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NEWS CLIPPINGS

21 February 2019

Thursday

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4 February 2019 THE STAR Page: 1

'Gov't scholars free to express dissent'

Palace shoots down youth body proposal

By CHRISTINA MENDEZ and JANVIC MATEO

The proposal of National Youth Commission chairman Ronald Cardema to strip "anti-government" or "rebellious" students of government scholarships was met with criticism both from the administration and the opposition for being violative of laws, particularly on freedom of speech and of expression.

Vice President Leni Robredo, presidential spokesman and chief presidential legal counsel Salvador Panelo, Justice Secretary Menardo Guevarra, Commission on Higher Education chairman J. Prospero de Vera III, Sen. Francis Escudero, Education Secretary Leonor Briones, opposition senatorial candidates Samira Gutoc, Florin Hilbay and Gary Alejano as well as former Bayan Muna representative Satur Ocampo all said students must be allowed to speak their minds and

Turn to Page 6

Gov't From Page 1

develop critical thinking.

President Duterte said he respects dissent to his policies and every Filipino has the right to do it. "*Wala naman kung* dissent *lang*...those are just expression. I need more overt acts," Duterte said, referring to chants to oust him during rallies, and that rebellion is another matter.

Panelo also clarified that mere membership of state university students in groups aligned with the Left is not a ground for the government to take away their scholarships.

He said the government will not be reckless in going after students who merely want to express their grievances.

"We are a government of laws and not of speculations," Panelo said, noting that mere suspicion that students are taking part in a plot to overthrow the government will not be enough to pin them down.

"We must have evidence," Panelo said.

Panelo sees nothing wrong if students join rallies or protest actions to air their dissent against government policies, noting that expressing one's opinion is a valid exercise of their constitutional right to freedom of expression and of assembly in a democracy.

Panelo also noted that the Anti-Subversion Law was already repealed in 1992.

De Vera said there is no law or policy that prohibits scholars from criticizing the government, even those who are allegedly allied with communist groups.

"We have to implement the law as is it written and the law, Republic Act 10931, says students of good standing," De Vera said, referring to the Universal Access to Quality Tertiary Education law, which removed tuition and other fees in government-funded tertiary institutions.

De Vera said critics may only be removed from government scholarships if they fail to fulfill the requirements, particularly of being in good standing.

Guevarra also expressed objection to the proposal of Cardema, warning that this could be a violation of the 1987 Constitution.

"With all due respect, such a proposal, if adopted, would effectively restrain the youth's constitutional right to freedom of speech and expression," he said in a text message.

"Our state universities and colleges, instead of taking it against the militant students by dropping them from the roll, should be proud that they are producing young people who are socially aware and concerned not only about themselves but also about the nation," he stressed.

Robredo said, "I felt sad when I read about that, because throughout the history of our republic, every time there is conflict, every time is upheaval, the youth are brave, they are the first ones to act."

"Does the National Youth Commission want our youth to become puppets of the government?" she said in Filipino. "Is this statement of the NYC something we have to fear?"

In a press conference, Gutoc, Hilbay and Alejano lamented that the idea came from no less than the head of a government body supposed to advance the interests of the country's youth.

Hilbay, a former solicitor general, said the scholarships granted under the law to college students in state universities and colleges (SUCs) should be "based on merits, not politics."

"The proposal is totally contrary to the mandate of the (NYC)... The youth should be allowed to speak their mind," Hilbay said.

Gutoc, a peace advocate from Marawi, cited a landmark ruling of the Supreme Court that states that students "do not shed their constitutional rights to freedom of speech or expression at the schoolhouse gate."

She said that students in and out of campus should instead be encouraged to think freely because this is what the nation needs.

Alejano said it is more dangerous to have young people who cannot think for themselves.

"If you gag them you also gag their future," the former military officer said. "Their freedom of expression is guaranteed as long as they do not violate the Constitution."

Escudero, chairman of the Senate committee on education, arts and culture, said Cardema is bringing shame to the administration for his "ignorance" of the Constitution, and if anyone should be fired it should be him.

Escudero said all students, including those who take part in street protests, are afforded by the state with the right even to due process and equal protection, just like any other citizen of this country.

He reminded Cardema that this government serves all Filipinos – whether they voted for the President or not.

Briones said if the student engages in illegal activities, "that's another matter."

"But being active in raising issues, questions and so on and so forth, we might as well ask a great number of national leaders to refund the government from the time when they were scholars," she added.

Ocampo, who attended trial on multiple murder case filed against him before the Manila regional trial court, said the proposal is "stupid and irrational," and even a "highest form of irony" as Cardema was a Reserve Officers' Training Corps commander from the University of the Philippines.

Defense from the flak

Cardema has asked President Duterte to issue an executive order removing the state scholarships of all anti-government scholars, specifically those students who are allied with the Communist Party of the Philippines, New People's Army and National Democratic Front, "a terrorist group that is trying to overthrow the Philippine government and killing our government troops."

"The Filipino people formed the government to govern, to regulate, to discipline, to collect taxes and to allocate the Filipino people's funds into government scholarships and programs. Fighting the government means fighting the majority of the Filipino people and also not fulfilling their roles as the expected breadwinners who will uplift their families and as our hope in strengthening our country," Cardema said.

Yesterday, Cardema called Escudero "ignorant" of the statement he made, saying his proposal does not cover all government scholars amid the flak he is getting.

In a Facebook post, Cardema denied that he demanded the removal of militant students from government scholarships but only those who have become part of communist groups.

The Palace said taking part in moves to overthrow the government is already criminal in nature.

Under the Revised Penal Code), sedition, rebellion and conspiracy to commit these are crimes punishable by law.

Panelo said the government should withdraw students' scholarships if they commit these felonies. – **With Edu Punay, Helen Flores, Cecille Suerte Felipe, Marc Jayson Cayabyab**

21 February 2019 PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER Page: A1

BILLIONS IN UNCOLLECTED PREMIUMS BY SSS BARED

STORY BY MELVIN GASCON

Instead of raising members' contributions, the pension fund for workers in the private sector should improve collection efficiency, invest wisely and reduce fat bonuses for officials, says Bayan Muna chair Neri Colmenares. A4

FROM A1

By Melvin Gascon
@melvingasconINQ

Two party-list groups on Wednesday asked the Social Security System (SSS), which handles the pension fund for workers in the private sector, to explain the P437 billion in uncollected contributions and penalties before it starts raising contribution rates.

Bayan Muna chair Neri Colmenares said SSS members should not allow the pension fund to flex its new powers under Republic Act No. 11199, or the Social Security System Rationalization Act, without correcting losses borne from years of "collection inefficiency."

"The SSS does not have the moral authority to increase contribution under the new law if it has failed to collect all uncollected contributions under the old scheme," he said at a press briefing.

President Duterte on Feb. 7 signed RA 11199, which repealed Republic Act No. 8282, the old SSS law.

RA 11199 allows the SSS to expand its investing capacity and generate more revenue for members and pensioners.

Gabriela Women's party-list group expressed concern the new law would lead to hefty SSS contribution hikes that would further slash the meager wages of workers.

"The new charter allows the SSS to bank on the wages of members supposedly to prolong the life of the agency, instead of improving its collection efficiency and getting rid of the bonuses to its board members," said Rep. Arlene Brosas.

Neri Colmenares

Higher contributions

The new law provides for a gradual increase in monthly contributions from the current 11 percent of the monthly salary credit. The contribution rate will go up by 1 percentage point starting this year until it reaches 15 percent in 2025.

A salary credit is the compensation base for contributions and benefits related to the total earnings for the month.

Extending fund life

The law also allowed the gradual adjustment of minimum monthly salary credit from P2,000 in 2019 to P5,000 in 2025 and maximum monthly salary credit from P20,000 in 2019 to P35,000 in 2025.

At least two-thirds of the contribution rate increase would be shouldered by the employer.

The additional collection

would replenish the SSS fund in six years. With higher contributions, the SSS fund life would be extended until 2038.

The SSS fund life was slashed by 10 years to 2032 when the additional P1,000 monthly pension was granted to pensioners in 2017.

The law also lowered the penalty rate for late payment of contributions to 2 percent from the current 3 percent.

Unremitted contributions

Citing figures from Commission on Audit (COA), Colmenares said the SSS had not fully explained to the public why it failed to collect premiums and penalties since 2010 totaling some P437 billion.

As of August 2018, the SSS had at least P13 billion in unremitted contributions from employers, aside from the P78.95 billion in uncollected outstanding loans from members.

"I have written SSS President (Emmanuel) Dooc three times, asking for explanation on these uncollected premiums, and they did not bother to answer," he said.

In 2010, the SSS declared that its unremitted premium contributions had reached P109 billion, while the penalties had risen to P280 billion.

"Why does the SSS allow this and yet they are so obsessed with increasing personal contributions?"

Any uncollected premium is a triple whammy for workers, according to Colmenares.

Employers deduct outright premiums from workers' low wages yet, employers do not remit these to the SSS, resulting in a loss of medical benefits for the workers.

Uncollected loans

Over the years, the SSS has been repeatedly called out by the state audit body for uncollected loans and illegal disbursement of benefits to its officials and employees.

Last year, the COA urged the SSS to improve its collection of P79 billion in members' outstanding loans.

Months later in December last year, the state audit agency ordered high-ranking officials of the SSS to return more than P71 million in excess benefits granted to employees of its branches in Metro Manila in 2010.

Colmenares belied SSS claims of improving collection efficiency, as COA reports showed that its P8 billion uncollected premiums from about 38,000 employers in 2016 rose to P13.8 billion involving more than 122,650 employers.

The SSS president also needs to explain a number of investment actions the SSS performed, Colmenares said, which have been questioned by the COA.

Instead of aiming for increases in members' contributions, the SSS should first work to improve its collection rate efficiency, make wiser investment decisions and cut down on "unnecessary bonuses" for officials and "excessive operations costs." —WITH A REPORT FROM INQUIRER RESEARCH - INQ

21 February 2019 THE STAR Page: 4

Full text of Yang Jiechi's keynote speech at the 55th Munich Security Conference (Part I)

MUNICH, Germany, Feb. 16 (Xinhua) -- Yang Jiechi, a member of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee, delivered here on Saturday a keynote speech at the 55th Munich Security Conference. An English translated version of the speech is as follows:

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my great pleasure to join you at this year's Munich Security Conference (MSC). As a global forum on security policy, the MSC provides an important platform for people around the world to express views and share insights on major issues concerning world peace and development. This year's focus on promoting international cooperation and multilateralism is important, timely and has much practical relevance.

Our world today is undergoing fast and profound changes with growing uncertainties and instability. Unilateralism and protectionism have been on the rise; the multilateral international order and global governance system have come under challenge. Our world stands at crossroads and faces a consequential choice between unilateralism and multilateralism, confrontation and dialogue, isolation and openness. As President Xi Jinping pointed out, multilateralism provides an effective way of upholding peace and promoting development, and the world needs multilateralism now more than ever.

It's been China's consistent view that the United Nations (UN) is the symbol of multilateralism, and the UN-centered multilateral architecture provides an overarching framework for international cooperation. The consensus of the global community on multilateralism has been enshrined in the UN Charter, which serves as the cornerstone for the modern international order. As a founding member of the UN and a permanent member of its Security Council, China has all along supported multilateralism, followed the multilateral approach, and advocated peace, development and win-win cooperation, playing its consistent role as a promoter of world peace, contributor to global development and upholder of the international order.

To serve the common and fundamental interests of the peopl of China and around the world, President Xi Jinping called for th fostering of a new type of international relations featuring mutua respect, fairness, justice and win-win cooperation, and the buildin of a community with a shared future for mankind. He expounded o a vision of an open, inclusive, clean and beautiful world that enjoy lasting peace, universal security and common prosperity. Such thinkin and vision encapsulate the propositions and principles that Chin holds dear as a staunch supporter of multilateralism.

They include, first, the principle of sovereign equality, which is th most important norm governing state-to-state relations. All countries regardless of size, strength and wealth, are equal. The right of peopl of all countries to independently choose their development path should be respected. And the practice of imposing one's will on other or interfering in others' internal affairs should be rejected.

Second, dialogue and consultation, which is an importan approach to sound global governance in today's world. Dialogue and consultation should be pursued in the interest of peaceful resolution o differences and disputes. The willful use or threat of force, hegemony and power politics should be rejected.

Third, the rule of law, which is central to the pursuit of law-based international relations. The basic norms governing international relations centering on the purposes and principles of the UN Charter must be safeguarded. International law must apply equally to all, and double standards or selective application of international law should be rejected

Fourth, win-win cooperation, which is essential for achieving common development. We must work together to pursue the greatest possible common interests among nations and expand areas of converging interests on the basis of mutual benefit.

To advocate and practice multilateralism is not just China's choice, but also the preferred option of an overwhelming majority of countries. The UN-centered system of international institutions have engaged in extensive dialogue and cooperation across the political, economic, security and cultural fields and worked to address global issues and challenges. Such efforts have advanced democracy in international relations and vigorously contributed to global peace, stability, development and prosperity. Inspired by the core principles of multilateralism, the G20, APEC, BRICS, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, Asia-Europe Meeting and other global forums have all carried out meaningful cooperation. The EU, ASEAN, the African Union, the Arab League, the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) and other international organizations have contributed to peace and development by advancing regional cooperation. All this has shown that to pursue global cooperation, multilateralism and a community with a shared future for mankind represents a momentous trend of our times and is the right way to go.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

History tells us that we can only realize our peoples' dreams for a better life by upholding multilateralism and enhancing global cooperation. It falls to us to grasp the underlying trend of our times, respond to the call of the people, and make the right choices.

China advocates a steadfast commitment to advance international cooperation, uphold and develop multilateralism, and make the international order more just and equitable.

First, we need to forge partnerships through mutual respect. Choosing dialogue over confrontation, we should work vigorously to develop partnerships that are more inclusive and constructive. This is a foundation and prerequisite for multilateralism and international cooperation.

China is committed to building a generally stable and balanced framework of major-country relations. We are ready to work with the United States to solidly implement the important common understanding reached between the two Presidents and jointly build a China-US relationship based on coordination, cooperation and stability. Over the past few weeks, the economic teams of the two sides have engaged in intensive consultations, and important progress has been made. We hope that the two sides will continue to make concerted efforts toward a mutually beneficial and win-win agreement.

Following the strategic guidance from the top leaders, China and Russia will work to elevate their comprehensive strategic partnership of coordination to new heights. China remains a staunch supporter of European integration. We welcome a Europe that is more united, stable and prosperous, and support Europe in playing an important and constructive role in international affairs.

China follows the policy of building friendships and partnerships with neighboring countries based on amity, sincerity, mutual benefit and inclusiveness. China is committed to pursuing the greater good and shared interests and to the principle of sincerity, real results, amity and good faith. We will earnestly implement all the outcomes of the Beijing Summit of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) -- the meeting between leaders of China and Pacific island countries, the China-Arab States Cooperation Forum, and the Forum of China and the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States -- to advance the building of a community with a shared future with all other developing countries.

Second, we need to uphold universal security through mutual support. We should work toward a new vision of common, comprehensive, cooperative and sustainable security, and respect and protect the security of each and every country. Global issues such as climate change, cyber security, terrorism and major natural disasters should be tackled through global responses, and regional and global security must be protected with common efforts. International cooperation must be intensified to safeguard the security and stability in West Asia and North Africa, and a holistic approach is required to tackle the issue of refugees and migrants at its root. A few weeks ago, Egypt, the new rotating Chair of the African Union (AU), hosted the successful 32nd AU summit, where constructive and meaningful dialogue and cooperation were carried out in addressing the issue of refugees, migrants and displaced people in Africa.

China has been actively involved in the UN peacekeeping missions, and is the largest troop contributor among the P5 and the second largest contributor to the UN peacekeeping budget. The Chinese navy has conducted escort missions in the Gulf of Aden and the waters off the Somali coast over the past ten years, serving over 6,600 Chinese and foreign vessels.

China has been an active player in international cooperation against terrorism, supported African countries in resolving African issues in an African way, and supported the AU and other regional and subregional organizations in playing a leading role in meeting the security challenges in their region. China is committed to facilitating the proper resolution of regional hotspots such as the Iranian nuclear issue and the Syrian, Palestinian and Afghanistan issues through dialogue and negotiation.

China supports security dialogue among the Asia-Pacific countries and efforts to explore a regional security vision and architecture that fits the reality of this region. We welcome the upcoming second meeting between the DPRK and US leaders, and will continue to work with other parties concerned toward the full denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula and the establishment of a permanent peace regime on the Peninsula.

China is resolute in defending its territorial sovereignty and maritime rights and interests. We firmly oppose any activity that undermines China's sovereignty and security interests under the pretext of freedom of navigation and overflight. China is committed to working with ASEAN countries to fully and effectively implement the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea and advance consultations on the Code of Conduct. And we hope that these efforts by the countries in the region will be respected and supported by all non-regional countries.

(To be continued)

21 February 2019 Tribune Page: 3

BIMP-EAGA COOPERATION URGED

'Blast pirates to smithereens'

By Kristina Maralit

President Rodrigo Duterte ordered the Philippine Navy to blast pirates from our waters or in the high seas even as he called for close cooperation among Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines to address maritime piracy, as well as the abduction of seafarers within and outside their waters.

The Chief Executive made the appeal during the ninth anniversary of the Mindanao Development Authority and the 25th anniversary of the Brunei Darussalam-Indonesia-Malaysia-Philippines East ASEAN Growth Area (BIMP-EAGA) celebrations held in Davao City on Tuesday night.

Let me very clear to the heads of states, my orders to my navy is to blast them off the earth.

Mr. Duterte urged the neighboring countries to "remain on guard" to combat terrorists and other lawless elements in their common seas.

"Once again, Indonesia and Malaysia, we have to band together. The world is changing, including the economy. It could either go bad or very bad or where it could go well. But we have to go to a bad level and I hope we can survive it," Mr. Duterte said in his speech.

"I call upon the BIMP-EAGA. We are doing commerce. Our navies must be vigilant. We have to be one in our patrols," he added.

The President added that the pirates have "no souls" and ordered the military to flush them out.

"Let me very clear to the heads of states, my orders to my Navy is to blast them off the earth. If there are pirates in our territory or in the high seas, my orders are: blast them to kingdom come.

He noted that it is very difficult to prosecute pirates because the witnesses are usually not interested in pursuing the case against them.

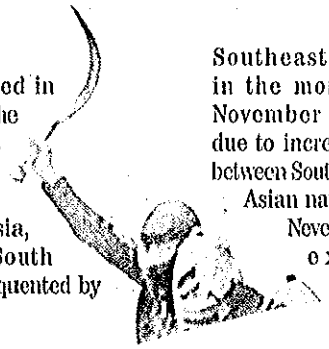
"Justice seems to be an illusion, it's a mirage actually floating in the seas. (That's why) I am telling the military forces, finish them

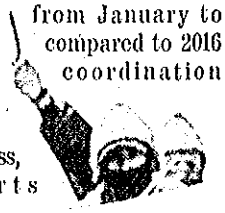
off," Duterte said.

An article published in March 2018 said that "in the last few years, Southeast Asia has emerged as a hotbed for piracy, with sea routes off Malaysia, Singapore and the South China Sea regularly frequented by traffickers."

Research data showed piracy in Southeast Asia fell significantly in the months from January to November 2017 compared to 2016 due to increased coordination between Southeast Asian nations.

Nevertheless, experts speculate that until the root causes of piracy are addressed, it will remain more significant in these waters than in traditional pirate haunts, such as Somalia.





21 February 2019 Manila Standard TODAY Page: A1

Trump wants 'Space Force'

WASHINGTON—President Donald Trump signed an order Tuesday outlining his vision for a new "Space Force" that could one day become a separate military branch on an equal footing to the Army and Navy. *Next page*

Trump...

From A1

Trump wants to create a space force to protect satellites, tackle vulnerabilities in space and assert US dominance in orbit.

"We have to be prepared," Trump told reporters after signing the directive.

"My administration has made the creation of a space force a national security issue."

Space Force would be the sixth branch of the military alongside the Navy, Marine Corps, Army, Air Force and Coast Guard.

The order calls for Congress to draft legislation that would establish Space Force as a branch that falls under the Air Force, similar to how the Navy oversees the Marine Corps.

Defense Department spokesman Charlie Summers said the Pentagon would submit its legislative proposal within the coming weeks.

With the new directive, "Trump is posturing the United States to compete, deter, and win in a complex multi-domain environment characterized by great power competition," Summers said in a statement.

The Air Force said a space force would work "to ensure unfettered access to, and freedom to operate in space, and to provide vital capabilities to joint and coalition forces."

But the creation of Space Force is by no means a done deal, as it must be vetted and approved by Congress.

Lawmakers and defense officials have reacted with skepticism, wary of the cost and added bureaucracy.

Space plays a vital role in just about every aspect of modern warfare, with many military technologies reliant on a network of orbiting sensors and satellites, and the Pentagon has warned that countries such as Russia and China are working to build anti-satellite capabilities. **AFP**

21 February 2019 Manila Standard TODAY Page: A1

Bishop: Mindanao needs martial law

A MINDANAO bishop on Wednesday expressed support for the Supreme Court's decision upholding the constitutionality of President Rodrigo Duterte's order to extend martial law in Mindanao for the third time, or until the end of this year.

"Mindanao needs martial law," Ozamis Archbishop Martin Jumoad said.

"This is good for us here. Others may not understand us but if you live in Mindanao, then you will know why."

Jumoad made his statement even as senatorial candidate Samira Gutoc said Wednesday the Supreme Court decision supporting the extension of martial law in Mindanao was a sad day for Mindanao, for the justice system and the fight for peace.

Voting 9-4, the Supreme Court declared as valid the extension of martial law in Mindanao until Dec. 31, 2019.

Next page

Bishop:...

from A1

Gutoc said she was not surprised by the decision, but she condemned it. She said martial law has resulted in the disenfranchisement of the poor and powerless in Mindanao.

"A lot of us are fearful to even speak up in protest of martial law and we know there have been unresolved human rights violations," she said.

Jumoad said the Mindanaoans trusted the members of the military and described them as professional in performing their tasks.

"We trust our men in the Armed Forces of the Philippines. We witness how professional they are in performing their work as peace keepers," Jumoad said.

"Our role now is to pray for the conversion of terrorists, and may the people of Mindanao, Muslims, Lumads and Christians work for peace and harmony. Let us respect one another regardless of conviction." **PNA with Macon Ramos-Araneta**

21 February 2019

Balita
Ang Nangungunang Pahayagang Tagalog sa Bansa ₱8.00

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ML extension, suportado ng archbishop

Sinuportahan ng Catholic prelate ang pagpapalawig sa batas militar, sinabing kailangan ito ng Mindanao.

"Mindanao needs Martial Law. This is good for us here," sabi ni Ozamis Archbishop Martin Jumoad sa isang panayam.

Idinagdag niya na ang mga taga-Mindanao lang ang makakaintindi nito.

"Others may not understand us but if you live in Mindanao then your eyes will be opened 'why,'" pahayag ni Jumoad.

Aniya, patuloy nilang pagkakatiwalaan ang Armed Forces of the Philippines sa kanilang trabaho bilang peace keepers.

"We trust our men in the Armed Forces. We witness how professional the way they perform their work as peace-keepers," sabi ni Jumoad.

Nagpahayag ng pag-asa ang Ozamis prelate na anumang relihiyon ay magtutulung-tulong ang bawat isa.

"May the people of Mindanao, Muslims, Lumads and Christians work for peace and harmony. Let us respect one another regardless of faith convictions," aniya.

"Our role now is to pray for the conversion of terrorists," dagdag ni Jumoad.

Leslie Ann G. Aquino

21 February 2019 PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER Page: A6

Palace, lawmakers, groups gang up on Nat'l Youth Commission chair

By the Inquirer Staff
@Team_Inquirer

Malacañang, lawmakers, the justice secretary and student groups on Wednesday rejected a proposal by the head of the National Youth Commission (NYC) to withdraw state scholarships from student activists with suspected links to communist rebels who join antigovernment protests, saying this would violate the constitutional right to freedom of speech and expression.

The officials and the National Union of Students of the Philippines (NUSP) reacted on Wednesday to statements made by NYC Chair Ronald Cardema who had urged President Duterte to issue an executive order to remove funding for all antigovernment scholars.

Duterte: No

Mr. Duterte himself said on Tuesday that students won't lose their scholarships just for expressing dissent.

"I need (to see) more overt acts," he said.

Presidential spokesperson Salvador Panelo said it was unlikely that the President would issue such an order.

"If a scholarship for a student is removed on the basis of suspicion, I don't think the President will sign that," Panelo said, adding that revoking a scholarship should be based on legal and "reasonable grounds."

The Duterte administration was a "government of laws and not of speculations," he added.

Violation of Constitution

Sen. Francis Escudero said Cardema's suggestion violated the Constitution and the people's right to free speech, to peaceably assemble and petition the government for redress of grievances, and to due process and equal protection of the laws.

"The sycophantic and obsequious suggestion of the NYC head shows his ignorance of the Constitution and, far from helping, is surely doing a disservice to PRRD and the government," said Escudero.

Justice Secretary Menardo Guevarra said adopting the proposal "would effectively restrain the youth's constitutional right to freedom of speech and expression."

"Our state universities and colleges, instead of taking it against militant students by dropping them from the roll, should be proud that they are producing young people who are socially aware and concerned not only about themselves but also about the nation," he said.

Guevarra added that it was not illegal to support communism as an ideology, but expressing this through armed struggle against the government "is something else."

NYC's illegal move

Sen. Francis Pangilinan said it was not illegal for students to join leftist organizations or join protests and rallies.

"It's the NYC that is making an illegal move if it would continue this illegal policy," Pangilinan said.

Pañlosaid it was "common sense" for the government not to finance the schooling of a student who wanted "to kill the government."

Cardema later clarified that his proposal was targeted specifically to students who are allied with the "terrorist" Communist Party of the Philippines, New People's Army and National Democratic Front of the Philippines.

He told reporters his proposed executive order would provide a system to identify these students, adding that the military has informed him that 23 government "scholars" have been killed in clashes with soldiers since last year.

But Escudero said rebellion was already a crime and the guilty would be imprisoned, so revoking any scholarship would be "moot and academic."

Vice President Leni Robredo expressed alarm over Cardema's statements, wondering whether the NYC wanted the youth to be "just blind followers."

Robredo told reporters in Cebu City on Wednesday that Filipino youth activists have always been seen as agents of change, citing their resistance to the Marcos dictatorship leading to the Edsa People Power Revolution.

Escudero said Cardema should be fired from the government for making those statements while student groups and minority legislators in the House of Representatives demanded his resignation.

NUSP, the broadest alliance of student councils in the country, said Cardema should step down for making the proposal and for alleged politicking by using the NYC as a platform to endorse administration candidates in the May midterm elections.

Kabataan Rep. Sarah Elago said both the right to protest and the right to education were fundamental rights that the state should uphold and protect.

"Only a fascist regime and its puppets like Cardema will hold these rights contrary to each other," she said.

Cardema's ouster backed

Akbayan Rep. Tomasito Villarin backed calls for Cardema's ouster, saying the NYC chair's statements "betray the qualifications of a public official who wants government to adopt and enforce his ideas no matter how idiotic they are."

The spokesperson for Akbayan Youth, Cassie Deluria, told the Inquirer that Cardema's statements were "unforgivable."

"What Cardema is calling antigovernment and anticountry, we think is nation building," Deluria said.

Bas Claudio, the convener of #YouthResist, an alliance of youth groups that includes Millennials Against Dictators and the Student Council Alliance of the Philippines, said Cardema was clearly "more interested in being a puppet for this government" than a youth advocate.

—WITH REPORTS FROM LEILA B. SALAVERRIA, CHRISTINE O. AVENDAÑO, DONA Z. PAZZIBUGAN, MELVIN GASCON, MATTHEW REYSIO-CRUZ, KRISSY AGUILAR AND DALE ISRAEL INQ

21 February 2019 THE PHILIPPINE STAR Page: 12

Rebels surrender in Iloilo, Lanao Sur

By JENNIFER RENDON

ILOILO CITY – The New People's Army (NPA) suffered another blow after 37 members of the Militia ng Bayan and 23 supporters abandoned the rebel group.

They surrendered on Feb. 15 and 16 to the Army's Community Support teams.

According to 1Lt. Hazel Joy Durotan, spokesperson for the Army's 61st Infantry Battalion (IB), those who surrendered are residents of Barangays Carataya, San Antonio and Mahunod-Hunod in Cuartero, Capiz – considered to be insurgency-influenced barangays.

"They took their oath of allegiance to the government after they decided to renounce and withdraw their support from the NPA," Durotan said.

Meanwhile, a sub-leader of the Islamic State-inspired Maute group surrendered to the military on Tuesday in Lanao del Sur, according to security officials.

Aloyodan Bantak, alias Ibrahim Bantak, surrendered to the 49th IB under Lt. Col. Edgar Allan Villanueva in Lumba Bayabao town at around 10 a.m.

Bantak also surrendered a rifle, two grenade launcher magazines and ammunition.

Bantak was the recruiter of the group of Owaida Marohombsar, alias Abu Dar, according to Villanueva.

Bantak reportedly participated in the November 2016 siege in Butig town where the Maute group took over the municipal hall.

– **With Roel Pareño, Michael Punongbayan, Jaime Laude**

21 February 2019 THE PHILIPPINE STAR Page: 12

Reds free 2 soldiers, 6 others in Davao

By EDITH REGALADO

DAVAO CITY – The New People's Army (NPA) released on Tuesday the last eight of their hostages in Barangay San Juan, Bayugan, Agusan del Sur.

The hostages were among members of the Army and Civilian Armed Forces Geographical Unit (CAFGU) kidnapped by the NPA in December 2018 in Barangay New Tubigon, Sibagat.

Six of the CAFGUs were earlier released by the NPA through a third-party facilitator and were turned over to the Army's 401st Brigade, on Feb. 14.

Freed were Pfc. Darlino Carino Jr. and Cpl. Eric Manangan of the Army's 3rd Special Forces and militiamen Jimuel Acebedo, Abel Iligan, Rolando Quiao, James Iligan, Gabriel Iligan and Janjan Iligan.

Sebastian Duterte and former special assistant to the president Christopher Go witnessed the release.

Duterte and Go accompanied the eight to the 402nd Brigade in Bancasi, Butuan City, where they were reunited with the first batch of hostages released by the NPA's.

"For me, fighting is senseless. Let's talk instead of fighting each other," the President's son said.

Go said he was part of the efforts to secure the release of the hostages. He said that a friend of Duterte, who is a relative of one of the hostages, sought their help.

Go said he coordinated with Gov. Adolph Edward Plaza and other officials to facilitate the release of the kidnap victims.

"The release is based on the goodwill of the NPA. Perhaps they want to negotiate again with the government and President Duterte. The President is open to peace talks," Go said in Filipino.

-- With Ben Serrano

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NPAs kill 2 civilians in Negros

By GILBERT BAYORAN

BACOLOD CITY – Two civilians were killed by suspected New People's Army (NPA) rebels in separate incidents in Negros.

Four communist rebels allegedly shot dead Jun Jun Sabeco on Tuesday in Barangay Camansi, Kabankalan City, Negros Occidental.

Sabeco, who used to be a member of the NPA's Revolutionary Proletarian Army-Alex Boncayao Brigade, was killed while on his way home after bringing his child to school.

The NPA owned up to the killing. Sabeco, the NPA alleged, was a military informant and was involved in criminal activities.

On Monday, Reynaldo Loqueloque, 43, was shot in his house in Bindoy, Negros Oriental.

Witnesses said the suspects claimed to be members of the NPA.

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2 soldiers, 6 CAFGUs released by NPA in Agusan del Sur

By JUNAR FENEQUITO

BAYUGAN CITY, Agusan del Sur – Eight soldiers and Civilian Armed Forces Geographical Unit (CAFGU) militiamen were released by the New People's Army (NPA) on Tuesday afternoon.

The released captives were identified as PFC Darlino Carino Jr. and Cpl. Eric Manangan of the Army's Third Special Forces unit, and CAFGUs Jimuel Acebedo, Abel Iligan, Rolando Quiao, James Iligan, Gabriel Iligan, and Janjan Iligan.

They were turned-over to former Special Assistant to the President (SAP) Christopher "Bong" Go and Presidential son Sebastian 'Baste' Duterte in Sitio Hugmacan, Barangay San Juan here at around 3 p.m of February 19.

They were among those abducted by the rebels from their detachment in Barangay New Tubigon, Sibagat, Agusan Del Sur last December 19, 2018.

Go bared he has been part of the efforts to secure the release the remaining NPA hostages. He said that a friend of Baste, who is a relative of one of the hostages, sought help to free the captives.

"Noong nakaraang taon, mayroong kaibigan si Baste na kamag-anak ng sundalong nanawagan sa akin para manghingi ng tulong (Last year, a friend of the presidential son who is a relative of one of the captive soldiers called me for help)," Go said.

The former SAP said he immediately coordinated with Governor Adolph Edward Plaza and other local officials who may be able to help facilitate the release of the NPA captives.

21 February 2019 Malaya The National Newspaper Page: B2

NPA frees 2 soldiers, 6 militiamen

BY VICTOR REYES

NEW People's Army rebels released on Tuesday afternoon two soldiers and six militiamen who had been abducted during a raid on an Army detachment in Sibagat town in Agusan del Sur last December.

The release of the eight government troopers came six days after the communists also freed six militiamen who were also taken captive during the raid that the rebels completed without firing a single shot.

The released troops were identified as Cpl. Eric Mamngan, Pfc. Darlino Carino and militiamen Jimuel Acebedo, Abel Iligan, Jan-jan Iligan, Rolando Quiao, Gabriel C. Iligan and James Iligan, all of the 3rd Special Forces Battalion.

Capt. Reggie Go, spokesman of the Army's 4th Infantry Division, said the eight were released to a group that included senatorial candidate Bong Go, presidential son Sebastian Duterte who is running for Davao City vice mayor, and Agusan del Sur Gov. Adolph Edward Plaza.

Go said the eight were released around 2:30 p.m. in Purok 9. Sitio Hugmakan in Barangay San Juan in Bayugan City. B2

The eight were among 14 troopers abducted by the rebels during a raid of an Army detachment in Sibagat town in Agusan del Sur on Dec. 19. The rebels also carted away dozens of firearms.

Six other kidnap victims – militiamen Jurian Gaviola, Marson Iligan, Bienvinido Lamion, Eddie Tindoy, Sanny Malobay, and Hermito Iligan – were released to the International Red Cross last Feb. 14 also in Bayugan City.

2 sundalo, 6 pang Cafgu pinalaya ng NPA

Pinalaya na ang dalawa pang sundalo at anim na Cafgu (Citizens Armed Forces Geographical Unit) na nalalabi pang bihag ng mga rebeldeng New People's Army (NPA) sa isang lugar sa Barangay San Juan, Bayugan City, Agusan del Sur nitong Martes ng hapon.

"Yes, all abducted Cafgu and two soldiers are all in," pagkumpirma ni AFP- Eastern Mindanao Command Commander Major Gen. Felimon Santos Jr.

Ang walo na Prisoners of War (POWs) ng NPA rebels ay pinakawalan matapos ang dalawang buwang pagkakabihag.

Kinilala ang walong pinalayang bihag na sina CAAs (Cafgu Active Auxilary) Jimuel Acebedo; Abel Iligan; Jan-jan Iligan; Rolando Quiao; Gabriel Iligan at James Iligan gayundin sina Cpl. Eric Manangan at PFC. Darlino Carino.

Bandang alas-2:25 ng hapon kamakalawa nang pakawalan ng kanilang mga abductors ang mga bihag sa isang liblib na lugar sa Purok 9, Sitio Hugmakan, Barangay San Juan, Bayugan City, Agusan del Sur.

Magugunita na una nang pinawalan noong Pebrero 14 sa Brgy. San Juan, Bayugan City ang anim na Cafgu at sumunod naman noong Pebrero 18 ang dalawang sundalo sa Brgy. San Antonio, Remedios Trinidad, Agusan del Norte.

Noong Disyembre 19 ng nakalipas na taon ay binihag ng NPA rebels ang dalawang sundalo at 12 Cafgu matapos sumalakay ang 50-80 nitong armadong miyembro sa kanilang patrol base sa Brgy. New Tubigon, Sibagat, Agusan del Sur kung saan nakatangay din sila ng malalakas na armas. ***(Joy Cantos/Iralnce Kim Micah Cabual)***

Mag-asawang guro dedo sa trak

NORTH COTABATO - Magkasabay na nasawi ang mag-asawang guro matapos na masangkot sa aksidente makaraang masalpok ng sinasakyan nilang motorsiklo ang isang truck sa Allah Valley Drive, Brgy. Libertad Surallah, South Cotabato.Kinilala ng Surallah Police ang mga biktima na sina Alex Colajes, 51, driver ng motorsiklo at misis na si Betty, 48; kapwa nakatira sa Brgy. Poblacion, Lake Sebu, South Cotabato at idineklarang dead-on-arrival sa Upper Valley Community Hospital sa Surallah. Ang mag-asawang biktima na patungong Lake Sebu mula Koronadal City ay tumilapon sa motorsiklo sa bahagi ng Allah Valley Drive sa Barangay Libertad, Surallah nang masalpok ng kasalubong na Isuzu truck. Nawalan umano ng kontrol ng truck dahil sa madulas na daan at pumalyang preno ang driver nitong si Anecito Ignacio, 56, pasado alas-7:00 ng umaga. ***(Rhodorick Beñez)***

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Exiled Reds welcome Du30 interest to reopen peace talks

Exiled communist leaders on Wednesday welcomed, albeit with mixed feelings, President Duterte's renewed interest in reopening the peace talks.

Communist Party of the Philippines founder Jose Maria Sison described as "better than entirely hostile" Mr. Duterte's statement on Tuesday that he would allow the insurgents' chief peace negotiator, Fidel Agcaoili, to return to the country to resume peace talks.

"The statements of Duterte ... are mixed. They carry positive and negative content, as well as serious and joking expressions," Sison said in an online interview from Utrecht, the Netherlands, on Wednesday.

"But they seem to be better than entirely hostile and cruel," he added.

Agcaoili, chair of the National Democratic Front of the Philippines (NDFP), said in a separate online interview that the communist insurgents remained "open to resume peace talks with the [government] without preconditions."

"We are ready to hear more details of this latest offer of the [government] to resume the talks," said Agcaoili, who, according to Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana, has been in the country since last week.

The umbrella group of all underground communist organizations, the NDFP has represented the insurgents in on-and-off peace negotiations with the government since 1986.

Don't arrest Agcaoili

On Tuesday, Mr. Duterte said he had told the military not to arrest Agcaoili when he returned to the country.

"I think Attorney Agcaoili has sounded off. He was coming again to talk and I told the military and the police to just

Fidel Agcaoili

allow him [to move around]," he said in a speech during the ninth anniversary of the Mindanao Development Authority in Davao City.

"After all, we're on a waiting period about the appropriate time to talk about peace. I am not that cruel," the President added.

Due to security concerns, NDFP leaders dropped plans in November last year to return to Manila to work for the possible resumption of peace talks.

In his speech, Mr. Duterte also told Sison to "find time to talk sensible peace" because, he said, time was running out.

Sensible peace

"Before he goes to the blue yonder, kindly find time to talk sensible peace," the President said. "We have been in that war for 53 years. If you had not succeeded in just about five years, it's a lost cause."

Sison noted that the President's declaration of renewed interest in peace talks had some ambiguities.

Pressed to elaborate, Sison said: "Duterte is subtle in making a threat, or is only stating a fact that everyone has limited time."

"I cannot try to answer the mixed statements of Duterte publicly because to do so can make me appear as the one [who is] mixed up. It is best to let the negotiators meet and do their job," he said.

Sison said he would let Agcaoili "sort out Duterte's statements" with his government counterpart, Labor Secretary Silvestre Bello III.

Whereabouts unknown

Lorenzana on Wednesday said Agcaoili returned to the country two weeks ago, but his "whereabouts is unknown."

He did not say how he came to know about Agcaoili's presence in the country.

Sison described Agcaoili and Bello as "competent representatives" of the NDFP and the Philippine government.

"They are conscious of seeking a common ground by responding to the needs and demands of the people and striving to agree on social, economic and political reforms as basis for a just and lasting peace," he said.

Peace talks between the government and the NDFP broke down in November 2017. The President blamed it on continuing rebel attacks on state security forces. —REPORTS FROM DELFIN T. MALLARI JR., JEANNETTE I. ANDRADE, CHRISTINE O. AVENDAÑO, ORLANDO DINOY AND MART SAMBALUD INQ

21 February 2019 The Manila Times Page: 41

Palace, DND: Govt still open to talks with Reds

BY DEMPSEY REYES

POLICY RELATIONS between the government and communist rebels are thawing, with President Rodrigo Duterte, Malacañang and the Defense department all leaving open the possibility of resuming peace talks.

Speaking in Davao City on Tuesday evening, Duterte said he had ordered the police and the military to allow the return of National Democratic Front (NDF) chief negotiator Fidel Agcaoili, and that the government was

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on "waiting time" for peace talks.

"I think Attorney Agcaoili has sounded off... he was coming again to talk and I told the military and the police, just allow him. For after all it's just on a... we're on a waiting period about the appropriate time to talk about peace. I am not that cruel," Duterte said.

The President has a standing order to arrest all NDF negotiators and consultants after cancelling peace talks and declaring the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) and New People's Army (NPA) terrorists organizations in late 2017.

Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana said Agcaoili has been in the Philippines since last week.

"He is already here since last week. His whereabouts is unknown," Lorenzana told reporters in a text message on Tuesday night.

Lorenzana said the statement of Duterte meant that the government "has not closed the door for peace talks."

"The President has enumerated some conditions for the resumption of peace talks like cessation of their extortion (their so-called revolutionary tax), no burning of equipment, no attack on military, police and civilians," the Defense chief said.

"The ball is in the CPP-NDF's court if they want to talk peace," he added.

Palace spokesman Salvador Panelo echoed Lorenzana, saying the government would go back to the negotiation table if the rebels stopped their extortion activities and attacks on state forces.

In a statement, exiled CPP founding chairman Jose Maria Sison, who engaged the President in a word war last year, noted that the President had toned down his pronouncements against the communist movement.

"[The statements] carry positive and negative content as well as serious and joking expressions. But they seem to be better than entirely hostile statements," Sison said.

"I cannot try to answer the mixed statements of Duterte publicly because to do so can make me appear as the one mixed up. It is best to let the negotiators meet and do their job," Sison added.

He praised Agcaoili and Labor Secretary Silvestre Bello 3rd for being "competent" representatives of the NDF and the government negotiating teams, respectively.

Hostages released to Go, Baste

On Tuesday, the President's son, Sebastian "Baste" Duterte and former special assistant to the President Christopher Lawrence "Bong" Go received eight hostages freed by the NPA, in another indication of improving relations.

The eight released hostages were among the 12 members of the Civilian Armed Forces Geographical Unit (Cafgu) and two soldiers the NPA abducted on December 2018 in Barangay New Tubigon, Sibagat, Agusan del Sur.

On February 14, six of the abducted Cafgus were released by the NPA through a third-party facilitator and were turned over to the Army's 401st Brigade under the Fourth Infantry Division.

Among the last batch of hostages freed were Private First Class Darlino Carino Jr. and Cpl. Eric Manangan of the Army's 3rd Special Forces as well as Cafgu militiamen Jimuel Acebedo, Abel Iligan, Rolando Quiao, James Iligan, Gabriel Iligan and Janjan Iligan.

The young Duterte and Go thereafter accompanied the released NPA captives for their formal turnover to the 402nd Brigade of the Philippine Army based in Bancasi, Butuan City, where the first batch of hostages released by the NPA less than a week ago were waiting for them.

Go revealed that he had been part of the ongoing effort since December last year to secure the release the remaining NPA hostages. He said a friend of the President's son, also a relative of one of the hostages, sought help to free the captives.

Acting in his private capacity, Go said that immediately after receiving the plea for assistance, he coordinated with Gov Adolph Edward Plaza and other local officials who might be able to help facilitate the release of the NPA captives.

Go said the release of the NPA hostages proved that dialogue is a potent tool in resolving differences.

"What I have always been saying is, let's just talk. Who wants war, and Filipinos to kill fellow Filipinos?" said Go, a senatorial candidate, in a news briefing.

Maj. Gen. Felimon Santos Jr., Eastern Mindanao Command chief, said military operations were not suspended despite negotiations for the release of hostages, and there would be no letup in operations against the rebels.

WITH RALPH U. VILLANUEVA

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Duterte sets terms of peace talks revival; NDF man arrives in Manila

By Nat Mariano and Francisco Tuyay

STALLED peace talks with communist rebels will resume only if the New People's Army stops its extortion and attacks on police and government troops, the Palace said Wednesday, after President Rodrigo Duterte said Tuesday night that National Democratic Front chief negotiator Fidel Agcaoili is welcome to come home.

"I think attorney Agcaoili has sounded off. He was coming again to talk. And I told the military and the police just allow him [to come home]," Duterte said in a speech Tuesday. "After all, we are on a waiting period about the appropriate time to talk about peace. I am not that cruel."

Duterte also had words for Communist Party of the Philippines founding chairman Jose Ma. Sison.

"I am not saying that I am now in agreement with Sison. I don't like his style but I do not hate him. We are friends and we can be friends. Some other time

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they say I would kill for money. But since Sison is my professor, I will kill him for nothing. Except that before he goes to the blue yonder, kindly find time to talk sensible peace," the President said.

The President said the communist rebellion has been going on for 53 years without succeeding.

"It's a lost cause. I suggest that we do not make any demands. We go to the table and talk about it. And if he proposes something which is not acceptable and I would say, 'No, I cannot accept that'," Duterte said.

"And if I propose something and he does not relish it, then maybe he can go back to Netherlands. If there's no peace, there is no way that he can come back."

Presidential Spokesman Salvador Panelo on Wednesday reiterated the President's conditions for a return to the negotiating table.

"We will return to the peace talks, one, if they stop extortion. Two, if they stop attacking our police forces," Panelo said in a Palace press briefing.

In November last year, Agcaoili, NDF consultant Luis Jalandoni and panel member Coni Ledesma were supposed to return to Manila to conduct informal talks with the President.

They canceled their trip after Agcaoili claimed that the government's peace panel advised them not to push through with the resumption of peace talks.

But Panelo said the NDF consultants' apprehension about returning to the Philippines was "misplaced."

"The President has been telling them that they are welcome to come if they want to talk. They will not be arrested. However, they expressed apprehension that they will be arrested. I already told them that their apprehension was misplaced, they're welcome," he said.

The Palace official said the communist group may even set conditions for the government to consider. Such conditions, however, must be "reasonable."

Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana, meanwhile, said Agcaoili was already in the country but his whereabouts were unknown.

"He was already here since last week," Lorenzana said Tuesday night.

Agcaoili and Ledesma have no pending criminal case in the country while Jalandoni has a pending murder case.

Duterte terminated the peace talks with the communists in 2017 amid a series of rebel attacks on military and civilian targets. He later declared the Communist Party of the Philippines and its armed wing, the New People's Army, as terrorist organizations.

Lorenzana said the government remains open to the resumption of peace talks with the communists, provided that the rebels would cease their attacks, extortion, and burning of equipment.

21 February 2019 Manila Standard TODAY Page: A1

Palace junks NYC proposal

By Nat Mariano, Rey E. Requejo and Macon Ramos-Araneta

THE Palace and the Justice department on Wednesday shot down a proposal from the National Youth Commission to strip students who are members of leftist organizations of their government-backed scholarships. *Next page*

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In a statement on Wednesday, the commission's chairman, Ronald Cardema, called on President Rodrigo Duterte to issue an executive order to withdraw the state scholarships granted to "anti-government scholars."

Cardema said these scholars were "fighting the majority of the Filipino people" by going against the government.

"[They are] also not fulfilling their roles as the expected breadwinners who will uplift their families and as our hope in strengthening our country," he added.

Cardema, who also chairs the so-called Duterte Youth Movement, said several scholars were recently caught as members of the New People's Army, the armed wing of the Communist Party of the Philippines.

He also asked officials of the Sangguniang Kabataan, Reserve Officers' Training Corps, Citizen Army Training, and other youth leaders to "report to the National Youth Commission all government scholars who are known in your area as anti-government youth leaders allied with the leftist CPP-NPA-NDF."

At a press briefing at the Palace, however, Presidential Spokesman Salvador Panelo described as reckless the proposal to withdraw scholarships based only on suspicion.

"We are a government of laws, not of speculations. If we are just speculating, that will not be possible. We need evidence [to support the claim] that they are really part of the groups that oppose the government," Panelo said.

Under the law, he added, students have the right to join protest rallies.

"If they are participating in rallies, that's their right. That's their right to freedom of expression and freedom of assembly... If you have grievances to the government, that's a constitutional right," he said.

"But if you use rallies to foment violence, to incite sedition, that's a different story," he added.

"Under the Revised Penal Code, we have sedition, rebellion, and conspiracies to commit sedition and rebellion. If you fit in those, the government cannot support you. Otherwise, the government will be killing itself," Panelo said.

He said he doubted if Duterte would heed Cardema's call.

"If you would only remove [the scholarships] on the basis of suspicion, I don't think the President will sign that," he said.

Justice Secretary Menardo Guevarra on Wednesday also rejected Cardema's proposal, saying this would be a violation of the students' constitutional rights.

"With all due respect, such a proposal, if adopted would effectively restrain the youth's constitutional right to freedom of speech and expression," the Justice secretary said.

Guevarra said state universities and colleges should be proud of their students who speak out on national issues.

"Our state universities and colleges, instead of taking it against the militant students by dropping them from the roll, should be proud that they are producing young people who are socially aware and concerned not only about themselves but also about the nation," Guevarra said.

Senator Francis Escudero said if anyone was to lose a position, it should be Cardema, not the students.

Escudero, chairman of the Senate committee on education, arts and culture, said Cardema was bringing shame to the administration for his "ignorance" and doing a disservice to the President and the government.

"That is clearly not part of their [NYC] mandate and in violation of the Constitution and the Bill of Rghts that guarantees freedom of speech, of expression and of the press, the right of the people to peaceably assemble and petition the government for redress of grievances, and due process and equal protection of the laws."

"The government is the government of those who agree with it and disagree with it... and the President is the President of those who voted for him and did not vote for him," Escudero added.

"Both the President and the government should serve every Filipino without distinction and regardless of political beliefs. Dissent, in a democracy should never be frowned upon, much less penalized in any way," said Escudero, who was a former student leader at the University of the Philippines-Diliman.

Senator Francis Pangilinan, another former student leader at UP Diliman, said it is not illegal to join leftist organizations nor it is illegal to protest or join rallies.

Senator Panfilo Lacson added that showing dissent and joining anti-government rallies was an exercise of a basic right available to any citizen of the country.

Former solicitor general Florin Hilbay argued that Cardema's proposal was contrary to the mandate of the youth commission. He said scholarships should be based on merit, not politics.

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Duterte assures safe passage for NDF peace negotiator

By **GENALYN D. KABILING**

National Democratic Front (NDF) chief negotiator Fidel Agcaoili will be given a safe passage if he returns to the country for possible peace negotiations with the government, President Duterte assured Tuesday.

The President revealed that he has already directed government forces to let Agcaoli return home, saying he was "not that cruel."

"I think Atty. Agcaoili has sounded off – he was coming again to talk and I told the military and the police just allow him. For after all it's just on a ... we're on a waiting period about the appropriate time to talk about peace. I am not that cruel," he said during an assembly in Davao City.

Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) founding chairman and National Democratic Front of the Philippines (NDFF) Chief Political Consultant Jose Maria Sison welcomed Duterte's assurance.

According to Sison, the statements of Duterte at the ninth anniversary of the Mindanao Development Authority (MinDA) in Davao City on February 19, although mixed, carried positive and negative content as well as serious and joking expressions.

The President expressed his interest to resume the peace talks with the communist rebel group during his speech. He made clear that he does not hate Sison, saying they could still be friends.

"I am not saying that I am now in agreement with Sison. I don't like his style but I do not hate him. We are friends and we can be friends," he said.

"Some other time they say I would kill for money. But since Sison is my professor, I will kill him for nothing. Except that before he goes to the blue yonder, kindly find time to talk sensible peace," he said.

He said the two sides should not impose demands and instead simply talk peace. (With a report from Francis T. Wakefield)

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Reds' chief peace negotiator already in PH: Lorenzana

BY VICTOR REYES

FIDEL Agcaoili, the Netherlands-based chief peace negotiator of the National Democratic Front of the Philippines, has been in the country since last week for a possible revival of the terminated peace talks between government and the communists.

Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana made the disclosure Tuesday night after President Duterte said he has instructed the military and the police to allow Agcaoili to return to discuss with the government the possibility of restarting the peace negotiations.

Lorenzana did not give details on Agcaoili's arrival.

"He is already here, since last week. His whereabouts is unknown," he said.

Duterte terminated the peace talks with the communists in 2017 amid a series of attacks by the New People's Army, the armed group of the Communist Party of the Philippines, on military and civilian targets. He later declared the CPP and the NPA as terrorist organizations.

Lorenzana said the government remains open to the resumption of the peace talks with the communists, provided the rebels would cease their attacks, extortion activities, and burning of equipment used in government projects and those owned by private companies which refuse to pay the NPA extortion money.

Lorenzana said Duterte's decision to allow Agcaoili to return to the country means "that the government has not closed the door for peace talks."

"The President has enumerated some conditions for the resumption of peace talks like cessation of their extortion, their so-called revolutionary

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REDS

tax; no burning of equipment; no attack on military, police and civilians," he said.

"The ball is in the CPP/NPA/NDF's court if they want to talk peace," he added.

Agcaoili, NDFP peace panel member Coni Ledesma, and her husband NDFP senior adviser Luis Jalandoni were supposed to visit the country last November but the trip did not push through after President Duterte backed out from an initial arrangement to meet with them.

The CPP expressed concern they will be arrested upon their return. Ledesma and Jalandoni are also based in the Netherlands.

Ledesma and Agcaoili have no pending criminal case in the country while Jalandoni has pending case for murder.

Communist party founder Jose Maria Sison, who has been on self-exile in the Netherlands since the late 80s, implied Agcaoili will meet with his counterpart in the peace talks, Labor Secretary Silvestre Bello III.

Jalandoni said he welcomes Duterte's statement "about being open to peace negotiations and to let NDFP chief peace negotiator sort out Duterte's statements with GRP chief peace negotiator DOLE Silvestre Bello III."

"Agcaoili and Bello are competent representatives of the NDFP and GRP. They are conscious of seeking a common ground by responding to the needs and demands of the people and striving to agree on social, economic and political reforms as basis for a just and lasting peace," said Sison.

Chief Presidential Legal Counsel yesterday reiterated Agcaoili would not be arrested if he returns.

Panelo, concurrent presidential spokesman, said this was the same assurance government gave Agcaoili and Jalandoni when they initially planned to return to the Philippines late last year for an informal talk with government.

Panelo maintained government would agree to resume the peace negotiations only if they stop their extortion activities and armed attacks.

He also said that until the peace talks resume, and a ceasefire is eventually declared, the government's pursuit operations against the CPP-NPA would continue. – *With Jocelyn Montemayor*

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NPA yields hostages to Baste Duterte, Bong Go

AGUSAN DEL SUR – On Tuesday, Presidential son Baste Duterte and former Special Assistant to the President (SAP) Christopher Lawrence "Bong" Go received eight hostages freed by the communist rebel group, New People's Army (NPA).

The released hostages were among the 12 members of the Civilian Armed Forces Geographical Unit (CAFGU) and two soldiers the NPA abducted last December in Barangay New Tubigon, Sibagat, Agusan Del Sur.

"Yung mga hindi pa pinapalaya, ire-release sa amin. Kasama ko si Baste Duterte, pupunta kami doon," said Go, in an interview before proceeding to the turnover site at Barangay San Juan, Bayugan.

Last Feb. 14, six of the abducted CAFGUs were released by the NPA through a third-party facilitator and were turned over to the Army's 401st Brigade, Fourth Infantry Division.

Among the last batch of hostages freed were Private First Class Darlino Carino Jr. and Cpl. Eric Manangan of the Army's 3rd Special Forces as well as CAFGUs Jimuel Acebedo, Abel Iligan, Rolando Quiao, James Iligan, Gabriel Iligan, and Janjan Iligan.

Baste and Go accompanied the released NPA captives for their formal turnover to the Army's 402nd Brigade based in Bancasi, Butuan City, where the first batch of hostages released by the NPA less than a week ago were waiting for them.

Go said he has been part of the ongoing effort since December of last year to secure the release the remaining hostages. He said a friend of Baste, who is a relative of one of the hostages, sought help to free the captives.

"Noong nakaraang taon, mayroong kaibigan si Baste na kamaganak ng sundalong nanawagan sa akin para manghingi ng tulong. Matapos niyang manawagan sa akin, naghanap kaagad kami ng paraan para makatulong," recalled Go, who took time off from his 2019 senatorial campaign for the turnover of the NPA hostages.

Acting in his private capacity, Go said that immediately after receiving the plea for assistance, he coordinated with Gov. Adolph Edward Plaza and other local officials who may be able to help facilitate the release of the NPA captives.

He thanked the military officials for their cooperation and exercise of restraint that made the negotiations for the release of the hostages possible.

He lauded the NPA for not demanding anything in exchange for

the release of their hostages. He added that the gesture of goodwill performed by the NPA group in the area may have made the renewal of peace talks between the government and the communist group a possibility once more.

Baste Duterte also noted that armed violence between the Armed Forces and the NPA is pointless when peace talks can be a non-violent yet viable alternative.

Go had been consistently appealing to the NPA to take advantage of President Rodrigo Duterte's offer of peace, saying the group would not likely find another President who would be open to negotiate peace with them like the former Davao City Mayor.

According to Go, he and Baste will relay to President Duterte the concerns aired by the NPA.

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...of his term.

Maximum offensive

Drugs is an enemy which can cause destruction of a country or will render it a failed state

By Kristina Maralit

He ain't done yet.

President Rodrigo Duterte vowed in a speech in Malacañang that a harsher war on drugs is to be expected expected in the remaining three years of his term.

In his interview with Palace reporters after the signing of several new laws, Mr. Duterte implied there will be a "bloodier" and harsher campaign in his administration's drive against narcotics as he now views the illegal drugs menace as a national security threat.

"I think so. I could not be more emphatic and be clearer about it. Stay away from drugs because it is an enemy which can cause destruction of a country

Turn to page 2

Maximum offensive

National security is a game of self-preservation. Either I destroy you or you destroy me

From page 1

or will render it a failed state. I told you, do not f*ck with my country. You destroy my country, I will kill you," the President stressed.

"I will declare war and raise it to the level of national security. National security is a game of self-preservation. Either I destroy you or you destroy me. Since I am the President, it behooves upon me to see to it that my country is safe," he said.

Job finished in 3 years

"What I really want is to end this problem during my watch. I have three years left and I am putting notice to everybody I will not allow my country to be destroyed by drugs," he said.

"I am declaring war, I am not declaring a punitive police action," he added.

The President said that he agrees with human rights groups in that "life is sacred."

"I do not want to kill people," he added.

The President, however, said alleged drug trafficker Peter Lim, who is the subject of a manhunt, should never surrender to him alive.

The Chief Executive made the remark during the ceremonial signing and turnover of newly-signed laws in Malacañang on Wednesday.

"I am warning those in the Visayas. Peter Lim, if I were you, I would commit suicide. Never ever surrender to me alive. You will commit suicide. Tie the rope around your neck yourself," an obviously miffed President said in his speech.

"Because I will jail him for 200 years. So, better to just commit suicide," he continued.

Narco list up for baring

Lim has yet to be caught by different law enforcement agencies after being indicted by the Department of Justice (DoJ) last year for his supposed involvement in the illegal drug trade.

He was earlier identified as the supplier of crystal meth, also known as shabu, that was peddled by self-confessed drug pusher Kerwin Espinosa in 2013 and 2014.

Meanwhile, the Chief Executive backed the plan of Interior and Local Secretary Eduardo Año to release the list bearing the names of so-called narco-politicians.

"Yes. I agree. I'm really against drugs. But it's up to Año to decide. I do not interfere with his office," stated Mr. Duterte.

Duterte has repeatedly voiced out his desire to distribute government-owned lands to farmers.

"Social dysfunction is what I wanted to avoid because if the breadwinner of a family goes down, everything in that family becomes dysfunctional," he said.

"Now that I am President, my duty, reduced in two sentences is this: to protect the people and to serve the Republic of the Philippines," Mr. Duterte added.

Lands to landless soon

The Palace also bared an executive order that puts into effect the President's vow to distribute government lands to the poor as it ordered departments, bureaus and offices to identify idle government-owned lands.

Duterte has repeatedly voiced out his desire to distribute government-owned lands to farmers.

In a speech during the ceremonial distribution of Certificates of Land Ownership Award in Buluan, Maguindanao, Duterte also told communist rebels that he was willing to give them lands, if they return to the fold of law.

Duterte signed Executive Order 75 on 15 February, but a copy of which was released to media only yesterday.

Under the order, the Department of Agrarian Reform (DAR) must acquire all lands devoted to or suitable for agriculture for the purpose of eventual distribution to beneficiaries.

I am declaring war, I am not declaring a punitive police action.

Within 30 days from the effectivity of the order, all agencies must identify their lands suitable for agriculture and submit a list to the DAR.

The list should indicate the location and area of the said lands, actual use and legal basis of ownership.

"The DAR, in coordination with the DENR (Department of Environment and Natural Resources), shall cause the preparation of an inventory of government-owned lands devoted to or suitable for agriculture and no longer actually, directly and exclusively used or necessary for the purpose for which they have been reserved or acquired. Agencies whose lands are covered by such inventory shall be furnished a copy thereof," the order read.

Within the 60 days from the effectivity of the order, the DAR and the DoJ must jointly formulate the implementing rules and regulations regarding the validation, segregation, transfer and distribution of "identified" government lands.

Roadshow chews current yarn

By Kristina Maralit

Malacañang defended as "meaningful and fruitful" the Press Freedom tour held by the Presidential Communications Operations Office (PCOO) in Europe to clarify issues involving President Rodrigo Duterte's style of governance.

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In a statement, presidential spokesman Salvador Panelo said the European sojourn was meant to clarify criticisms thrown at President Rodrigo Duterte and the way he runs the government and give "crucial information" regarding his policies.

The caravan in Brussels took place on 17 February, while another one was held in Geneva, Switzerland on the 20th.

Prior to that, the PCOO delegation took part in an engagement between a Philippine delegation and United Nations Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances in Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina last 11 to 15 February to discuss cases of alleged enforced or involuntary disappearances attributed to the Philippines from 1975 to 2012.

Missed information

"We express our support to the PCOO with its decision to send some of its officials to Europe in order to articulate on issues regarding involuntary disappearances and anti-communist terrorist groups, which have been the subject of misinformation and unfair dissemination by the detractors of PRRD and the administration and other relevant matters that require clarification and correction lest they permanently mislead the outside world," stated the official.

"I share the sentiments of PCOO Secretary Martin Andanar even as his office fulfills its mandate to disseminate the policies of our government and how they are implemented in accordance with our Constitution given the continuing lies spread by the critics of PRRD and the tendency of some foreign entities to believe them without the benefit of prior inquiry," he continued.

adoption of a national peace framework as directed by the President by putting together the context, messaging and communication plan for the whole-of-nation approach to be executed by the NTF," he added.

Andanar also assured that no public funds were wasted in the official mission.

Panelo also insisted that the PCOO's caravan has nothing to do with the recent arrest of Rappler chief executive officer Maria Ressa over a cyber-libel case and reiterated that the officials were only doing their duties as communicators of the government.

However, any question to be raised regarding Ressa, one of Mr. Duterte's most vocal critics, "shall be responded to."

He added the visits to Brussels and Geneva will make Filipino communities there more aware of what has been happening at home.

The PCOO delegation took part in an engagement between a Philippine delegation and United Nations Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances.

"The officials took the trip as an opportune time to bring the Press Freedom Caravan to Brussels and Geneva as it is relevant for the Filipino community to keep them abreast of the latest developments happening in our country," Panelo said.

Bearers of good news

"The delegation is tasked to deliver crucial information and programs of the government to Filipinos abroad, as well as to members of the international communities," he added.

The delegation, which will include members of the National Task Force (NTF) to End the Communist Armed Conflict, will also discuss ways to address communist insurgency.

"PCOO, being a committee member of the National Task Force to End Communist Armed Conflict pursuant to Executive Order 70, provides communications support in terms of messaging and content to the anti-communist terrorist groups' efforts," Andanar said.

"The engagement of PCOO in the NTF alongside relevant agencies of government in the security cluster is necessary in the

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Duterte: Dissent is no reason to strip students of scholarship

BY JOCELYN MONTEMAYOR and RAYMOND AFRICA

PRESIDENT Duterte yesterday said mere membership in a left-leaning group or expressing dissent to government policies is not enough ground for students to lose their scholarship especially in state universities and colleges.

"Wala naman kung dissent lang. If you disagree with my move, you disagree or you are not in --- you do not find consonance in our decision. But if you go and say, 'let us go out, join the NPAs, support the NPAs, give food to the NPAs, money to the NPAs,' then you espouse the destruction of the duly constituted government," he said.

The President issued the statement hours after NYC chairman Ronald Cardema clarified his statement about stripping students of scholarship from government.

Cardema issued the clarification amid criticisms from numerous sectors. Sen. Francis Escudero even asked the President to fire the NYC chair.

Caderma, in a chance interview at the Senate where he attended a hearing on the proposed restoration of the Reserve Officers Training Corps, said he was misquoted, adding what he meant was to strip the scholarships of government scholars who are joining the New People's Army.

"Never did I say all government scholars, all street protesters will be removed from their scholarships. I am correcting this because my statement was to ask President Duterte to issue an executive order to study government scholarships being given to anti-government scholars who are rebelling, or supporting the NPAs

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DUTERTE

(New People's Army)."

Cardema said there is nothing wrong with government scholars joining street protests as long as they will not be allied with the NPA.

Escudero said of Caderma's clarification: "That is totally different from what he said earlier. But be that as it may, rebellion is a crime that is punishable by law and should first be proven in court. If proven guilty, revocation of any government scholarship is moot and academic because he will be imprisoned anyway."

The government-run Philippine News Agency on Tuesday night reported Cardema "remains steadfast in his call to cancel the government scholarships for all anti-government scholars, specifically students allied with the leftist Communist Party of the Philippines-New People's Army-National Democratic Front (CPP-NPA-NDF)."

Cardema, a known leader of the Duterte Youth group, is also asking officials of the Sangguniang Kabataan, Reserve Officers' Training Corps, Citizens Army Training, and youth leaders to "report to the National Youth Commission all government scholars who are known in your area as anti-government youth leaders allied with the leftist CPP-NPA-NDF."

Chief Presidential Legal Counsel Salvador Panelo, earlier yesterday, said President Duterte is unlikely to agree to Cardema's proposal.

He said government should not be so reckless and needs enough legal grounds and concrete evidence before any action is taken.

The chairman of the Commission on Higher Education, Prospero de Vera, said scholarships in public higher education institutions cannot be revoked even if students are joining rallies.

He said if a student-protester is in good academic standing, then it is considered as an "expression of the freedom of speech."

He said there is no provision under the Universal Access to Quality Tertiary Education Act that states that students are prohibited from joining in rallies.

He also said it is not a ground for revocation of scholarship since participating in rallies is part of freedom of expression.

Justice Secretary Menardo Guevarra said proposing to strip a student of scholarship for joining anti-government rallies is "unconstitutional."

"With all due respect, such a proposal, if adopted, would effectively restrain the youth's constitutional right to freedom of speech and expression. Our state universities and colleges, instead of taking it against militant students by dropping them from the roll, should be proud that they are producing young people who are socially aware and concerned not only about themselves but also their nation," he said.

Escudero said Cardema seem to be "ignorant" of the Constitution since joining protest actions is guaranteed under the basic law of the land.

He said Cardema must understand the government should serve its citizens "without distinction and regardless of political beliefs."

Sen. Francis Pangilinan said it is not illegal for students to join leftist organizations and join mass actions.

He said the NYC is the one making an illegal move.

Sen. Panfilo Lacson said students who join mass actions must not be penalized or even kicked out of school as they are only exercising a basic right available any citizen of a country.

"However, if they bear arms and commit the crime of rebellion, in the same vein, just like any other person, they should not only be dismissed from school, they should suffer the consequences of their criminal act and jailed, after being accorded due process," Lacson said.

Left-leaning lawmakers led by Kabataan party-list and members of the opposition senatorial slate slammed Cardema.

"Mr. Cardema, clearly, you know nothing about the Constitution or anything about history," said Rep. Sarah Elago (PL, Kabataan). "The freedom to protest is a constitutionally guaranteed and celebrated right. In fact, the free tuition that the students in state universities enjoy now is a victory brought about by protests."

Another member of the Makabayan bloc, Rep. Carlos Zarate (PL, Bayan Muna) said Cardema "is a complete shame, a disgrace to his office, and, as were the fate of his fascist idols – he will also be harshly confined in the dustbin of history while those he despises will be celebrated as nationalist sons and daughters worthy of emulation by the youth and those generations yet to come." – ***With Ashzel Hachero and Wendell Vigilia***

AKTIBISTANG ESTUDYANTE ALISAN NG SCHOLARSHIP

Dapat tanggalan ng scholarship ang mga aktibistang estudyante na sumasali sa mga anti-government rallies.

Ito ang hiniling at apela ni National Youth Commission (NYC) chairman Ronald Cardema kay Pangulong Rodrigo Duterte na magpalabas ng executive order upang tanggalan ng government scholarship ang mga aktibistang estudyante na sumasali sa mga anti-government rallies at sumasapi sa mga left-leaning group na sinasabing kaalyado ng CPP-NPA-NDF.

"Nananawagan po ako kay Pangulong Duterte bilang head of our government to remove the government scholarships of all rebellious, anti-government scholars. Nilalabanan niyo ang ating mga pulis, ang ating mga sundalo and nilalabanan niyo at gusto niyong ipabagsak ang ating gobyerno

Ni RUDY ANDAL

at kayo ay government scholars," wika pa ni Cardema.

Kaagad namang kinontra ng Malacañang ang panukala ni Cardema dahil ginagantiyahan ng Konstitusyon ang karapatan ng mga mag-aaral para sa peace assembly at freedom of expression, ayon kay Presidential Spokesman Salvador Panelo.

"Mere membership alone would not suffice. You have to show evidence that one, you joined because you want to fight the government," dagdag pa ng presidential spokesman.

Ayon pa kay Sec. Panelo na mawawala lamang ang scholarships ng mga kabataang estudyante na ito kapag mayroong matibay na ebidensiya na kasama sila sa grupong nagnais pabagsakin ang pamahalaan at pagsali sa rally ng mga estudyante ay hindi krimen.

Puwera na lamang kung sumama sa pagpapabagsak sa gobyerno kasama ng NPA sa pamamagitan ng arm struggle dahil ito ay krimen.

8 PRISONERS OF WAR NG NPA PINALAYA

Matapos ang dalawang buwang pagkakabihag sa kamay ng mga rebeldeng New People's Army (NPA) ay tuluyan nang pinalaya ang dalawang sundalo at anim na CAFGU (Citizens Armed Forces Geographical Unit) nitong Martes ng hapon sa isang lugar sa Barangay San Juan, Bayugan City, Agusan del Sur.

Kinumpirma ni AFP-Eastern Mindanao Command Commander Major Gen. Felimon Santos Jr., na pinakawalan na ang 8 Prisoners of War (POWs) matapos ang dalawang buwang pagkakabihag.

Una nang pinakawalan ang 6 CAFGU noong Pebrero 14 sa Brgy. San Juan, Bayugan City at sumunod naman noong Pebrero 18 ang dalawang sundalo sa Brgy. San Antonio, Remedios Trinidad, Agusan del Norte.

Ang walong pinalayang bihag ay sina CAAs (Cafgu Active Auxilary) Jimuel Acebedo; Abel Iligan; Jan-jan Iligan; Rolando Quiao; Gabriel Iligan at James Iligan gayundin sina Cpl. Eric Manangan at PFC. Darlino Carino.

Magugunita Noong Disyembre 19 ng nakalipas na taon ay binihag ng NPA rebels ang 2 sundalo at 12 CAFGU matapos sumalakay ang 50-80 nitong armadong miyembro sa kanilang patrol base sa Brgy. New Tubigon, Sibagat, Agusan del Sur kung saan nakatangay din ang mga ito ng malalakas na kalibre ng armas.- ***Joy Cantos-***

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SC: No more oral arguments on BOL

By EDU PUNAY

The Supreme Court (SC) will no longer hold oral arguments on petitions questioning the constitutionality of the Bangsamoro Organic Law (BOL).

The SC justices had planned to hear in oral arguments the petitions filed by the Sulu provincial government led by Gov. Abdusakur Tan II and the Philippine Constitutional Association (Philconsa) seeking to stop the implementation of the BOL under Republic Act 11054.

But they decided not to pursue it anymore following the ratification of the law in the plebiscite conducted by the Commission on Elections (Comelec) last Jan. 21 and Feb. 6, an insider told **The STAR**.

The source, who requested anonymity due to lack of authority to speak for the Court, said the magistrates opted to deliberate and decide on the case next month.

"The member in charge will submit the draft decision in March," the insider revealed.

In the plebiscite, a majority of voters in ARMM and additional provinces voted to ratify the BOL.

The Court earlier deferred ruling on the plea of petitioners for issuance of a temporary restraining order (TRO) on implementation of the BOL, allowing the plebiscite to proceed as scheduled.

It opted to first seek comments from the respondents in the case -- Executive Secretary Salvador Medialdea, members of the Senate and the House of Representatives headed by Senate President Vicente Sotto III and Speaker Gloria Macapagal Arroyo, respectively -- before deciding on the plea for issuance of a TRO as well as on the merits of the case.

The two petitions raised practically the same arguments against the BOL.

Solicitor General Jose Calida has filed a comment on the petition of Tan and is expected to file another this week on Philconsa's petition.

21 February 2019 Manila Standard TODAY Page: A2

Muslim rebels 'cleared' to join Bangsamoro

MUSLIM rebels who previously fought for secession from the Philippines have been cleared to help run a new self-governing region in the southern Philippines, Murad Ebrahim, chairman of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front, said Wednesday.

Murad said Abdullah Macapaar, alias Commander Bravo, would also be appointed as one of 80 members of the Bangsamoro Transition Authority.

Murad will be joined by fellow MILF central committee members and front commanders, whose eligibility earlier came under scrutiny because of criminal cases that might still be pending.

But he told ANC's Early Edition beamed nationwide: "It is all cleared."

Murad was expected to take the role of chief minister of the three-year transition government of the new Bangsamoro autonomous region.

Macapaar led deadly attacks in Lanao del Norte and North Cotabato in 2008 after the MILF and the government failed to sign a peace deal.

The Memorandum of Agreement on Ancestral Domain, under then President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo, raised fears that it would lead to the creation of a sub-state for Muslims in Mindanao.

Murad said Macapaar, leader of the MILF's 102nd Base Command, "will be appointed," noting that the National Bureau of Investigation had cleared him of any pending cases.

Macapaar is expected to initially serve as a member of parliament.

Depending on the capability and qualifications, members would be tapped for ministerial positions, Murad said.

The MILF is awaiting the amnesty proclamation of President Rodrigo Duterte within the year to facilitate the transition of combatants to civilian life under the "normalization phase" of the peace process.

Members of the BTA were supposed to take their oath in Malacañang on Wednesday but the ceremony was reset to Feb. 22, said Murad.

He added 41 of them were nominated by the MILF while the rest were handpicked by the government.

The transition body is expected to take over governance of the old Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao the following week.

Murad acknowledged the pressure of governing a region long hobbled by poverty and violence.

"We are in another level of struggle that is to transform from the revolutionary organization to governance," he said, recalling that some MILF leaders had gone to Malaysia and Turkey for some training.

According to Murad, the BTA would still be using the old P32-billion budget for ARMM to deliver on the promise of improved education, social services, and infrastructure this year.

Congress allocated an additional P30 billion for the new government's operations, but Murad said the much bigger "block grant" would have to wait until next year.

The new region also stands to receive P50 billion in "special development fund" after 2019 to help rebuild areas devastated over years of armed conflict. A2

21 February 2019 Tribune Page: 2

Ex-secessionists admit BARMM governance challenging

By Elmer N. Manuel

Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) chairman Murad Ebrahim – who is expected to take the role of chief minister of the three-year transition government of the new Bangsamoro autonomous region – admitted on Wednesday that governance of the new autonomous region would present "another level of struggle" for long-time combatants.

In an interview on television, Ebrahim said Muslim rebel leaders, who once fought for secession, have been cleared to help run a new self-governing region in the southern Philippines.

We know that it would not be easy for us.

Ebrahim will be joined in the transition government by fellow MILF central committee members and front commanders whose eligibility came under scrutiny because of criminal cases that might still be pending against them.

"It is all cleared," said Ebrahim, noting that Abdullah Macapaar – alias Commander Bravo – will also be appointed as one of 80 members of the Bangsamoro Transition Authority (BTA).

Macapaar led deadly attacks in Lanao del Norte and North Cotabato in 2008 after the MILF and the government failed to sign a peace deal.

"He will be appointed," Murad said, noting that the National Bureau of Investigation had cleared Macapaar of any pending cases. He said Macapaar would initially serve as a member of parliament.

Ebrahim said his group is awaiting the amnesty proclamation of President Rodrigo Duterte within the year to facilitate the transition of the combatants to civilian life under the "normalization phase" of the peace process.

He bared that members of the BTA were supposed to take their oath in Malacañang on Wednesday but the ceremony was reset to 22 February. Forty-one of the BTA members were nominated by the MILF while the rest were handpicked by the government.

The transition body is expected to take over governance of the old Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) the following week.

"We are in another level of struggle – that is, to transform from the revolutionary organization to governance," said Ebrahim. "We know that it would not be easy for us."

The MILF chairman also noted that the BTA would still be using the old P32-billion budget for ARMM to deliver on the promise of improved education, social services and infrastructure this year.

To recall, Congress allocated an additional P30 billion for the new government's operations, but Ebrahim said the much bigger "block grant" would have to wait until next year.

Ebrahim said the new parliament would decide how to help rehabilitate Marawi, the Islamic city attacked by Islamic State-linked local terrorists in 2017. The once bustling city was reduced to rubble as security troops launched airstrikes and engaged Maute terrorists in close-quarter combat for five months.

21 February 2019 PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER Page: A14

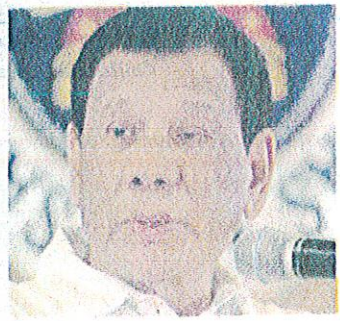
Du30 hints at 'reconfiguring' Moro region

DAVAO CITY—President Duterte has hinted at the possibility of reconfiguring the autonomous Moro region to accommodate the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF), whose founding chair Nur Misuari has kept his silence on the ratification of the Bangsamoro Organic Law.

"I have to talk to Nur Misuari and let's try to see if we could craft something more responsive," the President said at the ninth anniversary of the Mindanao Development Authority (MinDA) here on Tuesday.

"[The government needs to give] concessions to the Moro, which is the correct thing, and also to reconfigure the territory to correct the historical injustice in this land," he said, days before he swears on the 80-member Bangsamoro Transition Authority (BTA), the interim government in the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM).

But Misuari has not responded to Mr. Duterte's repeated appeal for a meeting.



President Duterte

Misuari keeps silence

"Nur has kept his silence and I have repeatedly stressed that we should soon talk. Nur, to his lasting credit, someday, he will be recognized as a revolutionary," the President said.

"We have reached an agreement with the leadership of the MILF (Moro Islamic Liberation Front chair), Murad [Ebrahim], MILF first vice chair [Ghadzali] Jaafar and company," he said.

The MILF earlier submitted 41 nominees to the BTA, with

Nur Misuari

the other 39 seats expected to include MNLF members, administration officials said.

Including MNLF

Mr. Duterte did not explain how he planned to reconfigure the autonomous region but Moro leaders said it could be done by including MNLF-controlled territories in it, with Misuari's help.

"I have a very limited [time] remaining, just three years," he said. "[Soon], I will be gone, and I told the military [that] maybe I could not wait for peace to travel at a snail's pace. We have to work hard and maybe it has to be now," the President said.

Moved to Friday

The oathtaking of the 80-member BTA has been moved to Friday, from Wednesday, according to Mohagher Iqbal, chair of the MILF peace panel.

He did not give any reason for the postponement of the event, which has been set at the Heroes Hall in Malacañang.

MILF nominees to the BTA left Central Mindanao for Manila on Feb. 19 aboard commercial flights, while their families and other guests boarded C-130 and C-295 planes of the Philippine Air Force.

The BTA will govern the new BARMM until the elections of the regular members of the Bangsamoro parliament in 2022.

The members of the BTA will be appointed by the President. It will be led by a chief minister and two deputy chief ministers. —REPORTS FROM GERMELINA LACORTE, ORLANDO DINOY AND TAHER SOLAIMAN INQ

21 February 2019 PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER Page: A9

DNA SAMPLE NEEDED

PNP LOOKING FOR JOLO SUICIDE BOMBERS' CHILD

The Philippine National Police is looking for a child who was left in the care of Abu Sayyaf sympathizers in Sulu province by an Indonesian couple who allegedly blew themselves up at the Jolo cathedral on Jan. 27.

PNP Director General Oscar Albayalde said that if the child was found, law enforcers could crossmatch the child's DNA sample with those taken from the two pairs of severed feet recovered from Our Lady of Mount Carmel Cathedral.

He said the body parts had remained unclaimed and possibly belonged to suicide bombers.

One pair of feet, Albayalde said, belonged to a woman and matched a nape tissue recovered from the blast site.

Part of police effort

None of the body parts belonged to the 23 people killed in the attack.

Searching for the reported child of the Indonesian couple "is part of our effort," Albayalde said in an interview at Camp Crame on Wednesday.

"We do not know if [the child is] 10 years old, whether male or female. But we do have information that [the couple] possibly left a child here," he added.

Albayalde said Philippine authorities were coordinating with their Indonesian counterparts to identify the bombers, adding that members of the Indonesian police were in the country just two weeks ago.

"If they have [DNA] samples from relatives of terrorists in their country, that would be a big help. —JAYMEE T. GAMIL INQ

21 February 2019 The Manila Times Page: A2

'BLAST PIRATES OFF EARTH'

Duterte urges Indonesia, Malaysia to team up vs piracy

PRESIDENT Rodrigo Duterte on Tuesday urged Indonesia and Malaysia to join forces with the Philippines in combating crime on the high seas, amid the continuous kidnappings by Abu Sayyaf bandits.

The Abu Sayyaf, a kidnap-for-ransom network that has pledged allegiance to the Islamic State terrorist group, has been kidnapping foreigners and locals for decades and holding them for ransom on its remote island strongholds in Mindanao.

In his speech during the during the ninth founding anniversary celebration of Mindanao Development Authority and the 25th anniversary of the Brunei-Indonesia-Malaysia-Philippines East Asean Growth Area (BIMP-EAGA) in Davao City, Duterte stressed the need to patrol a sea lane where commercial vessels could pass with protection from the three nations' navies.

"I call upon the BIMP-EAGA. We are doing commerce. Our navies must be vigilant. We have to be one in our patrols," the President said.

"Indonesia and Malaysia, we have to bond together. The world is changing, including the economy. It could either go bad or very bad or where it could go well. But we will have to look into a bad level and I hope we can survive it," he added.

The President then reiterated his order to the Philippine Navy "to blast them (pirates) off the earth."

"If there are pirates in our territory or in the high seas, my orders are blast them to kingdom come. Just the same, they are arrested, they go to prison, you do not have witnesses because the victims are... Once they are freed, they would not even wait for a minute to issue a statement to go home because they are scared," Duterte said. A2

"So, justice seems to be an illusion, it's a mirage actually floating in the seas. So these pirates, they have no souls, I assure you...I am telling the military forces, finish them off," he added.

CATHERINE S. VALENTE

21 February 2019 The Manila Times Page: A7

100 houses turned over to Marawi evacuees

MARAWI CITY: The Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) turned over 100 houses to as many families displaced by the Marawi siege in Barangay Pagalamatan, Saguiaran, Lanao del Sur, on Tuesday morning.

ARMM Gov. Mujiv Hataman led the turnover of the project under the ARMM's Bangsamoro Regional Inclusive Development for Growth and Empowerment (ARMM-Bridge).

Construction of the project worth P300 million began in September last year.

Hataman said the government assures the welfare of all those affected by the 2017 Marawi siege.

"The projects and programs for all them cannot be done alone by the government, hence we all have to be united," the governor said.

He cited the help of Wahab Pangcoga, the village chief of Pagalamatan who donated a four-hectare land on which to build 100 houses.

"We really hastened the construction so that families, especially those from ground zero or most affected area, who are living in evacuation centers can transfer immediately," David Ali, ARMM-Bridge project manager, said.

He added that another 100 houses were being constructed in Saguiaran.

Aside from the starter homes, the beneficiaries will also receive food supplies and livelihood assistance.

"We were already losing hope, that is why we are so thankful that we will soon have our own houses and will not have to live in cramped quarters," said Solaiman Macarambon, one of the 64 evacuee-families who has been staying in the Saguiaran evacuation center for two years.

MASIDING NOOR YAHYA AND JULMUNIR I. JANNARAL

DI-Maute sub-leader sumuko

Dahil sa matinding pressure sa military operation, sumuko sa tropa ng mga sundalo ang isang Daesh Inspired (DI)-Maute terrorist sub-leader sa Lumba Bayabao, Lanao del Sur nitong Martes ng umaga.

Kinilala ni Capt. Clint Antipala, spokesman ng Army's 1st Infantry Division (ID) ang sumukong DI Maute terrorist sub-leader na si Aloyodan Bantak alyas Ibrahim Bantak.

Bandang alas-10 ng umaga nang sumurender sa mga elemento ng Army's 49th Infantry Battalion (IB) sa Lumba Bayabao, Lanao del Sur ang suspek.

"Aloyodan Bantak, also known as alias Ibrahim Bantak's surrender was facilitated by local government unit of Lumba Bayabao," ani Lt. Col. Edgar Allan Villanueva, the 49th Infantry Battalion Commander.

Sa interogasyon, nabatid na si Bantak ay sangkot sa Butig siege sa Lanao del Sur at siyang recruiter ni Owaida Marohombsar na mas kilala bilang si Abu Dar, lider ng Maute-Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS).

Isinurender ni Bantak ang isang cal 5.56mm sniper rifle, dalawang gronade launchers magazine at mga bala. ***(Joy Cantos/trainee Kim Micah Cabual)***

Maute terrorist sub-leader sumuko

Sumuko sa tropa ng militar ang isang Daesh Inspired (DI) Maute terrorist sub-leader na si Aloyodan Bantak alyas Ibrahim noong Martes ng umaga sa Lumba Bayabao, Lanao del Sur dahil sa hindi umano makayanan ang military pressure.

Sa ulat ni Captain Clint Antipala, Spokesman ng Army's 1st Infantry Division (ID) na bandang alas-10:00 ng umaga nang sumuko sa mga elemento ng Army's 49th Infantry Battalion (IB) ang suspek.

Nabatid na si Bantak ay sangkot sa Butig siege sa Lanao del Sur at siyang recruiter ni Owaida Marohombsar group na mas kilala bilang si Abu Dar, lider ng Maute-Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS).

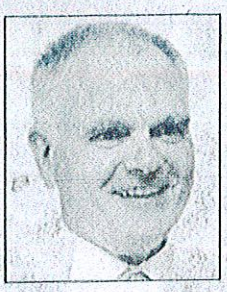
Isinurender din ni Bantak ang isang cal 5.56 MM sniper rifle, dalawang grenade launchers magazine at mga bala. Patuloy naman ang isinasagawang custodial debriefing sa sumukong suspek.-*Joy Cantos*-

21 February 2019 THE PHILIPPINE STAR Page: 9

NOTES FROM THE EU DELEGATION

FRANZ JESSEN

After the Plebiscite – what is next for Mindanao and for the EU?



The month of February has been a month loaded with many highlights for the Philippines and for me as the EU Ambassador.

Together with my EU colleagues, I have congratulated the Philippine Government, the Moro Islamic Liberation Front and the Commission on Elections for the generally peaceful conduct of the Bangsamoro Organic Law (BOL) plebescite this January and February 2019. I am confident that the outcome of the plebiscite will usher in a promising phase for the attainment of peace in the Southern Philippines.

I spent Tuesday evening in Davao celebrating the 9th anniversary of the creation of the Mindanao Development Authority (MINDA). The highlight was of course the speech by President Duterte. The President is seeking to create a new, different Philippines and he referred several times to the country's difficult past, as well as his own ethnic background. With the passing of the BOL, one of the difficult chapters in the country's history can hopefully be closed, and the next chapter can start with, not only hope and aspiration, but with concrete political and economic development initiatives.

This week's oath taking ceremony of the 80-member Bangsamoro Transition Authority (BTA) in Malacanang is another milestone. The symbolic value of that ceremony is more than just considerable. It constitutes a very promising indicator that Bangsamoro and Filipino identities can actually co-exist harmoniously and in a constructive spirit of compromise. During the event, MILF commanders who have never entered Manila will witness in Malacañang. It is heartening for all of us to see the Moro leaders taking oath for their own future government, which will function under the auspices and in tandem with the central authority.

The year 2019 is a new beginning for the Bangsamoro and the upcoming period of transition is definitely critical. From now on, the responsibility will be in the hands of MILF and BTA, as the governance process will officially start. The transition is an opportunity for all actors to work in a harmonious spirit to lay down a solid foundation for political, economic and social stability in Mindanao. With all these in place, the Philippines is certainly off to a good start.

As the EU has been built with peace as its DNA, the EU Delegation to the Philippines will step up its programmes for Mindanao, in agreement with all relevant government departments as well as the MILF as the Government's partner in the peace process.

After all, the EU has always been a staunch supporter of the Mindanao Peace Process throughout the years expressing its political support, encouraging all sides to pursue a peaceful solution and providing substantial financial support for the process. Already this week I will host a working lunch to which I have invited the Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process Secretary Carlito G. Galvez Jr. and MILF's Chairman Murad Ebrahim. Together with the EU MS Ambassadors to the Philippines, the European Chamber of Commerce and the Chambers of Commerce of EU Member States, we will discuss new opportunities arising for economic development and investments in the newly established entity of BARMM. I feel privileged to be a part of this historic development in the Philippines.

As our development cooperation programmes are concentrated in Mindanao, we leverage on our competencies and expertise to see how we can expand the programmes that we have and how to collaborate with more sectors in the country – be with government, NGOs, civil society organisations, business sector and the communities themselves.

In the light of the Philippines Development Plan, the 10-point socio-economic agenda, "Ambisyon Natin 2040" and the Strategic Framework for Mindanao Peace and Development, the EU Delegation will continue to collaborate with the Government to help make the justice system more efficient, effective and accountable and to help attain inclusive growth through access to sustainable energy and job creation. An example of this is the project launch I attended last week, "Renewable Energy Technology," to increase the value added of seaweeds to help achieve electrification in Tawi-Tawi.

More generally, a recent meeting I had with the new Philippines' Special Envoy to the EU, Atty Avelino Cruz coupled with my previous discussions with Foreign Affairs Secretary Teodoro Locsin Jr last January make me optimistic regarding the EU-Philippines' partnership. Although in office only since October 2018, Secretary Locsin has visited Brussels two times, first for the ASEM Summit in October and then for the successful EU-ASEAN Ministerial Meeting in January. He also met with Transport Commissioner Violeta Bulc.

There is so much hope and dynamism in the country and I must say that a healthy bilateral political and policy dialogue is foreseen. While there will be challenges along the way, the EU is always here to stay as a supporter for peace-building and development.

I always believe in the capacity, resiliency and strength of the Filipino people having witnessed many occasions on how Filipinos rise above themselves amidst conflicts – whether man-made or natural. The Filipino people will always be steadfast in their own resolve for peace and the EU will always be committed to peace-building and prosperity as a partner and neighbour.

* * *

(Franz Jessen is the Ambassador of the European Union.)

★

21 February 2019 The Manila Times Page: A1

Digong's recent trip to Hong Kong

IN MY LINE OF SIGHT

RAMON T. TULFO

I WAS in Hong Kong last weekend to campaign for candidate for senator Bong Go with the overseas Filipino workers (OFWs) in the former Crown Colony. ➤TulfoA6

While there, I got invited, along with a handful of close friends, to celebrate the birthday of President Digong's sweetheart, Honeylet Avanceña. It was also a post-Valentine celebration for the presidential lovebirds.

The President looked hale and hearty and didn't look like he had had a recent kidney transplant as reported by a fellow columnist.

During the simple birthday celebration, the President ate heartily and drank a glass of red wine, a no-no if one has had a recent kidney transplant.

***

During dinner, which was held at a nondescript Chinese restaurant — the President shuns ostentation — Digong was his usual bullient self while entertaining guests.

We discussed a wide range of topics.

The President said he would order all the bombs currently in military warehouses dropped on the lairs of Moro terrorists in Sulu so "we can have a new stock (of bombs)."

"I am capable of matching their violence," he said, referring to the terrorists.

He said he could have become a gangster had he not finished his law studies, but "God had other plans for me."

So, he would have no qualms about returning violence with violence in dealing with Moro terrorists and the communist New People's Army (NPA), the President said.

The President railed against corruption. He said he would not stop ridding his government of corrupt officials and employees even if they happened to be his friends and supporters.

He said there would be another purge of corrupt government officials and pointed to the Department of Agrarian Reform (DAR) as his next target.

The President said the purge of very corrupt policemen, especially those involved in drugs, was ongoing.

Some rogue policemen had been killed by unknown gunmen, but these were not reported in the papers, he said, smiling.

So, may this serve as a warning to policemen who persist in going about their wicked ways.

No, he didn't believe it when I told him that some military officers could be selling weapons and ammunition to the enemies of the state. I didn't insist.

On the Chinese illegal workers in the country who are employed in the construction and gaming industries, Digong said the government takes a tolerant attitude.

The President said there were

many Filipino workers who are illegally employed in China, but the Chinese government tolerates their stay as long as they're not committing any crime.

The President said he was siding with his Budget secretary, Benjamin Diokno, in the latter's quarrel with lawmakers who accuse him of favoring some contractors in the release of funds for public works.

He summoned Marinduque Rep. Lord Velasco, who was among the few guests, to the presidential table to explain Diokno's side, but the lawmaker hemmed and hawed.

Mainland Chinese tycoon Xu MingLiang, aka Jose Kho in the Philippines, will be presented with an award of recognition.

On his own, Kho compensated the families of the Hong Kong tourists who were killed in the Luneta hostage crisis of Aug. 23, 2010 as a result of a botched police rescue operation.

Then President Noynoy *Abnoy Kuyakoy* never apologized to the Chinese government for the bloody incident.

Kho is the founder and president of the Friends of the Philippines Foundation.

It will be the second award that Kho would receive from the government.

Last year, he was given the Order of Lapu-Lapu Rank of Kamagi for setting up the P750-million drug rehabilitation center in Malaybalay, Bukidnon, *gratis et amore*.

Kho and his sons, Kitson and Luis, occupied the presidential table at the three-table dinner.

***

Now, why am I campaigning for Bong Go, who resigned as Special Assistant to the President (SAP) to run for the Senate?

Because he has helped me to help others.

Many indigent patients who came to my public service program, "*Isumbong Mo Kay Tulfo*," were given free hospitalization courtesy of Bong Go when he was still SAP.

Go is running on a platform of giving the poor free medicines and treatment in government hospitals.

The *Malasakit* (empathy) desk, which attends to the needs of indigent patients, in various government hospitals is Go's brainchild.

By the way, this is the first time I'm actively personally campaigning for a candidate for national office.

Lest people point out that I am electioneering, I'm not covered by the President's ban on campaigning for any candidate.

Although I may be a special envoy to China, my position is just honorific as I receive no compensation from government.

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For our security, avoid war — and prepare for it

REPUBLIC SERVICE

RICARDO SALUDO

IN September 2016, this writer wrote about securing the Philippines, and called for scrapping the 2014 Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement (EDCA), but not the 1951 Mutual Defense Treaty (MDT) and the 1999 Visiting Forces Agreement (VFA) *(https://www.manilatimes.net/for-a-truly-independent-foreign-policy-scrap-edca/285890/).*

>>SaludoA5

SALUDO FROM A1

For our security, avoid war — and prepare for it

So, why did last Thursday's column call for scrapping the MDT? What happened in the last two years and five months? Plenty.

For starters, the United States escalated its campaign to challenge China's claim over nearly all the South China Sea and its island features. America brought in allies Britain and France in freedom-of-navigation operations (fonops), like sailing just outside the 12-mile claimed territorial waters of Chinese-built island bases in the disputed Spratlys.

There are now flashpoints in Taiwan and Korea, which were not there in 2016. They elevate the risk of the Philippines being dragged into a major war due to the treaty.

Plus: the current move to review and possibly revise the MDT raises not only the option of scrapping it, but also the risk of a more dangerous, disadvantageous pact being forged. For if the EDCA is any indication, Philippine defense negotiators could very well give Uncle Sam everything it wants, while getting little in return.

First, reduce threats

So, how exactly can the Philippines be secured without the MDT? Three strategies, which were presented by this writer in past columns through the years (*https://www.manilatimes.net/duterte-making-nation-secure/366744/*).

First, reduce threats. The biggest one is full-scale attack on the country by a US adversary facing bombardment from American forces deployed in the Philippines.

Just think: if President Rodrigo Duterte had not stopped the EDCA rollout, but instead allowed US war plans use five of our air bases under the agreement, North Korean leader Kim Jong Un might have included them in his threat during the 2017 Korean crisis to nuke the US base in Guam.

And the US Army-funded RAND think-tank report in 2016, "War with China: Thinking Through the Unthinkable," warned that primary targets of the People's Liberation Army in a war with America would be "aircraft carriers and regional air bases" (*https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research_reports/RR1100/RR1140/RAND_RR1140.pdf*).

Those bases would include the five allowed for US use under the EDCA, near the cities of Cebu, Puerto Princesa and Cagayan de Oro, and in major rice-growing provinces of Pampanga and Nueva Ecija.

MDT and EDCA proponents claim they are needed to assert our maritime sovereign rights and defend the archipelago from invasion. They are wrong on both counts.

Despite the defense treaty, the US did nothing when China took over Mischief Reef in 1995 and Scarborough Shoal in 2012, because America has consistently refused to get involved in our territorial disputes.

As for defending the Philippines from invasion, America, Japan, Australia and other nations would come to our aid even without the MDT. Why? Because letting a hostile power take control of the most strategically situated country in East Asia would create a mammoth geopolitical and security nightmare.

MDT or no MDT, America and its allies cannot afford to let the Philippines fall into enemy hands. So, it makes sense for us to scrap the treaty and reduce risks of being dragged into a US war in Asia, while still forging alliances for our defense.

Get ready for war

That is not to say the Philippines should sit back and do nothing for our defense. While allies would fight to stop invasion, they have shown time and again that they won't get involved in territorial spats. So, we must gear up to assert and defend what's ours.

To protect our sovereign rights on the high seas, we need A2-AD. That's anti-access, area denial armaments, urged by the Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments (CSBA), a Washington defense think-tank, in its report "The Geostrategic Return of the Philippines," published after the Aquino regime lost Scarborough Shoal in 2012 (*https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/154663/2012.04.18-Geostrategic-Return-Philippines1.pdf*).

Rather than the frigates favored by the Philippine Navy and presumably its American defense advisers, CSBA called on the US to help its ally acquire maritime surveillance aircraft, anti-ship missiles and air defense systems.

As we have argued before, those A2-AD assets are far more effective in spotting and deterring encroachment in our island territories, as well as our exclusive economic zone (EEZ), 200 nautical miles from our territorial baselines, and our extended continental shelf (ECS), 320 nm out.

Under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (Uniclos), we have exclusive rights to exploit resources in our EEZ waters and the ECS seabed. Part of our ECS is Benham Rise, an area larger than Luzon off the island's Pacific coast.

The late former National Security Adviser Roilo Golez, a graduate of the US Naval Academy, also pushed for anti-ship missiles, specifically the BrahMos projectile designed by Russia and India, and made by the latter. Vietnam is buying the BrahMos; its 300-plus-km range covers the entire EEZ, with an 800-km model now under testing.

Golez said 200 BrahMos are enough to deter interlopers. That would cost about P35 billion, including support infrastructure — about the same as the six Hyundai frigates the Navy wants to buy, which are far more vulnerable and far less deterrent than missiles (*https://www.manilatimes.net/defend-seas-get-missiles-not-ships/383395/*).

Mounted three to a truck, the BrahMos can move where there are threats, while hiding in jungle. If the supersonic projectiles are deployed, even our small patrol boats could confront major warships, with heavy precision firepower defending our navy from land.

Where do we source P35 billion? Budget officials confirmed to Golez that Malampaya royalties, now exceeding P150 billion, can be used to acquire the missiles, since they would secure offshore oil and gas deposits, an energy-related expenditure allowed for funding. And India has offered a billion-dollar credit line for exports to the Philippines.

Along with risk reduction and A2-AD, the third security strategy is multilateral defense. As long as they do not pose offensive threats against China, we can forge alliances with other nations. Indeed, Beijing has not opposed military cooperation between the Philippines and Japan, Australia, and other states. More on this next week.

21 February 2019 Malaya The National Newspaper Page: B5

Terrorist group

I am a student of Political Science in one of the universities here in the Philippines and hopefully I will be graduating soon. But I still don't understand why the Manila Regional Trial Court can't fast-track approval to legally declare the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) and its armed wing the New People's Army (NPA) as terrorists since the Department of Justice (DOJ) has already filled its petition and President Duterte himself proclaimed them as terrorist on December 2017.

This really troubled me since the European Union (EU) has declared them as foreign terrorist groups including their self-exiled communist leader Jose Ma. Sison. As I have read in an article citing reports from Ambassador to Belgium and EU Clemencio Montesa, that EU Council of Ministers adopted a "common position" to have the NPA declared as foreign terrorists and Sison as a terrorist last Oct. 28, 2002. With the EU declaration, individuals and organizations identified with the NPA and Sison, who is living in exile in the Netherlands, will be denied visas as well as sanctuary to any EU member country. Their funds and assets in the EU will be cut and frozen, and any other fund-raising activities will be prohibited. B5

With all these as bases, why is it so hard for our Philippine court to declare and decide on it? Are these people hiding something that it's so hard for them to decide on this matter? Maybe that's why this terrorist group has the confidence to do all their atrocities because they know that laws in our country are weak and decision making is sluggish even though evidence are all present. So I challenge our court now, the DOJ and especially the Manila Regional Trial Court to declare this group as TERRORIST as soon as possible. - ***JOHN BRIAN T. GATEB, General Santos***

ONLINE NEWS
21 FEBRUARY 2019

www.retiredanalyst.blogspot.com

295 NPA members surrender in Gigaquit town

From the Philippine Information Agency (Feb 20, 2019): **295 NPA members surrender in Gigaquit town**

SURIGAO CITY, Surigao del Norte -- **A total of 295 members and supporters of the Communist Party of the Philippines - New People's Army (CPP-NPA) voluntarily surrendered to the Community Support Program (CSP) teams under 30th Infantry "Python" Battalion (30IB), 4th Infantry Division, Philippine Army at around 11:00 o'clock in the morning on February 15, 2019 at Barangay Camam-onan, Gigaquit town.**

Among the surrenderers were 28 Militia ng Bayan (MB) and 267 Underground Mass Organization (UGMO) members who also yielded seven assorted firearms to Gigaquit mayor Elvira Egay and 30IB battalion commander Lt. Col. Allen Raymund Tomas.

The surrenderers pledged their oath of allegiance to the government followed by the declaration of the CPP-NPA as "Persona non Grata" headed by Inday Flor B. Bangga, barangay chairperson of Camam-onan.

Barangay Camam-onan was among the barangays declared as conflict-affected areas (Con-AAs) in the province which was also among the barangays declared as Peace and Development Zone (PDZ) that was launched on August 28, 2018.

In his message, Tomas said **the LASICAM Complex (Lahi,Sico-Sico, Camam-onan) were identified as stronghold of the CPP-NPA for the past decades** but due to the conduct of Community Support Program (CSP) activities and the entry of government projects and interventions, they were able to address issues, regain the trust and support of the masses.

Meanwhile, Brigadier General Franco Nemesio M Gacal, commander of 4ID commend Tomas and his troop, together with the officials of the local government unit of Gigaquit, for the big accomplishment.

"Indeed, peace and development is multi-dimensional that requires a whole-of-nation approach in order to effectively address perennial problems of the communities particularly in Con-AAs," Gacal said. (Lt. Ken Enciso, CMO-30IB, Philippine Army/PIA-Surigao del Norte)

www.retiredanalyst.blogspot.com

Former NPA team leader surrenders to 75IB, Phil. Army

From the Philippine Information Agency (Feb 20, 2019): **Former NPA team leader surrenders to 75IB, Phil. Army**

BISLIG CITY, Surigao del Sur - **A former team leader of the New People's Army (NPA) voluntarily surrendered to the folds of law.**

This was made possible through the efforts of Intel Operatives of Charlie Company, 75th Infantry (Marauder) Battalion, 4th Infantry Division, Philippine Army as he brought with him one US Cal. 30 carbine with one magazine loaded with ammunition at Sitio Kalingayan, Brgy. Consuelo, Bunawan, Agusan del Sur at around 8:00 a.m. on Feb. 14, 2019.

The surrenderer was identified as Jeffrey Piodos y Labandero alias 'Mao/ Mac Mac', 24 years old, single and a resident of Purok Triumph, Brgy. Sta. Cruz, Rosario, Agusan del Sur.

Labandero left the group to return to the folds of law, start a new life and work hand in hand with the government in achieving peace and harmony.

Lt. Col. Jaime Datuin, commanding officer of 75IB welcomed the surrenderer on his decision and willingness to be one with the government again.

"To the remaining members of the terrorists group, I know you are suffering in the hinterlands; you do not have food and proper rest; your family is suffering from loneliness of not having you with them. Give yourself a chance to be with your family and live a life away from fear and hunger," he said.

Also, Brigadier General Andres Centino, 401st Brigade commander, lauded the Marauder troopers for another accomplishment.

"The achievement of your troops with their initiative and efforts for the surrender of another member of NPA exemplifies the dedication of the Marauder Battalion in attaining the mission of 4th Infantry (Diamond) Division. The act of surrender manifests how they understand the purpose of our troops which is to search and run after them to maintain the safety of every civilian in our area of responsibility," Centino said. (75IB/PIA-Agusan del Sur)

https://pia.gov.ph/news/articles/1018615

www.retiredanalyst.blogspot.com

Maute group sub-leader yields to military in Lanao

From the Philippine News Agency (Feb 20, 2019): **Maute group sub-leader yields to military in Lanao**

PAGADIAN CITY, Zamboanga del Sur -- **A sub-leader of the Islamic State for Iraq and Syria (ISIS)-inspired Maute group has surrendered to military authorities in the province of Lanao del Sur, military officials said Wednesday.**

Lt. Col. Edgar Allan Villanueva, Army's 49th Infantry Battalion commander, identified the Maute group sub-leader surrenderer as Aloyodan Bantak alias Ibrahim Bantak who surrendered around 10 a.m. Tuesday in Lumba Bayabao, Lanao del Sur.

Villanueva said the surrender of Bantak was facilitated by the local government unit of Lumba Bayabao. **Bantak turned over a caliber 5.56 milimeter sniper rifle, two grenade launchers, and ammunition.**

"Our initial debriefing found out that he was involved in November 2016 Butig Siege and he is the recruiter of the group of Owaida Marohombsar alias Abu Dar," Villanueva said.

Bantak's surrender came a day after three Maute group members surrendered to the military in Sultan Dumalondong, Lanao del Sur.

The surrender of the three, who turned over one M2 Carbine rifle with ammunition, was witnessed by Mayor Jamel Kurangking of Sultan Dumalondong.

Col. Romeo Brawner, the Army's 103rd Infantry Brigade commander, reiterated the military's commitment to stamp out remnants of the Maute group that was responsible for the five-month siege of Marawi last year.

"Our efforts will be continuous against the Daesh-inspired Maute terrorists in order to achieve a peaceful and progressive community," Brawner said.

http://www.pna.gov.ph/articles/1062451