resistance when faced with a life-and-death situation. And, of course, never cease praying, asking God for protection," he said. *INQ*

Group says 1 activist killed almost weekly in Mindanao

By Melvin Gascon

@melvingasconINQ

Human rights group Karapatan on Tuesday called on the United Nations and the Commission on Human Rights (CHR) to investigate the alleged human rights abuses committed by state agents against activists and human rights advocates since the imposition of martial law in Mindanao last year.

The group made the call as it submitted its findings on the alleged abuses, noting an average of nearly one unsolved killing each week since President Duterte declared martial law on May 23 last year to battle Islamic State-inspired gunmen who laid siege to Marawi City.

In their letters to eight UN special rapporteurs and the CHR, Karapatan said it had documented at least "49 victims of extrajudicial killings" in Mindanao since martial rule was imposed. Most of the victims were indigenous people and members of peasant groups, it added.

The group also sent its let-

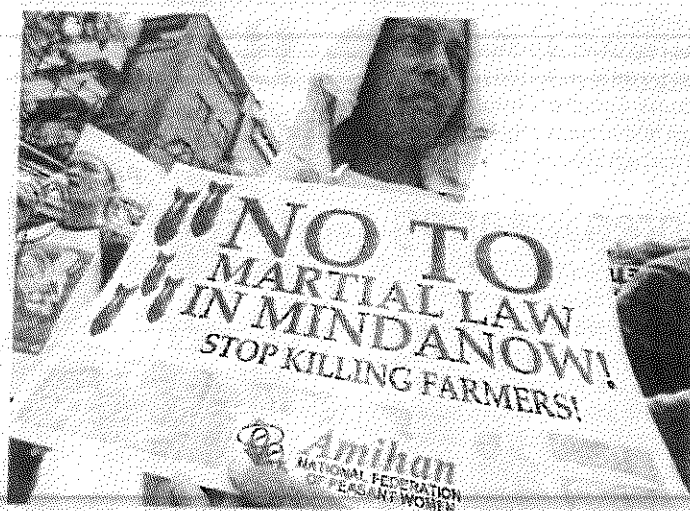
ter to Labor Secretary Silvestre Bello III, chair of the government's peace panel in peace talks with communist rebels.

"The report outlines how the Duterte administration, through his own brand of war on terror with the imposition and extension of martial law in Mindanao and the continuing implementation of [the] government's counterinsurgency program 'Oplan Kapayapaan,' has promoted state terrorism and violence in the southern Philippines," said Cristina Palabay, Karapatan secretary general.

CHR investigation

Karapatan urged the CHR to investigate the alleged human rights violations and prosecute the police and soldiers involved and call for the immediate lifting of martial law, which, it said, was used by government forces as a license to commit supposed atrocities.

The group also called for an end to airstrikes against communities targeted by the military, urged relief and assistance for people displaced by bom-



CRAME PROTEST Activists led by the National Federation of Peasant Women protest alleged human rights violations committed against the rural poor under the Duterte administration in Mindanao in front of Camp Crame in Quezon City on Monday. —NIÑO JESUS ORBETA

bardments, and pressed for the termination of counterinsurgency programs like Oplan Kapatayan, which, it said, "encourages the use of 'hit lists' that target activists and civilians."

The group said it had documented 22 cases of torture, 116

victims of frustrated extrajudicial killings, 89 victims of illegal arrest and detention and 336,124 victims of indiscriminate shooting and aerial bombings.

"At least 404,654 individuals have been displaced, largely because of these bombings. Many

more reported cases reveal a much graver magnitude of the effects of martial law," it said.

In Davao City, Jay Apiag, Karapatan secretary general in Southern Mindanao, and Bayan Muna Rep. Carlos Zarate said 72 political activists had been killed since Mr. Duterte took office in 2016.

Banana farm worker

One of the most recent victims was 33-year-old Ariel Maquiran, a banana plantation worker gunned down by motorcycle-riding men as he headed for work in Panabo City, according to Zarate.

Maquiran, a member of Bayan Muna, survived an attempt on his life just the day before.

Maquiran had earlier been questioned by the military on his alleged role in the 2017 takeover of land occupied by Lapanday Foods Corp. but that the Department of Agrarian Reform had awarded to farmers under the agrarian reform program. —WITH A REPORT FROM ALLAN NAWAL INQ

LAUNCH OF 'MARAWI AND BEYOND: THE JOINT TASK FORCE MARAWI STORY'

28 BOOKS TELL OF HEROISM AND TACTICS TO WIN THE BATTLE AGAINST TERRORISTS

By Jeannette I. Andrade
@jiandradeINQ



Tales of heroism of fallen soldiers and the courage, unity and resilience of Filipinos have been compiled in more than two dozen books that were launched on the eve of the first anniversary of the start of the five-month battle for the country's Islamic city of Marawi.

The books document the combat and noncombat operations in the fight against the Islamic State (IS)-linked gunmen who had laid siege to Marawi. Defense Undersecretary Cardozo Luna said during Tuesday's launch of the 28-volume "Marawi and Beyond: the Joint Task Force Marawi Story" at the Philippine Army headquarters in Fort Bonifacio.

Luna said the stories told in the books "exemplify the effective strategies and proficient

methodologies of combining hard power and soft power approaches toward translating our tactical gains in the main battle area into strategic victories."

The books detail the onset of the siege on May 23 last year and the various operations that helped security forces retake the city, and honor the heroes of Marawi.

Symbolism

"The symbolism of Marawi City: courage, unity and resilience, which truly represent Filipino virtues, are also encompassed in the books' contents aimed at driving capabilities toward a better Philippine Army," Luna said.

The 28 books that comprise "Marawi and Beyond" were produced by the Philippine Army's Operations Research Center (ORC) and Tarlac Heritage Foundation. The main coffee table book summarizes the contents of the 27 other volumes.



REDUCED TO RUBBLE The main battle area in the campaign to free Marawi from the terrorists.

JEFFREY MAITEM

Philippine history," she said.

Firsthand accounts

The Army commanding general, Lt. Gen. Rolando Bautista, who led Joint Task Force Marawi, said the narratives were based on firsthand accounts of primary actors, commanders and enlisted personnel to improve operations, particularly urban warfare.

Bautista noted that remnants of the IS-influenced groups—the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters, Abu Sayyaf and Khilafa Islamiyah—remained a security threat but it would take three to five years for them to mount a similar attack.

"We assessed that the threat from the enemy was totally reduced, in terms of leadership, in terms of armaments, in terms of foreign support. The hardcore (Maute) fighters were neutralized in the main battle area," he explained. INQ *h*

Only six books are available to the public. For confidential reasons, the other books in the collection are intended only for military personnel.

"These books are the first and only factual accounts to

date of the entire siege of the City of Marawi," said Isabel Cojuangco-Suntay, cofounder of Tarlac Heritage Foundation.

"We diligently explained and illustrated the salient points of various missions that

were undertaken by our combined security forces while showcasing their challenges, adaptations, innovations and lessons learned which revealed inspiring stories that are now part and parcel of

IS-influenced sleeper cells pose threat — Army chief

By MICHAEL PUNONGBAYAN

There are Islamic State (IS)-influenced sleeper cells in various parts of the country that pose a threat to the public, the military said yesterday.

Philippine Army chief Lt. Gen. Rolando Joselito Bautista said these sleeper cells could orchestrate lone wolf terrorist activities.

"If they are activated, they can create terrorist activities all at the same time," Bautista warned, adding that each cell may be composed of one or two terrorists.

Bautista reiterated the IS-Maute group that wreaked havoc in Marawi has been totally reduced, not only in terms of leadership but also armament and foreign support, with its hardcore fighters neutralized in the battle during last year's five-month siege.

But fragments are reportedly recruiting members, Bautista said, while the Abu Sayyaf group, Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters and Khilafa Islamiyah Mindanao continue to operate.

Even if such groups band together to launch another Marawi-like siege, Bautista believes that it would take them three to five years to do it.

So the military is ensuring that the government is able to provide for the basic needs of affected residents of Marawi, he said.

Bautista said although Abu Dar is considered as Isnilon Hapilon's successor as the emir of IS in Southeast Asia, it would be difficult for him or any other replacement to earn the trust and respect of extremists.

Hapilon, Bautista said, now has a negative image because of how he allegedly abandoned his men and committed looting during the siege in Marawi.

But reacting to Bautista's pronouncement, a source from the intelligence community, who requested anonymity, said he thinks that Bautista's statement is purely speculative and not based on actual or

factual information.

"When you say sleeper cell, they were recruited a long time ago, projected to a specific area, lay low for some time and maybe just gathering information and then activated for a specific mission or task," the source explained.

The source noted that even if the IS-inspired terrorists return to their areas to recoup and consolidate, it will be difficult for them to launch individual and simultaneous attacks in different parts of the country due to financial, logistical, security and cultural reasons.

"Much more (for so-called) lone (wolves). Lone wolves are entirely different from sleeper cells. Lone wolves, for all intents and purposes, have no connection with IS because their attacks at the time of execution have no support or were not planned by the (IS) or any of its leaders," the source stressed.

3

ISIS sleeper cells exist in Luzon, Visayas – army chief

By FRANCIS T. WAKELD

Army chief Lt. Gen. Rolando Bautista revealed yesterday the existence of ISIS sleeper cells not only in Mindanao but also in Isayas and Luzon.

Bautista made the revelation exactly one year after the Marawi siege. It took government forces

months to liberate the city from the hands of Maute-ISIS, which are reportedly responsible for the terror cells formed to possibly orchestrate terrorist activities.

He said ISIS sleeper cells are believed scattered in Luzon specifically in Baguio City in the Cordillera Administrative Region; Dagupan City, Pangasinan; Tarlac in Central Luzon; and in the Visayas provinces

of Samar and Cebu.

"They will orchestrate what we call terrorist activities. It might be in the form of lone wolf. If that is activated they might create or orchestrate terrorist activities," Bautista said during a book launch highlighting what transpired in Marawi a year ago.

"For example they will conduct an explosion in an area in Cebu, as-

sassination, liquidation that will create a big impact although only two or three persons are involved. So, most probably that's their strategy for the meantime," he added.

Bautista said following the neutralization of the Maute-ISIS hardcore fighters inside the main battle area (MBA), fragments of those with ISIS influence continue to recruit new members.

"We all know that although the Maute-ISIS group has been reduced in terms of strength and capability there is still the Abu Sayyaf Group; there is the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF); there is the Khalifa Islamiyah Mindanao, which is short of saying that they also have influence of ISIS," Bautista said. 3

IS sleepers capable of 'another Marawi'

BY DEMPSEY REYES

THE leadership of the Philippine Army warned on Tuesday of the existence of Islamic State (IS) sleeper cells across the country, which could mount another attack in the scale of the Marawi City siege one year ago.

Lt. Gen. Rolando Joselito Bautista, the Army commanding general, said the military discovered the sleeper cells during their campaign against Maute terrorists that attacked the Islamic city last year, which resulted in the deaths of more than 1,000 persons including uniformed men, civilians and terrorists.

Sleeper cells are present in places such as Baguio City, Dagupan City, Tarlac,

Samar and Cebu, he claimed.

"If they will be able to orchestrate such terroristic activities, it might be in the form of a 'lone wolf,'" the Army chief told reporters at Fort Bonifacio, Taguig City.

Martial law, imposed in Mindanao after the Marawi attack, remains in force until the end of the year.

► Sleepers A2

■ SLEEPERS FROM A1

IS sleepers capable of 'another Marawi'

Based on military assessments after the crisis in Marawi City, Bautista said the remaining members of the Maute group were having a hard time recruiting new members.

This is because of the leadership gap since the Maute brothers and IS Southeast Asian "emir" Isnilon Hapilon were killed at the tail-end of the five-month siege in Marawi.

Bautista said a Maute remnant

named "Abu Dar" was first mentioned by the 1st Infantry Division as the likely successor of Hapilon.

National Security Adviser Hermogenes Esporon Jr. had said there were 21 "candidates" that could replace the deceased leader.

'Purely speculative'

A military source however downplayed the statements made by

Bautista as "purely speculative."

"When you say sleeper cell, they were recruited a long time ago, projected to a specific area, lied low for some time and maybe just gathering information," the source said.

"Assuming there were IS members in Luzon after the Marawi siege, they cannot be considered immediately as sleeper cells," he said.

Army chief: ISIS has sleeper cells in PH

BY VICTOR REYES

ARMY chief Lt. Gen. Rolando Bautista yesterday said the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) has sleeper cells throughout the country, ready to be activated for terrorist attacks.

Bautista made the remarks in an interview at the Army headquarters in Fort Bonifacio, a day before the first anniversary of the attack on Marawi City by the Maute group which has declared allegiance to the ISIS.

"We discovered after the Marawi campaign that there are ISIS sleeper cells not only in Mindanao but also in Luzon and the Visayas," said Bautista, who served as head of the Joint Task Force Marawi.

The task force liberated the city on October 23, or five months after its occupation. The conflict resulted in the death of 94 terrorists, 168 soldiers and policemen, and 47 civilians.

"You can see the presence of ISIS cells in Baguio, Dagupan, Tarlac, Pangasinan. In the Visayas, there are (cells) in Samar, Cebu and so forth. If they will

orchestrate terrorist activities, it might be in the form of lone wolf," said Bautista.

"If they are activated, they can create simultaneous terrorist activities, for example, one or two explosions in one area and an assassination in Cebu, liquidation. That will create a big impact although two or three persons will carry that out. That is their most probable strategy in the meantime," said Bautista.

Bautista said terrorist groups may not be able to launch a Marawi-like attack in the next three to five years, noting that their strength had been degraded during the military operations in Marawi City.

He noted the deactivation of the Joint Task Force Marawi and the activation of the National Joint Task Force Bangon Marawi which is spearheading the reconstruction and rehabilitation of the city.

He said the enemy strength has been "totally reduced in terms of leadership, in terms of armament, in terms of foreign

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ARMY

support.”

“Their hardcore fighters have been neutralized in the main battle area,” he added.

Bautista nevertheless said the ISIS-influenced groups “are still recruiting” although the Maute group had been “reduced in terms of strength and capability.”

Bautista named the Abu Sayyaf, the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters, and the Khilafah Islamiyah Mindanao as among the ISIS-influenced groups. These groups, along with the Maute Group, have pledged with the ISIS a few years ago.

A security official, speaking on condition of anonymity, said Bautista’s statement may not be entirely accurate.

“I think the statement is purely speculative and not based on actual or factual information... With all due respect to CGPA (Commanding General, Philippine Army), I

think his statement is a product of an intel assessment that is highly speculative,” he said.

“When you say sleeper cell, they were recruited a long time ago, projected to a specific area, lied low for some time and maybe just gathering information, and then activated for a specific mission or tasking,” the source said.

He said those who joined the “jihad” in the Marawi siege came from various areas and were not members of sleeper cells.

“If ever some were able to go back to their area after the siege to consolidate and recover, it will be difficult for them to launch individual and simultaneous attacks at different parts of the country due to financial, logistical, security and cultural reasons,” he said.

He said sleeper cells have leaders, bomb makers, surveillance people, and logistics man. He said these are deployed in certain areas for “future attacks.”

“Now assuming that there are ISIS members who went back to Luzon after Marawi (siege), they cannot be considered immediately as sleeper cells,” he said.

He said “lone wolves” are entirely different from sleeper cells.

“Lone wolves, for all intents and purposes, have no connection with ISIS because their attacks at the time of execution have no support or were not planned by the group (ISIS) or any of its leaders,” he said.

He said lone wolves are mostly “self-radicalized and act on their own based on their belief that they are contributing to jihad and they will become martyr.”

Meanwhile, 641 Army enlisted personnel have been promoted to the next higher rank for their contribution in the liberation of Marawi City. Bautista led the donning of the rank for the soldiers yesterday in Fort Bonifacio.

Bautista told them, “You put your lives on the line and you did not

fail your country all in the name of service. I hope that when the time comes that you are needed, you won’t hesitate to give your best, even your lives, for the country.”

Col. Romeo Brawner, spokesman of the military’s Joint Task Force Ranao, said Air Force and Navy personnel would also be promoted for their role in Marawi but could not immediately give details.

Presidential spokesman Harry Roque said President Duterte is satisfied with efforts to rehabilitate Marawi City.

Government has launched a P72-billion rehabilitation program.

Roque said about 70 percent of displaced residents have returned to the city and provided with temporary or permanent shelters.

Roque also said the government has lined up some activities to commemorate the siege which include a possible visit to Marawi by the President. — *With Jocelyn Montemayor*

Duterte assumes full responsibility over Marawi crisis

By ALEXIS ROMERO

President Duterte is taking full responsibility for the Marawi siege, admitting that his administration had shortcomings in its handling of the crisis, which began exactly a year ago today.

Duterte admitted that he did not expect the clashes between government forces and terrorists to last for months.

"We had a very sad experience in the Marawi siege. And we all know... that we have fallen short in some respects the way it was handled. I assume full responsibility," the President said during the 120th anniversary of the Philippine Navy yesterday in Manila.

"I did not anticipate or even guess that there would be so much ordnance and the fight would take us about four months to finish. All of these faults, if it is indeed one, or our faults, it belongs and it falls on my shoulders as commander-in-chief. And I assume full responsibility to the nation for what's going to happen," he added.

Terrorists from the Islamic State (IS)-inspired Maute group laid siege on Marawi for more than four months starting May 23, 2017, prompting Duterte to place the entire Mindanao under martial law.

Nearly 1,000 militants, more than 160 government troopers and almost 100 civilians were killed and about one million residents were displaced during the crisis, the longest urban war in the Philippines since World War II.

Duterte declared Marawi liberated from terrorists last October but did not lift martial law because of the alleged threats posed by the surviving Maute group members. Congress has voted to extend military rule in Mindanao until the end of the year.

Duterte yesterday also praised the military and the police for protecting Marawi residents from the threats posed by the IS-inspired militants.

"I congratulate and I pay homage to my soldiers, my policemen and I was there almost nine times to join them even at night just to give them the esprit de corps. It was a very harsh condition," he added.

Duterte also lauded the Navy for their role in rebuilding the battle-ravaged city.

"It was only last year when we celebrated the Philippine Navy's anniversary during the Marawi siege. Then, we honored the heroic efforts of the men and women of the Navy and Marines in the liberation of Marawi. Today, we once again honor them as we make significant progress in the rehabilitation and reconstruction of that city," he said.

Malacañang said the President is also satisfied with efforts to rebuild Marawi, including the government's provision of houses to a majority of residents affected by the crisis.

"(The President) is satisfied and the President has full trust in (housing chief) General (Eduardo) del Rosario," presidential spokesman Harry Roque said in a press briefing.

"What is important is 70 percent of the residents have gone back to Marawi and are occupying homes that we built for them and life goes on for a greater majority of the residents of Marawi," he added.

Officials said the rehabilitation of the main combat zone in Marawi and surrounding areas is expected to cost P72.2 billion. The government aims to finish all rehabilitation projects by 2021.

Roque claimed the government is ahead of schedule in terms of rebuilding the conflict-ravaged communities, but he admitted that the rebuilding of the most affected areas is just about to start.

Over 100,000 displaced children

A year after Duterte's declaration of martial law in Mindanao, more than

100,000 children are still displaced and facing more risks, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) said.

The agency noted that many families apart from those displaced from Marawi City have been affected, including children.

Host families have shared homes, food, possessions and school materials with children temporarily living with them.

UNICEF said the situation of children living in Lanao del Sur was among the worst in the country even before the Marawi crisis. For this reason, UNICEF called for a province-wide approach throughout Lanao del Sur to ensure that children and their families fully recover from the crisis.

"With many displaced families moving from Marawi City to other areas in Lanao del Sur, the capacity of the province to provide essential services for children, and the capacity of host families to support their displaced relatives, has

been even further challenged," said UNICEF country representative Lotta Sylwander.

"While recognizing the good progress made to assist over 40,000 families to return to their homes in Marawi City, many children's lives are still far from returning to normal," she said.

As of yesterday, the military is still clearing certain areas in Marawi City of unexploded ordnances like artillery rounds, grenade projectiles and improvised explosive devices (IEDs).

The military's bomb experts are using calibrated liquid bomb disruptor explosives to set off live ordnances and improvised explosive devices laid by terrorists, according to Chief Supt. Graciano Mijares of the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao.

Col. Romeo Brawner, deputy commander of Joint Task Forces Ranaw, said most of the damaged structures remain as risks.

"They cannot return and live in that place,

there are still many unrecovered IEDs and unexploded ordnance which will pose danger to the lives of the civilians," he said.

Meanwhile, the 641 officers and soldiers who fought in Marawi were promoted to the next rank in a ceremony held in Fort Bonifacio yesterday.

Four colonels who served as company commanders during the battle received their first star as brigadier generals.

Thirty-six were promoted to master sergeant, 98 to technical sergeant, 103 to staff sergeants, 193 to sergeant and 211 to corporal.

The Philippine Army said the number of promoted officers and soldiers recognized yesterday is just part of the large promotion of 4,252 soldiers this year who are all being rewarded for their contributions in the fight to liberate Marawi. ~ With Pia Lee-Brago, John Unson, Roel Pareño, Jose Rodel Clapano, Rhodina Villanueva, Delon Porcalla, Michael Punongbayan

Rehab work in Marawi to go full swing after Ramadan

By ALI G. MACABALANG

COTABATO CITY - The full-scale rehabilitation and reconstruction of Marawi City will commence at the flattened section of the Islamic community's so-called Ground Zero sometime in mid-June or after the observance of Eid'l Fitr marking the end of Ramadan.

This was announced by Marawi City Mayor Majul Gandamra in an interview Monday, during which he also heralded his office's preparation for activities today, May 23, which marks the first year since the bloody siege, perpetrated by the Maute Terrorist Group, broke out in his city.

The mayor did not give details about specific activities slated today, but sources said his family, relatives and supporters will host an iftar (dinner for breaking fast) in the evening as thanksgiving for his safety from the marauding militants of combined Maute and Abu Sayyaf groups.

Gandamra and some supporters holed out inside his office building for more than a week starting on May 23, defending the city hall from invasion by the terror elements, according to media reports.

In his radio interview, Gandamra said the impending reconstruction works would bring about great improvements in the physical landscape in the 24-hectare main battle zone or ground zero in Marawi City.

But he assured that the works will pursue well-thought out designs respecting the cultural and religious sensitivities of the Maranao people.

Earlier, Housing and Urban Development Coordinating Council (HUDCC) Chair Eduardo del Rosario said full-scale reconstruction works would start shortly after all areas within ground zero were cleared of unexploded ordnances and improvised explosive devices.

Del Rosario, who heads the Task Force Bangon Marawi, also announced that all 67 evacuation centers in northern Mindanao and parts of Lanao del Sur will be cleared of occupants within this year, meaning all Maranao evacuees will be allowed to go home.

Palace says Marawi rehab efforts 'ahead of schedule'

As the country commemorates the first anniversary of the day when ISIS-inspired Maute Group laid siege to Marawi City, Malacanang yesterday said that the government, through Task Force Bangon Marawi (TFBM), is "ahead of schedule" in terms of rehabilitation efforts.

"The good news is as far as the residents are concerned, 70 percent of the residents have gone back to their homes. We have provided temporary or permanent homes to 70 percent of them," presidential spokesman Harry Roque said at a Palace briefing.

"That was accomplished in a year's time. We are even ahead of schedule when it comes to the rebuilding of the communities," he added.

Roque said that majority of the residents in Marawi City have been provided by the government with either temporary or permanent homes a year after the siege took place.

The spokesman acknowledged that rehabilitation in the most affected area on ground zero of Marawi City has yet to take place.

He sought for more patience from Marawi residents, noting that rehabilitation efforts had to follow a process.

"In the most-affected area, rehabilitation efforts are just about to begin. Like many Marawi residents, we are also getting impatient, but it has to go through a proper process," Roque said.

"What is important is that 70 percent of the residents have gone back to Marawi are occupying homes that we built for them and life goes on for a greater majority of the residents of Marawi City," he added.

Roque also said that the President is "satisfied" with the performance of TFBM chairperson Eduardo del Rosario.

Data from TFBM showed that out of the city's 96 barangays, most residents from 72 barangays have already returned to their area of

residences while those coming from the remaining 24 barangays from the totally damaged areas have yet to return to their homes since most of it have been destroyed.

The government has allocated an initial P15 billion for the rebuilding of Marawi City.

Meanwhile, Roque said that there have been plans for the President to visit Marawi City but could not confirm because of security considerations.

"As far as I know, we are both going but there's no schedule yet so I still cannot confirm it," Roque said in a Palace briefing.

"Security considerations will prevent us from actually confirming it," he added.

Meanwhile, the implementation of martial law in Mindanao has contributed to further economic activity and development in the region, Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) spokesman Col. Edgard Arevalo said yesterday.

"There is a sense of security in

terms of commerce, which means our economy is becoming active and booming. Overall, if we ask those from Mindanao who are experiencing it, they will tell you that they appreciate the enforcement of martial law (and) if possible, continue implementing martial law," he said.

Meanwhile, Arevalo said the AFP would first validate claims made by groups that they have suffered abuses and harassment due to the implementation of martial law in Mindanao.

Contrary to these claims, he said individuals and sectors interviewed by the military have conveyed positive opinions of martial law.

"We should know first who are those speaking about the matter. Let's validate and confirm if they are real victims because if we interview those who are from Mindanao, the ones who are directly experiencing the effects of martial law, what they say is they welcome martial law," Arevalo said. **PNA**

Marawi rehab in full swing; Palace satisfied

By Francisco Tuyay
and Maricel V. Cruz

ON THE eve of the first anniversary of the Marawi siege, Malacañang said it was satisfied with the rate at which the city is being rehabilitated.

"We are satisfied. The President has full trust in General Del Rosario," said Presidential Spokesman Harry Roque, referring to housing czar Eduardo del Rosario, who heads the task force that oversees the war-torn city's rehabilitation.

On May 23, 2017, the Islamic State-inspired Maute group terrorists seized control of areas of Marawi City. Five months later, government troops that led a protracted campaign to battle the terrorists declared they had taken back the city.

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Marawi...

From A1

President Rodrigo Duterte, who declared martial law in response to the Marawi takeover, is set to visit the city to mark the first anniversary of the siege.

"The good news is that, as far as the residents are concerned, 70 percent of the residents have gone back to their homes. We have provided temporary or permanent homes to 70 percent of them," Roque said.

This, he added, was good progress.

The spokesman said, however, that it would take more time to rebuild the main battle area, which came under heavy bombardment.

The commemoration of the Marawi siege started May 17 with a medical and dental mission and a peace caravan from the Armed Forces of the Philippines.

Col. Romeo Brawner, commander of Joint Task Force Lanao, said the main battle zone is still a controlled area due to unexploded ordnance, but residents were allowed to return to their houses to salvage their personal belongings.

Brawner said about 85 percent of the total

barangays have already been cleared while military engineers continue to remove an estimated 70 unexploded bombs.

Despite the prevailing peace in Marawi City, Brawner said possible threats will not just vanish amid reports that terrorists were trying to recruit fighters again.

An opposition lawmaker, meanwhile, warned of massive land grabbing and government encroachment of ancestral lands in the reconstruction of Marawi City.

"One year after Marawi City was almost obliterated in the aftermath of the unremitting joint military-police offensive following the controversial declaration of martial law on May 23, 2017, the promised rehabilitation of Marawi has barely started," Albay Rep. Edel Lagman said.

Lagman said the displaced Maranaos and other residents of Marawi City are mostly still homeless amidst the ruins of an improvident war.

"Maranaos fear that land ownership problems will lead to a) land grabbing; b) appropriation by the State of ancestral lands for government projects; and c) bank foreclosures of mortgaged properties,"

Lagman said. "These problems may further enflame extremism in the area," he added.

"With the inadequate response of the Duterte administration, the seeds of rebellion and terrorism continue to germinate which gave the government the convenient excuse of imposing a yearlong extension of martial law in Mindanao," he said.

Akhayan Party-list Rep. Tom Villarin, an oppositionist, echoed Lagman's view.

He said "some enterprising individuals in cahoots with unscrupulous government officials involved in land titling may be able to have large tracts of land in Marawi City titled to themselves."

In addition, Villarin said that in its effort to speed up the construction of houses for the displaced Marawi residents, the government may encroach on ancestral lands.

Also on Tuesday, the local governments of Lanao Sur and Marawi City welcomed the US government's additional assistance package for families displaced by the recent six-month siege that has razed the city's commercial center into what is now called the "ground zero." With PNA

'Crazy hope' for missing kin in Marawi

ILIGAN CITY (AFP) - Ten men from the same family vanished after jihadists invaded Marawi City a year ago - each day since, their wives have prayed their bones do not lie in its devastated landscape.

The women have been told to accept their husbands were likely among the 1,200 killed in the five-month battle that flattened swathes of the city, but they refuse to move on until they know for sure. ▶4

'Crazy hope' for missing... ◀1

"I am hoping he will come home. All of us are hoping they will return. Even if my family says I am crazy, I told them my husband will come back," Melgie Powao said of her husband Victor.

One year after the battle, reconstruction work is due to begin and the authorities say jihadists are far from mounting another such attack.

Yet, the families of the scores still missing are the overlooked victims of the country's deadliest confrontation with Islamists.

The fighting left behind hundreds of corpses, with more likely to be found in the conflict area which has yet to be completely cleared of unexploded bombs.

The Powao men - fathers and brothers, cousins and uncles - from neighboring Iligan City were in Marawi for construction jobs when clashes with Islamic State-aligned fighters broke out on May 23 last year.

In the fighting that ensued, government airstrikes on Marawi and house-to-house fighting left neighborhoods in ruins that have been compared to battlegrounds in Syria or Iraq.

Only one of the Powao group - the 11th man - escaped and it was from him the wives learned that an airstrike may have killed some of them, while jihadists herded others into a van.

"Until I see their bodies, I won't believe they are dead," 31-year-old Alma Tome said of her husband Rowel and the others.

The Powaos are among 78 people officially listed as missing, though possibly hundreds more disappeared.

Some families were hesitant to file reports out of fear they could be targeted by authorities hunting for anyone with links to jihadists.

'Bury them and grieve'

Many of Marawi's 200,000 residents fled their homes, including more than 10,000 people from the so-called "ground zero."

However so many explosives were left behind after the shooting stopped that even a year later thousands of residents have been allowed to visit - but not return to - their shattered homes.

The Powaos' ordeal began on the first day of the siege, which was the last time they heard from their men.

"We were running out of pictures as we gave them to authorities to try

to get help, but we went home without any news," said Melgie, 24.

The women gave DNA samples to police in October to check against recovered corpses, but have heard nothing yet.

Allan Tabell, who heads the group identifying the remains, told AFP that authorities are doing their best.

"We're not expecting it to be done overnight. It's a long process but we have to respect that it's a process... we cannot afford any mistakes," he said.

The testing will go on as the rebuilding of the city creaks into action. Philippine authorities estimate it will cost \$987 million to put Marawi right again. The work is expected to start in June.

Four Chinese companies and one Indian firm put in bids to handle a project that will involve the huge task of carting away hundreds of tonnes of debris, and which is expected to take years.

In the meantime, the Powao women will continue to seek answers, struggling with the gaping absence in their lives.

Alma, with her two-year-old son in her arms, said the boy sometimes picks up her ringing phone thinking his dad is on the other end. He calls out "papa" when a car stops in front of their house.

"The pain is double," said Alma, who also has a one-year-old toddler.

Melgie says the Powao women don't need aid, just answers.

"All we want is to see the DNA results. Even if they are just bones, at least we can bury them properly and grieve," she said.

Satisfied

So far, Presidential spokesperson Harry Roque said President Duterte is satisfied at the smooth rebuilding efforts in Marawi.

"We have provided temporary or permanent homes to 70 percent of them so they can live in a year's time. We are even ahead of schedule pagdating po doon sa mga [when it comes to] rebuilding of the communities," he said.

"Life goes on for a greater majority of the residents of Marawi," he added.

But government is still short of about ₱11-billion budget to bankroll the reconstruction efforts.

To be specific, the Marawi rehab would require funding of as much as ₱26 billion for this year alone and another ₱27 billion for the succeeding years until 2022.

As of now, government only has a sure funding of P15 billion this year to bankroll the rehabilitation scheduled to start on the second week of June.

In total, the cost to rebuild Marawi - or to implement as much as much as 892 priority programs, projects and activities (PPAs) in the city and its surrounding areas - stands around P53.4 billion.

That's according to Bangon Marawi Comprehensive Rehabilitation and Recovery Program (BM-CRRP), a masterplan drafted by National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA) that provides strategic interventions for the rehabilitation of Marawi City and municipalities directly affected by the conflict.

The program will be submitted to the Office of the President for approval.

NEDA Undersecretary for Regional Development Office Adoracion Navarro said discussions are now ongoing to finalize the funding support that will come from the private sector, non-government organizations, multi-lateral institutions, and other countries like Japan, China, and Australia.

"We are confident that we will be able to fund the requirement for this



PROMOTION FOR MARAWI HEROES - More than 600 soldiers were given a one-rank promotion for their contribution in the fight to liberate the war-stricken Marawi City from terrorists, in time with the commemoration of the first year anniversary of the start of Marawi siege today, May 23. The donning of ranks ceremony was held at the Philippine Army headquarters in Fort Bonifacio yesterday. (Ali Vicoy)

year. The private sector is very much committed," Navarro told reporters.

Meanwhile, all 641 army soldiers who fought to liberate Marawi from Maute fighters were promoted one rank higher yesterday.

"The valor and resilience that

you have displayed present the finest values of the military and the Filipino people," Defense Undersecretary Cardozo M. Luna said. (With reports from Genalyn D. Kabiling, Madelaine B. Mirafior, and Francis T. Wakefield)

'Crazy hope' for missing kin one year after Marawi siege

ILIGAN CITY: Ten men from the same family vanished after jihadists invaded the Philippine city of Marawi a year ago — each day since, their wives have prayed their bones do not lie in its devastated landscape.

The women have been told to accept their husbands were likely

among the 1,200 killed in the five-month battle that flattened swathes of the city, but they refuse to move on until they know for sure.

"I am hoping he will come home. All of us are hoping they will return. Even if my family says I am crazy, I told them my husband will

► **Missing A2**

■ MISSING FROM A1

'Crazy hope' for missing kin one year after Marawi siege

come back," Melgie Powao said of her spouse Victor.

One year after the battle, reconstruction work is due to begin and the authorities say jihadists are far from mounting another such attack.

Yet, the families of the scores still missing are the overlooked victims of the Philippines' deadliest confrontation with Islamists.

The fighting left behind hundreds of corpses, with more likely to be found in the conflict area that has yet to be completely cleared of unexploded bombs.

The Powao men — fathers and brothers, cousins and uncles — from neighboring Iligan city were in Marawi for construction jobs when clashes with Islamic State-aligned fighters broke out on May 23 last year.

In the fighting that ensued, government airstrikes on Marawi and house-to-house fighting left neighborhoods in ruins that have been compared to battlegrounds in Syria or Iraq.

Only one of the Powao group — the eleventh man — escaped and it was from him the wives learned that an airstrike may have killed some of them, while jihadists herded others into a van.

"Until I see their bodies, I won't believe they are dead," 31-year-old Alma Tome said of her husband Rowel and the others.

The Powaos are among 78 people officially listed as missing, though possibly hundreds more disappeared.

Some families were hesitant to file reports out of fear they could be targeted by authorities hunting for anyone with links to jihadists.

The Powaos' ordeal began on the

first day of the siege, which was the last time they heard from their men. In a shaking voice, Melgie's husband told her over the phone not to worry.

But after months of waiting the women made a search trip to Marawi. They even visited funeral homes but could not bear looking at the corpses' faces.

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AFF

'Crazy hope' for missing kin in war-torn Marawi City



Still crying for spouse's return Melgie Powao, whose husband is still missing one year after the Marawi siege, tears up during an interview with AFP in Iligan city on the southern island of Mindanao. AFP

Ten men from the same family vanished after Maute Group bandits invaded Marawi City a year ago — each day since, their wives have prayed their bones do not lie in its devastated landscape.

The women have been told to accept their husbands were likely among the 1,200 killed in the five-month battle that flattened swathes of the city, but they refuse to move on until they know for sure.

"I am hoping he will come home. All of us are hoping they will return.

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The fighting left behind hundreds of

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'Crazy hope' for missing kin in war-torn Marawi City

From page 1

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Only one of the Powao group — the 11th man — escaped and it was from him the wives learned that an airstrike may have killed some of them, while jihadists herded others into a van.

"Until I see their bodies, I won't believe they are dead," 31-year-old Alma Tome said of her husband Rowel and the others.

The Powaos are among 78 people officially listed as missing, though possibly hundreds more disappeared.

Some families were hesitant to file reports out of fear they could be targeted by authorities hunting

for anyone with links to Maute Group.

'Bury them and grieve'

Many of Marawi's 200,000 residents fled their homes, including more than 10,000 people from the so-called "ground zero."

However so many explosives were left behind after the shooting stopped that even a year later thousands of residents have been allowed to visit — but not return to — their shattered homes.

The Powaos' ordeal began on the first day of the siege, which was the last time they heard from their men. In a shaking voice, Melgie's husband told her over the phone not to worry.

But after months of waiting, the women made a search trip to Marawi. They even visited funeral homes but could not bear looking at the corpses' faces.

"We were running out of pictures as we gave them to authorities to try to get help, but we went home without any news," said Melgie, 24.

The women gave DNA samples to police in October to check against recovered corpses, but have heard nothing yet.

Allan Tabell, who heads the group identifying the remains, told *Agence France Presse* that authorities are doing their best. AFP

Speaker vows to pass BBL before congressional break

By DELON PORCALLA

Barring any hitches, the House of Representatives will pass on third and final reading the proposed Bangsamoro Basic Law (BBL) on May 30, a day before Congress adjourns *sine die* on June 1.

"Definitely, yes. We would pass that before our *sine die* break," Speaker Pantaleon Alvarez told reporters after a meeting with the Bangsamoro Transition Commission (BTC), government peace-panel and other stakeholders.

House Majority Leader Rodolfo Fariñas (Ilocos Norte) also gave assurance of the peace pact's passage, although he wanted President Duterte to certify the bill as urgent – a requirement that Alvarez said he could give notice to Duterte.

A bill that has been certified urgent by Malacañang need not undergo the three-day layover rule between its passage on second reading and third reading. The House has yet to pass on third reading House Bill 6475 – Alvarez's BBL version – before the end of the month.

Malacañang said the President is ready to certify the bill as urgent once the House of Representatives and the Senate agree to fast-track the deliberation over the agreed version.

"The President promised to certify it. I cannot absolutely guarantee that the version of the House will be certified because I haven't seen the text. But if it is in conformity with what was agreed upon, then there should be no problem. The President should certify it," presidential spokesman Harry Roque Jr. said yesterday.

A letter dated May 21 and signed by Senate President Vicente Sotto III and Majority Leader Juan Miguel Zubiri requesting Duterte to certify Senate Bill 1717 was already sent.

Duterte declared in a previous speaking engagement that he wants Congress to pass BBL by May 30, saying the government is "racing against time" to enact the measure that could help keep the peace in war-torn Mindanao. Otherwise, he said he would be forced to "resign" out of embarrassment to Muslim officials.

Both Alvarez and Fariñas, who presided over the meetings at the House, said the government panel and BTC members have requested for three more days to put some finishing touches on the possible amendments to the BBL provisions.

Early last week, a joint House committee approved the proposed BBL that will provide an autonomous and separate Islamic state in Mindanao, where most of the Filipino-Muslims are living. – With Christina Mendez, Paolo Romero, Janvic Mateo

BBL 'riddled with unconstitutional provisions'

THE proposed Bangsamoro Basic Law (BBL) backed by the Duterte administration is riddled with unconstitutional provisions, opposition lawmakers in the House of Representatives warned Tuesday.

Deputy Speaker Rolando Andaya of Camarines Sur, Edcel Lagman of Albay and Gary Alejano of Magdalo party-list made the statement on the same day that Speaker Pantaleon Alvarez of Davao del Norte and House

Majority Leader Rodolfo Fariñas of Ilocos Norte met with the members of the Bangsamoro Transition Commission (BTC).

The BTC was formed following
► Unconstitutional A2

■ UNCONSTITUTIONAL FROM A1

BBL 'riddled

the peace agreement inked between the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) and the government in March 2014, to draft the BBL.

Last week, the House committees of Muslim Affairs, Local Government and Peace, Reconciliation and Unity approved the proposed BBL as proposed by the BTC.

The BTC version of the BBL sponsored by Alvarez and Fariñas under House Bill 6475, proposes to abolish the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) and replace it with a Bangsamoro Region that will enjoy fiscal autonomy.

The region will be governed by the Bangsamoro Parliament elected by the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region's inhabitants.

Andaya noted that the BTC-backed House Bill 6475 grants fiscal autonomy to the Bangsamoro Region—a power that can only be granted by the Constitution.

House Bill 6475 states that the Bangsamoro region will enjoy the maximum form of fiscal autonomy "with the end view of attaining economic self-sufficiency and genuine development. It shall be entitled to all fund sources enumerated herein, and will have the power to create its sources of revenues as provided in this law."

Lagman, for his part, argued that the BBL would contravene the Constitution since it abolishes

the ARMM and replaces it with a Bangsamoro region.

Alejano is opposed to the opt-in provision and fears that the grant of fiscal autonomy—which will allocate a block grant to the Bangsamoro region—will allow the region to purchase weapons without the approval of the national government.

Senate wants BBL certified as urgent

The Senate leadership on Monday asked President Rodrigo Duterte to certify as urgent the passage of the BBL.

Senate President Vicente Sotto 3rd and Senate Majority Leader Juan Miguel Zubiri on Monday, May 21, wrote to the President, to seek help in expediting the approval in the upper house of

Senate Bill (SB) 1717 abolishing the ARMM.

"We aim to pass the said measure on third reading before the sine die adjournment of the Senate on June 2, 2018. Thus, we are hoping for your usual support as we work for the prompt passage of this law," they said.

If certified as urgent by the President, SB 1717 could be passed in one session day.

Congress – the Senate and the House of Representatives – have only three more session days, May 23 and from May 28 to May 30, before it adjourns sine die on June 2.

SB 1717 has been approved on second reading and is undergoing interpellations.

**LLANESCA T. PANTI
AND BERNADETTEE TAMAYO**

Alvarez: BTC needs more time to study amendments to BBL

The Bangsamoro Transition Commission (BTC) has asked for more time to study the proposed amendments to the bill seeking to provide for the Bangsamoro Basic Law (BBL), Speaker Pantaleon Alvarez yesterday said.

"The GRP (Government of the Republic of the Philippines) has proposals, and the BTC asked for three days in order to discuss these," Alvarez said in an ambush interview yesterday following a closed-door meeting with the said parties.

Alvarez is optimistic that the issues or concerns about the provisions of the proposed law would be resolved.

"I think we could reach an agreement," he said.

He also expressed confidence that the House could meet

Turn to page 2

From page 1

its deadline for the BBL's passage before Congress adjourns *sine die* on May 31.

"We could meet the deadline, definitely," Alvarez stressed.

House Majority Floor Leader and Ilocos Norte Rep. Rodolfo Fariñas shared Alvarez's view that BBL will be approved before the *sine die* adjournment "with the President certifying the bill as urgent."

He expressed optimism that President Duterte can even sign the BBL into law before his third State of the Nation Address on July 23, 2018.

"The BTC will bring the proposed amendments to its principals and will come back to us on Monday. We will have the caucus after I get their reaction," Fariñas said.

Fariñas, however, refused to reveal the details of the proposed amendments that triggered delays in the passage of the BBL.

'Anytime soon'

Malacañang assured that Duterte will certify the proposed BBL as urgent "anytime soon."

"The President promised to certify it," presidential spokesman Harry Roque said at a Palace press briefing.

Roque, however, said there is no assurance if the House of Representatives version of the bill will be certified by the President.

"I have not seen the text but if it is in conformity with what was agreed upon, then there should be no problem. The President should certify it," Roque, a former lawmaker, said.

Roque clarified that there is no need for the President to meet with House leaders.

The House leadership has reportedly said they will ask the President to certify the BBL as urgent since Congress is set to adjourn *sine die* on June 2.

"(It will) just be certified as urgent. That can speed up the passing of this BBL," he said.

Once certified as urgent, the BBL can be passed by Congress on the second and third reading on the same day.

Asked when the President would certify the BBL, Roque said "anytime soon, because that's what they agreed to speed up."

"Their last meeting here at the Palace is to speed up, you will have certification as urgent for both chambers," he added.

Constitutional 'red flags'

House Deputy Speaker and Camarines Sur Rep. Rolando Andaya Jr. asked the three committees of the House of Representatives that consolidated and approved the BBL bill to seriously look into constitutional issues on some provisions of the measure.

"We should work together to make sure this bill is as airtight as possible, as President Duterte's administration has put much work and effort into this measure. We all do not want to see it wasted just because of a fatal oversight," Andaya stressed in a statement.

In particular, Andaya expressed concerns that Section 1 of Article 12 of House Bill (HB) 6475, which talks about Fiscal Autonomy of the Bangsamoro, is unconstitutional according to existing jurisprudence.

The lawmaker said that fiscal autonomy is granted by the Constitution and cannot be superseded by a law passed even by Congress.

"It is a constitutional grant and cannot be attained by membership. This is the ruling of the Supreme Court on the power of fiscal autonomy," he further explained.

Last week, the House committee on Muslim affairs, voting 27-3; committee on local government, voting 32-3; and the special committee on peace, unity and reconciliation, voting 27-3, approved the committee report on House Bill 6475 or the BBL.

Authored by Alvarez, HB 6475 provides for the BBL and seeks the

abolition of the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM). The bill is based on the proposal submitted by the BTC to Duterte.

It aims to establish a political entity, provide for its basic structure of government in recognition of the justness and legitimacy of the cause of the Bangsamoro people and their aspiration to chart their political future through a democratic process that will secure their identity and posterity and allow for a meaningful self-governance.

Under the bill, the Bangsamoro territory shall remain a part of the Philippines.

The Bangsamoro territory shall be composed of the following: 1) the current geographical area of the ARMM; 2) the municipalities of Baloi, Munai, Nunungan, Pantar, Tagolan and Tangkal in the province of Lanao del Norte and all other barangays in the municipalities of Kabacan, Carmen, Aleosan, Pigkawayan, Pikit, and Midsayap that voted for inclusion in the ARMM during the 2001 plebiscite; 3) the cities of Cotabatao and Isabela; and 4) all other contiguous areas where there is resolution of the local government unit or a petition of at least 10 percent of the registered voters in the area asking for their inclusion at least two months prior to the conduct of the ratification of the basic law and the process of delimitation of the Bangsamoro.

The measure also retains the central government's power and control over defense and external issue.

The central government shall create a Bangsamoro Military Command of the Armed Forces of the Philippines for the Bangsamoro, which shall be organized, maintained and utilized in accordance with national laws.

A Bangsamoro Police, under the Philippine National Police, shall also be created for law enforcement and maintenance of peace and order in the Bangsamoro.

Gerry Baldo and PNA

Solons go to the meat of BBL bill

BY WENDELL VIGILIA

SPEAKER Pantaleon Alvarez remains optimistic that the House of Representatives will be able to come up with a "win-win" version of the proposed Bangsamoro Basic Law (BBL) that will be acceptable to all stakeholders.

"I believe we can come to an agreement on these issues," Al-

varez told reporters after he and other House leaders met with the Bangsamoro Transition Commission (BTC) and the government's peace panel.

Among the matters discussed during the meeting at the House were the proposed amendments to various provisions of the bill.

Alvarez, however, refused to divulge the specific issues,

provisions or objections raised during the closed-door meeting since "they (BTC) requested us to keep things between us for the meantime."

The BTC asked that it be given three days to discuss the proposed amendments to the measure which has yet to be

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SOLONS

sponsored in the plenary.

The BTC is expected to meet again with House leaders on Monday to give their position on the objections raised by some lawmakers against the measure.

Majority leader Rodolfo Fariñas said the House would conduct another caucus after Monday's meeting.

Alvarez said the House can pass the proposed BBL on third and final reading before Congress adjourns sine die on June 1. The House only has four session days left before the adjournment.

If the bill is certified as urgent by President Duterte, the House will be able to approve the bill on second and third reading on the same day.

President Duterte will certify the proposed bill as urgent, provided that it conforms to the provisions and contents that Malacanang and the legislative branch had earlier discussed and agreed on, according to presidential spokesman Harry Roque.

"The President promised to certify it. I cannot absolutely guarantee that the version of the House will be certified, because I haven't seen the text. But if it is in conformity with what was agreed upon, then there should be no problem. The President should certify it," he said, adding the certification would be done "anytime soon."

House Deputy Speaker Rolando G. Andaya Jr. of Camarines Sur warned his colleagues of the constitutional issues that may again rise once the bill becomes a law.

Andaya specifically expressed concerns on the Fiscal Autonomy of the proposed Bangsamoro autonomous region. — *With Jocelyn Montemayor*

Duterte pressed on BBL draft as priority measure

MALACANANG said Tuesday President Rodrigo Duterte will certify the proposed Bangsamoro Basic Law as urgent "anytime soon."

"The President promised to certify it," Presidential Spokesman Harry Roque told reporters.

In other developments:

The Senate has again asked Duterte to certify the BBL as urgent.

In a letter to the President, newly elected Senate President Vicente Sotto III and Majority Leader Juan Miguel Zubiri said the Senate intended to pass on third reading Senate Bill 1717, or "An Act Providing for the Basic Law for the Bangsamoro and Abolishing the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao" before it goes to sine die adjournment on June 2.

"We are hoping for your usual support as we work for the prompt passage of this law," Sotto and Zubiri said in the letter.

Speaker Pantaleon Alvarez said Tuesday he was hopeful the controversial issues on the BBL would be resolved to the "satisfaction" of the stakeholders, and that the measure would be passed before Congress takes a break at the end of the month.

Alvarez made the statement after emerging from Tuesday's closed-door meeting with the Bangsamoro Transition Commission and the government's peace panel.

"The GRP has proposals and the BTC asked for three days so they can discuss these," Alvarez said.

An administration lawmaker on Tuesday asked the three committees of the House of Representatives that consolidated and approved the Bangsamoro Basic Law bill to look into constitutional issues on some provisions of the measure.

Duterte's administration has put much work and effort into this measure," House deputy speaker and Camarines Sur Rep. Rolando Andaya Jr. said.

Roque said there was no assurance if the House of Representatives' version of the bill would be certified by the President.

"I have not seen the text but if it is in conformity with what was agreed upon, then there should be no problem. The President should certify it," Roque said.

He said there was no need for the President to meet with the House leaders. PNA, with Macon Ramos-Araneta and Maricel V. Cruz

EDITORIAL

How to lose what is ours

The national interest demands that the Philippines protest China's ongoing militarization of the Spratlys and resist every Chinese encroachment on our territory and every infringement of our sovereign rights. The Constitution commands it; international law requires it. To keep quiet, as the Department of Foreign Affairs under Secretary Alan Peter Cayetano has done, or to merely say that there's nothing new ("*sa amin hindi po bago 'yan*"), as presidential spokesperson Harry Roque said on Tuesday, is to fall far short of meeting the national interest.

President Duterte's latest pronouncements are consistent with his previous statements: De-escalate tensions with Beijing. Insisting on our sovereign rights or on the arbitral tribunal ruling will only lead to trouble. We cannot afford to wage war against China; we cannot win a war against China. And, yet again: There's nothing I can do ("*wala na rin akong magawa*").

In explaining its conspicuous silence, the DFA released a statement that essentially emphasized a lack of transparency as part of government policy. "While appropriate language, whether expressions of condemnation or concern, over certain developments are clearly conveyed through diplomatic channels, it is not our policy to publicize every action taken by the Philippine government whenever there are reported developments taking place in the West Philippine Sea and the South China Sea."

Roque struck a more pragmatic note: "We will move on

issues we can agree upon and set aside contentious issues for now."

But the President's own explanation is the riskiest for the Philippines, because his admission may be construed as official abandonment of some of our sovereign rights.

There is something to be said for pragmatism, of course; there is no denying that China is the preeminent power in the region. But our point: It is also pragmatic for the Philippines not to ignore or abandon other options, other courses of action.

Consider the Duterte administration's concession to the Chinese on bilateral talks. Previous administrations had declined to accept Beijing's request for bilateral discussions to ease tensions and resolve disputes in the South China Sea—for good reason. As the preeminent power in the region, China enjoyed a massive advantage in these one-on-one talks. As the success of the Ascan initiative to convince Beijing to sign a Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea in 2002 shows, concerted effort by smaller countries working together has a greater potential to influence Chinese conduct.

But as part of its policy of appeasement, the Duterte administration agreed to enter into bilateral talks with China to discuss South China Sea issues. What has this major strategic concession done for the Philippines?

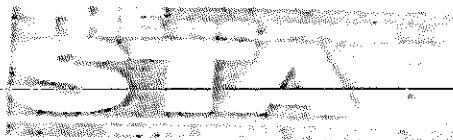
Has it enabled the country to stop China from constructing military-grade facilities—starting with aircraft hangars, radar facilities and barracks—on seven terraformed reefs in the Spratlys? Three of these reefs belong to the Philippines.

Has the bilateral mechanism empowered the Philippines to prevent the arrival, and perhaps the permanent basing, of Chinese military aircraft on Panganiban Reef?

Has it even allowed the country to learn about Chinese movements in the disputed areas in advance?

Seen from different perspectives—constitutional, political, even moral—the failure of the Philippines to defend its prerogatives and sovereign rights when these are undermined is a shortchanging of the nation's highest interest. But seen even from the prism of pragmatism, the country's studied silence, its setting aside of contentious issues, cannot be said to be working. *Mo*

IT IS ALSO
PRAGMATIC FOR
THE PHILIPPINES
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No room for complacency

The military estimates that around 50 improvised explosive

EDITORIAL

ified quality standards. Corruption must be prevented

devices are still lying hidden in Marawi, a year after the start of the siege that left the Islamic city in ruins. The United Nations Children's Fund, for its part, reports that some 100,000 children remain displaced following the five-month siege. Scores of residents remain missing.

Security officials also say that the Maute terrorist group, inspired by the extremist Islamic State, continues to pose a threat and can create trouble not only in Marawi but also in other parts of the country.

Dealing with those problems are just some of the challenges on top of the principal one, which is to rebuild a city that was once a prosperous and vibrant urban center. As in other reconstruction efforts, the aim is to build a better Marawi. The extent of the devastation opens opportunities for a thorough transformation, without sacrificing the city's cultural uniqueness.

President Duterte said he was satisfied with the reconstruction efforts. But there is always room for improvement, including in the assistance provided to evacuees. Transition shelters must meet spec-

as massive infrastructure and other projects get underway.

Reconstruction, especially of a city destroyed by armed conflict, is never easy. The areas devastated by Super Typhoon Yolanda in 2013 are still continuing recovery efforts. There are ways, however, of boosting the efficiency of reconstruction to build back better.

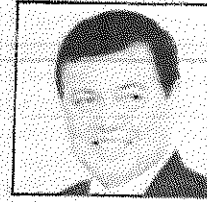
A top concern is preventing a resurgence of the Mautes and a repeat of the siege elsewhere in Mindanao. The attack appeared to have taken the government by surprise, with top security officials joining the President in Russia when the siege started exactly a year ago today.

The Mautes proved tenacious, taking on the Armed Forces of the Philippines for five months. The AFP performed its job with admirable courage and the kind of professionalism that dispelled concerns about martial law in the city. Top Maute and Abu Sayyaf commanders were neutralized or captured. Still, the threat persists. A year after the siege, there is no room for complacency. 10

OF TREES AND FOREST

New chiefs

By MANNY VILLAR



PRESIDENT Rodrigo Duterte announced last month two important appointments to two critical posts in government: Metro Manila police chief Director Oscar Albayalde as the new Philippine National Police (PNP) chief, replacing retiring Director General Ronald "Bato" dela Rosa, and Lt. Gen. Carlito Galvez as Armed Forces chief of staff vice Lt. Gen. Rey Leonardo Guerrero, who retired last April 18 after a six-month extension in office.

They are important appointments because these are posts critical to the flagship programs of the administration of instituting peace and order and in securing our country.

Several newspapers articles reported that the President solicited the opinion of some people from Davao City regarding who should replace General Bato and when the name of Albayalde came up, they said no, saying, "He's too strict." The President of course appointed Albayalde, which is a

decision I support.

The PNP occupies a pivotal role in the efforts of the President to maintain peace and order by dismantling the drug trade and thereby addressing the other forms of criminality that comes with it — murder, rape, robbery — not to mention saving Filipino families from the negative effects of illegal drugs.

But in waging the war on drugs, the PNP needs to cleanse its ranks of a few rotten fruits that might destroy the reputation of the majority of the police force who are honest, dedicated, and committed to serve and protect the public. The image and the credibility of the police force is as important as its professionalism and efficiency in ensuring the success of this war. General Bato has done that by suspending, removing, and sometimes taking to court those who abuse their powers. We need someone who is "too strict" to continue the job, to make sure that the gains on the war against drugs are sustained.

I have said many times, even during

the 2016 presidential campaign, that peace and order is a crucial issue for our people and something that the new president needs to address in order to sustain our economic performance. President Duterte won largely because this message resonated the most with Filipino voters.

The seriousness and uncompromising stance of President Duterte against those whose intention is to disturb the peace — mainly the drug lords — have made a dent on the illegal drugs operations and have allowed many of our communities to thrive without fear.

The AFP, on the other hand, is important because they are tasked to defend our sovereignty and our security. After defeating the local terrorist groups who violently took over Marawi City, our soldiers have proven that they can defeat the enemy. The military's victory over the Maute Group sent a clear signal of our seriousness in dealing with terrorism.

But it is important not to rest on our laurels. The threat of terrorism in Southeast Asia has grown stronger. We now have indications that the Islamic State in Iraq

and Syria, or ISIS, have increased their presence in the region. According to security experts, the Marawi Siege as well as terror attacks in Jakarta, Indonesia are just the initial posturing of ISIS and their affiliates in the region.

General Galvez has the unenviable task of ensuring that our armed forces are prepared to meet future security threats from terrorists and other elements. Specifically, he needs to retrain our forces from mere anti-insurgency units into one that can meet the new tactics and strategy of terrorists who employ urban warfare and effective social media propaganda campaigns to further its cause.

Gen. Galvez seems to be perfectly positioned to do this job. As the former chief of the Western Mindanao Command he has extensive experience in the Mindanao conflict and in peace-building efforts in the region. It is no surprise that many sectors, especially in Muslim Mindanao, welcomed his appointment.

I welcome the appointments of these two gentlemen and wish them good luck. ||

West Philippine Sea

Part 2 – Search for options

IN conflicts among civilized countries, diplomacy is the default setting. Only when diplomacy fails will Clausewitz's dictum be operative. To paraphrase the general: "War is not an independent phenomenon, but the continuation of diplomacy by other means." War should never be the first option. To his credit, the Deegong does not subscribe to this, but what comes nearest to it—the exercise of the state's monopoly of the legitimate use of violence has been a credo for DU30. His mind-set is perfunctorily attuned to it, having risen to power as a *strongman*, from a city mayor to the country's president.

The President's perorations on the West Philippine Sea (WPS) disputes, his first major stab at geopolitics, may not entirely be blamed solely on him as I'm afraid his subalterns perhaps don't have the balls to confront an imperious boss with sound advice that may be contradictory to his views.

Though somewhat experienced and successful in local diplomacy, having freed Davao from the clutches of criminal elements, a communist insurgency and the illegal drug menace, Duterte's thought process in 'conflict resolution,' particularly in regard to China, is direct and linear: "...a problem perceived as a zero-sum game, best solution available; fight or flee..."

Unfortunately, his appreciation of this strategy permeates the political conversation, eliciting extreme responses even from his avid supporters, samples of which proliferate in social media: "...it's a seppuku to challenge China..."; "Between national pride and survival, what should our president choose?" This is in fact a false choice.

In many predicaments in the



**LITO MONICO
C. LORENZANA**

President's world, his reaction is a uniquely persona-based one, exposing his raw alpha male behavior. This surfaced during the WPS hullabaloo that followed early in his watch after having been gifted with the PCA arbitral ruling ("West Philippine Sea: Part 1 A discordant foreign policy," *The Manila Times*, May 16, 2018).

The unfolding events could have used more diplomacy in geopolitics that presupposes negotiations and the need for compromise. This did not happen. Then came a cascade of errors. Bureaucracies already embedded in government that have specialized skills and experience could have responded more efficiently to threats but were never seriously consulted and mined for options. One such body, the National Security Council (NSC), among others was never convened.

Neophytes were recruited on the fly, anointed with responsibilities beyond their proficiency, shunting out the 'oldtimers' at the DFA who could have helped to devise negotiating postures on win-win scenarios with the Chinese government. There was too much on his plate, assuming personally the roles of foreign policy initiator, negotiator, decider of last resort and spokesperson; surrendering a cover for semantic "diplomatese" or outright faux pas. His choice of alter-egos in the field of diplomacy was less than stellar. His personal approach to statecraft was at best considered naïve. We have other foreign policy choices. The President needs to reach out to all beyond his immediate coterie.

One alternative could have been

an approach to the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD) members. These four major powers, US, Australia, Japan and India share common interests with the Philippines in maritime security from East Asia to the Indian Ocean. Instead, the Philippines embarked on a virtual policy of appeasement notwithstanding an array of policy choices

But it is not too late for the President to review his playbook. One of the leading experts that argued successfully the Philippine arbitration case at the Permanent Court of Arbitration at The Hague is Associate Supreme Court Justice Antonio Carpio, who is also from Davao. DU30 may not be attuned with Carpio's politics, but they are both patriots who care deeply for our country. Carpio has some ideas on WPS issue which could be considered. On the current Chinese initiatives, he suggests a five-point approach (Rappler, Carmela Fonbuena, March 20, 2017):

1. "File a strong formal protest against China's building activity. This is the least that the President can do. This is what the Vietnamese did recently when China sent cruise tours to the disputed Paracels."

2. Send the Philippine Navy to patrol Scarborough Shoal. If the Chinese attack Philippine navy vessels, then the President can invoke the Philippine-US Mutual Defense Treaty, which covers any armed attack on Philippine navy vessels operating in the South China Sea.

3. Ask the United States to declare that Scarborough Shoal is part of Philippine territory for purposes of the Mutual Defense Treaty since the shoal has been part of Philippine territory even during the American colonial period. The US has declared the Senkakus as part of Japanese terri-

tory for purposes of the US-Japan mutual defense treaty.

4. Accept the standing US offer to hold joint naval patrols in the South China Sea, which includes Scarborough Shoal. This will demonstrate joint Philippine and US determination to prevent China from building on Scarborough Shoal.

5. Avoid any act, statement or declaration that expressly or impliedly waives Philippine sovereignty to any Philippine territory in the West Philippine Sea. This will preserve for future generations of Filipinos their national patrimony in the West Philippine Sea."

The first point could be tweaked, like what Vietnam did, to signal the Chinese that we are opting "...for a policy of cooperation... we all look forward to a 'Code of Conduct' to guide the various nations on the South China Sea (SCS). Vietnam's statement was made in the form of a request to China, appealing to its sense of responsibility as a large country. It was just an expression of concern over militarization activities which are supposed to be avoided in the proposed Code of Conduct."

"Sometime ago President Duterte said that before his term ends in 2022 – four years from now – he will have to assert the Philippine victory in the Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA) in The Hague in 2016". (*Manila Bulletin*, May 16, 2018)

But why wait four years? This is simply passing the ball to the next administration and postpone the pain and responsibility. Some quarters, even among the ranks of Duterte allies, see this as downplaying our victory in exchange for economic benefits from China. Laying aside our sovereignty may not exactly be rape. But for lucre, we might as well call it for what it is. An apt word perhaps would be prostitution.

Useless analysis

According to a report, defense analyst and a military historian Jose Antonio Custodio, he claimed that the Philippine Air Force (PAF) has the capability to go against China's bomber aircraft in the South China Sea should a conflict ensue.

By way of his analysis, Custodio also said that China's H-6K bomber would still need extensive fighter escort protection if it will be used in battle. Bombers are generally not deployed without escorts.

"In fact, the FA-50s of the Philippine Air Force have the capability to shoot it (Chinese bombers) down should the Chinese use it within (Philippine) territory," Custodio said on Facebook.

The PAF is said to have 12 FA-50 light fighters from South Korea, which were acquired through the efforts of the Aquino administration. The FA-50 supersonic aircraft could carry enough munitions payload and could be used in air-to-air and air-to-ground combat.

Custodio has to be asked: What's his analysis of the aftermath of the shootout, should the PAF with its FA-50 bombers try to shoot down the Chinese bombers? The start of a long shooting war with China? And is there any chance of the Philippines winning the war?

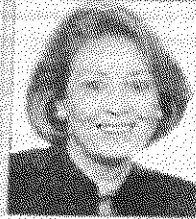
Or maybe it is Custodio's hope that with the Americans and their nuclear capable bombers President Duterte will have no choice but to frantically call the US government for succor and for the US military to fight it out against the Chinese bombers? Why should he and why should he allow the PAF to shoot the Chinese bombers down, when there is no way the Philippines can win against the Asian military power, China.

What then would happen to the Philippines?

Why make the Philippines a battleground in a battle between two military superpowers, China and the US?

So China's People's Liberation Army Air

FRONTLINE



Ninez Cacho-Olivares

Force announced that it had landed bombers, including the top-of-the-line H-6K, on Woody Island in the Paracel Islands.

This is Vietnam's sovereign claim. The Philippines is not a claimant.

Anti-Duterte analysts who are almost always the invited guests of the yellow broadcast media, have always praised Vietnam for standing up to China. Yet, Vietnam never bothered to join the Philippines in presenting its case to the Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA). They have not really gone out in a war against China, despite China's announcement of having landed in Paracel Islands, which is claimed by Vietnam.

It cannot be denied that from the time the Philippines under the stewardship of Duterte and his independent foreign policy, there has been relative calm in the South China Sea, which benefits not just the Filipinos but the entire Asean region. Why spoil this peace then by picking a fight with China and calling in the United States for military succor, especially since it is much too clear that the US wants to be the controlling power in the Asean region, just as the US insists on sanctions on Iran as well as Syria? It's about about the US having control over the Middle East and Arab countries, when it is Donald Trump who has

upset the peace process by unilaterally announcing that Jerusalem belongs to Israel and has even canceled Iran's nuclear deal, which makes Bibi Netanyahu dance with joy.

It is Israel and Netanyahu that want to be the only military power fueled by the US government in the Middle East.

But that's the Middle East, with other countries that have missiles, and other military materiel to fight it out, despite their knowledge of the US' penchant for taking on smaller countries that are not capable of becoming a military power and succeed in establishing a regime change, such as what the US did in Libya, in Iraq and other countries which the US wants to control.

But it is amazing for so-called analysts on the South China Sea and of course the usual yellow opposition, to even insist that Duterte to stand up to China, even as they are certainly aware of the fact that we can't ever be an equal militarily to the US, China and yes, even Russia.

The yellow opposition force, which is hardly a force these days, which is why it is cozying up with the Reds and as usual, banking on the meddlesome clerics and mums, to oust Duterte through this fake issue of the South China Sea imbroglio with the Philippines now less dependent on the United States?

Benigno Aquino, when he was president, sent in a military force to confront Chinese fishermen who he said were caught poaching.

That started the military confrontation between China and the Philippines which served no benefit to the Philippines.

What these yellows and perhaps even the CIA and State Department want is to get the Philippine military to topple Duterte and his government. They are running out of time to get Leni Robredo in power and position.

Get real destabilizers, you have no credibility.

Filipino-Chinese military cooperation is a century old

BY DIEGO C. CAGAHASTIAN

EXACTLY 100 years ago today (May 23), a Filipino patriot died in a hospital in Hong Kong while on a trip to visit China on the invitation of then Chinese leader Dr. Sun Yat-sen, also known as Sun Zhongshan.

He was Don Mariano Ponce of Balwag, Bulacan, a physician, writer and propagandist who worked with José Rizal, Marcelo del Pilar, Graciano Lopez Jaena, Eduardo de Lete and others in the great Propaganda Movement based in Spain and the Philippines. Ponce also served as member of the Philippine Assembly, representing the second district of Bulacan.

Ponce was one of the organizers of the Association Hispano-Filipino. He was also co-founder and managing editor of the newspaper *La Solidaridad*, which started printing in 1889, writing numerous articles with nationalist and reformist themes under the pseudonyms Kalipulaka (a play on Lapu-lapu's name), Tigbalang and Naring.

Ponce had just completed his medical studies at the Universidad Central de Madrid when the *La Solidaridad* was established, and the young physician joined the other expatriates in Europe in kindling the flame of nationalism and working to improve living

conditions in the native land.

The incendiary writings of Rizal, Del Pilar, Lopez Jaena, Ponce and others served as the midwife of the social upheaval called Philippine Revolution to effect of a new and free social order in the Philippines. In the words of Marx, force is the midwife of progress, effecting radical change in society, and force, the revolution that Andres Bonifacio's Katipunan embodied, saw the light of day a century ago induced partly by the courageous writings and propaganda work of young Filipinos, including Ponce.

Ponce's contributions to Philippine history and to Tagalog and Spanish literature are many, the most notable of which are *Efemerides Filipinas*, a collection of columns on historical events in the country, which appeared in *La Occidente Española* and *El Ideal*. In 1917, he wrote *Ang Wika at Lahi*, a detailed treatise on the importance of the national language.

These intellectual pursuits, however, are dwarfed by his accomplishments in the fields of diplomacy and governance, for it was the revolutionary situation at the turn of that century that impelled ordinary Filipinos to take on heroic deeds.

Ponce was arrested by Spanish authorities in Madrid when the Philippine revolution broke out on August 23, 1896, and upon his release, the nationalist phy-

sician left Spain and moved to Japan. By then, General Emilio Aguinaldo had just inaugurated the First Philippine Republic in Kawit, Cavite and since Ponce was already in Japan, Aguinaldo appointed him as official representative or ambassador, with the daunting task of working for the recognition of the new republic and procuring arms for the Filipino army, with funds coming from Galicano Apacible, Roxas Chua, and other patriots, and of course, from the first Philippine treasury.

Since Japan at that time already had industries, it was the source of rifles and ammunition for several fledgling armies like that of the Philippines and the similarly situated revolutionary force of Dr. Sun Yat-sen (also called Sun Zhongshan) in China, then fighting the Manchurian Qing dynasty. So both Sun and Ponce were in Japan to procure their much-needed arms and they became friends, being both physicians, libertarians and patriots. Sun is still referred to as Guo Fu (father of the nation) in China, and this of course includes Taiwan, Macau and Hong Kong. Columnist Michael Tan notes that just as we have so many streets, towns and schools named after Dr. Jose Rizal, China has many Zhongshan roads, Zhongshan being one of Sun Yat-sen's names.

Academic studies from this ep-

och relate that it was Sun Yat-sen who introduced Mariano Ponce to a Filipino-Japanese who facilitated the purchase of arms for the Philippine revolutionaries.

Ponce's first shipment of arms aboard the Japanese steamship *Nunobiki Maru* is documented well. It sailed on June 20, 1899 for Nagasaki, with 10,000 rifles, 6 million rounds of ammunition, a single field cannon, 10 field guns, 7 field glasses, pressing machine for gunpowder and ammunition and other military supplies. To avoid US blockage, it was to anchor first in Formosa (Taiwan) before proceeding to Manila. Unfortunately, it foundered in a typhoon off Shanghai and the arms were lost.

Even in those days, Japan had been positioning itself as leader of the Pan-Asian grouping and was supporting the Chinese cause against the Manchus. On Aguinaldo's instruction, Ponce and other members of the revolutionary junta went to Japan to solicit similar support, but Japanese leaders were cold to the idea because it would antagonize the United States. This explains why Sun Yat-sen, a Chinese leader close to the Japanese, was able to broker the arms deal of Ponce. Clearly business-minded, Sun earned a "commission" for the effort, say

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historians, but this is understandable because Sun needed large amounts of money for the Chinese rebellion.

Let me digress a bit here, and pay tribute to the exemplary business sense of Sun Yat-sen, also known as Sun Zhongshan. He travelled around the world, particularly in the United States and Europe, to solicit support and financial assistance for the Chinese rebels. He even tried to sell a "government bond" to J. P. Morgan, promising that the debt instrument would be honored by the up-and-coming new government of China when they finally achieve victory. Morgan, an astute investor, thought it was hilarious, close to a scam. He did not buy the bond, for it was issued by an entity that was yet to become a government.

Ponce succeeded in procuring two boatloads of arms with several Japanese officers and men who volunteered to serve in the Filipino army. The first boatload was sent aboard the ship Nunobiki Maru. Unfortunately, a storm sank this ship in July 1899 and all the rifles were lost.

Persistent in his mission, Mariano Ponce again bought another boatload of arms and prepared to ship these to the Philippines. But a historical event again intervened -- the capture of Aguinaldo by the Americans in Isabela, and

the impending defeats of Filipino revolutionaries in the Filipino-American war.

Perhaps not on his own initiative, and with the permission of Aguinaldo, historical records showed that Mariano Ponce "donated" the arms to the Chinese revolution of Sun Yat-sen. Other sources say the rifles were loaned (pinahiram) to the Chinese, who succeeded in defeating the Manchus in the Wuchang Uprising and formed their own first republic.

This was why Ponce and Sun became very close friends, so that Ponce was visiting China in 1918 when he fell ill and died in the government hospital in Hong Kong. When Ponce returned to journalism during the American occupation, he maintained his friendship with Sun and even published a biography of the Chinese leader in 1912. Ponce wrote that Sun had a vast political network that "extended through all the planet, even to Africa."

This particular episode in Filipino-Chinese relations was referred to by Chinese leader Hu Jintao to President Noyoy Aquino, when Hu mentioned that China has a debt of gratitude (utang na loob) to the Philippines. In September, 2011, President Noyoy made a state visit to Beijing and mentioned in a speech the friendship between Sun Yat-sen and Filipino revolutionaries.

But this historical debt, actually

the first manifestation of Filipino-Chinese military cooperation, was effectively extinguished when the Communist Party of China in 1970 shipped two boatloads of rifles and ammunition to the Filipino people, particularly the New People's Army (NPA). The first, loaded in the ship Andrea, did not make it to the country because -- again -- of a storm. The second, shipped aboard the fishing boat Karagatan, was received by the NPA rebels although some rifles were lost and confiscated by the Philippine military when the arms landing was discovered.

Sources in the NPA said that it was Chairman Mao Zedong -- whose fundamental tenet was "return the doors," meaning return all things that you borrowed (doors of houses were detached by the Red Army fighters to serve as beds for the night) -- who had always reminded Deng Xiaoping about this historical fact that Filipino patriots helped Sun Zhongshan with arms, and that this should be repaid.

Another source in the rebel army said Deng himself supervised the loading of the modern-day rifles onto Karagatan, but this, I believe, is far-fetched because during the time of the arms landing, Deng Xiaoping was out of grace with the Communist Party and was in fact out in the boondocks of China being "reformed."

The Karagatan arms landing is the 70s is therefore seen as the continuation of the Filipino-Chinese military cooperation, however unofficial, at the turn of the century.

Such military cooperation was revived by Karagatan, and continues to this day, with Chinese assistance from President Xi Jinping composed of guns, construction equipment, disaster relief materials, etc. for the fight for Marawi then, and now for its repair and rehabilitation.

Military experts from both the Armed Forces of the Philippines and the CPC are meeting twice a year to discuss common concerns, one of them the fight against drug syndicates and the war against terrorism, to include maritime security, intelligence sharing and counterterrorism exercises.

When Chinese Premier Li Keqiang visited Manila on Nov. 15, 2017, one of the 14 agreements he signed with President Duterte was about defense industry cooperation. The accord was signed by the Department of National Defense (DND) and the State Administrator of Science Technology Industry of the National Defense (SASTIND) which handles defense industrial development and policy.

In fine, military cooperation between the Philippines and China has all the potentials of being strong and stable, again against the hope and dreams of Duterte detractors. *DS*

Is Duterte China's accomplice in SCS military plans?

LAST Sunday, former Solicitor General Florin T. Hilbay tweeted: "12 July 2016 was an interesting day. I, with Justices Carpio & Jardeleza, went to Malacañang to explain to the President the decision in *Philis. v. China*. I received the decision by email from the tribunal. The President that we briefed was Rodrigo Duterte and his full cabinet."

July 12, 2016 was the day the Permanent Court of Arbitration in The Hague released the decision on the case the Philippine government filed against China on Jan. 22, 2013, when the president was Benigno Aquino III.

The Philippines asked the Tribunal concerned three basic issues: rule on the validity of China's nine-dash line map; low tide elevations (rocks or reefs that can be seen only during low tide and disappear during high tide) where China has built permanent structures should be declared as forming part of the Philippine Continental shelf (200 nautical mile); and the waters outside the 12 nautical miles surrounding the Panatag Island (Scarborough shoal) should be declared as part of the Philippines 200 nautical mile economic exclusive zone.

The Philippines got a favorable ruling in all the three issues which immensely strengthened our claim on the features in the South China Sea which are being claimed almost wholly by China

and partly by Vietnam, Malaysia, Brunei and Taiwan.

Hilbay had to make the tweet because earlier that day, in Talisay City, Negros Occidental, Pres. Duterte again repeated his own distorted timeline of the Arbitral Court decision at the groundbreaking of Vista Alegre Homes for soldiers and police officers. He said: "Kaya itong China Sea, wala na rin akong magawa. (This China Sea, there's nothing I can do) Do not believe in that s*** that it was during my time that this was arbitral ruling was handed down. Of course, it was not. The fate of that started two months before, three months before akong pumasok (before I came in.) Because it was already announced there was the arbitration decision. Dumating lang nga yung papelsatin (the paper just arrived) officially it was

handed to us."

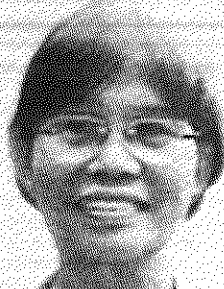
Let's help Duterte fix his timeline: He took his oath as President of the Republic of the Philippines on June 30, 2016.

The Constitution states that the Philippines has sovereignty over its national territory comprising "all the islands and waters embraced therein."

Duterte complained that acting Supreme Court Justice Antonio T. Carpio kept on pushing him to assert Philippine claim on the disputed part of South China Sea which have been turned by China into artificial islands.

Carpio urged that the Philippines and other claimants in South China Sea make a united stand to oppose China aggressive action in the area, the latest of which is the deployment of nuclear-capable bombers in the Paracels which is

ELLEN TORDESILLAS



'But what is more disturbing is what Duterte revealed he knew about China's nuclear weapons in Philippine territory all along.'

being claimed by China and Vietnam.

A news report in Chinese newspapers attributed to the People's Liberation Army Air Force said a H-6K bomber aircraft landed on an airport in the South China Sea during a recent exercise, marking the first time Chinese bombers have used an airport in the region.

While it is believed that it was in Woody Island at the Paracels, security experts believe it's a matter of time before China will also do the same in Mischief (Panganiban), Subi (Zamora) and Fiery (Kagitingan Reefs) which are claimed by the Philippines but occupied by China.

The Department of Foreign Affairs issued a statement that was more a justification of the government's tolerance of China's aggressive activities in the disputed seas. "While appropriate language, whether expressions of condemnation or concern, over certain developments are clearly conveyed through diplomatic channels, it is not our policy to publicize every action taken by the Philippine Government whenever there are reported developments taking place in the West Philippine Sea and the South China Sea," the DFA said adding that "The country has gained much under the Duterte Administration."

But what is more disturbing is what Duterte revealed he knew

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about China's nuclear weapons in Philippine territory all along. He said in the Talisay speech: "

"Yung gusto ninyo makipag-giyera ako, kung mapahiya ako? 'Di largatalagaito. O dryan pa lang paunananatayo ng cruise missiles. Kalokohanan. (You want me to got to war. What if I get embarrassed? We will rained with cruise missiles. That's crazy.)

"And we do not --- hypersonic thing and they have it in there, salikod ng (at the back of) Spratlys. There's an airway there that's where the... I know because they told me. I've been to China about for four times already."

So he knew. Does that make him an accomplice in China's military design in the South China Sea?

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