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NEWS CLIPPINGS

21 December 2018

Friday

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PING BARES WASTEFUL PROJECTS WORTH P583B

STORY BY DJ YAP

A huge amount of taxpayer money was 'wasted' in 2017 on discontinued or shelved projects that the Commission on Audit found to be irregular, according to Senator Lacson.

FROM A1

By DJ Yap
@deejayapINQ

Out of every P100 Juan de la Cruz paid in taxes to run the government for a year, almost P20 went to projects that were later suspended, stopped or under litigation as these were found to be irregular, unnecessary, extravagant or unconscionable.

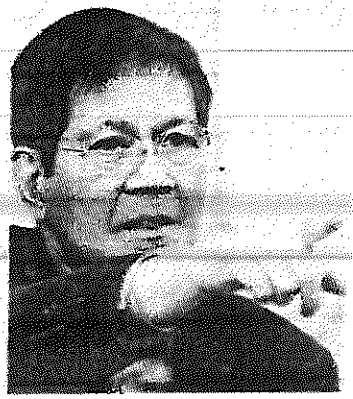
That's the bane of Philippine government spending, as P583.5 billion had been "wasted" on discontinued or shelved projects as of December last year, according to Sen. Panfilo "Ping" Lacson.

That represented 17.4 percent of the P3.35-trillion national budget for 2017.

In a roundtable discussion with Inquirer editors and reporters on Thursday, Lacson said an audit of government agencies showed the extent of wasteful and questionable spending practices that caused taxpayer money to go down the drain.

Lacson was referring to the Commission on Audit (COA) list of government projects issued "notices of suspensions, disallowances and charges," which, as of the end of last year, had ballooned to nearly P600 billion.

"It is revolting in the sense that we keep paying taxes, then you see this is where our money goes," he said.



Panfilo Lacson —JOAN BONDOC

"We're either overtaxed or underserved, or both," said Lacson, who opened a can of worms this month when he discussed last-minute insertions of multibillion-peso allocations for the districts of favored lawmakers in the proposed P3.8-trillion budget for 2019.

As of December 2017, the COA had suspended government transactions worth P402.8 billion, disallowed projects worth P20 billion, and issued notices to other projects worth P160.7 billion under litigation or "charged," according to a list provided by Lacson's staff and cross-checked by the Inquirer with official COA records.

"It's huge, isn't it? That's P583 billion from a national budget of P3.35 trillion," Lacson said.

"Now, we're asking the COA to show who has the biggest disallowances and suspensions ... so we can see which agencies are failing," he said.

COA AUDIT REPORT 2017

Suspensions
P402,835,875,146.59

Disallowances
P19,988,247,122.67

Charges
P160,699,539,834.66

Total
P583,523,662,103.92

*The table is based on COA reports and only on available data. It does not include SUCs and other NGAs (except MinDa).

SOURCE: Office of Sen. Panfilo Lacson

INQ GRAPHICS

The Inquirer, independently checking the senator's compilation with COA reports, found that two agencies accounted for the biggest slices of the pie of disallowed or suspended projects.

Bureau of Customs

For instance, the Bureau of Customs (BOC) was No. 1 on the list, accounting for P392.8 billion of all disallowed, suspended or charged funds, representing more than two-thirds of the total.

BOC notices of suspension cover P379.7 billion; notices of disallowances, P424.2 million; and notices of charges, P12.7 billion.

No. 2 on the list was the Department of Energy (DOE), which registered P146.9 billion worth of

suspended or stopped projects, or about a quarter of the total.

DOE's notices of charges, however, accounted for the lion's share of the P146.8 billion, owing to a suit filed in connection with the "undercollection" of the government's 60-percent share of royalties from the Malampaya natural gas project, which resulted from the deduction of corporate income taxes of the service contractors.

As of the reporting date, an appeal is pending with the COA, according to records.

Altogether, the BOC and the DOE accounted for 92 percent of the total, by the Inquirer's reckoning.

Armed Forces

A far third on the list was the Department of Agriculture (DA) with P8.11 billion, followed by the general headquarters of the Armed Forces of the Philippines with P6.46 billion.

Other agencies with sizable amounts were the Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH) with P6 billion, Department of Education (DepEd) with P3.8 billion, and Department of Transportation (DOTr) with P2.12 billion.

Lacson said the figures did not yet reflect funds for state universities and colleges (SUCs), as well as other agencies whose audit had not been completed and released by the COA.

But the released figures paint a sorry picture for the government, he said.

"The assumption here is all this money went to waste because the project was disallowed or suspended or discontinued," Lacson said.

"More or less you can draw your own conclusions," he said.

Irregular, unconscionable

In line with its constitutional mandate, the COA may issue notices to disallow, suspend or charge "irregular, unnecessary, excessive, extravagant or unconscionable expenditures or uses of government funds and properties."

Notices of disallowance or charge are considered "audit decisions" that have been adequately established by evidence and supported by law and regulations, according to the COA's 2009 revised rules of procedure.

Notices of suspension may be slapped on "transactions of doubtful legality/validity/propriety to obtain further explanation or documentation," based on COA rules.

Lacson, aided by his researchers, arrived at the figures by compiling the COA's 2017 reports on suspensions, disallowances and charges of individual government agencies.

The COA does not publicly release totals of suspended, disallowed or charged projects in the entire bureaucracy.

It releases individual reports of its audit of agencies every year. INQ

IN THE KNOW

What P583.5 billion could have funded:

- Rehabilitation of Marawi City and still have over P500 billion in extra money. The most recent estimate of the project is P80 billion.
- Construction of 785 modern hospitals in 81 provinces, 145 cities and 559 selected municipalities. This is based on the cost of a modern Fabella Hospital being constructed in Manila at a cost of P743 million.
- Construction of more than 216,000 classrooms or 18,000 four-story buildings with 12 classrooms. This estimate is based on a document from the Department of Public Works and Highways in June 2018, which allocated P32.112 million for a four-story, 12-classroom building in Marilao, Bulacan. The four-story buildings could have been built in all cities, provinces and municipalities in the country.
- Construction of 1.21 million socialized subdivision homes. The Housing and Urban Development Coordinating Council has set a price ceiling of P480,000 for a socialized subdivision unit with 22 square meters and with a loft of at least 50 percent of the base structure or 24 sq m. More than 3 million housing units are needed to be built for poor and homeless Filipinos between 2012 and 2030.

—COMPILED BY INQUIRER RESEARCH

21 December 2012 Philippine Star Page 1

Defense chief seeks PhI-US treaty review

By JAIME LAUDE

Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana wants a review of the provisions of the 1951 Mutual Defense Treaty (MDT) with the United States.

Lorenzana stressed the need to review the treaty given the ambivalent stand of the US on the country's maritime domain and territorial issue in the West Philippine Sea.

In a yearend press briefing at Camp Aguinaldo yesterday, Lorenzana said it is about time both countries look into the provisions of the MDT, given the mounting security concerns in the South China Sa.

In calling for the review, Lorenzana said the defense department wanted the US to give a definitive stand on whether it will support the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) in the event of a confrontation with other claimants.

Lorenzana said areas in the South China Sea over which the Philippines has sovereign rights should be covered by the MDT to obligate the US to come to the aid of the country if ever the Philippines is attacked by other states.

"We are thinking about that also... we really wanted to review that also... I think we have been discussing that with our staff inside the Department of national Defense (DND)," he said.

The Permanent Arbitration Court in The Hague has awarded the Philippines sovereign rights and defined its maritime entitlements over three disputed

Turn to Page 8

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Defense From Page 1

areas in the Spratlys: Panganiban (Mischief) Reef, Ayungin (Second Thomas) Shoal and Recto (Reed) Bank. Panatag (Scarborough) Shoal off Zambales was declared as a common fishing ground over which no country has control.

The arbitral court also invalidated China's entire nine-dash-line territorial claim over the South China Sea.

China has ignored the ruling and built fortified artificial islands in the South China Sea including Panganiban Reef.

The Chinese sealed off Panatag and harassed resupply operations to Filipino troops on Ayungin.

The territorial dispute is listed by the AFP as the primary source of the country's external threat.

Lorenzana said the review of the MDT and its provisions was raised with US officials a month ago in Hawaii by Defense Undersecretary Cardozo Luna.

"I think it was Undersecretary Luna who was invited to Hawaii to attend a conference where he said maybe we should start reviewing our MDT," Lorenzana said.

"We are going to (review it)... we'll need to look at the provisions there, discuss with the end view of reviewing to make it stronger," he added.

Lorenzana said the review is needed in order for the country to make its alliance with the US stronger "because it is the only country we have an alliance with."

The US, while sustaining its Freedom of Navigation Operations in the South China Sea directly challenging China's massive maritime and territorial claim in the region, has been non-committal on whether it will defend the Philippines in the event of an attack.

"The US is very ambivalent. They are saying the MDT covers only the metropolitan Philippines. I think their definition of metropolitan Philippine is just the whole country and KIG (Kalayaan Island Group) is not included," Lorenzana said.

He also raised concern on possible miscalculation in the disputed region, saying that once that happens close to the Filipino troops' occupied outposts, the Philippines for sure will be dragged into the conflict.

"Recently, US and China destroyers almost figured in a collision and that is very concerning because if they go into a shooting war, we can be involved because it happened in our backyard," Lorenzana pointed out.

21 December 2018 INQUIRER Page: A5

Lorenzana: Time to review PH-US defense treaty

By Jeannette I. Andrade
@jiandradeINQ

Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana on Thursday said the Philippines wanted to review the Mutual Defense Treaty with the United States amid concerns about hostile encounters between the country's longtime military ally and China in the West Philippine Sea (WPS), an area where Beijing and Manila have conflicting territorial claims but not covered by the 1951 accord.

"Since we have a Mutual Defense Treaty with the US we might get involved in their conflict because it is [happening] in our turf. It is within the West Philippine Sea, within our sovereign jurisdiction in the WPS," Lorenzana said at a news conference in Camp Aguinaldo.

Destroyers' near-collision

He said encounters between American and Chinese forces in the area were "very concerning," particularly the recent near-collision of destroyers from both countries.

"They (United States and China) might go into a shooting war and there might be a miscalculation," Lorenzana said.

The 67-year-old treaty says "an armed attack on either of the Parties is deemed to include an armed attack on the metropolitan territory of either of the Parties, or on the Island territories under its jurisdiction in the Pacific Ocean, its armed forces, public vessels or aircraft in the Pacific."

Lorenzana noted that the accord's territorial coverage was silent on areas in the WPS that the country is claiming.

US 'very ambivalent'

"The US is very ambivalent there," he said. "The US has always said it will not meddle into territorial disputes. They would not care about that [dispute]."

Lorenzana said the islands, shoals and reefs in the WPS that comprise the Kalayaan Island Group claimed by the Philippines were not covered because they were outside the country's 370-kilometer exclusive economic zone (EEZ).

"So if anything happens, those islands are not covered by the Mutual Defense Treaty," he said.

Even Scarborough Shoal, which is west of Zambales province and within the Philippine EEZ, may not be considered part "metropolitan" Philippines, he added. INQ

21 2

Regular military patrols in Ayungin Reef assured

By FRANCIS T. WAKEFIELD

Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana on Thursday said that the military will continue to patrol Ayungin Reef as part of efforts to protect it from incurssions.

In a press briefing at Camp Aguinaldo, Quezon City, Lorenzana said that Filipino troops will sustain its patrol in the area.

Nagpa-patrolya tayo [We patrol] regularly, so we will continue on strengthening our islands," Lorenzana said.

"Mayroon tayong siyam na islands [We have nine islands]. The people at the Sierra Madre (Landing Ship Tank) will still be there, continue pa rin 'yung ating replacement saka [also] resplacement ng tao [of people] regularly plus yung re-supply nila [re-supplying them] that will continue," Lorenzana added.

Ayungin forms part of the country's group of islands in the hotly-contested Spratlys region being claimed by five other countries, including China.

Ayungin is located near the Chinese-occupied Mischief (Panganiban) Reef which now serves as China's forward base for its warships.

Both reefs are located near Palawan.

Lorenzana, in the same press briefing, said that there are plans to improve the living conditions of soldiers posted in Pag-Asa island, Palawan.

He also said that the island's beaching ramp is 42 percent finished.

"We just continue what we are doing now, and that is to fortify or improve the living condition, the quarters of our troops. Spread sila lahat eh, mayroon tayong tropa sa lahat ng ating islands na occupied natin [They are spread. We have troops stationed in islands that we occupy]," he added.

The defense chief also said that the government is looking at the possibility of renewing the Mutual Defense Treaty with the United States.

Lorenzana said they are studying how to get a better deal for the country, under the MDT, especially in protecting the

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A1

PH wants review of defense treaty with United States

THE PHILIPPINES wants to review provisions of its mutual defense treaty (MDT) with the United States, to expand the 1951 pact's coverage to the nine islands occupied by Manila at the Kalayaan Island Group (Spratly Islands) in the West Philippine Sea (South China Sea), Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana said on Thursday.

Lorenzana made the statement as he clarified that Manila and Washington's MDT only covers "Metropolitan Philippines," which includes the

➤Treaty A2

TREATY FROM A1

PH wants review of defense treaty with US

three main islands — Luzon, Visayas and Mindanao, and territories within the country's exclusive economic zone (EEZ).

Cardozo Luna, Defense undersecretary, was invited to Hawaii to attend a conference where he raised before US officials the possibility of reviewing the MDT.

"We are going to [review this]... We just need to look into the provisions and discuss with the end of reviewing it to make it stronger," Lorenzana told reporters in a news conference at Camp Aguinaldo.

"This is also to strengthen our alliance with the United States because it is the only country we have an alliance with," he added.

The Defense chief also believes it is high time for both nations to tackle once more their military partnership which has stretched for decades.

The Philippines wants US support in case of any confrontation that may be sparked by outside forces in the disputed South China Sea territories.

The nine islands and shoals occupied by the Philippines in Kalayaan Island Group are Pag-asa (Thitu) Island, Parola (Northeast Cay) Island, Kota (Loaita) Island, Lawak (Nanshan) Island, Patag (Flat) Island, Likas (West York) Island, Panata (Lankiam Cay) Island, Ayungin (Second Thomas) Shoal and Rizal (Commodore) Reef.

Ayungin and Scarborough (Panatag) Shoals are both within the Philippines' EEZ. Panatag is occupied by China.

Lorenzana emphasized that the Philippine-occupied islands in the West Philippine Sea is outside the country's EEZ, which is not included in the so-called Metropolitan Philippines.

The US, he added, had stated that it would keep its hands off when it comes to the sea dispute, noting Washington has been "ambivalent" when referring to the issue.

'US, China tension concerning'

Recalling events that transpired this year involving the dispute in the West Philippine Sea, Lorenzana said the "concerning" issue was the tension between the US and China in the contested waters.

"That is very concerning because if they go into a shooting war, it will cause miscalculation and since it is being held at our backyard, we may get involve with them," he said, citing the MDT with the US.

Lorenzana said he wanted to build barracks for troops stationed at the islands within the Spratly archipelago, lamenting that soldiers were living in nipa huts.

"We want to give them a better home, such as barracks, especially in Pag-asa," he noted.

As for the runway, it is expected to be finished by 2019 after repairs due to cracks found. The completion rate of the runway is 42 percent.

He also said *BRP Sierra Madre*, which has served as an outpost at Ayungin Shoal after running aground in 1999, would be maintained and troops would be continuously deployed to the area.

Marine troopers based in the vessel guard Ayungin Shoal.

Lorenzana said the Philippine military would continue patrolling in the area and "take actions" if the Chinese would make moves "inconsistent" with the country's national interest.

"We will keep on protesting if we will see any actions from China that are not consistent with our national interest. We are going to protest to China," he said.

DEMPSEY REYES

21 December 2018 Manila Standard TODAY Page: A3

DND seeks to review treaty between US, PH

By Francisco Tuyay

NEARLY seven decades after the signing of the Mutual Defense Treaty between the United States and the Philippine government, the defense department will seek to review the Aug. 30, 1951 accord to solicit Washington's position with regards the dispute in the South China Sea.

Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana said the planned review of the MDT will seek Washington's specific stand as to whether the Philippines can count on US support in the event hostilities break out following China's occupation of the islets and reefs in the West Philippine Sea.

"We are thinking about that also... we really wanted to review that also. I think we have been discussing that with our staff inside the Department of National Defense (DND)," said Lorenzana during his yearend news briefing on Thursday.

He said the review of the MDT and its provisions have already been raised with US officials a month ago in Hawaii by a team headed by Defense Undersecretary Cardozo Luna.

"I think, it was Undersecretary Luna, who was invited to Hawaii to attend conference where he said maybe we should start reviewing our MDT, yes he is," the defense chief said.

"We are going to (review it)... we'll need to look at the provisions there, discuss with the end view of reviewing to make it stronger or whatever," he added.

Lorenzana said that the islets and shoals in the WPS should be covered by the treaty, which obligates the US to militarily respond to the aid of the country once it is attacked by other states.

At present, some of the country's islets and shoals in the West Philippine Sea were being challenged aggressively by China which has already converted some of them into military bases.

21 December 2018 Manila Standard TODAY Page: A1

DND vows continuing patrol of WPS

DESPITE improving ties with China, the Philippines will continue patrolling the West Philippine Sea and strengthening the islands under its control, Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana said Thursday.

"We will still continue with our activities there. We will patrol regularly… [and] continue strengthening our islands. We have nine islands. The people at the Sierra Madre [a grounded landing ship] will still be there, and we will continue resupplying them and replacing them," he said in a mix of Filipino and English.

The Defense chief added that the country

Next page

DND...

From A1

will protest any action by the Chinese that are inconsistent with the Philippine national interest.

Part of the buildup, he said, would be better housing for troops on Pagasa Island.

"We have allotted funds for the shelter of our troops because right now, they only have huts there. We should give them good shelters, barracks, especially in Pagasa," he added.

By the end of next year, he said, the runway on the island will have been repaired, and a beaching ramp was already 42 percent complete. The ramp will enable them to bring in the materials and equipment to repair the runway, he said.

At the same time, Lorenzana said two missile-armed frigates being built by South Korean shipbuilder Hyundai Heavy Industries will be named the BRP Antonio Luna and BRP Jose Rizal.

Navy flag officer-in-command Vice Admiral Robert Empedrad said the construction of the frigates was going smoothly, and the ships would be delivered by February or March 2020.

The keel-laying for the first-missile-armed frigate took place last Oct. 16 in Ulsan, South Korea while the steel-cutting for the second ship took place last Sept. 17.

The Philippines and Hyundai signed a P16-billion contract for the two frigates, with P2 billion set aside for its weapon systems and munitions. The projected delivery date for the first frigate is 2020 and the second one is 2021. PNA

21 December 2018 THE DAILY tribune Page: 1

Defense: Review MDT

By Mario J. Mallari

On the heels of increasing maritime friction between the United States and China, the Department of National Defense (DND) recommended yesterday a review of the 67-year-old Philippines-United States (US) Mutual Defense Treaty (MDT) amid the emerging regional security challenges affecting both nations.

Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana said, in fact, the DND has initially floated the idea of reviewing the MDT during a recent conference in Hawaii.

Lorenzana made the admission after citing a near-collision incident between US and Chinese warships in the disputed West Philippine Sea (WPS).

The incident happened late October involving a US Navy destroyer and a Chinese warship.

President Rodrigo Duterte, in the practice of his independent foreign policy, said the tense situation was due to the rivalry of the US and China which the Philippines should not be part of.

The near miss happened as the military vessel Decatur was conducting what the US calls "freedom of navigation operations" (FONOP) near two Chinese-held man-made islets in the Spratly chain of the waterway.

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The US and its allies periodically send planes and warships through the area to conduct FONOP

From page 1

China, shortly after, scolded the US for sending naval vessels close to the disputed islands where Beijing has built military installations.

The US and its allies periodically send planes and warships through the area to conduct FONOP intended as a signal to Beijing of their right under international law to pass through the waters claimed by China.

Under the MDT, both nations agreed to support each other if either the Philippines or the United States were to be attacked by an external party.

The MDT, signed by the Philippines and the US in 1951, however, does not cover disputed territories. "The US is very ambivalent on this. They are saying it's only metropolitan Philippines... not including Kalayaan," Lorenzana said.

Maybe we should start reviewing our MDT with the end view of making it stronger.

The Defense chief said Defense Undersecretary Cardozo Luna earlier had floated the idea of reviewing the MDT during a conference with the Americans in Hawaii.

"We are thinking about that... We also want to review... I think we've been discussing that with our staff inside DND. Secretary Luna said 'maybe we should start reviewing our MDT with the end view of making it stronger or to enhance the alliance with the United States'," Lorenzana said.

"It is the only country we have an alliance with," he added.

Hot area

The USS Chancellorsville guided-missile destroyer also recently sailed near the Paracel islands "to challenge excessive maritime claims and preserve access to the waterways as governed by international law."

The Chinese military scrambled aircraft and warships, sending out warnings for the American vessel to leave the area.

"We urge the US to strengthen the management of its vessels and aircraft that pass by Chinese territory to prevent unexpected events," People's Liberation Army Southern Theatre spokesman Li Huamin said in a statement.

China has also lodged a diplomatic complaint with Washington, foreign ministry spokesman Geng Shuang said during a regular press briefing, calling on the US to "immediately stop such provocative actions that violate China's sovereignty."

Lorenzana stressed that such incidents, if miscalculated by either party, may lead to a "shooting war" that could drag the Philippines into the conflict since "WPS is within our sovereign jurisdiction. That's very concerning."

"Everybody is asking, not the Philippines, but all other countries in ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) for the superpowers to be more careful with their actions in the WPS because we do not want a miscalculation," he said.

Meanwhile, the Defense chief said repair works at the beach ramp on Philippine-occupied Pag-asa Island in the WPS are 42 percent completed.

He said by next year repair of the Rancudo Airfield will start and is expected to be finished by end of 2019.

Patrols to continue

The Philippine Navy will continue patrolling the WPS and this will be the thrust of the defense establishment for the coming year.

"We will still continue with our activities there. We patrol regularly, so we will continue on strengthening our islands. We have nine islands. The people at the (BRP) Sierra Madre (a grounded landing ship tank) will still be there. Replacement of people and resupply will be continuous," Lorenzana said.

The MDT, signed by the Philippines and the US in 1951, however, does not cover disputed territories.

The DND chief added they will also keep protesting if they see any actions of the Chinese that are inconsistent with national interest.

When asked to expound on what he means by "strengthening our islands," Lorenzana said this refers to improvements on the housing accommodation for troops deployed there, especially on Pag-asa Island.

"We have allotted funds for the shelter of our troops because, right now, they only have huts there. We should give them good shelters, barracks, especially in Pag-asa. At the end of next year, we expect the runway to be repaired and we are doing the beaching ramp," he said.

Once completed, the ramp will enable them to bring in the necessary materials and equipment to repair the runway.

21 December 2018 INQUIRER Page: A7

2 Navy frigates named after Jose Rizal, Antonio Luna

The Philippine Navy's two new missile frigates have been named BRP Antonio Luna and BRP Jose Rizal even before their scheduled arrival in 2020 and 2021. At a press conference on Thursday at Camp Aguinaldo, Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana said it was the first time the Navy used national heroes as ship names. The frigates are now being built by Hyundai Heavy Industries in A7 South Korea at a total cost of P16 billion. The Navy previously had a BRP General Antonio Luna, one of two patrol gunboats of the Emilio Aguinaldo class constructed at the Cavite naval shipyard, but it was decommissioned in April 2016. —JEANNETTE I. ANDRADE

21 December 2018 THE STAR Page 7

New Navy ships to be named after Rizal, Luna

By JAIME LAUDE

Two Navy missile-firing frigates now being built in South Korea would be named after the country's heroes – *BRP Jose Rizal* and *BRP Antonio Luna*, the defense department announced yesterday.

Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana said the first frigate will be delivered in 2020 and the other in 2021.

Lorenzana said it is just right for the Navy's new frigates to be named after two of the country's patriots.

Rizal is the country's national hero for his writing against the abuses committed by Spanish colonial authorities, thus inspiring the Philippine revolution.

Luna is known for his staunch resistance against the Americans during the Philippine-American War.

Construction for the missile-armed frigates is proceeding smoothly, Navy chief Vice Admiral Robert Empedrad said.

"(Construction of) our frigates is moving forward, it will be coming on February or March 2020. It's all systems go and we should be very happy for our country," Empedrad said.

Keel-laying for the frigate was done last Oct. 16 in Ulsan, South Korea, while steel-cutting for the second ship was conducted last Sept. 17.

The Korean firm HHI is expected to lay the keel of the second frigate by the first quarter of 2019.

The Philippines and HHI signed a P16-billion contract for two missile-armed frigates, with another P2 billion set aside for weapons systems and munitions.

While still building their respective capabilities, the Navy and the Philippine Air Force (PAF) are continuously conducting routine air and maritime sovereignty patrols over the West Philippine Sea.

Lorenzana made this known yesterday amid the silence of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) of its ongoing sea and air operations in the disputed region.

"We will still continue with our activities there, we conduct regular patrols. We will also continue strengthening our islands. Our people at the *Sierra Madre* will still be there. Nothing has changed with our troop rotation and resupply operations," Lorenzana said, referring to the grounded ship at Ayungin Shoal.

Soldiers deployed on the country's nine occupied outposts in the disputed Spratlys are supplied with provisions, specifically food, water and medicine, on a regular basis.

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Outgoing Air Force chief offered job at coconut agency

BY VICTOR REYES

PRESIDENT Duterte is planning to appoint outgoing Air Force chief Lt. Gen. Galileo Gerard Kintanar to the Philippine Coconut Authority, Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana said yesterday.

He did not say what specific job awaits Kintanar, who has opted for early retirement, at the PCA.

Kintanar is due to relinquish his post to AFP Western Command chief Lt. Gen. Rozzano Briguez today during rites at the Air Force headquarters in Villamor Air Base in Pasay City.

Kintanar is supposed to retire in January 2020 when he reaches the mandatory retirement age of 56. Early this month, he was ordered replaced by President Duterte to, according to authorities, give more junior officers a chance to command the Air Force.

Lorenzana said Kintanar will retire early next year.

"The President said -- although this is not yet official -- he wants to put him at the PCA, Philippine Coconut Authority. That is what the President is thinking. But that's not yet official," he said.

Lorenzana said Kintanar already

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OUTGOING

knows about the President's plan. "He (Kintanar) was there when the President said it."

He also said Kintanar accepted the offer.

Lorenzana said he was planning to endorse Kintanar's appointment to the Philippine Aerospace Development Corporation. He said Kintanar's background fits the PADC.

A defense blog said earlier said Kintanar was relieved because his position on the acquisition of combat utility helicopters is contrary to that of Duterte administration officials. Reports said the Air Force is pushing for the acquisition of Bell helicopters while Duterte officials want less-capable helicopters. The government has allotted P12 billion for the helicopter project.

On the PCA, Agriculture Secretary Emmanuel Piñol earlier this month said President Duterte has asked its board members to file courtesy resignations.

Piñol said he suggested the courtesy resignation to the President in preparation for the expected reorganization of the PCA under the proposed coco levy act.

Duterte has yet to sign the coco levy act.

21 December 2018 PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER Page: A5

Reds make presence felt in Metro Manila suburb

San Pedro City police say propaganda war carried out by sympathizers, supporters of NPA

By Maricar Cinco
@maricarcincoINQ

SAN PEDRO CITY—Police here on Thursday wielded paint rollers to clean up walls and bridge railings painted with messages by communist rebels or their supporters in what appeared to be a gesture of taunting President Duterte, who had declared he would finish off the rebels by the end of his term in 2022.

The messages seemed to be intended as a show of force by rebels for the 50th founding anniversary of the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) on Dec. 26, which rebel forces would celebrate nationwide.

Supt. Giovannie Martinez, city police director, said policemen had covered eight sites, among them bridges and building façades, which had served as canvases of rebels for messages of support written in red spray paint.

Propaganda

Some of the markings, urging people to join the 50-year communist rebellion, appeared to be meant for CPP's anniversary, according to Martinez.

"It's a propaganda war," he said.

Martinez, however, believed the markings did not mean the rebels' presence in this urban city, but the presence of rebel "sympathizers or network."

He said cleaning up walls and other infrastructure of messages of support for rebels meant "added cost and work for us."

"The money came from our own pockets," Martinez added.

He said if police allowed the vandalism to fester, other vandals, like those from street gangs, were likely to follow suit.

Ordinance

San Pedro City, according to Martinez, has an ordinance against vandalism.

In a recent series of rants, Mr. Duterte kept repeating his threat to let out the dogs of war against communist rebels, saying "blood will flow."

He also said that communist rebels deserved no mercy and ordered the forming of assassination squads targeting rebels, their sympathizers or anyone adjudged to be likely to join rebels.

Duterte rage

The President accused the rebels of insincerity, citing CPP's declaration of a unilateral truce which its own armed wing, NPA, violated.

The rebels had declared a two-step truce. The first would start at midnight of Dec. 24 and end at midnight of Dec. 26. The second would start at midnight of Dec. 31 and end at midnight of Jan. 1.

Mr. Duterte expressed rage at continuing attacks by rebels, like those on police stations in Camarines Sur and Sorsogon, after the truce declaration.

But CPP founder Jose Maria Sison said the NPA attacks were not yet covered by the truce since it has not taken effect yet.

Mr. Duterte, Sison said, "has disdain for the ceasefire" declared by rebels.

"But he demands that the NPA ceases fire on days outside of the time frame of the five-day ceasefire," Sison said.

—WITH A REPORT FROM DELFIN T. MALLARI JR., INQ

21 December 2018 PHILIPPINE INQUIRER Page: A3

Lawyers group cries out vs 'surveillance'

By Mariejo S. Ramos
@MariejoRamosINQ

The National Union of Peoples' Lawyers (NUPL) on Thursday accused the military of "increased surveillance" and harassment of the human rights group.

NUPL president Edre Olalia sent out a message to the media about reports that armed men in motorcycles, cars and a military truck were seen in the vicinity of the NUPL office in Quezon City early on Thursday morning.

Later, the men took positions at street corners near their office, he said.

The NUPL office is in the same building as human rights watchdog Karapatan and the left-wing Bagong Alyansang Makabayan, or Bayan.

NUPL secretary general Rey Cortez, who was among the first to reach the building, said he was told by the staff that two men in civilian clothes were seen roaming the area around 7 a.m.

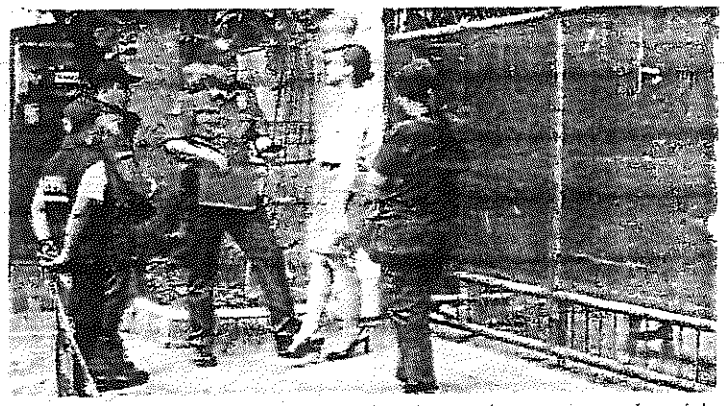
Armed with pistols

The men were armed with pistols, which could be seen bulging from their waists, he added.

Cortez said the staff also observed an unusually big number of people in front of the building on Thursday morning.

He said they could not immediately verify the report about military men on a truck.

"The increased surveillance may be connected to an SOS message sent by a consultant of the National Democratic Front of the Philippines (NDFP) last night that he was being tailed and that [motorcycle-riding men were] posted outside the place he was staying," he said.



SURVEILLANCE? Police Insp. Richard Arca (center) speaks with lawyer Kristina Conti about unidentified people seen casing the building in Quezon City that houses the NUPL office. —LYN RILLON

The NUPL, which provided legal services to the NDFP during peace talks with the government, declined to identify the consultant.

Cortez said the surveillance and harassment could also be connected to their work, including giving assistance to the families of nine farmers massacred in a sugarcane plantation in Sagay City, Negros Occidental province, in October.

Communist 'minions'

Last week, the NUPL denounced the "Red-tagging" of human rights defenders on posters in Iloilo City that showed pictures of members of people's organizations and the NUPL-Panay who were called "minions" of the NDFP, the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) and the New People's Army (NPA).

Another poster featured Ma. "Concha" Araneta-Bocala, another NDFP peace talks consultant in the peace talks, naming her the "No. 1 terrorist in Panay."

"This government's way of dealing [with] critics and members of the opposition—branding them drug users or peddlers, terrorists, or members of the CPP-NPA-NDF—is an old trick of shaming them or silencing them," the NUPL said in a statement.

The Quezon City Police District's Criminal Investigation and Detection Group is conducting an investigation of the alleged surveillance and harassment by the unknown armed men. INQ

21 December 2018 PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER Page: A7

AFP forms board of inquiry to probe Agusan NPA raid

The Armed Forces of the Philippines has formed a board of inquiry to investigate Wednesday's raid by communist insurgents on an Army detachment in Sibagat town, Agusan del Sur, that resulted in the capture of two soldiers and 12 militia men. Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana said the Communist Party of the Philippines-New People's Army (CPP-NPA) might have been planning to use its captives as leverage to compel the government to resume the peace process. Col. Noel Detoyato, chief of the AFP Public Affairs Office, said that while pursuit operations were underway against the raiders, a board of inquiry had been formed to "ascertain the facts leading to the raid and abduction to determine who was remiss [in] his duty." Lorenzana said the absence of a firefight indicated that the Army detachment could have been infiltrated before it was overran. —JEANNETTE I. ANDRADE

Army officers face court-martial over NPA attack

By JAIME LAUDE

The Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) will look into last Wednesday's rebel attack that overran an Army patrol base in a remote area in Agusan del Sur that led to the kidnapping of 12 militiamen and two soldiers.

AFP Public Affairs Office chief Col. Noel Detoyato said a board of inquiry (BOI) has been created to determine possible lapses in the security of the Army's Special Forces troops.

"Pursuit operation is ongoing and the BOI was commissioned to ascertain the facts leading to the raid and to determine who was remiss in his duties," Detoyato said.

Initial reports said communist New People's Army (NPA) staged the attack on the outpost of the Army's 3rd Special Forces Battalion where the rebels snatched 12 militiamen and two soldiers supervising them.

They were apparently literally caught sleeping on the job, reports said.

Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana said the rebels could have had an informant inside the camp.

"We are still verifying reports that one of the abducted militiamen has NPA relatives and he could have acted as the rebels' conduit in the raid. At any rate we are still investigating and we don't have a complete picture of what really happened. Let's wait for the completion of the full investigation of the commanders on the ground," Lorenzana said.

Officials said the ranking officers might face court martial proceedings over the lax security.

AFP chief Lt. Gen. Benjamin Madrigal Jr. said the Army launched pursuit operations against the NPA rebels responsible for the attack.

Maj. General Ronald Villanueva, Division Commander of the Army's 4th Infantry Division, said he wanted to discharge from the service the troops kidnapped by the NPA.

Villanueva took note of reports that the troops were sleeping when they were attacked by the NPA rebels.

Villanueva told a local radio station that they will no longer conduct rescue operations for the kidnapped soldiers and leave their fate to the NPA.

NPA spokesperson Ka Sandara said all 14 are in their custody.

Sandara said the hostages would be treated fairly and humanely as prisoners of war.

Sandara also announced two other government troopers were captured or held as prisoners of war by NPA rebels in Los Angeles, Butuan City. – With Ben Serrano, Jose Rodel Clapano

INACCURACIES

2 POLICE EXECS SACKED OVER WRONG REPORTS ON NPA ATTACKS

By Mar S. Arguelles
@msarguellesINQ

LEGAZPI CITY—The police chiefs of two towns in Sorsogon province have been relieved of their duties for erroneous reports on attacks by communist rebels.

Chief Insp. Arnel Geronga, police director of Magallanes town, and Chief Insp. Ariel Blanco, Gubat town police director, were sacked over an erroneous report on the civilian victim of a New People's Army (NPA) attack on police stations in the province, according to Senior Supt. Marlon Tejada, provincial police chief.

Tejada, in a phone interview on Thursday, said Geronga committed a blunder by issuing a report that a civilian had been killed in the attacks.

Survivor

"The civilian, though hit by a stray bullet, has survived after he was treated at a hospital," Tejada said.

The civilian was wounded along with three police officers, he added.

The wounded civilian, identified only as Luigi, was described as a "mentally ill person" by Tejada.

He said Geronga's mistake "caused a confusion, putting the police command in a bad light."

"My standing order is to always be accurate in reporting," Tejada said.

He said the Gubat police chief was also sacked for inaccurate reporting by not validating a report on the rebel attack on a police detachment in his area.

Tejada said Blanco failed to follow police reporting standards by issuing an invalidated and unconfirmed report about the attack, which actually did not happen.

"Before issuing the report, he should have checked with other units if, indeed, there was an attack," Tejada said.

He said Blanco submitted a sketchy report which said rebels also fired at a police detachment in Gubat town, also on Monday. —WITH A REPORT FROM STEPHANIE FLORIDA INQ

Negros cop chief relieved over slay of deputy

By GILBERT BAYORAN

BACOLOD CITY – The police chief of Guihungan, Negros Oriental was relieved from his post following the killing of his deputy by suspected communist rebels on Wednesday.

Superintendent Mario Baquiran was replaced by Superintendent Cristopher Navida, Senior Superintendent Raul Tacaca, Negros Oriental police director, said yesterday.

Senior Inspector Porferio Gabuya Jr. was shot several times while having coffee at a commercial establishment near the Guihungan police station.

Juanito Magbanua, spokesman for the New People's Army in Negros, denied that they were involved in the killing of Gabuya, saying the police officer had no record with the NPA.

"We are not responsible for his death," Magbanua said over *MBC Aksyon Radyo*.

He gave assurance that the NPA would abide by the ceasefire it declared from Dec. 24 to Dec. 26 and Dec. 31 to Jan. 1.

Soldiers overrun NPA camp

In Nueva Ecija on Tuesday, soldiers overran a rebel camp in Bongabon, Nueva Ecija, where communist rebels were supposed to hold their 50th anniversary celebration on March 26 next year, the military said.

Personnel of the 91st Infantry Battalion said six plastic containers filled with rice were among the items recovered at the scene.

Lt. Gen. Emmanuel Salamat, Northern Luzon Command chief, commended the soldiers for their "efficient response" to combat terrorism in Northern and Central Luzon. – With Artemio Dumlao

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Negros Oriental police officer shot dead

BACOLOD CITY: Another police officer in Guihulngan City, Negros Oriental was killed in an ambush in broad daylight on Wednesday.

Unidentified men riding a motorcycle shot dead Senior Insp. Porferio Gabuya Jr., deputy police chief for operations of Guihulngan City.

Based on initial police reports, Gabuya was inside the San Vicente Ferrer Enterprises along the national highway across the Bureau of Fire Protection office in Guihulngan City when the two gunmen on board a Mio black motorcycle shot him at about 10:25 a.m.

The suspects, whose faces were covered with shirts and dark sunglasses, were armed with an M-4 rifle while their motorcycle did not have a license plate, the report said.

Gabuya was rushed to the Guihulngan District Hospital but was pronounced dead on arrival.

Senior Supt. Raul Tacaca, acting provincial police director, blamed the killing on the New People's Army (NPA), that earlier announced it would launch offensives against government law enforcement units.

He added that there is a Special Partisan Unit, the armed wing of the Communist Party of the Philippines–NPA in the city.

Aside from the rebel angle, investigators are also looking at Gabuya's previous operations against illegal drugs.

Gabuya was just assigned to Guihulngan City in October.

The attack was the second time a high-ranking Guihulngan police officer was killed, following the fatal ambush of the city's then-police chief Police Supt. Aruel Arpon, along with four other police officers by the NPA in July 2017.

Meanwhile, Tacaca reminded all police stations to be extra vigilant as the NPA celebrates its founding anniversary on December 26.

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EUGENE Y. ADIONG

21 December 2018 MANILA BULLETIN Page: 11

Sinulog security tightened

By CALVIN CORDOVA

CEBU CITY — Security for January's Sinulog will be tighter following last Wednesday's killing of a police official in Guihulngan City, Negros Oriental.

Sr. Supt. Royina Garma, Cebu City police chief, said security will be tight especially during the Grand Parade, which falls on the third Sunday of January.

The New People's Army (NPA) has claimed responsibility for the death of Sr. Insp. Porferio Gabuya Jr. who was gunned down while having coffee in a store a few meters from the city police station.

Garma said At least 6,000 policemen will be deployed during the festivity, "We will have at least 4,500 policemen from different provinces who will augment our current 1,500 personnel. We will also tap security guards and students as force multipliers," he said.

Garma said authorities will proceed with the plan to cut off cell phone signals during the celebration.

"There are specific areas where there will be no cell phone signals. We were told by the National Telecommunications Commission to write them a letter to finalize everything," he said.

"The police will be there to secure but we are asking everyone, especially the tourists, to take it upon themselves to take extra care," said Garma.

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₱420,000 aid for ex-rebels

TACLOBAN CITY — The government has given cash assistance to eight New People's Army (NPA) rebels who have surrendered. Leyte Gov. Leopoldo Dominico Petilla told Manila Bulletin the rebels received a total of ₱420,000 as emergency and livelihood assistance. With ₱320,000 coming from the national government and ₱100,000 from his office. Each surrenderer received ₱85,000. (Restituto A. Cayubit)

21 December 2018 MANILA BULLETIN THE NATION'S LEADING NEWSPAPER Page: 6

Army captures NPA camp in Nueva Ecija

By [redacted]

SAN FERNANDO CITY, La Union – The military has captured what is believed to be a New People's Army (NPA) encampment on Tuesday in Bongabon, Nueva Ecija.

Major Ericson C. Balusan, spokesperson of the Armed Forces of the Philippines' Northern Luzon Command (Nolcom), on Thursday confirmed that troops from the 91st Infantry Battalion (IB) seized the supposed NPA camp and food storage facility at around 5p.m. on Tuesday.

He said that the 91st IB, 703rd Infantry Brigade of the 7th Infantry Division (7ID) conducted focused military operations in the area after being tipped off by local residents.

"Our troops recovered from the site the six blue containers (36L), four of which were filled with rice and one gallon (6L capacity) that was fully-filled with salt which were later discovered as means to be used for the celebration of the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) anniversary in the area," he said.

Nolcom chief Lieutenant General Emmanuel B. Salamat, commended Major General Felimon T. Santos, Jr., commander of the army's 7ID, for the efficient response of his troops in combating terroristic motives in the areas of Northern and Central Luzon.

"As the holiday season is nearing, Nolcom will continue to be more vigilant in looking out for elements that pose as threats to the well-being of the people. It will also continue to strengthen its bond with the community and other concerned agencies in order to further maximize its capabilities in achieving lasting peace, security, and development in its area of responsibility," Salamat said.

21 12

AFP begins probe on troops' abduction by communist terrorists

By **FRANCIS T. WAKEFIELD**

Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) Chief of Staff Lt. Gen. Benjamin Madrigal, Jr., has ordered an investigation following the abduction of two soldiers and 12 militiamen by an estimated 50 Communist New People's Army Terrorists (CNTs) during a daring raid of a patrol base in Agusan del Sur early Wednesday morning.

This developed as a Board of Inquiry (BOI) has also been formed to fast track the probe on the raid in Sibagat, Agusan Del Sur.

Madrigal said part of the probe is to determine how the CNTs managed to conduct the raid despite military units in the country being placed on heightened alert status.

Madrigal earlier said the Philippine Army, in coordination with the Philippine National Police (PNP), has stepped up its security to repel New People's Army (NPA) attacks on government installations.

This after CPP founding chairman Jose Maria Sison ordered the NPA to step up its tactical offensives against the government.

The government earlier rejected the proposal to reciprocate the annual declaration of truce of the NPA.

The CPP will mark its founding anniversary on December 26.

"We have informed our units to increase their awareness and to be proactive. We will be conducting investigation (but) up to this time we still have raw information," Madrigal said.

Madrigal, at the same time, said that the attack only proves that the CPP-NPA could not be trusted even though they declared a unilateral ceasefire.

Meanwhile, AFP Public Affairs Chief Col. Noel Detoyato said a BOI has been formed to hasten the investigation on the incident.

"Pursuit operations are ongoing even as a Board of Inquiry was commissioned to ascertain the facts leading to the raid and abduction to determine who was remiss in his duty," Detoyato said.

Detoyato also said the Philippine Army, together with the PNP, will file appropriate charges as soon as details and facts are established by the BOI.

Army 4th Infantry Division (4th ID) Chief Major General Ronald Villanueva, earlier said NPA terrorists belonging to the Sub-Regional Sentro de Gravidad Westland under alias Monoy and Guerilla Front 30 under alias Megan raided the New Tubigon Patrol Base in Sibagat town, Agusan del Sur at around 2 a.m. of December 19, 2018.

Villanueva said an estimated 50 NPA terrorists abducted the two soldier cadres and 12 Civilian Armed Forces Geographical Unit (CAFGU) members, during the raid and carted away a number of firearms.

The two soldiers taken as hostages were identified as Pfc. Darlino A. Cariño and Corporal Eric B. Manangan.

Among the firearms seized include 17 .56 M16 rifles, four 7.62mm M14 rifles, two 5.56mm R4 rifles, one 7.62mm M60 and a Harris Handheld radio.

He said the Army's 3rd Special Forces Battalion is now pursuing the perpetrators.

Soldiers were also sent to the area to investigate the incident.

Available troops with two combat groups were also organized for pursuit operations and intelligence personnel were tasked to monitor the withdrawal route of the enemy.

Villanueva said that a probe will be conducted to determine why the NPAs were able to conduct the raid despite military forces under heightened alert status in view of the NPA attacks in various parts of the country.

"Yun ang iimbestigahan namin [That will be the focus of our investigation]," Parayno said. "We don't know why it happened so it will be part of our investigation."

Lt. Col. Rhoderick Parallag, Commanding Officer of 3rd Special Forces Battalion, said that the abducted soldiers are protected by the provisions of the International Humanitarian Law or IHL which requires the NPAs to inform their families of their capture, their status, and location.

The abducted soldiers also have the right under IHL to have to have contact with their families or relatives.

The NPAs did not inform yet the families of the victim's status and location.

On Tuesday, Madrigal said that

he has directed military units in the country to be on alert following recent attacks staged by the Communist New People's Army Terrorists Group (CNTG) against military and police detachments in the Bicol Region.

"I have directed our units to be on alert. Also, Army units are in close coordination with the PNP. We strengthened the coordination due to their (NPA) diversionary tactics," Madrigal said.

"What's important is we have proactive measures to prevent them from attacking," he added.

Madrigal, who visited on Tuesday wounded soldiers at the V. Luna Medical Center to give them cheers this Yuletide Season, said the NPA attacks could be part of the 50th anniversary celebration of the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) or a form of protest following Congress' approval to extend martial law in Mindanao for one more year or up to December 31, 2019.

"Actually, it could be to show that they are still here as they celebrate their anniversary. We call their attacks as "nuisance harassment". They will fire one to two shots from afar, about 300 to 500 meters, then they will run. They do that just to say they were able to harass," he said.

"But what we are guarding is their diversionary operation or decisive attacks, that's what we need to guard against," he added. (With reports from Mike U. Crismundo and Armando B. Fenequito Jr.) 12

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AFP chief slams deceitful Red truce

By Francisco Tuyay

THE abduction of 12 militiamen and two soldiers in Sibagat, Agusan Del Sur on Wednesday showed that the New People's Army declaration of a holiday ceasefire was merely an act of deceit, Armed Forces chief Gen. Benjamin Madrigal said Wednesday night.

To prevent similar attacks, the AFP chief ordered all troops to be more alert and pro-active in their security measures.

In Wednesday's raid, rebels also carted away high-powered weapons, ammunition, a radio and various supplies.

Madrigal said heavy rains prevented troops assigned to the 3rd Special Forces

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AFP...

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Battalion from detecting the incursion of some 50 NPA rebels who carried out the raid.

He also said a board of inquiry has been formed to investigate the incident at the Tubigon Patrol Base, a newly established detachment in the hinterlands of Sibagat.

AFP public affairs chief Col. Noel Detoyato said pursuit operations were ongoing.

Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana said the soldiers were clearly taken by surprise.

"They were taken without a firefight, so they were caught off guard," he said in a mix of English and Filipino. "Maybe they were relaxing. We expect the patrol base to be manned and properly constructed so it can't be overrun."

He said the military was looking at the possible involvement of a militiaman with familial ties with the NPA.

In a statement, the Communist Party of the Philippines said the 14 prisoners of war would only be released if the military stops its offensives against the rebels.

"The 14 prisoners of war taken yesterday in Barangay New Tubigon, Sibagat, Agusan del Sur are being treated leni[illegible]," the statement said.

Madrigal slammed the NPA, saying the abduction proved that the communists were not trustworthy. With PNA

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NPA deceit won't halt ops

By Kristina Maralit

The Department of National Defense said yesterday the government will not bow down to terrorists, adding military operations against the communist New People's Army (NPA) will continue despite the abduction of 14 soldiers and militiamen in Agusan del Sur on Wednesday.

Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana vowed the military will not give in to the demand of the NPA to stop operations.

"They want to use that (hostage-taking) as leverage... but we will not stop. I think the

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A Board of Inquiry was commissioned to ascertain the facts leading to the raid and abduction

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soldiers and the Citizen Armed Force Geographical Unit (Cafgu) know that we are at war with these people, and if they are taken as hostages, then that's part of their job," Lorenzana said.

On Wednesday, more or less 50 fully-armed NPA rebels raided a military detachment in Sibagat town, Agusan del Sur, taking two Army soldiers and 12 militiamen as hostages.

Maj. Gen. Ronald Villanueva, commander of the Army's 4th Infantry Division, rejected any possible negotiation with the NPA for the release of the captives.

"We don't negotiate and bow down to terrorists," Villanueva said.

He said operations are now ongoing to track down the NPA raiders.

He explained that, based on initial investigation, the troops were caught by surprise by the NPA, citing there was not a single shot fired during the raid.

Lingering effect

Malacañang maintained it takes even the slightest threat of terrorism seriously and stressed that the safety and security of the country and the public remain the utmost concern of President Rodrigo Duterte.

Presidential spokesman Salvador Panelo stressed the importance of readiness for any eventuality following the release of the Global Terrorism Index 2018 report by the Institute for Economics & Peace (IEP) where is listed the Philippines as the 10th most affected country by terrorism.

"Terrorism knows no time, geography or circumstances. No matter how prepared a country or its government is, damage will inevitably be incurred if terrorism befalls in a locality within its jurisdiction. Reports, such as the one issued by the IEP, are among the reasons why peace and order remains a primordial concern of the President," Panelo said in a press statement.

The President's mouthpiece also reiterated increasing efforts being exerted by the Duterte administration to combat terrorism and that security forces remain on high alert to ensure any threat within and outside the country's borders is addressed.

ML directed at terror

"We are not taking terrorism lightly. Our goal is to totally eradicate rebellion by crushing it as well as by providing better services and opportunities for all to achieve a state where there would no longer be a need for any uprising or armed struggle," Panelo said.

Among the measures undertaken by the government, according to Panelo, are Mr. Duterte's declaration of martial law in Mindanao – extended by Congress for the third time until 31 December 2018 – and the issuance of Memorandum Order 32 ordering

the deployment of additional military personnel in Samar, Bicol and Negros which are tagged as high-risk areas for insurgency.

The President recently also executed Executive Order (EO) No. 70 that created a national inter-agency task force aimed at ending armed conflict against communist rebels across the country.

"All of these form part of the Duterte Administration's comprehensive approach in achieving inclusive and sustainable peace throughout the Philippines," Panelo said.

"Amid baseless denunciations by critics, we can assure our people that the President remains focused and steadfast in fulfilling his constitutional mandate to serve and protect the Filipino people," he added.

Caught flatfooted

"If they were prepared, they could have (engaged but) they were surprised," he said.

The military is also considering the possible involvement of a Cafgu member who is a relative of an NPA member who penetrated the patrol base and took hostages in the process.

Lorenzana said pursuit operations in coordination with local officials and the Office of the Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process is now under way.

Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) public affairs chief Col. Noel Detoyato said a Board of Inquiry (BoI) has been formed to probe the rebel raid in Sibagat, Agusan del Sur.

"A Board of Inquiry was commissioned to ascertain the facts leading to the raid and abduction to determine who has was remiss of his duty," Detoyato added.

He said the Philippine Army with the Philippine National Police will file charges based on the BoI findings.

We don't negotiate and bow down to terrorists.

Aside from the capture of military personnel, the rebels seized automatic rifles, ammunition, a radio and other supplies.

Deceitful NPA

The attack also showed the NPA declaration of a unilateral ceasefire was nothing but an act of deceit, AFP chief of staff Lt. Gen. Benjamin Madrigal said.

"(The attack in Agusan del Sur showed that) they declared (a) unilateral ceasefire which we cannot trust. They say there is a ceasefire. Even in the past, there was a ceasefire, but they do not follow it," Madrigal added.

To prevent similar attacks, the AFP chief instructed all troops to increase their awareness and be pro-active in their security measures.

During the said raid, scores of high-powered weapons, ammunition, a radio and various supplies were also carted away by the rebels.

Meanwhile, Lorenzana remains optimistic the military can defeat the NPA within the term of Mr. Duterte. **Mario J. Mallari**

21 December 2017 Malaya B1

Military rejects communists' demand to stop offensives

BY VICTOR REYES

THE Communist Party of the Philippines yesterday said the two soldiers and 12 militiamen abducted by the New People's Army in Agusan del Sur on Wednesday would be released if the military would stop its operations against the communist rebels.

Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana and the military rejected the communists' demand.

"They (rebels) want to stop the military operations in the area but we will not stop," Lorenzana said. "I think the soldiers and the Cafgus know that we are at war with these people (communists). If they are held hostage, then that's part of the job of their job."

Lorenzana also said military commanders "are not going to stop until our people and the firearms are recovered."

Maj. Gen. Ronald Villanueva, commander of the Army's 4th Infantry Division, said, "We don't negotiate with and bow down to terrorists."

He also said several Army battalions are conducting pursuit and rescue operations. "We have many battalions there to track them," he said.

The CPP, in a statement posted

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on its website, said the "prisoners of war" are being "treated leniently."

"They will be released soonest so long as the AFP relents in their offensive in order to pave the way for their orderly and safe release and give them the opportunity to be with their families this Christmas. We urge third party facilitators to coordinate and cooperate with the local NPA command," it said.

On Wednesday, about 80 NPA rebels swooped down on the detachment of the 3rd Special Forces Battalion in Sibagat town, seized the troopers and carted away around 20 firearms and a Harris tactical radio.

Villanueva, asked if the military has determined why the soldiers were not able to put up a fight before they were abducted, said, "They were asleep... That's the initial report I got. If they were prepared, they should have put up a fight. They were surprised."

On the CPP claim that the 14 were seized for crimes and abuses, Villanueva said, "That's propaganda."

In the statement, the CPP congratulated the NPA, its armed wing, for the blow against the military. It hailed the NPA for a similar feat in Lope de Vega town, where four soldiers and two civilians were injured in an ambush also on Wednesday.

The CPP said the tactical offensive in Agusan del Sur and Samar "displays the superiority of the NPA in terms of support of the people and mastery in guerrilla warfare."

It reiterated its call to the NPA "to mount more tactical offensives in the next few weeks and months to defeat Duterte's all-out war and fascist attacks against the people's democratic rights and livelihood."

Duterte resumed formal peace negotiations with the communists shortly after he assumed the presidency in June 2016. He cancelled the talks late last year because of continued attacks by the NPA, even while the negotiations were ongoing.

He has not declared a traditional yuletide truce with the communists. The CPP declared a five-day truce earlier this month.

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Palace slams use of UN as platform of attacks vs Rody

THE Duterte administration is "fed up" with the practice of using the United Nations as a platform to echo the "baseless criticisms" of the opposition against the government, Malacañang said Thursday.

"We are fed up with this practice of using the UN as a platform to parrot baseless criticisms of local interest groups who are supported by resentful politicians belonging to the opposition," Presidential Spokesman Salvador Panelo said in a statement.

"For too long has the UN been used by these detractors as a tool for vilification."

In other developments:

• The government continues to uphold the rule of law and ensure that alleged human rights violations in the country are "properly investigated," the Department of Foreign Affairs said Thursday.

The agency made the statement in response to the unpublished report of a United Nations rapporteur on the state of human rights defenders in the Philippines.

Michael Forst, UN special rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders, launched his "world report" that provides a comprehensive analysis on the situation of HRDs in 140 countries.

• The Commission on Human Rights on Thursday urged the Duterte administration to search for alternative ways of protecting the Lumad community from communist influence instead of keeping them in "hamlets."

"There are other ways to protect the Lumad from the [New People's Army], CHR spokeswoman Jacqueline de Guia said.

"That is what we are urging the government to do."

Panelo made his statement after Forst called on the Duterte administration to end all forms of violations against human rights defenders.

In his report, Forst said Duterte "has fostered very harmful rhetoric against human rights defenders, labeling them as anti-nation, protectors of drug lords, communists and terrorists."

He also highlighted Duterte's relentless crackdown on drugs, adding it had created a climate of insecurity and impunity for extra-judicial killings that affect human rights defenders.

The report irked the Palace and described Forst's call as "reckless and irresponsible."

"The recent call of United Nations Special Rapporteur Michel Forst not only is reckless but irresponsible as well for it not only demeans the integrity of the UNSR system but the entire UN mechanism itself," Panelo said.

Nar Mariano, with PNA

21 December 2018 Tempo Page: 2

AFP probes abduction of 14 troops in Agusan

By FRANCIS T. WAKEFIELD

Armed Forces of the Philippines Chief of Staff Lt. Gen. Benjamin Madrigal Jr. has ordered an investigation on the abduction of two soldiers and 12 militiamen by an estimated 50 New People's Army rebels during the daring raid of a patrol base in Agusan del Sur the other day.

A Board of Inquiry has been formed to fasttrack the probe of the raid in Sibagat, Agusan del Sur.

Madrigal said part of the probe is to determine how the NPA managed to conduct the raid despite military units in the country being placed on heightened alert status.

Madrigal had earlier said the Philippine Army, in coordination with the Philippine National Police, has stepped up its security to repel NPA attacks on government installations.

Communist Party of the Philippines founding chairman Jose Maria Sison ordered the NPA to step up its tactical offensives against the government.

The government has rejected the proposal to reciprocate the annual declaration of truce of the NPA. The CPP will mark its founding anniversary on Dec. 26.

"We have informed our units to increase their awareness and to be pro-active. We will be conducting investigation but up to this time we still have raw information," Madrigal said.

Madrigal said that the raid only proves that the CPP-NPA could not be trusted even though they declared a unilateral ceasefire.

"Pursuit operations are ongoing even as a Board of Inquiry was commissioned to ascertain the facts leading to the raid and abduction to determine who has was remiss of his duty," Armed Forces Public Affairs chief Col. Noel Detoyato said.

Detoyato said the PA together with the PNP will file appropriate charges as soon as details and facts are established by the BoI.

Ayungin Reef patrols continue

Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana said yesterday that government troops will continue to patrol Ayungin Reef as part of efforts to guard the atoll from incursions.

Lorenzana said that Filipino troops will continue their activities on Ayungin Reef also to strengthen the country's islands.

"Nagpa-patrolya tayo regularly, so we will continue on strenghtening our islands," Lorenzana said.

"We will still patrol and we will keep on protesting kung meron tayong nakikita mga acitons 'yung Chinese not consistent with our national interest. We are going to protest China," he added. (Francis T. Wakefield) 2

4 soldiers wounded

Four soldiers, who had just delivered food supplies to fellow troops conducting a community support program, were wounded following an attack by suspected New People's Army rebels in Northern Samar on Tuesday.

The victims were on board a Light Ace civilian vehicle bound for Catarman when they were hit by a landmine blast followed by a rain of bullets from about 15 gunmen believed to be rebels between Barangay Hinatad and Barangay McKinley, according to 43rd Infantry Battalion commanding officer Lt. Col. Apollo Herrera.

The firefight lasted for about five minutes before the assailants withdrew toward different directions.

The victims were identified as Private Rolly B. Dizon, Private First Class Rorey O. Montopar, Private Joel Lacabe, and Corporal Jose Jerome L. Ballano, who all sustained minor wounds.

Two civilian passers-by were also hurt. They were identified as Sherly Robenacio, 35, and her 17-year-old son Christian. They were brought to Northern Samar provincial hospital. **(Francis Wakefield)** 12

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Inside job sa kidnapping ng NPA vs 2 sundalo, 12 Cafgu

Iniimbestigahan ng Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) ang posibleng anggulo ng inside job sa kaso ng pagsalakay at pagbihag ng mga rebeldeng New People's Army (NPA) sa 2 sundalo at 12 miyembro ng Citizen's Armed Forces Geographical Unit (CAFGU) nitong Miyerkules sa Brgy. New Tubigon, Sibagat, Agusan del Sur.

Ayon kay Defense Sec. Delfin Lorenzana, posibleng may kontak ang mga umatakeng rebelde sa isa sa mga CAFGU sa nasabing patrol base na maaring nagbudas sa mga kasamahan nito at mga bantay na sundalo.

"Normally we expect the patrol to be properly constructed na hindi siya ma-overran ano, so ang isang anggulo na tinitingnan natin ay baka may nakapasok diyan na hindi nila alam, siguro nagpanggap na kaibigan tapos after that na-overpower na sila," pahayag ni Lorenzana.

Bandang alas-3 ng madaling araw nang sumalakay ang tinatayang 50-80 rebeldeng NPA at kinidnap ang dalawang sundalo at 12 Cafgu habang tinangay din ang mga armas sa New Tubigon Patrol Base.

Kabilang sa mga binihag sina Pfc. Darlene Canlio at Corporal Eric Managan gayundin ang 12 pang Cafgu na kasama ng mga itong nagbabantay sa nasabing detachment.

Sinabi ni Lorenzana na isa sa mga iniimbestigahan nila ay ang posibilidad na may kasanak na rebelde ang isa sa mga Cafgu na siyang ginamit ng mga kalaban para makapasok sa nasabing patrol base hanggang sa tuluyan itong makubkob at wala ng nagawa ang mga bantay dito.

Aniya, maaring nag-relax ang tropa dahil hindi nila alalang mga kalaban ang pumasok sa nasabing patrol base na nagpenggap na dumadalaw lamang sa kanilang mga kamag-anak.

Inamin naman ni AFP Chief of Staff Gen. Benjamin Madrigal Jr. na naisahan sila ng mga rebelde sa nasabing pag-atake at iniimbestigahan pa ang kapabayaan sa seguridad kaya nangyari ang pagsalakay.

Samantala patuloy ang hot pursuit operations para mabawi ang mga bihag. *(Joy Cantos)*

26 rebelde, 3 pa sumuko sa Vizcaya

Aabot sa 26-na miyembro ng New People's Army (NPA) at tatlo pang tagasuporta ng Kilusan ang sumuko sa Nueva Vizcaya, kamakailan.

Ayon kay 5th Infantry Battalion (IB) spokesperson, Major Jefferson Somera, ng Philippine Army (PA), ang mga rebelde ay sumurender sa 54th IB sa Poblacion Ambaguio sa nabanggit na lalawigan, sa tulong na rin ng local government officials at ng mga residente.

"This is another batch of Communist-NPA-Terrorist members, who surrendered to the local authorities and soldiers belonging to the army's 54th Infantry Battalion at Poblacion, Ambaguio, Nueva Vizcaya," ayon kay Somera.

Ang 26 na rebelde at tatlong supporter ng Kilusan ay nitong nakarang linggo pa sumuko, ngunit kailangon lang isinapubliko ang detalye nito.

Isinuko rin ng mga ito ang tatlong high-powered firearms: isang M16 Armalite rifle, isang carbine, at isang Garand rifle.

Freddie G. Lazaro

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'Terrorist attack leader', timbog

Napigilan ng mga awtoridad ang umano'y planong pambobomba sa General Santos City ngayong Pasko, kasunod ng pag-aresto sa umano'y leader ng grupo na magsasagawa ng terror attacks sa isang pagsalakay nitong Miyerkules ng gabi.

Sa ulat na ipinarating sa Camp Crame sa Quezon City, kinilala ang inaresto na si Jamin Sala, miyembro ng Ansar Khalifa Philippines (AKP) na pamahan pa ni yumaong Mohammad Jaafar Maguid.

"He is currently closely-associated with Commander Salahudin Hassan," saad sa ulat.

"Accordingly, he will lead a team that will conduct bombing operation in General Santos City during the Yuletide Season," dagdag sa ulat.

Sa ulat mula sa intelligence community, sinalakay ng mga pulis ang Sala's lair sa Barangay Dadiangan East at naaresto ang suspek, dakong 7:30 ng gabi.

Nakuha sa suspek ang isang hand grenade.

Base sa intelligence reports, si Sala, na kilala rin sa mga alyas na Jamiung at Jumajum, ay inugnay na sangkot sa Sarangani attack noong Agosto 2008 at roadside bombing sa Malapatan, Sarangani noong 2016.

Isinangkot din siya sa pambobombe sa tapat ng General Santos City Hall, na ikinasugat ng pitong katao noong 2014 at hand grenade attack sa kasagsagan ng Maasim founding anniversary noong 2016, na ikinamatay ng pulis at ikinasugat ng ilang sibilyan.

Hawak na ng mga awtoridad si Sala at kakasuhan kaugnay ng pagkakasamsam ng granada sa kanya.

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Aaron Recuenco

Phl ranks 10th in world terrorism index

DAVAO CITY – The Philippines ranked 10th on the list of countries most impacted by terrorism based on the highest number of deaths related to terrorist attacks over a decade, according to the Institute for Economics and Peace in its 2018 Global Terrorist Index (GTI).

Topping the list is Iraq followed by Afghanistan, Nigeria, Syria, Pakistan, Somalia, India, Yemen and Egypt.

The index took into account the number of terrorist incidents in the country, the number of deaths from these incidents and the scale of their physical and psychological effects.

Dubbed among the "emerging hotspots of terrorism," the Philippines is the only country in Southeast Asia in the top 10.

The GTI report listed 326 people killed in the Philippines due to terrorist incidents last year, the highest in the country since 2002.

It was also rated 8th among countries with the highest increases in terrorism deaths worldwide.

The report said the main driver of terrorist activity in countries like the Philippines was "exacerbated tensions between splinter terror groups and national governments."

Among the worst attacks listed by the index was the siege of Marawi City by the Islamic State-Maute Group in 2017, which led to a five-month war with government forces.

– Edith Regalado

21 December 2018 MANILA BULLETIN Page: 12

Troops rescue wife and children of ASG bandit

By NONOY E. LACSON

ZAMBOANGA CITY – The military rescued the wife and two children of an Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) gunman while conducting clearing and follow-up operations at Minis Island in Patikul, Sulu.

Naval Forces Western Mindanao (NFWM) Commander Rear Admiral Rene V. Medina identified the wife of ASG member Jackie Solaiman alyas Jackie Chan as Manah Solaiman, 27 and her two daughters Raiza Solaiman, 7, and Pirhana Solaiman, 2.

Medina said operating troops from Naval task Group Sulu and Philippine Marine Ready Force Sulu composed of 62nd Marine Company, Special Operations Platoon 1 and 83rd Marine Company, rescued the mother and her two daughters during a clearing and follow-up operations at Minis Island in Patikul, Sulu on Saturday, Dec 15.

Marine soldiers rescued the mother and her daughters at a mangrove area of Minis island where they were hiding during the encounter between the Marine soldiers and the ASG.

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'Govt doing its best to stop terror'

BY RALPH EDWIN U. VILLANUEVA

MALACAÑANG on Thursday assured the public that the government has been doing its best to fight terrorists.

Palace spokesman Salvador Panelo said the report of the Global Terrorism Index 2018 that the Philippines ranked 10th among countries most affected by terrorism has made it imperative for government to be vigilant against terrorism.

"Terrorism knows no time, geography or circumstances. No matter how prepared a country or its government is, damage will inevitably be incurred if terrorism befalls in a locality within its jurisdiction," Panelo said.

He gave assurances that the government was not taking terrorism sitting down and was doing its best to quell terror attacks.

"Our goal is to totally eradicate rebellion by crushing it as well as by providing better services and opportunities for all to achieve a state where there would no longer be a need for any uprising or armed struggle," Panelo said.

"Amid baseless denunciations by critics, we can assure our people that the President Rodrigo Duterte remains focused and steadfast in fulfilling his constitutional mandate to serve and protect the Filipino people," he added.

He ticked off several measures the government has implemented to address terrorism, such as declaring martial law and suspending the writ of habeas corpus in Mindanao.

issued Memorandum Order 32, which reinforced the guidelines of the military and the police in implementing measures to suppress and prevent lawless violence and Executive Order 70, which created a national task force to end the communist armed conflict.

On Monday, Duterte said in a speech during Sen. Manny Pacquiao's 40th birthday celebration in General Santos City that there would be "some movements" in Mindanao to attain peace in the region.

"Amid laudable efforts of our law enforcers on the ground to thwart rebellion, the latter remains and various groups continue to sow terror and chaos in Mindanao, with remnants of Abu Sayyaf Group, Daulah Islamiyah, and Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters members still struggling to pursue their goal of establishing an Islamic state and ousting the Philippine Government," Panelo said.

"This persistent and continuing threat to public safety has compelled the President to push for the extension of martial law in the region," he added.

Panelo said to address threats, the President is-

BOL bares MNLF schism

By Perseus Echeminada

Factions of the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) will likely go their own separate ways in connection with the plebiscite for the ratification of the Bangsamoro Organic Law (BOL).

This developed after a leader of one faction of the MNLF yesterday said they will participate in the plebiscite but vote "no" to block the ratification of the BOL.

Lawyer Emmanuel Fontanilla, MNLF spokesman told the *Daily Tribune* that MNLF members in Sulu, Basilan, Tawi Tawi and Cotabato will cast their votes against the ratification of the proposed law.

"The consensus of the people of Sulu and all MNLF members is to participate in the plebiscite to dramatize their opposition to the BOL," he said.

MNLF members in Sulu, Basilan, Tawi Tawi and Cotabato will cast their votes against the ratification of the proposed law.

However, only last month another faction of the MNLF led by former Sulu Gov. Yusop Jikiri expressed its support for the BOL amid moves to question the legality of the measure.

Jikiri's group, known as the Council of 15, was formed in late 2001 by the MNLF's most senior leader amid claims that the group's founding chairman Nur Misuari had lost the support of the Moro people.

President Rodrigo Duterte signed Republic Act 11054 or the BOL last 27 July. The Commission of Elections has scheduled a plebiscite for the ratification of the BOL on two separate days next year, on 21 January and 6 February 2019.

The proposed law which grants self-rule to Muslims in Mindanao was the offshoot of a peace accord between the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), a breakaway faction of the MNLF, and the Philippine government.

Fontanilla's group did not participate in deliberations of the BOL in Congress, insisting the proposed measure would overlap with 1996 peace agreement forged by the MNLF and the government.

Fontanilla, however, said the MNLF has decided to participate in the plebiscite so that they can exercise their right to oppose the BOL.

"We will not boycott the plebiscite otherwise the 'yes' vote will prevail," he said.

Fontanilla also expressed hope that stalled peace talk of MNLF and government panel will resume with the appointment of retired Gen. Carlitos Galvez as the new Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process.

He said the MNLF welcomes the appointment of Galvez because he has been in Mindanao for a long time and he knows the grassroot of the secessionist problem in the Southern Philippines.

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Maguindanao sets pro-BOL grand rally in Cotabato City

By ALI G. MACABALANG

BULUAN, Maguindanao – Hundreds of people in this province, led by their elected officials, will hold a grand rally here today to manifest their staunch support for the ratification of the Bangsamoro Organic Law (BOL) in a plebiscite set on Jan. 21 next year.

According to Gov. Esmael Mangudadatu, the provincial pro-BOL "miting de avance" rally will be held inside the 32-hectare compound in Cotabato City of the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) on the third week of January.

"Prior coordination has been made with ARMM officials and Cotabato City Mayor Cynthia Guiani-Sayadi as a matter of protocol," he said.

ARMM officials led by Governor Mujiv Hataman is strongly supporting the BOL ratification, but Mayor Sayadi and allied barangay leaders are campaigning for the rejection of the law.

The BOL, known as R.A. 11054, was enacted last July that provides for the creation of the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM) in pursuit of the provisions of two major peace accords the government forged with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) in 2013 and 2014.

It proposes BARMM's automatic coverage of ARMM and the inclusion of Cotabato and Isabela cities, six towns in Lanao del Norte and 39 barangays in six North Cotabato towns. Some villages in Iligan and Zamboanga cities, five more towns in Lanao del Norte and some barangays in Zamboanga Sibugay have petitioned for inclusion in BARMM, prompting the Commission on Elections to set a separate plebiscite on Feb. 6 next year.

At the Dec. 18 meeting here, Gov. Mangudadatu underscored the significance of the BOL ratification, saying the proposed BARMM will be "good for all of us – Muslim, Christians and indigenous people."

Despite dearth allocations and powers, the ARMM governance has benefitted from its component provinces of Lanao del Sur, Maguindanao, Basilan, Sulu and Tawi-Tawi and the cities of Marawi and Lamitan, he said.

Because of its more autonomous powers and larger national subsidies, BARMM is expected to yield bigger benefits for areas that will be incorporated, Mangudadatu said.

Besides, he said, voters in the coming referendums should value the 200,000 lives lost in decades of armed struggle for meaningful autonomy in the Bangsamoro.

The Cotabato City electorate cast negative votes in 1989 and 2001 plebiscites for the ARMM creation and expansion, respectively. Ironically, the city has been serving as "temporary seat" of the ARMM government.

Mayor Sayadi, in an earlier statement, said the electorate will likely reject as usual the BOL because the city can "stand on its own" as proven in its "rapid growth" in recent years.

But pro-BOL advocates, including MILF officials, said that ARMM's monetary expenditures have greatly contributed to the city's growth. Besides, they said, the city people derive natural resources like water supply from nearby towns of Datu Odin Sinsuat and Sultan Kudarat in Maguindanao.

Debates over the BOL have escalated as can be seen in the surge of billboards in all strategic city streets and suburbs, heating up more the mayoralty contest between Sayadi and Maguindanao Rep. Sandra Sema, one of BOL main authors and wife of former City Mayor Muslimin Sema.

Informed by journalists who saw the contrasting billboards on Wednesday, new Presidential Adviser Carlito Galvez Jr. on Wednesday said candidates in the 2019 polls should not make BOL a "personal political propaganda" because the law evolved from crucial processes, including loss of thousands of lives and extreme poverty in Moro areas.

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ARMM bags P20-B investments in 2018

BY JULMUNIR I. JANNARAL

COTABATO CITY: Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) Gov. Mujiv Hataman reported on Wednesday that the Regional Board of Investments (RBOI) registered cumulative investments of P20 billion and 15,000 employment in 2018.

Hataman, in his *Ulat sa Bayan* (Report to the Nation) reckoned the investment data of the region from his assumption as regional governor in 2012 to 2018, which is the final year of the ARMM's existence if the Bangsamoro Organic Law is approved in the plebiscite on January 21 next year.

Lawyer Ishak Mastura, RBOI chairman and managing head, said the years of cumulative growth in investments of at least P1 billion a year in the region coincided with greater stability brought about by the success of the peace process.

"The window of investment growth in the ARMM, which is set to become the Bangsamoro region, will require more nurturing and active stewardship by the leaders that will follow the ARMM in order to sustain the gains of the region," said Mastura.

All ARMM provinces have received business investments with Maguindanao enjoying the most number of RBOI registered firms at 73 percent, particularly by cavendish banana plantations, that export their product to China, Japan and the Middle East.

Just this month, Sulu received its very first registered outside investment of P8 million in a fruit jam plant of Sulu Food and Beverage Corp., a subsidiary of Destileria Limtuaco, one of the oldest food and beverage companies in the country.

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ROSES & THORNS

PIA ROCES MORATO

Look for the silver lining

When Ms. Universe Catriona Gray told the world to see situations with a silver lining, most of us knew that this answer would win her the crown.

To look for the silver lining in the circumstances of life is something we hear so often yet many times fail to do. We judge life by how good or how bad things can be for us yet, there is so much more in the process where in the end, we find what is best for us.

There is a deep sense of wisdom when it comes to the silver linings of life – the kind that actually helps us overcome setbacks or worse yet, a major crisis.

More often than not, we find ourselves either dwelling on the past or thinking too far ahead. We are either making up for lost time or planning too much for the future that we fail to see the here and now. What life teaches us however is that, and where we least expect it, the most horrible of circumstances can become windows of opportunity waiting to help us reflect and learn to be grateful.

Perhaps one can say that looking for the silver lining is the last thing any of us would see until we are actually "forced" to pause and yield to a life situation.

It is actually in that moment of pause that we begin to search for a certain beauty which somewhat secretly surrounds us.

Silver linings are there to teach us about the unexpected things life brings even in the darkest of situations. It is precisely because of the silver linings in our daily lives that we learn to find the joy even in our struggle.

I've learned to look for silver linings through the personal experiences of others. At a time where I thought I had things bad, stories of loss from people who have continued to persevere despite a tragedy have more often than not put me to shame.

When I joined the reserve force at the Armed Forces of the Philippines, I trained side by side with the toughest men and women- the same ones who have lost their homes, families and even properties during Yolanda.

The realization of literally looking forward to life happens when I see people such as our soldiers, able to laugh, crack jokes or more importantly, tell me their story with hope in their eyes because that to me right there is the silver lining.

Hope in my opinion, is a feeling that is just so hard to describe however, it is something you will realize when you look into the eyes of a person that has lost everything yet trusts that he can recover.

It is in such an experience that I am able to look deep into myself and appreciate what I have and pursue what I hope to be. Whether it be in good times or bad, we all need to train ourselves to look deep into the blessings in disguise. It is a moment of pause that requires us to look up and listen. After all, and as the saying goes, "every cloud has a silver lining."

★

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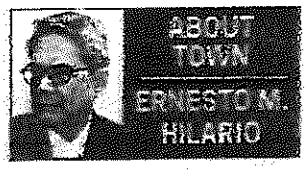
Red-hot House



LET'S set aside the current tiff between the House of Representatives and the Budget Department over the proposed 2019 budget as it has yet to be resolved, and focus on what our legislators have done in the past six months. The House, it would seem, posted a very strong performance since Speaker Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo took over on July 23 this year by passing the Duterte administration's priority legislative agenda in record time.

According to data from the Committee on Rules, in just 41 days of the Third Regular Session of the 17th Congress, the House led by processed a total of 1,426 measures, or an average of 35 measures processed per session day.

Of the 1,426 measures processed, a total of 513 measures were approved. These included 95 enacted into law; 39 transmitted to the President; 30 bicameral reports ratified; four Senate versions adopted; 11 Senate amendments concurred with; 22 up for deliberation in bicameral conference; 228 approved on third reading; 37 approved on second reading; and 44 resolutions/motu proprio inquiry adopted.

At the adjournment of the House last December 13, Arroyo congratulated the lawmakers for their hard work as the House succeeded in processing all the priority measures of President Duterte—a pledge she made when she was elected to the Speakership.

"My concern is not my legacy as Speaker. My concern is to support President Duterte's legacy in the year that I have as Speaker. And as of yesterday, the House can report with confidence that we have already passed the President's entire legislative agenda as he announced in his 2018 State of the Nation Address," Arroyo said.

The approved bills include Republic Act 11054, or the Organic Law for the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao, a landmark piece of legislation that will allow Muslim Filipinos to exercise genuine autonomy within the framework of the Constitution.

Also enacted was RA 11148, or the Kalusugan at Nutrisyon ng Mag-Nanay Act, which scales up the national and local health and nutrition programs through a strengthened integrated strategy for maternal, neonatal, child health and nutrition in the first 1,000 days of a child's life. Others are RA 11106, the Filipino Sign Language Act; RA 11127, the National Payments Systems Act; RA 11131, the Philippine Criminology Act of 2018; RA 11055, the Philippine Identification System Act; RA 11057, the Personal Property Security Act; and RA 11058, Strengthening Compliance with Occupational Safety and Health Standards.

> *"Can the public expect more next year?*

Moreover, 39 more measures were transmitted to the President, awaiting his approval to be enacted into laws.

Likewise, the House approved on third reading the draft federal charter or Resolution of Both Houses 15, proposing the revision of the 1987 Constitution, as well as House Joint Resolution 32 extending the availability of the 2018 appropriations for maintenance and other operating expenses and capital outlays to December 31, 2019.

Resolution of Both Houses 17 approved the request of the President for the further extension of the proclamation of martial law and the suspension of the privilege of writ of habeas corpus in Mindanao for one year.

Not surprisingly, House leaders are all praises for the former President's leadership of the chamber. Rep. Estrellita Suansing, chair of the Committee on Ways and Means, commended Arroyo for setting a good example to House Members. Suansing said Arroyo exemplifies effective leadership as she is a workaholic and personally monitors every bill.

Rep. Robert Ace Barbers, chair of the Committee on Dangerous Drugs, said Arroyo's no-nonsense leadership style is what is really at this time. The lawmaker said Arroyo managed to effectively lead the House members despite their big number and different backgrounds.

Rep. Gus Tambunting, chair of the Committee on Games and Amusements, lauded Arroyo for remaining committed in fulfilling her mandate as the leader of the House. "Speaker Arroyo has stayed true to her word in focusing on the priority bills of President Duterte, as she, being a former President very well knows how important it is for Congress to support the President for anything to get done. In only half a year, the House has done so much under her good leadership, and this is something we can be proud of," said Tambunting.

Rep. Jose Panganiban, Jr. , chair of the Committee on Agriculture and Food, said Arroyo exemplified hard work even during the hearings on the 2019 national budget. He said the House deliberated overnight on the budgets of the Department of Interior and Local Government and the Department of National Defense with Arroyo in attendance. The next day, she attended a committee hearing at 9 am. "That's how hardworking and professional she is," said Panganiban, who gushed that the House is likely to accomplish more when session resumes in January.

If Congress has been on fire in the last six months, can the public except it to glow more red-hot in the first six months of 2019?

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The top PH stories of 2018

LOOKING at the year about to end, I consider the following events or developments as the biggest stories of 2018: 1) Duterte's China pivot; 2) the Philippines' Catriona Magnayon Gray wins the Miss Universe title; 3) inflation hits a ten-year high and TRAIN is derailed; 4) the return of the Balangiga bells; 5) Duterte's total war against the New People's Army.

1. The flowering of President Duterte's pivot to China, a revolutionary foreign policy, will change the future of the Philippines forever.

So far, the dividends from Duterte's strategic reboot have been superficial but they show huge potential: participation in the Belt and Road Forum, use of a Chinese rifle to kill the Philippines' most wanted terrorist, infra build-up in Marawi, importation of Filipino English teachers, 50 scholarship grants, 10,000 tons of rice for Ompong victims, to name some.

The biggest Chinese investors are in the wrong business—online gaming which has attracted easily 500,000 transient (some say illegal) Chinese workers and created the largest demand for real estate along Manila Bay, Makati, and Fort Bonifacio. Online gaming is growing by one million square meters a year.

The Chinese have yet to fulfill their promise to build three new bridges across the Pasig River to ease traffic, and to start any billion-peso plus infrastructure project.

Tourist arrivals from China more than doubled in three years to one million a year (968,000 in 2017 from 491,000 in 2015; 973,000 in 9 months of 2018) making the Chinese the country's No. 1 tourists, growing by a frenetic 35 percent year-on-year, and displacing the Koreans.

Duterte has also copied China's growth playbook. China grew big largely because of government spending. Accordingly, Duterte's P9-trillion Build, Build, Build program is built on that premise.

The strong-willed Filipino leader's China pivot coincided with China becoming the world's largest economy in purchasing power parity for the third year in a row, with $23.1 trillion GDP in 2017, following 30 years of unprecedented growth.

By 2018, China had completely dominated strategic military presence in the South China Sea where the Philippines has sovereign rights to more than two million square kilometers of what could be resource-rich and hugely strategic waters and where a third of global maritime trade passes.

According to the New York Times, China's militarization of the South China Sea is a done deal, "short of war with the US."

"China is now capable of controlling the South China Sea in all scenarios short of war with the United States," says Admiral Philip S. Davidson said, commander of the US Indo-Pacific command.

According to Justin Yifu Lin, a former World Bank senior economist, this is what happened to China in the last 40 years of

> *China, Catriona, TRAIN, Balangiga and the NPA*

opening up: per capita GDP rose from $155 in 1978 to $8,836 in 2017, higher than the global average; China surpassed Japan to become the second largest economy in 2009, overtook Germany as the world's biggest exporter in 2010, and replaced the United States as the biggest trading nation in 2013. More than 700 million Chinese rose out of poverty.

Fortunately for Duterte, China President Xi Jinping believes in the wisdom that "all creatures may grow together without harming each other or roads may run parallel without interfering with one another."

Visiting Manila last November, Xi announced that "the President (Duterte) and I both agreed to elevate our relationship into one of comprehensive, strategic cooperation. This vision charts a clear course for China-Philippines relations and it sends a strong message to the world that our two countries are partners in seeking common development."

2. Filipino-Australian Miss Philippines Catriona Gray lava-walking to the 2018 Miss Universe title, the Philippines' fourth in 66 years brought cheers and tears of joy to a nation buffeted by record-high inflation, high prices of prime goods, crippling traffic, and massive government corruption in nearly every agency, on top of colossal red tape for such things as getting a driver's license, getting a car plate, securing or renewing a passport, and worst of all, getting a business permit.

Out of 190 countries, the Philippines ranks 124th in Ease of Doing Business, in the bottom 15 percent, the worst ranking in ASEAN, and the worst ranking for the country in four years.

3. Inflation hit a ten-year high to 6.7 percent in September and October 2018 amid the most severe rice shortage in a generation and a massive backlash against taxes, especially on fuel and sugar drinks, imposed by TRAIN – the Tax Reform for Acceleration and Inclusion, especially after the government imposed a tax on diesel, from zero in 2017 to P4.50 this January 2019. LPG tax is tripled from P1 per kilo in 2018 to P3 per kg in 2020. The tax on coal, which provides most of Philippine energy, is tripled, from P50 in 2018 to P150 in 2020.

The backlash against TRAIN virtually cripples government's ability to impose new and higher taxes. That inability in turn hampers government's ability to shoulder the salaries of state workers, especially teachers, policemen and soldiers whose pay Duterte promised to double immediately.

Perhaps, Duterte's economic managers should learn a lesson from Emmanuel Macron of France. The JFK of France imposed a tax on fuel (in the name of climate change) and hundreds of thousands of nameless French spilled out into the streets for three weeks to demand the ouster of what they perceive as a pro-rich and arrogant president.

4. The return of the three Balangiga bells on Dec. 11, 2018 symbolizes a massive rewriting of Philippine-American history (it is an admission of defeat) and shows to what extend the Americans will go to accommodate a Philippine leader bent on severing Manila's longstanding ties from America and pivoting towards its old neighbor, China which up to the early 1970s was supporting communist guerillas in the Philippines.

The Americans, of course, are not legendary for their patience. They had previously removed two Philippines presidents not of their liking—Ferdinand Marcos in 1986 and Joseph Estrada in 2001.

5. Duterte's total war against the communist New People's Army is a new direction in the Philippine military's vision to end the world's longest running communist insurgency. This is on top of the President's total war against the terrorists, many of whom are Muslim fundamentalists.

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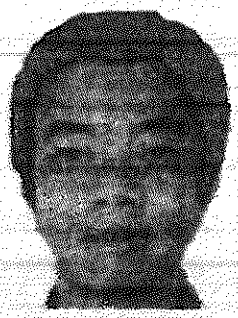
Malaya

Imagining



Duterte had ranted against "a very corrupt and useless institution" funded by billions of peoples' money..."

BLESSING THE TIDES

DODY LACUNA

NPA rebel detainees are at the mercy of the military or the police, not of the courts.

In the case of Satur Ocampo and Partylist Representative France Castro, we do not hear the court ordering a reinvestigation of the kidnapping and human trafficking case against them, especially on the evidence which should have been an affront to the intelligence of the hearing judge. Planting of evidence has never been incredibly real today for the police and the military, which unfortunately has been condoned by President Duterte. But, up against unidentified guerillas also skilled in leaving little or false pieces of evidence, they could do no less to ensure that those captured languish in jail, unable to carry on their operations.

The provincial judge did not flinch when Foreign Affairs Secretary Teddy Boy Locsin called the charges "bullsh*t" and Senator Francis Pangilinan and Chiz Escudero branded them as "ridiculous and preposterous."

We expect too much from judges handling similar cases against rebel leaders and sympathizers and forget the deeper issues that weighed down on government negotiators who were palpably helpless to confront the police and military armed with otherwise undermining agenda.

The distrust has become deeper since President Duterte gave in to the pressure of the AFP to cancel the peace talks immediately prior to the signing of a major agreement.

With Duterte insulting CPP founding chairman Joma Sison at almost every turn, the military and the police have since displayed extreme disdain for the leadership of NPA rebels. It was quite apparent that they were out to neutralize Ocampo as one of the remaining advocates of militant causes and a strong media voice for the CPP/NDF.

Ocampo should be thankful that his fate was not similar to victims of political ambushes and vigilante killings. He survived one such attempt to his life many years ago after his car was "accidentally" smashed by a truck. It was easy for the military to take the cue from Duterte who has since subverted the rule of law.

Duterte wants Christmas not to offer any respite from the continued clashes between government forces and the rebels. Most rebels do take advantage of the traditional Christmas truce to be with their families, which somehow has contributed to confidence-building measures by the government. Duterte no longer wishes for lives of both rebels and soldiers to be saved and homes torn apart by family separation to be rebuilt during this season of hope and reconciliation. Choosing Christmas as the best time of the year, the aging and the sick among them are opting to give up the "struggle" for a better life. No one gets over the torments of causing the doom of one's broken family. What sort of ideology has led thousands of families astray for an imagined "utopia" that would never come. Even for just two weeks, a Christmas truce would bring solace to deep-seated personal wounds from the vicious cycle of vengeful death and destruction.

A suspected rebel official detained in a provincial jail in Agusan del Sur is bringing new life to several drug pushers and addicts. He has mentored them on the right way to live and has become their "father." The local police was pleasantly surprised that drug dealing at the jail premises has stopped. Several times, the rebel detainee would stop to think of his own two sons who have since lost their father.

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The moment has come for President Duterte to make his wish come true, and we imagine during the Christmas season - the abolition of the House of Representatives against which he ranted early on during his presidential campaign for the billions of peoples' money it takes to sustain "a very corrupt and useless institution."

Well, people change and so do presidents.

He is now faced with another planned grand thievery spearheaded by House leaders themselves. The Road Users' Tax which Duterte wanted scrapped would be the latest casualty of a greedy and election-hungry law-making assembly.

Flesh barred is well and alive at the House of Representatives and the Supreme Court bereft of any police power is unable to enforce its legal order outlawing it. We have to wake up from our stupor dealt by too much wine from endless parties to stop imagining.

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Whether we like it or not, we should come before God to pray for President Duterte, as Our Father in heaven commanded. The Bible says to pray without ceasing, and not only during Sundays or prayer meetings.

Our prayer should be like this: "Lord, you suffered and died for President Duterte. Even if he denies you as the true God, the Creator of heaven and earth, please reach out to him, Lord. Make him know that Your love has no limit and Your mercies are new every day. Through the power of the Holy Spirit we rebuke the power of darkness in his life and we break the yoke that binds him in his bitterness, pain and in his homicidal rage against drug peshers and addicts, who are also victims of the drug menace. Lord, make him value the lives of Your created in this world as You continue to value us. Send him true servants of your Kingdom, Lord, to enlighten and guide him in Your ways now and forever. In Jesus' Name! Amen."

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Agusan del Sur attack shows Reds' ceasefire deceitful: AFP

By Priam Nepomuceno

MANILA -- The rebel attack, which resulted in the abduction of 12 Civilian Armed Forces Geographical Unit (CAFGU) members and two soldiers in Sibagat, Agusan Del Sur on Wednesday, showed that the New People's Army's (NPA) declaration of a unilateral ceasefire during parts of the Yuletide season is nothing but an act of deceit.

This was what Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) chief-of-staff Lt. Gen. Benjamin Madrigal said in an interview with reporters in Camp Aguinaldo, Quezon City Wednesday night.

"(The attack in Agusan Del Sur showed that) they declared (a) unilateral ceasefire *(na) hindi natin pwede pagkatiwalaan* (which we cannot trust). *Sinasabi nila, merong* (They say there is) ceasefire even in the past, *nagkaroon ng* (there was a) ceasefire *pero hindi naman talaga (nila sinusunod)* (but they do not follow it)," he added.

To prevent similar attacks, the AFP chief instructed all troops to increase their awareness and be pro-active in their security measures.

In the said raid, scores of high-powered weapons, ammunition, a radio, and various supplies were also carted away by the rebels. *(PNA)*