NEWS CLIPPINGS

"THE NAVY: PROTECTING THE SEAS, SECURING OUR FUTURE"

Date: 03 SEP 2020

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PHL Navy’s new frigate joins Rimpac in Hawaii

The world’s biggest military war games Rim of the Pacific Exercise 2020 (Rimpac 20) culminated in Hawaii three days ago, marking the successful maiden participation of the Philippine Navy’s brand-new frigate BRP Jose Rizal (FF150).

As part of the concluding ceremony, US 3rd Fleet and Rimpac 20 Commander Vice Adm. Scott Conn visited on Tuesday the area where the ships of the 10 participating states, including the Philippines’s BRP Jose Rizal (FF150) are docked to congratulate them for taking part in the exercise.

“We strengthened relationships and deepened our sense of trust in one another. Each one of our navies has something to offer and that diverse range of knowledge and professionalism is what makes us stronger, and allows us to work together to ensure a free and open Indo-Pacific and ultimately, our collective prosperity,” Conn said, according to a statement from the Philippine Navy.

Conn also exchanged pleasantries and congratulated the commanding officer of FF150 and concurrent contingent commander, Capt. Jerry Garrido Jr., for the fruitful participation of the PN in this US-led naval exercise.

In his statement, Garrido lauded the members of Naval Task Group (NTG) 80.5 for their dedication, “[in] promoting the Philippine Navy’s objective of strengthening relationship and multilateral cooperation among regional and extra regional navies, with their eager participation in this Rimpac Exercise.”

Navy chief Vice Adm. Giovanni Carlo Bacordo congratulated the NTG 80.5 for “completing all given serials of the exercise which demonstrates her [FF150’s] capability to handle various operational requirements without any derangement on the frigate’s weapons, communications, electronics and information system hull, machinery, and electrical systems.

“The Navy contingent took advantage of Rimpac 2020 to train as a team, put the ship at pace with possible real-world scenarios, and the crew to gel during this time,” Bacordo said.

Serving as a shakedown cruise shortly after its commissioning ceremony in July, the FF150—with the 125-strong men and women of Naval Task Group 80.5—successfully participated in serialized training, advanced integration, and free play training activities that were purely executed at sea amid the prevailing global pandemic.

Navy spokesman Lt. Commander Maria Christina Roxas said this year’s Rimpac included 53 replenishment-at-sea events, 101 pallets of cargo distributed, over 16,000 rounds of small arms munitions shot, over 1,000 large caliber weapons fired, 13 missiles expended, and 1,100 pounds of mail delivered.

The multidimensional training exercises allowed the members of NTG 80.5 to work in conjunction as they tested the PN’s first four-dimensional warfare capable frigate that is on a par with those of other participating navies.

Roxas said the Navy’s participation in a naval exercise of such magnitude advances its maritime operational capability to multilateral level, thereby increasing readiness and interoperability with foreign navies. It further builds and strengthens mutual understanding through cooperative activities of multinational maritime forces. Rene Acosta
Naval Task Group 80.5 lauded for RIMPAC 2020 efforts

By Priam Nepomuceno  September 2, 2020, 5:01 pm

JOB WELL DONE. Members of the Naval Task Group 80.5 pose for a photo opportunity at the closing ceremony of the "Rim of the Pacific" at the Pearl Harbor in Hawaii on Tuesday (Sept. 1, 2020). The biennial exercise took place from August 17 to 31 off the waters of Hawaii. (Photo courtesy of Naval Public Affairs Office)

MANILA – The head of the Philippine Navy (PN) contingent expressed his appreciation for the dedication shown by all members of the Naval Task Group 80.5 which participated in the two-week long "Rim of the Pacific" (RIMPAC) exercises which took place off the waters of Hawaii from August 17 to 31.

In a statement Wednesday, Navy Captain Jerry Garrido, NTG 80.5 chief and concurrent commanding officer of the country’s first missile frigate, BRP Jose Rizal (FF-150), lauded all 125 members of the contingent for all their hard work in making sure that Philippine participation in the biennial naval exercise will be a success.

This, he said, greatly helped "(in) promoting the Philippine Navy’s objective of strengthening the relationship and multilateral cooperation among regional and extra-regional navies with their eager participation in this RIMPAC exercise."

The two-week RIMPAC exercise also served as the "shakedown cruise" of BRP Jose Rizal who was officially commissioned on July 10 at Alava Wharf, Subic Bay, Zambales, departing from there on July 29 and arriving in Pearl Harbor, Hawaii on August 15 after a fueling stop in Guam last August 2.

"FF-150, with 125-strong men and women of Naval Task Group 80.5, successfully participated in serialized training, advanced integration, and free play training activities that were purely executed at sea amid the prevailing global pandemic," PN public affairs office chief Lt. Commander Maria Christina Roxas said.

This year’s RIMPAC included 53 replenishment-at-sea events, 101 pallets of cargo distributed, over 16,000 rounds of small arms munitions shot, over 1,000 large caliber weapons fired, 13 missiles expended, and 1,100 pounds of mail delivered.

"These multi-dimensional training exercises allowed the members of NTG 80.5 to work in conjunction as they put into test the PN’s first four-dimensional warfare capable frigate that is at par with those of other participating navies," Roxas said.
She added that the PN's participation in a naval exercise of such magnitude advances its maritime operational capability to a multilateral level thus increasing readiness and inter-operability with foreign navies.

It further builds and strengthens mutual understanding through cooperative activities of multinational maritime forces.

Meanwhile, PN chief Vice Admiral Giovanni Carlo Bacordo congratulated the NTG 80.5 for "completing all given serials of the exercise which demonstrates her (FF-150's) capability to handle various operational requirements" without any derangements on the frigate’s weapons, communications, electronics, and information system hull, machinery, and electrical systems.

Also, Bacordo said the PN contingent took advantage of RIMPAC 2020 to train as a team, put the ship at pace with possible real-world scenarios, and got the crew to gel.

As this developed, US 3rd Fleet and RIMPAC20 commander Vice Admiral Scott Conn, during the closing ceremony on Tuesday (Wednesday, Manila time), visited the area where the ships of the 10 participating nations — including the Philippines' BRP Jose Rizal — are docked to congratulate them for taking part in the exercise.

"We strengthened relationships and deepened our sense of trust in one another. Each one of our navies has something to offer and that diverse range of knowledge and professionalism is what makes us stronger, and allows us to work together to ensure a free and open Indo-Pacific and ultimately, our collective prosperity," he added. (PNA)

https://www.pna.gov.ph/articles/1114168
PH Navy wraps up smooth stint in RIMPAC 2020

Published September 2, 2020, 5:22 PM
by Martin Sadongdong

Without encountering any problems, the Philippine Navy (PN) announced Wednesday that it has successfully concluded its participation in the Rim of the Pacific (RIMPAC) Exercise 2020, the largest maritime warfare drill in the world, held in Honolulu, Hawaii.

Philippine Navy
(MANILA BULLETIN)

Vice Admiral Giovanni Carlo Bacordo, PN Flag Officer in Command, congratulated the Naval Task Group 80.5 for completing all given serials of the exercise on August 31.

Bacordo was elated with the performance of the contingent aboard the brand new frigate, BRP Jose Rizal (FF-150), which capabilities were tested during the drill.

He said the contingent reported that there was no derangement on the ship's weapons, communications, electronics and information system, hull, machinery, and electrical systems.

"The Navy contingent took advantage of RIMPAC 2020 to train as a team, put the ship at pace with possible real-world scenarios, and the crew to gel during this time," the Navy chief said.

Meanwhile, Captain Jerry Garrido Jr., skipper of BRP Jose Rizal, lauded the members of NTG 80.5 for their dedication "in promoting the Philippine Navy's objective of strengthening relationship and multilateral cooperation among regional and extra regional navies with their eager participation" in the RIMPAC 2020.

The NTG 80.5, composed of 125 PN personnel, participated in serialized training, advanced integration, and free play training activities that were purely executed at sea amid the prevailing COVID-19 pandemic.

It included 53 replenishment-at-sea events, 101 pallets of cargo distributed, over 16,000 rounds of small arms munitions shot, over 1,000 large caliber weapons fired, 13 missiles expended, and 1,100 pounds of mail delivered.
The multi-dimensional training exercises allowed the members of NTG 80.5 “to work in conjunction as they put into test the PN’s first four-dimensional warfare capable frigate that is at par with those of other participating navies,” Garrido said.

Vice Adm. Scott Conn, commander of RIMPAC 2020 and the US Navy’s 3rd Fleet, exchanged pleasantries and congratulated Garrido after the drill for the “fruitful participation” of the PN in the US-led naval exercise.

“We strengthened relationships and deepened our sense of trust in one another. Each one of our navies has something to offer and that diverse range of knowledge and professionalism is what makes us stronger, and allows us to work together to ensure a free and open Indo-Pacific and ultimately, our collective prosperity,” Conn said.

The RIMPAC 2020, held from August 17 to 31, was participated in by 10 countries namely Australia, Brunei, Canada, France, Japan, New Zealand, Republic of Korea, Philippines, Singapore, and United States.

A total of 22 ships, one submarine, and around 5,300 naval personnel joined in the drill that pushed through despite the limitations brought about by the pandemic.

The RIMPAC 2020 served as a shakedown cruise for the BRP Jose Rizal to test the frigate’s capabilities after its commissioning ceremony two months ago.

Navy completes installation of sovereign markers

Philippine Information Agency
02 Sep 2020, 18:38 GMT+10

TUGUEGARAO CITY, Cagayan, Sept. 2 (PIA) - - The Philippine Navy has already completed the installation of the 11 "sovereign markers" in the uninhabited islands in the northern most part of the Philippines.

One of the sovereign markers installed in A'li Island, Itbayat, Batanes. (Phil. Navy)

Lieutenant Jayvee Abuan, public affairs officer of the Naval Forces northern Luzon, the uninhabited islands are located north of Cagayan province, within the Babuyan Channel and the Batanes Group of Islands.

He said the Naval Forces Northern Luzon and the North Luzon Command have installed the markers to the islands.

The sites, he said, were identified based on the strategic relevance of the islands to the national territory and security.

"The locations of these islands are prominent to passing vessels, either merchants of military vessels so they could easily identify that these areas are part of the Philippine territory," Abuan said.

He said the move of the government to install the sovereign markers in the uninhabited island was ignited when Batanes Governor Marlou H. Cayco reported to President Rodrigo R. Duterte, during his visit in Basco, that several foreign vessels have been spotted fishing near the said islands.

"We are hoping that when they see the symbols, the Philippine Flag which is attached in the markers, they will realize that they are already intruding our territory and that they will avoid fishing in those grounds." Abuan added.

He also said there are allot of islets in the northern part of the Philippines but only eleven were surveyed as feasible for the installation of the markers as others are rocks and inaccessible. (MDCT/OTB/PIA 2-Cagayan)

New PH Navy assets to beef up capabilities vs. lawless elements

By Priam Nepomuceno  September 2, 2020, 11:42 am

Navy chief, Vice Admiral Giovanni Carlo Bacordo. (File photo)

MANILA – The Philippine Navy (PN) on Tuesday said the arrival of new patrol assets will greatly enhance its patrol capabilities and prevent terrorists and other criminals from sneaking in.

"This situation will be best addressed through the modernization of our assets that we are now continuously pursuing, particularly the acquisition of the Philippine Fleet’s Fast Attack Interdiction Craft (FAIC) project and the Philippine Marine Corps’ Combat Raid and Interdiction Boats as well as its Small Unit Riverine Craft (SURC)," PN chief Vice Admiral Giovanni Carlo Bacordo said.

Bacordo said these naval platforms are necessary to contain the dynamics of maritime terrorists and transnational criminals and capacitate the Navy to secure and defend the country’s maritime territories and jurisdiction and promote coastal peace and order.

These are expected to be delivered within the next two years as in the case of the FAIC.

"Through the upbeat support of the Filipino people, through the government, to the modernization efforts of the whole of the Armed Forces, the Philippine Navy is now in the process of acquiring more capable surface assets to interdict pirates and other lawless elements, and become more responsive to the ever-changing security threats to the Philippines’ vast maritime environment," the PN chief added.

Bacordo added that they are exerting all efforts in conducting security patrols against terrorists and other threats while assisting in response efforts to the coronavirus disease 2019 (Covid-19) pandemic.

"The PN’s conduct of intensified and sustained security operations in our maritime borders has been a deterrent factor for terrorism and other transnational crimes, however, it remains to be a challenge for the Naval Operating Forces especially now that these rogue elements are taking advantage of the government’s preoccupation with the Covid-19 crisis," he added.

Meanwhile, PN public affairs office chief Lt. Commander Martha Christina Roxas said the Navy’s efforts for the past three years have reduced incidents of kidnapping, maritime terrorism and robbery-at-sea in the tri-border area of Zamboanga, Basilan, Sulu and Tawi-Tawi.
"While such is the case, we still cannot discount the possibility that these foreign terrorist individuals might have sneaked in through other maritime ingress given the wide expanse of our porous border," she added. (PNA)

https://www.pna.gov.ph/articles/1114097
Naval forces in central Philippines hold field training exercise

The Philippine Navy’s Naval Forces Central (NAVFORCEN) conducted a Field Training Exercise (FTX) KADAGATAN 2020 from August 26 to 28.

According to NAVFORCEN, FTX KADAGATAN 2020 aimed to evaluate, enhance interoperability between ships and aircraft through the conduct of Naval operations at sea, Maritime Surveillance/Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance (ISR), Maritime Operations and Division Tactics.

The exercise was led by Captain Emmanuel Eugenio C. Bello (GSC), Commander, NTF50; together with CDR Maynard S. Cabungcal (GSC), Commander, Naval Task Group 50.1 (Stingray), and also the Exercise Director.

"The FTX was participated by NTF50 naval assets PC371, PC372, PB356, PB358, and naval air asset NH431," NAVFORCEN said.

It noted that exercise KADAGATAN 2020 is a local unit training purposely conducted to enhance capability and maintain the operational readiness of NFC naval assets as it continues its voyage protecting the maritime domain of the Central Region moreover in this time of the pandemic.

"Your Navy in the Visayas will continue sailing and securing Central seawaters onto its next waypoint," NAVFORCEN said.

Navy pursuing acquisition of Fast Attack Interdiction Crafts, Combat Raid Interdiction Boats

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“While such is the case, we still cannot discount the possibility that these foreign terrorist individuals might have sneaked in through other maritime ingress given the wide expanse of our porous border,” she added.

President Duterte ‘recalibrates’ our China policy

By Ricardo Saludo

September 3, 2020

At a two-hour online video forum last Saturday with Ambassador to China Jose Santiago “Chito” Santa Romana, convened by the Philippine Council for Foreign Relations, or PCFR, this writer asked how Beijing regarded the increasingly assertive recent statements of Foreign Affairs Secretary Teodoro Locsin Jr.

Sta. Romana is immensely knowledgeable on China, having lived there since their group of visiting Filipino leftists got stranded by the declaration of martial law in the Philippines nearly four decades ago this month. He was also Beijing news bureau chief for the American Broadcasting Corp., or ABC, covering the People’s Republic for 21 years till he retired from the network in 2010.

The envoy said Beijing was not overly disturbed by Secretary Locsin’s statements, which have recently aligned with Washington’s more combative stance toward Chinese actions in East Asia, including the contentious South China Sea (SCS), recently analyzed by fellow columnist Rigoberto Tiglao (https://www.manilatimes.net/2020/08/31/opinion/columnists/topanalysis/locsin-dumps-dutertes-china-policy-and-follows-trumps-election-stunt/761499/).

The Philippines, Sta. Romana explained, was “recalibrating” our China policy, asserting sovereignty and sovereign rights while maintaining the strong relations forged under President Rodrigo Duterte, reversing the confrontational approach of his predecessor Benigno Aquino 3rd.

The ambassador pointed out that the Philippines maintains positive ties with Malaysia and Vietnam, despite territorial disputes with them in the Spratly Islands. So, he argues, why can’t we have cordiality with China while constantly espousing our sovereign interests?

Indeed, his boss Locsin recently reiterated the Philippine claim to the North Borneo region of Sabah, integrated into Malaysia since 1959. Predictably, Kuala Lumpur bristled at the Locsin locution, but no further public dissonance was expected.

Now, with President Duterte himself nixing his Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) chief’s urging to blacklist Chinese state enterprises involved in SCS reclamation and bases construction, as the US has done, Beijing has even less reason to fret over Locsin’s tough talk. Thus, with the DFA’s remarks, the administration gets to counter claims of kowtowing to China. But Duterte keeps the drama from becoming a real confrontation damaging long-term ties.
So, was it all playacting for the nation and the media? Well, Tiglao rightly argued that US President Donald Trump’s tough stance against China, played up in Asia by US Secretary of State Michael Pompeo, was meant to boost Trump’s voter ratings, as confrontations normally do for the commander in chief.

If Trump does it, why not Duterte?

The latter can’t run for reelection in 2022, but he still wants his camp to retain power. And as this column argued in March, Washington, Beijing and their Filipino supporters aim to get their favored presidentiable into Malacañang, having seen how Duterte recast regional security by dismantling Aquino’s anti-China, pro-America policy (https://www.manilatimes.net/2020/03/05/opinion/columnists/the-maneuvering-for-the-2022-elections-has-begun/700318/).

In this Sino-American battle for Filipino votes, done through local allies, the US and its backers in Philippine politics, business, and media have been effectively stirring up fear and hostility toward China, helped by SCS incidents like the collisions of Filipino fishing boats and China-flagged vessels, maritime moves by China’s People’s Liberation Army, or PLA, and the coronavirus disease 2019 blamed by many on China.

Those seeking to demonize Beijing now get big boosts from President Trump, his state and defense secretaries, the US State Department, and American allies in Asia and Europe, all played up by major international media. In addition, Beijing’s assertive stance on territorial issues, including warnings against Philippine Air Force patrols in the Spratlys, further antagonizes Filipinos.

Also fueling anti-China sentiment is the nation’s longstanding distrust of China. In the July Social Weather Stations (SWS) poll, China had a net trust rating of minus-36 percent, versus plus-42 for the US. Hence, when Washington and its local allies accuse Beijing, Filipinos listen.

With this burgeoning anti-China agitation, maintaining the administration’s perceived pro-China stance would tend to push Filipinos toward the pro-US opposition and cast the ruling camp as selling out to Beijing.

That’s certainly how the government’s reluctance to ban flights from China early in the contagion was lambasted, even though the World Health Organization, or WHO, advised against closing borders as late as February. Also decried is Duterte allowing Chinese online gaming operations, even though Beijing actually opposes them.

If you can’t beat them...

So, what’s the Duterte camp to do in the face of this escalating anti-China agitation? Well, if you can’t beat them, join them.

That may explain why both Locsin and Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana have ratcheted up their anti-China, pro-US rhetoric since the fourth anniversary of the July 2016 ruling by the
Permanent Court of Arbitration, or PCA, in the Hague against China’s “nine-dash line” claim over nearly all the South China Sea.

This “recalibration” of China relations even seems coordinated with Washington’s latest messaging against Beijing, citing not China’s SCS moves, but also the blacklisting of Chinese enterprises involved in SCS island-building, which Secretary Pompeo announced weeks before Locsin’s push for similar sanctions.

The latter also spoke of calling on America if the PLA attacks the Philippine Navy. The 1951 US-Philippines Mutual Defense Treaty provides for both countries to respond under their respective “constitutional processes” to an 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.” US officials had said before that the treaty covers the SCS as part of the Western Pacific.

Won’t this change in tune rekindle Chinese hostility? Not if China isn’t threatened.

This writer asked Ambassador Sta. Romana how Beijing will respond if the Philippines implements the 2014 Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement, expanding US forces in the country with access to our bases.

The envoy said it’s crucial to avoid actions threatening China. That presumably includes hosting nuclear-capable American vessels and aircraft. Plus: Beijing knows our democracy and should tolerate anti-China rhetoric to neutralize a potential election issue against the Duterte camp.

So, enjoy the Locsin-Lorenzana Show.

https://www.manilatimes.net/2020/09/03/opinion/columnists/president-duterte-recalibrates-our-china-policy/762874/
NBI PRESSES CHARGES VS 20 TAGGED IN ‘PASTILLAS’ SCAM

Investigators say 19 airport immigration officers and a Chinese tour operator ran a clandestine escort service that collected bribes to allow the entry of Chinese nationals planning to work illegally in the Philippines.

The National Bureau of Investigation has asked the Office of the Ombudsman to suspend and prosecute 19 immigration officers it found to have been running a clandestine escort service known as the “pastillas” racket that catered mostly to Chinese nationals planning to work in the country illegally.

NBI Special Action Unit chief Emerico Dongallo Jr. on Wednesday said the preventive suspension would “preclude” the airport officers of the Bureau of Immigration (BI) from influencing any subsequent investigation.

Chinese national Liya Wu, owner of Empire International Travel and Tours in Binondo, Manila, was also held legally liable for the corruption of public officials by conniving with some of the BI officers in sending the “undesirable aliens” to the country, Dongallo said.

In a statement, the immigration bureau welcomed the charges against its officers, saying they would be given the “opportunity to defend themselves in the proper forum.”

“We are one with the campaign of the government to get rid of corruption and make those erring personnel accountable before the court of law,” the bureau said in a statement.

After a five-month probe, the NBI said in a letter to the Ombudsman on Tuesday that it found that the 19 immigration officers had violated the anti-graft law, or Republic Act No. 3019.

Rescued Taiwanese

One of the 19 immigration officers, Jeffrey Dale Ignacio, also violated the human trafficking law for allegedly facilitating the entry of a Taiwanese woman who was later rescued from a prostitution den, Dongallo said.

Under the pastillas scheme,
which was disclosed by a whistleblower during a Senate investigation led by Sen. Risa Hontiveros early this year, Chinese nationals traveling as tourists but who intended to work for Philippine overseas gaming operators (Pogos) pay a P30,000 “service fee” for their smooth entry into the country.

Immigration officer Allison “Alex” Chiong, the whistleblower, told the Senate that of the total amount, P2,000 would be divided among officers of the BI’s Travel Control and Enforcement Unit (TCEU), duty immigration supervisor and terminal heads. The remainder was to be given to tour operators and syndicates who will transport the Chinese from the airport to the Pogo facilities.

The scheme acquired the pastillas label because the bribe money was rolled in a white piece of paper and looked like the Filipino milk candy.

Illegal Pogo
According to the NBI letter to the Ombudsman, the Taiwanese woman, who also testified at the Senate inquiry, said she traveled to the Philippines in October 2019 after being offered work as an administrative staff for an advertising company. She was later moved to an illegal Pogo, where her passport was seized, and then ended up in the prostitution den.

Acting NBI Director Eric Distor said it was Ignacio who recruited the woman to work in the Philippines even though she only had a tourist visa.

The NBI said that the 23-year-old woman was abused physically, mentally and “forced to work like a slave” until she was rescued by the NBI Special Task Force on Feb. 3, 2020.

Still in PH
Distor said the NBI validated Chiong’s allegations and verified that the names of foreign nationals in the “Pastillas Viber group” were “real,” and that they were allowed entry into the country and “processed” by members of the pastillas group.

Records also show that most of the foreigners are still in the Philippines despite the lapse of the period of their legal stay in the country.

Distor said Chiong’s allegations were “meritorious” but further investigation of “other personalities” was needed.

“Based on the evidence gathered, supported by photos and video recordings submitted by the whistleblower, subjects in this case indeed committed criminal transgressions and should be held liable thereof,” Distor said.

Hontiveros commended the NBI “for taking decisive action against those who have betrayed the country and contributed to the victimization of many Filipino women and children.”

The senator was looking into the operation of prostitution rings that catered to Pogo workers that victimized both Filipino and foreign women, including young girls, when the pastillas scheme was exposed.

Pño in grease money
She said up to Pño billion in bribe money greased the
TELL THE TRUTH  More than a dozen immigration officers swear to tell the truth at the start of this March 2 Senate hearing (left photo) on the operation of prostitution rings catering to Chinese nationals and the alleged "pastillas" racket that allowed the entry of mostly illegal Chinese workers who bribed their way into the country. In a slide presentation during the hearing (above), the senators were shown a list of Chinese and Vietnamese who allegedly paid airport immigration officers to enter the Philippines. —INQUIRER FILE PHOTOS

hands of corrupt BI employees and private tour operators behind the racket since the early part of the Duterte administration.

"In our committee hearings, the evidence presented pointed to how systemic and far-reaching the 'pastillas scheme' was. There were people in the higher levels of the BI who were supposedly on the take and benefitting from this illegal enterprise," she said.

The senator said the filing of cases would help authorities prevent the arrival of undocumented Chinese travelers, many of whom ended up working for Pogos.

Other respondents

The other immigration officers who face graft charges are senior immigration officers Grifton Medina, acting chief of the Port Operations Division (POD) since 2018, and Er German Tegio Roblin, deputy chief for operations of airport operations section from 2019 to 2020; Immigration Officers III Alfonso B. Arroyo and Julius B. David; Nala terminal head at Ninoy Aquino International Airport until September 2019 and Abdul bahad Calaca of the Airport Operations Division (AOD) until February 2020; Nala duty immigration supervisors Aurelio Someray Lucero III and George Bituin; and Nala POD duty immigration supervisor Salahudin Pacalda Hadjihaqah. Also criminally liable are Immigration Officers II Abdulhafez dela Tonga Hadjihaqah, duty immigration supervisor since November 2019; Gabriel Ernest Estacio assigned at the arrival and departure areas of Nala 1; Chevy Reyes Nanlong, member of the TCEU Nala AOD since 2013; Jeffrey Dale Ignacio and Manuel Sarmiento III, both of the AOD.

The others are Immigration Officers I Ralph Ryan Garcia, Phoi Villanueva, Danilo Deurder, Mark Dolete Macababat; Hamza Pacasum and Cherry E. Payabyab Ricardo; and Security Guard 2 Fidel Mendoza designated as POD chief of staff.

—WITH REPORTS FROM Jovic Yee and Marlind Ramos

9/3
Olongapo RTC orders Pemberton’s release

By BEBOT SISON JR.

OLONGAPO CITY — The Regional Trial Court Branch 74 here yesterday granted the motion of US Marine Lance Corporal Joseph Scott Pemberton, who was convicted of killing transgender Jeffrey “Jennifer” Laude in 2014, for an early release through the Good Conduct Time Allowance (GCTA).

The court’s Presiding Judge Rolene Ginez Jabalde issued the release order.

Laude’s family, however, filed a motion for reconsideration, saying the convicted killer failed to show proof of good conduct.

Marilou Laude-Mahait, the victim’s sister, filed a motion through their lawyer Virginia Suarez opposing Pemberton’s release, citing.
Olongapo

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"a) there is no proof of Pemberton’s behavior conduct and participation of any activities certified by the Time Allowance Supervisor; and b) there is no proof of the required recommendation made by the management, screening and evaluation committee."

Pemberton’s camp had filed a motion for his immediate release with full credit, saying the American serviceman had already completed service of his sentence based on good conduct.

On Dec. 1, 2015, Pemberton was sentenced to up to 10 years in prison for homicide after admitting in court he strangled and killed Laude.

The American serviceman had also paid the Laude family P4.6 million in civil damages after the Supreme Court allowed Pemberton to withdraw his appeal to reverse his conviction.

The court took into consideration the supposed GCTA credits earned by the US Marine officer, and that based on the computation he even served beyond the maximum of 10 years.

During his preventive suspension, he served 405 days in prison and another 1,737 days during his service of sentence, for a total of 2,142 days.

Adding GCTA credits, he obtained during his preventive suspension 260 days and 1,288 days during his service of sentence that totaled 1,548 days.

By combining the 2,142 days actual time served and 1,548 days GCTA, this summed up to 3,690 days.

Article 13 of the Civil Code states that a year is equivalent to 365 days and a month is 30 days.

"Finally, accused Pemberton has a total accumulated time served with entitlement of GCTA of 10 years, one month and 10 days, which is more than the 10 years maximum penalty imposed by this court and affirmed by the Court of Appeals. Thus, he is now entitled to be released for he had already served the 10 years maximum of his penalty," the court order said.

Laude was found dead at Celzone Lodge along Magsaysay Drive in Olongapo City on Oct. 11, 2014.

Pemberton, according to Suarez, is a national prisoner as declared by the court and should have served his sentence in the New Bilibid Prison.

By Pemberton’s own motion and invoking the Visiting Forces Agreement, he was given the privilege of serving his sentence solo and comfortably in a specially made facility at Camp Aguinaldo.

"His conduct was never put to test as he has never joined other convicts," Suarez said.

She also insisted that the GCTA is made to unlog the overpopulated prisons in the country, and Pemberton was kept in a "special prison," where no one is with him, which casts doubt on whether Pemberton really displayed good conduct.

"(Pemberton) should be kept in Bilibid. He is very privileged... Barely five years from his sentence, he already invoked GCTA. How can you invoke GCTA (when) you do not have any person with you?" Suarez said in Filipino in a radio interview over radio station dzBB yesterday afternoon.

"(The GCTA is based on) rehabilitation programs and authorized work activities... He has none at all. There is no basis for the GCTA. There should be a recommendation from the management screen evaluation committee, but he has none," she added.

Suarez also emphasized that the "injustice" on the release of Pemberton "is likewise an injustice to the Filipino people," and so Pemberton’s motion for early release should be denied and he should be ordered to complete his sentence.

Laude’s family was "devastated" on the release order, according to Suarez, and that Pemberton "never apologized" to them.

"Despite these, should (he) apply for GCTA?" the lawyer said. - With Ralph Edwin Villanueva, Evelyn Macaliran
Palace: Phl can set aside unresolved SCS issues

By ALEXIS ROMERO

The Philippines can "set aside" unresolved issues in the South China Sea and pursue investment projects with Chinese firms since the arbitral ruling has upheld Manila's sovereign rights over its exclusive economic zone (EEZ), Malacañang said yesterday.

While the Philippines is a party to the South China Sea row, President Duterte has refused to follow the United States' lead in banning trade with Chinese companies that helped build artificial islands in disputed waters, citing the need to finish infrastructure projects.

One of the companies blacklisted by the US is state-run China Communications Construction Co. Ltd. (CCCC), which will handle the development of Sangley Airport in Cavite, a facility close to key Philippine naval and air bases. The P208-billion project seeks to ease airport congestion in Metro Manila.

Despite concerns about the involvement of Chinese firms in vital projects, Malacañang claimed

Turn to Page 2
national interest requires that flagship infrastructure projects be completed.

He (Duterte) said that we will pursue the national interest and the national interest dictates that we finish the flagship projects of the Build, Build, Build and therefore he will not follow the footsteps of the Americans. He will respect the contracts that we have entered into with Chinese companies,” presidential spokesman Harry Roque told CNN Philippines.

Asked whether banning business with Chinese firms would send a signal that the Philippines is not condoning China’s island-building in contested waters, Roque said an arbitral court has ruled against such activities.

“You know, there is already a decision there that the Philippines has sovereign rights where they built the artificial islands and that means that whoever built those artificial islands had no legal basis to do; and we’re satisfied with the decision,” Roque said.

“For as long as that decision stands, we can proceed forward on matters that we think we can push on such as trade and investment and meanwhile set aside matters that we cannot resolve perhaps in our lifetime,” he added.

Roque said the government is satisfied with the arbitral ruling which stated that “only the Philippines could have built those artificial islands because they form part of (our) exclusive economic zone.”

China has built artificial islands on Kagitingan (Fiery Cross), Panganiban (Mischief), Zamora (Subi), Burgos (Gaven), Kennan (Hughes), Mabini (Johnson South) and Calderon (Quartermaster) Reefs, areas located off the province of Palawan that are also being claimed by the Philippines.  

— Pla Lee-Brago, Richmond Mercurio
Palace: Philippines to honor contracts with Chinese investors

By GENALYN D. KABILING and ROY C. MABASA

The government will continue to honor contracts with Chinese investors as it is “satisfied” with an arbitral decision upholding the country's sovereign rights over the West Philippine Sea, Malacañang said on Wednesday.

Presidential spokesman Harry Roque said the government will proceed with trade and investments with China and set aside matters of concern that “can’t be resolved perhaps within our lifetime” for the meantime.

The Palace had earlier announced that all China-backed projects, including the Sangley Airport project, will push through as planned despite the United States’ move to blacklist several Chinese firms engaged in the reclamation works in the disputed South China Sea.

“We will respect the contracts that we entered into,” Roque said.

Palace: Philippines to honor... (1/4)

with Chinese companies,” Roque said over CNN Philippines Wednesday.

“The President has actually spoken on the matter. It was not televised but he spoke up and he said that we will pursue the national interest and the national interest dictates that we finish flagship projects of the 'Build, Build, Build' and therefore he will not follow the footsteps of the Americans,” Roque said.

“There is already a decision that the Philippines has sovereign rights where they built the artificial islands and that means whatever built those artificial islands had no legal basis to do so. We are satisfied with that decision,” he said when asked if the Philippines is following the US blacklist of Chinese firms to show its opposition to the building of artificial islands in the disputed territory.

Roque maintained that the Philippines, having the sovereign rights over the West Philippine Sea, is the only nation allowed to build any structure within the territory.

“For as long as that decision stands, we can proceed forward on matters that we think we can push on such as trade and investments and meanwhile set aside matters that cannot be resolved perhaps in our lifetime,” he said.

“But we are satisfied that the UN tribunal for the law of the sea ruled that only the Philippines could have built those artificial islands because they form part of our exclusive economic zone,” he added.

In July, 2016, an arbitration court ruled in favor of the Philippines in the South China Sea dispute after it nullified China’s nine-dash claim over the resource-rich waters. Beijing, however, has refused to recognize the decision and continued its reclamation works in the disputed area.

Locsin agrees

Foreign Affairs Secretary Teodoro Locsin Jr. on Wednesday backed on his suggestion to rescind the contracts of Chinese companies that were earlier sanctioned by the United States for involvement in the artificial island-building in the West Philippine Sea or the South China Sea.

Locsin’s sudden turn-around came after President Duterte declared that all projects, “regardless of which Chinese contractor is involved” will continue, citing national interest as the reason.

“President is right. It’s a sovereign choice. Also, If we break a contract, we get sued abroad,” the country’s top diplomat said in a tweet.

Locsin noted a breach of contract that happened in the North Rail project during the time of the Arroyo administration when the Philippines terminated the project with China due to alleged serious legal issues in the contract.

“Happened even with an anomalous North Rail contract. We lost the case I believe. At best we can adopt prospectively but I wouldn’t encourage it,” the foreign secretary said in the tweet he posted at exactly 8:07 a.m. on Wednesday. He later deleted the tweet.

One of the Chinese companies mentioned in the US sanction was the state-owned China Communications Construction Company (CCCC) that bagged the $10-billion Sangley Point International Airport project in partnership with Singapore’s MacRaha Corp.

The US government alleged that CCCC was one of the many companies involved in the controversial reclamation and construction of military posts in the South China Sea.

Malacafang said Duterte will not follow the lead of the United States because the Philippines is a free and independent nation and in need of the projects from China.

“We are not a vassal state of any foreign power,” palace spokesman Harry Roque said.
All Chinese projects in PH to continue - ambassador

Chinese Ambassador to Manila Huang Xilian said all Chinese projects in the Philippines would continue to support the Duterte administration’s flagship Build, Build, Build program.

Huang issued the statement amid calls for President Rodrigo Duterte to cancel deals with Chinese companies involved in the militarization of and construction of Chinese artificial islands in the South China (West Philippine) Sea.

"All Chinese projects in the Philippines will continue as planned," Huang said on Tuesday in a local radio interview transcript, which was shared by the Chinese Embassy in Manila.

He made the remark in reaction to Duterte’s pronouncement that he would ensure the completion of flagship projects under the Build, Build, Build program.

"Recently, the US State Department and Commerce Department imposed sanctions on some Chinese companies and citizens. China is firmly opposed to this," Huang said.

The ambassador said "the participation of Chinese companies and individuals in domestic construction activities is legitimate, lawful and beyond reproach, lies entirely within its sovereignty."

"The move by the US side, under the pretext of protecting the South China Sea, grossly interferes in China’s internal affairs and aims to drive a wedge between China and regional countries," he added.

"We have taken note of the statement made by the presidential spokesperson Harry Roque [jr.] that President Duterte charted an independent foreign policy course that puts the national interest at the core. And that the national interest of the Philippines is to ensure the completion of flagship projects under the Build, Build, Build program," Huang said.

"We believe that the pursuit of an independent foreign policy is in line with the fundamental interests of the Philippines and its people," he added.

The cooperation between China and the Philippines, he said, had "always been based on mutual respect, mutual benefit and win-win results, and all projects are all conducted in compliance with the existing laws and regulations."

The in-depth synergizing of China’s Belt and Road Initiative and the Build, Build, Build program has achieved fruitful results and is bringing more and more benefits to the people of our two countries," the envoy said. "Chinese companies have made important contributions in this endeavor. I believe that any attempt to undermine the normal economic cooperation between China and the Philippines will never succeed."

BERNADETTE E. TAMAYO
Deals press on, China vows

The projects, which are mostly classified as flagships of the Build, Build, Build campaign will not stop despite the controversy hounding it stemming from United States-imposed restrictions on 24 Chinese state-owned enterprises and executives for activities in the West Philippine Sea.

BY CHITO LOZADA
@tribuneph_dch

The cooperation projects between China and the Philippines will not be impeded by geopolitics, officials in China and the Philippines affirmed.

Ambassador Huang Xilian said all Chinese deals will continue as planned.

The projects, which are mostly classified as flagships of the “Build, Build, Build” (BBB) campaign will not stop despite the controversy hounding it stemming from United States-imposed restrictions on 24 Chinese state-owned enterprises and executives for activities in the West Philippine Sea.

The participation of Chinese companies and individuals in Philippines’ construction activities is legitimate, lawful and beyond reproach and lies entirely within the country’s sovereignty.

Presidential spokesperson Harry Roque also said that the Sangleys project would continue. All the other projects involving Chinese companies banned in the US can continue in the Philippines, he added.

Huang noted President Rodrigo Duterte’s statement that he will not follow the directive of the Americans because the Philippines is “not a vassal state of any foreign power, but an independent country.”

The US State and Commerce departments imposed sanctions on Chinese companies and citizens which China has firmly opposed.

“The participation of Chinese companies and individuals in Philippines' construction activities is legitimate, lawful and beyond reproach and lies entirely within the country’s sovereignty,” according to Huang.

The move by the US side, under the pretext of protecting the South China Sea, grossly interferes in China’s internal affairs and aims to drive a wedge between China and regional countries, he added.

Core is nation’s interest

“We have taken note of the statement made by the presidential spokesperson Harry Roque that President Duterte charted an independent foreign policy course that puts the national interest at the core,” Huang noted.

He added the national interest of the Philippines is to ensure the completion of flagship projects under the “BBB” program.

“We believe that the pursuit of an independent foreign policy is in line with the fundamental interests of the Philippines and its people,” Huang underlined.

The Chinese diplomat explained the pragmatic cooperation between China and the Philippines has always been based on mutual respect, mutual benefits, and win-win results, and all projects are all conducted in compliance with the existing laws and regulations.

“The in-depth synergizing of China’s Belt and Road initiative and the “BBB” program has achieved fruitful results and is bringing more and more benefits to the people of our two countries,” Huang said.

He added Chinese companies have made important contributions in the complementary projects.
I believe that any attempt to undermine the normal economic cooperation between China and the Philippines will never succeed," Hurong said.

Arbitral ruling enough
Roque has said he does not see a need for President Duterte to copy the United States' decision to blacklist Chinese firms to show that it does not condone Beijing's construction of artificial islands in the South China Sea.

We have taken note of the statement made by the presidential spokesperson Harry Roque that President Duterte charted an independent foreign policy course that puts the national interest at the core.

Roque said the government is already "satisfied" by asserting its sovereign rights by raising the Hague-based arbitral court's 2016 decision which invalidates China's vast claims on the contested territory.

"There is already a decision there that the Philippines has sovereign rights where they build the artificial islands and that means that whoever built those artificial islands had no legal basis to do so and we're satisfied with that decision," he added.

He said that while the government is not abandoning the Philippines' historic arbitration victory against China, he believes that the two countries can still enjoy close trade and investment relations.

"For as long as the decision stands, we can proceed forward on matters that we think we can push on such as trade and investment and meanwhile, set aside matters that we cannot resolve perhaps in our lifetime. But we are satisfied the UN tribunal of the sea ruled that only the Philippines could have built on those islands because they form part of our exclusive economic zone," he said.
AFP dials down Facebook ‘regulation’

By Marlon Ramos @MRamosINQ

Seeking congressional approval of his appointment as chief of the Armed Forces of the Philippines, Lt. Gen. Gilbert Gapay conceded that the government could not use the controversial Anti-Terrorism Act of 2020 to “regulate” Facebook and other similar social media without violating the Bill of Rights.

But Gapay insisted, the government could hold online networks and internet service providers liable and force them to control the contents of their platforms so that terrorist groups could not recruit members, “radicalize” young people and secure financial aid from supporters.

Make companies liable
“The goal is to regulate [and] make social media platforms and service providers more liable for the content they host, especially to enforce the traceability of the content to enable accountability,” Gapay said at his confirmation hearing before the bicameral Commission on Appointments.

Gapay made the remarks after he was asked to explain his earlier proposal to restrict what social media users could post on their social media accounts under the new antiterrorism law that is currently being challenged before the Supreme Court.

“This regulation is not tantamount to curtailment of the right to freedom of speech and expression, as well as the freedom of assembly as exercised in social media,” he opined, stressing that the AFP only wanted to “regulate the social media platform and service providers, not the users.”

“They can regulate what is being uploaded in the social media platforms,” said the country’s highest military official, adding that they were now co-

ordinating with Facebook Philippines regarding their concerns. “There is no intention to impose prior restraint when we proposed regulating social media. We believe that anybody can post anything on social media, but we suggest that they do it responsibly,” he said.

Violation of civil rights
But Sen. Franklin Drilon, a former justice secretary, reminded Gapay that the government would violate the Bill of Rights as stipulated in the 1987 Constitution if it would impose regulations on the service providers and social media networks.

“We should not anticipate what these social media platforms will do... They are private companies,” Drilon said. “There should be no attempt on the part of government to impose prior restraint on [social] media outlets.”

Besides, Sen. Panfilo Lacson, who presided over the hearing, said that he neither thought of violating the Bill of Rights nor imposing prior restraints when he sponsored the measure in the Senate.

“What we will penalize under the law is the actual act of facilitating [terrorism] and recruiting [terrorists]. We cannot regulate social media,” Lacson told Gapay, whose appointment was eventually confirmed.

Last May, the US Supreme Court rejected a 2016 lawsuit [Force vs. Facebook] claiming Facebook knowingly hosted accounts belonging to the terrorist organization Hamas. The court declined to hear the case, reaffirming its position that even hate speech is protected speech in the United States.

The case is one of many against the social network giant involving the promotion of hate but Facebook has recently stepped up the enforcement of its “community standards” to block hate speech. INQ
AFP chief, 29 other military officers breeze through CA

By PAOLO ROMERO

The Commission on Appointments (CA) has approved the nomination of Gen. Gilbert Gapay as Armed Forces chief and the promotion of 29 other senior military officers.

Gapay hurdled his confirmation hearings before the CA committee on national defense and security — chaired by Sen. Panfilo Lacson — where he was grilled on his stand on various issues as well as on his comments that social media must be regulated.

In endorsing his confirmation before the CA plenary session, Lacson said Gapay graduated at the top of his class at the Philippine Military Academy in 1986 and obtained the most number of awards during graduation rites, “giving him the notoriety as the most decorated cadet in the history of PMA.”

During committee deliberations, the general was asked about calls by some political support groups to establish a “revolutionary government,” with President Duterte as head until the Constitution is amended.

“The Armed Forces of the Philippines does not support this movement in calling for a revolutionary government, precisely because of the reason that it is unconstitutional and we find it politically motivated,” Gapay replied.

He said a revolutionary government will “cause more harm than good at this point in time in our country.”

Gapay also clarified his remarks that social media must be regulated and covered by the Anti-Terrorism Law.

He said the military has no intention to curtail freedom of expression but he wants social media platforms and service providers to be more liable for the content they host.


President Duterte’s mention of the revolutionary government in his latest public address was only a contribution to the “marketplace of ideas,” Malacanang said yesterday, as it maintained that the chief executive is still not supportive of the idea.

A pro-Duterte group called Mayor Rodrigo Roa Duterte-National Executive Coordinating Committee is pushing for the establishment of a revolutionary government to amend the Constitution, saying it would solve all the problems hounding the country.

— With Alexis Romero
Duterte to Cascolan: Rid PNP of corruption

By CHRISTINA MENDEZ

President Duterte has given his marching orders to new Philippine National Police chief Camilo Cascolan: cleanse the PNP ranks of scalawags as part of efforts to maintain the integrity of the police force.

Presidential spokesman Harry Roque Jr. said yesterday Duterte also wants Cascolan, who has only two months to serve as PNP chief, to ensure that the police would always uphold the rule of law.

"To the PNP chief, of course, number one is to maintain...uphold integrity of the rule of law as far as the PNP is concerned," Roque said.

"Number two, rid its ranks individuals," he said in an interview over Teleradyo.

Cascolan agreed that small-time drug pushers and users, who are the usual casualties in the anti-drug campaign, should not be killed and instead be used to catch the main players.

Aside from drug traffickers, he said rapists should also be covered by the proposal to reimpose the death penalty.

Cascolan was one of the authors of Oplan Double Barrel that became

of corruption because that’s the reason why the President doubled the salary of the armed forces and military. And number three what is closest to his heart, sustain the gains of the drug war,” Roque said.

Cascolan assumed his post yesterday after the retirement of Gen. Archie Gamboa.

The President ordered Cascolan to “professionalize the ranks, uphold the Constitution and the rule of law and continue the gains of the drug war,” Roque said.

Cascolan said the PNP would also focus on high-value targets or big-time drug lords as he vowed to make a significant impact in the government’s war on illegal drugs.

He promised to intensify operations against drug syndicates that continue to operate amid the health crisis brought by the COVID-19 pandemic.

“We will see to it that we will build up cases most especially against high-value
the PNP’s flagship program in
the anti-drugs campaign.

He also crafted the En-
hanced Managing Police Op-
erations which police units are
using to address criminality,
terrorism and internal security.

Cascolan also pledged to
defend the 1987 Constitution
in response to calls by a group
pushing for the establishment
of a revolutionary government
to be headed by President
Duterte.

Cascolan said they will nev-
er support moves to change the
Constitution through extra-
legal means and that they will
not hesitate to arrest people
involved in such activities.

Duterte’s allies belong-
ing to the Mayor Rodrigo
Roa Duterte-National Execu-
tive Coordinating Commit-
tee (MRRD-NECC) want a
revolutionary government to
hasten the process of Charter
change to set up a federal form
of government.

— With Emmanuel Tumis,
Cecilia Suarez Felipe, Romina
Cabrera, Jose Rodel Clapano,
Artemio Dumlao Jr.
Lorenzana sees flattening of curve this month

By MICHAEL PUNONGBAYAN

Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana, chair of the National Task Force (NTF) Against COVID-19, is confident that the flattening of the curve will finally be achieved within the month. Such can be done with the help of everyone.

From Page 1

Filipino who should follow all health protocols aimed at putting an end to the pandemic, Lorenzana said.

"Yes, we can. What will we do to achieve it? Strictly implement the health protocols and follow the campaign plan developed by the NTF," Lorenzana told journalists yesterday.

He said the key is to abide by or follow the acronym PDITR, which stands for protect, detect, isolate, treat and reintegrate.

Lorenzana said such system contains step-by-step processes that should be implemented at work, at home and even when travelling to prevent the spread of the coronavirus.

"The NTF has disseminated this to the businesses, Regional Task Forces and LGUs (local government units)," he said, when asked on the prediction of University of the Philippines researchers that the curve may finally flatten this month.

"If everyone follows this plan, we will not only flatten the curve but bring it down," Lorenzana said.

Meanwhile, newly installed Philippine National Police (PNP) chief Gen. Camilo Pancratius Cascalon vowed yesterday to punish police officers who are violating quarantine protocols.

Being implementors of government policies, police officers should serve as examples by following the rules themselves, Cascalon said.

"I will see to it that everybody who imposes or implements the law should be disciplined and should follow the law they are implementing," he said.

He issued the statement in response to a query on the controversy generated by the "ma-ianita" or birthday serenade for National Capital Region Police Office (NCRPO) chief Maj. Gen. Debold Sinas in May.
Public cooperation can help flatten COVID-19 curve — Lorenzana

There is a good chance that the Philippines could flatten the curve of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) within the month if everyone follows health and safety protocols, Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana said.

"Yes, we can. What will we do to achieve it? Strictly implement the health protocols and follow the campaign plan developed by the NTF (National Task Force) — the PDITR: Protect, detect, isolate, treat, and reintegrate," the chair of the NTF against COVID-19 said in a message on Tuesday night.

Lorenzana was commenting on the possibility of flattening the COVID-19 curve as predicted by a research group from the University of the Philippines (UP), which cited the decline in the number of infections in the past few days.

The PDITR, Lorenzana said, contains the steps to be done in work areas, homes, and public transportation to prevent infection and eradicate COVID-19.

"The NTF has disseminated this to the business, regional task forces, and LGUs (local government units). If everyone follows this plan, we will not only flatten the curve but bring it down," Lorenzana added.

Researchers from UP said the flattening of the COVID-19 curve can be achieved by the end of August or September.

The UP experts said the disease's "reproduction rate" in the country fell from 1.5 to 1.1 after Metro Manila and the provinces of Bulacan, Cavite, Rizal, and Laguna reverted to the stricter Modified Enhanced Community Quarantine (MECQ) from August 4 to 18. (PNA)
Covid curve to flatten in September – Lorenzana

DEFENSE Secretary Delfin Lorenzana is confident the coronavirus disease 2019 (Covid-19) curve will be flattened this month, citing the new campaign plan developed by the National Task Force Covid-19 in charge of the pandemic response.

In a message to reporters, Lorenzana said that strictly implementing health protocols and sticking to the campaign plan will help reduce the number of Covid-19 cases.

The virus has infected more than 200,000 Filipinos and drastically slowed down economic growth.

The campaign plan is called the PDHR – protect, detect, isolate, treat and reintegrate.

"Yes, we can," Lorenzana said on Tuesday night when asked if the country could flatten the curve.

According to the Defense department, the government of New Zealand has provided $1.5 million worth of assistance for affected persons by Covid-19 in Mindanao and contributed funding for the National Kidney and Transplant Institute and the Philippine Disaster Resilience Foundation to support 15 local government units in response to the pandemic.

Lorenzana also said the task force disseminated their campaign plan to businesses, their regional counterparts and all local government units.

"If everyone follows this plan, we will not only flatten the curve but bring it down," he said.

DEMPSEY REYES
Duterte gives new PNP chief three marching orders

By GENAVYN D. KABILING and AARON R. REBENDO

Philippine National Police (PNP) Chief Lt. Gen. Casmilo Cascolan must uphold the rule of law, fight corruption in the police ranks, and sustain the war on illegal drugs during his brief stint as head of the organization, Malacañang said Wednesday.

These are President Duterte’s three marching orders to Cascolan who took over as police chief from Gen. Archie Gamboa who retired on Wednesday, according to presidential spokesman Harry Roque.

Cascolan is expected to serve as the country’s top cop for only two months since he will reach the mandatory retirement age of 56 this November.

"To the PNP chief, of course number one is to maintain, uphold the integrity of the rule of law as far as the PNP (Philippine National Police) is concerned," Roque said over CNN Philippines Wednesday.

"Number two, rid its rank of corruption because that’s the reason the President doubled the salary of the Armed Forces and (the police) and (number three) what is closest to his heart, sustain the gains of the drug war," he added.

Police marshals

Cascolan, for his part vowed to discipline cops violating quarantine rules.

"I will see to it that everybody who imposes or implements the law should also follow the law they are implementing," said Cascolan.

Aside from Metro Manila police chief Maj. Gen. Debold Sinas who was criticized for holding a masamitsa during his birthday celebration at the height of the community quarantine in May, several policemen were also seen violating the rules on pillion riding as posted by several netizens on the social media.

Cascolan said all the measures that were crafted and enforced to prevent the spread of the virus will be strictly implemented.

In addition, Cascolan said he would initiate the deployment of police marshals in public transport terminals and public utility vehicles to ensure that both drivers and commuters observe minimum health safety standards such as wearing face masks, face shields and physical distancing.

"At the same time, I will also establish what we call a barangay enforcement team which will conduct regular patrol in the barangays with the local policemen," said Cascolan.

The enforcement of quarantine measures, according to Cascolan, would come with measures to protect policemen from infection.

The PNP Health Service said 4,179 policemen have been infected by the coronavirus, with 2,842 recoveries and 16 deaths.

"Aside from the medical reserve force and health service, we will also make sure that all the logistical needs that our personnel need would be delivered on time," said Cascolan.

Malacañang announced Tuesday that President Duterte has appointed Cascolan, currently the second highest police official, as the next chief of the PNP. Prior to his appointment, Cascolan served as deputy for administration of the PNP.

He is a member of the Philippine Military Academy Class 1986.
Gapay, 29 AFP officers get CA nod

THE Commission on Appointments (CA) on Wednesday confirmed the ad interim appointment of Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) Chief of Staff Gen. Gilberry Gapay and 29 other senior military officials.


Gapay, a member of Philippine Military Academy (PMA) Class of 1986, has assured members of the bicameral panel that the AFP has no intention of regulating social media. He said the Armed Forces supports the Duterte administration’s independent foreign policy or being “friend to all, enemy to none.”

He told lawmakers that the development of the Army Aviation Regiment into a force of the Philippine Army that could be deployed anywhere is in full swing.

“As the battlefield becomes more complicated and intricate, the more that we need capabilities such as an aviation unit for the Philippine Army,” the AFP chief said.

Sen. Francis Tolentino said the AFP was set to receive from the United States four Black Hawk helicopters and four Cobra helicopters that would help augment the Army Aviation Regiment’s air defense capability.

Tolentino urged Gapay to pursue the establishment of airstrips for the Army Aviation Regiment in Kalayaan Island and near Fuga Island.

“The AFP is identifying airstrips all over the country where we could put detachments not only for the Army but for the Philippine Air Force, as well,” said Gapay.

Sen. Panfilo Lacson, chairman of the CA Committee on National Defense, said Gapay graduated at the top of his class and obtained the most number of awards during his graduation rites. “Giving him the notoriety as the most decorated cadet in the history of PMA.”

BERNADETTE E. TAMAYO
Gapay warns soldiers against revgov push

BY HANANEEL BORDEY
@tribune_ph_hane

Reiterating his opposition to the "politically-motivated" push to instate a revolutionary government, Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) Chief of Staff Lt. Gen. Gilbert Gapay warned all military personnel against actively participating in any attempt to abrogate the Constitution.

Gapay, who presented himself before the Commission on Appointments on Wednesday, was asked by Senate Minority Leader Franklin Drilon if he will allow anyone in the armed forces to "entertain views" on the revolutionary government.

"We are entitled (to have our own views) individually but as the Armed Forces of the Philippines, we will not allow anybody to be part of this movement and to actively participate in the furtherance of the goals and objectives of the group pushing for the establishment of revolutionary government," Gapay told the body.

Over the past few weeks, the Mayor Rodrigo Roa Duterte-National Executive Coordinating Committee have been urging different sectors to band together and establish a revolutionary government that will be headed by President Rodrigo Duterte until 31 December to amend the 1987 Constitution and establishment a federal form of government.

This, however, had already been rejected by Malacañang.

The newly-installed military chief maintained that they will not support these movements as this will only result in more consequences than benefits.

"Precisely because of the reason that it is unconstitutional and yes, we find it politically motivated and it will cost more harm than good at this point in time in our country," noted Gapay, adding that the AFP's actions are and will always be guided by its sworn duty to uphold and protect the Constitution.

Drilon said it is "very reassuring" to hear the AFP chief's statements.

Meanwhile, Gapay clarified that his previous statement about social media regulation being included in the implementing rules and regulations of the Anti-Terrorism Law was not intended to curtail the citizens' freedom of speech.

Social media monitoring does not mean restricting what netizens can and cannot post on online platforms, but more of having mechanisms that will help them detect and block communications and preparatory acts of terrorism.
Gapay ‘grilled,’ then given 4th star

BY RAYMOND AFRICA

AFP chief of staff Gilbert Gapay yesterday said the Armed Forces never intended to curtail freedom of speech and expression when he suggested that the regulation of social media use be included in the implementing rules and regulations of the Anti-Terrorism Act of 2020.

Gapay gave this assurance when he was “grilled” by Senate minority leader Franklin Drilon during the confirmation of his rank to four-star general along with the promotion of 29 other military officials before the committee on national defense of the bicameral Commission on Appointments.

After more than three hours of questioning, Sen. Panfilo Lacson recommended that Gapay and 29 other military officials be given the rank commensurate to their respective positions in the AFP, to which he was objected.

Aside from Gapay, promoted to the rank of lieutenant generals (three-star) were Franco Nemesio Gacal and Jose Faustino Jr., while Gilbert Saret and Alfred Rosario were promoted to major general (two-star).

The other 25 officers were promoted to colonels in the Army and Marines, and captains (equivalent to colonel) in the Navy.

Drilon said he was concerned with what Gapay had suggested—regulating the use of social media to combat terrorism since doing so is against the Constitution which guarantees the freedom of speech and expression.

Drilon said since the AFP is one of the agencies that will implement the new law, the suggestion to regulate social media use was not included in the law.

“What I am just concerned is there should be attempt on the government to impose prior restraint (not rather) hold these media outlets and authors responsible for what they write and say,” Drilon said.

Gapay clarified that what he meant by regulating social media use was for social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and the like, adding a terrorist should not be able to exploit social media to advance or promote terrorism.

“We don’t intend to really curtail freedom of expression as guaranteed by our Constitution and we don’t want to impose prior restraint to anybody and what we are suggesting are the acts themselves should be regulated pertaining to really combating terrorism,” Gapay said.

Gapay also gave assurance that he will not let any member of the AFP to “entertain” any invitation to join the revolutionary government proposed by supporters of President Duterte.

“Although we are entitled individually (to express our views), but as (the) Armed Forces, we will not allow anybody to be part of this movement and to actively participate in the furtherance of the goals and objectives of the group pushing for the establishment of a revolutionary government,” Gapay said.

Gapay said calls for a RevGOv are a political matter, aside from being unconstitutional, the reason why the AFP does not support it in any way.
Duterte, calling them “incomprehensible.”

Presidential spokesman Harry Roque said he finds it “strange” that the self-proclaimed Duterte supporters are seeking a new form of government.

“I don’t know what they want. They claim to be supporters of the President. So why would they want to unseat a constitutional president? I find it strange,” Roque stated.

“The whole exercise to me is incomprehensible,” he added.

The Palace official also maintained that President Duterte believes that the Philippines does not need a revolutionary government at the present.

This, despite the Chief Executive’s recent pronouncement that proposals to establish a different form of government should be discussed publicly.

I don’t know what they want. They claim to be supporters of the President. So why would they want to unseat a constitutional president? I find it strange.

“Join the President in his call that the Constitution should be upheld because all public officers took an oath to uphold the Constitution and the laws of the land,” Roque said.

The Mayor Rodrigo Roa Duterte National Executive Coordinating Committee (MRRD-NECC) renewed their call to establish a revolutionary government led by Duterte, believing that this could fast track the country’s shift to Federalism.

The advocates of a revolutionary government also claimed that this is the way to go to heal “all the ills of our society” without amending the 1987 Constitution.

The President has since thumbed down the proposal, adding that he does not know the members of the group.

The MRRD-NECC called to establish a revolutionary government on August 22 during a large gathering at the Clark Freeport and in front of the Barasoain Church in Mabalac, Bulacan despite the ban on large groups of people amid a
pandemic quarantine.

Bobby Brillante, deputy national spokesperson of the MRRD-NECC, identified some of the leading participants in the open call for the establishment of a “revolutionary government” as


As the AFP, we will not allow anybody to be part of this movement and to actively participate in the furtherance of the goals and objectives of the group pushing for the establishment of a revolutionary government.

Mammadiong was appointed by Duterte as TESDA (Technical Education and Skills Development Authority) Director General in 2016 before he ran and lost the Lanao del Sur gubernatorial post to Mamintal “Bumbit” Adiong Jr. in May last year.

Diño is currently the Undersecretary for Barangay Affairs at the Department of the Interior and Local Government. He was the former barangay leader in Quezon City who served as “placeholder” for Duterte during the 2016 presidential elections. He withdrew his candidacy so that Duterte could take his place as official PDP (Partido Demokratiko Pilipino) presidential candidate.

Brillante is a politician who lost a bid to become a Makati councilor in May last year; San Pedro was a mayor of San Jose Del Monte, Bulacan from 2010 to 2016; Alvarado is currently the Bulacan vice-governor although he served as the provincial governor from 2010-2013; and Fajardo was appointed by President Duterte as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary to the Republic of Iraq in 2018.

Fajardo once faced a case of indiscriminate firing and grave threats after shooting at a provincial bus along EDSA in Makati City in 2021, according to a newspaper report from that year.

Meanwhile, Senate Minority Leader Franklin M. Drilon welcomed the assurances made by Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) chief of staff Lt. Gen. Gilbert Gapay that the military will never support calls for a revolutionary government.

Drilon said Congress and the Filipino people will hold the chief of staff to account for his words.

I join the President in his call that the Constitution should be upheld because all public officers took an oath to uphold the Constitution and the laws of the land.

Responding to questions by Drilon during the committee of national defense of the biennial Commission on Appointments (CA) hearing on Wednesday, Gapay said the AFP will not allow its members to participate in the talks on
revolutionary government.

"As the AFP, we will not allow anybody to be part of this movement and to actively participate in the furtherance of the goals and objectives of the group pushing for the establishment of a revolutionary government," he added.

"The Armed Forces of the Philippines do not support this movement in calling for a revolutionary government, precisely because of the reason that it is unconstitutional and we find it politically motivated," Gapay stressed.

"It will cause more harm than good at this point in time in our country. Our actions are being guided by our sworn duty to uphold and protect our Constitution and serve our people," Gapay said.

"That is very reassuring and it is good to hear that for the record," Drilon responded.

"With those reassurances, I want to place my record that the nominee has my vote and support on this confirmation process," he added.

In a separate statement, the minority leader said: "We will hold Lt. Gen. Gapay to his words. The assurance he made should lay to rest these loose talks about a revolutionary government."

"We should not be distracted by all these loose talks about a revolutionary government. The task at hand is enormous - contain COVID-19 so that we can get our lives and the economy moving again. We should not be sidetracked. Our people need help - 7.3 million Filipinos are unemployed and 5 million families are hungry. Businesses are closing down," Drilon said.

"Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenza and the AFP, led by Lt. Gen. Gapay, should continue to uphold the Constitution and denounce calls for a revolutionary government," Drilon added.
Our deepest condolences to tycoon Lucio Tan and his family and the Lucio Tan Group of Companies for the demise of Mrs. Lucila "Letty" Gonzalez-Tan who passed away on Monday, Aug. 31, 2020.

She "lost her battle to a lingering illness," according to a family statement. She was 77.

Mrs. Tan leaves behind her husband, and children Michael and Angelina, Sharon and Edgardo, John and Nancy, Cherry and Alfred, Tammy and Christine and her grandchildren.

As reported by GMA News, the Tan children described Mrs. Tan as "the tapeta's warm, friendly and affable spouse...and a jolly and loving mother and grandmother."

Her wake will be at Chapel 3 of Heritage Park Memorial Chapel in Taguig City which started Sept. 2 will be up to Sept. 7, at 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.

Interment will be on Sept. 8, at 11 a.m. also at Chapel 3 of Heritage Park.

So many developing events battle for our attention: the US presidential campaign, the killings of black humans, the letting go of white killers in the US of A. (Political campaigns are characteristically misleading exercises, but the American contenders and followers (guess who) are ungovernable here and violations of provisions of the US constitution but are only questioned for doing so but not haled to court.

Here at home there's the frantic move to form a "revolutionary government" that opponents consider foolishly as there must be an EDSA type revolution that will unseat the incumbent president and install another. The creators of such a revolutionary government do not realize that, as lawyer Romulo Macalintal declares, the present president, if that is the intent, cannot head such a Rev-Gov, he will have to resign, the effect of which, as pursuant to the 1987 Constitution, the duly elected Vice President, Leni Robredo, automatically assumes and performs the functions and duties of the Office of the President.

On the other hand, Senator Panfilo Lacson's desire is for Congress to pass a "Designated Survivor" bill that will guarantee the continuity and stability of operations in government in case the president and the three officials in the line of constitutional succession are disabled or killed due to a terrorist attack. Heaven forbid that such an event will take place, but Senator Lacson says, "Just in case..."

Then there is the unpleasant story of Kapuso broadcaster Arnold Clavio's being declared the father of former OFW Sarah...

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* * *
Balabagan's son, Sarah made this revelation only recently - 21 years after her son was born, in which case, an attorney said Clavio is not liable for child abuse charges since the prescriptive period is between 12 years and one day and 20 years. "If she was 17 when it happened and she filed, there was a crime, but she didn't, so he gets away with it," the lawyer said.

Sarah is reported to have made the revelation upon the insistence of some sectors, and even her present husband allowed her to make the revelation.

If such a prescriptive period applies in Clavio's case, it behooves my good friend, Henry Gozon, president and CEO of Channel 7, to rule on the propriety of an employee's taking advantage of a 17-year-old when she was in that phase of her experience as being at death's door for having killed her Arab employer for raping her. Clavio was one of the reporters covering Sarah's case.

We wait with bated breath for how Clavio's case is treated.

Other developing stories are on the Congressional Committee on Women and Gender Equality (chaired by Bukidnon Rep. Malou Acosta Alba) bills on the creation of a National Filipino Women's Museum and "National Day Against Homophobia, Biphobia, Transphobia, and Other Phobias on Persons of Diverse Sexual Orientation or Gender Identity or expression, or Sex Characteristics (SDGIESC)"

* * *

The COVID-19 pandemic still roams and roars quietly but fatally. I am heartened by the beauty of a poem written and posted on Facebook by my sister-in-law, Rowena Tiempo Torrevillas, a nationally recognized poet who lives in Iowa with my brother, Lemuel. I'm taking the liberty of printing her poem.

SUMMER RAIN

By Rowena Tiempo Torrevillas

The day after the longest day of the year: Summer solstice. Starting today, we get a minute less of daylight. Then it all starts over again. In Paleolithic times, at prehistory's crowning glory, Stonehenge, men calculated exactly the moment the rising sun would send its rays between two precisely distanced rocks, the dawn of time. Today we hear Trump absurdly declaring he alone decides we're free to stop our self-isolation.

These times of distancing are deprived of the simplest affirmations: the kiss that smiles, the pat on the shoulder... We guess at what the eyes really mean. Above the face masks that have turned us into barguards, or highwaymen in the Wild West, or hostages with mouths duct-taped.

In our voluntary isolation, we're sneak thieves of moments with the grandchildren six-feet-away And beyond the glass pane, strangers to ourselves. The virus crowned our days with this abase. We wish the gust of rain sweeping past, overhead, Would last just long enough to cleanse the humid petri dish in intra-species infection of its experiment. Some wrong: a minute shorter in the day of humankind.

RT, Cecil diary entry 6/23/20

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China is considered to be almost reaching its riskiest point as a global power. The most dangerous time for a rising power, like China, is when it is strong enough to feel confident and arouse suspicion from rivals, but not yet powerful enough to ensure its intended new positions of power in the face of resistance. A dual sense of destiny and insecurity can lead to high levels of risk tolerance and, at times, self-fulfilling prophecies of international confrontation.

The challenge for China is that the fears of "China's rise" are no longer being taken lightly. The changing power balance between China and the United States is no longer one that people can simply hope will not and cannot happen. Even the European Union is increasingly concerned by China's economic and regulatory reach, and is taking steps to curtail Chinese investments in critical sectors.

The United States has abandoned its strategy of cajoling and working with China. It has now stepped up its drive to break its dependence on China for technology supply chains and is urging companies to leave China. The US Navy has also maintained a robust operational tempo along the Chinese periphery and engaged in maritime exercises with several countries, including Japan and Australia, and paid a major port visit to Vietnam. Foreign Secretary Teodoro Locsin Jr. has publicly said that if China invades Philippine territory, he will ask the United States for assistance.

China seems increasingly concerned about the results of the US elections. A Biden victory could lead to a change in American international policy. There could be trans-Atlantic economic and political coordination as well as increased trans-Pacific economic and security coordination against China.

For a long time, since the Second World War, Japan has operated under an anti-war constitution. Its armed forces have been strictly defensive oriented. However, a growing more assertive China is accelerating Tokyo's offensive capabilities.

Looking back on its contemporary history, Japan's military core strategy was shaped by the Yoshida doctrine in which Japan largely outsourced its national security to the United States while focusing its energy on economic development at home. It should also be realized that Japan is a resource-poor country and very import dependent. It must protect the sea lanes that connect Japan to Europe, Africa and the United States.

Recently Japan, like the rest of the world, has become insecure about US commitment to its allies. Recently Japan has increased its economic and security engagement in the Indo-Pacific and the South China Sea. Japan has also become a regional alternative to China.

Amidst all these geopolitical changes and challenges, the Philippines must seek the path that will provide the most benefits for the sovereignty of the Filipino people.

An Invitation for Young Writers, ages 8-13:
Young Writers' Hangout is on Zoom on Sept. 12 & 25, 2-3pm. Contact wr@thingspilip.com, 0945.2273216
Email: elfrencruz@gmail.com  
The controversial Saugley Point International Airport project, one of the China-backed multi-billion infrastructure projects greenlighted by the administration, is a joint venture between Lucio Tan’s MacroAsia Corp. and CCC. The Chinese firm not only had a hand in turning Philippine territory in the WPS into militarized Chinese outposts, it was also blacklisted by the World Bank from 2011-2017 over supposed questionable practices in building the Philippines’ National Roads Improvement and Management Project.

But the far bigger anomaly is that a company owned and controlled by the Chinese government will gain access to a strategic area crucial to the defense of Manila, the country’s capital. In a Facebook post in December last year, retired Navy chief Alexander Fama called the project “highly objectionable and even worse,” and said: “Only an idiot will not understand the adverse security implication to our country of this reported win of MacroAsia and its Chinese company partner to purchase Saugley airport. If implemented, it will be a dagger pointed to the heart of the nation!”

Greg Poling of the US-based think tank Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative also noted in a tweet the jarring irony of the Philippines bowing to CCC—the bullied, in effect, rewarding its oppressor: “This is bonkers, Manila to award a multi-billion dollar airport project, and at a strategically vital location, to the same Chinese company that illegally built an artificial island at Mischief Reef in PH waters.”

None of these concerns, unfortunately, has made inroads into the Duterte administration’s slavish stance toward China, despite Foreign Secretary Teodoro Locsin Jr. batting for the termination of the contracts with Chinese companies involved in the WPS reclamation. Samar Rep. Edgar Mary Sarmiento, chair of the House transportation committee, has expressed support for Locsin’s proposal, as “allowing these Chinese companies to operate here is too much of an insult for all Filipinos.” It is, but it’s an insult that is lost, first of all, on Sen. Imee Marcos, who opposed scrapping such onerous deals for markedly defeatist reasons: “Bakit naman tayo magtatanggap-tapatan kung wala namang tayong lutangga?” (Why act brave when we’re really weak?)

And it is an insult that is lost, as usual, on Malacañang, which appears to be in the grip of full-blown Stockholm Syndrome. Explaining President Duterte’s decision to reject the US move and stick it out with China, Roque declared, in high solemn seriousness: “We are not a vassal state of any foreign power.”
Who we want to be

COMMENTS
JOSÉ IGNACIO REYES

I was deeply shaken by the recent torture and death of Randall “Randy” Echanis, chair of Anakpawis and tireless advocate for the poor and landless. When the first reports emerged, I thought it was strange that his killing departed from the usual modus operandi of hired assassins, with which we have regrettably become so familiar: drive-by shootings by hooded and bonneted tandem riders who disappear at once and are never brought to justice.

There was that strange tussle over the body between police and Ka Randy’s family, and the police theory that it might have been an akay-akay gone wrong. Finally, autopsy results showed that, besides suffering the knife wound that fatally ruptured his aorta, he had been hit repeatedly in the head with a blunt weapon, and sustained 12 incised wounds in his back that did not penetrate the lungs—cuts meant to cause pain rather than to kill. In other words, he had been tortured.

Why does this incident shock? It comes on the heels of so many others; one can hardly keep up with the names of killed activists. There was Zara Alvarez, a human rights worker gunned down on the very day of Ka Randy’s funeral. Zaldy Meraya and Bebe Tobino, tagged by the military as communists, and Harold Tablacion and Glenn Bunda, peasant organizer and Sangguniang Kabataan chairperson respectively, were killed on June 20. On May 26, farmer leader Allan “Mario Boy” Aguillanda was shot, becoming the 251st farmer-victim of extrajudicial killings (EJKs) under the Duterte administration, according to farmer group Kilusang Magbabubukid ng Pilipinas. Perhaps it was not surprising that Global Witness reported in July that the Philippines was the second most dangerous country in the world (after Colombia) for environmental and land activists in 2019.

While we are talking about killings, need I mention the thousands of EJKs in the government’s anti-drug campaign? The latest official death count (of suspects who died in anti-drug operations) stands at 5,792, though human rights groups say that the real figure could be several times more. By and large, four years on, we have become inured to this constant stream of killings, in which human life is so casually and inconsequently snuffed out by state policy.

Perhaps it takes the gruesome cruelty of Ka Randy’s torture and killing to shock us, once again, out of our collective stupor. Watching Michelle Obama’s speech at the recent Democratic National Convention in the United States, I was surprised by how much her sentiments echoed my own. “Right now,” she said, “I’m deeply troubled by what our kids are witnessing—a nation that’s underperforming not just on matters of policy, but on matters of character. In our hearts, we know that so much of what’s happening is just not right. It’s not who we want to be.”

Is this who we want to be—a society where human life is cheap and easily discarded, where those who stand up against injustice and speak truth to power are violently silenced while the rest of us look on, discomfited but not particularly moved to act? Where the death penalty is, once again, on the table, even as we know from long experience that violence can never be a true solution to social ills? “I have set before you life and death,” says the God of the Christian scriptures in whom so many of us profess to believe. “Now choose life, so that you and your children may live” (Dt 30:19). What do we choose?

Thankfully, while the situation looks bleak, the seeds of change are already in each of us. Ka Randy, Zara Alvarez, and the many who have laid down their lives, show us that we, too, are capable of great courage, strength, and untiring hope. Pope Francis, another courageous change-maker, reminds us in his encyclical “Laudato Si”: “Human beings, while capable of the worst, are also capable of rising above themselves, choosing again what is good, and making a new start; despite their mental and social conditioning. We are able to take an honest look at ourselves, to acknowledge our deep dissatisfaction, and to embark on new paths to authentic freedom. No system can completely suppress our openness to what is good, true and beautiful, or our God-given ability to respond to his grace at work deep in our hearts.”

Let us not be afraid to choose life, trusting that the forces of death will never overcome it.

Jose Ignacio Reyes is a fellow at the John J. Carroll Institute on Church and Social Issues.
Why the UNGA matters

The locus of world opinion is the United Nations General Assembly or UNGA, where all members of the United Nations are represented. A resolution approved by the UNGA, even when not legally binding, is the expression of world opinion. A state that is rebuffed in the Security Council because of the veto of one of the five permanent members can bring the issue to the UNGA. World opinion matters because a state does not want to be an outcast in the civilized community of nations.

In 1986, when the US refused to comply with an adverse ruling of the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in the Nicaragua v. US case, Nicaragua asked the Security Council to approve a resolution calling for the US to comply with the ruling. The US, a permanent member of the Security Council, promptly vetoed the resolution. Nicaragua then sponsored a resolution in the UNGA demanding that the US comply with the ruling. The resolution passed overwhelmingly, 94 to 3. The following year, Nicaragua again sponsored the same resolution, and this time, only Israel joined the US against the resolution. The US suffered a huge reputational cost as the US appeared like a rogue state. World opinion eventually forced the US, the greatest economic and military power in the world, to strike a face-saving compromise with Nicaragua that effectively complied with the ICJ ruling.

Nicaragua was alone in fighting the US, which violated the territorial integrity of Nicaragua by mining its territorial seas and supplying arms to the Contra rebels. Yet Nicaragua won the support of the world because the ICJ ruling represented the rule of law. The Philippines not only has its UNCLOS arbitral ruling in its favor, it also has the support of four Asean coastal states—Vietnam, Malaysia, Indonesia, and Brunei—whose exclusive economic zones (EEZs) are encroached by the same nine-dash line of China that encroaches on Philippine EEZ. These four Asean coastal states are expected to support the Philippines if it sponsors a resolution in the UNGA calling for China to comply with the ruling in the South China Sea Arbitration.

Before and after the issuance of the arbitral ruling, the G7 countries declared that the Philippines and China must comply with the arbitral ruling. The countries that regularly conduct freedom of navigation and overflight operations in the South China Sea—the US, UK, France, Japan, Australia, Canada, and India—have either expressly or impliedly used the arbitral ruling to justify their naval and aerial operations in the South China Sea. All these countries will certainly support the Philippines in the UNGA.

The small coastal states that depend on UNCLOS to protect their maritime zones will logically also support the Philippines in the UNGA. In 2016, tiny Timor Leste brought Australia before an UNCLOS compulsory conciliation commission to seek a more equitable delineation of its overlapping maritime zones with Australia. In 2018, Australia and Timor Leste reached a compromise settlement based on the proposal of the conciliation commission. Timor Leste and other small coastal states know that UNCLOS protects their maritime zones, and it is in their paramount national interest to uphold UNCLOS.

Most of the 27 European Union states took that position that China and the Philippines must comply with the arbitral ruling. Among the three states that were lukewarm—Greece, Hungary, and Croatia—Greece presents a lesson to other states. Greece was more interested in counting China to invest in the Port of Piraeus than in upholding UNCLOS. However, Greece today is fervently invoking UNCLOS to prevent Turkey from encroaching on the EEZs of its tiny habitable islands in the Aegean Sea.

The dispute in the Aegean Sea should be resolved in accordance with customary international law. Turkey has not ratified UNCLOS, but the UNCLOS provisions on the EEZs are now part of customary international law binding on Turkey. The aim of Turkey is an “equitable solution” to the overlapping EEZs in the Aegean Sea. UNCLOS has an “equitable solution” principle that will benefit Turkey, a principle that has benefited Myanmar in its arbitration with Bangladesh, and Nicaragua in its arbitration with Colombia. In the UNGA, most member states will obviously vote to uphold UNCLOS, which is the paramount national interest of almost all coastal states.
Book review: ‘The Battle of Marawi’

Marov City now lies in ruins, a no man’s land. Grief, terror, and anger remain in the hearts of those who experienced the 2017 battle up close. More so for the soldiers who stared death in the face and cradled comrades felled by gunfire.

Those of us who were not physically there shared in the pain even as colleagues in journalism stalked danger and shuddered fear to get to the heart of the story.

Hot off the press is Griselda Yabes’ latest opus “The Battle of Marawi” (Pawikan Press, 2020). This is Yabes’ 10th book. Though Manila-based, Yabes is no stranger to the landscape of the south.

A story must be told before the embers turn cold. The book is the result of Yabes’ hundreds of post-battle interviews with government forces as well as individuals whose lives had a bearing on the bloody events that transpired from May to October of 2017 in the lakeside city of Marawi in Lanao del Sur. Here, a battle raged between government forces and the IS-inspired Maute group (led by Maute brothers Omar Khayyam and Abdullah) that wanted to turn Marawi into an IS-ruled Islamic city.

Yabes’ story is a blend of investigative and literary journalism. Fast-paced, it reads like a suspense thriller, the pages bursting with artillery and sniper fire and bombs from the air, dripping with blood from mangled heads and severed limbs, and filled with the cries of the wounded and the dying. Cinematic, with lots of dialogue, faces, names. Courage is the Filipino soldier’s name.

Reader, be aware that the story is told mainly from the vantage point of government fighters on the ground and air who, take note, had been trained for jungle counterinsurgency but not for urban warfare. And there lies the crux of the matter.

But be that as it may, through the eyes of these soldiers who fought day after day for five months, one could slowly see, as they did, the nature of the enemy. A deadly force to reckon with, equipped with a battle plan, inspired by a foreign religious ideology that promised heavenly paradise for jihadi fighters. For context, read the author’s prologue and epilogue.

The book is divided into chapters under three main parts: The Race to the Lake (June to July), Trident (August to September), and the Final Days which ends in October. But the story begins earlier when the commander of the Philippine Army’s 1st Division called seven officers for a meeting. The moment they had been waiting for had come. Isnilon Hapilon, top renegade of the Abu Sayyaf faction, was nearing the military’s crosshairs. Or so they thought.

The book provides a map of Marawi and the site of fierce firefights as well as the Marawi military chain of command. Officers and foot soldiers are identified in the story by their call signs—Azalea, Firefox, Raptor, Braveheart, Six-Eight, etc. One answers to the call sign Padre Pio.

One has to go above the sea of military jargon and then dive into the battle scenes, hear the crackle of gunfire, and feel the eerie silences. The first three chapters are jolting but soon one gets into the thick of it, the military maneuvers, the strategies and tactics, the call signs. The what, when, where, how, why. House to house, floor to floor, hole to hole, building to building. The school campus, the bridges, the mosque. The casualties.

I teared up for the foot soldier who saved lives but lost his. I crumpled at the deaths by friendly fire, my heart jumped with every bomb dropped and gasped at split-second decisions that were made.

“Are you young boys with guns. They are marching toward us. Sir, do we shoot the kids?”

“We have no choice. They will come for us.”

The Final Days chapter is the push toward the misty Lanao Lake that spelled the death of Omar Khayyam Maute (Abdullah was presumed to have been killed early on), “the last stand in 1010,” and the release of hostages.

Oh, while in the Raven’s Flight chapter, read between the lines.

Yabes’ count: 188 soldiers, 500 rebels and civilians dead.

Yabes writes: “As in the past, the battle was again an example of reacting to a visible threat that caught them by surprise, rather than preventing and nipping it in the bud.”

Order your copy via “The Battle of Marawi” Facebook page.

Send feedback to cerespc@gmail.com
President Duterte ‘recalibrates’ our China policy

At a two-hour online video forum last Saturday with Ambassador to China Jose Santiago "Chito" Sta. Romana, convened by the Philippine Council for Foreign Relations, or PCFR, this writer asked how Beijing regarded the increasingly assertive recent statements of Foreign Affairs Secretary Teodoro Locsin Jr. Sta. Romana is immensely knowledgeable on China, having lived there since their group of visiting Filipino leftists got stranded by the declaration of martial law in the Philippines nearly four decades ago this month. He was also Beijing news bureau chief for the American Broadcasting Corp., or ABC, covering the People's Republic for 21 years till he retired from the network in 2010.

The envoy said Beijing was not overly disturbed by Secretary Locsin's statements, which have recently aligned with Washington's more combative stance toward Chinese actions in East Asia, including the contentious South China Sea (SCS), recently analyzed by fellow columnist Rigoberto Tiglao (https://www.abs-cbnnews.com/net/2020/08/31/opinion/columnists/topanalysis/locsin-dumps-duertes-china-policy-and-follows-trumps-election-stunt/761499/).

The Philippines, Sta. Romana explained, was "recalibrating" our China policy, asserting sovereignty and sovereign rights while maintaining the strong relations forged under President Rodrigo Duterte, reversing the confrontational approach of his predecessor Benigno Aquino 3rd.

The ambassador pointed out that the Philippines maintains positive ties with Malaysia and Vietnam, despite territorial disputes with them in the Spratly Islands. So, he argues, why can't we have cordiality with China while constantly espousing our sovereign interests?

Indeed, his boss Locsin recently reiterated the Philippine claim to the North Borneo region of Sabah, integrated into Malaysia.
since 1959. Predictably, Kuala Lumpur bristled at the Locsin location, but no further public dissatisfaction was expected.

Now, with President Duterte himself mixing up his Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) chief’s urging to blacklist Chinese state enterprises involved in SCS reclamation and bases construction, as the US has done, Beijing has even less reason to fret over Locsin’s tough talk. Thus, with the DFA’s remarks, the administration gets to counter claims of kowtowing to China. But Duterte keeps the drama from becoming a real confrontation damaging long-term ties.

Pass the popcorn, please

So, was it all playacting for the nation and the media? Well, Tuglao rightly argued that US President Donald Trump’s tough stance against China, played up in Asia by US Secretary of State Michael Pompeo, was meant to boost Trump’s voter ratings, as confrontations normally do for the commander in chief.

If Trump does it, why not Duterte?

The latter can’t run for reelection in 2022, but he still wants his camp to retain power. And as this column argued in March, Washington, Beijing and their Filipino supporters aim to get their favored presidentiale into Malacañang, having seen how Duterte recast regional security by dismantling Aquino’s anti-China, pro-America policy (https://www.manilatimes.net/2020/03/05/opinion/columnists/the-manoeuvering-for-the-2022-elections-has-begun/700318/).

In this Sino-American battle for Filipino votes, done through local allies, the US and its backers in Philippine politics, business, and media have been effectively stirring up fear and hostility toward China, helped by SCS incidents like the collisions of Filipino fishing boats and China-flagged vessels, maritime moves by China’s People’s Liberation Army, or PLA, and the coronavirus disease 2019 blamed by many on China.

Those seeking to demonize Beijing now get big boosts from President Trump, his state and defense secretaries, the US State Department, and American allies in Asia and Europe, all played up by major international media. In addition, Beijing’s assertive stance on territorial issues, including warnings against Philippine Air Force patrols in the Spratlys, further antagonizes Filipinos.

Also fueling anti-China sentiment is the nation’s longstanding distrust of China. In the July Social Weather Stations (SWS) poll, China had a net trust rating of minus-36 percent versus plus-42 for the US. Hence, when Washington and its local allies accuse Beijing, Filipinos listen.

With this burgeoning anti-China agitation, maintaining the administration’s perceived pro-China stance would tend to push Filipinos toward the pro-US opposition and cast the ruling camp as selling out to Beijing.

That’s certainly how the government’s reluctance to ban flights from China early in the contagion was lambasted. Even though the World Health Organization, or WHO, advised against closing borders as late as February. Also decried is Duterte allowing Chinese online gaming operations, even though Beijing actually opposes them.

If you can’t beat them...

So, what’s the Duterte camp to do in the face of this escalating anti-China agitation? Well, if you can’t beat them, join them.

That may explain why both Locsin and Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana have ratcheted up their anti-China, pro-US rhetoric since the fourth anniversary of the July 2016 ruling by the Permanent Court of Arbitration, or PCA, in the Hague against China’s “nine-dash line” claim over nearly all the South China Sea.

This “recalibration” of China relations even seems coordinated with Washington’s latest messaging against Beijing, citing not China’s SCS moves, but also the blacklisting of Chinese enterprises involved in SCS island-building, which Secretary Pompeo announced weeks before Locsin’s push for similar sanctions.

The latter also spoke of calling on America if the PLA attacks the Philippines. The 1951 US-Philippines Mutual Defense Treaty provides for both countries to respond under their respective “constitutional processes” to an 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. US officials had said before that the treaty covers the SCS as part of the Western Pacific.

Won’t this change in tune rekindle Chinese hostility? Not if China isn’t threatened.

This writer asked Ambassador Sta. Romana how Beijing will respond if the Philippines implements the 2014 Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement, expanding US forces in the country with access to our bases.

The envoy said it’s crucial to avoid actions threatening China. That presumably includes hosting nuclear-capable American vessels and aircraft. Plus, Beijing knows our democracy and should tolerate anti-China rhetoric to neutralize a potential election issue against the Duterte camp.

So, enjoy the Locsin-Lorenzana Show.
Refreshing it is that this government is finally speaking up firmly against China's blatant rudeness and underhanded bullying. Taking the other option of sitting idly in diplomatic silence despite of an in-your-face insult is untenable and deplorable.

So, it is a pleasant surprise Foreign Secretary Teodoro Locsin Jr. is taking a vociferous exception to China's Foreign Ministry mouthpiece admonishing the country for allegedly violating China's sovereignty and security by sending military aircraft into airspace adjacent to islands and reefs being illegally occupied by China.

Rare as it was, Mr. Locsin's flamboyant indignation and subsequent positions were generally welcomed by both reluctant allies of Mr. Duterte and the vocal opposition.

"Kudos to DFA Secretary Teddy Boy Locsin for putting the Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman in his place. Banning us from sending our military aircraft into airspace near Panatag Shoal surely deserves a strong rebuke. I'm proud that our top foreign policy implementer did it," said Senator Panfilo Lacson.

"China's display of arrogance by accusing us of infringing on its sovereignty and security by sending military aircraft into airspace adjacent to Panatag Shoal/Raja de Maguilloc, urging the Philippines to immediately stop illegal provocations, tops it all," Lacson added.

Here, Lacson means to say weren't provoking anybody when our aircraft were flying over our own territory.

While a few cautioned for tempered words — using again the well-worn bogey we can't match China militarily — Mr. Locsin deserves our support. We surely can't mince words and be forever bound by politeness in the face of disrespect.

At any rate, it does seem Mr. Locsin, or for that matter the Palace, since no other senior official contradicted him, has had enough of politeness, too.

Being too polite does seem like tricking oneself into the comforting feeling of having a "real" and "true" self beneath the politeness performance. Resorting to this trick is utterly useless now. Time to speak out now or be forever silent.

We should also refuse China's drivel about us and them being in some sort of parasitical "friend-zone." This "friend-zone" only masks a form of tyrannical arbitrary power, leaving us with the choice of either retaining our ingenious niceness or adopting more Machiavellian strategies in order to avoid a nice guy's dreadful fate.

If ever there is the greatest trick which China ever pulled, it is her convincing the world its arbitrary power doesn't exist.

Such power-inflicted thinking is incompatible with whatever friendship China wants. Whatever relationship is there is one which keeps the
advantaged at an advantage over the disadvantaged.

At any rate, it is time we also play up our advantages while we still can as we strengthen the country's diplomatic posture in the West Philippine Sea.

Advantages which take form with Mr. Loesin's rare remarks explicitly saying that the Philippines will invoke its 1994 Mutual Defense Treaty with the US if China attacks a Philippine naval vessel in the West Philippine Sea.

The defense treaty says Mr. Loesin, is the country's “greatest assurance of national defense.”

Aside from invoking the defense treaty with the US, Mr. Loesin is also strongly going by US moves to blacklist two dozen Chinese state-owned companies behind the massive land reclamation in the contested waters.

Since 2013, China has dredged and constructed outposts and bases. Some of these outposts have air defense and anti-ship missile weapons.

To make matters practicable, Mr. Loesin recommends the termination of existing contracts the country has with these blacklisted Chinese companies.

Among the blacklisted companies are several subsidiaries of China Construction & Communications Corporation (CCCC).

CCCC has been awarded at least one local contract for the construction of the $500 billion international airport in Sangley Point, Cavite.

Cavite Governor Jonic Remulla says the joint venture between CCCC and local firm MacroAsia is “about to be completed but is not perfected yet.”

Even if any action done against blacklisted firms sounds slavishly pro-American, there is still need to thoroughly examine the contract.

"Being too polite does seem like tricking oneself into the comforting feeling of having a ‘real’ and ‘true’ self beneath the politeness performance."

Allowing a Chinese contractor which had actively built dangerous bases directly pointing at us is more than irony. It is heightened stupidity.

So, anything which makes us more stupid than we already are should force us to reexamine whatever “friendly” relationship we have with China. Nothing beneficial will come out in the long run of such a relationship. It is not even an independent foreign policy.