

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



TEAM **ARMY**

Serving the people. Securing the land.

oacpa.army2012@gmail.com
OFFICE OF THE ARMY CHIEF PUBLIC AFFAIRS

NEWS CLIPPINGS

27 May 2018

Sunday



Honor. Patriotism. Duty

TABLE OF CONTENTS

27 MAY 2018

Weather Forecast-<http://pagasa.dost.gov.ph/weather/daily-weather-forecast>

PAGE NR.	TITLE	SOURCE
NATIONAL NEWS		
1-3	Rody mobilizes gov't team vs rising prices	Phil Star p. 1
4-5	Duterte orders DOLE: convene wage boards	PDI p. A1
AFP/ SECURITY RELATED NEWS		
6-7	PH starts repairs on Pag-asa airstrip	PDI p. A3
8-9	Phi repairs Spratlys runway	Phil Star p. 1
10-11	PH begins runway repairs at Pag-asa	Mla Times p. A1
12	PH repairs sea outposts	Mla Standards p. A1
13-14	TIEZA steps up Boracay rehab	Phil Star p. 4
15	9 drugs suspects killed in N. Cotabato shootout	Mla Bulletin p. 14
16	Joint military police team kills 9 drugs suspects	Mla Standard p. A3
17	NPA slain in CamSur clash	Phil Star p. 13
18-19	Oslo, Hanoi eyed as venue for Rody-Joma meet	Phil Star p. 9
20-21	Gov't Reds see peace talks revival in June	PDI p. A2
22-23	Sison: I don't want to be in Duterte's pocket	Mla Times p. A1
24	Joma cold-shouldered on Hanoi Gab with Rody	Mla Standard p. A2
25-26	Joma snubs Rody offer for his return	Daily Tribune p. 1
27	BBL to get major facelift	Phil Star p. 1
28-29	Civilian 'Suicide Squad' finds Moro pride in saving Marawi lives	PDI p. A9
EDITORIAL/OPINION/COMMENTARY		
30	How many island does Phi still have	Phil Star p. 10
31	A more assertive, more forceful Senate	Mla Bulletin p. 10
32-33	Seafaring is in our DNA	Mla Bulletin p. 12
ONLINE NEWS		
34	President's chief bodyguard gets new post	www.inquirer.net
35-36	6th Infantry Division gets new commander	www.philstar.com

Rody mobilizes gov't team vs rising prices

By CHRISTINA MENDEZ

As the public continues to agonize over rising prices due to surging global crude cost and the effects of the Tax Reform for Acceleration and Inclusion (TRAIN) law, President Duterte has mobilized concerned agencies and ordered them to take immediate steps to ease consumer woes and protect them from profiteers.

In an interview with *dzMM*, presidential spokesman Harry Roque yesterday said the Chief Executive is aware of the plight of consumers and is doing his best to address the situation.

He said Duterte has ordered Trade Secretary Ramon Lopez to ensure the public is protected from predatory pricing as he warned profiteers of severe sanctions if caught.

"The President is not callous or insensitive to what is happening. Nobody wants oil prices to be this high," he said in Filipino.

"Now, the President wants three things done - first, for the DTI (Department of

Turn to Page 8

Rody From Page 1

Trade and Industry) to monitor and apprehend violators of the law on standard retail price," he said. He estimated some 70 percent of businessmen could be taking advantage of the situation.

The Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE), upon Malacañang's instructions, has also asked regional wage boards and other groups to convene and discuss possible wage hikes.

The Department of Energy, meanwhile, has been directed to explore the feasibility of importing cheaper fuel—especially diesel—from nations outside the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) like Russia.

Roque warned unscrupulous businessmen of hefty fines or shutdown of their establishments if they are caught engaged in profiteering. He said the DTI's surveillance teams are operating in full force.

Roque said labor chief Silvestre Bello III has ordered all 17 regional tripartite wages and productivity boards to study calls by concerned groups for wage increase to help workers weather the rising inflation. He said any wage increase would be in accordance with procedures provided for under the Labor Code.

For former Senate president Aquilino Pimentel III, a review of the TRAIN law by the Department of Finance (DOF) is in order.

As the new chairman of the Senate committee on trade, industry and entrepreneurship, Pimentel voiced concern about reports of disparity in the prices of goods in Metro Manila and other parts of the country.

Together with the committee on economic affairs headed by Sen. Sherwin Gatchalian, Pimentel said he would look into the reasons why there is great disparity in prices across regions.

"My call is for the DOF to review this. Because world oil prices have gone up and this was not within the predictions when the TRAIN was being discussed in Congress," Pimentel said over *the* radio.

He recalled that the law was based on projections that world crude prices were going down.

"So if all our assumptions were wrong, it is time that they review this and they should either suspend, reduce or repeal (the TRAIN provision)," Pimentel said.

Senate President Pro Tempore Ralph Recto said he also supports the suspension of the provision in the law that increas-

es excise tax on fuel but pointed out that there are other factors that contribute to the hike in the price of fuel and other goods.

For instance, he said the weak peso was also a factor in the price fluctuations.

However, he agreed with the proposals of Senators Paolo Benigno Aquino IV, Grace Poe, Pimentel and Joseph Victor Ejercito for the suspension of the increase in the excise tax on fuel especially now that world crude prices were nearing the \$80 per barrel mark.

Recto said the suspension could be done automatically as envisioned by Congress when it crafted the TRAIN. "They can suspend this if they wanted to," Recto said.

Appeal to President

Rep. Michael Romero of party-list group I-Pacman said he was raising his appeal for the suspension of collection of taxes on diesel and other oil products to President Duterte himself.

"I appeal to the President to suspend the imposition of taxes on fuel until inflation subsides, the peso stabilizes and the price of crude oil in the world market goes down," Romero said.

He said the price of crude is nearing the \$80-per-barrel level, while the value of the peso has fallen to a 12-year low at P52.70 to the US dollar.

He said a further increase in crude cost and deterioration of the peso would have a domino effect on consumer prices.

Romero explained that under the TRAIN law, the DOF is authorized to suspend the second and third installments of the new and higher taxes once the price of crude reaches \$80 per barrel.

He said the DOF would base its review on the three-month average cost of crude.

"However, I feel that the waiting period of three months may be a long time for the country - for the poor and middle class especially - to wait. Consider also that the effects of three months of \$80 per barrel of oil can linger for many months after," he said.

He said he would file a bill to amend the law and allow the DOF to conduct a review earlier than the three-month timeframe.

In the meantime, he added that the President could temporarily stop the collection of fuel taxes.

Other congressmen and at least three senators are also calling for the suspension of oil levies.

TRAIN imposed a P6 tax on diesel, cooking gas, kerosene and bunker fuel, which is used to produce electricity. The tax was spread over three years beginning this year up to 2020.

The amount of levy this year varies on the product. It is P2.50 per liter for diesel and P1 per

kilogram for cooking gas.

Militant groups are blaming the new and higher taxes on fuel for the spikes in consumer prices.

And what made matters worse for consumers, they said, is the 12-percent value added tax prescribed by the law.

Thus, the P2.50 tax on diesel starting in January this year became almost P3 per liter.

But a large part of the increase in the cost of 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.

Labor group Bukluran ng Manggagawang Pilipino (BMP) has also asked Malacañang to take immediate actions to arrest the skyrocketing prices of goods and commodities.

In a statement, BMP president Luke Espiritu said that Malacañang is engaged in a "blame game" by pointing to world oil prices as the culprit "instead of using the powers of the state to address the people's complaints against inflation."

"The Duterte regime is reactive only insofar as to putting the blame on other factors rather in doing proactive measures to curb the general rise in prices," he noted.

Espiritu said this "reveals the president's utter lack of sympa-

thy to a people whose pockets are being emptied sooner than their next payday or income because of inflation."

He added that in times of emergencies, the president can always enforce price regulation to "secure the lives and livelihood of the Filipino people."

"Every peso increase in the price of basic necessities spells disaster to the workers and the poor. Yet he only lifted a finger to blame the world market rather than to sign a decree to curb prices, he maintained.

According to Espiritu, the "president's lack of empathy to the wails and woes of the Filipino majority" is evident in his "continued implementation of the neoliberal economic policies, which he adopted from his predecessor and favorite punching bag Noynoy Aquino."

He said that Duterte's "so-called platform for change is a scam and we have not seen any major change in our country's economic policies."

"Duterte only needs a kind heart and the political will to implement the reversal of the deregulation for oil prices, for this temporal but immediate situation, which should be the first step towards the outright repeal of the oil deregulation law," he added. - With Jess Diaz, Lawrence Agcaoili, Marvin Sy, Sheila Crisostomo

DUTERTE ORDERS DOLE: CONVENE WAGE BOARDS

STORY BY JULIE M. AURELIO

Malacañang announces the move as consumer prices continued their fastest rise in five years and oil-producing countries planned to drive crude prices to \$80 per barrel. Suspending higher excise taxes is also an option, but a senator says there must be alternatives for the government's spending program.

A2

FROM A1

By Julie M. Aurelio
@JMAurelioINQ

Amid complaints of surging prices, President Duterte has ordered the Department of Labor and Employment (Dole) to convene regional wage boards in the hope of cushioning the impact of a weakening peso and higher taxes.

Presidential spokesperson Harry Roque said Mr. Duterte's call to convene the wage boards was one of the three measures aimed at mitigating the effects of the Tax Reform for Acceleration and Inclusion (TRAIN) Act and the depreciation of the peso against a resurgent US dollar.

"The President is not numb to what is happening, and no one

likes that pump prices are this high. He has now issued three marching orders for this," Roque said in an interview over dzMM.

Arrest profiteers

The first directive is for the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) to monitor prices of basic goods and to arrest traders taking advantage of the rise in oil prices.

The DTI's surveillance team, Roque said, has been activated to go after profiteers and close down their establishments.

"The DTI will monitor and really arrest businessmen violating the suggested retail price. Many are taking advantage of the high prices of goods. I think 70 percent of those taking advantage are businessmen," he said.

Second, the Dole was tasked to determine if there is a need to increase the minimum wages of



HEAVY BURDEN The TRAIN law has been a cross to bear for the poor, as these protesters show. —MARIANNE BERMUDEZ

workers, amid the skyrocketing prices of basic goods. "[Labor] Secretary [Silvestre] Bello instructed the regional wage boards to convene and check if the minimum wages should be increased," Roque said.

"We know that prices of ba-

sic goods are high, so there might be a need for higher wages," Roque added, clarifying that wage hikes can only be done at the regional and not the national level.

The President's third directive was for the Department of

Energy (DOE) to look for cheaper sources of petroleum products from countries that are not members of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (Opec).

Looking for cheaper oil

"The DOE is working to look for cheaper oil from non-Opec members like Russia. We will do everything to be able to import cheaper petroleum, because not all oil producers are members of the Opec," Roque said.

He said the government was looking at importing diesel first from Russia, which on Friday announced that it would increase production.

Roque explained that since the TRAIN law already provided for the suspension of higher excise taxes on fuel products should oil reach the price of \$80 a barrel, there was no need for the

President to make an executive issuance to activate safety nets.

Nearing the threshold

Sen. Ralph Recto said the government would have no choice but suspend fuel excise taxes if the price of crude oil hit \$80 per barrel, but that the Department of Finance would have to find funding for key government spending plans.

He said the revenues from the TRAIN law had been allocated for the increase in the policemen and soldiers' salaries and for the free college education program this year.

At the same time, Sen. Joseph Victor Ejercito said the government should also consider that the prices of goods were rising faster than expected, with inflation reaching a five-year high of 4.5 percent in April. INQ

PH starts repairs on Pag-asa airstrip

By Frances Mangosing
@FMangosingINQ

The Philippines has started planned upgrades and the repair of the dilapidated runway in Pag-asa (international name: Thitu), the biggest island controlled by Filipino troops in the West Philippine Sea, according to a Washington-based think tank.

Work on the "crumbling airstrip" of Pag-asa appears to have started, the Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative (Amti) of the Center for Strategic and International Studies said on Saturday.

In a brief statement, presidential spokesperson Harry Roque said: "The repair of port facilities in Pag-asa is consistent with our national sovereignty and jurisdiction."

A military officer who spoke on condition of anonymity would neither confirm nor deny the Amti report, but said that maintenance work on the airstrip had always been done, "otherwise the runway would shorten."

Amti said satellite images from May 17 showed two barges off the western edge of the runway, which has been eroded over the years.

"It appears that a grab dredger, consisting of a crane with a clamshell bucket, is installed on the smaller barge to the west, while the other carries a backhoe. Loose sediment from dredging can be seen in the water around the two barges and freshly deposited sand is visible along the northern edge of the

runway," Amti said.

It said this dredging method was similar to what Vietnam, another territorial claimant in Spratlys, had been doing at some of its outposts.

"While still harmful to the marine environment, it affects surrounding reefs at a smaller scale and is far less environmentally destructive than the suction cutter dredging undertaken by China, which destroyed thousands of acres of reef from late 2013 to early 2017," it said, referring to Beijing's artificial island-building spree.

9 PH-occupied islands

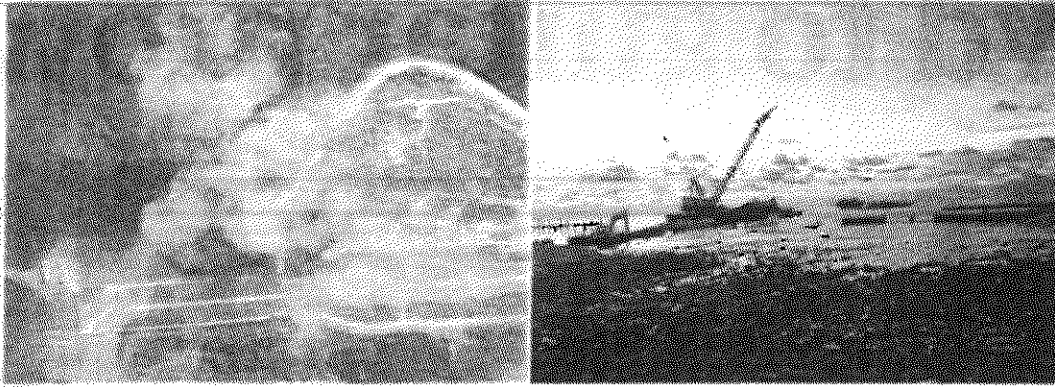
Pag-asa is one of the nine Philippine-occupied islands in the Spratlys, inhabited by about a hundred civilians and a small number of troops. The Philippines was the first to build an island runway among claimants in the Spratlys.

In April 2017, the Philippine government announced that it would repair the runway on Pag-asa and construct a beach ramp or a port to allow ships to bring in construction materials.

Later that year, then Chief of Staff Gen. Eduardo Año cited a nonbinding agreement between China and Southeast Asian countries that allowed the improvement of areas already occupied by claimants, but not new occupations.

Repairs of the eroded airstrip have been stalled for a long time over fears it would displease China. The previous administration had allotted P1.6 billion for the upgrades.

PHOTO FROM AMTI



DAN REYES

LONG-NEEDED UPGRADE A May 17 satellite photo (left) from the Washington-based think tank, Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative, shows two barges off the western tip of the airstrip on Pag-asa Island dredging the seabed to repair the dilapidated runway. The May 16 photo at right shows a closer view of one of the barges at work on the 1.3-kilometer crumbling coral airstrip that has become dangerous to aircraft.

The eroded 1.3-kilometer coral airstrip built in the 1970s has become risky for landing big planes, including several whose tires blew out due to intense braking to prevent them from overshooting the short runway.

Muddy problem

The airstrip also becomes too muddy whenever it rains and pilots have to wait at least three days before they can land.

Early this month, the Inquirer published several close-up photos showing other claimants outpacing the Philippines in fortifying its outposts in the West Philippine Sea. But all their efforts still pale in comparison to China's garrison-building.

Amti's satellite images from February 2017 show minor upgrades in Pag-asa last year, including at least seven new buildings and a "fresh coat of paint" on the island's basketball court.

A satellite photo on May 1, shows a new round-roofed shelter had been built on the eastern size of Rizal Reef (Commodore).

Amti also noted that an empty field on Lawak Island (Nanshan) had been converted into a helipad as of Feb. 20 this year. On Panata Island (Loaita Cay), a new hexagonal shelter was spotted from a May 17 satellite image.

The rest of the Philippines' outposts in the Spratlys—Kota Island (Loaita), Parola Cay (Northeast Cay), Likas Island (West York), Patag Island (Plat) and Ayungin Shoal (Second Thomas Shoal)—showed no visible upgrades, Amti said.

Lit like Makati

A former commander of the Palawan-based Western Command (Wescom), which oversees the West Philippine Sea, lamented how the Philippines

was "far behind" its neighbors in maintaining its outposts in the Spratlys.

"[Our neighbors] have piers and they have long runways similar to international airports. At night we have no lights while theirs is like Makati," said the former commander, who spoke to the Inquirer on condition of anonymity.

He also said the fear of China had further emboldened the Asian giant to encroach upon the country's territory.

"As a former Wescom commander, I feel our efforts defending, preserving our territorial integrity became useless," he said.

"We stood our ground and we were aggressive then—David against Goliath. We saw that they hesitated in bullying us because if they did, they knew we were willing to sacrifice our lives," he said. "They al-

so knew the international repercussion if they did massacre us. The whole allied nations will gang up on them. They will lose. All we need is to show them we have balls!"

The former Wescom chief said China would not risk starting an armed confrontation but the Philippines must assert the UN-backed international tribunal's ruling throwing out Beijing's claims to nearly all of the South China Sea.

'Psywar' already lost

He said China knew it would face international sanctions if it made hostile acts against Filipino forces, but Manila already lost the "psywar" (psychological warfare) to Beijing.

"China won't wallop our islands just like that because other countries will respond," he said.

He said, however, the country's allies, including the United States, cannot be expected to start any fight with China. "If you look at the Mutual Defense Treaty, our ally will only come in when we are attacked but they won't start the fight for us," he added.

He also disputed the President's notion that war was the only option to settle the territorial claims.

"There are diplomatic means," he said. "You can also boost your defenses to show the aggressor that you are willing to put up a fight. Even if you are at a disadvantage, you will face them head on. It's called patriotism." INQ AB

Phl repairs Spratlys runway

By JAIME LAUDE

The long-delayed repairs of Rancudo Airfield in Pag-asa (Thitu) Island as well as other limited development projects on several smaller military

outposts within the Philippine-claimed Kalayaan Group of Islands, are now underway, a senior security official said yesterday.

He issued this statement to confirm satellite imagery

released by Washington-based Center for Strategic and International Studies-Asian Maritime Transparency Initiative (AMTI) showing repairs have begun at the crumbling airfield

Turn to Page 2

Phl From Page 1

in Pag-asa

Meanwhile, Malacañang defended yesterday the repairs, saying these are tantamount to the Philippines' assertion of sovereignty in the contested group of islands.

"(The) repair of port facilities in Pag-asa is consistent with our national sovereignty and jurisdiction," presidential spokesman Harry Roque Jr. said.

Originally designed to be a 1,300-long runway, Rancudo Airfield, also the seat of Kalayaan town, a fifth-class municipality of Palawan with around

100 to 300 civilian residents and a small number of soldiers, is currently operating on a 1,200-meter unpaved ground.

Both ends of the runway have already eroded into the sea, making it highly dangerous for bigger planes like C-130s to land or take off. It sits 12 nautical miles from China's bustling naval and air base at Zamora (Subi) Reef.

"Even before we filed an arbitration case against China, we were already doing repairs of dilapidated facilities in Pag-asa as well as those in other outposts to at least improve the living conditions of our soldiers on forward deployment in the

region," the security official, who asked not be named, said.

He added that construction materials needed for the Kalayaan projects have been pre-positioned in Palawan.

However, at the height of the trial before the Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA), the repairs had to be stopped and hauling of construction materials was suspended so as not to affect the Philippine maritime case against Beijing.

After winning the case, he said what the Philippines got from the PCA was a piece of paper with no enforcement mechanism despite China's uncharted nine-dash line

claim to almost 90 percent of the entire South China Sea being invalidated.

"This is the reason why we decided to also proceed with our long-delayed infrastructure developments not only at Pag-asa but also in all other outposts across Kalayaan," the official said.

He also attributed the slowing down of repairs of already existing infrastructures in all nine outposts in Kalayaan to China's repeated assurance that it will stop development activities, much less militarize, their seven occupied areas in the disputed region.

Turn to Page 9

Phil From Page 2

As AMTI reported earlier, China despite its promises, was monitored to have deployed anti-ship cruise missile and surface-to-surface missile systems on man-made naval and air bases at Kagitingan (Fiery Cross) Reef, Zamora (Subi) Reef and Panganiban (Mischief) Reef.

These former three obscure maritime features are now be-

ing described as China's "Big Three" naval and air bases located in the Spratlys.

AMTI also reported that China has landed its long-range and nuclear-capable bombers on Woody Island in the Paracel Island Group, a move perceived by defense and military analysts to be a prelude for the deployment of this aircraft on the so-called

"Big Three" down south in the Spratlys.

"If Congress and the Senate will openly commit and allocate funds for the improvements on our occupied islands, then we will have a more strong stance out there," the official said.

He added that while diplomacy is necessary, which most of President Duterte's critics have been clamoring for if only to show that the Philippines is standing up against China, a strong and highly

motivated military must be always around to support this.

"Diplomacy will only work if you have the strength to back it up," he said, quoting another officer, as telling him.

As early as last year, Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana has announced the government's plans to upgrade all nine military outposts in Kalayaan, beginning with the building of a beaching ramp at Pag-asa to be followed by the repairs of Rancudo Airfield.

The defense chief said he expected no opposition from China because the Philippines is simply improving the living conditions of its soldiers.

Aside from Pag-asa, where two barges were anchored off on the western end of Rancudo Airfield, AMTI also monitored limited infrastructure developments on Rizal (Commodore) Reef, Lawak (Nanshan) Island and Panata (Lankiam Cay) Island.

"In addition to the start of

work on the runway, other upgrades are visible around Pag-asa (Thitu) Island. At least seven new buildings have been constructed in the last year, with four near the residential area on the eastern side of the island, one near the administrative facilities at its center, another along the northern shore and one at the western end next to the island's basketball court," AMTI reported last Friday - With Janvic Mateo, Christina Mendez

PH begins runway repairs at Pag-asa

BY DEMPSEY REYES

THE repair of the crumbling runway on Pag-asa (Thitu) Island has finally begun more than a year after it was announced.

In a double feature study released on Saturday, the Washington-based Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative (AMTI) of the Center for Strategic and International Studies said the Philippines had commenced the repair of the runway in the largest of its nine outposts in the

southern islands (Palawan island) at Pag-asa Island is 12 nautical miles from the oil and naval base built by China on Subi (Zamora) Reef (Pag-asa Palawan island). The island, home to more than 100

Runway A2

■ RUNWAY FROM A1

PH begins runway

civilians, was the site of a standoff with a Chinese flotilla in August last year.

It is also considered the largest island occupied by the Philippines within the disputed Spratlys.

The AMTI showed satellite images dated May 17 this year, revealing that two barges were anchored off the western portion of Pag-asa Island runway, which collapsed into the sea years ago.

"It appears that a grab dredger, consisting of a crane with a clam-shell bucket, is installed on the smaller barge to the west, while the other carries a backhoe," the AMTI said in its report.

In April last year, Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana, then Armed Forces chief Eduardo Año, then Western Command chief Raul del Rosario and other high-ranking military officials went to Pag-asa Island.

Lorenzana announced that the Philippines would be initiating the repair of the runway on Pag-asa Island.

Their visit alarmed Chinese officials.

First runway

The airstrip in Pag-asa was constructed during the 1970s and was the first runway built within the Kalayaan Island Group.

The runway is officially 1,300 meters long, but the real length is closer to 1,200 because of the collapsed portion.

According to AMTI, the restoration of the runway was made by the Philippines using a method "similar" to Vietnam's in claiming an island within the Spratly archipelago.

"While [the method] is still harmful to the environment, it affects surrounding reefs at a smaller scale and is far less environmentally destructive than the suction cutter dredging undertaken by China, which destroyed thousands of acres of reef from late 2013 to early 2017," it noted.

The think tank also noted that the coral reef surrounding Pag-asa gave a hard time to approaching large ships.

This was evidenced by the "rusting hulk" of the Philippine Navy's BRP *Lanao del Norte* (LT-504), which approached the northwest edge of the coral reef in 2004 and is still there.

The repair of Pag-asa's runway was proposed in 2014, with several officials of the military saying that a channel needed to be dredged to allow larger ships to deliver heavy machinery and construction materials to the island.

"It is likely that dredging such a channel is still part of the plan this time around," the AMTI said.

Difficult landing

Because of the condition of the runway surface on the western portion, it was difficult for Philippine Air Force aircraft to land and take off.

One example was the C-130 plane that carried then Armed Forces chief Gregorio Catapang Jr. to the island in May 2015.

Aside from the long-delayed project to reconstruct the runway, the AMTI also noted "other upgrades" visible around the Pag-asa Island.

It showed satellite images of at least seven new buildings constructed last year, four located near the residential area on the eastern side of the island and one near at the western end next to the island's basketball court.

Last year, Lorenzana mentioned that a beach ramp would have to be constructed first to assist the supplier of the materials for the reconstruction.

Satellite images released by the AMTI did not show any ramp because of a cloud cover, "and no new ramp was visible as recently as February."

Other islands

The AMTI also showed before-and-after satellite images of several islands of the Philippines in Spratlys, including the Rizal (Commodore) Reef, Lawak (Nanshan) Island and Panata (Loaita) Island.

An image dated May 1 showed that a new round-roofed shelter was constructed on the eastern side of the outpost on Rizal Reef.

An empty field in Lawak Island was seen converted into a helipad based on the satellite image dated February 20 this year.

On Panata Island, an additional hexagonal shelter has accompanied the outpost established there, which was visible in the image dated May 17.

The AMTI noted that Panata Island was "often misreported" as being on Lankiam Cay, to the east of Panata.

"While reports suggest Lankiam was once a small sandy cay, it appears to have been washed away, leaving only a submerged reef and a small, shifting sand bar," it said.

"If there was ever a Filipino facility there, it was moved to Loaita Cay and took the name 'Panata Island' on it," it added.

The Philippines also has outposts on Kota (Loaita) Island, Parola (Northeast Cay) Island, Parola (West York) Island, Patag (Flat) Island and Ayungin (Second Thomas) Shoal.

Ayungin Shoal is where the "purposely grounded" BRP *Sierra Madre* serves as a permanent facility, where members of the Philippine Marine Corps are stationed.

The Philippines also claims Balagtas (Irving) Reef.

For Jay Batongbacal, director for the University of the Philippines Institute of Maritime Affairs and Law of the Sea, the reconstruction on the damaged runway was "overdue."

"The repairs are overdue actions on existing facilities, and do not significantly change the situation between the claimants in the [Spratly] area," Batongbacal told *The Manila Times*.

Earlier this month, the AMTI reported that Beijing had landed H-6K aircraft bombers on Woody Island in the Paracels, within striking distance of the Philippines, Vietnam, Malaysia and Indonesia, among others.

22

May 2018

Manda
Standard

47

PH
Standard

PH REPAIRS SEA OUTPOSTS

By Sara Susanne D. Fabunan

THE Philippines has begun long-delayed repairs to its crumbling runway in the country's territory in the disputed Spratly Islands, Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative reported.

The renovation in the Philippines' nine outposts came amid increasing Chinese military reclamation in the disputed Spratly Island.

The AMTI said the commotion was monitored in February 2017 and May 17, 2018 by its satellites which showed minor improvements to facilities on Ragiese Island (Thitu Island) and three other of its post in 2017 until the present.

"In addition to the runway repairs, a comparison of recent imagery with photos from February 2017 shows minor upgrades to facilities on Thitu and three other outposts in the last year," the AMTI said.

Standard

Court Chief Justice Antonio Carpio warned Friday that Subi Reef (Zamora Reef) could soon see foreign bombers and fighter jets landing on its runway.

The magistrate, a foremost advocate of the Philippines claims in the South China Sea, said this is in light of a recent report that the island was now home to a small town with "sports grounds, neat roads, and large civic buildings," and could possibly host China's first troops in the area.

Carpio told reporters the presence of military-grade runways, hangars, hardened storage for ammunition, and retractable roofs for anti-cruise missiles in Chinese military installations in the South China Sea all point to the presence of fighter jets and bombers in the near future.

"What will they do with close-in weapons if not to protect valuable aircraft? All military analysts agree that China will bring their fighter jets and bombers," he said on the sidelines of a special exhibit of the Murillo-Velarde 1734 Map at the Manila Polo Club in Makati City.

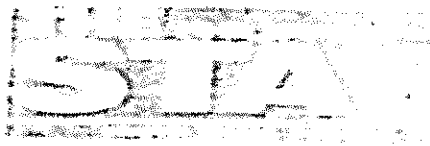
The map was among the close to 300 ancient maps the Philippines submitted to the United Nations arbitral tribunal in pursuing its case against China's expansive claims to the South China Sea.

The Philippines military has also occupied, controlled, and raised the flag over Rizal Reef and Ayungin Shoal.

Some of these were permanently occupied as early as 1970 (Lawak Island); the latest (Ayungin Shoal) in 1995.

The island is also home to 100 Filipino civilians—just over 12 nautical miles from China's air and naval base at Subi Reef.

k



TIEZA steps up Boracay rehab

By CATHERINE TALAVERA

The Tourism Infrastructure and Enterprise Zone Authority (TIEZA) has mobilized the construction of a temporary discharge pipeline to fast-track rehabilitation activities in Boracay at the onset of the rainy season in June.

"The temporary outfall will prevent flooding on various underground utilities and road construction projects while TIEZA and the Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH) augment their de-clogging activities in the drainage systems and sewerage facilities of Boracay," TIEZA said in a statement.

The outfall will have a discharge pipe extending up to 800 meters offshore of Balabag beach, catering to drainage water from the central Boracay section.

Under Executive Order No. 53 which created the Boracay Inter-Agency Task Force, the TIEZA is

directed to undertake completion of the drainage system program, to work with DPWH in the establishment of flood control infrastructures, and to ensure the completion of expansion programs of water and sewerage system in the three barangays of Boracay Island.

"The Boracay Interagency Task Force, chaired by the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR), along with the local government of Aklan, TIEZA and Boracay Water are actively pursuing programs to address the island's drainage and sewage issues to ensure Class SB quality of the beach waters," TIEZA said.

"They are urging all establishments to do their share in contributing to the speedy rehabilitation of the island by way of connecting to the existing sewerage system of Boracay Water to ensure that wastewater is properly collected and treated according to the standards of

DENR," it added.

TIEZA also clarified that the government-built sewerage system discovered at the beachfront last weekend was built decades ago, with the necessary government approvals.

"Representatives from TIEZA and Boracay Water assured officials from the DENR that the sewer system is operating and capacitized to prevent overflows to the beach waters," TIEZA said.

The agency pointed out that the major cause of manhole overflows and water pollution in Boracay is the refusal of many establishments to connect to the proper sewerage system and illegally tapping to the drainage line.

Last weekend, trainees of the Philippine Army successfully excavated 28 illegal pipes at the Boracay beachfront.

Environment Secretary Roy Cimatu said of the 28 excavated pipes, 26 were releasing wastewater to the sea. 4

Turn to Page 5

TIEZA From Page 4

"The President said Boracay is a 'cess-pool.' Those illegal pipes unearthed came from establishments that carry with them bacteria coming from human feces. It is called e-coli-form," he added.

The underground pipes built by the Philippine Tourism Authority (now known as TIEZA) that encroached into Boracay's main beach area were also found.

Cimatu was quoted as saying the discovery was "very disturbing."

"Boracay Water allayed the fears of Secretary Cimatu and presented its plan to upgrade and expand the sewer network along Balabag main road, which will accommodate higher flows coming from the beach front," the TIEZA said.

TIEZA added that Boracay Water committed to complete the Balabag Sewer Network Rehabilitation Project in four months.

"This is a faster and more feasible alternative to relocating the sewer network which may affect more establishments and require acquisition of right-of-way that may take a longer time to complete beyond the closure period," the agency said.

In a ceremony held over the weekend, Cimatu lauded the 100 trainees of the 3rd Infantry Division of the Philippine Army in Jamindan, Capiz for detecting illegal pipes.

"I will call you 'Boracay Centurion.' My order to you is 'search and destroy' the illegal pipes, not with rifles but with shovels," he added.

The Army trainees, headed by Col. Dennis Tanzo, were deployed in all three stations of Boracay's beachfront, with total length of 4.5 kilometers.

Aklan Gov. Florencio Miraflores provided shovels. The provincial government also provided three backhoes and manpower assistance in excavating buried illegal pipes.

The trainees are on a four-month train-

ing at Camp Peralta, a requirement prior to their enlistment to the Army.

President Duterte ordered the closure

of Boracay for six months starting April 26 to clean and rehabilitate the island.

- With Rhodina Villanueva

9 drug suspects killed in N. Cotabato shootout

By MALU CADELINA MANAR
and JOSEPH JUBELAG

MATALAM, Cotabato - Nine drug suspects were killed after engaging law enforcement authorities to an hour-long gun battle in Barangay Kilada here Friday night.

Senior Superintendent Maximo Layugan, director of the Cotabato Police Provincial Office (CPPO), said his men, together with the Matalam municipal police station, other police units in North Cotabato, and the 7th Infantry Battalion of the Philippine Army were armed with two search warrants issued by Judge Alandrex

Betoya of the Regional Trial Court (RTC) branch 16 based in nearby Kabacan town against Dadting Kasan and Intan Aban.

Layugan said that even before they could reach the area, they were fired at by the group armed with high-powered firearms.

The troops had no choice, he stressed, but to return fire.

Seven of the wounded suspects were brought to Babol General Hospital in Poblacion, Matalam, but did not make it alive.

Layugan has yet to get the identities of the fatalities, but said he is certain that Kasan and Aban were killed.

Another report identified seven of the fatalities as Dadting Kasan, 45; Moner Kasan, 22; Mohamiden Kasan, 25; Ding Kassan, Usop Mantis, Mujahid Mantis and a certain alias Abu.

Recovered from the scene of the encounter were several grams of shabu, assorted high-powered firearms and ammunition, including a home-made sniper rifle and a rocket-propelled grenade.

The police have yet to determine whether or not Kasan and Aban and their followers have links with drug syndicates operating in North Cotabato and in other areas in south and central Mindanao.

15

27 Nov 2019

Mindanao
Standard

Page 13

JOINT MILITARY, POLICE TEAM KILLS 9 DRUG SUSPECTS

A JOINT operation by the police and the military resulted in the killing of nine people suspected of drug dealing in a town in Cotabato City.

According to Superintendent Bernard Tayong, spokesperson for the North Cotabato Police Office, police and military operatives were about to serve a search warrant on the "lair" of drug suspects Dadting Kasan and Intan Aban in Sitio Biao, Barangay Kilada in Matalam town at about 11:15 pm. on Friday when the suspects fired at them.

The operatives fired back, killing Kasan and Aban were and seven other suspects.

"During the implementation ... subjects of search warrants fought and engaged law enforcers using high-powered firearms," Tayong said in a statement.

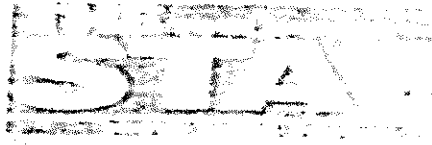
The government operatives recovered from the crime scene assorted heavy firearms, including improvised 50-caliber barret sniper rifle, rocket-propelled grenades and ammunition. No illegal drugs, however, were found during the raid.

Meanwhile, Major General Cirilito Sobejana of the Army's 6th Infantry Division vowed to support the administration's campaign against illegal drugs.

"We will sustain our active support in the PNP and PDEA's war on illegal drugs."

The police have yet to determine if Kasan and Aban and their followers are members of drug syndicates operating in North Cotabato and in other areas in south and central Mindanao. *AB*

16



NPA slain in CamSur clash

LEGAZPI CITY - A suspected New People's Army (NPA) guerrilla was killed in an encounter with government security forces in Garchitorena, Camarines Sur on Friday.

Troopers from the Army's 83rd Infantry Battalion were on patrol in Barangay Lidiong when they encountered at least 20 rebels at around 5 a.m., according to Capt. Joas Pramis, public affairs officer of the Army's 9th Infantry Division based in Pili town.

The rebels retreated, leaving behind their slain comrade, whose name was not immediately available.

No one was hurt among the troopers, who recovered two

M-16 rifles, an M203 grenade launcher and two sets of improvised explosives devices.

The military said there are about 200 communist guerrillas operating in Bicol's five provinces, mostly in Camarines Sur, Masbate and Sorsogon. **13**

- Celso Amo



Oslo, Hanoi eyed as venue for Rody-Joma meet

By JOSE RODEL CLAPANO

Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) founding chairman Jose Ma. Sison wants Oslo, Norway or Hanoi, Vietnam as venue for his meeting with President Duterte.

According to Sison, the government peace panel and the National Democratic Front (NDF) have initially agreed during backchannel talks to have Duterte attend the Oslo ceremony for the signing of the interim peace agreement.

However, Sison said the government backed out and offered Executive Secretary Salvador Medialdea to attend the signing in Oslo instead, as reported by ABS-CBN.

Sison said the NDF proposed the capital of Vietnam as a venue in consideration of Duterte's health.

He said the government rejected Hanoi and the special envoy of Norway, which

served as third party facilitator, cannot make any arrangement there as well.

"For my soonest possible interface with Duterte, the NDF has considered my meeting at the signing of the interim peace agreement," ABS-CBN quoted Sison as saying.

Sison noted Duterte had insisted to come home to meet him.

Sison reiterated he will only return to the country if there will be substantial progress in the peace talks.

Vital parts of the interim peace accord are a ceasefire deal, amnesty proclamation for political prisoners and an agreement on agrarian reform and rural development and national industrialization and economic development, key components of the proposed Comprehensive Agreement on Social and Economic Reforms.

Sison said his premature re-

turn to the Philippines would be contradictory to previous agreement to hold talks in a foreign neutral venue.

He said this would also place him and the entire peace negotiation at Duterte's mercy.

Meanwhile, the CPP urged the people to unite and oppose the national ID system.

The CPP said the ID system has long been proposed by security officials as this would facilitate mass surveillance by looking into the personal information of the bearer.

"Past regimes have failed to push the national ID system confronted with popular opposition," the CPP said.

They said President Duterte will have greater powers and can institute more "insidious measures" with a national ID in place.

The CPP said the national ID system will practically be reviving the detested *cedula* of

the Spanish empire, which was used to control the movement of people and suppress their democratic rights.

"In the hands of Duterte, the national ID system is bound to be a weapon of suppression, a weapon of mass monitoring and surveillance to track everyone's movement, and to bribe and arm-twist, especially against Duterte's political critics and dissenters," the CPP said.

The CPP said Duterte's feverish push to implement a national ID is part of his machinations to establish a totalitarian state of mass surveillance, population control, social, political and criminal profiling and mass murder.

"The draft law of the national ID system has been bulldozed by Duterte's supermajority of political allies in the House of Representatives. Will the Senate pass the proposed ID system with similar

dispatch and prove itself to be no more than a rubberstamp than the Lower House is?" the CPP said.

The CPP said many countries have used the system to collect, officially as well as illegally, information for "terrorist profiling" of suspected individuals.

"To conceal its insidious aims and dupe the people to support the proposed identification system, the Duterte regime makes false claims that the national ID will serve to expedite the delivery of government service. Such claims are put to dispute by the fact that the Duterte regime continues to cut the budget for public education and public health and other important social services," the CPP said.

"How can a national ID system help facilitate the provision of public health when government hospitals are, in

fact, being commercialized and privatized in whole and in part? If the priority of government is to provide everyone with free public health, free education, free public housing, public transportation and so on, there is no need for a national ID system for the people to benefit from these," it said.

The CPP said a national system of identification has nothing to do with the efficiency in the provision of public service.

Neither does computerization make a clean government, they said.

"This is starkly demonstrated by continuing widespread corruption in government agencies which has computerized its record-keeping and processing. Manipulation of election results in the Philippines has become more widespread, albeit less obvious, through automation," the CPP said. 9

HANOI PROPOSED AS NEW VENUE

GOV'T, REDS SEE PEACE TALKS REVIVAL IN JUNE

By Delfin T. Mallari Jr.
@dtmallarijrINQ

LUCENA CITY—The government panel and its communist counterpart are set to sign the interim peace agreement (IPA) next month to pave the way for the resumption of formal peace talks, Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) founding chair Jose Maria Sison has revealed.

Sison said back-channel consultations between the peace panels of the government and the National Democratic Front of the Philippines (NDFP) resulted in the recent approval of the IPA.

The NDFP is the umbrella group of all communist-led underground organizations that has been conducting on-and-off peace talks with the government since 1986.

Disagreements

In an online interview on Saturday, Sison said the signing of the IPA was supposedly

scheduled on June 28 in Oslo, Norway, with President Duterte sending Executive Secretary Salvador Medialdea as his representative.

Disagreements over the final venue—Mr. Duterte has insisted that the signing of the IPA be held in the Philippines—and the President's demand for Sison to return to the Philippines, however, must be resolved first.

Sison, the self-exiled NDFP's chief consultant, said he would return to the country only if there were significant developments in the negotiations.

"I have consistently declared that I will return home when substantial progress is already achieved in the GRP (Government of the Republic of the Philippines)-NDFP peace negotiations, and my comrades and lawyers are satisfied with the legal and security guarantees," he said in a statement issued from his base in Utrecht, the Netherlands.



Jose Maria Sison

The communist "supremo" said they listed the Vietnamese capital, Hanoi, as a possible venue as it is closer to the Philippines.

"Nothing is sure until there is a joint announcement [from the two panels]. Wait for the joint announcement in the second week of June," Sison said.

'Big help'

He said the signing of the IPA would contribute to the success of the peace talks and add to mutual confidence-building measures.

"The IPA would be a big help. Duterte and the military would be pleased that there would be a ceasefire and the NDFP would be happy with the amnesty proclamation to free all political prisoners," Sison said.

The IPA is meant to pave the way for a formal ceasefire between the military and New People's Army, the CPP's armed wing.

Both parties have approved the agrarian reform and rural development, and national industrialization and economic development sections of the comprehensive agreement on social and economic reforms (Caser).

Personal meeting

Considered as the heart and soul of the peace process, the Caser calls for, among other solutions to the country's

social problems, free land distribution and rural industrialization.

Sison, in a Facebook post on Saturday, said the NDFP had planned a personal meeting between him and Mr. Duterte during the signing of the agreement.

Precarious situation

"There are certain important considerations against my prematurely returning to the Philippines," he said, adding that the peace talks would be placed in a precarious situation if it would be held in the country.

"First, I would be going against the established mutual agreement to hold the peace negotiations in a foreign neutral venue. Second, I would be placing myself and the entire peace negotiations in the pocket of Duterte and at his mercy. Third, any peace spoiler or saboteur would be able to destroy the entire process by simply abducting or harming any NDFP panelist or consultant," he said.

Sison said the original plan mutually agreed upon by both parties during the back-channel consultations was to have Mr. Duterte attend the Oslo ceremony for the signing of the IPA.

Alternative site

But Malacañang rejected the idea and instead offered Medialdea as Mr. Duterte's representative, according to Sison.

He said the NDFP then offered Hanoi as the alternative venue but the government did not give a positive answer.

"Hanoi as a venue near the Philippines was proposed by NDFP in consideration of the heavy work schedule of Duterte," Sison said.

The Norwegian government's special envoy, he said, cannot make any arrangement with Hanoi. Norway has long served as a third-party facilitator for the peace talks. —WITH A

REPORT FROM GABRIEL PABICO
LALU INQ. 12

Sison: 'I don't want to be in Duterte's pocket'

THE founding chairman of the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) over the weekend said peace talks between his group and the Duterte administration would be held if he personally returned to the country.

Besides, according to some state's "former" sison, he does not want to be in the "pocket of Duterte."

In a statement released on Sunday, Sison, now chief political consultant to the rebel group National Democratic Front (NDF) of the Philippines, gave three reasons why he was shelving going back to the Philippines for now.

One, holding the talks would be "going against the established mutual agreement to hold the peace negotiations in a foreign neutral venue in accordance with the historic Joint Declaration and Joint Agreement on Waters and Immunity Guarantees."

He said the NDF previously proposed that the meeting should be in Ocala, Norson, or Hanoi, Vietnam.

The government, however, offered Executive Secretary Salvador Medialdea as the proxy of President Rodrigo Duterte in the Ocala ceremony for the signing of an interim peace agreement.

Sison said Manila did not give a positive answer for him and friends to meet in Hanoi.

Two, going back home now would be "plugging himself and the entire peace negotiations in the 'pocket of Duterte.'"

Three, Sison said any peace talks or peace settlement would involve the main peace talks by abandoning or leaving the NDF command.

He said he will only come home when there is substantial progress achieved in the peace talks.

"These conditions should be met with... 22

POCKET FROM A1

I don't want to be in Duterte's

return home when substantial progress is already achieved in the GRP (Government of the Republic of the Philippines)-NDF peace negotiations and my comrades and lawyers are satisfied with the legal and security guarantees. By substantial progress, I mean the entire Caser (Comprehensive Agreement on Social and Economic Reforms) has been mutually approved by the GRP and NDF principals."

The statement came after Duterte said he had invited Sison to return to the Philippines to continue the peace talks.

He, however, warned that he will "kill" Sison if the talks fail.

"I have invited Sison to come home. He has agreed... I will allow him to go out. I will not arrest him because that's word of honor. But I will really tell him, you son of a

b****, do not go back again here. I will really kill you." Duterte said on Thursday evening in a mix of English and Cebuano.

Sison was forced into exile in The Netherlands after peace talks failed in 1987.

Earlier this week, Sison disclosed that the interim peace agreement was expected to be signed when formal talks between the government and the NDF resume on June 28.

Duterte previously terminated the peace talks with the communist rebels in November 2017, later tagging them and their armed wing, the New People's Army, as terrorists.

Earlier this year, Duterte changed his mind and said he wants to hold peace talks again.

ROY D.R. NARRA

27

A2

JOMA COLD-SHOULDERED ON HANOI GAB WITH RODY

By Joyce Pangco Pañares

THE Communist Party of the Philippines has proposed a meeting between CPP founding chairman Jose Ma. Sison and President Rodrigo Duterte in Hanoi, but the government has rejected the offer.

In a statement, Sison, also the chief political consultant of the National Democratic Front, said the original plan was for Duterte to attend the ceremonial signing of an interim peace agreement in Oslo once both sides have firmed it up.

"But the government side backed out and offered Medialdea as the proxy of Duterte," he said.

Sison said the NDF then offered Hanoi as an alternative venue to "facilitate the attendance" of the President.

"Hanoi as a venue near the Philippines was proposed by NDF in consideration of the heavy work sked of Duterte," he said.

The government, however, "did not give a positive answer," the communist leader said, noting that Norway, as third party facilitator, could not make any arrangement with Vietnam until a consensus had been reached by both negotiating panels.

Sison has rejected Duterte's offer to

hold the peace talks in the Philippines, saying there are security issues that have to be considered in making such a move.

"I have consistently declared that I will return home when substantial progress is already achieved in the peace negotiations and my comrades and lawyers are satisfied with the legal and security guarantees. By substantial progress, I mean the entire Comprehensive Agreement on Social and Economic Reforms has been mutually approved by the government and NDF principals," he said.

"There are certain important considerations against my prematurely returning to the Philippines... I would be placing myself and the entire peace negotiations in the pocket of Duterte and at his mercy. Any peace spoiler or saboteur would be able to destroy the entire peace negotiations by simply abducting or harming any NDF panelist or consultant," Sison added.

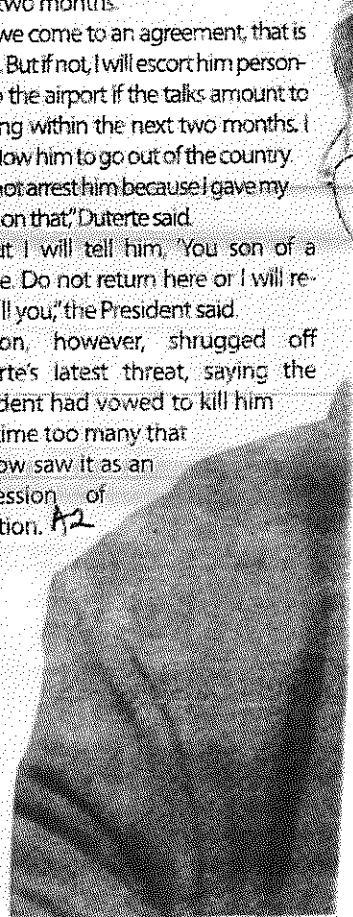
While Duterte promised that no

harm would come to Sison if he returned to the Philippines, the President threatened to kill his former college professor if the peace talks failed to produce an agreement within the next two months.

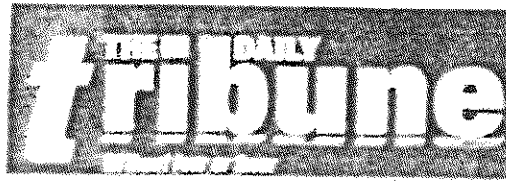
"If we come to an agreement, that is good. But if not, I will escort him personally to the airport if the talks amount to nothing within the next two months. I will allow him to go out of the country. I will not arrest him because I gave my word on that," Duterte said.

"But I will tell him, 'You son of a whore. Do not return here or I will really kill you,'" the President said.

Sison, however, shrugged off Duterte's latest threat, saying the President had vowed to kill him one time too many that he now saw it as an expression of affection. A2



22



Joma snubs Rody offer for his return

United Communist Party of the Philippines (UCPP) founder Jose Maria Sison turned down the offer of President Duterte for him to return home for the peace negotiations between the government and the communist movement and offered instead to meet with Duterte either in Oslo, Norway or Hanoi, Vietnam.

Sison offered the two venues for the signing of an interim peace agreement, which both sides are still trying to hammer out for next month.

The National Democratic Front of the Philippines

(NDFP) proposed the Vietnamese capital as a venue in "consideration of the heavy work schedule" of the president, Sison said.

Mr. Duterte said last Friday that Sison has accepted his offer for him to return home after he opened a 60-day window for the negotiations with the communist rebels in near-term. Mr. Duterte said the negotiations will be a "make-or-buy" opportunity.

"If we can understand each other, then it's good. If not, I will see to it and will personally maybe escort him to the airport if nothing would happen in two months," Duterte said in his speech during inauguration of the Davao River Bridge widening project in Davao City last Friday.

"I will allow him to go out. I will not arrest him because that word of honor but will really tell him, son of a bitch, do not go back again here," he added.

Turn to page 2

25

Joma snubs Rody offer for his return

From page 1

The "original plan" earlier agreed upon by government and NDFP negotiators during back-channel negotiations, Sison said, was "to have Duterte attend the Oslo ceremony for the signing of the Interim peace agreement."

Sison, also the Chief Political Consultant of the National Democratic Front of the Philippines added that he will return to the Philippines only when there is substantial progress in the peace negotiations.

"I have consistently declared that I will return home when substantial progress is already achieved in the GRP-NDFP peace negotiations and my comrades and lawyers are satisfied with the legal and security guarantees. By substantial progress, I mean the entire CASER [Comprehensive

Agreement on Social and Economic Reforms] has been mutually approved by the GRP [Government of the Republic of the Philippines] and NDFP principals," he said.

"For my soonest possible interface with Duterte, the NDFP has considered my meeting at the signing of the Interim Peace Agreement, packaging the ceasefire agreement, amnesty proclamation and the ARRD and NIED sections of CASER either in Oslo or Hanoi. But Duterte has insisted that the meeting be in the Philippines," he added.

Sison cited "important considerations against my prematurely returning to the Philippines" saying that his return would be going against the established mutual agreement to hold the peace negotiations in a foreign neutral venue in accordance with The Hague Joint Declaration and JASIG.

Sison added he would be placing

myself and the entire peace negotiations "in the pocket of Duterte and at his mercy." "Third, any peace spoiler or saboteur would be able to destroy the entire peace negotiations by simply abducting or harming any NDFP panelist or consultant," he added.

Gov't backed out — Sison

Sison, however, said the government panel "backed out" of having Mr. Duterte attend the signing of an interim agreement and offered Executive Secretary Salvador Medialdea to instead attend a signing in Oslo.

The government side rejected the Hanoi proposal, he added, and the special envoy of Norway which serves as third-party facilitator, "cannot make any arrangement" there as well.

"For my soonest possible interface with Duterte, the NDFP has considered my meeting at the

signing of the interim peace agreement," he said.

"But Duterte has insisted that the meeting be in the Philippines," he added.

Sison earlier told a televised interview that the signing was expected to take place on June 28 following substantial developments in informal talks in Utrecht since April.

Sison also denied Duterte's announcement that he had agreed to return to his home country during the 2-month window imposed by the president to complete the peace talks.

"I have always declared that I will return home when substantial progress is already achieved in the peace negotiations and my comrades and lawyers are satisfied with the legal and security guarantees," he said.

Packaged in an interim peace accord, he said, are a ceasefire deal

amnesty proclamation for political prisoners, and an agreement on agrarian reform and rural development and national industrialization and economic development—key components of the proposed Comprehensive Agreement on Social and Economic Reforms.

Mr. Duterte last Thursday threatened to "kill" Sison if peace talks failed, a statement his one-time college professor played down as a "term of endearment."

"It seems to me that in using strong words, he is eager to resume the peace negotiations rather than to block them," he said.

Mr. Duterte said if Sison will return again to the Philippines, he will kill the communist leader because he killed "so much of my soldiers and policemen".

"If nothing will happen, I would tell him "do not ever, ever return again to this country. I will kill you,"

he said.

Sison had expressed openness and readiness to resume peace negotiations which the President cancelled in November last year due to the series of attacks launched by the New People's Army on civilians and government troops.

In response, Duterte said in an event in Legazpi on April 23 this year that he is ready to give the communist rebels another chance to talk peace.

Duterte had even said he would allow the communist rebels to set up a camp where they could talk without arms around.

The President assured that Sison will be given complete freedom to move around without being harmed by the military and police.

Sison went into exile in the Netherlands after the two-decade regime of former President Ferdinand Marcos ended in 1986.

24

BBL to get major facelift

By MARVIN SY

The Senate's final version of the proposed Bangsamoro Basic Law (BBL) could be very different from what was proposed by Malacañang and the Bangsamoro Transition Commission.

While the period of interpellation on the BBL was completed last Wednesday and the period of amendments set to start next week, the sheer number of proposed changes from two senators alone could very well change the shape of the bill if these are adopted.

Interviewed over *dwiz* yesterday, Senate President Pro

Turn to Page 6

BBL From Page 1

Tempore Ralph Recto said he has around 150 amendments to the BBL, which he has prepared for the continuation of the plenary debates on the bill tomorrow.

Recto said Senate Minority Leader Franklin Drilon has more or less the same concerns as he has and these could very well be brought out next week as amendments to the BBL.

According to Recto, among his concerns about the BBL is its name, which he said connotes the establishment of a separate state.

He explained that he has no issue with devolving the powers from the national government to the proposed Bangsamoro state, but if this results in the reduction of powers of the national government, then this would be a problem for him.

Recto noted that shared and exclusive powers, neither of which are found under the Constitution, are also something that must be addressed in the BBL.

"I am in favor of the peace process but let us do this properly," he added.

Recto also has an issue with the government providing an annual allocation of P150 million to the Bangsamoro state but expects nothing in return from them for national development.

"I am in favor of passing the BBL but let us make it more responsible," the senator added.

Recto is confident his proposed amend-

ments would be adopted based on his discussion with the bill's sponsor, Majority Leader Juan Miguel Zubiri.

He said that the points he and Drilon raised were all meant to ensure the final version of the BBL would pass the test of constitutionality so that it would not suffer the same fate as the Memorandum of Agreement on Ancestral Domain of the Arroyo administration, which the Supreme Court declared unconstitutional.

Sen. Aquilino Pimentel III has urged his colleagues to be more liberal in their treatment of the BBL, considering that it is also a product of a political process.

The BBL is seen as the final piece of the peace process between the government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front that the administration is banking on to achieve lasting peace in Mindanao.

Pimentel said he understands why members of the Senate are very conscious of the constitutionality issues of the BBL, the very reason the bill is being scrutinized carefully.

Senate President Vicente Sotto III said he expects the BBL to be approved on second reading on Tuesday or Wednesday next week.

If Malacañang is able to transmit President Duterte's certification of the BBL as an urgent bill by Wednesday, the bill could be approved immediately on third and final reading.

Civilian 'Suicide Squad' finds Moro pride in saving Marawi lives

By Yara Lukman
@yarylukman

Emely Comaling recalled having had a hard time memorizing an Islamic prayer that her Muslim colleagues had taught her. But it was something she had to master—for her life depended on it.

By reciting the prayer, she could pass herself off as a Muslim—and be spared from harm—should Islamic State-inspired gunmen ask for her identity.

"Right now, I really don't remember any Islamic prayer that was taught to me. I only remember greetings like 'Assalamualaikum' (peace be with you)," said Comaling, one of the Christians who were trapped in Marawi during the five-month siege of the city last year.

Comaling recalled her experience in a panel discussion during the launch of the documentary film "Maratabat: Mga Kuwento ng Kagitingan sa Marawi" (Honor: Stories of Valor in Marawi), at Yuchengco Museum in Makati City on Thursday, a day after the first anniversary of the siege.

Family honor

"Maratabat" means "sense of pride and honor" in the Maranao dialect. For families belonging to the Moro ethnic group, the loss of such honor could be enough to trigger a clan feud, or a "rido."

But in the context of the Marawi war, it also means finding pride in helping and saving one's fellowmen in life-and-death situations and later helping them heal and rebuild.

"Maratabat" is thus applica-



SAVING THE QURAN A Muslim man recovers copies of the Quran amid the rubble and ruins of Marawi City. —BOBBY TIMONERA

ble to non-Muslims, said Norain Ahmad Mohammad, a youth leader and one of the residents of the Marawi area that became "ground zero" of the military operations.

Prominent Lanao clans

The documentary recounts the deeds of the "Suicide Squad"—a group of volunteers from prominent clans in Lanao del Sur—who rescued people trapped at the height of the Marawi siege. It highlights the stories of Muslims who helped Christians avoid being captured by terrorists.

Also featured is the peace-building organization International Alert Philippines,

whose officials spoke on the importance of local knowledge and context in the rebuilding process.

Comaling, who was originally from Davao City and now a project officer of Maranao People Development Center Inc. (Maradeca), a nongovernment organization based in Marawi, recalled how she feared for her and her family's safety after reading social media posts about terrorists beheading Christians in the city.

Men in black outfits, she said, roamed the streets and asked incriminating questions of people they met.

Comaling narrated how her Muslim friends lent her their hi-

job, the head covering worn by Muslim women, so she could look just like them.

Saripada "Tong" Pacasum Jr., a member of Suicide Squad and head of the Lanao del Sur local disaster risk reduction and management office, said he had to lie to his family to pursue the group's mission. "I told my daughter I was not a part of the operations she had watched on TV," he said.

Rescue hotline

Pacasum and his fellow volunteers went in and out of the city, first to save their relatives. They increasingly became organized and came up later with a rescue hotline number, through

which they received more distress calls about people trapped in the city.

Armed only with basic protective gear like white helmets, they entered the main battle area by car.

Looking back, Pacasum said, what he did was part of his "jihad" (struggle) to stand for fellow Muslims. "We should not be complacent. We should not leave our people alone so that Marawi won't experience another siege in the future," he said.

Aid lacking for evacuees

A year after the siege, Salic Ibrahim, Maradeca's chief executive officer, noted that residents forced to flee the fighting remained at the evacuation centers, coping with inadequate aid.

The water supply has particularly become a problem in this holy month of Ramadan, as the evacuees need it for religious purposes like ablution, aside from cooking meals before and after their daily fasts. Some of the food coming from foreign donors proved unappetizing for the children, Ibrahim also noted.

"The mind-set of those who want to help us should not just be [confined to] 'evacuation system.' This is not like the situation after Super typhoon Yolanda," Ibrahim said.

While Marawi has been receiving aid from different countries, International Alert stressed that the residents should learn to stand by themselves and that rebuilding efforts should be placed primarily in the hands of the locals.

A local solution should be found for a local problem, the documentary said, echoing the group's stand. "We need to remember and build upon the many instances when ordinary people fought against terror, rescued the vulnerable, and generously shared their food and resources at the height of the crisis."

It called on viewers to remember May 23, 2017, not only for the blood spilled in Marawi but also for the humanity that shone through the bravery of those who risked their lives to save those trapped in the combat zones.

Martial law acceptable

In an interview, members of Suicide Squad said they found the imposition of martial law in Mindanao acceptable because it was "different from martial law during the Marcos regime."

With martial law in place, the movement of firearms within the island is minimized, Ibrahim said.

The screening of "Maratabat" on Thursday also featured a photo exhibit by Mindanao-based photojournalists Ferdinandh Cabrera, Manman Deje-to, Bobby Timonera and some Marawi residents.

The documentary was written and narrated by journalist Ed Lingao, and produced with the support of Australia's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, INQ.

"Maratabat" can be viewed online through the website and social media channels of International Alert Philippines (www.international-alert.org). *AG*



POSTSCRIPT

FEDERICO D. PASCUAL Jr.

How many islands does Phl still have?

The smart answer to the question "How many islands comprise the Philippines?" used to be: "Depends on whether it's low or high tide." Not anymore - now the cautious reply is: "Before or after Duterte?"



Filipinos, supposedly among the world's happiest people, resort to jokes to soften the impact of the uncertain hard times. It helps, arguably, that President Rodrigo Duterte is the highest-ranking joker in the pack.

The then Davao City mayor said during the presidential debates in 2016, when asked about Chinese bullying of Filipino fishermen, that he would ride a jet ski and plant the flag in the Spratlys or the Scarborough shoal. (He was not sure where?)

But Filipino voters, who love entertainment more than enlightenment on the campaign trail, laughed and lapped it up.

Now the joke is on them. It has turned out that the jet ski spiel was just one of several vote-getting promises (including stopping runaway crime and corruption in six months, and reining in prices) that millions swallowed and now want to spit out but cannot.

Continuing the entertainment, the President's son Paolo and a senatorial-wannabe whom Duterte once described as a "bugan" recently stirred the sea off Cagiguran with their jet ski antics as a symbolic show of the flag in undisputed Philippine waters.

In the same program, a sendoff for Filipino scientists tasked to conduct research at the Philippine (Benham) Rise, Duterte again vowed not to allow other states to grab Philippine sovereign rights - except that that problem is on the other (west) side of Luzon.

In his original 2016 jet ski line, Duterte said in reply to a question of one of the fishermen shooed away from Scarborough (Panatag) shoal by the Chinese coast guard:

"I will ask the Navy to bring me to the nearest boundary *dyan sa Spratly...* Scarborough. *Babala ako, sasakay ako ng jet ski, dala-dala ko yung flag ng Pilipino at pupunta ako doon sa airport nila tapos itanim ko, then I would say, 'This is ours and do what you want with me.' Bahala na kayo. I would stake that claim and if they want to, you know - eh matagal ko ng ambisyon yan na maging hero rin ako. Pag pnatay nila ako doon, bahala na kayong umiyak dito sa Pilipinas."*

Meanwhile, however, a confident China has stepped up its setting up of military installations on artificial islands built in the Philippines' Exclusive Economic Zone with Duterte looking the other way.

A count by Reuters has shown that since 2014, China

has constructed more than 1,600 structures in the disputed South China Sea, nearly half of them reportedly in Philippine waters.

The more menacing installations include military-grade airstrips, reinforced shelters and anti-ship and surface-to-air missile batteries on Subi, Mischief and

southern part of Palawan. We commented here two weeks ago: "The alarming transformation of the West Philippine Sea into a security flashpoint should jolt President Duterte into abandoning the naive notion that he can tackle China by his lonesome."

Has he sought wider and deeper non-partisan consultations on how to confront Chinese encroachment? What has he done about China's military buildup? We noted in our *Postscript* of May 10, "Playing solo, Duterte is sure to lose to China." <https://tinyurl.com/yandsx8h>

As we write this, we have only the standing statement of the Department of Foreign Affairs that they have been "monitoring" developments but need not make public their moves regarding China's aggressive maneuvers. We believe the administration should level with the people.

• Hague: Philippines doesn't 'own' Panatag

Our notes taken after the UNCLOS-based award was handed down on July 12, 2016, by the Permanent Court of Arbitration at The Hague showed interesting details.

The Philippines did not win it all. For one, the arbitral court ruled that the rich fishery resources of Panatag shoal off Zambales should be open not only to the Philippines but also to China and other neighbors whose nationals traditionally fish there.

If proximity were the only criterion (it is not), Filipinos should have priority access to Panatag. The shoal is only 120 nautical miles from Zambales and 530 nm from Hainan island, the nearest China landmass in the South China Sea.

In its 15 submissions, the Philippines did not ask the arbitral court to drive out or ban the Chinese, but only to declare illegal under the UNCLOS their harassing and barring Filipinos from Panatag.

Also known as Bajo de Masinloc in Spanish times, Huangyan Dao to the Chinese, and Scarborough to much of the world, Panatag had been a fishing ground to generations of Filipinos until 2012 when the previous administration left them at the mercy of the Chinese coast guard after a standoff.

Although Panatag is within the country's 200-nm Exclusive Economic Zone, the PCA ruled that the Philippines and China must share its fishery resources between them and with other neighbors. China refuses to honor the award.

Without power to resolve sovereignty disputes, the tribunal was silent in its 479-page award on who owns Panatag. Ownership equates to sovereignty, which involves the exercise of the full power and authority of the state.

The tribunal classified Panatag as "high-tide features" (rocks), which cannot sustain human habitation or economic life of their own. "Rocks" have no EEZ or continental shelf, but they do count for territorial claims, i.e. claims of up to 12 nm of territorial waters.

A more assertive, more forceful Senate

The Senate elected a new president last Monday in the person of Sen. Vicente Sotto III of the Nationalist People's Coalition (NPC). He took over from Sen. Aquilino "Koko" Pimentel III, president of the PDP-Laban.

Senator Pimentel was elected Senate president at the start of the Duterte administration in 2016, not because the party had a majority in the chamber; it was more an agreement by consensus among 23 members who, although divided into nine separate groups, wanted to work with the new administration.

Certain recent events, however, appear to have convinced the senators that they need a leader who will be more assertive of their more independent views. Senator Pimentel is the PDP-Laban president and naturally tends to share the views of other party leaders, most notably Speaker Pantaleon Alvarez, the party's secretary-general.

The Philippine Senate today is a difficult mixture of parties -- six from the Liberal Party (LP), four independents, three from PDP-Laban, three from the Nationalist People's Coalition (NPC), two from the Nacionalista Party (NP), two from the United Nationalist Alliance (UNA), one from the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), one from Pwersa ng Masang Pilipino (PMP), and one from Akbayan.

There are only three from administration party PDP-Laban but the senators chose Pimentel at the start of the new Congress as leader of the pro-administration coalition. Sotto's NPC has also only

three members in the chamber, so the party was not a factor in his election last Monday as the new Senate president. Rather, it is said, the senators believe Sotto will be more assertive of the rights of the Senate as an independent chamber of Congress and of the interests of the senators of whatever political party.

The Senate faces a difficult road ahead. Speaker Alvarez has been very vocal in his insistence that in the coming Constitutional Convention to draw up a new constitution incorporating a federal system of government, the congressmen and senators should sit and vote as one body. That would push the Senate to irrelevancy, its 23 members overwhelmed by the House's 297 members.

For the coming senatorial elections, Speaker Alvarez also proposed a list that ignores non-PDP-Laban reelectionist senators although they have been with the pro-Duterte majority coalition in the Senate. This too is an issue that new Senate President Sotto is expected to address.

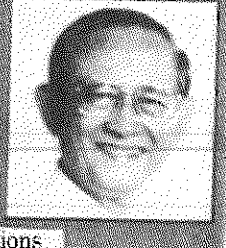
Many senators also feel the Senate has not been as assertive as it should be as the treaty-ratifying institution in the government, in a number of foreign policy issues, such as the Philippines' rights in the South China Sea and its relations with the United States, China, Russia, and other countries.

With Senator Sotto as the new Senate president, they hope the Senate will now be a more active, more confident, more forceful, more independent institution in the great tradition of Senates of the past. We join them in that hope. *JP*

ON EMPOWERING THE FILIPINO PEOPLE

Seafaring is in our DNA

By FIDEL V. RAMOS
FORMER PHILIPPINE PRESIDENT



WE were part of an admiring group that welcomed the return at the Manila Yacht Club last 22 May of the intrepid fleet of three balangays of ancient design on their homeward leg from Xiamen, China, and Hong Kong.

PN Rear Admiral Erick Kaganan led the Government authorities at the homecoming. The odyssey of the expedition which set sail from Manila for Xiamen (Amoy in the old days) last 28 April is recounted in the Manila Bulletin issue of 20 May as follows:

"According to expedition leader former DOTC Undersecretary (FVR Cabinet) Arturo Valdez, the purpose of the expedition was to mark the 600th year since Sultan Paduka Batara of Sulu travelled to the Middle Kingdom in 1417.

The sultan traveled to China to pay tribute to the Yongle Emperor of the Ming dynasty in Beijing.

"We sailed about 2,700 nautical miles while crossing the vast South China Sea," says Valdez.

The 32-member crew sailed on-board three identical wooden sailboats, a well-crafted centuries-old design.

The crew spent six days in Xiamen, China, rode a train to Dezhou in the eastern province of Shandong where the Sultan's remains are buried, and was even able to travel through the Grand Canal.

The expedition's story began in 2009 when Valdez and his crew set sail from Tawi-Tawi in the Southern Philippines on a 17-month voyage that called on the ports of Brunei, Indonesia, Singapore, Thailand, Cambodia and Vietnam.

The original plan was to continue and sail on to China. However, due to bad weather, the plan was postponed.

"This was supposedly the first attempt to mark the 600th anniversary of the historical journey of the Sultan of Sulu," says Valdez.

Reporter Stuart Heaver recounts the odyssey of the 32 hardy Filipino seafarers as told to him by expedition leader Arturo Valdez, the 69-year-old mountaineer and former undersec-

tary of transport and communications in the 13 May 2018 issue of the Hong Kong-based *Post Magazine*, thus:

"Seafaring is our DNA—our forefathers sailed these oceans long before the Europeans arrived. A nation that does not produce trailblazers, explorers, and discoverers can never be a great nation," Art says, speaking with unrestrained enthusiasm. "Nations are built out of dreams."

According to Ming dynasty annals, the party was warmly welcomed by the Chinese court, offered full royal honors and showered with priceless gifts. As Valdez likes to point out, his nation was a major maritime power with close links to China more than a century before Portuguese explorer Ferdinand Magellan was said to have "discovered" the Philippines, in 1521.

The expedition has been battling with International Maritime Organization reference numbers, technical specifications, registration, insurance, and classification documentation as much as it has with unfavorable weather conditions and technical difficulties.

The sailing itself, though, was basic, as it was in this part of the world some six centuries ago. The balangay has no wheel with which to steer, instead relying on two sturdy timber tillers, one on each side of the quarter deck and each manned by one crew member. They are connected at right angles to rudders trailing like two long-handled spoons through the water. As the vessel gathers speed, they shudder and tremble under the helmsmen's hands.

An inflatable white plastic life raft is lashed to the fore deck, but there is no auxiliary engine, no navigation equipment, and next to nothing in the way of modern technology or creature comforts.

The only modern marine equipment visible is a VHF radio aerial, for keeping in contact with the other two boats in the flotilla; a large water flask lashed to the bulkhead and a single torch hanging limply from a lanyard over a pair of flip-flops.

Conditions are spartan and spending even 24 hours on board in rough weather is extremely challenging.

The minimalist, 15th-century approach proved adequate for that first phase of their expedition, visiting

32

“ A nation that does not produce trailblazers, explorers, and discoverers can never be a great nation...”

remote islands of the Philippine archipelago, and some coastal hopping, but for an ocean passage from Manila to Xiamen, it is courageous bordering on reckless. Busy shipping lanes near the Taiwan Strait are notorious for their confused currents and unpredictable seas. The area is invariably crowded with merchant and fishing vessels, and small wooden boats do not show up well on radar.

“Sailing at night is the biggest worry,” says Jan Paul Rodriguez, skipper of the lead balangay. “We have no lights.” He admits his boat was nearly hit by a fast ferry during a night passage near Mindanao only a few weeks earlier.

If the wind drops, the only means of propulsion are the two huge oars on the upper deck, but none of Valdez’s young team are afraid of a physical challenge. A few of them were with him in 2006, when he led the first expedition of Philippine mountaineers to scale Mount Everest.

At their temporary Manila headquarters, on the concrete pier near the Cultural Center of the Philippines, the conditions are hardly glamorous and there is none of the media circus normally associated with high-profile sailing expeditions. Security at the covered entrance is provided by four sleepy pariah dogs chained to a fence.

There is a curious absence of corporate logos, local politicians, or public-relations types sporting Ray-Ban sun glasses and pressed chinos. Instead, a shirtless shipwright is carving some

model boat hulls from solid timber near the end of the pier, squatting next to caged chickens.

The only professional ocean navigator among them is John Manginsay, a master mariner and deck officer from Chicago in the United States. He was born in Butuan, on Mindanao, is more used to navigating oil tankers.

There is no shortage of goodwill, effort, or enthusiasm, but this is not a slick, big-budget operation fronted by celebrity explorers with a book deal in the offing. And given the symbolic nature of the voyage and its emphasis on historical marine ties between China and the Philippines, official support is curiously absent, too.

“We have been all over the news but we really need institutional help from government,” Valdez says. “There is no material help from the authorities.”

While he is quick to praise the Philippine Coast Guard, which has provided much of his crew on secondment, he admits that perhaps Sino-Philippine relations have become too politically sensitive to trust to a romantic sailing expedition.

Chinese commercial ports are accustomed to dealing with giant container ships, which means the expedition’s vessels could be treated like any visiting cargo vessel, and their crews expected to pay the full docking, security, and pilotage fees.

“There are only two places in the Philippines where they still know how to build these boats the traditional way, with no metal screws or nails,” says Valdez, naming the Batanes archipelago, the northernmost province of the country, and Tawi-Tawi, an island province in the autonomous Muslim region of southern Mindanao.

“The sway of the colonial powers did not reach that far,” says Valdez, who believes that a legacy of three centuries of Spanish and then American colonialism, during which indigenous shipbuilding skills were used to build Western-style vessels, has been the loss of his country’s maritime heritage and tradition.

Six hundred and one years ago, the Sultan of Sulu’s visit to China ended in tragedy. After 27 days of lavish, imperial hospitality, the sultan’s party commenced their homeward journey weighed down with gold, silver bolts of fine silk, and ceremonial insignia.

While transiting the Grand Canal, he fell ill, and he died in Dezhou, Shandong province, in late 1417. Some of his retinue, including one of his wives and two of his sons, remained in China and were given land by the emperor. Their descendants still live in the area and Dezhou has a memorial park dedicated to the sultan.

Art Valdez concludes: It is a great relief to receive a brief email on the evening of 3 May: “Balangay fleet after 64 hours of sailing across the vast South China [Sea] has entered Xiamen Port safely. It’s been a challenging voyage with swells, rough seas, lack of sleep plus threat of being run over by big ships because of zero visibility.”

Not just millenials, but also the nonagenarians and the centenarians vigorously applaud the heroic balangays in their expedition of goodwill, brotherhood and serendipity!!

Please send any comments to fr@rpdev.org. Copies of articles are available at www.rpdev.org.

ONLINE NEWS

27 MAY 2018

www.inquirer.net

President's chief bodyguard gets new post



Brig. Gen. Lope Dagoy, commander of the Presidential Security Group (PSG), assumed his new post on Thursday as brigade commander of the 802nd Brigade based in Leyte, replacing Brig. Gen. Francisco Mendoza Jr.

Maj. Gen. Raul Farnacio, chief of the 8th Infantry Division, presided over the change of command ceremony.

A member of the Philippine Military Academy "Hinirang" Class of 1987, Dagoy had led the PSG since March last year.

Sources said Col. Jose Eriel Niembra, who once served under Task Force Davao and the PSG, is the strongest candidate to replace Dagoy at the PSG. —FRANCES MANGOSING

www.philstar.com

6th Infantry Division gets new commander

By: John Unson



MAGUINDANAO, Philippines — The Moro Islamic Liberation Front joined the symbolic installation of the new commander of the Army's 6th Infantry Division on Saturday, first ever in the unit's 30-year history.

Gen. Cirillito Sobejana, who graduated from the Philippine Military Academy in 1987, took over from Gen. Arnel Dela Vega, now commander of the Western Mindanao Command based in Zamboanga City.

Dela Vega, who belong to PMA's Class 1985, was 6th ID's commander for more than a year prior to his designation as chief of WestMinCom by President Rodrigo Duterte.

The MILF was represented in the event, held at Camp Gonzalo Siongco in Datu Odin Sinsuat town in Maguindanao by Von Al-Haq, Toks Ebrahim and members of their Coordinating Committee on the Cessation of Hostilities led by Butch Malang.

Units of 6th ID and the MILF are cooperating in maintaining tranquility in conflict flashpoint areas based on an interim ceasefire pact between the group and Malacañang, the July 1997 Agreement on General Cessation of Hostilities.

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

Sobejana, commander of Joint Task Force Sulu before he got to the helm of 6th ID, said he will support extensively Duterte's peace process with the MILF, just the way his predecessors, Dela Vega and Gen. Carlito Galvez Jr., now chief of the Armed Forces, did.

Sobejana, while a junior officer, receive a Medal of Valor for gallantry in combat.

Also present in the turnover program were local officials from provinces in Region 12 and the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao, among them ARMM Gov. Mujiv Hataman and Jhazzer Mangudadatu, incumbent member of the Sangguniang Panlalawigan in Maguindanao.

Sobejana said at the sideline of the activity that he will sustain 6th ID's peace-building programs pioneered by Galvez and Dela Vega in keeping with Malacañang's southern peace process, meant to put a negotiated closure to the now 50-year Moro issue.

"Of course the 6th ID will need the support of all local government units inside its area of responsibility. I am thankful that the LGUs in this part of the country are very supportive of peaceful means of addressing local security concerns," he said.

The 6th ID covers the provinces of Maguindanao, Sultan Kudarat, North Cotabato and several towns in Lanao del Sur, where there government-recognized enclaves of the MILF, now called "peace zones."

The command transition from Dela Vega to Sobejana was presided over by Gen. Rolando Joselito Bautista, commanding general of the Philippine Army.

The ceremony was capped off with the grant of a distinguished service star citation to Dela Vega for his accomplishments while 6thID's commander.

Dela Vega was instrumental in the liberation of more than a dozen barangays in Maguindanao and North Cotabato from Islamic State-inspired militants led by Abu Toraife.

Toraife, a radical cleric, is self-proclaimed "revolutionary emir" of a faction in the outlawed Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters.

The BIFF uses the Islamic State flag and is feared for the enforcement by its commanders of a Taliban-style justice system that local Muslim communities detest for being ruthless and primitive.

Dela Vega also played a key role in the surrender in batches in recent weeks of 15 BIFF members, four of them trained by the slain Malaysian terrorist Zulkifli bin Hir, also known as Marwan, in fabrication of improvised explosive devices.

The now reforming former BIFF members are now being ushered into mainstream society by the 6th ID and the office of Maguindanao Gov. Esmael Mangudadatu via socio-economic and psycho-social interventions.



Honor. Patriotism. Duty

39