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Monday



Honor. Patriotism. Duty

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Honor. Patriotism. Duty

Rody warns of raids on rice warehouses

Phl edging toward food crisis — senators

By EDITH REGALADO and CHRISTINA MENDEZ

DAVAO CITY — President Duterte yesterday warned rice traders he would not hesitate to order military and police raids on warehouses as part of emergency measures to address any rice shortage.

"I will not allow Filipinos to go hungry. Do not force me to resort to emergency measures," the President said in a pre-departure press briefing at the Ninoy Aquino International Airport before leaving for Israel and Jordan on an official visit.

Duterte made the warning following reported rice shortages in certain parts of the country.

He said he would exercise his powers as chief executive should an artificial rice shortage prevail.

"If I see something amiss, I will not hesitate to exercise the powers of the President. And I will ask the mili-

tary and police to raid your warehouses, *boacgas*, and I will just subject (you) of course to just compensation," Duterte said. "I can do that, but do not force me."

Duterte warned traders against resorting to hoarding.

"Because if you do that and time is very limited, and if there is an artificial scheme going around, I do not care if it is really the forces of the market that will impact on the situation, I will really raid your warehouses," he said.

Sen. Francis Escudero said the President should instead declare a state of calamity given the dire situation of the

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Rody

From Page 1

country's food supply.

He said the country is edging towards a full-blown food crisis and with declaration of a state of calamity, the government could impose price controls and bear down on greedy rice traders.

"What if we declare a state of calamity and impose price controls lest the situation worsens and the people suffer more?" Escudero said.

He warned that it was not only rice and *galunggong* (round scad) that are in short supply but also other food items like vegetables.

Escudero earlier asked the Department of Justice (DOJ) and the National Bureau of Investigation to look into the possible filing of economic sabotage charges against certain rice importers and traders, who are not only undervaluing their imports but also jacking up prices.

"It's clear that we're being exploited by greedy businessmen," he said, adding even if the unscrupulous importers and traders would declare the correct value of their rice imports and pay the right duties, they would still earn a healthy profit.

Escudero agreed with Sen. Cynthia Villar who said that if the President is not inclined to declare a state of calamity, he can order the Department of Trade and Industry to set price ceilings on rice and other

commodities where violators can be penalized, including closure of their establishments.

Villar last week warned rice cartels that continue to operate with impunity. She chided the Department of Agriculture and the DOJ for not going after them.

Escudero attributed the country's current food woes to the bickering, as well as lack of expertise of officials, particularly Agriculture Secretary Emmanuel Piñol and National Food Authority (NFA) chief Jason Aquino.

He claimed Aquino used up bulk of the NFA budget allocation for rice this year to pay the agency's debts while officials close to Duterte failed to advise him to set rice tariffs when Congress went on a break last month.

"The question is why did he (Aquino) do that (pay debts instead of buying rice)? Is he just pea-brained? Is he useful? If you have some logic, you won't do that," he said.

Escudero also lamented that current officials do not seem alarmed while remaining clueless on how to resolve the situation.

Former solicitor general Florin Hilbay urged Piñol to resign for inflicting a double-whammy on fishermen and the country by pushing importation from China as a means to lower prices of fish in the market.

"Our fishermen are losing their livelihoods and they (Piñol) are letting China profit from it when the fish was caught in the West Philippine Sea," Hilbay said in a statement.

He said fish supposedly imported from China would be laced with formalin, a preservative, as a "bonus" for Filipinos.

Hilbay said the Department of Agriculture (DA) should look for other means, rather than focus on importation, as it will affect the livelihood of fishermen.

Hilbay earlier called on authorities to investigate whether the NFA distributed the imported rice to its intended beneficiaries and not to rice hoarders who want to control the price of the staple food.

Piñol, Aquino and the NFA council have been blamed for the prevailing rice shortage and rising rice prices for their failure to handle the situation.

No need to fire people

Duterte said he is not firing Piñol and Aquino over their supposed failure to control the problem on rice supply.

He said the problem could be a result of weak laws but that it doesn't mean there is a need to fire people.

"Maybe the laws are weak or uncomfortable. All we have to do is improve on those laws. Not necessarily fire people," the President said.

"You know, all officials, including me are bound by laws on the matter of rice or whatever it is, there are laws of the land," he said.

Duterte said he does not see any serious offense committed by Piñol and Aquino to warrant their dismissal from office.

"And I do not see any serious offense there. We have not lost anything except that there is an aberration in the market," the President added.

Rep. Jose Panganiban Jr. of party-list ANAC-IP agreed with the President against firing Piñol and Aquino.

Panganiban said heads should not roll because closer coordination is all that is needed.

Panganiban noticed that the DA's two agencies - the Aquino-led NFA and the NFA Council which solely approves rice importations - only need to have better coordination in the future.

Minority Leader Danilo Suarez of Quezon, however, said Piñol's remarks on the importation of agricultural and fishery products instead of protecting local farmers and fishermen, and pushing the legalization of rice smuggling are enough reasons for his resignation.

"Their solutions will put further strain on our agricultural sector. The importation of rice and *galunggong* will impress upon the idea of encouraging further importation, potentially on other agricul-

tural products at the costly expense of our farmers and fishermen," Suarez said.

'Legalize' rice smuggling

Duterte, on the other hand, disagreed with Piñol's proposal to legalize rice smuggling.

Piñol earlier proposed to make rice smugglers turn their operations into legitimate rice trading, subject to tariffs and import rules, to address the supply shortage in southern Mindanao.

Piñol stressed this was the most practical option to address the rice shortage.

"No, of course not. The smuggling itself? No, of course not. It is destructive to the economy," Duterte said.

Piñol had envisioned the establishment of a "trading center" for rice in the region of Zamboanga-Basilan-Sulu-Jawi-Jawi, which he claimed has always been the traditional practice in the area.

The island provinces actually source their rice from the neighboring areas of East Malaysia, particularly Sabah.

The President rejected Piñol's proposal even if the move would make government earn as much as P2 billion from tariffs that would be collected.

"Smuggled rice, unrestrained, will promote disorder in this country. Well, those smuggled rice have not paid any taxes, or tariff or whatever," Duterte said.

The President said he would rather confiscate the smuggled rice and sell them

to the public at a lower price even if government loses revenues.

"So, they are confiscated at a disposal of government. Maybe I will distribute it for free or go down to the market prices. Maybe I will distribute it for free or sell at lowest prices," he said.

The DA pointed out that Zamboanga City only has a rice sufficiency rating of 55 percent; Basilan at five percent; Sulu, two percent, and Tawi-Tawi with only one percent registered. The lower figures were a result of local traders having given up on selling since their price ceilings could not compete with smuggled rice priced at only P29 per kilo.

Duterte stressed he wanted to import rice and risk losing revenues but he could not allow smuggling.

"Maybe we can import and lose. We import rice then sell them at a lower price any Filipino can afford," he said.

Duterte said government could lose along the way if it sells rice at very low prices.

"We can lose (revenues) but we cannot allow smuggling in this country. The other way around, we import rice even if it is a losing venture to sell them at lower prices. At least we have that benchmark how much we are willing to lose in terms of revenues," the President said.

- With Delon Porcalla, Christina Mendez, Paolo Romero, Jack Castaño

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DUTERTE EYES ARMS DEAL WITH ISRAEL

STORY BY CHRISTINE O. AVENDAÑO AND JULIE M. AURELIO

Pursuing a policy that moves Manila away from dependence on Washington for weapons, the President is expected to shop for military and police hardware during a four-day official visit to Tel Aviv.

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FROM A1

By Christine O. Avendaño
and Julie M. Aurelio
@Team_Inquirer

JERUSALEM—President Duterte was expected to arrive in Israel early on Monday in pursuit of a policy moving the Philippines away from its longtime reliance on the United States for military hardware and backing.

Mr. Duterte's four-day official visit to Israel is the first by a Philippine leader in more than 60 years of diplomatic ties between the two nations, even though their links go back to Filipinos sheltering Jews during the Holocaust.

The President, accompanied by a large entourage that included military and police officials, will sit down with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and hold an event with thousands of Filipinos working in Israel.

Fulfillment of a promise

His visit is a fulfillment of a promise to visit Filipinos here, who voted for him in the 2016 presidential election, said Philippine Ambassador to Israel Nathaniel Imperial.

"[The President] was supposed to come in May last year but because of the Marawi incident, he had to postpone his overseas travel," Imperial explained in a radio interview.

He was referring to the five-month siege of Marawi by local terrorists who had pledged allegiance to the Islamic State jihadi group in the Middle East.

Before leaving for Tel Aviv on Sunday afternoon, Mr.

Duterte told a crowd at Ninoy Aquino International Airport in Manila that he was visiting Israel on the invitation of Netanyahu and Jordan on the invitation of King Abdullah II.

"My schedule will be full. I shall seek to reaffirm the ties between our peoples made more significant by a meaningful shared history," Mr. Duterte said.

Protection for OFWs

He promised to work for the protection and welfare of 28,000 Filipinos working in Israel and 48,000 in Jordan.

"You know, without mentioning anything, there's a volatile situation there and we have to be sure that our citizens are fully protected," he said.

Mr. Duterte's first event in Israel was a meeting with the Filipino community on Sunday night.

"We assign great importance to this visit, which symbolizes the strong, warm ties between our two peoples," Israel's foreign ministry said in a statement.

Besides coming to the aid of Jews during the Holocaust, the Philippines was also the only Asian nation that voted in the United Nations for the Partition plan that led to the birth of Israel in 1948.

Shopping for arms

Mr. Duterte has pivoted the Philippines away from its traditional ally, the United States, and toward warmer diplomatic and business ties with China and Russia.

He will look at Israeli military hardware for possible acquisitions for the Armed Forces of the Philippines and the

Philippine National Police

The United States and Canada have both had military hardware deals fall apart with the Philippines due to concerns over Mr. Duterte's war on drugs.

But so far, sales with Israel have gone smoothly.

Among top arms dealers

"[The visit] is for President Duterte to look for an alternative market for . . . weapons for our Armed Forces as well as the police," Henelito Sevilla, an international relations expert at the University of the Philip-

Secretary Arthur Tugada, Energy Secretary Alfonso Cusi, National Security Adviser Hiermogenes Esperon, presidential spokesperson Harry Roque, Special Assistant to the President Christopher Go, Presidential Political Adviser Francis Tolentino, acting Interior Secretary Eduardo Año and the Philippine Coast Guard's chief, Rear Adm. Elson Hermogino.

Also traveling with the President is his daughter, Davao City Mayor Sara Duterte, Sen. Richard Gordon, and 150 Filipino businessmen.

Mr. Duterte will sit down with Netanyahu on Monday and with Israeli President Reuven Rivlin on Tuesday.

He will visit the Yad Vashem Holocaust Memorial Center, a museum dedicated to 6 million Jews who perished in Nazi concentration camps under Adolf Hitler in World War II.

The President is expected to witness the signing of up to 15 agreements, including defense, labor and science and technology, at the King David Hotel on Tuesday.

Before leaving for Jordan on Wednesday, Mr. Duterte will lay a wreath at the Open Doors Monument at Holocaust Memorial Park.

Manila and Tel Aviv have dedicated the monument in the city of Rishon Lezion "to commemorate the humanitarian assistance provided by the Philippines to Jewish refugees escaping the Holocaust in the late 1930s," Imperial said.

"This monument is a manifestation of this enduring friendship and the shared history between the Philippines and Israel," he said. —WITH A REPORT FROM AFP INQ

pines, told Agence France-Press (AFP).

Israel is among the world's top arms dealers, with nearly 60 percent of its defense exports going to the Asia-Pacific region, according to Israeli defense ministry data.

The Philippines emerged as a significant new customer in 2017 for Israel, with sales of radar and antitank equipment worth \$21 million.

There could be far bigger deals on the way as Manila plans a multibillion-dollar overhaul of its arsenal.

Mr. Duterte has been dismissive of American sales overtures, saying he does not need US fighter jets or submarines to fight communist insurgents but attack helicopters.

Large entourage

Traveling with Mr. Duterte are Executive Secretary Salvador Medialdea, Foreign Secretary Alan Peter Cayetano, Labor Secretary Silvestre Bello III, Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana, Trade Secretary Ramon Lopez, Environment Secretary Roy Cimatu, Transportation

'Suspicious' public reins in deals with Beijing on WPS

By PAOLO ROMERO

A "highly suspicious" Filipino public is keeping President Duterte in check when it comes to dealing with China and handling the country's territorial dispute with other claimants to the West Philippine Sea, analysts said.

In a recent commentary published in the Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative (AMTI) website, Renato Cruz de Castro said Duterte continued the Armed Forces' modernization program of previous administrations that would cost P300 billion during his term alone.

After his election in 2016, Duterte suggested he would pursue a policy of gravitating closer to China while ignoring territorial defense and focusing again on internal security, De Castro noted.

He said since late 2016, Duterte has pursued a policy of "appeasement" toward China by downplaying the disputes in the South China Sea in return for promised Chinese investment in the Philippines.

Duterte also proceeded to set aside the July 2016 ruling from the Permanent Court of Arbitration, which was in favor of Manila and against many of Beijing's claims in the South China Sea.

But despite the rapprochement in Philippines-China relations, De Castro said Duterte's decision to finance the modernization program of the military suggests that he will continue the shift from internal to territorial defense.

"There seem to be two major reasons for this decision. First, Duterte needs to maintain support from the military, especially as he seeks to shift the country away from its historical reliance on the United States and toward a closer relationship with China driven by economic concessions."

Duterte also needs to "shore up" military support in light of the resilience of domestic security challenges, as shown by the five-month siege of Marawi City by Islamic militants in 2017.

"Second, Philippine public opinion remains highly suspicious of Chinese actions in the South China Sea and is critical of the administration's efforts to improve relations with Beijing," De Castro said.

He said the political opposition and several civil society organizations have castigated the Duterte government for not pressing Beijing to comply with the Hague ruling and failing to denounce recent Chinese escalations in the South China Sea, including the landing of bombers in the Paracel Islands, installation of missile and jamming systems in the Spratlys, and harassment of Filipino fishermen at Scarborough Shoal.

De Castro said the Department of Foreign Affairs, after being "pressured by public opinion, has recently notified China of actions or crossing "red lines" that Manila would consider unacceptable in the South China Sea.

These include the Chinese construction of a permanent facility at Scarborough Shoal; any attempt to remove the derelict *BRP Sierra Madre* from Second Thomas Shoal or prevent resupply of the Filipino marines stationed aboard it; and unilateral extraction of oil and gas from the Philippines' continental shelf.

"The decision to finance the second horizon is aimed at assuring the Filipino public that the government is developing a credible defense capability that will enable the AFP to respond in case China crosses those red lines," De Castro said.

The sea game

Another analyst, however, said Duterte is using the 2016 arbitration ruling as "leverage" in dealing with China to advance the Philippines' interests in the West Philippine Sea.

"Critics who slam the government for its failure to assert the ruling do not realize that that assertion is happening, albeit in different manner than expected," said Lucio Blanco Pitlo III, a research fellow at the Asia-Pacific Pathways to Progress Foundation.

Pitlo made the remarks in a commentary titled, "Duterte's Sea Game: Arbitration as a means to an end," which was published on the AMTI website on Aug. 27.

He said Duterte demonstrates pragmatism, foresight, and ingenuity in handling the South China Sea disputes.

"His rhetoric and actions suggest that he appreciates the arbitral award more as a means rather than an end," Pitlo said. "The limitations and openings created by the ruling shape the emerging contours of Duterte's sea game."

The President had said the Philippines' warmer relations with China have eased

tensions and improved negotiations on the West Philippine Sea.

Pitlo said those warmer relations would not have been possible if Manila had aggressively

touted the tribunal's decision.

The Philippines is also not confining itself to a bilateral track, but is also actively taking part in regional tracks, he said.

Pitlo cited the dialogue between the ASEAN and China, which led to a draft framework for a Code of Conduct on the South China Sea.

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"Participation in such dialogue on top of the bilateral talks shows the government is taking a multi-faceted approach, maximizing available tools to advance the country's position and interests," Pitlo said.

Pitlo pointed out the tentative fishing agreement that allowed Filipino fishermen to re-access their traditional fishing ground in Bajo de Masinloc (Scarborough Shoal) and the renewed talks for joint exploration in the Recto (Reed) Bank are both steps toward implementing the award.

The decision of the Hague-based arbitral tribunal on July 12, 2016 declares Bajo de Masinloc a traditional fishing ground for Filipinos, Chinese and Vietnamese.

Pitlo said that while the ruling affirmed the Philip-

pinas' sovereign rights in its exclusive economic zone, it did not make a determination on the ownership of contested features.

"The description by its very nature suggests the possibility of a fishing agreement between the sovereign parties, which would be a feasible way to reduce tensions," he said.

Joint exploration

Pitlo added the 60-40 revenue sharing on the proposed joint oil exploration with China presents a "viable and easily implementable avenue" to pursue resource cooperation in the West Philippine Sea.

Foreign Affairs Secretary Alan Peter Cayetano had said the administration is working on a framework for possible oil exploration with China where companies can work

on a commercial level without damaging the country's claims.

Cayetano gave assurance the framework would not go beyond the 60-40 sharing of revenues as provided by the 1987 Constitution.

Pitlo noted the arbitral ruling did not prevent cooperation on oil and gas extraction in the seabed.

"The affirmation of the Philippines' sovereign rights in its exclusive economic zone limits cooperation to certain areas but does not prevent it entirely," he said.

Pitlo said Duterte does not see merit in pressuring Beijing to comply with the international court ruling through multilateral means.

He said the President saw the inability of the US security alliance and the international community to prevent China from building its artificial islands during the course of arbitration.

"Instead of pressuring and being rebuffed, his government is making headway in subtly implementing significant portions of the award specifically on resource access," Pitlo said.

He said Duterte saw the ruling as a means to advance Philippine interests in the West Philippine Sea while keeping a stable external environment.

"The award was used as a leverage in dealing with China, enabling Manila to get tremendous economic concessions. In the meantime, cooperation has provided a cover for implementing the award without critics realizing it," Pitlo said.

Follow the ruling

A senior US State Department official said all claimant countries in the South China Sea should recognize the tribunal ruling in favor of the Philippines.

"There is an international law to follow on this and we have arbitral decision on July 12, 2016 that define a lot of what goes on in that region. All claimants should live up to that," said Walter Douglas, US Deputy Assistant Secretary of State.

Douglas said China should follow on its commitment not to militarize the region.

"And our belief is also that China and President Xi Jinping in 2015 talked about not militarizing the region. I think that's a pretty good guideline to have and we ask him to follow what he spoke about," Douglas said.

"And so in all that what we think there's a way to look at this region and it's up to everybody to follow that."

Douglas stressed the US is "not going away" as he emphasized the significance of recognition of its role in the region amid China's increasing presence.

"We're not gonna change that. We're not going away. So what's important is that our role be recognized that we're here," Douglas told reporters on Wednesday during his visit to Manila.

The US official explained the Indo-Pacific strategy of the Trump administration.

The US is more interested in the region as demonstrated by President Donald Trump's 13-day trip in the region in November last year and the heavy involvement with diplomacy, Douglas said.

Douglas said the US is concerned about the developments in the South China Sea, the radio signals and warnings to foreign ships and aircraft flying and sailing near artificial islands built by China.

"These are open sea ways. We always sail there. We will sail, fly, operate as we always have in this region," Douglas said. — With Helen Flores, Pia Lee-Brago

100 kids listen to tales of greatness, heroism

Small heroic acts could lead to a greater cause.

This was the message of the the second session of Inquirer Read-Along belatedly commemorating National Heroes Day.

Over 100 children listened to tales of courage and greatness from guest readers during the Saturday morning program, dubbed #TapangAtGalingParaSaBayan at the Inquirer headquarters in Makati.

Saturday's storytellers were: singer and actress Hannah Precillas; Metrobank Foundation's 2018 Outstanding Filipino awardees Aimee Marie Gragasin, Lt. Col. Danilo Facundo and Police Senior Supt. Pascual Muñoz; and veteran storyteller Dyal Justo of Adarna House.

Justo read Luis Gatmaitan's "Ang Ambisyon ng Isteroskop," a story about a stethoscope who aspires to be famous in the world through an excellent European doctor, but ended up being owned by a Filipino named Dr. Jose Rizal.

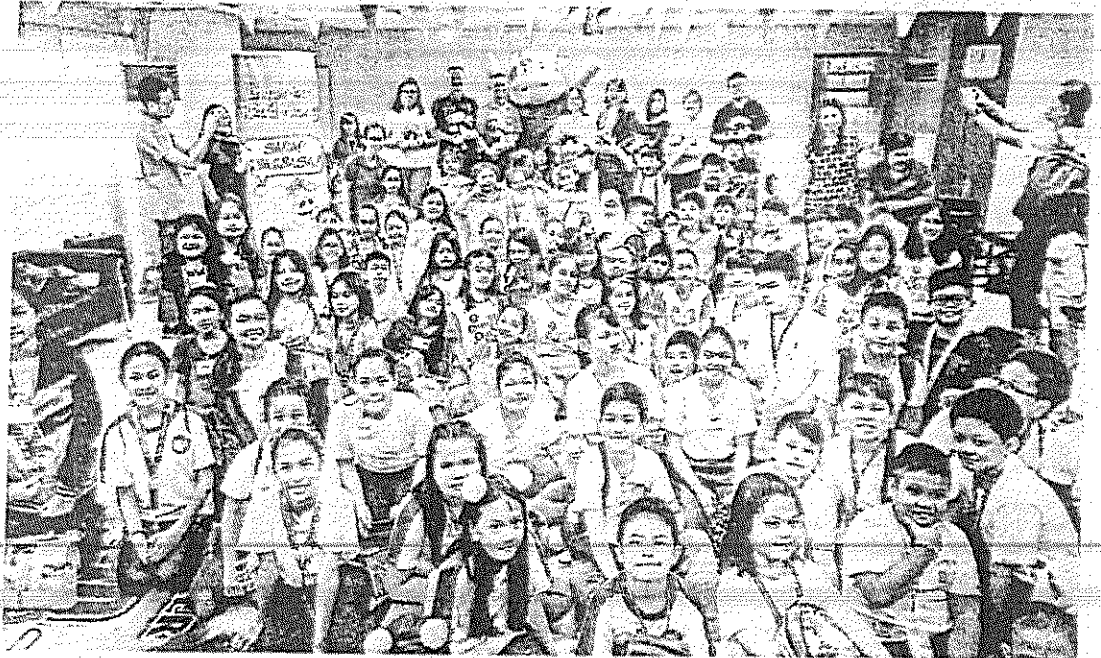
The Metrobank awardees took turns reading "Si Pandakotyong" written by Severino Reyes and retold by Christine Bellen.

The story is about a small but smart tailor who wishes to do more with his life.

Symbol of courage

He then sets off to outwit strong and gigantic creatures to win the heart of a princess and becomes a symbol of courage and hope to the community.

"Every person should be willing to take a risk and go out of his or her comfort zone to see what is beyond the horizon. Just as what Pandakotyong did, he left his usual routine and did greater things, and it paid off," said Facundo, who is a member



HEROIC STORIES FROM LIVING HEROES Students from different schools pose after listening to tales of heroism from Metrobank's 2018 Outstanding Filipino awardees during the Inquirer Read-Along at the Inquirer headquarters in Makati City. —JAM STA ROSA

of the Philippine Marines and the mobile training and exercise director of the Marine Corps Force Development Center.

For teacher Gragasin, heroism is about going beyond one's limitations and doing things that would make an impact in the community.

"Humans are born imperfect and with limitations. So we should focus more on our abilities to become better persons for the people around us," said Gragasin, who teaches physics at the Philippine Science High School-Cagayan Valley campus in Bayombong, Nueva Vizcaya province.

Being a hero does not always mean that a person has to sacrifice one's life for a greater cause, Muñoz said.

"Heroism could be as simple as doing things beyond what is

expected from a person. Strive to improve yourself all the time so you could give everything even if it means sacrificing your time for yourself and family," said Muñoz, who is the directorate for logistics of the Philippine National Police.

But being sincere to one's tasks adds substance and meaning to one's goals and achievements, according to the Metrobank awardees.

Size does not matter

Precillas read "Si Carancal Laban sa Bongbongeros" by Rene Villanueva, which tells of how a pint-size boy led the townsfolk in driving away fishermen who were using dynamite and destroying marine life.

For Precillas, Carancal proves that size does not matter to be able to lend a helping hand.

"Just because you're small does not mean you can be belittled by anyone. You can do something big for the benefit of others," she said.

Stand up vs bullying

She said children could be heroes themselves by standing up against bullying.

"If they know someone who gets bullied, they could either convince the bully to repent or report the incident to elders to immediately address the problem," she said.

Saturday's session, hosted by Inquirer Lifestyle Super editor Ruth Navarra-Mayo, was held in cooperation with Laarnie Luna of Metrobank Foundation and Wilfred Villaruel of GMA Artist Center.

—KATHLEEN DE VILLA AND RAFAEL L. ANTONIO, INQUIRER RESEARCH INQ

Phl may buy grenade launchers, ammo from Russia

By JANVIC MATEO

Grenade launchers and ammunition, including special warheads for urban warfare, are being eyed as the first

batch of weapons that the Philippines would purchase from Russia, according to Philippine Ambassador to Russia Carlos Sorreta.

In a post on his Facebook

account on Friday, Sorreta said Philippine and Russian representatives worked out and signed an amendment to the agreement for the procurement of rocket-propelled

grenade (RPG) launchers and ammunition.

"The amendment settled the issue of bank charges which will now be shouldered by Russia without any changes

in price and quantity," wrote the ambassador.

"This is the first procurement of Russian weapons. Both sides had to get a better

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appreciation of each other's procurement laws, rules and practices. These RPG launchers and ammunition will soon be in the hands of our soldiers," he added.

His post was shared by the official Facebook account of the Russian embassy in Manila.

According to Sorreta, he was told by representatives from the Philippine military that there will be a variety of ammunition for the weapon.

"One of particular interest in urban warfare is the ability to unleash an anti-personnel thermo-baric warhead through a

concrete wall and into a room without necessarily injuring those in nearby rooms and also without bringing down the house or building," he wrote.

"Any future procurement from Russia will be based on what was learned through this first contract. Procurement will only be made if the terms and conditions are the most favorable that the Philippines can get from any supplier," added the ambassador.

In a separate post, Sorreta said a team from the Philippine Coast Guard also went to Moscow last week to take a closer look at Russian equipment and

weapons.

"The Coast Guard had previously examined Russian equipment and weapons and are now deep in discussions for a first set of possible procurement," he said.

"Any procurement will be made only if it is the best deal that the Philippines can get. It will be under an agreed legal framework and pursuant to our procurement laws and regulations," added the ambassador.

President Duterte earlier bared plans to procure submarines from Russia.

Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana last week said that the Philippines is also looking at procuring other military hardware from Russia and other countries.

M

De Lima warns vs plan to oust Leni

By Julie M. Aurelio
@JMAurelioINQ

Detained Sen. Leila de Lima warned on Sunday that President Duterte had a "malevolent plan" to remove Vice President Leni Robredo from office so that former Sen. Ferdinand Marcos Jr. would succeed him.

In a statement, De Lima said the President was tarnishing the Vice President's image so that the public would be conditioned to accept a victory of the defeated Marcos in his electoral protest.

"[Mr. Duterte] has expressed his preference for Marcos, Chiz Escudero, a military junta. But none of them include the constitutional mode of succession,

which is the only legal way of replacing him," she said.

De Lima added: "With the federal Charter change campaign dead on the water and a military junta having no avid takers from the military, this means that the only viable option remaining is to make sure that Marcos is in position to succeed as VP when Mr. Duterte decides to step down."

Malacañang, however, brushed off allegations of a "malevolent plan" to unseat Robredo as De Lima's mere "prison hallucination."

"Prison hallucination. How can we unseat [her], that's pending [on] the Presidential Electoral Tribunal (PET), the Supreme

Court, not the President," presidential spokesperson Harry Roque told reporters at Ninoy Aquino International Airport.

De Lima made the remarks in the wake of the President's recent tirades against Robredo, belittling her as incompetent and unfit to lead the country.

It may be recalled that Marcos filed an electoral protest against Robredo with the PET, following his defeat in the 2016 vice presidential election by 263,473 votes.

Roque maintained that President Duterte would not interfere in the electoral protest between Robredo and Marcos.

"He's not in a position to interfere," Roque pointed out. INQ

Palace mocks De Lima: Prison hallucination

By Nat Mariano and Macon Ramos-Araneta

MALACANANG on Sunday dismissed the claim of detained Senator Leila de Lima that President Rodrigo Duterte had a "malevolent" plan to oust Vice President Leni Robredo to allow former senator Ferdinand Marcos Jr. to take his seat should he step down from the presidency.

"[That is] prison hallucination. [The] fate of the VP hangs with the [Supreme Court] and not [with] the President." Presidential Spokesman Harry Roque told reporters in a text message.

He said Duterte had nothing to do with Marcos' electoral protest.

De Lima said Sunday Duterte was destroying Robredo's public image to make it easier for the Filipinos to acknowledge Marcos as his replacement should Marcos win at the Presidential Electoral Tribunal.

"Duterte has several ideas how he will be replaced in case he decides to step down before his term ends," De Lima said in a statement issued from her cell in Camp Crame.

"He has expressed his preference for Bongbong Marcos, Chiz Escudero, a military junta [but] none of them include the constitutional mode of succession, which is the only legal way of replacing him.

"With the federal Charter change campaign dead on the water, and a military junta having no avid takers from the AFP [Armed Forces of the Philippines], this means that the only viable option remaining is to make sure that Marcos is in a position to succeed as VP when Duterte decides to step down."

De Lima, one of Duterte's top critics, said that as the math of the co-opted high court votes improved to favor a Marcos fake victory, so would the Marcos-Robredo PET case unravel to its malevolent conclusion.

"After the Supreme Court has demonstrated its capability to perform the unconstitutional ouster of its own Chief Justice, it can no longer be relied upon to stand as the guardian of the Constitution and the rule of law," De Lima said.

She urged the public to be vigilant in opposing Duterte's plan.

"Now, more than ever, citizens must rely on their own organic power to thwart any attempt to undermine constitutional democracy and to foist Duterte's illegitimate choice of successor upon the Filipino people," De Lima said.

Asked to comment on De Lima's 59th birthday on Thursday, the Palace insisted it would not give her birthday wishes.

The Palace has consistently belied De Lima's statements and told her to spend the rest of her life in jail.

2 tugboats sent to tow Navy ship

By Jeannette I. Andrade
 @jiandradeINQ

Two tugboats from a private firm are expected to arrive on Monday to extricate the Navy's BRP Gregorio del Pilar, which ran aground at Hasa-Hasa Shoal in the West Philippine Sea.

Help of local firm

The Navy flag officer in command, Vice Adm. Robert Empedrad, said that while the country had not refused assistance from China, South Korea, United States and our Southeast Asian neighbors in retrieving the frigate, securing the help of a local firm was "the fastest" way to salvage the ship and return it to safe harbor.

The BRP Gregorio del Pilar is the lead ship of its class and is one of the three former US Coast Guard Hamilton class cutters acquired in 2011 under

the US Excess Defense Articles and the Foreign Assistance Act.

The BRP Gregorio del Pilar ran aground on Wednesday last week in the vicinity of Hasa-Hasa Shoal.

Efforts to retrieve the fast frigate are underway while investigation is being conducted on its grounding.

Empedrad explained that it was necessary to tap the services of a private company with an "experience to salvage ships that are grounded especially big vessels" because neither the Navy nor the Coast Guard had tugboats.

Many offers to help

He clarified that two Coast Guard ships and two Navy vessels were deployed to the vicinity of Hasa-Hasa Shoal to provide security and assistance to the BRP Gregorio del Pilar crew, none of whom were hurt when

the ship ran aground.

Empedrad assured "the ship is intact, the crew are safe, and we are on top of the situation."

Fastest way

He said there were many countries that had offered their help, but "we want us to extricate the ship ... If we wait for assistance from other countries, it will take a long time."

"We have companies in the Philippines which have tugboats and are experts in salvaging ships that have ran aground ... It's the fastest [way] ... [We can't risk the vessel] getting caught in a tropical cyclone or low pressure area because that would make it very tough for the ship," the Navy commander pointed out.

He said that the extrication process might take a week or two because the safest way of removing the ship would have to be undertaken. INQ file

2 private tugboats tapped to aid grounded Navy ship

BY VICTOR REYES

NAVY chief Vice Adm. Robert Empedrad yesterday vowed an "expeditious" but careful recovery of BRP Gregorio del Pilar, a Navy ship that ran aground at the Hasahasa Shoal in the South China Sea Wednesday last week.

Empedrad said two private tugboats hired by the Navy are due to arrive today at the shoal, also known as Half Moon Shoal, to pull out the ship which is one of three cutters acquired from the US Coast Guard.

Empedrad said the salvage operations will have to consider several factors, including the safety of the ship and crewmen and the environment.

The ship has 117 crew members, including 15 officers, on board.

"We also have to save the corals, and ensure there is no spill of fuel oil because it will destroy the environment. So we have to be careful in pulling it out," Empedrad said.

The ship ran aground at the shoal, about 60 nautical miles from Rizal in Palawan, during a routine patrol at the South China Sea on Wednesday night.

Officials earlier said the ship incurred "very minimal" damage.

"We are going to consider all these but we are going to do it (recovery of the ship) expeditiously. We are not sure how many days. It could take us a week or two but there is no certainty (of the time)," he said.

Empedrad said the two tugboats will assess the condition of the grounded ship upon arrival at the shoal today. "We're going to realize the extent of the damage once

we get the tugboats (in the area)," he said.

Empedrad also said the US, China, and other countries have offered assistance in recovering the ship.

"When they learned about the incident, some of them called me to offer help," he said. "But we want to recover the ship on our own," he said.

Empedrad said it may take time for China and the US to send salvage ships to the shoal, and the Navy cannot wait because "if a typhoon or a low pressure area comes, it will be very tough on the ship."

He said there are many companies in the Philippines that have experience in the recovery of large ships like BRP Gregorio del Pilar.

On reports that Chinese ships were seen at the vicinity of the

shoal after the ship ran aground, Empedrad said sighting of Chinese vessels are normal in the area.

Also, he said it is normal for foreign ships to extend assistance to vessels in distress.

Asked how many Chinese ships were seen, Empedrad said: "I think one or two but I have not received the (full) report. That's only the initial."

"Most likely, they are there because they saw that we are in need (of assistance) but when our ships arrived in the area, they're okay. There are no more (Chinese) ships there. They already left, they are no longer there," he said.

Empedrad said two Navy ships and two Coast Guard ships are in the shoal area "to provide security and assistance" to BRP Gregorio del Pilar and its crew members.

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Duterte kicks off Israel visit

By ALEXIS ROMERO

JERUSALEM – President Duterte yesterday kicked off his historic visit here in a move that seeks to affirm his “friends to all, enemies to none” policy. The visit – the first by a Philippine

president – will include a meeting with Israeli leaders and attendance at the inauguration of a Holocaust memorial site.

In his departure speech, Duterte expressed his administration’s desire to have a “stable and secure” situation

not just in the Middle East but all over the world.

The trip comes as the Middle East continues to be gripped with tension over a long-standing conflict between Israel and Palestine that has turned the region into a flash point.

Israel has welcomed the United States’ recent decision to end its funding to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency, which helps Palestinian refugees.

“We consider this visit extremely
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important. We consider it a historic visit and we hope to transform this historic relationship and this enduring friendship into a more vibrant and stronger partnership," Philippine Ambassador to Israel Nathaniel Imperial told state-run *Radio Television Malacañang*.

"We consider this a new phase of our relationship with Israel. This is an important landmark visit. No Philippine president before ever dared visit this country. But now things have changed. We have a very close relationship with Israel and its people," he added.

The Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) has said Duterte's landmark visit to Israel won't hurt the Philippines ties with Arab countries that do not recognize the Jewish state.

"We are aware of certain sensitivities... I believe we have reached a stage of maturity in our relations that they understand each one of them," DFA Undersecretary Ernesto Abella said in a recent press briefing.

"We have multilateral relations, and as we pointed out, we are friends to all and enemies to none... It should not serve as any obstacle with our ongoing bilateral relationships with each of these nations," he added.

The Philippines is the only Asian country to support a United Nations resolution that created Israel. Its vote broke the tie at the UN that paved the way for the establishment of the state of Israel.

Israel was formed after the UN adopted a resolution dividing Palestine into Jewish and Arab states in 1947.

The UN resolution also placed Jerusalem, an important religious site for Jews, Christians and Muslims, under international control and administered by the UN.

The UN resolution was opposed by Palestinians who regarded it as an attempt to drive them away from the area.

Duterte started his four-day visit yesterday by meeting with 1,400 members of the Filipino community to update them on the developments in the Philippines. Israel hosts about 28,000 overseas Filipino workers.

Duterte vowed to ensure the safety of the Filipinos working in the region.

"I shall renew my pledge to do my utmost to bring the

change we desire in our country, in ourselves as a people. I will ask them to continue to be our partners for growth, progress and change," he said.

"In these official visits, I shall continue to be guided by my mandate to uphold and protect the national interests of the Philippines," he added.

On Monday, Duterte will meet with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to discuss ways to boost cooperation in labor, tourism, trade, agriculture, counterterrorism, security and law enforcement.

Duterte is also expected to witness the signing of bilateral agreements on the employment of Filipino caregivers, scientific cooperation and investments. About 13 to 15 private sector deals will also be inked during the visit.

"We have a great opportunity to really maximize the potential of this relationship, which in some aspects is still quite underdeveloped," Imperial said.

Previous reports said Duterte would push for an arms deal with Israel but officials have yet to confirm it.

Imperial noted that Israel is one of the countries providing defense equipment to the Philippines because of a logistics agreement.

"We are also trying to diversify our sources of supply of defense equipment. And this is important if we are to pursue an independent foreign policy," the envoy said.

After Duterte's meeting with Netanyahu, Duterte will visit the Yad Vashem Holocaust Memorial Center. He would join a ceremony inaugurating a monument to the Filipino rescue of Jews during the holocaust.

The Philippines provided sanctuary to 1,300 Jewish refugees who were fleeing the holocaust, the systematic murder of about six million Jews by Nazi Germany during World War II.

In 2009, the Philippine embassy and the Israeli government dedicated a monument in the city of Rishon Lezion, called the Open Doors monument, to commemorate the humanitarian assistance provided by the Philippines to Jewish refugees.

Two years ago, Duterte sparked outrage after he compared his war on illegal drugs with the holocaust.

The tough-talking leader said Nazi leader Adolf Hitler had massacred three million Jews and he was happy to slaughter three million drug addicts. Duterte has apologized for the remark and has insisted that he did not intend to desecrate the memory of the holocaust victims.

Duterte will meet with Israeli President Reuven Rivlin on Tuesday and will depart for Jordan the following day.

Executive Secretary Salvador Medialdea, Foreign Affairs Secretary Alan Peter Cayetano, Labor Secretary Silvestre Bello III, Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana, Trade Secretary Ramon Lopez, Environment Secretary Roy Cimatu, Transportation Arthur Tugade, Energy Secretary Alfonso Cusi and National Security Adviser Secretary Hermogenes Espenon are joining the trip.

Presidential spokesman Harry Roque, Special Assistant to the President Christopher Go, Presidential Adviser for Political Affairs Secretary Francis Tolentino, Sen. Richard Gordon, Interior Secretary Eduard Año, Philippine Coast Guard Commandant Elson Hermogino, Quezon City Rep. Feliciano Belmonte and Camarines Sur Rep. LRay Villafuerte are also joining the trip.

Sara joins trip

Meanwhile, presidential daughter and Davao City Mayor Sara Duterte-Carpio made good her promise to join her father in his official trips abroad to prevent a repeat of the kissing incident that marred the President's trip to Seoul, South Korea.

Based on initial information provided by Malacañang's Protocol Office, the mayor will be bringing along her youngest child, Marko Digong, and her younger brother Sebastian to Israel.

During his visit to Seoul in June, the President kissed an overseas Filipino worker on the lips in front of the Filipino community. Duterte drew flak for kissing the married woman.

Mocha Uson, controversial blogger and assistant secretary of the Presidential Communications Operations Office, defended Duterte by posting an old video showing admirers kissing senator Benigno Aquino Jr. on the cheek before he was assassinated at the airport on Aug. 21, 1983.

— With Christina Mendez, Edith Regalado

Duterte begins historic trip to Jerusalem

To seek broader economic, defense cooperation with Israel

By ARGYLL CYRUS B. GEDUCOS and GENALYN D. KABILING

President Duterte has embarked on a weeklong historic visit to Israel and Jordan to seek broader economic and defense cooperation as well as protec-

tion of Filipino workers.

Before leaving the country, the President said his landmark visits to the two countries underscore his vision that "a Philippines that is a ▶4

Duterte begins historic... <1

friend to all and an enemy to no one."

Duterte, accompanied by his daughter Davao City Mayor Sara Duterte Carpio and several Cabinet members, will first travel to Israel for an official visit from September 2 and 5. His next stop will be Jordan on September 6 to 8.

"My schedule will be full. I shall seek to reaffirm the ties between our peoples made more significant by a meaningful shared history," the President said in his departure statement at the Ninoy Aquino International Airport Terminal 2.

"At the same time, I shall seek to have a robust relationship that looks forward to broader cooperation on a broad range of mutually important areas - defense and security, law enforcement, economic development, trade [and] investments and labor," he added.

The President is scheduled to hold separate talks with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and President Reuven Rivlin during his historic trip.

The Philippines and Israel are expected to forge agreements on the employment of Filipino caregivers, scientific cooperation, and investment cooperation during Duterte's visit.

Duterte said he also accepted the invitation of King Abdullah II for an official visit to Jordan. He acknowledged that the agenda in Jordan was "promising" as he seeks to renew relations with a country and people that have the common aspirations.

"Certainly, I look forward to discussing ways [of] advancing cooperation in the key areas of improving defense and security, sustaining growth, addressing transnational crime, intensifying trade and investments and enhancing labor cooperation," he said.

In his visits to Israel and Jordan, the President said he would try "to fully maximize economic cooperation and realize trade potential" with the two nations.

Duterte said a Filipino business delegation would join his visit to explore the diverse trade and investment opportunities that make Jordan and Israel "more tempting to offer."

"Of course, we will invite their business leaders to look at our own rich market potential," he added.

In both countries, the President also plans to look into the plight of the Filipino workers and ensure their safety and protection.

"With more than two million Filipinos [working] in that region, I intend to emphasize the great importance that the Philippines attaches to maintaining peace and stability in the region," he said.

"We have about 28,000 Filipinos in Israel and there are 48,000 Filipinos in Jordan and you know, without mentioning anything, there's a volatile situation there and we have to be sure that our citizens are fully protected," he added.

As he travels abroad, the President said he would be guided by his mandate uphold and protect the national interests of the Philippines.

"The Philippines shares with all countries the desire for a stable and secure world," he said.

"In our efforts to strengthen the bonds of friendship and amity with our partners around the world, we shall be guided by our Constitution and laws as well as our international commitments in support of efforts and initiatives, including the two-state solution, towards the attainment of just and lasting peace," he added.

The President has designated Justice Secretary Menardo Guevarra to be the officer-in-charge while he is abroad.

The President's delegation included Foreign Affairs Secretary Alan Peter Cayetano, Trade Secretary Ramon Lopez, Labor Secretary Silvestre Bello III, Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana, Environment Secretary Roy Cimatu, Transportation Secretary Arthur Tugade, Energy Secretary Alfonso Cusi, Interior and Local Government acting Secretary Eduardo Año, National Secretary Adviser Hermogenes Esperson Jr, Presidential Spokesman Harry Roque, Presidential political adviser Francis Tolentino, Chief Presidential Legal Counsel Salvador Panelo, Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) commandant Rear Admiral Elson Hermogino, and Housing and Land Use Regulatory Board chief executive officer and commissioner Lloyd Christopher Lao.

Pivot

"We assign great importance to this visit, which symbolizes the strong,

warm ties between our two peoples," Israel's foreign ministry said in a statement.

Duterte has pivoted the Philippines away from its former colonial master the United States and toward warmer diplomatic and business ties with China and Russia.

The US and Canada have both had military hardware deals fall apart with the Philippines due to concerns over Duterte's drug war. But so far sales with Israel have gone smoothly.

Israel is among the world's top arms dealers, with nearly 60 percent of its defense exports going to the Asia Pacific region, according to Israeli defense ministry data.

Holocaust Memorial visit

JERUSALEM - President Duterte is set to visit the Yad Vashem Holocaust Memorial Center on Monday as part of his four-day historic visit to Israel.

During his visit, Duterte will take part in the wreath-laying ceremony at the Hall of Remembrance. The President is also signing the guest book at the Children's Memorial Hall.

According to The Times of Israel, Duterte will take part in a ceremony inaugurating a monument to the Filipino rescue of Jews during the Holocaust.

With Israel, the Philippines is celebrating the 81st anniversary of the Open Doors policy of the Philippines under then President Manuel L. Quezon who offered shelter to more than a thousand Jews escaping the holocaust in Europe.

According to Philippine Ambassador to Israel Nathaniel Imperial, the Philippine embassy and the Israeli government dedicated in 2009 the Open Doors monument in the city of Rishon LeZion to commemorate the humanitarian assistance extended to the around 1,300 Jewish refugees in the 1930s.

"We expect the President to visit this important site which symbolizes our strong friendship with the Israeli people. And you know it's an important part and highlight of the visit of the President," he said.

Imperial said that there are three pillars that form a triangle and represent doors that are opening inward. He said the footprints of Max Weissler, one of the refugees allowed to enter the Philippines and had survived the Holocaust, can be seen imprinted on the marble floor.

PH delegation embarks on landmark trips to Jordan, Israel

By Nat Mariano

PRESIDENT Rodrigo Duterte will bring a delegation of 150 businessmen and 15 government officials on his trip to Israel this week, in hopes of reaffirming the ties between the two countries.

"I leave today for landmark visits that underscore our vision for our country—a responsible member of the world community—a Philippines that is a friend to all, an enemy to no one," said the President in his departure statement Sunday afternoon.

Duterte, who was criticized in 2016 for comparing the Jews to the victims of the campaign against illegal drugs, said he responded to the call of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

"We have about 28,000 Filipinos in Israel and there are 48,000 Filipinos in Jordan. And you know, without mentioning anything,

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there's a volatile situation there and we have to be sure that our citizens are fully protected," said Duterte, who promised to bring several retiring military officials as a "gift" for serving the country.

"I shall seek to have a robust relationship that looks forward to broader cooperation on a broad range of mutually important areas—defense and security, law enforcement, economic development, trade [and] investments and labor," he added.

Meanwhile, the Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs said Duterte's three-day visit "symbolizes the strong, warm ties" between the two countries and the potential for developing and strengthening those relations.

"The Philippine President will be accompanied by a large delegation of ministers, including the ministers of foreign affairs, national defense, trade and industry, agriculture, internal security, science and technology, labor and employment, tourism and transportation. Senior senators will also be part of the delegation," MFA spokesperson Emmanuel Nahshon said in a statement.

Nahshon said Duterte's visit will mark several important events such as the 80-year anniversary of the Philippines opening its doors to the Jewish refugees in the late 1930s, the 70-year anniversary of the Philippines' support of United Nations Resolution 181, paving the way for the creation of the State of Israel, and 60-year anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Israel and the Philippines.

"One of the important subjects to be discussed is the opening of a direct flight route between Manila and Ben Gurion Airport," said Nahshon, saying that direct

flights will bring a rise in the number of Filipino tourists going to Israel, particularly Christians wanting to make pilgrimages to the Holy Land.

Nahshon said other agreements to be discussed or signed include one that would regulate the employment of thousands of Filipino caregivers.

"The agreement will protect the workers' rights, ensure equal and fair treatment of them, and cancel all the fees that until now they have been forced to pay to intermediate agents," he said.

Nahshon also said there are agreements waiting to be signed in science and technology, promotion of investments, agreements between chambers of commerce, and the environment.

The official delegation includes: Executive Secretary Salvador Medialdea, Foreign Affairs Secretary Alan Peter Cayetano, Labor and Employment Secretary Silvestre Bello III, Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana, Trade and Industry Secretary Ramon Lopez, Environment Secretary Roy Cimatu, Transportation Secretary Arthur Tugade, Energy Secretary Alfonso Cusi, National Security Adviser Hermogenes Esperon, Presidential Spokesman Harry Roque, Special Assistant to the President Christopher Go, Political Adviser Francis Tolentino, Senator Richard Gordon, Interior and Local Government officer in charge Eduardo Año, and Philippine Coast Guard commandant Rear Admiral Elson Hermogino.

The Palace has already said that public funds will be used to finance Duterte's trip to Israel and Jordan, but said the benefits would outweigh the cost.

Duterte is set to arrive Sunday for a visit to Israel and Jordan, pursuing a pivot away from his nation's long-time reliance on American military hardware and backing.

The four-day stay in Israel is the first

by a Philippine leader in more than 60 years of diplomatic ties between the two nations, even though their links go back to Manila sheltering Jews during the Holocaust.

Duterte's visit has generated a lot of attention, powered both by his penchant for foul-mouthed statements—including likening himself to Hitler—and his internationally condemned drug crackdown that has killed thousands.

Duterte, accompanied by an entourage including soldiers and police, will sit down with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and hold an event with some of the thousands of Filipino migrant workers in Israel.

"We assign great importance to this visit, which symbolizes the strong, warm ties between our two peoples," Israel's foreign ministry said in a statement.

Duterte has pivoted the Philippines away from its former colonial master the United States and toward warmer diplomatic and business ties with China and Russia.

The US and Canada have both had military hardware deals fall apart with the Philippines due to concerns over Duterte's drug war. But so far sales with Israel have gone smoothly.

"[The visit] is for President Duterte to look for an alternative market for... weapons for our armed forces as well as for the police," Henelito Sevilla, an international relations expert at University of the Philippines, said.

Israel is among the world's top arms dealers, with nearly 60 percent of its defence exports going to the Asia Pacific region, according to Israeli defence ministry data.

The Philippines emerged as a significant new customer in 2017 for Israel, with sales of radar and anti-tank equipment worth \$21 million.

Lapeña favors establishment of rice trading center for ZamBaSuTa

By NONOY E. LACSON

ZAMBOANGA CITY – Customs Commissioner Isidro Lapeña favors the proposal of Agriculture Secretary Emmanuel Piñol to establish a rice trading center in Jolo, Sulu or Bongao, Tawi-Tawi, saying that this will generate substantial collections for the Bureau of Customs (BOC).

However, Lapeña was quick to add that, for Piñol's plan to push through, this should be accompanied by a directive or memorandum from President Rodrigo Duterte that would guide authorities involved in the implementation of anti-smuggling operations in that part of the country.

Piñol had earlier broached the idea of establishing the rice trading center in the south that would allow illegal rice and sugar importers to sell their smuggled products after paying tariff to the government.

"As of now, I have no idea if the President has approved the proposal of Secretary Piñol for the establishment of a rice trading center in Jolo, Sulu and in Bongao, Tawi-Tawi," Lapeña told reporters here.

Senator Joseph Victor Ejercito said Saturday that the planned to legalize rice smuggling in ZamBaSuTa area would eventually kill the country's agriculture sector.

At present, the price of rice at the public market of Zamboanga City ranges from ₱55 to ₱70 per kilo for commercial rice, while NFA rice is being sold at ₱32 per kilo.

In some towns in Basilan province and in Sibuco, Zamboanga del Norte, the price of rice reaches as high as ₱85 per kilo.

Zamboanga City BOC District Col-

lector Atty. Lycee C. Martinez said he will adhere to the order of Lapeña if the campaign against rice and sugar smuggling in the ZamBaSuTa area should be slowed down or not.

He said that rice and sugar traders from ZamBaSuTa area are bringing in their goods without the necessary importation permit (IP), a reason for the Philippine Navy and the Philippine Coast Guard authorities to hold their cargoes.

Martinez also accompanied Lapeña during his port visit in Basilan, Sulu and Tawi-Tawi Friday and Saturday.

Martinez said Lapeña was able to talk to the BOC personnel, and see for himself the condition of the BOC offices in the three provinces.

People in the ZamBaSuTa area also pleading with the President to allow local traders to bring in rice from Sandakan in Sabah, Malaysia since the three island provinces do not produce rice.

PNP, AFP forge ties amid security threats in Mindanao

By **MARTIN A. SADONGDONG**

The Philippine National Police (PNP) and Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) have signed an agreement that aims to monitor the activities of local government units (LGUs) in Mindanao amid security threats in the region.

PNP chief, Director General Oscar Albayalde and AFP Chief of Staff, General Carlito Galvez Jr. signed recently the Joint Letter Directive that serves as the implementing order on the monitoring of local chief executives in Mindanao as contained in Martial Law Instructions No. 1 issued by Martial

Law Administrator and Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana.

"The PNP sustains responsiveness to do its mission to serve and protect the Filipino people. Police and military efforts may have been bolstered with the declaration of martial law in Mindanao but we must oversee [the] situations of our fellow Mindanaoans in the light of aggressive violence that may victimize [the] lives of innocents," Albayalde said.

According to the PNP, the Joint Letter Directive seeks to establish a monitoring system, in coordination with the PNP and AFP among other law enforcement agencies, "to effectively assist the regional and

provincial governors in Mindanao."

"It will also provide a system to monitor and assess the operationalization of LGU councils and committees; and monitor [the] participation of local officials in all programs, activities and projects of these LGU councils and committees," the PNP said.

The interaction of local officials with their constituents will also be monitored to determine "if they are present and discharging their official functions in their localities, as well as supervising their various executive departments in the implementation of government programs and services for the benefit of their constituents." ✓

PNP, AFP move to preempt more terror attacks in Mindanao ahead of BARMM plebiscite

By **AARON B. RECUENCO**
and **MARTIN A. SADONGDONG**

The Philippine National Police (PNP) and Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) have intensified their

operations to preempt the possible plans of some groups to sabotage the plebiscite for the new Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM) through attacks that include bombing activities.

PNP chief Director General Oscar Albayalde said "everything is possible when it comes to threat on the security of Mindanao," what with the bombing in Isulan town of Sultan Kudarat that left three people dead and ▶4

PNP, AFP move to...

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more than 30 others injured.

"What we can do only is to implement preemptive measures," said Albayalde.

Fears were raised that some groups may sabotage the peace agreement between the government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) after the Isulan bombing.

Some Muslim groups are opposing any form of peace agreement and are instead pushing for independence while some groups are opposing the inclusion of their communities to the BARMM.

Part of the security measures, according to Albayalde, is to strengthen the intelligence in Mindanao and strategic deployment of policemen to reduce the capability of some groups to carry out attacks.

"And of course, we have to have the active participation of the community because they should be our eyes and ears especially in critical areas," said Albayalde.

Police forces in Mindanao are under highest security alert status while those in Metro Manila are placed under heightened alert after the Isulan bombing.

Joint monitoring

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activities of local government units (LGUs) in Mindanao amid security threats in the region.

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projects of these LGU councils and committees," the PNP said.

The interaction of local officials with their constituents will also be monitored to determine "if they are present and are discharging their official functions in their localities, as well as supervising their various executive departments in the implementation of government programs and services for the benefit of their constituents."

The Joint Letter Directive was signed as the National Joint Peace and Security Coordinating Center (JPSCC) convened at the AFP general headquarters in Camp Aguinaldo with Albayalde and Galvez, co-chairmen, presiding over the meeting.

Despite being under the martial law, several security threats are continuously being monitored by state security forces in the southern part of the country.

Just last Tuesday, August 28, a man believed to be part of the Abu Turaife group, a threat group which pledged allegiance to Islamic State (ISIS), slipped past security and detonated an improvised explosive device in Isulan, Sultan Kudarat during a town festival that killed three people and wounded 36 others.

Prior to that, an IED also went off in a military checkpoint in Lamitan, Basilan last July 31 which claimed the lives of 10 people and injured nine others.

NAVY BATTLES HUGE FIRE IN TAWI-TAWI

ZAMBOANGA CITY: The Philippine Navy rescued dozens of families from a huge fire that broke out Sunday at the port area in Bongao, Tawi-Tawi. The fire, which began at about 2:30 a.m., burned several buildings and houses near the pier where the patrol corvette BRP Miguel Malvar was moored at the time of the blaze, according to Rear Admiral Rene Medina, commander of the Naval Force Western Mindanao. Medina said the patrol ship crew led by Commander Charles Merric Villanueva immediately responded to the fire and rescued and evacuated at least 50 families. There were no casualties reported. He said Villanueva's group also deployed two teams of fire fighters armed to combat the conflagration until firemen arrived. The fire lasted for three hours. The Bureau of Fire and Protection said it still investigating the cause of the fire.

A7: AL JACINTO

Go assures support for soldiers

TANAY, Rizal — Special Assistant to the President Christopher Lawrence "Bong Go" on Saturday assured incoming soldiers of government support.

In his speech at the closing ceremony held at Camp General Mateo Capinpin for the Candidate Soldier Class 532-2018, Go lauded the trainees for their support for the administration of President Duterte.

Go also told the incoming soldier the government will take care of them.

"The current administration under the leadership of President Rodrigo Roa Duterte ensures your welfare. As your Kuya Bong, I am telling you that we will take care of you by increasing your salaries and modernizing the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP)," Go said.

He became known as "Kuya Bong" by personally delivering assistance to the needy and victims of tragedies upon orders of Duterte, who is fondly called by many as "Tatay Digong."

The 240 candidate soldiers — consisting of 234 males and six females — are aspiring to be members of the Philippine Army.

They finished 16 weeks of physical, mental and emotional training.

After their graduation, the candidate soldiers will be deployed to Mindanao, Region IV-A (CALABARZON) or Region IV-B (MIMAROPA).

In an interview, Go said the aspiring soldiers will be eligible for the increased base pay that the Duterte administration had set for the AFP.

"I am referring to the increase in their base pay. It used to be around, P14,000, but now it is P29,000. Their entry position salary has been doubled effective January of 2018.," Go said.

Go also noted the ongoing modernization of the military.

"We are in the third horizon of the modernization process and the SND (Secretary of National Defense) is currently looking into the priorities, like dual purpose equipment for the external defense of the Armed Forces, Air Force, Navy and Army," he pointed out.

He said one of President Duterte's agenda in his official visit to Israel is to look for military equipment that could be purchased for the AFP. **3 EWB**

Base pay ng sundalo, P29K na

Kinumpirma ni Special Assistant to the President Christopher "Bong" Go na kasama na sa base-pay increase ang mga bagong sundalo.

Ayon kay Go, mula sa dating P14,000 ay naging P29,000 na ang entry level ng mga sundalo kaya naman marami ang mga nai-engganong pumasok sa serbisyo.

Sinabi ni Go na sa katunayan ay aabot sa 10,000 ang mga bagong sundalo ng AFP.

Samantala, tiniyak ni Go na pagkatapos ng salary standardization ng mga guro sa 2019, ay agad na susunod ang pangakong adjustment ni Pangulong Duterte sa mga ito.

Ipinangako rin ni SAP Go na siya mismo ang magpapaalala sa Pangulo hinggil sa inaasam na salary increase ng mga guro pagkatapos ng 2019. (Rudy Andal)



Bagong sundalo kasama sa pay increase-Go

Kasama na sa base-pay increase ang mga bagong sundalo.

Ito ang kinumpirma ni Special Assistant to the President Christopher Bong Go na kung saan ay nabot sa 10,000 ang mga bagong sundalo ng AFP.

Mula sa dating P14,000

ay naging P29,000 na ang entry level ng mga sundalo kaya naman marami ang mga nai-engganyong pumasok sa serbisyo.

Tiniyak ni Go na pagkatapos ng salary standardization ng mga guro sa 2019, ay agad na susunod ang pangakong

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-Rudy Andal-

INCLUSION 'UNFOUNDED, MALICIOUS'

HUMAN RIGHTS ACTIVIST SEEKS REMOVAL FROM TERROR LIST

By Krixia Subingsubing
@krixiasINQ

Taking a cue from the two UN members and two militant leaders cleared from the Department of Justice's (DOJ) proscription petition to declare the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP), its armed wing New People's Army (NPA) and 600 individuals as terrorists, an indigenous peoples' rights leader also asked a Manila court that she be declared as a nonparty to the petition.

On Friday, human rights activist Beverly Longid asked Regional Trial Court Branch 19 Judge Marlo Magdoza Malagar to clear her from the terrorist list as she was neither an officer nor a member of the CPP-NPA.

She argued that the petition,

which was filed in February, not only failed to prove her association with the Maoist rebel group, but also did not apply to her as an individual as a proscription petition can only apply to organizations, associations or group of persons as per Section 17 of the Human Security Act.

Same grounds

Her "unfounded, malicious and irresponsible" inclusion in the list, she said, posed serious threats to her life.

These were the same grounds used by fellow defendants UN Special Rapporteur for Indigenous Peoples' Rights Victoria Tauli-Corpuz, former UN member Jose Melencio Molintas, former Bayan Muna Rep. Satur Ocampo and peace

talks consultant Rafael Baylosis.

They were among the over 600 individuals—some of whom were activists, leaders of mass organizations and former Catholic priests—named by the DOJ as alleged leaders and members of the group behind Asia's longest-running insurgency.

The proscription petition stemmed from President Duterte's promise to clamp down on the rebel groups following the collapse of peace negotiations between the government and the communist-led National Democratic Front of the Philippines.

'Virtual gov't hit list'

Human rights advocates and militants alike have assailed the petition as a "virtual government

hit list" meant to harass and threaten progressives and critics of the Duterte administration.

Some of the 600 names included double entries, dubious aliases and generic names—which Justice Secretary Menardo Guevarra had admitted no having vetted.

In August, Malagar's 14-page resolution cleared Corpuz, Molintas, Baylosis and Ocampo on nearly the same legal base now being used by Longid.

Longid, a member of several local and international human rights groups, said in an interview that the proscription petition was nothing more than a harassment suit meant to target the "increased resistance against the abuses committed against indigenous peoples." INC

COMMUNIST PARTY FOUNDER GOT WRONG INFO

JUSTICE SECRETARY GUEVARRA APPOINTED OFFICER IN CHARGE OF NAT'L GOV'T

By Jeannette I. Andrade
and Julie M. Aurelio
@Team_Inquirer

Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) founder Jose Maria Sison sees President Duterte's designation of a caretaker to run the government while he is visiting Israel and Jordan as an inclination toward fascist dictatorship.

In a statement posted on Saturday on his website (josemaria-sison.org), Sison claimed that instead of allowing the constitutional successor, Vice President Leni Robredo, to serve as caretaker, Mr. Duterte "created a caretaker committee headed by Inday Sara (the President's daughter, Davao City Mayor Sara Duterte) to rule the country."

Wrong information

Sison's information was wrong: Mr. Duterte designated Justice Secretary Menardo Guevarra as caretaker of the national government, as Executive Secretary Salvador Medialdea, the usual caretaker when he is out of the country, is traveling

with him this time.

Presidential spokesperson Harry Roque said on Sunday that it was the first time that a justice secretary was chosen to run the government in the absence of the President.

"It's unprecedented. It's the first time that the secretary of justice was named as the caretaker. The officer in charge is the justice secretary, Menardo Guevarra," Roque told reporters at Ninoy Aquino International Airport, prior to the departure of Mr. Duterte on an 11-hour flight to Tel Aviv.

Roque explained that the choice of caretaker depended on who had the President's trust and confidence.

Under the Constitution, the Vice President takes over only when the President dies, he said.

"It doesn't say that the Vice President will be the officer in charge when the President goes abroad. There's no entitlement," he added.

The Palace has not announced a caretaker committee, much less one that includes Mayor Duterte.



UNPRECEDENTED Before flying to Israel and Jordan, President Duterte named Menardo Guevarra caretaker of the national government. This marked the first time a justice secretary was tapped to run the government in the President's absence.

Sison, however, referred to such a committee in a Facebook post last month, in which he claimed Mr. Duterte had been taken ill and slipped into a coma, only for the President to turn up in Cebu City two days later to address a meeting of Visayan mayors and challenge him to come home if he was sick, promising to make room for him in the national penitentiary.

Joining Mr. Duterte in his official visit to Israel are Cabinet officials and 150 businessmen.

'One more expensive tour'

Mr. Duterte is visiting Israel from Sunday to Wednesday on the invitation of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

On Wednesday, he flies to Amman for a four-day visit to Jordan on the invitation of King

Abdullah II.

Mr. Duterte is expected to return to the Philippines through Davao City, his hometown, on Sunday.

Sison described Mr. Duterte's trip as "one more expensive tour cum medical treatment in Israel."

Commenting on Mr. Duterte's claim that Robredo was incompetent to lead the country, Sison said, "Leni Robredo is far more intelligent, honest and competent than a Duterte who has gone out of his mind by worshiping and emulating the fascist dictatorship and corruption of Marcos."

Still capable of mischief

Although burned by the false information about the President falling into a coma, Sison still believed Mr. Duterte was sick.

"Duterte may be seriously sick physically and mentally. But he can still walk and give orders to his minions. While still alive, he is capable of doing a lot of malicious mischief and inflicting social disaster on the

Filipino people," he said.

"He and his coconspirators are still hell-bent on carrying out a discernibly four-stage plot of establishing a fascist dictatorship a la Marcos and imposing it on the people," he said.

Mr. Duterte, he claimed, has spoken about the four-stage plot through his pronouncements on the possibility of declaring martial law nationwide, setting up a revolutionary government, "effective control of the results of the May 2019 elections to ensure Charter change through the needed majority in both houses of Congress," and a shift to federalism.

Sison described the proposed shift to federalism as a "facade for fascist dictatorship."

"Duterte and his coconspirators are clever and brutal enough to plot and carry out their evil plan. But time and circumstances are against them," Sison said, citing the growing unrest over Mr. Duterte's strongman tactics as well as the "rapid deterioration of the economy." INQ **N**

KADAMAY MEMBERS HEED DEADLINE FOR THEM TO LEAVE BAGOLOD HOUSING SITE

By **Carla P. Gomez**
@carlagomezINQ

BAGOLOD CITY—The 1,500 informal settlers who camped out at a housing site for uniformed government personnel in the village of Felisa in this city to lay claim to unoccupied houses heeded a deadline for them to leave the area peacefully on Friday.

Susana Nonato, an architect at the National Housing Authority (NHA) who heads the housing program for soldiers and policemen, told leaders of Kalipunan ng Damayang Mahihirap (Kadamay) that they had to leave the housing site to prevent anarchy.

Nonato and other NHA and city officials met with Kadamay leaders who mobilized up to 1,500 of their members in entering the housing site for the Armed Forces of the Philippines and the Philippine National Police.

Homeless' rights

Kadamay leaders, insisting the homeless had a right to take over unoccupied government housing units, had initially refused to leave, citing a joint resolution of the House of Representatives and Senate endorsed by President Duterte.

They said the joint resolution authorized the NHA to award the houses that were intended for but not occupied by soldiers, policemen, firemen and jail personnel.

Nonato, however, said all 1,498 houses at Ciudad Felisa, the subdivision built for men in uniform, had all been awarded to

Justice Teresita Leonardo de Castro for leading a judicial coup d'etat with the orchestration of master puppeteer Jose Calida. But there's a time of reckoning. When the time comes, may the loving God bless her with a chance to sav

Penology, and Bureau of Corrections, Nonato said.

Supt. Algen Tala told Kadamay leaders that the 675 housing units allotted for the PNP were not even enough for the number of policemen apply-

ing for the houses.

He said the PNP had already awarded 368 policemen housing units.

The P360-million Ciudad Felisa housing project started in 2012 and was completed in

2015. It is now fully booked, Nonato said.

The men in uniform who applied for housing units went through the process, she added.

"We cannot double award houses," she said.

Nonato said Kadamay could instead submit a list of homeless people who should go through proper processing for future housing projects.

She said officials would again hold a dialogue with the informal settlers and Church officials.

Church role

Fr. Chris Gonzales, head of the Social Action Center of the Diocese of Bacolod, had recommended a dialogue between officials and the informal settlers.

Bacolod Mayor Evelio Leonardia said lots were still available at the Arao relocation site in the village of Vista Alegre.

The city government, Leonardia said, planned to secure a loan to develop the area as a socialized housing site.

Nonato said the NHA was already addressing the lack of electricity and water facilities in Ciudad Felisa.

She said Kadamay had already invaded five government housing sites and the AFP-PNP Housing Board had already waived its rights for two such projects in favor of the informal settlers.

Senior Supt. Francisco Ebreo, acting Bacolod police chief, said a private security agency was already securing the Ciudad Felisa project but police would provide more men. INQ

NPA owns slay of another b'gay chief

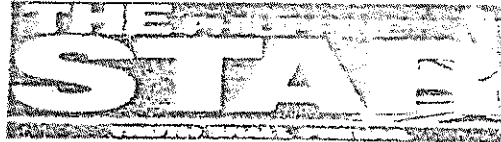
BACOLOD CITY - The New People's Army (NPA) has claimed responsibility for the killing on Aug. 30 of Mario Gonzales, barangay chairman of Panciao in Manjuyod, Negros Oriental, the fifth to be killed since June.

Juan Malaya, spokesperson of the NPA's Mt. Canseron Operational Front Command, accused Gonzales in a statement of being an intelligence asset of the Armed

Forces of the Philippines and Philippine National Police.

Gonzales was the fifth barangay chairman killed since June 12 on Negros island, including two in Isabela, Negros Occidental and two in Guihulngan City, Negros Oriental, police and military records showed.

Gonzales' death should serve as a warning to those who allow themselves to be used by the military, Malaya said. 14 - Gilbert Bayoran



Troops seize rebels' firearms in Abra

By ARTEMIO DURLAO

BAGUIO CITY - Government forces seized the firearms of communist guerrillas in a remote village in the hinterland town of Sallapadan in Abra Friday morning.

Troops of the 24th Infantry Battalion and the 73rd Military Intelligence Company discovered the cache contain-

ing several firearms of still unknown calibers, bullets and other war materiel while they were on patrol at around 6:10 a.m.

Lt. Col. Isagani Nato, spokesperson for the Taria-based Northern Luzon Command, said the discovery was a result of the campaign focusing on community support and the relentless

combat and intelligence operations of the military together with police intelligence agents.

"With the help of local government authorities, (our) efforts in Abra will be in full swing to rid the far-flung areas of the influence of the communist terrorist group," Nato added.

- With Michael Punongbayan

Mayor Sara lauds Cotabateños in staging of Kalivungan fest

KIDAPAWAN CITY, North Cotabato (PNA) - Presidential daughter and Davao City Mayor Sara Z. Duterte lauded the people of this province for the successful staging of the Kalivungan Festival, calling it a symbol of unity in diversity.

The mayor was guest of honor in the closing ceremonies of the Kalivungan Fest on Saturday and hailed the festivity of unity in diversity as similar to Davao City's multicultural Kadayawan sa Davao Festival.

"Mao ni atong kinahanglan, nga maghiusa kita sa luyo sa atong governor, sa atong vice governor, sa atong mga board members, sa atong mga mayors og konsehal even sa atong mga barangay kapitan - maghiusa kita sa ilang likod kay ang kusog sa mga local government officials naa diha sa katawhan (This is what we need, to unite with our governor, vice governor, board members, mayors and councilors and even our barangay captains - we should unite with them because the strength of the local government lies with our constituents)," she said.

Sara said without unity, there will be no fruitful outcome from efforts of government officials.

She also urged the people not to support the New People's Army (NPA) in their respective barangays and municipalities, and called on them to rally behind the government.

"Naa lang pud koy hangyo,

naa koy request nga kung pwede ayaw lang pud ninyo tabangi ang kalaban sa gobyerno para pantay (I have a request to you if you will not help the government, do not also help the enemies of state to be fair)," Sara said.

She added that the rebels in her city are also the same in the province because the NPA is operating in remote areas of Marilog and Paquibato districts in Davao City going to the municipalities of Arakan and Magpet of Cotabato.

"Moingon lang mo - sundalo man na, NPA man na, o terrorista, sir, ayaw lang ako ang istoryaha, ayaw alang ako ang i-recruit, ayaw lang diri sa akong tugkaran because ang gusto nako malinawon nga pagpamuyo diri sa among barangay, diri sa among municipality. Gusto nako akong mga anak maka iskwela og tarong, mahuman og iskwela, maka negosyo ko gamay, ang akong bana maka drive og motor ako magka tindahan ang amoang uma matarong namo para sa among harvest - mao lang ang akong hangyo (Just tell them - whether they are soldiers, NPA or terrorists, sir don't talk to us, do not recruit us, not here in our place, because I want peace in our barangay and municipality. I want my children to go to school and finish their studies, have small business, my husband could drive a motorcycle, I could have a small store, fix our farm to have good harvest - that is my only request)," she said.

NPA camp in Batangas captured by troops

TROOPS yesterday overran a camp of the communist New People's Army after a firefight in Lobo town, Batangas where the rebel group was reported to be extorting money and rice from residents.

Capt. Patrick Jay Retumban, spokesman of the Army's 2nd Infantry Division based in Rizal, said troops from the 1st Infantry Battalion under Lt. Col. Jonathan Manio conducted the operation to seize the camp in Barangay Calumpit at around 5:45 a.m. yesterday based on the civilians' report.

He said the firefight broke out as soldiers were closing in on the rebel position.

Retumban said the 20 rebels who were manning the camp fled after a 10-minute firefight. The NPA group was led by one Salma and Mulan of the NPA's Sub-Regional Military Area 4-C under the Southern Tagalog Regional Party

Committee, he said.

Retumban also said there was an undetermined number of casualties on the NPA side based on blood stains seen at their position.

Recovered from the camp, which has 30 makeshift tents, were three improvised explosive devices, ammunition for cal. 45 pistols, backpacks, cellphones, and documents.

Retumban said the rebels belong to the same group of NPA men encountered by soldiers in Barangay Buisa, San Juan town also in Batangas on July 31.

Maj. Gen. Rhoderick Parayno, 2nd ID commander, said the last five encounters between his soldiers and the communist rebels were all prompted by reports given by barangay residents.

"They have realized that the NPAs are plain bandits nowadays," he said. — *Victor Reyes*



Troops overran NPA encampment

GOVERNMENT forces overran a temporary encampment of the New People's Army (NPA) shortly after a brief encounter yesterday morning in Lobo, Batangas.

This was confirmed by Capt. Patrick Jey Retumban, spokesman of the Ar-

my's 2nd Infantry Division. Retumban said elements of the 1st Infantry Battalion led by Lt. Col. Jonathan Manio were conducting patrol operation in Bgy. Calumpit, Lobo, at around 5:45 a.m. when they encountered the rebels. A 10-minute firefight imme-

diately occurred until the rebels scampered to different directions.

During clearing operation, troops recovered the temporary encampment of the rebels with 20 makeshift tents.

Also recovered in the area were improvised ex-

plosive devices (IEDs), backpacks, celphones, and other subversive documents.

Accordingly, rebels were in the area extorting money from the residents.

It was learned that the same group of rebels, led by certain alias Salma,

were already encountered by government forces on July 31, 2017 in Bgy. Bulsa, San Juan, Batangas.

Authorities are conducting hot pursuit operation against the fleeing rebels. Zaida delos Reyes-Palanca

12

**SECOND ATTACK IN SULTAN KUDARAT
BOY KILLED, 7 INJURED
IN ISULAN BOMB EXPLOSION**

By Edwin O. Fernandez
@Inquirermindanao

ISULAN, SULTAN KUDARAT — Unidentified men set off another improvised bomb here that killed an 18-year-old boy and injured seven other people, police said on Sunday.

Supt. Aldrin Gonzales, speaking for police in Region 12, said the improvised bomb exploded just outside Prince internet café along Valdez Street in Barangay Kalawag 2 at 7:28 p.m.

Eight people, many of whom sustained leg injuries, were rushed to the Sultan Kudarat provincial hospital, according to an initial police report.

One of the victims, 18-year-old Jan Mark Palencia Lupa, died from his injuries, Gonzales said.

One of the other victims was in critical condition, he said.

Gonzales said police scene of the crime operatives were working at the blast site.

Sunday's bombing came after a man set off a powerful improvised bomb along rows of used-clothing stores in Barangay Kalawag 3 on Aug. 28 that left three people dead and 36 injured. *A12*

The bombing came while the town was celebrating its foundation anniversary and Hamungaya Festival.

Sultan Kudarat Gov. Pax Mangudadatu has offered a P1-million reward for any information that would lead to the arrest of the Aug. 28 bombers. **INQ**

SULTAN KUDARAT

**1 DEAD,
15 HURT
IN BLAST**

ONE person died and 15 others were wounded following an explosion at an internet café in Sultan Kudarat on Sunday night, a military official said.

In a report by the Sultan Kudarat provincial police, the source of the blast in downtown Isulan City at 7:20 p.m. was an improvised explosive device (IED), according

>BlastA2

■ BLAST FROM A1

1 DEAD, 15 HURT

to Brig. Gen. Cirilito Sobejana, 6th Infantry Division commander.

It was the second bombing in five days in the same area. It was unclear how the bomber managed to smuggle the device. The casualties were rushed to nearby hospitals.

No individual or group claimed responsibility for the bombing which occurred after the August 28 blast also in Isulan that killed three people and wounded at least 35 others and followed President Rodrigo Duterte's order to the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) to crush terrorism.

The IS and the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF) both claimed responsibility for the attack that was carried out using a motorcycle laden with explosives.

The BIFF, whose members are mostly former Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) fighters, is one of several pro-IS militant groups fighting for the establishment of a caliphate in Mindanao.

In July 31, a Moroccan IS soldier, Abu Kaftheer al Maghribi, drove a van filled with explosives in an apparent suicide attack in Lamitan City in the volatile Muslim province of Basilan, several nautical miles south of Zamboanga. The IS claimed responsibility for the explosion that left over a dozen casualties.

In a post on its Amaq News

Agency, the IS said a Moroccan man carried out the daring assault against Filipino soldiers and identified the executor of the suicide bombing as Maghribi. "A martyrdom attack led to 15 Filipino soldiers being killed in the city of Lamitan on the island of Basilan in the southern Philippines," it said.

Philippine authorities said, however, that 12 people were killed when the bomb exploded at a security checkpoint after government militias stopped the suspicious vehicle in Bulanting village, about 2 kilometers away from downtown Lamitan.

The province is also a known stronghold of the militant group Abu Sayyaf whose leaders also pledged allegiance to the IS.

The attacks come as the whole of Mindanao continues to be under martial rule, more than a year after the IS-inspired Maute group laid siege to Marawi City in May 2017, killing hundreds, displacing thousands, and destroying billions of pesos worth of infrastructure.

Several foreign fighters had been killed in clashes with soldiers in Basilan in recent years. The military earlier urged the public to be on alert and stay vigilant at all times following attempts by pro-ISIS militants to bomb civilian targets in the restive southern region.

AL JACINTO, DEMPSEY REYES

SABAH EXTENDS SEA CURFEW OVER ABU SAYAFF GROUP THREAT

ZAMBOANGA CITY: Persistent threats posed by the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) prompted Sabah to extend its sea curfew over the Eastern Sabah Security Zone (Esszone) covering three nautical miles off the border of Tawi-Tawi's chain of islands.

Malaysian media reported that the Sabah's dusk-to-dawn sea curfew has been extended by yet another two weeks to September 15 over Tawau, Semporna, Kunak, Lahad Datu, Kinabatangan, Sanda-

kan and Beluran.

Sabah Police Commissioner Datuk Ramli Din said the decision to extend the curfew, first imposed four years ago, came based on continuous threats from cross-border criminals, including kidnap-for-ransom groups and the Abu Sayyaf.

"There is a need to continue the curfew in these waters to prevent the encroachment of terrorists and criminals who can threaten the safety of locals, international researchers and tourists on the

islands," the Star Online quoted the official as saying.

He said: "We also want to ensure the safety of the people of Sabah who use the waters and are staying near the Eastern Sabah Safety Zone."

Ramli added that the curfew was to facilitate enforcement and monitoring of boat activities in the area, as well as to establish a sense of security for nearby chalet owners and fishermen through the presence of a security team.

The curfew was first implemented on July 19, 2014, following a series of kidnapping incidents which saw the beheading of Bernard Ther Ted Fed, a Sarawakian, and the killing of several others, including a policeman and tourists.

Just last month, a group of at least 10 gunmen attempted to abduct a tugboat crew near Lahad Datu's Tambisan area in Sabah. But the crew locked themselves in a room and quickly radioed for help that patrolling members of the

Esscom responded immediately forcing the gunmen to escape. It said the armed men, believed from southern Philippines, sneaked into Sabah and boarded the tugboat on the evening of August 9.

Esscom commander Datuk Hazani Ghazali said the crew were ferrying palm oil from Felda Sabahat in Tengku and on their way to Kuantan when the gunmen came alongside their boat in Tambisan waters near the Tawi-Tawi chain of islands.

Malaysia and Indonesia have a border patrol agreement with the Philippines and share regular intelligence and conduct trilateral maritime patrols to prevent piracy and terrorism, including ransom kidnappings of sailors in the maritime borders.

The military has said that security is tight in the border to prevent Abu Sayyaf kidnappings inside Sabah or in the waters of Tawi-Tawi frequented by cargo boats

AL JACINTO

3

Mayor open to inclusion of 8 Pigcawayan villages in BARMM

B. KEITH BACONGCO

PIGCAWAYAN, North Cotabato - In the hope of addressing decades of strife, Mayor Eliseo Garcesa Jr. is open to the inclusion of the eight barangays here in the proposed Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM).

In an interview with The Manila Bulletin, Sarcesa said there was no problem in carving out some the barangays from his town.

"Though I cannot speak for these eight barangays, personally. But the purpose of the BOL (Bangsamoro Organic Law) is to give opportunity to those who belong to the Bangsamoro to rule themselves and to work for their peace and progress. We cannot attain

peace if we do not give them the opportunity to lead their own governances," explained Garcesa, who had been a mayor of this town for more than three terms already.

The eight barangays are Balacayon, Buricain, Datu Binasing, Kadingilan, Matilac, Lower Baguer, Lower Pangankalan and Patot.

Aside from these eight barangays, 31 other barangays from the towns of Aleosan, Kabacan, Midsayap and Pikit are being eyed for inclusion in the proposed Bangsamoro territory and will participate in the plebiscite either in February.

Garcesa pointed out that there should be an exhaustive information drive, especially for those who still have doubts, could understand the law better. ✓

'Convene NSC, Ledac for Marawi rehab, BOL'

By Rio N. Araja

A HOUSE majority leader has urged President Rodrigo Duterte to convene the National Security Council and the Legislative-Executive Development Advisory Council to discuss the progress of the Marawi City rehabilitation program and the Bangsamoro Organic Law.

Camarines Sur Rep. Rolando Andaya Jr., committee on rules chairperson, said the rehabilitation efforts in war-torn Marawi and the BOL must be discussed in the deliberation of next year's P3.757-trillion national budget.

"I would suggest that Malacañang call a meeting of the NSC or even Ledac," he said.

Andaya is pushing for a supplemental budget to be able to meet the financial requirements of the implementation of the BOL.

"What are the financing bottlenecks, for example? The bottomline is the people of Mindanao should be consulted," he said.

"At the House, the views of the Mindanao bloc are important. The people in or around the so-called ground zero should be consulted. Civilian views should be part of the discussion," Andaya added.

Task Force Bangon Marawi head Eduardo del Rosario said changes in the reconstruction of Marawi City would not cause a delay in their target project completion of 2021.

The task force earlier faced a setback after a failed negotiation with the developer, the Bangon Marawi Consortium.

Falconi Millar, task force secretary-general, said the Chinese-led consortium failed to satisfy the financial, technical and legal requirements of the project.

As this developed, the Department of Trade and Industry is planning to provide more assistance to affected Maranao entrepreneurs in Marawi.

"We plan to allocate more budget for this year to support the Bangon Marawi programs to provide livelihood assistance to around 80 percent of identified internally displaced persons in 2018," Trade Secretary Raimon Lopez said. *np*

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Out of proportion

It was unfortunate enough that the Philippine Navy frigate *BRP Gregorio del Pilar* ran aground Wednesday on the shoal of the Spratly Islands in the disputed area of the West Philippine Sea.

What is even more unfortunate is that vested interests are apparently trying to capitalize on the offer of China for assistance to drive a wedge in the improving bilateral relations between Manila and Beijing.

The Philippine Navy frigate was patrolling the area going to Ulugan Bay in Palawan when the incident happened. The silver lining is that no crew member was hurt when the former US coast guard boat retrofitted to serve as frigate ran into shallow waters at Hasa-Hasa Shoal.

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Following the incident, the *South China Morning Post* (SCMP) quoted China's foreign ministry spokesman Hua Chunying as saying that Chinese Coast Guard vessels have steamed into the shoal to offer help.

"We are discussing with the Philippine side how we can provide assistance," Hua said.

"China has learned of the relevant situation. China Coast Guard vessels are already at the scene. 'Nanhajiu 115' specialized in maritime search and rescue, is also in nearby waters. China is discussing

with the Philippines the relevant search and rescue matters," he added.

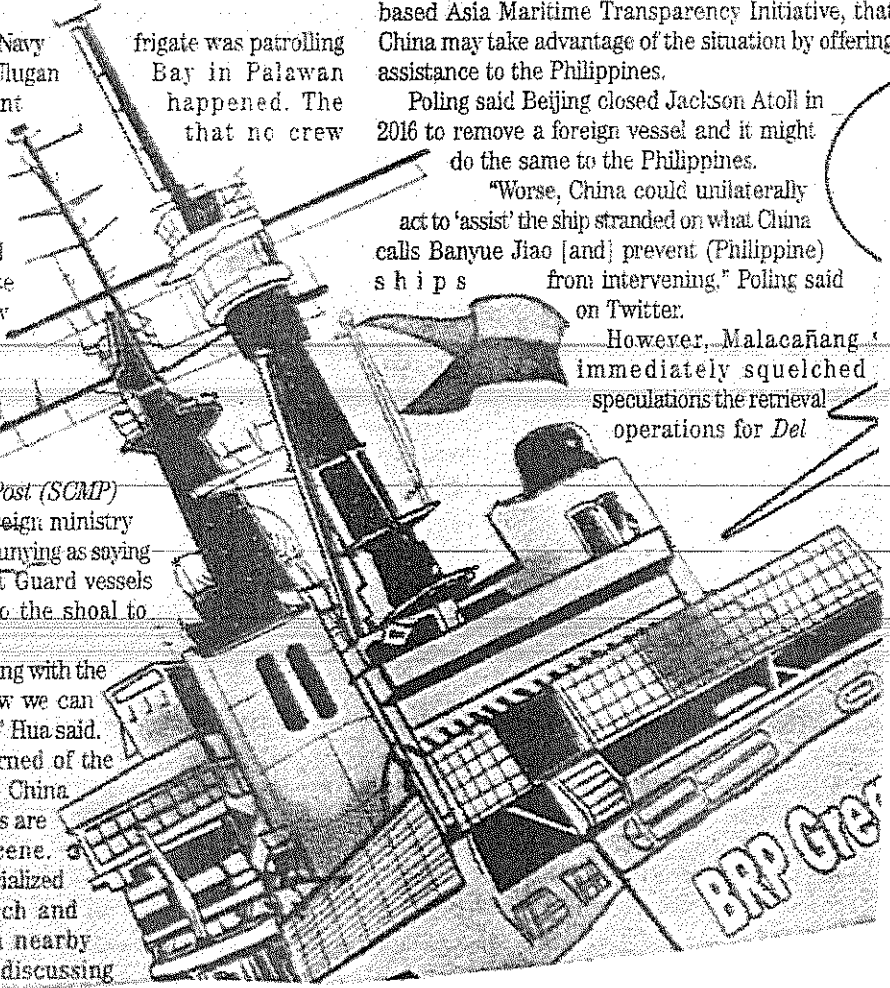
However, Armed Forces of the Philippines spokesman Col. Noel Detoyayo said only Philippine vessels are in the area to let *Del Pilar* loose by making it more buoyant through the removal of unnecessary weight.

That reaction is likely prompted by warnings, such as the one from Greg Poling, director of Washington-based Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative, that China may take advantage of the situation by offering assistance to the Philippines.

Poling said Beijing closed Jackson Atoll in 2016 to remove a foreign vessel and it might do the same to the Philippines.

"Worse, China could unilaterally act to 'assist' the ship stranded on what China calls Banyue Jiao [and] prevent (Philippine) ships from intervening," Poling said on Twitter.

However, Malacañang immediately squelched speculations the retrieval operations for *Del*



Pilar could create tensions with China.

"I understand that efforts are being undertaken to retrieve the grounded *Del Pilar*...It's ongoing with no problems from China," presidential spokesman Harry Roque said during a Palace press briefing.

It was also reported that the Philippine government informed China about the incident and the two countries are talking about the operation to extricate the grounded vessel.

To add perspective, China's offer of assistance should neither be a cause for surprise or alarm. All vessels at sea are in fact mandated by international law to help other vessels in distress.

Article 98 (1) of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea 1982 requires masters of vessels sailing under the flag of signatory States to render assistance to those in distress at sea. It is primarily a State duty fulfilled by the master of the vessel.

Likewise, Regulation V/33 of the International Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea 1974 (SOLAS) imposes an obligation on masters of vessels who are in a position to provide

assistance to do so.

In addition, Chapter 2.1.10 of the International Convention on Maritime Search and Rescue 1979 (SAR) obliges States Party to the Convention to ensure that assistance is provided to any person in distress at sea, "regardless of the nationality or status of such a person or the circumstances in which that person is found."

The fact that China offered assistance and waited for Manila's response before Beijing's rescue ships sailed into the vicinity of the grounded frigate can even be viewed as a gesture of respect for the decision of the Philippine authorities.

Poling's alarmist response reflects the growing unease of the US over Duterte's foreign policy pivot to other countries such as China, Russia, South Korea and Japan.

Incidentally, several US high-ranking officials recently tried to dangle American military equipment to Duterte following reports the Philippines is eyeing to buy submarines from Russia.

While there may be an existing territorial dispute between Beijing and Manila, the soft approach of Duterte instead of the confrontational stance of the previous administration is proving to be a prudent strategy where both countries may benefit.

Going back to *Del Pilar*, it appears military authorities believe that we have enough resources and capability to retrieve the grounded vessel. There is nothing wrong with that.

But China's offer to help in the rescue of the stranded frigate should be taken at its face value. Any speculation about Beijing's possible hidden agenda is unproductive, a mere exercise in blowing matters out of proportion.



NO,
THANKS.



NEED
HELP?

ONLINE NEWS
03 SEPTEMBER 2018

Soldiers, NPA rebels in Batangas clash anew

By: Maricar Cinco - Correspondent / @maricarcincoINQ

Inquirer Southern Luzon / 01:08 PM September 02, 2018

SAN PEDRO CITY — Soldiers on Sunday overran a rebel camp in Lobo town in Batangas province shortly after a brief encounter with members of the New People's Army (NPA).

Captain Patrick Jay Retumban, spokesperson of the Philippine Army's 2nd Infantry Division, said the ten-minute clash happened around 5:45 a.m. in Barangay (village) Calumpit. Soldiers under the Army's 1st Infantry Battalion encountered at least 20 rebels who they believe were part of the same rebel unit that they encountered on July 31 in San Juan town.

Retumban said residents in the area tipped off the police and Army of the NPA's presence and its alleged extortion activities.

He said the soldiers found improvised explosive devices, backpacks, cellphones, and documents from what seemed to be a "temporary" NPA camp, with about 20 makeshift tents, that the rebels left behind as they retreated.

No one from the Army's side was hurt, he added. /je