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## NEWS CLIPPINGS

25 May 2018

Friday



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# CONVENE WAGE BOARDS, LABOR URGES GOV'T

STORY BY MELVIN GASCON AND JULIE M. AURELIO

Workers want the tripartite regional bodies to raise the floor pay to help them cope with the surge in prices of basic goods, which they blame on the TRAIN law and the imposition of a value-added tax on the new excise on fuel.

A2

## FROM A1

By Melvin Gascon  
and Julie M. Aurelio  
@Team\_Inquirer

Calls to convene the regional wage boards and repeal a provision of the Tax Reform for Acceleration and Inclusion (TRAIN) Act have mounted as prices of basic goods soar in the wake of rising global oil prices and the imposition of an excise on fuel that unknown to many is slapped with another tax.

Amid these calls, Malacañang defended anew the TRAIN law, which took effect on Jan. 1, saying it did not cause the fuel price increases.

The National Anti-Poverty Commission (NAPC) is seeking the scrapping of part of the law imposing the 12-percent VAT on the excise on fuel, while a labor group is calling on the 17 regional wage boards to grant workers across-the-board pay increases.

### Purchasing power eroded

Wage boards are mandated to adjust wage rates due to super-

vening conditions affecting the capacity of workers to cope with inflation, said the Associated Labor Unions-Trade Union Congress of the Philippines (ALU-TUCP).

In a statement, Gerard Seno, ALU-TUCP national executive vice president, said rising inflation had eroded the minimum wage earner's purchasing power.

"As of March 2018, the real value of the P512 daily minimum wage (in Metro Manila) was only P326," he said, adding that it was way below the daily amount needed by a family to survive.

ALU-TUCP estimates that a Filipino family of five needs at least P1,200 a day to cope with rising cost of living and live above the poverty line.

### 'Oppressive' double tax

NAPC Chair Liza Maza wondered why the excise under the TRAIN law was subject to the VAT, which made the recent tax increases much higher.

Maza said this week's latest round of oil price increases—the 10th since January—was made "more oppressive" by the "double taxation."

The excise on fuel is now P7 per liter for gasoline, P2.50 per liter

for diesel and LPG, and P3 per liter for kerosene, according to Maza.

"With a 12-percent VAT, these new excise taxes further drive the final price upward: a total of P7.84 per liter for gasoline, P2.80 per liter for diesel and LPG, and P3.36 for kerosene," she said.

"This means a full 50-liter tank will cost P392 more under this double taxation scheme," she added.

Since the start of the year, diesel prices have gone up by

P10.01 per liter and gasoline by P9.67 per liter.

#### Reassess TRAIN law

Maza urged the Department of Finance to reassess the TRAIN law and seriously consider proposals to repeal portions pertaining to taxes on oil products.

She said the poorest sectors would continue to bear the brunt of the increasingly adverse effects of the price and tax increases, as their "incomes

have not kept up with the rising prices of basic commodities."

Inflation in April rose to a five-year high of 4.5 percent.

"Price hikes and higher taxes spell gloom for the country's poor, but it is not too late for [the] government to make things right," Maza said.

In Marawi City on Thursday, presidential spokesperson Harry Roque appealed to merchants not to take advantage of the rising prices of fuel by hiking their

prices.

Roque said the price of rice was expected to go down since a shipment of imported grain would arrive by the end of the month.

Roque said the fuel price increases were beyond the control of Malacañang.

#### Non-Opec sources

He pointed out that the government was taking steps to deal with the rising pump prices by studying the importation of cheaper fuel from non-Opec members like Russia, China and the United States.

The TRAIN law has a "self-executory" provision for freezing fuel excise tax if the price of crude oil reaches \$80 a barrel, according to Senate President Pro Tempore Ralph Recto.

"The tripwire is \$80 per barrel, based on Dubai crude as reflected in MOPS [Mean of Platts Singapore]," Recto said in a statement.

He maintained that Filipinos were benefiting from the TRAIN law because of their higher take-home pay, stemming from the lower income taxes that they now pay. —WITH REPORTS FROM TINA G. SANTOS AND ANTHONY Q. ESGUERRA INQ



# Phil to import more oil

## Phil From Page 1

### Non-OPEC states eyed as source; more protests set

By CHRISTINA MENDEZ and JESS DIAZ

As rising global crude costs continue to impact on local prices, the Philippines might consider importing cheaper petroleum products from non-OPEC oil producers like the United States and Russia, Malacañang said yesterday.

Countries under OPEC or the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries are the Philippines' traditional sources of fuel.

Presidential spokesman Harry Roque raised the scenario as militant groups vowed to launch more protest actions against the Tax Reform for Acceleration and Inclusion (TRAIN) law that is widely blamed for the surging prices of basic goods, including fuel.

Concerns over the likely loss of some of Iran's oil exports due to US sanctions as well as Venezuela's plummeting production have sharply pushed up oil prices in the world market.

"Now when it comes to oil, we're doing something about it. In fact yesterday I learned from some people in government that we're planning to import cheaper oil from non-OPEC members like Russia

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and the United States," Roque said in Filipino.

He stressed the surge in oil prices was beyond the government's control. The 12 members of OPEC are Algeria, Angola, Ecuador, Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Libya, Nigeria, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates and Venezuela.

He also parried criticisms against the Duterte administration for its implementation of the TRAIN law.

"Let us see if the hike will stop since it is summer already. But, whatever the world prices will be, we have a built-in mechanism, such as once the prices of oil reach \$80 a barrel," he said, citing a provision in the controversial law.

Roque explained that the government will still collect the excise taxes provided for under the law.

What could be suspended is the imposition of additional excise taxes under the TRAIN law, he added.

Roque maintained the government may only temporarily suspend the collection of excise taxes on crude oil covered under the TRAIN law if the global prices reach \$80/barrel.

He emphasized the TRAIN law is not to blame for the soaring fuel prices.

"We can't deny the prices of goods have sharply gone up, largely due to the sharp rise in global oil price. It's beyond our control," Roque pointed out.

He also said a majority of Filipinos have higher take-home pay due to lower income tax provided for under the TRAIN law.

But as the government tries to assuage public fears of further hikes in the prices of basic goods and even transport fares, militant party-list groups vowed to launch more protest actions against the TRAIN law.

"We are protesting this unjust new tax measure because it is slowly killing our people

with high prices of goods and services. We will continue to go out in the streets to shout in protest so the Duterte government could hear the sentiments of the poor," Rep. Ariel Casilao of Anakpawis said yesterday.

He said some of the protest actions would be done right at the House of Representatives and the Senate "to compel Congress to junk the TRAIN law."

He said several consumer groups, including Samahan at Ugnayan ng mga Konsyumer para sa Ikauunlad ng Bayan (SUKI), would join the protests.

Casilao belongs to the Makabayan bloc of seven leftist party-list representatives who have filed Bill 7653, which effectively seeks the repeal of the TRAIN law by proposing the deletion of all provisions that imposed new and higher taxes.

He said prices of diesel, gasoline and other oil products have gone up significantly in part due to the new and higher levies imposed under TRAIN.

"The government and the oil companies are getting windfalls in terms of profits and returns in just five months since the law took effect at the expense of the public," he said.

### People worst hit

He said it is the people who suffer since "petroleum products are widely used for electricity and transportation as well as for producing and processing a wide array of goods and services."

Oil price hikes "have always had ripple effects on families' basic needs," he stressed.

Casilao noted that the Bureau of Internal Revenue has reported an additional collection of P12.5 billion in the first three months of this year due to the TRAIN law.

That amount was mostly contributed by the poor, workers and middle-income

groups, he said.

Quirino Rep. Dakila Cua, who chairs the House committee on ways and means, has said he is open to reviewing the law.

But he is against the proposal to suspend it while a review is ongoing.

"Suspending it will affect the national coffers, and that is not a responsible thing to do," he said.

For another lawmaker who is also an economist, more pressures on inflation are expected.

"Higher inflation could be up the road because of the rising cost of crude oil and the depreciation of the peso," Rep. Michael Romero of party-list group 1-Pacman said yesterday.

"Crude oil prices in the world market seem to be heading toward \$100 per barrel again. We've all been there before in 2011 to 2013. While that develops, another rising trend line has emerged, and this is the continuing depreciation of the peso against the US dollar," he said.

He warned these conditions would cause the prices of products and services to go up further.

Romero noted that the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas (BSP) recently tried to control inflation by increasing borrowing rates.

However, he said the BSP still warned the public that more inflationary pressures could emanate from "possible adjustments in transport fares, utility rates and wages."

"Considering these developments, we ask the administration's economic managers to update Congress on its strategies and tactics for heading off inflation over the next 12 to 18 months," he said.

The lawmaker said he would like to hear particularly from the Department of Social Welfare and Development, Department of Health, Depart-

ment of Education, Commission on Higher Education, and Technical Education and Skills Development Authority their plans for helping cushion the impact of steadily rising consumer prices.

A large part of the increase in diesel and other oil products is due to rising prices of crude oil in the world market.

Only last Tuesday, higher crude cost caused local prices to increase by P1.60 per liter for gasoline and P1 for diesel.

### **False hopes**

Rep. Antonio Timo of Alliance of Concerned Teachers said Malacañang is raising false hopes on the suspension of excise taxes on diesel and other oil products imposed under TRAIN.

"President Duterte himself has declared he's willing to suspend TRAIN. But the truth of the matter is that what the law allows to be suspended is the increase for 2019 and 2020," he said.

He said the President's spokesman contributed to the confusion when he told journalists that the administration was willing to suspend fuel taxes if the price of crude oil in the world market reaches \$80 per barrel.

Timo said Finance Secretary Carlos Dominguez III clarified Roque's statement, saying what would be stopped is the scheduled increase for next year and 2020.

This means that the collection of excise taxes on oil products could not be scrapped, Timo stressed.

"The total tax is P6 spread over three years. This year, the tax on diesel is P2.50. The declaration of the President and his spokesman does not mean that this would be suspended if crude cost goes up to \$80 per barrel. So they are just giving the public false hopes," he said.

He urged the House of Representatives to tackle the

proposal of the Makabayan bloc, to which he belongs, to delete all provisions of the TRAIN law that impose new and higher taxes.

Aside from diesel, the law levied a P6 tax on cooking gas, kerosene and bunker fuel, which is used for electricity. This year's first installment of the levy varies depending on the product.

In the case of cooking gas, it is P1 per kilogram. Thus, the levy on an 11-kilogram cylinder is P11, plus 12-percent value added tax.

Meanwhile, Senate President Vicente Sotto III said he would rather leave the matter of suspending the implementation of the excise tax on fuel to the economic managers.

Several calls have been made for Congress to act on the suspension of the increase in the excise tax on fuel, with Sen. Paolo Benigno Aquino IV even suggesting a rollback of pump prices to pre-TRAIN levels.

"I'll leave it to the economic experts because they are the ones handling it. They are the ones seeing the figures, and (Finance) Secretary Dominguez is very optimistic because we are only seeing the increase in the price of this and that but we are not seeing the benefits (of TRAIN)," Sotto said.

"The economic experts will be in the best position to say that it should be suspended," he added.

Senate President Pro Tempore Ralph Recto said the calls for a suspension of the increase in excise tax on fuel were unnecessary because the TRAIN has "a tax-freeze provision which shall kick in when the benchmark price of crude oil reaches \$80 a barrel."

"The tripwire is \$80 per barrel, based on Dubai crude as reflected in MOPS," Recto said.

"This is the circuit breaker in TRAIN. When oil touches this price, the excise tax increase on gas is suspended," he added. — With Marvin Sy

'FALLACY' IN STAND

PH REFUSAL TO PROTEST REEF DEV'T ASSAILED

By Jhesset O. Enano @JhessetEnanoINO

A maritime law expert on Thursday slammed the Duterte administration's refusal to confront China in the South China Sea, saying the Philippines had already lost much because of the government's cop-out.

Jay Batongbacal, director of the University of the Philippines Institute for Maritime Affairs and Law of the Sea, said that by saying he did not want to go to a war he could not win, President Duterte was just justifying his inaction on China's encroachments on Philippine territory in the South China Sea.

"I think people are realizing the fallacy of the administration's position that asking for respect for our legal rights would elicit war as a response from China or that the assertion of rights won in a legal case requires the Philippines to go to war," Batongbacal said, referring to a 2016 arbi-

trational court ruling that invalidated China's claim to nearly all of the South China Sea and upheld the Philippines' sovereignty in its territory in the strategic waterway.

"The fallacy is proven by the fact that both Vietnam and Indonesia insist and act on their legal rights, and yet China has not responded with the use of force," he said.

Sharp contrast

Unlike the Philippines, Vietnam has asked China to stop its illegal activities on Vietnamese territory in the South China Sea, respect its sovereignty, and cease activities that raise tensions in the region.

In contrast, the Duterte administration has played down China's landing of military planes and deployment of anti-ship cruise missiles and surface-to-air missile systems on Philippine-claimed reefs in the Spratly archipelago, saying the missiles were not aimed at the Philippines and that it saw no threat because of the "new-found friendship" between the two countries.

"The administration's tepid and ambivalent response to developments in the West Philippine Sea, including its apparent inability to even file a diplomatic protest, is evidence of its policy of submission to and fear of China," Batongbacal said.

INO



RESPONSE TO BEIJING'S MILITARIZATION OF SOUTH CHINA SEA

# PENTAGON DISINVITES CHINA FROM MAJOR US MILITARY EXERCISE

WASHINGTON—The Pentagon on Wednesday disinvited China from a major US-hosted naval drill in response to the latter's militarization of islands in the South China Sea, a decision Beijing called unconstructive.

"As an initial response to China's continued militarization of the South China Sea we have disinvited the PLA Navy from the 2018 Rim of the Pacific (Rim-pac) Exercise," said Lt. Col. Christopher Logan, a spokesperson for the Pentagon.

PLA is the English-language acronym of China's military, the People's Liberation Army.

Logan did not specify what else the US government might do to respond but stressed there was "strong evidence" that China had deployed anti-ship missiles, surface-to-air missile systems and electronic jammers to contested features

in the Spratly Islands.

## 'Unconstructive move'

"We find that a very unconstructive move," the Chinese government's top diplomat, State Councilor Wang Yi, told reporters in Washington after meeting with US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo.

Wang described China's activity in the South China Sea as self-defense, saying it was working on a "much smaller scale" than what the United States had done in Hawaii and Guam.

"We hope that the US will change such a negative mindset," he said.

In Beijing, foreign ministry spokesperson Lu Kang told a daily news briefing on Thursday that China had sovereign rights in the South China Sea and it was unrealistic for the United States to use this kind of action

to try to coerce it.

In a brief statement, China's defense ministry said the United States had "ignored the facts and hyped up the so-called militarization of the South China Sea."

"This decision by the United States is not constructive. Closing the door to communication at any time is not conducive toward promoting mutual trust and communication between the Chinese and US militaries," it added.

Being invited or not invited cannot change China's intention to play a role in protecting peace and stability in the Asia-Pacific region, the ministry said in a statement.

## Nuclear-capable bombers

Over the weekend, China's Air Force landed nuclear-capable bomber planes on disputed islands and reefs in the South China Sea as part of a training

exercise in the region, triggering concern from Vietnam and the Philippines.

Satellite photographs taken on May 12 showed China appeared to have deployed truck-mounted surface-to-air missiles or antiship cruise missiles on Woody Island in the Paracel island chain to the north of the Spratlys, said Greg Poling, a South China Sea expert at Washington's Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS).

Poling, who heads the CSIS Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative, said the images showed China had also deployed J-11 combat aircraft as part of its exercises.

He said later satellite images, taken on May 20 and published by Fox News, showed the missile systems still in place, suggesting they could be there to stay.

The Rimpac exercise is billed

as the world's largest international maritime exercise, held every two years in Hawaii in June and July, and China has attended previously.

#### Largely symbolic

Abraham Denmark, a former deputy assistant secretary of defense for East Asia under then US President Barack Obama, said the move was largely symbolic.

"To me it shows that the relationship is veering toward increasingly intense competition and the Pentagon sees diminishing returns on the value of military to military cooperation with China," Denmark said.

US President Donald Trump has praised China in recent months for its help in putting pressure on North Korea, even amid concerns about a potential trade war between Washington and Beijing, the world's

two largest economies.

#### Consequences

Earlier this month the United States said it had raised concerns with China about its latest militarization of the South China Sea and said there would be near-term and long-term consequences.

Pentagon officials have long complained that China has not been candid enough about its rapid military buildup and using South China Sea islands to gather intelligence in the region.

Chinese officials have accused Washington of viewing their country in suspicious "Cold War" terms. *AP*

"On the so-called militarization in the South China Sea, we talked about this issue just now. It is a normal deployment and has nothing to do with militarization," Wang said. —REUTERS

# China's build, build, build on reefs fuels concerns

HONG KONG/SINGAPORE—At first glance from above it looks like any clean and neatly planned small town, complete with sports grounds, neat roads and large civic buildings.

But the town is on Zamora Reef, internationally known as Subi Reef, in the Spratlys archipelago of the hotly contested South China Sea and, regional security experts believe, could soon be home to China's first troops based in the maritime heart of Southeast Asia.

Private sector data analysis reviewed by Reuters shows Zamora, some 1,200 kilometers from China's coast and located in Philippine waters, is now home to nearly 400 individual buildings—far more than other Chinese islands.

Zamora could be the future location of hundreds of People's Liberation Army (PLA) troops, as well as a possible administrative hub as China cements its claim with a civilian presence, according to security analysts and diplomatic sources.

## Standard PLA base

The data from Earthrise Media, a nonprofit group supporting independent media with imagery research, was based on surveys of high-resolution images obtained by DigitalGlobe satellites, dating back to when China started dredging reefs in early 2014.

The images show neat rows of basketball courts, parade grounds and a wide variety of buildings, some flanked by radar equipment.

Earthrise founder Dan Hammer said his team's count included only freestanding, permanent and recognizable structures.

"When I look at these pictures I see a standard PLA base on the mainland—it is incredible, right down to the basketball courts," Singapore-based security analyst Collin Koh said after reviewing the data and images.

"Any deployment of troops will be a huge step, however—and then they will need to secure and sustain them, so the military presence will have to only grow from where it is now," Koh said.

Senior Western diplomats describe the placement of troops or jet fighters on the islands as a looming test of international efforts to curb China's determination to dominate the vital trade waterway.

## Big Three

Zamora is the largest of seven Philippine-claimed reefs that China seized and transformed into man-made islands in the Spratlys.

The so-called Big Three reefs of Zamora, Panganiban (Mischief) and Kagitingan (Fiery Cross) all share similar infrastructure—in-

cluding emplacements for missiles, 3-km runways, extensive storage facilities and a range of installations that can track satellites, foreign military activity and communications.

Panganiban and Kagitingan each house almost 190 individual buildings and structures, according to the Earthrise analysis.

The previously unpublished data details the building count on more than 60 South China Sea features, including those occupied by Vietnam, Malaysia, Taiwan and the Philippines.

While the data shows well-developed infrastructure on some on islands such as Vietnam's Spratly Island, the Philippines' Pag-asa (Thitu) Island and Taiwan's Itu Aba, the scale and development by China dwarfs its rivals.

The number of buildings on Zamora Reef makes it similar in size to Woody Island in the Paracels, a Beijing-controlled group much closer to China but

also claimed by Vietnam.

Woody is the base and surveillance post that foreign military attachés say is the headquarters of the military division across the South China Sea, reporting to the PLA's southern theater command.

Koh and other analysts said the facilities on Zamora, Panganiban and Kagitingan could each hold a regiment—between 1,500 to 2,400 troops.

#### **China intentions unclear**

China's precise intentions remain unclear, and Chinese experts say much will depend on whether Beijing feels threatened by regional security trends, particularly US activity such as its "freedom of navigation patrols."

China's defense ministry did not respond to Reuters' questions about the buildup on Zamora Reef or what the facilities could be used for.

Beijing has consistently said the facilities on its reclaimed is-

lands are for civilian use and necessary self-defense purposes. It blames Washington for militarizing the region with its freedom of navigation patrols.

Ding Duo, a researcher at the Chinese government-backed National Institute for South China Sea Studies, said Beijing needed a military presence in the Spratlys to protect its civilian infrastructure.

"As for how big that presence is depends on the threat assessment China has going forward for the Nansha Islands," he said, using the Chinese name for the Spratlys.

"The Nansha region faces severe military pressure, especially since Trump took office and increased freedom of navigation patrols. So China has raised its threat assessment," he added.

#### **Bases complete**

Adm. Philip Davidson, the nominee to be the next commander of all US forces in the

Pacific, said last month China's bases in the Spratlys were now complete and lacked only deployed forces.

"Any forces deployed to the islands would easily overwhelm the military forces of any other South China Sea claimants," Davidson told a congressional panel.

So far, repeated US naval patrols close to Chinese features and growing international naval deployments through the region have had little obvious impact on Beijing's plans.

"There's a real sense among Western nations that a new strategy is needed, but there is little sign anything meaningful coalescing," said one senior Western diplomat familiar with discussions across several countries.

"The deployment of jet fighters—even temporarily—will sorely test that lack of a cohesive response," the diplomat said. —REUTERS

## Japanese warship in Phl for goodwill visit

By JAIME LAUDE

A Japanese destroyer which sailed through the West Philippine Sea is expected to dock at the Port of Manila today for a two-day goodwill visit.

Philippine Navy spokesman Capt. Lued Lincuna yesterday said the Asagiri-class destroyer *JS Setogori* will be docking at Pier 15, South Harbor at around 7:30 a.m. today.

Aboard the visiting Japanese warship are 220 officers and crew headed by Capt. Susumi Moriyama, commander of the Japan's Escort Division Seven, and Commander Tokeshi Tonegawa, commanding officer of the *JS Setogori*.

*Setogori* last visited the Philippines two years ago. This is the fourth port call within the last five months by Japanese warships of various types.

The increase in goodwill visits is occurring amid the mounting regional security concerns spawned by China's continuing military build up in the South China Sea.

Aside from anti-ship cruise missiles and surface-to-surface missiles, China has been reported to have landed a nuclear-capable long range bomber at Woody Island in the Paracel Island Group.

Close to China's southern province of Hainan, Woody island is just north of the disputed Spratlys archipelago, where Beijing has already established its naval and air bases on three of its man-made islands.

While Japan is not a party to the maritime dispute in the Spratlys archipelago, it is closely monitoring China's military activities in the region in relation to its own maritime

dispute with China in the Senkaku Island Group in the East China Sea.

Two key areas in the South China Sea that Tokyo is very concerned about are the Chinese activities at Panatag Shoal near Zambales as well as Bashi Channel towards East China Sea and the Pacific Ocean.

Home ported at Ominato Naval Base, *JS Setogori* is among key Japanese Self Defense Forces naval assets strategically prepositioned at the northern tip of mainland Japan.

From the highly-secured Ominato Naval Base, Japan's warships can sail either towards East China Sea or the Pacific Ocean through a channel opening that connect the two seas.

"The Philippine Navy will render customary welcome ceremony upon arrival of the vessel, to be followed by port briefing on security and health aboard the Japanese destroyer," Lincuna said.

In a related development, the Philippine Navy is sending, for the first time, two of its vessels to take part in the forthcoming Rim of the Pacific Exercise (RIMPAC), the world's biggest naval and maritime joint exercises scheduled this year.

Navy chief Vice Admiral Robert Empedrada said they have yet to name the two warships that will participate in the exercises.

The annual naval exercise has 27 countries participating. China, however, was disinclined into the joint drill due to its continuing militarization in the South China Sea.

The RIMPAC exercise is spearheaded by the Hawaii-based *US Pacific Command*.

# US 'disinvites' China to Pacific Rim exercises

By **JOSE KATIGBAK**  
STAR Washington Bureau

WASHINGTON — The Pentagon has withdrawn its invitation to the Chinese Navy to the 2018 Rim of the Pacific (RIMPAC) military exercises in response to Chinese militarization of the South China Sea.

Chinese state councilor and foreign minister Wang Yi said the US decision was "non-constructive." China's defense ministry expressed regret over the withdrawal of the invitation.

RIMPAC, previously attended by China, is billed as the world's largest international maritime exercise held every two years in Hawaii in June and July.

Wang, in his first ever meeting in Washington with Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, said the move was unhelpful to US-China mutual under-

standing.

Pompeo said he raised US concerns about the militarization of the sea with Wang but "I will leave it to our militaries to talk about their efforts together."

At a joint news briefing after their talks, Wang said it was his hope the US will change its negative mindset.

"On the so-called militarization in the South China Sea," he said China was only building civilian and some necessary defense facilities on its own islands.

"That is the right to self-defense and preservation of every sovereign state. It is a normal deployment and has nothing to do with militarization, just like the US has military presence in Hawaii, in Guam. And China's deployment is at a much smaller scale than the US. It's just out of necessary defense purposes.

We don't hope to see any exaggeration or hype-up of this matter," Wang said.

The South China Sea is one of the most contested areas in the world with overlapping territorial claims by China, the Philippines and Vietnam, among several other claimants.

According to US intelligence reports, the Chinese military has installed weapons systems on artificial islands in Spratly (called Nansha by the Chinese) east of the Philippines. They are capable of striking ships some 300 nautical miles away.

Eric Sayers, an adjunct fellow at Washington's Center for Strategic and International Studies, called the missile deployment "a major escalation."

He had accurately predicted one immediate US response could be to rescind Beijing's invitation to this year's RIMPAC.

China sees its participation in the exercise as a sign of its

acceptance among the world's maritime powers.

In a brief statement, China's defense ministry said the US had "ignored the facts and hyped up the so-called 'militarization' of the South China Sea, using it as an excuse to disinvite China.

"This decision by the United States is not constructive. Closing the door to communication at any time is not conducive towards promoting mutual trust and communication between the Chinese and US militaries," it added.

China's island-building program in the South China Sea and the West Philippine Sea has sparked concern around the region and in Washington about Chinese intentions.

China says it has every right to build what it calls necessary defensive facilities on its own territory.

Over the weekend China's

air force landed bombers in the South China Sea as part of a training exercise, triggering concern from Vietnam and the Philippines.

The ministry reiterated that its building of defense facilities was to protect the country's sovereignty and legitimate rights, and had nothing to do with militarization.

"The United States has no right to make irresponsible remarks about this," it added.

"Being invited or not cannot change China's will to play a role in protecting peace and stability in the Asia-Pacific region, and cannot shake China's firm determination to defend its sovereignty and security interests."

It is in both countries' interests to develop healthy military ties, and China hopes the United States keeps the broader picture in mind, abandon its "zero sum" mentality

and appropriately handle disputes, the ministry said.

Pentagon officials have long complained that China has not been candid enough about its rapid military buildup and using South China Sea islands to gather intelligence in the region.

Chinese officials have accused Washington of viewing their country in suspicious, "Cold War" terms.

Speaking at a separate briefing, Chinese foreign ministry spokesman Lu Kang said China has sovereign rights in the South China Sea and it is not realistic for the United States to use this kind of action to try to coerce Beijing.

The US has dispatched warships to disputed areas of the South China Sea in a bid to challenge China's extensive sovereignty claims in the territory.

— With Pia Lee-Brago, Reuters



## US 'disinvites' China from Pacific drills

WASHINGTON—The Pentagon has pulled its invitation for China to join maritime exercises in the Pacific because of Beijing's "continued militarization" of the South China Sea, an official said Wednesday, in the latest sign of US-China strains.

China hit back at the decision, calling it "very non-constructive" and saying it was taken without due reflection.

Personnel from more than two dozen countries train together and work on seamanship across the vast region for the biennial Rim of the Pacific exercise organized by the US Navy. *Next page*

### US...

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But the United States now says China's behavior in the South China Sea runs counter to the spirit of the drills.

"China's continued militarization of disputed features in the South China Sea only serves to raise tensions and destabilize the region," Pentagon spokesman Lieutenant Colonel Chris Logan said.

"We have disinvited the PLA Navy from the 2018 Rim of the Pacific Exercise. China's behavior is inconsistent with the principles and purposes of the RIMPAC exercise."

China's Foreign Affairs Minister Wang Yi said the US decision to exclude it from RIMPAC was "very non-constructive."

"It's also a decision taken lightly and is unhelpful to mutual understanding between China and the US," Wang said at a press conference with Secretary of State Mike Pompeo after the two met in Washington.

Pompeo did not comment on the matter,

saying only that the pair had had a "good discussion" about American concerns of militarization of the South China Sea.

#### Military hardware

China has deployed anti-ship missiles, surface-to-air missile systems and electronic jammers to "contested features" in the Spratly Islands region of the South China Sea, Logan said.

"While China has maintained that the construction of the islands is to ensure safety at sea, navigation assistance, search and rescue, fisheries protection and other non-military functions, the placement of these weapon systems is only for military use," Logan said, noting that the landing of a Chinese bomber on Woody Island had only exacerbated strains.

The decision to pull China's invitation comes amid new tensions between Beijing and Washington.

President Donald Trump said Wednesday that he was not satisfied with talks aimed at averting a trade war with China.

And on Tuesday, he suggested that Chinese President Xi Jinping might have played a role

in North Korea's recent threats to withdraw from a planned summit with the US.

#### 'Freedom of navigation'

China claims most of the South China Sea, believed to hold vast oil and gas deposits and through which \$5 trillion in trade passes annually. It has built up islands and military installations across the region.

Brunei, Malaysia, the Philippines, Taiwan and Vietnam also have claims in the sea.

The US Navy periodically conducts "freedom of navigation" operations in which naval vessels sail close to the Chinese-claimed militarized islets.

Logan said the Pentagon had urged China to remove its military installations "immediately" and to "reverse course" on its militarization of the sea.

Given China's growing military confidence and its heavy investment in the South China Sea, such a move is highly unlikely.

Logan added that Xi had broken a promise he made to the international community that China would not militarize the Spratly Islands. **AFP**

## Pentagon uninvites China from major US military exercise

WASHINGTON (Reuters) — The Pentagon on Wednesday uninvited China from a major US-hosted naval drill in response to what it sees as Beijing's militarization of islands in the South China Sea, a decision China called unconstructive.

"As an initial response to China's continued militarization of the South China Sea we have disinited the PLA Navy from the 2018 Rim of the Pacific (RIMPAC) Exercise," said Lieutenant Colonel Christopher Logan, a Pentagon spokesman.

PLA is the English-language acronym of China's military, the People's Liberation Army.

Logan did not specify what else the US government might do to respond but stressed there was "strong evidence" that China had deployed anti-ship missiles, surface-to-air missile systems and electronic jammers to contested features in the Spratly Islands.

"We find that a very unconstructive move," the Chinese government's top diplomat, State Councilor Wang Yi, told reporters in Washington after meeting with US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo.

Wang described China's activity in the South China Sea as self-defense, saying it was working on a "much smaller

scale" than what the United States had done in Hawaii and Guam.

"We hope that the US will change such a negative mindset."

Over the weekend China's air force landed bombers on disputed islands and reefs in the South China Sea as part of a training exercise in the region, triggering concern from Vietnam and the Philippines.

Satellite photographs taken on May 12 showed China appeared to have deployed truck-mounted surface-to-air missiles or anti-ship cruise missiles at Woody Island in the Pratacel island chain to the north of the Spratlys, said Greg Poling, a South China Sea expert at Washington's Center for Strategic and International Studies.

"On the so-called militarization in the South China Sea, we talked about this issue just now ... It is a normal deployment and has nothing to do with militarization," Wang said.

The United States has dispatched warships to disputed areas of the South China Sea in a bid to challenge China's extensive sovereignty claims in the territory, which is subject to various claims by China, Vietnam, the Philippines, Taiwan, Brunei and Malaysia. 4

# TRIBUNE

## Pentagon pulls China's invite to Pacific naval exercises

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China hit back at the decision, calling it "very non-constructive" and saying it was unfair without due reflection.

Planned drills meant that two dozen countries would together and work on security issues the next month for the biennial Rim of the Pacific (ROMPAC) exercise organized by the US Navy.

But the United States now says China's behavior in the South China Sea runs counter to the spirit of the drills.

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of disputed features in the South China Sea only serves to raise tensions and destabilize the region," Pentagon spokesman Lt. Col. Chris Logan said.

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Wang Yi said the US decision to exclude it from ROMPAC was "very non-constructive."

"It's also a decision taken lightly and it undoubtedly to normal understanding between China and the US," Wang said at a press conference with Secretary of State Mike Pompeo after the two met in Washington.

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See page 7

matter, saying only that the pair had had a "good discussion" about American concerns of militarization of the South China Sea.

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installations "immediately" and to "reverse course" on its militarization of the sea.

Given China's growing military confidence and its heavy investment in the South China Sea, such a move is highly unlikely.

Logan added that Xi had broken a promise he made to the international community that China would not militarize the Spratly Islands.

According to the Navy, this year's RIMPAC was originally slated to include more than 1,000 personnel from 27 countries.

An invitation to the exercises, which are held in and around the Hawaiian Islands and Southern California, carries some political weight as it offers legitimacy and acceptance to participating military forces.

Thailand was disinclined in 2014 following a coup.

RIMPAC began in 1971 and was held annually until 1974, when it switched to every two years due to its large scale. The founding nations are Australia, Canada and the United States.

China has participated twice previously in 2014 and 2016.

The Liberal Party (LP) yesterday urged Malacañang to heed the call of the public in taking action on what they earlier described as a creeping invasion of Philippine territory in the South China Sea by China.

In a statement, they renewed their call on the government in asserting the country's sovereignty.

"We implore the President and his administration to heed the call of the Filipino people, to exhibit courage, to not give away our islands and to do the right by their oaths to the Constitution," they said.

"We echo House resolution 1875, introduced by Liberal and allied Congressmen, and Senate resolution 744, introduced by LP Sen. Leila de Lima, in urging the

government to take immediate and appropriate action, including the filing of diplomatic protests against the People's Republic of China, in connection with these recent developments," they added.

The LP has raised concern over what they noted as continuous violation of the arbitration award and international rules which recognized the Philippines' rightful claims on the disputed territory.

It could be recalled that only a few weeks ago when reports came out about the deployment by China of missiles on some parts of Spratly island while there was also a reported landing of Chinese bomber planes on an island in the South China Sea.

"The People's Republic of China has installed missiles in the Spratlys, well inside our EEZ (exclusive economic zone) and our territorial claims in the West Philippine Sea. In an unprecedented move, it has also landed nuclear-capable bombers near the area, putting almost the whole Philippines within the bombing range of China," they said.

"These actions are a cause of great concern and anxiety not only for the peoples in the region who consider the West Philippine Sea and its nearby waters a maritime commons, but for all peace-loving peoples of the world," they added.

The government, the LP said, has been remiss both in its duty to pursue the national interest when it failed to exert efforts preventing the militarization of these waters.

It likewise failed to uphold the country's dignity as a sovereign nation, they said.

The Duterte administration also has failed in its responsibilities to the community of nations, among them, to work toward peace and stability and not to act in a manner that compromises the security of neighboring countries. **AFP**

## Helicopters from Jordan to boost Phl security measure

By ROEL PAREÑO

ZAMBOANGA CITY – The country security campaign will be boosted by the two attack helicopters that will be donated by the king of Jordan, Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana said on Wednesday.

Jordan's AH-1 Cobra helicopter is capable of operating at night and will boost the country's campaign against terrorism and insurgency.

Lorenzana made the statement after President Duterte announced during the 120th anniversary of the Philippine Navy that King Abdullah II bin Al-Hussein promised to donate two Cobra helicopters.

He said the defense department is waiting for the transfer of the aircraft.

Pilots from the Philippine Air Force (PAF) were sent to inspect the helicopters at the Royal Jordanian Air Force in Jordan.

They reported that the aircraft are in good condition.

The Royal Jordanian Air Force is using Cobra helicopters to secure its country's borders from threats posed by Islamic State militants and other insurgent groups.

Lorenzana said the PAF pilots have to undergo training before they could bring the helicopters home.

The PAF relies heavily on its fleet of MG-520, a light multirole attack helicopter, as well as on the Italian-built AW109 attack helicopters of the Philippine Navy in its fight against the terrorism and insurgency.

# PNP preparing for return of cops' training

By CECILLE SUERTE FELIPE

The Philippine National Police (PNP) is preparing for the return of the duty to educate and train police recruits to the police force.

PNP chief Director General Oscar Albayalde on Wednesday welcomed the pronouncement of President Duterte to bring back the training of police officers to the PNP

Albayalde said the PNP has been pushing for the return of the training of police officers, both commissioned and non commissioned, to them.

"We submitted that to Congress a long time ago as part of the modernization of the PNP. We requested to return the training of police recruits, both the PNPA and PNPTI to us," Albayalde said, referring to the Philippine National Police Academy and the PNP Training Institute,

which are handling the training of police officers.

He thanked Duterte for supporting the PNP's quest to manage the training of police recruits.

"I agree with the President when he said it is important for the recruits to have military training because like the men in the Armed Forces, police officers handle firearms and engage in internal security operations," Albayalde said. 14



IMPROVEMENT IN PEACE AND ORDER

MINDANAO PEOPLE LOVE MARTIAL LAW, AFP CHIEF SWEARS

Believe it or not, despite reports of daily killings, the people of Mindanao love martial law.

"People we have spoken to, they love martial law. Peace-loving people have seen the remarkable improvement in peace and order," Gen. Carlito Galvez, chief of staff of the Armed Forces of the Philippines, told reporters on Thursday.

"They no longer see guns in the streets. These [firearms] are now concealed," Galvez said, adding that 6,000 firearms had been seized by security forces in Mindanao since January.

President Duterte placed all of Mindanao under martial law a year ago after Islamic State-inspired local terrorists seized Marawi City.

Congress has twice extended the declaration, with the latest running up to the end of 2018.

Illegal firearms

The terrorists were defeated after a five-month military campaign, but Galvez said martial law was still needed because illegal firearms continued to proliferate on the island.

The military denies human rights defenders' claims of daily killings in Mindanao under martial law.

Maj. Ezra Balagtey, spokesperson for the military's Eastern Mindanao Command (Eastmincom), on Thursday said in a statement that the Commission on Human Rights and its regional offices had "not forward-

ed any complaint [about] abuses and violations of human rights perpetrated by our troops."

"While there may be allegations, particularly from the progressive groups, these have not been substantiated nor proven by any means. We have challenged them to file cases and prove them in court," Balagtey said. —JEANNETTE ANDRADE INQ

# Palace dares martial law critics: Prove rights violations

By ALEXIS ROMERO

Malacañang yesterday dared critics of martial law in Mindanao to prove allegations of human rights violations by government forces or just shut up.

Presidential spokesman Harry Roque claimed that groups accusing the security forces of abusive practices have not filed charges.

"My challenge is this: Where are the complaints? Let us not accuse our soldiers. Many soldiers offered their lives. Many of them were wounded, hurt or lost limbs. Let us not accuse them of committing violence if we do not have proof," Roque said in a press briefing in Marawi.

"We recognize the heroism of soldiers and we give them the presumption of good faith. To the accusers, the burden of evidence and burden of proof lie on you. Where is your evidence? Otherwise, just shut up because you are not the ones dying for the country," he added.

Earlier, human rights group Karapatan said it has recorded 49 cases of extrajudicial killings in Mindanao since President Duterte declared martial law last year.

Karapatan also claimed to have documented 22 torture cases, 116 victims of frustrated extrajudicial killings, 89 victims of illegal arrest and detention and 336,124 victims of indiscriminate shooting and aerial bombings.

Bombings have also displaced at least 404,654 persons, according to the group.

Karapatan has asked the Commission on Human Rights to look into the abuses and has demanded the lifting of martial law, which was declared after Islamic State-inspired terrorists laid siege to Marawi City on May 23, 2017.

Roque said he has seen the professionalism of soldiers involved in the security operations in Marawi.

"Because they are professional, they have mechanisms to punish violators of the law, especially the laws of war," he said.

Roque previously said it is not yet time to lift martial law in Mindanao, an area that officials said is facing threats from IS terrorists and communist rebels.

## No negative impact on businesses

Roque also claimed that martial law in Mindanao would not have a negative impact on businesses.

"During the first quarter, we achieved our growth target.

We're on track to achieving our growth target, so I think there is no negative effect," he said.

"In Marawi, it seems positive because it gives confidence to businessmen to invest because of the presence of security forces," he added.

Contrary to Roque's claim, however, the Philippine economy expanded by 6.8 percent in the first quarter, lower than the government's growth target of seven to eight percent because of higher commodity prices.

## 'Mindanao people love martial law'

Given a choice, the people of Mindanao want martial law to stay across the region, Armed Forces of the Philippines chief Gen. Carlito Galvez Jr. said yesterday.

The people themselves are asking the military and political leaders for the retention of military rule due to its remarkable contribution to the improvement of the peace and order in the entire Mindanao, according to Galvez.

"We talked to the people and they love martial law. They have been telling us they want Mindanao to be under martial law forever," he said.

He added that the people do not seem to mind the setup because its enforcement is being directed not against any peace-loving individuals but against lawless groups.

"Very effective because we can search houses once we have monitored or have suspicions that there are hidden firearms or illegal materials hidden inside these particular places," Galvez said.

During the first quarter of this year, government enforcers of martial law, he said, were able to seize or recover 6,000 firearms of various calibers, particularly in Sulu. These, however, represent a small percentage of loose firearms still in the hands of various lawless groups in Mindanao.

"There are around 80 percent of loose firearms that we have to recover in Mindanao," Galvez said in a press briefing during his visit in Marawi City yesterday.

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## Palace From Page 5

### **Nationwide martial law possible**

The threat of declaration of martial law all over the country persists, Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) founding chairman Jose Ma. Sison said yesterday.

In a statement posted on the National Democratic Front of the Philippines (NDFP) website, Sison said pro-Duterte the constitutional commission (Concom) is drawing up a draft federal charter that would be an easy vehicle to declare martial law nationwide.

"Within the so-called constitutional commission, there is the drive of certain pro-Duterte elements headed by a retired general to draw up a draft federal charter that makes easier the declaration of martial law by citing lawless violence or a series of offensives by the New People's Army (NPA) as the basis for the declaration of martial law," Sison said.

The drive of the pro-Duterte elements, according to Sison, is an indication that the threat of martial rule – declared before or after charter change – continues to exist and does not augur well for the resumption and success of peace negotiations while Duterte is the president.

"Instead of trying to scape-

goat the NPA and make it the pretext for martial law declaration, state terrorism and fascist dictatorship, the Duterte regime should let the peace negotiations succeed in addressing the roots of the armed conflict and laying the ground for a just and lasting peace through comprehensive agreements on social, economic and political reforms," Sison said.

Sison had earlier said that only a "substantial progress in the peace negotiations" between the Philippines and the NDFP can convince him to return to the country.

Sison issued the statement in an exclusive interview with ABS-CBN.

Sison said the government and the NDFP, the umbrella organization of the CPP and its armed-wing the NPA, can only be able to round up three vital agreements if the fifth round of talks would ever resume.

The agreements include the ceasefire between the government and the NDFP, amnesty proclamation and important portions of the Comprehensive Agreement on Social and Economic Reforms (CASER).

Sison said he wants to return to the country at the proper time and expressed optimism that it may happen within the year. – With Jaime Laude, Jose Rodel Clapano

## Palace: Martial law to stay in Mindanao

MARTIAL law in Mindanao will not be lifted yet by President Rodrigo Duterte, Malacañang said on Thursday, as it challenged critics accusing government troops of alleged abuses to show proof or shut up.

Speaking to reporters in Marawi City, Palace spokesman Harry Roque Jr. said it was unfair to accuse soldiers, who have sacrificed their lives to combat terrorists and other threats, of violating the law without showing evidence.

*"Kinikilala po natin ang pagiging bayani ng ating kasundalohan.*

► Stay A2

# Palace: Martial law to stay in Mindanao

*Binibigyan po natin sila ng presumption of good faith [We recognize the heroism of our soldiers. We are giving them a presumption of good faith].*" Roque said in a news conference.

*"At sa mga accuser, yung mga nagrereklamo, yung burden of evidence, yung burden of proof, nasaan ang ebidensya ninyo? Otherwise, tumahimik na lang kayo dahil hindi naman kayo ang nagpapakamatay para sa inang bayan [The burden of evidence, burden of proof is with the accusers or those with complaints. Show your evidence otherwise shut up because you're not the ones sacrificing your lives for the nation]."* he added

According to Roque, it was easy to hurl accusations against the military but there are no complaints or evidence to support such allegations.

*"Napakadaling sabihin na maraming paglabag ng karapatang pangtao. Nasaan po ang mga reklamo? Eyung mga parehong grupo naman na nagsasabing napakaraming paglabag, hindi naman nagpapatay ng kanilang reklamo. Ilabas nila, nasaan ang mga reklamang yan at patunayan nila na kung merong mga reklamo, binalewala ng ating Hukbong Sandatahan [It's easy to say there are human rights violations. Where are the complaints? These are the same groups claiming that there have been abuses but have not filed any complaints. They must show the complaints and prove that such complaints were ignored by the Armed Forces],"* he said.

*"Napakadaming sundalong ang inaalay ang buhay nila, napakaraming mga hanggang ngayon nasugatan, nasaktan, nawalan ng kamay, nawalan ng paa, huwag naman natin sila pagbintangan na gumagawa ng karahasan na walang pruwaba dahil magagalit na po ang taumbayan dyan [There are many soldiers who offered their lives, many who have been injured, lost their limbs. Let's not accuse them of committing abuses without proof because the public will certainly get angry],"* Roque added.

He made the statement after some concerned groups called for the lifting of martial law in Mindanao, citing alleged rights violations and

abuses by government forces.

But the Palace official insisted that there was no reason yet to lift the martial law declaration in Mindanao a year after the deadly terror siege in Marawi City.

"The Palace would like to assure the public that the moment the need for martial law ceases, it will be lifted. But certainly one year after the siege, the time to lift martial law is not yet here," Roque said.

Rights group Karapatan has slammed the Palace for rejecting the call, saying, "The Duterte regime's adamant defense for the continuing imposition of martial law in Mindanao speaks of its militarist and ineffective approach in addressing the root causes of the social problems that spawned the armed conflicts in Mindanao and elsewhere."

The group has documented at least 49 victims of extrajudicial killings in Mindanao since the declaration of martial law, noting that most of the casualties are indigenous peoples and members of local peasant organizations.

It added that there were 22 cases of torture, 116 victims of frustrated extrajudicial killings, 89 victims of illegal arrest and detention and 336,124 victims of indiscriminate gunfire and aerial bombings.

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

President Rodrigo Duterte placed the entire Mindanao under martial law last year after Islamic State-inspired terrorists laid siege to Marawi City.

The military rule was extended until December 31, 2018.

Five months of fighting left over 1,000 people dead and displaced some 200,000 others.

The government has set aside at least P72 billion to rebuild the city.

Roque assured the public that the government was acting fast on its efforts to completely rehabilitate and reconstruct the war-torn city.

"We remember Marawi. We pay tribute to the sacrifices of our fallen men in uniform and recognize everyone's efforts in rebuilding the Islamic City," he said, noting that the government's priority right now is to restore normalcy in the lives of displaced

Filipinos affected by the siege and that much work has to be done.

To date, Roque said, 70 percent of displaced residents have gone back to Marawi, occupying temporary shelters built by the government.

Furthermore, he cited that all 67 evacuation centers in Northern Mindanao and parts of Lanao del Sur will be cleared of occupants within the year, which means all evacuees will be allowed to return home soon.

A total of 77,700 individuals or 10,835 families were also allowed to return to the most affected area (MAA), Roque said.

The Palace official added that the Bangon Marawi Comprehensive Rehabilitation and Recovery Program was targeted for approval by the Cabinet this June.

Under the initiative, 892 short- and medium-term programs, projects and activities will be implemented by different government agencies for the reconstruction and development of all localities affected by the siege.

"It will be a very modern Islamic city that all Filipinos can be proud of," Roque said, as he assured residents and stakeholders that the rehabilitation plan would take into account the cultural and religious sensitivities of the Maranao people.

A groundbreaking ceremony will be conducted in June to signal the start of a full-scale reconstruction of the MAA, he added.

## 'They love martial law'

Meanwhile, according to Armed Forces chief Gen. Carlito Galvez Jr., the people of Mindanao "love" martial law.

Galvez cited improvements in security and peace in their areas a year after military rule was imposed on the region.

"We saw that the implementation of martial law [in Mindanao] went well. Based on the people we have talked to, they love martial law," he said in an interview in Marawi City also on Thursday.

He also cited retrieval of at least 6,000 firearms in Mindanao, mostly in Jolo, Sulu.

**CATHERINE S. VALENTE  
AND DEMPSEY REYES**

# Rights abuse claims unfair to soldiers – Roque

By GENALYN D. KABILING

**M**alacañang has challenged groups accusing the military of alleged abuses during martial law in Mindanao to show proof or shut up.

Presidential Spokesman Harry Roque argued that it was unfair to accuse soldiers, who have sacrificed lives and limbs to combat terrorists and other threats, of violating the law without showing evidence.

"Kinikilala natin ang pagiging bayani ng ating mga kasundalohan. Binibigyan natin sila ng presumption of good faith (We recognize the heroism of our soldiers. We are giving them a presumption of good faith)," he said

during a press conference in Marawi City.

"Nasa accusers o yung nagreklamo yung burden of evidence, burden of proof nasaan ang ebidensya ninyo otherwise tumahimik na lang kayo dahil hindi naman kayo ang nagpapakamatay para sa inang-bayan (The burden of evidence, burden of proof is with the accusers or those with complaints. Show your evidence otherwise shut up because you're not the ones sacrificing lives for the nation)," he added.

Some concerned groups have called for the lifting of martial law in Mindanao, citing alleged rights violations and abuses by government forces.

The cases of abuse remained unreported allegedly due to the victims' fear of retaliation from authorities.

tion from authorities.

Roque said it was easy to hurl accusations against the military, but the allegations have not been substantiated with evidence.

"Nasaan ang reklamo? (Where are the complaints?)," he asked.

"These are the same groups claiming there have been abuses but have not filed any complaints. They must show the complaints and prove that such complaints were ignored by the Armed Forces," he added in Filipino. 3



PROPOSED CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT

NPA ATTACKS AS GROUND FOR MARTIAL LAW THREAT TO PEACE TALKS—JOMA

By Delfin T. Mallari Jr. @dtmallarijrINQ

LUCENA CITY—Making New People's Army (NPA) attacks a ground for the declaration of martial law as a proposed amendment to the 1987 Constitution threatens the success of peace talks between the government and communist insurgents, according to exiled Communist Party of the Philippines founding chair Jose Maria "Joma" Sison

"[The] drive of the pro-Duterte elements is an indication that the threat of martial rule, being declared before or

after Charter change, continues to exist and does not augur well for the resumption and success of peace negotiations while Duterte is the President," Sison said in an online interview on Wednesday

'Roots of armed conflict'

"Instead of trying to scapegoat the NPA and make it the pretext for martial law declaration, state terrorism and fascist dictatorship, the Duterte regime should let the peace negotiations succeed in addressing the roots of the armed conflict and laying the ground for a just and lasting peace through compre-

hensive agreements on social, economic and political reforms," he said

Retired Supreme Court Associate Justice Eduardo Nachura, a member of consultative committee tasked by President Duterte to review the 1987 Constitution, announced on Wednesday that the panel had approved proposed grounds for the imposition of martial law, including a "series of attacks" by the NPA

'Lawless violence'

He said "lawless violence" was added to rebellion and invasion as reasons for the President to impose martial law

Sison, who is based in Utrecht, the Netherlands, claimed that within the consultative panel, "there is the drive of certain pro-Duterte elements headed by a retired general to draw up a draft federal charter that makes easier the declaration of martial law by citing 'lawless violence' or a 'series of offenses' by the NPA as [a] basis for the declaration of martial law."

Retired Lt. Gen. Ferdinand Rocobo, a member of the committee, said on Wednesday that he made the proposal to enable the Philippines to respond to terrorism and violent extremism. INQ Kip

# Solon wants Reds' revolutionary tax resolved before peace talks resume

By MALU CADELINA MANAR

KIDAPAWAN CITY – One of the issues that need further discussion when talks between the Philippine government and the communist movement resume is the latter's alleged revolutionary taxation.

Cotabato 2nd district Congresswoman Nancy Catamco said the alleged "forceful" revolutionary taxation of the New People's Army (NPA) and the non-compliance of government troops with the Comprehensive Agreement on the Respect for Human Rights and the

International Humanitarian Law (CAR-HRIHL) can be addressed by creating a local monitoring mechanism while the GRP and the NDF panels talk peace.

The collection of revolutionary taxes is "strong" in the hinterlands, according to Catamco.

Catamco has expressed her support to the move of the Duterte administration to resume the stalled talks with the communists.

In fact, she introduced House Resolution Number 1891, which she passed on May 21.

The resolution supports President

Duterte's move for the talks' resumption because such move, according to Catamco, is also in support of the people's peace agenda crafted by the Church and Civil Society for Network for Justice and Peace in the province of North Cotabato.

Catamco said the Church and civil network is composed of multi-denominational churches, which includes the Roman Catholic Church, Methodist Church, United Church of Christ in the Philippines, Philippine Independence Church, Islamic Faith Believers, indigenous peoples, and other religious groups. ♀

# NPA amazon surrenders in Abra

By FRANCIS T. WAKEFIELD

A female New People's Army (NPA) rebel surrendered to the Philippine Army's Northern Luzon Command (Nolcom) in Abra last Monday, the military announced yesterday.

Nolcom spokesman and Public Information Office chief Lt. Col. Isagani Nato, said Genevive Daloy-on Pedro, alias Ricky/Elvis, an NPA amazon from Barangay Kili in Tubo, Abra who

eluded authorities since November 2013, voluntarily surrendered at about 8 a.m. Monday.

She also turned over one M1 Carbine with Serial Number 1801959, to the Headquarters of the Army's 81st Infantry Battalion (81IB).

Nato said the said amazon divulged that she was a former Political Guide (PG) of Team Dos, Sandatahang Yunit Pampropaganda (SYP), Komiteng Larangang Gerilya (KLG) AMPIS, Ilocos-Cor-

dillera Regional Committee (ICRC).

He said the surrender materialized with the cooperation of her family and the assistance of local officials in the area.

"Nolcom will keep its doors open for negotiations and will continue to engage all stakeholders to encourage more members of communist terrorist groups to lay down their arms and become a productive citizen and help in nation-building," Nato said. (with a report Mar T. Supnad)

# Rody threatens to 'kill' Joma if peace talks fail

By F. Pearl A. Gajunera

DAVAO CITY—President Rodrigo Duterte said he would kill Communist Party of the Philippines founder Jose Maria Sison once he returned to the Philippines and the peace negotiations with the rebel group fail.

During his speech in the inauguration of the Davao River Bridge here on Thursday, Duterte noted that Sison already agreed to go back to the Philippines for two months to revive the peace talks between the communist CPP-National Democratic Front and the government.

"I have invited Sison to come home, he has agreed. I gave him a window of two months, very small, make or break," the President said.

Duterte stressed that he would personally escort Sison to the airport whatever the outcome of the peace talks that would end the longest-running communist rebellion

in the world.

"I will allow him to go out, I will not arrest him because it's my word of honor. But I will really tell him, [expletive], do not ever, ever return again to this country, I will kill you," the President said.

Sison, being the founder of the CPP and its armed wing the New People's Army, "has killed so many police and soldiers in the country" over more than five decades of war with the government, Duterte said.

He earlier asked Sison publicly to come back to the Philippines after the President decided to restart the peace negotiations, almost three months after he declared the NPA as a terrorist group.

Duterte was prompted to declare the NPA as terrorists after the series of atrocities and reports of extortion the President received from the different parts of the country.

Despite his announcement about the two-

month window for negotiations, Duterte said he would not revoke his proclamation categorizing the NPA as a terrorist group.

The military recently captured a top NPA leader in the Davao Region, Elizalde Cañete alias "Ka Jinggoy," at Don Carlos Hospital in Don Carlos, Bukidnon.

Cañete, captured on May 12, is the leader of Pulung Bagani Command 1, covering the entire Davao Region and some parts of Bukidnon. He replaced the late Leoncio Pitao alias "Parago," who was killed in an encounter three years ago.

Cañete was also responsible of the burning of the Lapanday Box plant in Mandug, Davao City last year and the death of fish vendor Larry Timbal Buenafe. A 2

Davao City Mayor Sara Duterte said the city would file charges against Cañete after the atrocities he caused in the city, including the death of Buenafe.

# Rebuilding of mosques inspires hope for Islamic city's recovery



By the Inquirer Staff  
and Mindanao Bureau  
@Team\_Inquirer

*(Last of three parts)*

MARAWI CITY—Lawyer Jamil Cayamodin remembers the collective sound of calls to prayer from hundreds of mosques in his native Marawi during the holy month of Ramadan.

"You can hear the whole city calls, all at the same time," said Cayamodin, college secretary of the University of the Philippines' Institute of Islamic Studies.

"I have memories of those calls to prayer ... They were so nice, I miss them," he added.

But this was before the Philippines' only Islamic city was reduced to rubble by government air strikes as state security forces fought Islamic State-inspired terrorists who seized the city on May 23 last year.

After the war that raged for five months, not a single mosque was left standing in the main battle area.

### Hope for recovery

As the people of Marawi struggle to make sense of the devastation a year after the siege, rebuilding the mosques has been identified as a priority, giving the war-torn city hope for recovery.

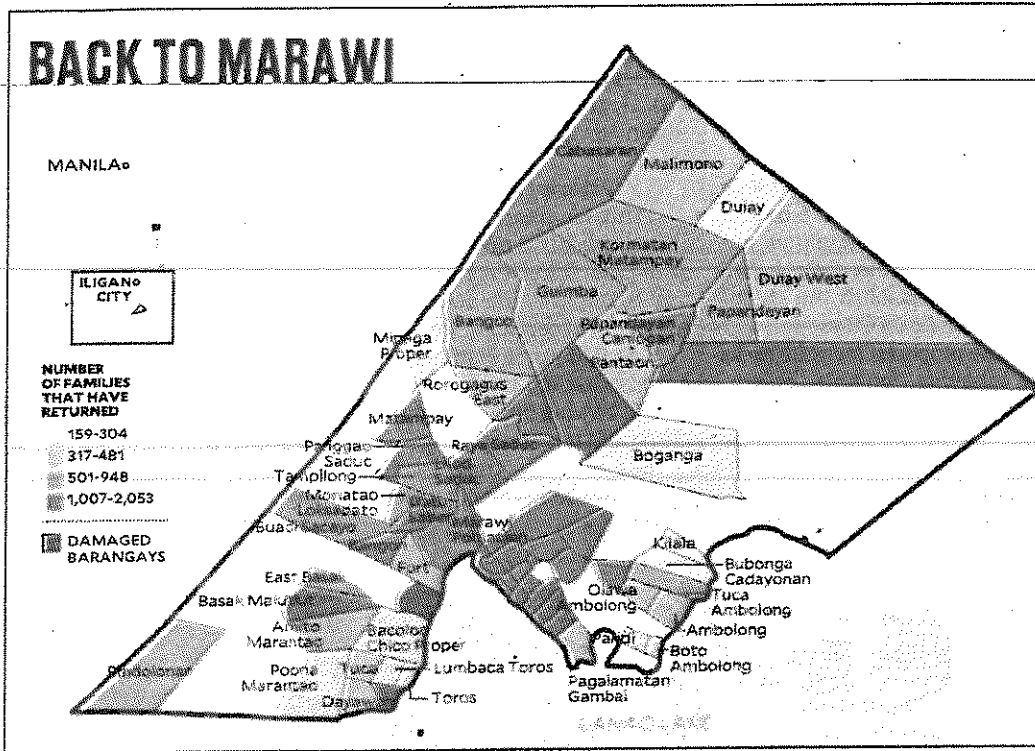
"A mosque is a place of worship for the Bangsamoro. It is a sacred place, a place of hope and mercy," said Fatima Pir Allian, a Tausug and program director of Nisa Ul Haqq Fi Bangsamoro, a group helping displaced residents.

### Foundation of faith

"It is our foundation of faith and our identity, the trademark of what we believe in and what we are fighting for. The mosque is our home and when our home is a shambles, it causes imbalance," Allian said.

Lanao del Sur Vice Gov. Mamintal Adiong said the local government was seeking help, especially from the Middle

# BACK TO MARAWI



are expected to be finished by next month. Most of the roughly 9,191 families (52,802 people) from these villages are still languishing in evacuation centers or staying with relatives.

## Temporary shelters

The government has built temporary shelters for the evacuees, the biggest of which is at Barangay Sagonsongan. But only 700 units of the more than 6,000 shelters planned to be built there have so far been completed. As of April, 624 units had been occupied.

Temporary shelters will also be built at Barangay Papan-dayan, where the National Housing Authority plans to set up permanent houses for 2,747 families, and at Barangay Dansalan, where an apartment block will rise for residents.

## Rebuilding cost

Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana earlier estimated the cost of rebuilding Marawi to run up to P50 billion, but Housing Secretary Eduardo del Rosario, head of Task Force Bangon Marawi, set a higher figure of P80 billion for rehabilitation and reconstruction.

The rehabilitation of areas outside the main battle zone will entail funding of P26.2 billion during the first year of reconstruction, according to the National Economic and Development Authority.

President Duterte, during his visit to Marawi on May 11, asked the residents to be more patient.

"We are rebuilding Marawi. The money is slowly coming in. It can't be done overnight," he said.

But the Ranaw Multi-Sectoral Movement suggested that the government instead allow the residents to rebuild the city on their own.

"Let the people rebuild Marawi one house at a time, one mosque at a time, one village at a time," the group said in a statement. —REPORTS FROM DIVINA SUSON, ALLAN NAWAL, JULIE ALI-PALA, GERMELINA LACORTE, JIGGER JERUSALEM AND RICHEL V. UMEL IN MINDANAO; AND BEN O. DE VERA IN MANILA INQ 8/2

East, to rebuild the mosques.

The government has also proposed building a military camp in the middle of the city, which worries Muslim scholars like Cayamodin because of its impact on the culture and religiosity of the residents.

## Unwritten rule

Cayamodin said he could not imagine a military camp inside an Islamic city like Marawi because it would bring in vices unacceptable to Muslims.

Drieza Lininding, chair of the Moro Consensus Group in Marawi, said the freedom that the residents used to enjoy had always been tempered by an unwritten rule they all followed.

"We were always free to protest, to air our grievances, but there should be no selling of pork here, no liquor, no videoke," Lininding said.

## Disintegrated

"But the war had turned us into a silent and disintegrated people. We are afraid to speak our minds now because we fear being accused and tagged as terrorists," he said.

Another place of worship that needs to be rebuilt for the city's Catholic residents is St.



**RECONSTRUCTION** Residents salvage materials from their destroyed houses for reconstruction a year after government forces clashed with Islamic State-inspired terrorists in Marawi City. —RICHEL V. UMEL

Mary's Cathedral.

Bishop Edwin de la Peña said the cathedral, which was put up in 1934, would have to be rebuilt only after Marawi's full rehabilitation.

## Interreligious harmony

"In the meantime, we focus our energies on rebuilding communities," De la Peña said in a post on the website of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines.

Rebuilding the cathedral is important, he said, because "Marawi has always been the showcase of interreligious harmony in the Philippines."

Government records showed that as of April 1, 37,276 families, or 95,820 people, had returned to 42 villages in Marawi. Another 1,423 families (7,721 people) were awaiting word to return to six more villages.

Clearing operations at 24 villages in the main battle zone



# Marawi IDPs need justice, social healing – Dureza

By ANTONIO L. COLINA IV,  
BONITA L. ERMAC, ELLSON A. QUISMORIO,  
ALI G. MACABALANG and TAJ S. BASMAN

**D**AVAO CITY – There will be no full social healing for Meranaw families affected by the nearly five months of armed clashes between military and Islamic State-inspired Maute Group in Marawi unless transitional justice is attained, Presidential Adviser on Peace Process (PAPP) Secretary Jesus Dureza said on Wednesday.

In a press briefing in Lanao del Sur, Dureza emphasized the need for social healing in order to restore the moral fiber that was destroyed by the armed conflicts between government forces and Islamic State-inspired Maute Group.

He said the destruction to the structures could easily be repaired by engineers unlike the work on “repairing back the destroyed social fabric, the relationship that had been broken,” which the secretary emphasized also needs equal attention.

“We cannot move on and make things already feel normal and better if there is no justice given, the correct justice needed, to redress the wrong that was committed and that will be the start of a social healing. There will be no full healing of relationships unless justice is served,” Dureza said.

He said OPAPP has lined up similar activities during this year’s Ramadan, emphasizing the need to put peace into the government’s rehabilitation efforts to ensure there would be no projects that will “trigger more conflict.”

“There will be no easy healing if you don’t allow opportunity for a vent that will allow them to express first... Because we believe that social healing can only take place if there is ownership by them who are the victims. It is not for anybody upstairs who were able to provide to them the solution; they provided it themselves,” he said.

Dureza also asked the people to be patient because there is “no magic formula” in the rehabilitation process

and that reconstruction cannot happen overnight, considering that there would be a lot of challenges amid the “contrary voices and feelings.”

## Open communication

Assemblyman Zia Alonto Adiong said the Meranaws must be assured that the reconstruction efforts in the war-torn Marawi City must not only include repairing the damaged areas but also ensure that it would preserve the identity of the victims.

Adiong said the government must keep an open communication line between Task Force Bangon Marawi, local government unit, and residents to keep them informed of the rehabilitation process and manage their expectation to address growing frustration of the people in the rebuilding of Marawi.

He said it’s important that the rehabilitation process is clear to them in order to eliminate frustration stemming from the “fear of expulsion, fear of not knowing what’s going to happen” but he believes it can be managed by keeping the public informed of the process that the government is undertaking.

“Well, we don’t actually question the process, why the government is meticulously doing consultations and then acquiring legal grounds, putting up the technical specificities in terms of the reconstruction, prior to the reconstruction. We don’t question that, if it means delaying the process and we also do not question but rather we understand the frustration of the people,” he added.

Adiong said the affected residents must be transformed into development partners of government in Marawi.

The residents displaced by nearly five months of armed clashes between government forces and Islamic State-inspired Maute Group may start rebuilding their destroyed houses after the government clears the debris and completes the “horizontal preparations” in 12 to 18 months, Housing Assistant secretary Felix Castro.

Castro assured the Meranaw families in a series of consultations that the

government “will not touch the private properties” and that “rehabilitation will only involve government infrastructures.”

Mayor Majul Gandamra challenged his constituents to be on the same level with the premier urban centers of the country, one that is true to its cultural roots and yet progressive and peaceful enough to become a source of genuine pride among Maranaos.

Lanao del Sur 2nd district Rep. Mauyag Papandayan Jr., chairman of the House Committee on Muslim Affairs, criticized the “vague” rehabilitation plan presented by Task Force Bangon Marawi (TFBM) exactly a year after local terrorists’ siege in the Islamic city.

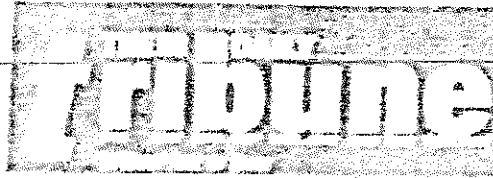
The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) has called for intensified interventions for the reconstruction of Marawi City and relief efforts for its thousands of displaced residents.

“Around 230,000 people remain displaced and in need of stronger support one year after armed conflict broke out (in this city),” the ICRC said in a statement issued on Wednesday.

Pascal Porchet, head of the ICRC delegation in the Philippines, said: “Efforts to rehabilitate Marawi and assist its people must be stepped up to reduce the suffering of thousands of those who were displaced over the past year. The efforts are there, but these must match the growing needs of those who face prolonged displacement and are close to despair.”

Senator Antonio “Sonny” Trillanes IV has filed two resolutions seeking a formal inquiry into the events surrounding the infamous incident as well as on the real status of government rehabilitation and reconstructions efforts for this war-torn city.

News about Sen. Trillanes’ move promptly drew praises from members of the Maranaw community including even the militant residents, who had once deplored the Bicolano senator for his dissenting stance that contributed to the 16th Congress’ shelving of the first draft of the Bangsamoro Basic Law (BBL). 4



## Palace to Trillanes: Not true gov't has no rehab plan for Marawi

Malacañang yesterday rejected a senator's claim that there is no master plan for the rehabilitation of Marawi a year after the city was besieged by terrorists of the Maute Group.

"With all due respect, we cannot agree with the conclusions made by Senator (Antonio) Trillanes," presidential spokesman Harry Roque said at a press briefing in Marawi City.

Roque was commenting on Trillanes' move to file a resolution looking into the government's rehabilitation efforts and his plan to investigate the circumstances that led to the five-month armed conflict between government forces and the Islamic State-inspired Maute Group.

Roque described Trillanes' call for a probe as "political," noting that the creation of the inter-agency Task Force Bangon Marawi itself is proof that a master plan is in place.

He, however, lamented that rehabilitation efforts in Marawi have been hampered by a number of issues, such as questionable contractors and displacement or land grabbing fears of the affected residents.

In June 2017, Duterte signed an administrative order creating Task Force Bangon Marawi that would spearhead the recovery, reconstruction, and rehabilitation of Marawi City.

"We are following a master plan, it comes in phases," Roque said. "It just so happens that we are prioritizing the internally displaced persons."

He said that if it is true that there is no master plan for Marawi, the government would not have achieved as much as providing majority of the residents with temporary or permanent homes.

"The Palace and Task Force Bangon Marawi are ready to cooperate if the Senate investigation pushes through," Roque said.

The Palace spokesperson, meanwhile, sought for more patience from residents of the war-torn city, pointing out that rehabilitation takes time.

"We are all getting impatient but the rehabilitation process is a long one," he said.

Rebuilding ground zero is "secondary" only to making sure the displaced persons have homes to return to, Roque said. **PNA**

MILITARY:

# 'Abu Dar' is Maute's last remaining leader

BY DEMPSEY REYES

**O**WAYTA Benito Marohombsar, or "Abu Dar," is the only remaining "significant figure" in the Islamic State (IS)-inspired Maute group that attacked Marawi City last year, Armed Forces chief Gen. Carlito Galvez Jr. said on Thursday.

Galvez however said military intelligence had yet to validate if Marohombsar indeed succeeded Isnilon Hapilon as the Southeast Asian "emir" of the IS. The military chief's remarks came

in the wake of reports that Marohombsar replaced Hapilon in the IS leadership after the latter was killed during the Marawi siege last year. The Philippine Army earlier re-

vealed that IS sleeper cells had been planted across the country and could start a crisis similar to the five-month long siege of Marawi City.

Galvez claimed that support for the Maute group was "waning."

"Previously, [10 members surrendered], but after the President talked, spoke with them, it [increased] to 42 surrenderers and they are included in the most wanted list," he told reporters in Marawi City.

The Maute members were presented to President Rodrigo Duterte earlier this month. Duterte told the former terrorists they were welcome to visit Malacañang.

Galvez said Marohombsar was

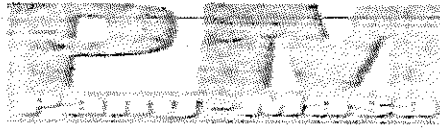
among the planners of the Marawi siege, alongside the Maute brothers and Hapilon.

The Maute brothers - Omarkhayam, Maddie, Ottoh and Abdullah - were all killed during the crisis.

Galvez warned of ongoing recruitment efforts being conducted by the Maute remnants in Mindanao.

"But we believe that our counter-narrative is being strengthened and we saw that there are lot of people even from other terror groups such as the BIFF (Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters) and ASG (Abu Sayyaf Group) [surrendering to us]," he said.

"We see that there is a snowball of surrenders," he claimed. *h2*



### **42 Maute-ISIS sumuko**

Umaabot na sa 42 miyembro ng Maute-Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) terrorists ang sumuko sa militar matapos na 15 miyembro pa ang nagsisuko noong nakalipas na Linggo na ipinisinta kay Pangulong Rodrigo Duterte.

Ayon kay AFP Chief of Staff Gen. Carlito Galvez, patuloy na humihina ang suporta ng Maute-ISIS na bumabagsak na ang recruitment.

Hinggil naman sa napaulat na si Abu Dar na ang pumalit sa Emir ng ISIS sa Southeast Asia na si Isnilon Hapilon na napatay sa assault operation sa Marawi City noong Oktubre 17, 2017 ay sinabi ni Galvez na patuloy pa rin itong kinukumpirma - *Joy Cantos*.

# Duterte ready to sign BBL next week

By ARGYLL CYRUS B. GEDUCOS

Malacañang said yesterday that President Duterte is just waiting for both houses of Congress to come up with one version of the much-awaited Bangsamoro Basic Law (BBL) so he can sign it into law next week before Congress goes into recess by the end of the month.

In a press briefing in Marawi City Thursday morning, Presidential Spokesman Harry Roque said it can be expected that the BBL will be passed next week without undergoing a bicameral conference committee or bicam.


"Yes [we are looking at its passage], before end of the month. Dahil 'yan din po ang ipinangako ng liderato ng Kongreso (Because that is also what is promised by Congress leaders)," he added.

"Hindi po sila magri-recess hangga't hindi maaprubahan ang BBL, 'yan po ang pangako (They will not go into recess unless they have approved the BBL. That was the promise)," he added.

"Well, we're holding them to their promise. Kasi wala naman pong dahilan para hindi na sila ma-meet ang deadline (Because there is no reason for them to miss the deadline)," he said.

Roque said he believes that all stakeholders will find the latest version of the BBL acceptable.

He said the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF), and lumad were all consulted.

Peace Process Adviser Jesus Dureza also said last month that Pampanga Representative Gloria Macapagal Arroyo and Senator Miguel Zubiri already vowed to support the BBL and act on it before congress adjourns. 

# Palace sees BBL passage

BY CATHERINE S. VALENTE AND  
BERNADETTE TAMAYO

**M**ALACANANG is confident the proposed Bangsamoro Basic Law (BBL) will be passed by Congress this month.

In a news conference in Marawi City on Thursday, Palace spokesman Harry Roque Jr. said Malacanang was relying on the commitment of the House of Representatives that it would approve the BBL before Congress adjourns *sine die* on June 2.

"We're holding them to their promise *kasi wala naman pong dahilan para hindi na nila niameet ang deadline* (because there is no reason for them not to meet the deadline)," Roque told reporters.

"I understand they had an all-members caucus in the House and it was agreed that it will be passed before they go on break," he added.

President Rodrigo Duterte is waiting for the Senate and the House to come up with one version that he could sign into law next week.

The House of Representatives and the Senate had asked the President to certify the proposed Bangsamoro law as urgent.

A bill certified as urgent autho-

rizes Congress to approve it on second and third reading on the same day.

On Thursday, Senate President Vicente Sotto 3rd said senators would try to pass on third and final reading the proposed Bangsamoro Basic Law, Senate Bill 1717, either on Tuesday or Wednesday next week.

Senate Minority Leader Franklin Drilon finished his interpellation on the bill on Wednesday night.

"The strategy that I want to do as presiding officer would be to do it page by page on Monday during the committee amendments. And thereafter all individual amendments will do it page by page," Sotto said in a media forum.

"So, if we do that we'll be able to pass [the bill], and I'm keeping my fingers crossed. We'll be able

to pass and finish the period of amendments by Monday, at the latest, Tuesday, and then pass it on second reading on Tuesday," he said. "If we receive the certification from the President, then we will do away with the three-day rule and we can approve it on third and final reading on Wednesday at the latest."

## Acceptable

Roque said all stakeholders had found the latest version of the BBL acceptable.

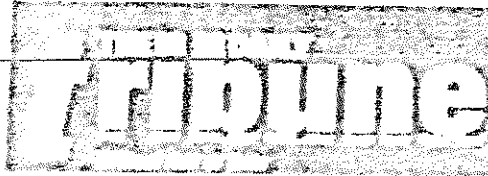
He said the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF), and Lumad were consulted in the crafting of the proposed law.

"*Ang alam ko po buong-buong naman ang suporta ng MILF. At sa unang pagkakataon, ito po ay*

*BBL na all-inclusive, pati po mga lumad ay kinonsulta. Member din po sila ng BTC unlike 'yung ibang bersiyon ng BBL na parang nakalimutan ang mga Lumad* (I know the MILF supports this version. And for the first time, this is a BBL that is all-inclusive since Lumad were also consulted. They were members of the Bangsamoro Transition Commission unlike before when it seemed like they were forgotten)," he said.

"Acceptable po ang bersiyon ng BBL na ito sa kaparehong MILF at MNLF (This version of the BBL is also acceptable to both the MILF and MNLF)," the Palace official added. **A3**

The measure being pushed aims to abolish the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao and replace it with a Bangsamoro region. **WITH LLANESCA PANTI**



# Rody's commitment to BBL stays, says Palace

By Kamfir Masuh

The Palace said that President Duterte has not wavered in his support for the Bangsamoro Basic Law (BBL) but he wants to make sure that versions from both chambers of Congress will have similar provisions before certifying the bill.

Mr. Duterte earlier promised that he would certify the BBL as urgent noting that it was one of the only ways to achieve long-lasting peace in Mindanao.

Presidential spokesman Harry Roque said the president wants to be sure that both versions in the House and the Senate should be the same

and contain all the provisions that have been agreed upon.

At the same time, Roque said during a press briefing telecast live in Marawi City that even if there is no certification from the President classifying the BBL as an urgent bill, there is no stopping its passage.

"There is no reason for the

certification [of the BBL] as urgent to be delayed. Even without the certification as urgent, both Houses are working for the quick passage [of House Bill 6475] which is now pending in the Senate and at the House of Representatives," Roque said.

The president only wants to be

Turn to page 2



# Rody's commitment to BBL stays, says Palace

From page 1

sure that both versions do not have any dissimilarities," he added.

Speaker Pantaleon Alvarez and Majority Leader Rodolfo Fariñas sent a letter to the president dated May 23 asking Mr. Duterte anew for the certification.

Alvarez introduced the bill based on the version submitted by the Bangsamoro Transition Commission without any amendments. It has been approved on the committee level.

At the same time, Roque reiterated that Mr. Duterte has committed to certify the BBL as urgent since July last year but is only waiting for both versions.

If the Senate and House versions are alike, Roque said that he expects both chambers to approve the bill on the same day on second and third reading and no longer need to convene in a bicameral conference to reconcile both their versions.

## May 30 deadline should hold

Roque, meanwhile, said the Palace still expects Congress to hold on to its promise to meet the deadline for the passage of the BBL before Congress adjourns *sine die* on May 30.

"That is the promise of the leaders of the Congress -- they won't go on recess until the BBL is approved before they adjourn on May 30," Roque said.

"We're holding them to their promise because there's no reason for them not to meet the deadline," he added, noting that the House even

has a two-hour all-member's caucus to discuss the BBL.

He described the deadline set by Duterte as "realistic" noting that the House of Representatives, in particular, is known to push for the immediate passage of bills prioritized by the administration.

The BBL seeks to establish a new Bangsamoro political entity with more autonomy.

Roque said that the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLFP) and Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILFP) have both expressed their support for the BBL's passage.

Galvez reiterates ML still needed For Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) Chief of Staff Gen. Carlito Galvez Jr. said the military still needs martial law to completely account for loose firearms in Mindanao that are prone to be used to criminalities, including terrorism.

Galvez said that during the first quarter of 2018 alone, about 6,000 illegal firearms had already been accounted by the military.

"We saw that the implementation of martial law was good. People we talked to say 'they love martial law'...peace-loving people saw remarkable improvement in peace and order," said Galvez.

The AFP chief stressed that under martial law, the military was allowed to search for firearms inside houses of those being suspected in possession of illegal guns and involved into illegal activities.

"They (peace-loving people) saw that martial law is being implemented

against lawless elements...and for peace-loving people, martial law is favorable and comfortable for them," said Galvez.

It was not clear, however, what's the total number of firearms seized or accounted for since martial law was implemented on May 23, 2017 - hours after the Maute-ISIS group started the Marawi City siege.

President Duterte declared martial law in Mindanao while on an official visit to Russia. He cut short the trip and went home immediately to address the Marawi City siege.

However, it took five months more for the government security forces to liberate Marawi City from the Maute-ISIS group, led by Isnilon Hapilon and the dreaded Maute brothers, namely, Ottoy, Mati, Abdullah and Omarkhayam.

Duterte declared Marawi City's liberation on October.

The siege ended with 908 terrorists, including Hapilon and the four Maute brothers, killed, along with 165 government forces and 47 civilians. Hundreds of thousands were displaced.

Asked if martial law is still needed at this time, Galvez replied "yes definitely, we still need to get 80 percent (of the loose firearms)...we need to get all the 80 percent of the firearms so that we will remove the possibility of using these for lawlessness and criminalities."

Currently, various cause-oriented groups are calling for the lifting of the martial law in Mindanao -citing the liberation of Marawi City and the military's claim of defeating the Maute-

ISIS group.

Some even went to former Supreme Court Chief Justice Lourdes Sereno to be their voice in calling for the lifting of martial law, claiming they were traumatized by the implementation of military rule.

The AFP has challenged them to support their claims with evidence to be acted upon.

Galvez declared that the military is winning against the Maute group, citing the recent surrender of 42 terrorists.

"These surrenderees have reward and they are listed in our PSR, and they are also known to the circle of the Mautes. So we are seeing the support to the Maute group is waning," said Galvez.

Currently, the AFP is all-out in assisting the efforts of Task Force Bangon Marawi to ensure the smooth rehabilitation and rebuilding of the Islamic City.

Task Force Bangon Marawi head Undersecretary Eduardo del Rosario said that the next three years will be crucial in rebuilding Marawi.

Del Rosario stressed that the AFP's presence is vital since the Maute group remains to pose a threat and one major disruption of peace and order in Marawi City may derail the massive rehabilitation efforts.

## Put up or shut up

Roque also dared anybody to show proof of abuses by government forces in Mindanao which was placed under Martial Law by Mr. Duterte last year to stop the Islamic State-linked Maute group. **Mario J. Mallari**

# House, Senate clear way for Bangsamoro bill's OK

By Vito Barcelo

**P**RESIDENT Rodrigo Duterte is expected to sign the proposed Bangsamoro Basic Law before May 30, after both houses in the Congress agreed on one version of the BBL, Presidential Spokesperson Harry Roque said Thursday.

In a press briefing in Marawi, the Palace spokesman said both the Senate and the House agreed on one version of BBL and would be certified as urgent for speedy passage by Congress.

In related developments:

• In a letter dated May 23, Speaker Pantaleon Alvarez and House Majority Floor Leader and Ilocos Norte Rep. Rodolfo Fariñas said only the certification of the President would guarantee the timely passage of the BBL on third and final reading next week.

"We once again respectfully request that House Bill 6457 be certified as urgent by your administration," the House leaders said, referring to the BBL.

"We aim to pass the said measure on third and final reading before the sine die adjourn-

ment of Congress on June 2, 2018. Thus, we are hoping for your usual support as we work for the prompt passage of this law," they said.

Last Tuesday, the Bangsamoro Transition Commission asked the House of Representatives to give the group until Monday next week to respond to the undisclosed amendments on the peace bill principally authored by Alvarez.

• Newly-elected Senate President Vicente Sotto III on Thursday expressed hope the Senate could come up with a conservative but well-crafted proposal for a Bangsamoro Law and pass it on second reading either Tuesday or Wednesday next week.

"We would be able to pass the period of amendments by Monday, at the latest Tuesday, and pass it on second reading on Tues-

day. If we receive the certification as urgent from the President, then we do away with the three-day rule," he said.

Without the certification, Sotto said they could not approve it on third reading because of the three day rule "and we don't have three days after Wednesday."

Congress adjourns on Wednesday and resumes on the last Monday of July for the State of the Nation Address of the President.

Sotto also said the House version was much closer to what the Bangsamoro Transition Committee submitted.

"So, the bicam would take a lot of time, I think. But we're also optimistic that if the President sees the Senate version, we might get the support," he said.

"We're thinking that the BBL, if we pass it, might become the template for the regional federal states or federal areas or federal regions (under federalism)," he said.

The President earlier said the BBL would give rise to a genuine autonomous region as well as bring healing and reconciliation to the historical injustices committed against the Bangsamoro people. **With Maricel V. Cruz and Macon Ramos-Araneta**

## 'CHINA'S AGGRESSION DOES NOT DIMINISH PH'S SOVEREIGN RIGHTS'

**C**hina keeps on occupying more territories that it claims as its own despite protests from other claimant countries. It continues building manmade islands and turns them into missile bases, even as it causes massive destruction on the environment. Jamming devices in Fiery Cross Reef on Spratly Islands in the West Philippine Sea have also been detected; military planes were spotted on Mischief Reef. This is part of China's strategy to project its supremacy and advance its economic agenda and military designs.

China wants to take control of the Spratlys and obviously is interested in the Philippine Rise because of their vast economic resources and strategic location. It desires to secure all methane hydrate for its own and make the West Philippine Sea an asylum for its nuclear-armed submarine. China's government has already declared that the military installations it has built on the islands will be limited to required resistance necessities.

The Kagitingan Reef now occupied by China is also claimed by the Philippines, Taiwan and Vietnam. China's display of power signals its aggressive designs which the international community has condemned from the day the sea dispute erupted.

Nevertheless, such aggression does not diminish our sovereign rights which the UN Permanent Court of Arbitration in The Hague categorically acknowledged in July 2016.

The question is, are we allowing China to exploit our natural resources? Are we permitting it to militarize our territories? Our country should be extra concerned with this because such act poses a serious threat to our country as well as to other claimant nations. This particular issue should awaken the spirit of patriotism in every Filipino and unite the nation in asserting our sovereign right to our exclusive economic zone.

The hard part is that we cannot call for war or for a more hard line reaction. China is a global superpower with nuclear warheads and a missile arsenal that could hit the Philippines from the mainland. But if China wants to be respected as a global power, it should abide by the UN-backed arbitral court ruling that invalidated its expansive maritime claims. *Alb*

We hope China would not threaten peace and stability in the West Philippine Sea nor disrupt other countries in the exercise of their sovereign rights.

ANN R. AQUINO

EDITORIAL

# Running short in Marawi

**L**ast Wednesday marked the first anniversary of the start of the siege of Marawi City—and the imposition of martial law in all of Mindanao. It weighed heavily on President Duterte's mind. At the 120th anniversary rites of the Philippine Navy the day before, he struck a somber, reflective note. "We had a very sad experience in the Marawi siege and we all know that we've fallen short in some respects in the way it was handled."

He meant this in both an official and personal capacity. He lamented the number of deaths, saying he did not expect that the Maute group would have "so much ordnance and that the fight would take us about four months to finish." (It took exactly five months; the military proclaimed complete victory on Oct. 23.) But he also acknowledged the impact the siege would have on his own legacy, saying he knows it would leave "a dent in my own history when I go out of government service."

"All of these faults, if it is indeed one, or our faults, it belongs and it falls on my shoulders as commander in chief," the President said.

He is right. The excessive use of force he authorized the Armed Forces to use resulted in the destruction of a large part, the very center, of the country's only Islamic city. The scale of the bombardment was such that the Maute group, which sought to reinvent itself as the Mindanao branch of the so-called Islamic State, used the devastation of the city as propaganda; the group said it wanted to save the city from the government, and in retaliation the government was destroying the city.

The complete military victory may have undermined the power of such propaganda—but the real danger lies ahead. The heart-stopping images of the ruined center of Marawi have the potential to radicalize many young and even not-so-young Muslims.

The President knows this only too well; this is part of what he means when he says Marawi will also leave a dent in his legacy.

But what is truly risky, for the Duterte administration and for the country as a whole, is an incomplete, incoherent, even incompetent approach to the rehabilitation of the city. That is what will truly

already under great strain.

First, and as the International Committee of the Red Cross has pointed out, around 230,000 residents of what was once a thriving urban center remain displaced, one year after the siege started. Using taut diplomatic language that could barely contain the urgency of the matter, the head of the ICRC delegation in the Philippines called for greater efforts from the government. "Efforts to rehabilitate Marawi and assist its people must be stepped up to reduce the suffering of thousands of those who were displaced over the past year. The efforts are there, but these must match the growing needs of those who face prolonged displacement and are close to despair," Pascal Porchet said. Worse, as many as 65,000 of the displaced will not be able to return to their area for the next two to three years—and the seeming lack of urgency on the part of the government can only amplify the sense of frustration and injustice that many of the displaced already feel.

Second, and as the Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism has reported, the "vaunted multibillion-peso rehabilitation and reconstruction program remains a patchwork of disconnected promises mired in multiple problems." Worse, the rehabilitation plan looks ready to accommodate Chinese companies blacklisted by the World Bank and contractors associated with Mindanao political clans. At the same time, despite all the talk of consultation with stakeholders, there is a growing sentiment in the city that the needs and insights of the residents themselves are not being truly heard. This seeming lack of respect for their experience can only add stinging insult to grievous injury.

Third, despite the all-clear, military rule in Mindanao continues. This is a festering source of unhappiness in Marawi and its surrounding areas. Rubber-stamped by an accommodationist Supreme Court, the imposition of martial law and the suspension of the privilege of the writ of habeas corpus has driven concerned citizens to argue their case before Congress and in the streets. This seeming overkill, this unnecessary show and use of force, can only sharpen the sense of discrimination the proud citizens of the Islamic City of Marawi now feel. *My*

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## A LAW EACH DAY

[Keeps Trouble Away]

JOSE C. SISON

### More proactive and effective moves

Corruption in the government is still rampant despite Duterte's supposed all out war against it. In fact when he assumed office, one of the first plans of action he announced is that he will eliminate corruption in six months. It is now more than two years after he made that announcement but corruption in various government agencies appears to be increasing even more.



So Duterte has to focus his attention on this problem again. And this is a most welcome move indeed especially to those who have dealings with various government offices where corruption remains unabated. Noteworthy in this connection are the recent sacking and dismissals of some Cabinet members and other high ranking officials in the various departments and attached agencies who have brazenly and openly violated the Anti-Graft Law.

But Duterte should show more determination in his fight against this seemingly unstoppable menace plaguing our country. Right now his moves appear to be more for show to promote his public image and win more admirers rather than a real honest to goodness campaign against graft and corruption. To erase this public impression, he should stop announcing in media the names of the officials allegedly involved in corruption and asking them to resign or else they will be fired. It would be better if he talks to them privately and asks them to resign especially because they have not been found guilty of alleged corrupt acts. Or he should first file the necessary charges against them and suspend them indefinitely while the case is pending. This move is more in accordance with the rule of law.

Furthermore, he should realize that firing these officials suspected to be involved in corruption will not ultimately eliminate government corruption. As shown in the past, even if officials are fired, there is no guarantee that others subsequently appointed will no longer commit graft and corruption. Duterte should concentrate more in finding the inherent reasons behind the continuous existence of corruption in government.

He should realize and consider that too much red tape in the processing of papers or in transacting with any government office is the main reason why people dealing with almost all government offices are unnecessarily forced to shell out "grease money" to obtain the necessary papers they need or the official actions they are applying for in some of the government offices.

Then it would also be better if appointments in government will be based on merit, fitness and length of service untainted by any anomaly. Politics and closeness to the "powers that be" should not be used in appointing public officials. The primary consideration for their appointment should be their proven integrity and capability to perform the functions of the office to which they are appointed. In other words, individuals to be appointed to any government office should only be those who consider public office as a public trust and who will serve the people with utmost responsibility, integrity, loyalty and efficiency, patriotism and justice, and who lead modest life (Article XI Section 1 of the Constitution).

Another questionable and disturbing action or non-action of the Duterte government concerns the expanding military presence of China in the West Philippine Sea particularly the Scarborough Shoals or the Benham Rise located between Zambales and Palawan. This area has already been declared to be part of the Philippine territory in a United Nations decision way back in 2016 through the International arbitral court pursuant to the United Nations Law of the Sea third Conference (UNCLOS-III). The UNCLOS III of which China is also a signatory, provides that said area, where China has even put up missiles, is within the exclusive economic zone of the Philippines. In other words said area is part of the "other territories over which the Philippines has sovereignty or jurisdiction" (Article I Section 1, Constitution). So in its relations with other countries more specifically China, the State or the government must pursue an independent foreign policy having as one of the paramount consideration, its territorial integrity (Section 7, Article II, Constitution).

Hence when it assumed office, the Duterte government should have tried to enforce the aforesaid decision by seeking the assistance of the United Nations which approved the UNCLOS III on which the International arbitral court decision declaring said area within the territory of the Philippines is based. But instead of doing so, the Duterte government not only ignored the decision but also allowed China to continue with its military expansion activities thereon. The initial excuse of the government was that we have "no match" to the military might of China if we tried to enforce said decision. Actually however such non-action is to maintain friendly relations with China and obtain more grants and financial assistance from said country. Lately it even blamed the past administration and the US for the ongoing military build-up in the area. Then last Monday, Malacanang merely expressed "serious concern" over the landing of long range bombers on one of the man made islands China has built in the area.

On the other hand, the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) could only say that they are already "taking the appropriate diplomatic action necessary to protect our claims and will continue to do so in the future, but "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 South China Sea."

So as suggested by former Foreign Affairs Secretary Albert del Rosario who spearheaded the filing of the action challenging China's vast territorial claims before the International Arbitral Court in The Hague, "Filipinos should now convince Duterte to be more proactive and assertive in defending what is ours."

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# COMMONSENSE

MARICHU A. VILLANUEVA

## Lawfare, not warfare, in South China Sea

Former National Security Adviser (NSA) Roilo Golez has found an ingenious buzzword to stir up the sense of nationalism, if not patriotism of Filipinos. Trained on psy-war techniques at the Annapolis Naval Academy as a young cadet, Golez has started waging the so-called *lawfare* as a peaceful assertion of the international court ruling on our country's claims in our overlapping maritime territory in South China Sea.



Golez is calling for *lawfare*, not warfare, amid China's increased militarization of reclaimed reefs, atolls, and shoals that has been turned into man-made islets and islands in South China Sea. The offered solution by the ex-NSA chief was in obvious reference to President Rodrigo Duterte's stand against those agitating for stronger response – short of going to war – to prompt Beijing to abide by The Hague arbitral ruling on the South China Sea in favor of the Philippines.

Citing Collins Dictionary, Golez quoted *lawfare* is defined as "the use of the law by a country against its enemies," especially by challenging the legality of military or foreign policy. The latest jargon *lawfare* traces its origin from the words law and warfare.

Two years after The Hague ruling, Golez noted with concern the seeming lack of urgency on the part of President Duterte to assert this favorable ruling to the Philippines. The Hague Arbitral Court set aside the nine-dash claims of Beijing over the entire stretch of South China Sea.

Golez said The Hague ruling is now part of the international laws that the Philippines can invoke aside from those existing ones under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) to back our country's sovereign rights. As responsible members of the world community, countries big and small like China, the United States, the Philippines and others must respect and comply with such international laws.

**Golez offered "lawfare" as a way that the Philippines can wage its rightful claims in South China Sea.**

Since The Hague ruling was handed down a few weeks in 2016 when he first assumed office at Malacanang, President Duterte has placed it at the backburner while reigniting the once strained and icy bilateral relations with China. President Duterte has said it then and up to now, there will be a proper time to take up The Hague ruling with China to assert with conviction our country's claims over the West Philippine Sea.

Recent activities of China in its reclaimed islands in Mischief Reef, Subi Reef and Fiery Cross that are now armed with missiles, warships and long-range bomber

planes have alarmed the US, Australia, Japan and other claimant countries in South China Sea like Vietnam, Thailand, Malaysia and Taiwan.

Lately though, the former Davao City Mayor has noticeably changed his policy tack and now often mouths "it's all geo-politics" in trying to calm down renewed agitation to assert The Hague ruling following the increased military activities of Beijing in South China Sea. Refusing to be called a "strongman" because he is not a dictator, President Duterte conceded he could not allow a situation where the Philippines will enter into an armed conflict, fully realizing we stand to lose in this war.

During our *Kapitan sa Manila Bay* breakfast forum last Wednesday, Golez renewed his appeal to President Duterte to compel the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) to file a much stronger worded diplomatic protest and to convene the National Security Council to assess the magnitude of the threat posed by China's militarization moves in the South China Sea.

Golez offered "*lawfare*" as a way that the Philippines can wage its rightful claims in South China Sea.

Through this, he pointed out, it would meet the stand of President Duterte against engaging in "warfare" with Beijing and he expects many countries will support the Philippines in this diplomatic tact.

Golez along with Undersecretary Martin Diño of the Department of Interior and Local Government (DILG) were my featured guests in this week's *Kapitan sa Manila Bay* that we hold at Cafe Adriatico in Remedios Circle, Malate.

As one of the most active leaders of the Volunteers Against Crime and Corruption (VACC) before he joined the government service, Diño joined Golez in several anti-China rallies they had in front of the Chinese Consulate in Makati City. Diño recalled they even cut off the head of Chinese President Xi Jinping to dramatize their outrage after the coast guard ships of China drove away Filipino fishermen out of the Scarborough Shoals located in the disputed territorial waters near Zambales.

But when he first joined the Duterte administration as chairman of the Subic Bay Metropolitan Authority (SBMA), Diño said his animosity was replaced with optimism that issues between the Philippines and China are best addressed on bilateral talks. As then SBMA chief, Diño recalled having joined President Duterte as part of his official delegation to Beijing in October, 2017.

During that official visit, Diño signed a number of memorandum of understanding (MOUs) with top executives of various Chinese companies interested to engage in various infrastructure project proposals in the former American naval base in Olongapo City turned into Subic special freeport zone. As of present, Diño could not say what happened to these MOUs after leaving the SBMA to become DILG Undersecretary in January this year.

Being a former Navy officer after his graduation from Annapolis, Golez shares the President's stand that the Philippines is not a military might to engage in any saber rattling with Beijing. Moreover, he swears, he is the last person to espouse war.

While war is not an option in the South China Sea issue, methinks, President Duterte should enlist Beijing's help in his all-out war against shabu being smuggled into our country all the way to its main sources in China.

In the meantime, we can only join Golez in his *lawfare* campaign, not warfare, to help convince Beijing to respect The Hague ruling and stop militarizing the South China Sea.

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BELOW THE LINE

## Revisiting an otherwise bumpy road

By JOSE ABETO ZAIDE

**I** MAY have said a mouthful last week when I wrote (with suppressed expectation) about the time when former President Fidel V. Ramos was getting along swimmingly with the then Prime Minister Mahatir Mohammed, who at 92 years is just on his second wind as PM of Malaysia.

One who didn't think it a misplaced optimism was our former Ambassador to Malaysia Alberto Encomienda, the man at the right elbow of President Ramos when he made his official visit to Kuala Lumpur on 29 January 1993. Mahatir would return the visit to Manila on 3 February 1994. From his body English in his narration of the exchanges between the two-like minded leaders, Encomienda was nostalgically hopeful.

Encomienda recalls that the first Ramos and Mahatir meeting was under four eyes for two-and-half hours, after which the two leaders emerged and announced a new baby named BIMP-EAGA. After the Ramos visit in Malaysia, Mahatir told his cabinet to open all doors to the Philippines. The chemistry was contagious, and we were probably closest to a solution to the Sabah issue by bridging sovereignty with cooperation.

A defining moment in bilateral relations. In welcoming the return visit of Malaysian Prime Minister Mahatir, Ramos quickened the pace: "We cannot change history. But we, as leaders, can change its future course. We cannot change the history that tore our countries apart. But we can shape the history that is bringing us together again."

Both leaders set aside the things that hampered relationship and transformed their relations into a new partnership in which the relative significance of the difficulties between the two sides could be more easily finessed. They converted problem into opportunity, turning their partnership into a force for the security of both countries, the prosperity of their peoples, and the peace and stability of the region.

Results manifested almost immediately. Philippine-Malaysian relations, anchored on mutual interest in the strengthening and consolidation of ASEAN and expeditious achievement of the ASEAN Free Trade Area, were fundamentally transformed. Solidarity



was a vital force for peace and progress in the region.

Waves of Malaysian businessmen would come to Luzon, the Visayas, and Mindanao, to Subic and Davao Exchanges among our parliamentary, cultural and information sectors.

#### Growth area in East ASEAN

East ASEAN growth area: Mindanao, East Malaysia, East Malaysia, Brunei Darussalam, and Eastern Indonesia, encouraged by their national governments

Their assets and strengths linked by modern communication and by vastly improved air and sea transportation, goods and capital flowing freely among them. (Malaysia Airlines flying to Cebu, and Philippine Airlines between Zamboanga and Labuan.)

The Joint Commission charted fruitful cooperation in agriculture and fisheries, science and technology, tourism and culture, and trade and industry.

Fisheries cooperation in the maritime area, where there are overlapping claims. (This is consistent with 1992 Manila Declaration for cooperative endeavors in the South China Sea and peaceful approach to the disputes in the area)

Joint Committee on Border Cooperation for the movement of people and goods across common border effectively facilitated and regulated.

There was the initiative to accredit the 11 heirs of the Sultan of Sulu. Besides the challenge of bringing the 11 families to agree, many others wanted a piece of the action. There was UP Prof Nur Misuari whose wife's lineage had a claim, and Misuari himself, as descendant of a grandfather who fought for the Sultan of Brunei, was eligible as beneficiary of the largesse on Sabah. Mahatir's answer to cover all claimants was to provide a foundation to benefit not only the heirs but to extend the benefits to the largest number.

BIMP EAGA was conceived to address the social and economic development of the less developed and remote territories on the eastern side of the ASEAN. There were initially four strategic pillars - Food Basket, Connectivity, Tourism, and Environment. A fifth pillar, Socio-Cultural and Education, was added in 2015. The focus areas covered the entire sultanate of Brunei Darussalam; the provinces

of Kalimantan, Sulawesi, Maluku and West Papua of Indonesia; the states of Sabah and Sarawak, and the federal territory of Labuan in Malaysia; and Mindanao and the province of Palawan in the Philippines.

Fast forward to PDU30. At President Rodrigo Duterte's visit to Malaysia on November 9-10, 2016, DTI Secretary Ramon M. Lopez met with business leaders and government officials to strengthen trade ties between the two countries. Sec Lopez identified increased collaboration in tourism, halal industry, and Islamic banking among key areas for cooperation between Manila and Kuala Lumpur. Good initiatives, but just scratching the surface.

If PDU30 were to give a fillip to the promise of BIMP-EAGA's 1.5 million square kilometers of land with 70 million people, there is perhaps no better duo who can do this than the elder statesmen who were there at the birthing of the BIMP-EAGA. Mahatir has his hands full as prime minister of Malaysia; but he can be depended on as steadfast supporter of the initiative. Ramos sees the ASEAN economic community move toward a single market and production base, evolving into a competitive economic region with the freer flow of goods, services, investment, capital, and skilled labor towards greater engagement in the larger ASEAN Community. It is also just a short step to China's Belt and Road Initiative.

*Postscript* To make this happen Ambassador Encomienda adds, "We need a Joey Concepcion to fill in the private sector role which can give a second wind to the BIMP EAGA in the ASEAN program."

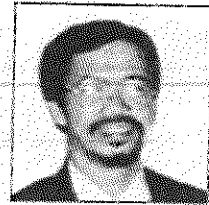
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"COMFORT WOMAN". Manila City Administrator Jojo Alcovendaz said that Manila will get back the statue undergoing repair -- but not at its original site on Baywalk area on Roxas Boulevard. The reason? DPWH will construct a footbridge in the location. (Gabriela, which champions the cause of women, wants to fathom the real reason for the relocation of the "Comfort Woman" statue. I hope they don't put it next to the comfort room.

FEEDBACK: [josecabetozaide@gmail.com](mailto:josecabetozaide@gmail.com)

PUNCHLINE

Graft cases to Ombudsman; we'll defend PH territory — Palace



By FRED M. LOBO

ends. Tsk-tsk.

Such practice is unacceptable, Digong The Punisher said.

MALACANANG said it is leaving to the Office of the Ombudsman the task of investigating and filing corruption charges against government officials fired by President Duterte.

Let OO exercise its constitutional mandate against corruption, the Palace said.

The Palace said the President has fired in recent weeks several appointees for alleged involvement in corruption or abuse of power.

Be lily-white in public service, DU30 insists.

Rogue said the recent cases of firing should serve as warning to government officials to avoid seeking favors or influence from the President's relatives.

Thou shall not use DU30's name in vain. No to "Kamag-anak Inc.!"

"The Ombudsman should look into it because it has the constitutional mandate to conduct preliminary investigation to determine if they should be charged in court for violating the anti-graft law," presidential spokesman Harry Roque said in a press briefing.

Yes, the ball is now in OO's court.

It added that Cesar Montano, chief operating officer of the Tourism Promotions Board (TPB), resigned after new Tourism Secretary Bernadette Romulo Puyat questioned the agency's P320-million "Buhay Carindera" culture and food promotion project which was reportedly awarded without public bidding.

From "Buhay Carindera," it's back to "buhay-artista" for Cesar M.

Meanwhile, Malacanang said it will protect and defend Philippine territory amid China's increased military buildup in the South China Sea.

"We will uphold our right in the sea that's part of our exclusive economic zone but at the same time move on with our bilateral relations," presidential spokesman Harry Roque said in press briefing.

Roque pointed out there should be accountability of public servants even after being dismissed by the President.

Accountability begins where firing

Earlier, the President fired Transportation Assistant Secretary and fraternity brother Mark Tolentino "for having dealings" with a presidential sister about a government project, the Mindanao railway project.

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," Roque added.

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

"The recent introduction by China on Woody Island of the H-6K long range bomber that can carry nuclear armed cruise missiles" is a cause for alarm, Carpio said.

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"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.

Too close for comfort. Whew!

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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."

"A formal protest is necessary to preserve our sovereignty," Carpio stressed.

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Vice President Leni Robredo also expressed "serious concern" over deployment of long-range Chinese bombers and urged the government to file a diplomatic protest, saying "Our Constitution prohibits the presence of any nuclear weapons anywhere in the Philippines."

Translation: No nukes or we'll rebuke! <sup>10</sup>

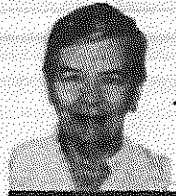
## Independent foreign policy?

THE independent foreign policy that this country has been told the government has embarked on is quite puzzling. Usually a major change in such a field is the product of a well-thought out plan with a program of steps that lead to the change without upending existing positive relationships or creating unnecessary hostility. The whole project or program is undertaken with professional assistance and expertise, usually from the Department of Foreign Affairs. And the public is informed beforehand what to expect, what will change. And it should obviously be for the best of the country.

What we see is sudden emotional flare-ups based on sensitivity to criticism taken personally or outright unexplainable hostility brought to the fore. Meanwhile, the Department of Foreign Affairs has to cope, explain, act and manage the aftermath of these upheavals.

The issue of China's occupation and militarization of islands that the Philippines has rightfully considered its own over centuries is a case in point.

Is it independent to allow such a situation without a diplomatic protest at least? Will a diplomatic protest necessarily be considered



AMBIENT  
VOICES

MA. ISABEL  
ONGPIN

a declaration of war? It is taking a rightful and lawful stand for the world to take note and for China to understand and act according to the rule of law.

Of course, we are not the equal of China in military might but we do have a moral right to protest what can only be considered bullying by a superpower of a small and weak state. This cannot be considered friendly despite the pouring of monetary and in-kind assistance. I certainly hope it is not bribery.

The International Permanent Court of Arbitration's ruling that the disputed islands are in our jurisdiction is a moral and legal victory that we own and yet we seem not to take into account. This country went through the judicial process, paid for it with taxpayers' money and emerged victorious. Why are we retreating from that victory and acting as though we are oblivious to it?

Does the above have to be settled by war or violence or force? There is a rule of law, which we

have every right to insist on.

Yes, peaceful means must be used to come to a resolution that is just and fair. Simply allowing occupation of what clearly belongs to us may be peaceful but it is not just or fair.

Our Constitution clearly defines these outlying islands and islets as being part of our national territory. Therefore, we must defend what the Constitution states, we cannot ignore that or cease to protest the violation that is going on. That could be called pusillanimous.

The late Senator Angara, referring to the Chief Executive, said he listens to sensible advice by sensible advisers. He then went on to say that sometimes they are not around, are ignored or are not recognized for the expertise that they can give to assist the Chief Executive in managing issues.

It is time to listen to them — the jurists like Acting Chief Justice Carpio who has become an expert on the matter of our West Philippine Sea claimed territories and the law of the sea and its jurisdictions, and professor Jay Batongbacal, an expert in maritime law. Even the lawyers that won the case for us at the Hague could be called on for advice. They can help. They should be listened to.

They all say the islands are ours, that we have to protest their occupation and their militarization. The situation that China has brought about near us implies that the use of force could suddenly occur with other nations in the disputed waters, countries that are equally ready to answer violence with violence.

Where does that leave us? When the elephants fight, the little creatures are collateral damage.

But little creatures have moral rights, can display moral superiority and moral virtue like courage to call a spade a spade, invoke the rule of law, use every means except violence to defend their rights. A bully becomes more of a bully when the victims fold or appease. It is the law of nature, the dark side of human nature that leads to bullying.

We are all humans in this China Sea equation. Let us use what human beings have — the use of reason, acquired expertise, the rule of law, the use of diplomacy, advice. That is not throwing the gauntlet for a war. It is trying to make a just peace.

It is time to listen to good advice from the expert resources around — experts in foreign relations, the law, the Constitution. Time to take the right stand.

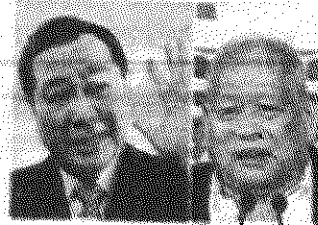
## Intellectual dishonesty the likes of Justice Carpio's will keep PH as US proxy in Asia

BY RIGOBERTO TIGLAO  
Columnist

**F**OR starters, Supreme Court Senior Associate Justice Antonio Carpio shouldn't be blabbering about our territorial disputes with China, or with any other nation.

He is not a private individual, but

► TiglaosA6



■ The anti-China justice and his guru, Ramos' national security adviser Almonte.

a member of the country's highest tribunal, and as such, his words carry the weight of the prestige and integrity of the Supreme Court that represents the third branch of our Republic. Have you ever heard a justice of the US Supreme Court comment on America's numerous territorial disputes, or its military invasions of sovereign nation, or even about Russia's alleged expansionism?

Carpio should study our laws. It is the President who is the chief architect of the Republic's foreign policy. Would he appreciate if the executive branch disputes the Supreme Court's decisions, calling what it doesn't like unconstitutional or unpatriotic?

To understand this: Will Carpio's words on the South China Sea issue carry the same weight, after October next year when he steps down from office? Or will he be relegated to the same level as many analysts in this town like Richard Heydarian, Victor Manhit or even Rey Casiple, eager-beavers in reading their names in the newspapers?

Why is Carpio talking about our territorial disputes with China when he isn't even an expert on international law, but has engaged for most of his legal career in the more lucrative practice of corporate law?

Patriotism? But instead of clarifying issues, he obfuscates them and picks only the data that would portray China as out to conquer the Philippines. If President Duterte ever believed Carpio's claims, and if hypothetically we had enough arms, we would have gone to war with China

## Carpio is scaring us

Only recently, Carpio issued a statement to the press: "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-dash line as China's national boundary in the South China Sea."

Carpio obviously intends to scare us, and he doesn't explain why he refers to "huge air and naval bases," when all of China's infrastructure on reef and atolls in the South China can't compare for instance to the former US military bases in Subic and Clark, or to the US Seventh Fleet base in Yokosuka and its 3rd Military Expeditionary Force base in Okinawa.

Carpio refers to China's "nuclear-armed strategic bombers" to create an image in our minds of a fleet of warplanes with nuclear bombs in their bomb bays sitting on reclaimed island near us, ready to blast the Philippines back to the stone age, unless we acquiesced to that nation's "imperialist" expansion.

But the bomber that landed on Woody island is only *technically* described by the US defense department as "nuclear capable," not nuclear armed. Even at the height of the Vietnam War, I don't think the fleets of B-52s that regularly refueled at Clark Airbase were reported as "nuclear armed," although they were certainly nuclear-capable.

But more importantly, Carpio didn't explain that the Chinese planes landed on the biggest island of the *Paracel* group, which China has controlled since 1974, or 44 years ago, and which we aren't claiming. That's at the part of the South China sea farthest to us, and nearest China, where we have no business to be commenting on.

Carpio even had the gall to claim: "Any self-respecting sovereign state will immediately formally protest such encroachment on its sovereignty and sovereign rights. The Philippines must do no less." But how could China's landing of its planes on an island it has claimed and occupied for 44 years be an encroachment on our sovereignty and sovereign rights?

## Carpio confuses Filipinos

Carpio is trying to confuse Filipinos, to put in our minds the very wrong idea, which Vice President Robredo also had, that the Chinese planes landed on an island near our Pag-Asa island in the Spratlys.

If Carpio is convinced that there is militarization in the South China Sea threatening our sovereignty, he should also protest the regular patrols of the US Pacific Fleet, with its nuclear aircraft carriers and nuclear-armed submarines, in the South China Sea, ostensibly to ensure freedom of navigation.

Carpio is a vociferous anti-China partisan, and he has long concluded that China is out to conquer or at least control Southeast Asia – which has for decades been the US propaganda line.

Carpio's anti-China bias is obvious in his 247-page ebook, *The South China Sea Sea Dispute: Philippines Sovereign Rights and Jurisdiction in the West Philippine Sea*.

While pretending to be a scholarly work with over 100, mostly medieval maps, the book from the start reveals its anti-China bias by which only facts that confirm its conclusion are presented.

Carpio himself reports how he got his views on China from former President Ramos security adviser Jose Almonte, one of the most pro-American Filipino officials I've ever met, permanently trapped in the Cold War era. Almonte, reputedly Ramos'

intellectual guru, was Carpio's colleague in Malacañang when he was Ramos' Chief Presidential Legal Counsel.

## Carpio got it from Almonte

In his book's Acknowledgments section Carpio wrote:

"Almonte gave me a comprehensive overview of the geopolitics in the Asia-Pacific region. In the two decades since China seized Mischief Reef from the Philippines in 1995, Almonte has enlightened me, over monthly or bi-monthly dinners at his house, on the national security issues facing the Philippines from the time of the Vietnam War until the present and in the near future.

"In mid-2011, I asked Almonte which shoal or reef would China seize from the Philippines next. He immediately answered without any hesitation: Scarborough Shoal. I completely agreed with him for two reasons. First, Scarborough Shoal is essential for China to complete a triangle of airbases to impose an Air Defense Identification Zone (ADIZ) in the South China Sea. Second, an air and naval base in Scarborough Shoal will allow China to protect the Bashi Channel, which is China's outlet to the Pacific for its nuclear-armed submarines. Such an air and naval base is a dagger pointed at Manila.

"My long-running conversations with Gen. Almonte made me decide to embark on an advocacy — to convince the Philippine government to question the validity of China's nine-dash line before an UNCLOS tribunal."

I would have expected a Supreme Court justice to get the views of others, especially experts and academicians on the complex topics of modern China and the South China Sea, other than this long-retired cold-warrior, on this important foreign policy issue confronting the country. But it seems he believed everything Almonte said.

Facts reveal Carpio's undeniable bias here. Carpio says Almonte in 2011 claimed that Scarborough Shoal would be the next to be seized by the Philippines because of so and so, with a hifalutin ADIZ even mentioned to impress us.

As I have written in so many columns, it was because of President Benigno Aquino 3rd's ineptness that we lost Scarborough or Panatag Shoal, by first arresting Chinese fishermen, then sending a warship BRP Gregorio del Pilar there, thereby militarizing the episode. Because of Sen. Antonio Trillanes 4th and Foreign Secretary Alberto del Rosario's bungling involvement, Aquino withdrew all of our vessels, letting the Chinese occupy, and permanently hold on to, the shoal. Almonte predicted this would happen?

## Can't even mention Marcos

Carpio's intellectual dishonesty is also demonstrated by the fact that he doesn't explain at all how the Philippines got the Kalayaan group of islands in the early 1970s, which was because of President Marcos' bold move to claim and occupy it — when China was in chaos during its so-called Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution. In his 90,000-word book, Carpio devotes just one sentence to explain this very audacious move of Marcos: how we got to have any territory in the Spratlys. He's just like all Yellows, allergic to the word "Marcos" that he can't even write it down: "Presidential Decree No. 1596 dated 11 June 1978 incorporated the Kalayaan Island Group into Philippine national territory on legal, historical and equitable grounds."

Carpio's melodramatic statement in an 2011 speech quoted in the book's Preface reveals what is really on his mind: "This battle to defend our EEZ from China, the superpower in our region, is the 21st century equivalent of the battles that our forebears waged against Western and Eastern colonizers from the 16th to the 20th century."

In Carpio's paranoid mind or one in which he seems himself as the country's modern hero, the Chinese are the modern equivalent of Spaniards colonizing us in the 16th century, Americans stealing our independence victories and occupying us at the turn of the century, and the Japanese invading us in 1942 — in all three cases killing hundreds of thousands of Filipinos. That is certainly a stretch: The world's colonial and neocolonial era ceased at the end of World War II.

China of course claims the South China as its territory, and at the very least intends to be the dominant superpower in the region. It is an emerging economic superpower, and like all superpowers in modern history, it believes it has a right to create a sphere of influence surrounding it in order to protect itself, especially with its vast economy.

But it is preposterous to jump up and down to claim that it aims to turn us into its colony with the People's Liberation Army occupying us.

We just have to be creative to maneuver our way to take advantage of China's emergence as a superpower, but prevent it from turning us into its neocolony, as the US did in the past century.

Carpio's intellectual dishonesty and hysteria are only intended to maintain us forever as America's lackey and proxy in the region, especially as it doesn't really have any business here, and its hegemonic power expected to diminish in this century.

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## Editorial

### Abas faces task of restoring credible election system

**T**HERE are compelling reasons to welcome the confirmation of Sheriff Nanimbayan Abas as the new chairman of the Commission on Elections (Comelec).

First, this ends a prolonged vacancy of the chairmanship of the commission after the erratic and scandal-plagued leadership of former chair Andres Bautista.

Second, it can set the stage for institutional strengthening of the Comelec and the return of the elections body to its fundamental mission of ensuring fair, free and credible elections in the country.

Third, this allows time for the nation and the government to prepare well for the mid-term elections next year, and the presidential elections in 2022. That year is certain to be a very important time in the life of the nation.

The fact that Mr. Abas is a Filipino Muslim and hails from Mindanao is salutary, because it affirms the neutrality of our electoral processes, and the non-discriminatory character of government appointments to sensitive posts. Mr. Abas will logically wish to assign equal importance to elections in heavily populated urban centers, and in the regions and provinces. His attention will be focused on the entire archipelago.

Our experience of local elections controlled and manipulated by gangs and dynasties must be systematically taken down.

The Abas accession is also an opportunity for the government and our Muslim communities to dispel the impression that elections are most porous in the Muslim south, and that most election irregularities are perpetrated in our Muslim communities, usually by the ruling government.

This could also contribute in no small way to the success of President Rodrigo Duterte's ambitious project of establishing long-lasting peace and spurring rapid economic development in Mindanao.

Mr. Abas could be ideal to lead the cleansing of our election system and processes, because he is a career public servant, a man of the law, and a political outsider. It is not insignificant that he is related to a ranking official of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF).

The task that should principally concern Chairman Abas and the other Comelec commissioners is the restoration of the Filipino people's confidence in the integrity and effectiveness of Philippine elections.

That confidence was badly shaken by accusations and counter-accusations of massive cheating in certain segments of the 2016 elections.

Upon his confirmation, Sheriff Abas spoke longingly of credible elections following our entrapment in Smartmatic manipulated election results.

Credibility must be the watchword of a new Comelec. Public faith in democracy will not be restored unless the Comelec shows real capability and determination to conduct and guarantee free, fair, peaceful and credible nationwide elections. And unless the national leadership and the leading political parties make common cause in holding free, fair and credible elections in the country.

Politicians and citizens alike have a huge stake in a reformed Commission on Elections and a credible election system.

The reform challenge cannot be accomplished overnight. But the work must begin somewhere and soonest. We think the commencement of Sheriff Abas' term as Comelec chairman is a key part of the beginning.

Let us all wish him success.

AU

## The lessons of Marawi

THE six-month siege of Marawi City last year taught us many things that we shouldn't forget. But apparently some people, one year onward, have a vastly different recollection of what happened.

A group of leftists, for instance, wants us to remember that martial law is still in effect in Mindanao as a result of the Marawi conflict. They took the opportunity presented by the anniversary of the IS-inspired takeover of the



LOWDOWN

JOJO ROBLES

southern city to tell us that President Rodrigo Duterte is the local running dog of the Americans, who are hell-bent on propping up something the local Commies call an "imperialist US-Duterte

► RoblesA6

civil disobedience and distrust, they will fail, as they did last year.

And the reason why the people of Marawi, Mindanao and the rest of the country supported the siege of Marawi was because it was stupid to be perceived to be on the side of terrorists. Besides, because the military was very professional—remember the squad of soldiers who found and returned a huge stash of terrorist cash?—none of the charges of supposed human rights violations stuck.

There is a corollary lesson that we're supposed to take away from the siege, as well: If the foreign backers of the critics

Duterte said he would much rather celebrate the anniversary of the end of the war, when actual and measurable strides have been made towards getting Marawi back on its feet. And I suddenly remembered Mar Roxas, who, on one anniversary of the Noynoy Aquino government's unnecessarily heavy-handed military action in Zamboanga City some years back, publicly congratulated the residents of the war-torn area — an announcement that was justifiably met with anger and bitterness by the affected populace, who could not believe the callousness of the pronouncement.

In Marawi, the government needs to make sure that it doesn't repeat the fiasco that was Zamboanga, whose residents are still reeling from Noynoy's video-game annihilation of their city and the half-hearted, empathy-free rehabilitation effort that followed.

Let's not allow the anti-Duterte forces to rewrite the history of what happened in Marawi, with their sob stories of non-existent atrocities, suffering and neglect. Marawi was a shining moment for the Filipino people, when we collectively stared down the most serious terrorist attack on our country, with the combined efforts of a heroic military, a responsive government and a supportive citizenry.

To insist otherwise is to hijack the truth and disrespect the sacrifices of those who took back Marawi from the terrorists. And now it's time for us to show the same effort and solidarity in building back the city.

■ ROBLES FROM A1

## The lessons of Marawi

dictatorship" through military rule.

Yes, they still said that in their placards last Wednesday, during their rally near Mendiola Bridge outside Malacañang Palace.

And they had me downright confused.

For instance, known Communist sympathizers like the Akbayan party-list, led in the Senate by the brilliant Sen. Risa Hontiveros, insist that Duterte is a Chinese stooge. They want Duterte to take a tougher stance against China in the South China Sea controversy and accuse him of wanting to turn the Philippines into a new Chinese province because he won't.

I hope they make up their minds about Duterte's true loyalties soon. Or, at the very least, if they want to protest against martial law in Mindanao again, I suggest that they hold their rallies in Marawi and other parts of Mindanao, to see if the locals agree.

Because that's one of the main things that Marawi taught us: That martial law can actually be embraced by the populace, just like the people of Mindanao have embraced it.

Relatedly, that's another thing we learned in Marawi, by the way, that resonates with someone like me who grew up in the original martial law years: That we, the civilian populace, can actually love our soldiers.

Our military men, bless them, took back Marawi from the Maute terrorists. And they did so without violating the rights of the people by wanton killing and torture, raping their womenfolk, taking their property or doing any of the things that the military was supposed to have done during the first imposition of martial law more than four decades ago.

Oh, the opponents of the government tried their best to find abuses committed by soldiers in Marawi. The Commission on Human Rights even went there, practically soliciting cases it could use against the military; but they found nothing, so they moved on.

This leads me to another lesson that we learned in Marawi: If the people do not support the bleeding-heart liberals who are so quick to find fault in government and military action and to incite

of Duterte (who automatically became critics of the retaking of Marawi last year) stay away from a local and media-manufactured controversy, it will die a natural death.

I am convinced that the American and European "partners" of the local opposition got so spooked by the Maute terror gang's daring takeover of Marawi that they could not support the usual Duterte critics masquerading as human-rights advocates. The entire world, in fact, was rooting for the Philippine government in its campaign to retake the city; they could not send the usual support that they so generously provide to what domestic opposition to the Marawi campaign there was.

Yet another thing we should learn from Marawi is that rehabilitation efforts in the aftermath of something as disruptive and damaging as last year's war will take a long time and a lot of resources. This realization, I think, occurred to Duterte when he refused to commemorate the first anniversary of the conflict, since a lot of work still needed to be done to repair the damage to the people of the once-bustling city.

## Digong as China's protectee

THE President does not want the US and other countries, agencies and individuals to interfere with his anti-poor drug war.

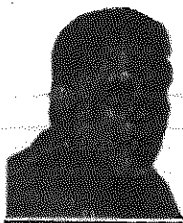
China, not known for human rights, doesn't so interfere but is busy building fortifications in the disputed seas west of the Philippines. Indeed, Digong appears to be China's "protectee" while the country has been reduced to a "protectorate" of it, to be defended by it, from the US, etc., but not from itself.

Digong may be remembered as the President who minimized, or gave away, our 2016 arbitral win, with its sorry consequences. Smart, he may think, taking the long view?

We may have been a smart people for centuries, under Spain, Britain, America and the Japanese. Our ancestors and we can be like that French priest, Abbe Sieyes, who, when asked what he did during the Reign of Terror, said: "I survived." Survival seems key to the Prez.

We survivors just may have a world record in being subjugated and humiliated. But, in 1991, we, Magnificent or Maleficent 12, voted No! in the Senate on the military bases on the basis that we had had enough of being America's last plantation.

Today, we have smart survivor Digong, the suzerain, bragging that China will protect him and us from the US, but apparently not from China itself. President Xi Jinping promised, boasted



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the protectee last week: "We will not allow you to be taken out from your office, and we will not allow the Philippines to go to the dogs."

Where do we go then?

### Silent Senate

Yes, Sec. 25 of Art. XVIII of the Constitution says: "... foreign military bases, troops, or facilities shall not be allowed in the Philippines except under a treaty duly concurred in by the Senate and, when the Congress so requires, ratified by a majority of the votes cast by the people in a national referendum held for that purpose, and recognized as a treaty by the other contracting State."

So, what do we call China's open militarization in our very own territory? Why does it have bombers in the disputed West Philippine Sea? Beijing reportedly said China had deployed nuke-capable bombers to conduct strikes at any time and strike in all directions.

The National Security Council (NSC) should have been convened yesterday. The Senate, with its primary foreign relations functions, should be more vocal and busy other than in reorganizing itself. When

the SolGen filed his quo warranto petition, it should have intervened because it would be caponized. *Natulog po yata sa pansitan.*

Now we know that Rep. Ruffly Biazon and former Rep. and National Security Adviser Roilo Golez called for convening the NSC. Fomer Foreign Affairs Secretary Albert del Rosario has spoken up. And Justice TonyCarp is doing and saying what the Executive should be aggressively saying. Veep Leni Robredo says government should protest.

Virtual silence from the Senate.

### Needless, unprovoked insults

The Department of Foreign Affairs says: "Secret." We have the right to know. The talkative Prez thrives on needless unprovoked insults. He even said last week, needlessly: "*Magtapon ka ng [Pinoy] Marine diyan sa dagat, 3 days, mag-survive 'yan. Amerikano itapon mo, one hour after, he will be floating already.*"

Pettiness or childishness is not for Presidents, from where I sit. He should stick to the dignified high road. Digong has many attack dogs. Let one of his rottweilers do it. Like in talking about the alleged illicit affairs of a slain priest. It's not for him to say so, again from where I sit. *Nandiyan po sina Sai Panelo, atbp.. Mababangis at makamandag po.* Pity the bereaved family of the priest. Digong even reportedly showed a matrix of his

alleged affairs. Could not wait for the burial and a decent interval?

Why not a West Philippine Sea matrix? China would be offended? Anyway, which President of ours has survived being at sea for extended periods in a hostile area, and survived? Such as Jack Kennedy did in 1943 and George Bush, Sr., a year later. When Jack was asked about it, he said, "it was involuntary. They sank my boat." Charming. *Kung si Digong, PI!?*

For us in the tiny human rights community who heard Jimmy Carter, Walter Mondale, John Kerry, Pat Derian, et al., speak out on human rights during the Dark Years, it hurts to read our Prez say: "*Ang nalaman lang ng mga buang na ito [Americans] is human rights.*"

Our soldiers and cops, who Digong strokes, detests *hara kiri*, "*masakit 'yun*," PMAyer Bato de la Rosa, would say, and punctuates, he would be tough in the national penitentiary.

Digong and Bato have no monopoly of courage.

### Brave Americans

Let us look at navy aviator George Herbert Walker Bush. In 1944, serving as a torpedo bomber pilot in the Pacific theater of World War 2, his squadron was attacked by Japanese anti-aircraft guns. He was forced to bail out of his plane over the ocean. His

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## Digong

group was conducting a bombing mission on a Japanese installation on Chi Chi Iima when they encountered heavy anti-aircraft fire. The plane's engine was set ablaze, yet he managed to release his bombs and head back toward aircraft carrier San Jacinto before bailing out over the water. Three other crew members perished in the attack.

After floating on a raft for four hours, a submarine crew fished a safe but exhausted hero out of the water. His bravery earned him a Distinguished Flying Cross. The previous June, he experienced a similar close call when forced to make a crash landing on water after a bombing run; a US destroyer crew rescued him from the sea. In 1944, Bush won three Air Medals as well as a Presidential Unit Citation. He flew 58 combat missions during the war.

Lt. John Fitzgerald Kennedy's encounter with a Japanese destroyer on the night of August 1, 1943 is said to be the most famous small-craft engagement in naval history.

Jack's PT-109 was one of 15 PT boats ("Patrol Torpedo" boats) that had set out to engage, damage, and maybe even turn back the "Tokyo Express," the Japanese navy's supply convoy to soldiers fighting the advance of US forces. The patrol actually came in contact with the Tokyo Express, three Japanese destroyers acting as transports with a fourth serving as escort. The encounter did not go well for the Kanos, not as tough as Pinoys.

A destroyer, the Amagiri, struck PT 109, ripping away the starboard aft side of the boat, killing more than one crew. Jack and his crew were at sea virtually for a week before being rescued.

Jack had been on the swim team at Harvard; he towed a fellow trooper by a belt clamped in his teeth, etc. Jack and his men were finally rescued on August 8, or a week later.

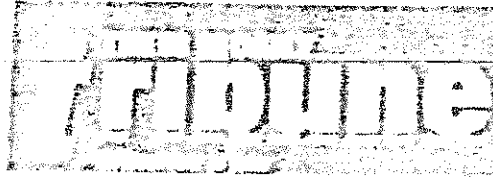
For his courage and leadership, Jack was awarded the Navy and Marine Corps Medal. Injuries suffered during the incident also qualified him for a Purple Heart. The episode's consequences were more far-reaching than simple decorations. The story followed him into politics and provided a strong foundation for his appeal as a leader.

These Kano *buangs* can be brave too. They do not deserve to be blasted by our Sinophile Prez who won't paraphrase Emiliano Zapata's: "*Prefero morir de pie que vivir en rodillas*" by saying "I'd rather die on my feet than live [in shame] on bended knees."

Kanos can be Warriors too, as Stephen Curry shows in the NBA, scoring, while another Curry, Bishop Michael, preaching, shone or bombed, in that royal wedding.

Another Warner-President, George Washington, inspired Charles Dryden to write *First in War, First in Peace* and *Last in the American League*.

Seriously, George had his bitter winter of 1777, when all seemed lost; he did not promise to ski in Valley Forge with a moveable deadline, but persevered and won, with the help of sympathizers too.



## EDITORIAL

# Not a one-way street

Critics are accusing President Duterte of being a collaborator from allegations of being timid in refusing to challenge its increasingly militaristic acts in South China Sea.

Like always, there should be a measure of interpretation in the statements of Rody regarding his "I can't go to war" admission before the Philippine Navy that sounded like him turning tail on any Chinese moves in the disputed territories.

Chinese bombers just last week landed on one of the artificial islands in the South China Sea which was after the United States said that it is a "very interested party" in the South China Sea and the Palace followed it up saying that Rody will visit Pag-asa island in the Spratlys which long has a Filipino community established there.

Before members of the Philippine Navy, he said that "I cannot go into a battle that I cannot win."

Foreign media called Rody's position as defeatist but he is merely stating the obvious: that a bloody confrontation will have the Philippines at the losing end.

Rody has proven his determination to finish what he started primarily in the campaign against narcotics.

A shift in the current policy on China which is engaging it in dialog instead of confrontation will have a domino effect on the other thrusts of the Duterte administration particularly on maintaining the economic growth momentum.

Indeed, deception was present in the development in the artificial islands which initially China maintained were meant for non-military purposes such as tourism and maritime protection.

Last May 18, the People's Liberation Army Air Force (PLAAF), however, announced it had landed bombers, including the top-of-the-line H-6K, on Woody Island, China's largest base in the Paracel Islands.

China also has built large hangars in all three of its key outposts in the Spratlys (Subi, Mischief, and Fiery Cross Reefs) that can accommodate bombers like the H-6 series as well as large transport, patrol, and refueling aircraft, according to Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative.

"The base H-6 aircraft's combat radius of nearly 1000 nautical miles means even China's basic bombers taking off from Woody Island could cover the entire South China Sea. Nearly all of the Philippines falls within the radius of the bombers, including Manila and all five Philippine military bases earmarked for development under the U.S.-Philippines Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement," AMTI said.

An H-6K, with its technical upgrades giving it a combat radius of nearly 1900 nautical miles, would dwarf this radius, putting all of Southeast Asia in range of flights from Woody Island, it added.

AMTI said future deployments in the Spratlys would bring Singapore and much of Indonesia within range of even China's lower-end bombers, while the H-6Ks could reach northern Australia or U.S. defense facilities on Guam.

While saying that he can't go to war, Rody keeps reminding China that he would raise the Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA) award nullifying the claims of China on nearly the entire South China Sea and affirmed the country's exclusive rights to 200 nautical miles of sea from its shores.

Rody is banking on relations between both countries that would be strong enough to withstand the very contentious negotiations over the territorial conflict.

In effect, Rody is using the arbitral award as a leverage to gain concessions with China primarily in the funding of his ambitious infrastructure buildup that would need P1.5 trillion in funding from the budget yearly.

Rody's timetable, however, is being assailed mainly by foreign media that he is allowing the favorable UN-backed ruling slip away into becoming irrelevant amid China's buildup in the contested areas.

Rody's argument, however, is if the United States is not willing to pick a fight with China why should he be the one to do it?

The Philippines is following a plan to effectively address the territorial conflict not according to the strictures of other nations or groups and its position should be respected.