

DAILY NEWS CLIPPINGS

06 March 2015

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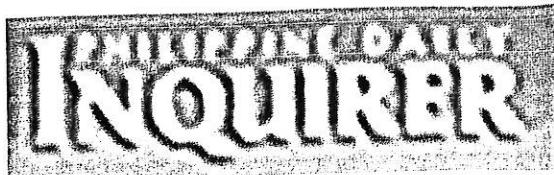
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Ex-AFP chiefs cry for peace

Academics urge P-Noy to take responsibility

By Nikko Dizon

THEY are warriors who, in two separate venues and by happenstance, joined sober voices calling for peace, not war, during a forum yesterday, the 39th day since the Mamasapano fiasco.

During the gathering sponsored by academics and international agencies, President Aquino was urged to show statesmanship and acknowledge responsibility for the botched raid that led to the slaughter of 44 police commandos in Maguindanao province on Jan. 25.

"Unfortunately what has been lost in Mamasapano is the trust in the presidency," said Sedfrey Candelaria, dean of Ateneo Law School. "It takes a lot of humility on the part of the presidency to once and for all say that 'I am accountable as the Commander in Chief of all the

Armed Forces of the Philippines."

"If only to save the peace process perhaps we should think as a nation to help the President walk through this process. It's very difficult, but if we go through it perhaps that is the tipping point we are waiting for," Candelaria said.

Coincidentally, also yesterday, a young Special Action Force (SAF) commando who took part in the Mamasapano operation that neutralized Malaysian terrorist Zulkifli bin Hir, alias "Marwan," posted an online petition asking people to support the peace process and abandon "demands for an all-out war."

Retired generals Rodolfo Biazon and Emmanuel Bautista, who both served as chief of staff of the Armed Forces of the Philippines, made a similar plea for peace during the peace forum in Makati City.

In sum, these three men said that those calling for war in the aftermath of Mamasapano did not know what it was like to see blood spilled, to live in fear.

The SAF trooper, who used the pseudonym "Jason Navarro," uploaded his petition on the global online platform, Change.org, at 7 a.m. By 5 p.m., the petition has 335 supporters.

"I lost 44 of my comrades and was wounded in battle. I will carry physical and emotional scars for life. Even so, I grieve to hear demands for 'all-out war.' For I, too, am a child of Mindanao. In childhood, I watched the flight of thousands of people from nearby towns. Entire families desperately seeking safe haven, war having obliterated their communities," Navarro said.

Mothers, children

"I wrote this petition to give voice to the many who share my

belief in peace. I write for the countless mothers who have seen offspring sacrificed to war. No mother wants to see her child with a gun, not even when their husbands are warriors. Mothers and children suffer the most. No prize, no victory will ease their pain. War does not distinguish among faiths. War snuffs out lives—Filipino lives," he added.

As the saber-rattling in Manila became more pronounced in the Senate investigation, the media, and on Facebook, the commando said the villagers he saw in the cornfields on Jan. 25 filled his mind—the women and children fleeing for their lives.

"I couldn't forget their worried faces. There was a mother pulling a carabao with a wagon where her children sat with their belongings," the commando said.

do said. He initiated the petition, addressed to the government, because "it is them, the women and children, whom I want to protect."

Scared of war

At the forum, Bautista was introduced by Biazon as the "son of a general who was killed while pursuing peace."

"I was 37 years old when I was fighting in Jolo together with the father of General Bautista. Now I am 80, and the reason for which General Bautista's father died is still the problem we have to address," Biazon said.

"It is going to be a very difficult one but we cannot abandon the search for peace. We cannot drop the Bangsamoro Basic Law. I am scared of the possibili-

ty of the collapse of the peace process," Biazon said. "I am scared of war."

Peace ultimate justice

Brig. Gen. Teodulfo Bautista and 33 other officers and men were gunned down by Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) rebels in Patikul on Oct. 10, 1977, when they arrived unarmed for a meeting with MNLF leader Usman Sali to talk about a ceasefire.

The younger Bautista was then a cadet at the Philippine Military Academy.

Bautista admitted that he had also thought of avenging his father's death, that he was overcome by anger and rage. "But later on, you come to realize that what kind of justice would you want to achieve? My father

had advocated peace. What was the purpose of him giving up his life? Should I turn my back on that and perpetuate conflict?" Bautista told reporters.

At the forum, he said "justice is served when we give peace. Peace is the ultimate justice we can get."

Inclusive charter

Philippine Council for Islam and Democracy president Amina Rasul-Bernardo said that as the peace process moved along in the past four years, "everyone thought we were seeing the light at the end of the tunnel."

"We didn't know it was [instead] a train," Bernardo said.

Almost all the speakers said the passage of a good Bangsamoro Basic Law (BBL) should be the next step to attain peace.

"It is not a cure all to all the problems in Mindanao but it will create the conditions, the prospects of peace and prosperity if we have a representative and inclusive BBL," said Sen. Sonny Angara.

Successful mission

Abhoud Syed Lingga, an MILF peace negotiator, said that part of moving on was the acceptance that the SAF had a successful mission, that of taking down international terrorist Zulkifli bin Hir, alias "Marwan."

"We were drowned in the issue of what led to the deaths. We should disaggregate the issue and then we can move forward," Lingga said, stressing that he was speaking as an academic and not as an MILF negotiator.

Lingga said that the Bangsamoro people, and not just the MILF, continued to support the peace process and the passage of the BBL.

"Although the BBL [aims] to devolve [certain powers] to the Bangsamoro region, it will not lead to dismemberment of the Philippines. Moros are Filipino citizens and the Bangsamoro region will even strengthen the central government," Lingga said.

Stop finger-pointing

Misamis Occidental Rep. Henry Oaminal, vice chair of the Ad Hoc Committee on the BBL, said everyone should "refocus" on the BBL and "calm the emotions" in the aftermath of the Mamasapano tragedy.

"We should minimize the finger-pointing," he said. Calling for justice for the deaths of all those who were killed in Mamasapano was right, he added, "to make sure that what happened would not happen again."

"But the passage of the BBL remains very important," Oaminal said, adding that there would certainly be amendments "but not a watered down law."

80% of House to back BBL amendments

Provisions to be scrutinized 'section by section'

By JESS DIAZ

At least 80 percent of 290 members of the House of Representatives want changes in the proposed Bangsamoro Basic Law (BBL) and would reject the measure in its current form if it were put to a vote, two Mindanao congressmen said yesterday.

"I would say 80 percent to 90 percent want changes in the draft. If the proposed legislation is put to a vote in its present form, I would say the same 80 percent to 90 percent will reject it," Zamboanga City Rep. Celso Lobregat said.

Lobregat is a member of the ad hoc committee on the draft BBL, which Cagayan de Oro City Rep. Rufus Rodriguez chairs.

"I will reiterate – we are for peace, we are not anti-peace, but we want the BBL to be fair, just, acceptable, feasible and, more importantly, consistent with the Constitution and the law," he said.

He said the draft would undergo scrutiny and rewriting in the committee and in plenary "provision by provision, section by section."

"We have so many concerns

that we want addressed in the final product," he said.

Davao City Rep. Karlo Nograles agreed with Lobregat that most House members would vote for changes and would not accept the BBL draft.

"I think all of us congressmen and congresswomen are for peace. All of us want a law, a Bangsamoro law that we imagine will usher in a new era of peace for Mindanao. So there is really no one blocking passage of such law. No one, except that we have our different concerns with the present version of the proposed law," he said.

"Of course there are some congressmen who are giving certain conditions, but those conditions, like the surrender of those involved in the killing of our 44 policemen in Mamasapano and the return of the

remaining firearms, those are just a way for us to gain confidence (in the Moro Islamic Liberation Front). Those are just confidence building measures. But I think no one in Congress – both in the Senate and the House – is against passing a just, constitutional and legal Bangsamoro law," he said.

Lobregat said aside from several provisions Rodriguez has declared as constitutionally questionable, many Mindanao congressmen want the issue on the decommissioning of MILF forces addressed in the law itself, rather than in an executive agreement.

"It should be included in the law, so that when there is a violation, it is a violation of law, instead of an executive agreement," he said.

Timeline worries

Lobregat said they have another concern on decommissioning – timeline. He said that with only 30 percent of MILF armed forces set for decommissioning by the time a plebiscite and election of new regional officers are held, the rebels would have 70 percent of their arms during the plebiscite and election.

Nograles cited unresolved issues regarding the justice system in the envisioned Bangsamoro region.

"So if a Muslim commits a crime in the Bangsamoro region, would he be under the jurisdiction of a regular court or a Shariah or Muslim court? Will they have their own judicial process?" he asked.

For his part, Rep. Lito Atienza of party-list group Buhay said, "Everyone in Congress is for peace, but peace that is right, just, legal and constitutional."

"We don't want peace at all cost. But while peace is a common goal all of us are striving for, we cannot ignore the inherent constitutional infirmities of the proposed BBL, such as the establishment of a parliamentary form of government in the Bangsamoro within our presidential system, as well as having its own police force," he said.

Timetable irrelevant

At the Senate, Sen. Miriam Defensor-Santiago said setting a timetable for the passage of the BBL is irrelevant, as the measure would inevitably land in the Supreme Court if it gets approved.

Emerging from a hearing of the Senate committee on foreign relations, Santiago told reporters that BBL, in its present form, contains several provisions that are unconstitutional.

Santiago also argued that the President, through his alter egos in the government peace panel, does not have the sole authority to negotiate for an arrangement that in effect would create a sub-state.

"What is the constitutional basis for the authority to negotiate on the part of the Philippine government? The President simply assumed that he had the power. That is not so," Santiago said.

"Where is the Senate authorization for the President to conduct these negotiations sometimes called the peace process? He does not have an instrument of that nature. He just assumed that he had the power but he does not," she added.

Santiago, who also heads the Senate committee on constitutional amendments, revision of codes and laws, pointed out that under the Constitution, the President cannot act on foreign relations without the concurrence of the Senate.

"If the Constitution requires that the President cannot move in foreign relations unless he has the concurrence of the Senate, how much more does the spirit of the Constitution require that there should be Senate concurrence when the President authorizes a so-called peace process through a so-called peace panel," she said.

She cited an "abundance of unconstitutional features" in the BBL as government negotiators "thought they can negotiate away certain parts of the Constitution."

She added the BBL would even infringe on the country's sovereignty because the parliament in the proposed Bangsamoro would be granted exclusive powers.

"If their powers are exclusive, that means that they exclude even the powers of our own state. So this is really much more complicated than what the negotiators think," Santiago said.

She advised the administration to consider the option of renegotiating the process all over again to avoid the scenario of the BBL getting declared unconstitutional by the Supreme Court.

In a statement, the Philippine Military Academy Alumni Association Inc. is calling on the administration to take lessons from the Mamasapano incident and have the BBL undergo closer review.

Constitutional

But for Justice Secretary Leila de Lima, there is nothing unconstitutional in the proposed BBL. At Malacañang, Presidential Communications Operations Office Secretary Herminio Coloma Jr. also reiterated President Aquino's message to lawmakers that the Mamasapano incident should underpin the need for the passage

of the BBL.

De Lima said the BBL had gone through careful scrutiny by the Department of Justice and other concerned agencies.

"As part of the executive, I support the BBL. They consulted with me the justice system portion, and we support that," she said.

"The draft has been approved for presentation in Congress," she pointed out.

De Lima's pronouncement was in response to Negros Occidental Rep. Albee Benitez's request that she come up with a legal opinion on the matter.

A member of the government peace panel, for her part, rejected claims by some lawmakers that the BBL would allow pork allocation for the Bangsamoro.

"There is no provision in the BBL stating that the Bangsamoro will receive P75 billion. That is clear if we read the proposed BBL," National Commission for Muslim Filipinos Secretary Yasmin Busran-Lao said. She also quipped "pork" is forbidden among Muslims.

Lao said the BBL simply aims to alleviate poverty in areas being proposed to be part of the Bangsamoro.

She also belied claims by BBL detractors that Bangsamoro spending would be exempted from Commission on Audit (COA) scrutiny.

"If they've read the BBL at all, they'll know that the auditing

system in the proposed Bangsamoro will be conducted on two levels. The internal auditing to be conducted by the Bangsamoro will be subject to the auditing of the national COA," she said. "Because of this, it will be really hard to commit corruption in the Bangsamoro."

Former ambassador Macabangkit Lanto bewailed what he called a disinformation campaign being waged against the BBL.

In a statement, Lanto said nothing in the BBL provides for an independent and separate Commission on Elections, Commission on Human Rights, Civil Service Commission, ombudsman and police force.

Non-government organizations (NGO) advocating for the rights of children called on lawmakers yesterday to continue pursuing peace through the crafting of BBL.

Meanwhile, a coalition of more than 20 child-focused organizations called Bata Muna urged Congress to strengthen the proposed BBL by including a specific provision for the protection of children in situations of armed conflict.

Close to 40,000 children have been displaced by fighting in Maguindanao and North Cotabato between government forces and rebels. – **With Marvin Sy, Edu Punay, Jose Rodel Clapano, Roel Pareño, Alexis Romero, Jaime Laude, Delon Porcalla, Helen Flores**

AFP appoints new spokesman

By Zaida delos Reyes-Palanca

THE Armed Forces of the Philippines has a new spokesman in the person of Brig. Gen. Joselito Kakilala, who replaced Col. Restituto Padilla.

Kakilala, appointed chief of the Civil Relations Service last February, assumed his new post on Thursday.

Kakilala, a member of the Philippine Military Academy Class 1984 "Maharlika," was awarded as Outstanding Philippine Soldier in 2008.

He also served as chief of the AFP Strategic Studies and Strategy Management.

Kakilala commanded the 903rd Brigade that launched successful operations against communist rebels in Sorsogon.

Kakilala also received three Distinguished Service Stars; a Gold Cross Medal, the third highest award for bravery; four Bronze Cross Medals; several military merit medals; wounded personnel medal; and various awards and decorations.

The awards and recognition he received include Presidential Lingkod Bayan Award in 2011; the Cavalier Award for Army Operations in 2009 from



the Philippine Military Academy (PMA); one of the Ten Outstanding Philippine Soldiers (TOPS) by the Rotary Club of Makati Metro Manila and Metrobank Foundation in 2014.

Kakilala is new AFP spokesman

Brig. Gen. Joselito Kakilala formally assumed his new post as spokesman of the 120,000-strong Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) yesterday.

He replaced Col. Restituto Padilla Jr. during short ceremonies at the Del Pilar Lounge at AFP headquarters in Camp Aguinaldo, Quezon City.

Kakilala, who recently assumed command of the Civil Relations Service, will join the ranks of CRS commanders who also served as AFP spokesmen.

Among them are retired Generals Honesto Isleta, Oscar Florendo, Victor Garcia, Alexander Yano and Jose Mabanta.

AFP spokespersons are usually general or flag officers who serve in concurrent capacity.

The designation of the new CRS commander as new spokesperson is consistent with the realignment of assignments in the AFP aimed at facilitating a more proactive posture on public affairs, public information and civil-military relations.

AFP chief-of-staff General Gregorio Pio Catapang Jr. has commended Padilla for his splendid job as a spokesperson.

For three months, Padilla successfully articulated the AFP's messages to the public on burning issues including the military's challenges in social media, the rescue of Abu Sayyaf hostages, Sulu and Basilan military operations, the Papal Visit, and the Mamasapano encounter.

Padilla was appointed as AFP spokesman in December following the retirement of Major Gen. Domingo Tutaan Jr. and in addition to a primary designation last year as Assistant J-7.



KAKILALA

He will now work full-time as the Assistant Deputy Chief of Staff for Civil Military Operations, J-7, the office that leads the formulation of strategies, policies, and plans for all Civil Military Operations of the AFP and a critical staff of the AFP's IPSP "Bayanihan."

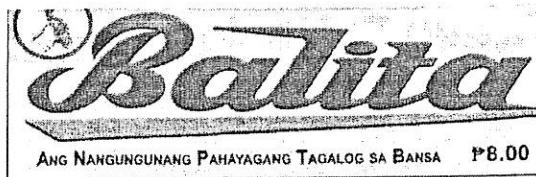
Prior to his current post, he was the Philippine Liaison to the United States Pacific Command in Hawaii and received the US Defense Meritorious Service Medal for his work in planning and execution of Philippine-US military programs under the MDB-SEB.

Kakilala is expected to feel comfortable in his new assigned task, having served as spokesman in the Philippine Army in 2003.

He also earned valuable field experience as commander of the 48th Infantry Battalion and 903rd Infantry Brigade.

Kakilala, an awardee of The Outstanding Philippine Soldiers in 2008, also received the Presidential Lingkod Bayan Award in 2011 and the Award for Continuing Excellence and Service in 2014.

3 PNA



Bagong tagapagsalita ng AFP, itinalaga

Itinalaga ni Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) Chief of Staff Gen. Gregorio Pio Catapang Jr. ang isang beteranong mandirigma laban sa mga rebelde bilang bagong tagapagsalita ng Hukbong Sandatahan.

Papalitan ni Brig. Gen. Joselito "Joey" Kakilala si Col. Restituto Padilla bilang tagapagsalita ng AFP. Samantala, mananatili rin si Kakilala bilang hepe ng AFP Civil Relations Service (CRS) na nakabase sa Camp Aguinaldo sa Quezon City.

Isang miyembro ng Philippine Military Academy (PMA) Class 1984, pinamununan ni Kakilala ang AFP Strategic Studies and Strategy Management bago siya naupo bilang CRS commander.

"Brig. Gen. Kakilala earned a reputation characterized by successful stints in combat and administrative leadership and academic excellence. He had also previously served in the CRS as its Chief of Staff, providing him with the wealth of experience needed by a Commander," pahayag ni Catapang.

Sinabi ng AFP chief na hindi lang kinikilala ang magandang track record at reputasyon ni Kakilala sa organisasyon kundi maging sa ibang sangay ng gobyerno at civil society organization, dapat lang na maitalaga ito bilang AFP-CRS chief.

Bukod dito, malaki rin ang karanasan ni Kakilala bilang combat officer sa Central Luzon at Bicol, nang pamunuan niya ang 45th Infantry Battalion at 903rd Infantry Brigade na nakasungkit ng parangal

na "Best Battalion in 2006" at "Best Brigade in 2013 and 2014."

Ang kanyang agresibong kampanya sa Bicol bilang commander ng 903rd IB ay nagresulta sa neutralization ng ilang lider ng New People's Army-Bicol Regional Party Committee.

Nahasa rin ang galing sa larangan ng tactical operations ni Kakilala nang maitalaga siya sa bulubunduking lugar ng Basilan, Surigao at Agusan na roon nakasagupa ng kanyang tropa ang mga rebelde at bandido.

Noong 2008, pinarangalan si Kakilala bilang isa sa Ten Outstanding Philippine Soldiers (TOPS) ng Rotary Club of Makati Metro at Metrobank Foundation, Inc.

Elena L. Aben

4

SALUDO KAMI!

Misa, inialay sa SAF 44

Ni Bella Gamotea

Isinagawa kahapon ang isang misa sa Shrine of Saint Therese sa Pasay City bilang pagpupugay at pagkilala sa 44 Philippine National Police-Special Action Force (PNP-SAF) commando na namatay sa operasyon sa Mamasapano, Maguindanao noong Enero 25.

Dinaluhan ang misa ng personnel na mula sa PNP, Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP), Bureau of Fire Protection (BFP), Bureau of Jail Management and Penology (BJMP) at mga sibilyan kasabay ng paggunita sa ika-40 araw sa nangyaring Mamasapano carnage.

Nabatid na nakuisa sa misa si AFP Chief of Staff Gregorio Pio Catapang Jr.

Ilang aktibidad ang inilinya para sa nasabing okasyon, kabilang ang prayer activity sa Ateneo de Manila University (ADMU) at Embahada ng Pilipinas sa Washington DC.

Gumawa naman ng mural at bantayog bilang pagkilala sa 44 SAF ang

Quezon city-based artists' group.

Patuloy ang pag-iimbestiga ng ilang ahensiya ng gobyerno sa nangyaring insidente sa Mamasapano at maging ang Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) na nalagasan din ng 18 mandirigma sa naturang madugong baktakan.

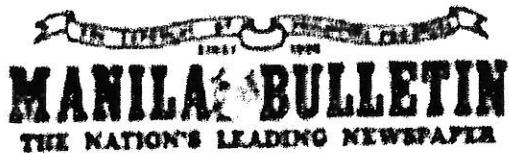
Pinalawig pa ng pamahalaan ang pagbibigay ng tulong pinansiyal at iba pang benepisyto para sa mga nauilang pamilya ng 44 SAF.

May kaltas na P30 sa suweldo ang mga miyembro ng AFP na boluntaryong magbibigay ng kontribusyon para sa dagdag na financial assistance sa mga pamilya ng namatay na SAF members.

Unang nagkalooob ang Makati government ng tig-P100,000 check sa mga pamilya ng 44 SAF at nag-alok pa ng libreng pag-aaral sa unibersidad na pinapatakbo ng lokal na pamahalaan at medical benefits sa Ospital ng Makati.

Bukod dito, inayudahan nito ang mga nasugatang SAF member at ang Forgotten 19 na kabilang sa operasyon sa Mamasapano. Z

Ok March 2015

**MANILA BULLETIN**
THE NATION'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

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» **'Valor' fund**

Pangasinan Second District Representative Leopoldo Bataoil, a former police general, has filed a measure that would hasten the release of the monthly gratuity and pension of "Medal of Valor" awardees from the Philippine National Police (PNP). The proposed Bill seeks to transfer the budget of the awardees' monthly gratuity and privileges from the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) to the Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG). He said "our PNP Medal of Valor awardees have a hard time claiming their gratuities because Section 7 of Republic Act (RA) 9049 provides that the amount necessary for implementation of the law shall be charged to the AFP appropriations." Aside from amending the problematic clause, the budget should be transferred to the DILG, which has operational and supervisory control over the PNP.
(Ellison A. Quismorio)

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Palace verifying reports on WWII ship wreck

By DELON PORCALLA

The Philippine government is in the process of verifying news reports that Microsoft co-founder Paul Allen found in Sibuyan Sea a Japanese ship that sank during the World War II, a Palace spokesman said yesterday.

"The reported discovery of the Japanese battleship *Musashi* by the group of Mr. Paul Allen is now being verified by the National Museum and other concerned government agencies," said Presidential Communications Operations Office Secretary Herminio Coloma Jr.

According to Coloma, officials of the National Museum are "closely coordinating" with the stakeholders concerned, including the Romblon provincial government, where the shipwreck was reportedly found.

"The discovery of an archeological artifacts such as this is covered by Republic Act 10066 or the National Cultural Heritage Act of 2009," Coloma said.

Officials will also be coordinating with billionaire Allen and his US-based organization.

"We will await the verification being done now by the National Museum. They are the lead agency of government in doing what is needed regarding this development," Coloma said.

Meanwhile, the military yesterday welcomed the finding of the *Musashi*.

"It's a historical artifact and hopefully, the discovery will show that it is not good to wage war," Armed Forces spokesman Brig. Gen. Joselito Kakilala said.

Kakilala said the ship is also a potential tourist attraction.

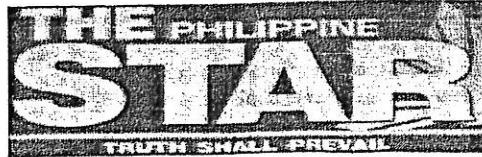
In a Twitter post on Wednesday, Allen revealed that he found the wreck of the long-lost World War II Japanese battleship near the Sibuyan Sea at the south of Luzon.

He posted images on the social networking site that allegedly showed the *Musashi*, once one of the two largest warships in the world. The wreckage of the warship was reportedly discovered by Allen's yacht, the *M/Y Octopus*, last March 1 as part of an expedition he launched.

The search has taken Allen and his team of researchers more than eight years.

The images and video were taken by an unmanned submersible deployed from the vessel.  - With Alexis Romero

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Samar mayor to police, military: Beef up security amid NPA extortion

CALBAYOG CITY – The mayor here has asked the police and military to tighten security in the city amid reports of extortion activities by communist rebels.

At the recent meeting of the Joint Peace and Security Coordinating Council, Mayor Ronaldo Aquino also asked the Army's 8th Infantry Division and the Samar police office to intensify their intelligence operations.

Lt. Col. Seigfred Tubalado, commander of the 43rd In-

fantry Battalion (IB), said they have recovered documents showing that the Eastern Visayas committee of the Communist Party of the Philippines has collected around P1.2 million in monthly "revolutionary taxes" from Calbayog.

In a multi sectoral peace forum held in Basey town on Wednesday, Lt. Col. Antonio Dulnuan Jr., commander of the 87th IB, called on concerned sectors not to provide funds to communist insurgents.

A25 – Ricky Bautista

Two NPA commanders, 11 of their cohorts nabbed in Caloocan, Quezon cities

Joint military and police operatives arrested two New People's Army (NPA) commanders and 11 others during law enforcement operations in Caloocan City and Quezon City last Wednesday night.

Armed with three search warrants numbers 5044(15) to 5046(15) for Violation of Republic Act 10591 (Comprehensive Firearms and Ammunitions Regulation Act), personnel from Philippine National Police (PNP) and Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) swooped down on Barangays Urduja and 168 Deparo in Caloocan City and Barangay Kaligayahan in Quezon City Wednesday night.

The raid resulted in the arrest of at least 13 persons and the confiscation of assorted illegal firearms and explosives, AFP public affairs office chief Lt. Col. Harold Cabunoc said.

Among those arrested were suspected NPA commanders Emmanuel Bacarra and Ruben Saluta.

Presentacion Estrada Saluta, another suspected member of NPA, was also arrested in the operation.

Bacarra used to command his NPA forces in Mindoro while the male Saluta had his group in Panay.

They carried out extortion activities like burning of buses and facilities in their localities, Cabunoc said.

Their cohorts — Enrique Ruiz, Eduardo Garcia, Leilani Marasigan, Roy Zulueta Baldostamo, Veraflor Santillan Guevarra, Emmanuel Estudillo Villamor, Policarpio Herrera and Miguel Domingo Cortez — were also captured as a consequence of holding the firearms and explosives in their possession during the search.

The Salutas and Bacarra have criminal records ranging from murder to arson and were issued warrants of arrest by courts in provinces of Quezon, Antique and Occidental Mindoro (Criminal case No. 2646-S).

Records show they were also positively identified as members of

the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP)-NPA-National Democratic Front (NDF) and were filed with case of violation of Republic Act 6968, otherwise known as the Anti-Rebellion Act of the Philippines.

"Our operatives have been working on these cases for several months to identify the suspects engaged in different criminal activities in Southern Tagalog Regions. Our operatives from PNP and AFP shared intelligence information, compared notes until they were able to positively identify these personalities," Cabunoc stressed.

"Our law enforcers had ensured that the basic rights of the suspects were protected during their arrest. They are considered innocent unless proven otherwise in a court of law," he added.

Cabunoc said the AFP and PNP would continuously work together to protect the people from lawless elements to bring justice and to maintain peace and order in our communities.

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NPA leaders nabbed in Caloocan, QC

JOINT military and police forces arrested New People's Army leaders and several cohorts in separate operations in Caloocan and Quezon cities on Wednesday night.

The military said three NPA leaders and 10 of their cohorts were arrested while the PNP said only two NPA leaders and six cohorts were nabbed.

AFP public affairs office chief Lt. Col. Harold Cabunoc said the operations were mounted after several

months of planning to account for insurgents who have pending arrest warrants.

He identified the NPA leaders as Emmanuel Bacarra, Ruben Saluta, and Presentacion Estrada Saluta. He said they are operating in Mindoro and Panay.

Cabunoc said the 13 were arrested in operations in barangays Urduja and 168 Deparo, both in Caloocan City, and in barangay Kaligayahan in Quezon City. The suspects yielded

firearms and explosives.

Cabunoc said the NPA leaders have pending cases ranging from murder, arson and rebellion, pending before the courts of Quezon, Antique and Occidental Mindoro.

Cabunoc could not immediately say if the 10 others are NPA members but he said they were arrested because they were in the company of the three NPA rebels and they yielded firearms and explosives.

— *Victor Reyes and Raymond Africa*

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11 NPA rebels nabbed in Caloocan, QC

By Alfred Dalizon

COMBINED agents of the Philippine National Police and the Armed Forces on Wednesday arrested eight men suspected to be members of the Communist Party of the Philippines/New People's Army in separate operations in Caloocan and Quezon cities, a report to PNP officer-in-charge Deputy Director General Leonardo A. Espina said yesterday.

PNP Criminal Investigation and Detection Group chief Director Benjamin B. Magalang said Ruben Saluta alias 'Ompong,' Precientation Saluta, Enrique Belmonte and Eduardo Garcia were arrested in a raid at the North Olympus Subdivision in Barangay Urduja, Quezon City.

Saluta is an NPA commander who is the subject of a warrant of arrest for rebellion with no bail recommended.

Another suspect identified as Policarpio Herrera was arrested for illegal possession of firearms and ammunition also inside North Olympus Subdivision.

In another operation inside Celia Subdivision in Deparo, Caloocan City, Emmanuel Bacarra, a suspect-

ed NPA commander operating in Occidental Mindoro and Leilani Marasigan, Roy Baldostamo, Veraflor Guevarra, Emmanuel Villamor and Miguel Cortez, were arrested.

Bacarra is wanted for murder and multiple frustrated murders, both with the use of unlicensed firearms.

Magalang said the arrests were made in connection with the Oplan Paglalansag Omega, Oplan Big Bertha and Priority Project Avatar Pivot of the PNP and the AFP aimed at neutralizing partisan armed groups, drug dealers and guns-for-hire in the metropolis.

Both Saluta and Bacarra were described to be NPA members who formed the so-called Avatar Group involved in criminal activities in Southern Luzon since 2011. 12

2 NPA commanders arrested in Caloocan

By ZAIDA DELOS REYES-PALANCA

COMBINED police and military elements arrested two suspected commanders of the New People's Army (NPA) during their operation the other night in Caloocan City.

Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) Public Affairs Office (PAO) chief Lt. Col. Harold Cabunoc identified the arrested rebels as Emmanuel Bacarra and Ruben Saluta.

Cabunoc said these personalities have criminal records of murder and arson issued by courts in the provinces of Quezon, Antique and Occidental Mindoro.

They were positively identified as members of the CPP/NPA/NDF and were

also facing charges of violation of the Anti-Rebellion Act of the Philippines.

Records showed that Bacarra and Saluta are NPA commanders operating in Mindoro and Panay. Their group carried out extortion activities like burning of buses and facilities in their localities.

Cabunoc said authorities have been working hard to identify the suspects involved in different criminal activities in Southern Tagalog region.

He said with the help of the Philippine National Police (PNP), they were able to identify the suspects.

"The AFP and PNP will continuously work together to protect the people from lawless elements, to bring justice and to maintain peace and order in our communities," Cabunoc said. ||

2 NPA commanders, timbog

Dalawang notoryus na commander ng New People's Army (NPA) ang nasakote ng pinagsanib na elemento ng militar at pulisya matapos matunton ang pinagtataguan ng mga ito sa isinagawang operasyon sa Caloocan City, kamakalawa ng gabi.

Kinilala ang mga nasakoteng suspek na sina Emmanuel Bacarra, na aktibong nag-ooperate sa Oriental Mindoro at Ruben Saluta, na ang grupo ay aktibo naman sa Panay Island.

Ayon kay AFP Public Affairs Office (AFP-PAO) Chief Lt. Col. Harold Cabunoc, inaresto kamakalawa ng gabi ng mga operatiba ng militar at pulisya ang dalawang opisyal ng NPA rebels sa hideout ng mga ito sa Caloocan City.

Bukod dito, ang mga ito ay nahaharap din sa mga kasong paglabag sa Republic Act No. 6968 o Anti-Rebellion Act.

Sinabi ni Cabunoc na ang matagumpay na pagkakalambat kina Bacarra at Saluta ay bahagi ng law enforcement operations ng AFP at PNP matapos na isailalim sa surveillance operations ang lugar na pinagtataguan ng mga ito. (*Joy Cantos*) 4

AFP to end offensive vs BIFF by weekend

By ALEXIS ROMERO

The military aims to flush out the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF) in Maguindanao and Cotabato by the weekend to allow displaced residents to return to their homes.

Armed Forces spokesman Brig. Gen. Joselito Kakilala said the clearing operations have been extended by three days starting yesterday to prevent the BIFF from reasserting influence in the areas.

Armed Forces chief Gen. Gregorio Catapang Jr. approved the extension during his meeting with troops of the Western Mindanao Command and the 6th Infantry Division in Maguindanao last Tuesday.

The military can still ask the Ad Hoc Joint Action Group for another extension if clearing operations are not completed by Saturday.

"We would like to accomplish the clearing operations as fast as we can so that we can bring normalcy to the affected communities," Kakilala said in a press conference yesterday.

Kakilala also said the military aims to significantly reduce the capabilities of the BIFF within three months.

"We can decimate the capability of the BIFF. They should not have the space and time to organize tactical offensives against the government and to conduct terrorist acts like bombing of vital installations and hitting civilians," he added.

More than 40,000 individuals or about 8,000 families have

fled their homes because of the military's offensives against the BIFF in Central Mindanao.

The military has activated Task Force Kalinga, a unit composed of military doctors, to provide medical services to the displaced residents.

Catapang has also met with Maguindanao Gov. Esmael Mangudadatu to ensure the efficient and timely delivery of assistance to affected families.

However, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) expressed concern over the displacement of thousands of civilians in Maguindanao due to the hostilities and reminded all parties to the gun battle to respect human life and dignity.

Pascal Mauchle, head of ICRC delegation in the Philippines, said residents from the villages in Kalbugan and

Buliok who were displaced early February fear returning to their homes because of the risk of explosive devices and uncertainty of the situation.

"Displacement, especially when it's prolonged and repeated, uproots people from their normal lives and causes untold suffering," he added.

ICRC said displaced families need food, clean water and access to sanitation. All injured or sick people, regardless of their religion, ethnic group, gender or political beliefs, must receive medical treatment.

The ICRC and the Philippine Red Cross started to deliver food, drinking water and other relief items last week to some 20,000 people in North Cotabato and Maguindanao.

Meanwhile, the remains of three soldiers who died in the roadside bombing attack by

Abu Sayyaf in Patikul, Sulu last Wednesday were flown to Zamboanga City yesterday and given funeral honors at military headquarters.

The soldiers were on a resupply convoy to deliver provisions when a bomb explosion signaled their ambush at Barangay Pansul and Panglayahan road in Patikul shortly before noon.

The slain soldiers were identified as 1Lt. Fernan James Magbanua, 1Lt. Emerson Somera and Sgt. Niel Daez.

Six of the wounded troopers were air evacuated to Camp Navarro General Hospital for further treatment. They are SSgt. Julieto Payumo, Pfc. Ramil Akiatan, Pfc. Jay-Ar Sumagang, Cpl. Carlos Baguio, Pfc. Samuel Quiniones and Pfc. Nasser Adian. — With Sheila Crisostomo, Roel Pareño

AFP to 'decimate' terror groups

**BY FERNAN MARASIGAN
AND RITCHIE A. HORARIO
REPORTERS**

BENT on stopping the reign of terrorism in Mindanao, the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) on Thursday vowed to decimate all rebel and terror groups to bring normalcy to the South.

Brig. Gen. Jóselito Kakilala, newly-installed AFP spokesperson, said government forces in particular aim to neutralize the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF) through military operations in the so-called SPMS Box. SPMS refers to Salvu, Pagatin, Mamasapano and Shariff Aguak in Maguindanao.

The town of Mamasapano was the site of a deadly encounter between police commandos and Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) and BIFF fighters in January.

► Decimate A7

The military described the SPMS Box as "no man's land."

"We would like to do this as fast as we can so that we can bring normalcy to the affected communities. The AFP has extended its clearing operations for another three days and will conduct detailed assessment for our future action," Kakilala said in a news briefing.

He added that once the military has flushed out the armed bandits and terrorists from these areas, it will facilitate the safe return of the civilians to their homes.

Kakilala explained that the military aims to reduce the capability of lawless groups to sow terror.

But even as it pressed its anti-terror operations in the South, the military called on armed groups to "embrace lasting peace or continue to be on the run."

Kakilala said the MILF supported the AFP's operations. MILF members have voluntarily relocated to areas away from the battle sites.

The continuing military operations have displaced 25,000 civilians.

According to the official, AFP chief Gen. Gregorio Pio Catapang Jr. met with Maguindanao Gov. Esmael Mangudadatu to discuss ways on how to deliver humanitarian assistance to the affected families.

He said civil-military operations are in place to complement the military operations.

The military said it is closely coordinating with the local government of Pagalungan for the return of the evacuees. Officials are also collaborating with relief organizations for delivery of humanitarian assistance to the affected communities.

"We have also deployed the Task Force Kalinga, a unit that is composed of military doctors that will

be augmented by civilian volunteers, in order to provide medical services to the evacuees who fled ongoing law enforcement actions against the BIFF in Maguindanao," Kakilala said.

Catapang recently ordered an all-out offensive against armed groups that military officials said was a reaction to attacks by the BIFF led by Kagi Karialan on various communities in Pikit, North Cotabato, in mid-February.

On Wednesday, Kakilala's predecessor, Col. Restituto Padilla Jr., said at least 70 armed members of the BIFF have formed a new faction that joined the Asian terrorist group Jemaah Islamiyah (JI).

Called the Justice Islamic Movement (JIM), the group is reportedly led by Mohammad Tambako, who was earlier tagged by the military as the codiller of Filipino bomb-maker Abdul Basit Usman.

Usman was one of the targets of the Special Action Force (SAF) operation in Mamasapano, Maguindanao, that led to the killing of 44 police commandos by the BIFF and the MILF on January 25.

Refuge

But Emmanuel Bautista, executive secretary of the Cabinet cluster on security, justice and peace, said international terrorist groups such as the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) may take advantage of the continued armed conflicts in Mindanao and seek refuge in the country.

Bautista explained that in case the ISIS is defeated in Syria and Iraq, its members from Malaysia and Indonesia may go to areas where there are ongoing armed

conflicts, like in Mindanao.

"When the ISIS is defeated in Syria and Iraq, where will those members from Malaysia and Indonesia go? Where else will they seek sanctuary but in a place with continuing conflicts?" he said in a forum on implications of the Mamasapano massacre on the peace process.

Bautista warned that there could be a spillover of violence from followers of the ISIS if the Mindanao armed conflicts escalated.

"We need to address this because of the potential threat from the outside," he said.

Although there was no confirmation on the ISIS' direct recruitment in the country, Bautista mentioned reports that the group has a half-Filipino member.

He said the proposed Bangsamoro Basic Law, which is being pushed by the government, would help solve the internal conflicts in Mindanao.

"We have been in conflict for the last 40 years, we can't go on fighting in the next 40 years," Bautista added.

Senator Juan Edgardo Angara, a forum resource person, said the proposed P75-billion fund for the Bangsamoro government is not actually a "big deal" if it is to be reckoned from the current fund of the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao.

He added that the budget is not that big since all government agencies' budgets usually go up every year.

"So, P75 billion is not a radical departure from P62 billion. If you just see P75 billion, then that's a lot of money. But in this case, it's just a matter of progression," Angara said.

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Palace assures AFP capability versus BIFF breakaway group

By **MADEL SABATER-NAMIT**

Malacañang assured yesterday that the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AF) stands ready to defend the country against the Justice for Islamic Movement, the breakaway group of the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF).

Presidential Communications Operations Office (PCOO) Secretary Herminio Coloma, Jr. said the AFP will defend the country against any group that plans to sow terror.

"Our Armed Forces continues to

monitor the movement of various armed groups, especially those who plan to sow terror in the country and in communities," Coloma said in Filipino.

"Hindi sila pahihintulutang mag-sagawa ng mga aksyon na yan at pipigilan sila ng ating Sandatahang Lakas (They will not be allowed to conduct such acts and the Armed Forces is prepared to stop them)," he said.

The secretary said members of Justice for Islamic Movement are among those being hunted by law

enforcement authorities, considering that the military has an all-out offensive against the BIFF.

"The AFP is doing and will continue to do what it could to enforce the law," he said.

The Justice for Islamic Movement is headed by Mohhamad Ali Tambako, a former member of the MILF, Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF), and the BIFF.

Reports revealed that Tambako created the Justice for Islamic Movement because of misunderstandings with colleagues in the BIFF. 

AFP ready to fight new rebel group

Malacañang said yesterday the Armed Forces stands ready to defend the country against Justice for Islamic Movement, the breakaway group of the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF). Presidential Communications Operations Office (PCOO) Secretary Herminio Coloma, Jr. said the AFP will defend the country against any group that plans to sow terror. "Ginagampanan ng ating Sandatahang Lakas ang tungkulin na tutukan lahat ng pagkilos ng iba't ibang armadong grupo, lalong lalo na yung mga naghahasik ng ligalig sa ating bansa at sa ating mga pamayanan," Coloma said. "Hindi sila pahihintulutang magsagawa ng mga aksyon na yan at pipigilan sila ng ating Sandatahang Lakas," he said. According to Coloma, members of Justice for Islamic Movement are among those being hunted by law enforcement authorities, considering that the military has an all-out offensive against the BIFF. "Ginagawa at gagawin ng Sandatahang Lakas ang nararapat para umiral ang batas [The AFP is doing and will continue to do what it could to enforce the law]," he said. The Justice for Islamic Movement is headed by Mohammad Ali Tambako, a former member of the MILF, Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF), and the BIFF. Reports revealed that Tambako created the Justice for Islamic Movement because of misunderstandings with colleagues in the BIFF. Reports also revealed that the Justice for Islamic Movement is coddling notorious international terrorist Abdulbasit Usman, who escaped during operations last January 25. **(Madel Sabater-Namit)** 

Gov't ready to thwart new rebel group

By AUREA CALICA

The government is ready to nip in the bud the Justice for Islamic Movement (JIM) with the help of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), considering the new terror group would pose a threat to efforts to achieve lasting peace in Mindanao, Malacañang said yesterday.

Presidential Communications Operations Office Secretary Herminio Coloma Jr. said the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) was doing its duty to monitor the activities of different armed groups.

"They will not be allowed to carry out any terror acts and will be stopped by the AFP," Coloma said.

He stressed the military would do everything necessary.

Coloma added the military was continuously coordinating with the MILF to check the

movements of different armed groups in their strongholds in Mindanao.

The AFP disclosed the JIM, a breakaway group from the separatist Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters, was organized by Mohamad Ali Tambako after a falling out with BIFF founder Ameril Umbra Kato.

AFP spokesman Col. Restituto Padilla described Tambako as a radical Muslim cleric trained in the Middle East and was one of the leaders of the BIFF.

Tambako, according to the AFP, formed his own band of jihadists now reportedly providing sanctuary to bomb expert Abdul Basit Usman and at least five foreign militants.

Newly installed AFP spokesman and commander of the AFP Civil Relations Service Brig. Gen. Joselito Kakilala said Tambako used to be finance officer of the BIFF, directly involved in soliciting and collecting funds from foreign donors for their group.

Kakilala, former chief the AFP's anti-terror

Joint Task Force General Santos City, said Tambako broke ranks with the BIFF following a rift borne out of leadership jealousy as well financial issues with their group's logistic officer, Sheikh Muhiddin Alimbang, alias Commander Kagi Karialan, shortly after Kato suffered a stroke in 2011.

Kato, meanwhile, is physically incapacitated with the left half of his body paralyzed, according to a relative.

The rift further widened, leading to the split after Karialan was nearly killed in a bomb attack in 2013. The incident was blamed on Tambako, who is known for his links with Malaysian terrorist Zulkifli bin Hir, alias Marwan, and then MILF Special Operations Group commander Basit Usman.

Usman, on the other hand, was repeatedly disowned by the MILF.

Marwan was killed in a covert operation by the Philippine National Police-Special Action Force in Mamasapano, Maguindanao on Jan. 25. Usman, however, was able to escape though initial reports said he was wounded during the attack.

The Mamasapano operation, however, cost the lives of 44 SAF policemen who figured in a firefight with BIFF and MILF rebels.

Tambako is now reportedly coddling Usman and several other foreign jihadists, who from time to time were monitored to be in the company of BIFF rebels headed by Karialan.

"The two Muslim rebel groups may have different leaders with differing views, but they're the same. They're coddlers of terrorists," Kakilala said.

Tambako had even assumed command of the BIFF for eight months, when Kato got so weak after his family confined him to a hut in a remote village somewhere in Shariff Aguak, South Upi and Guindulungan towns.

"The BIFF has less than 500 members and only about 300 of them are armed, but they are jihadists, whose extreme spiritual views were made so extreme by Kato's *kuthab* (sermon) during Friday worship rites when he was still healthy," 43-year-old peasant Udtog Kumbel said.

Local officials in Mamasapano, Datu Piang, Datu Saudi, Datu Unsay and Shariff Aguak towns said Kato's most trusted lieutenants, including Karialan and Tambako, now act in-

dependently, their groups separated by factional divides.

The erstwhile BIFF commanders have openly pledged support to the extremist Islamic State of Iraq and Syria during a gathering somewhere in Maguindanao in July 2014.

On the reported direct links of JIM and BIFF to al-Qaeda and ISIS, Kakilala said the report is subject of an ongoing validation.

As per previous monitoring, at least one Arab-looking and four Indonesian terrorists were seen with the group of Tambako. — **With Delon Porcalla, Jaime Laude, John Unson**

6 March 2015

New rebel group sprouts from infighting in BIFF

By Mario J. Mallari

The emergence of a new rebel group called Justice for Islamic Movement (JIM) is a mere product of an internal squabble between two senior officials of the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF) after its founding chieftain Ameril Umbra Kato suffered a stroke a few years ago.

Brig. Gen. Joselito Kakilala, newly installed spokesman for the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP), yesterday said that the differences between Kagi Karialan, Kato's chief of staff, and Mohammad Ali Tambako, BIFF finance officer, led to the birth of JIM.

Initially, Tambako took the helm at BIFF but was immediately eased out after he was criticized by Karialan for the atrocities committed by the BIFF against farmers.

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From page 1

According to Kakilala, the feud between Karialan and Tambako worsened in 2013 when Karialan was hit by an improvised explosive device (IED) and blamed Tambako.

Tambako went on to establish JIM in 2013.

However, Kakilala stressed that there are still strong ties between the BIFF and the JIM, citing Tambako's close relationship with Kato.

"It is one and the same group. It was only a product of rivalry between Tambako and Kagi Karialan, the chief of staff of the BIFF," said Kakilala in a press briefing.

Tambako, a Cairo-educated Muslim scholar, is a nephew of Ameril Umbra Kato, the founder of the BIFF.

The AFP also downplayed the threat posed by JIM as a group.

The military estimated Tambako's group as composed of about 70 active members.

The JIM is currently coddling the group of Basit Usman, including the five foreign nationals spotted in Central Mindanao.

"There's no problem, they're coddling terrorists. They are bandits, still same old threat," said Kakilala.

Kakilala said that the JIM is existing through its extortion activities.

He said the military has not established any foreign funding of JIM.

The AFP spokesman said the all-out offensive operations against the JIM and BIFF are continuing but there was no reported contact with the group during the past days.

"As of yesterday (Wednesday), they are still on the run," said Kakilala.

"We are optimistic our offensive operation will have a positive impact...we will degrade their capability," he added.

Kakilala said all of the displaced

families in Pikit, North Cotabato have already returned to their homes, while 70 percent of the families who left their homes in Pagalungan, Maguindanao, have gone back to their residences.

Senate Majority Leader Alan Peter Cayetano also bolstered reports on the alleged continuing recruitment of new members by the MILF despite forging a peace agreement with the government.

Cayetano's latest revelation came three days after claiming that he has evidence showing that the group had coddled slain Malaysian terrorist and bomb maker Zulkifli bin Hir alias Marwan.

The senator revealed having received information that the MILF is conducting "massive recruitment" not for its political party but as combatants for its armed wing.

Cayetano, who was in Zamboanga City on Thursday attending the 40th day mass for Capt. Ryan Pabalinas, one of the fallen Special Action Force (SAF) members in the Mamasapano operation, appealed to his colleagues not to rush the passage of the proposed Bangsamoro Basic Law (BBL).

The senator, last Tuesday, revealed that he has in his possession some evidence proving that the MILF indeed coddled Marwan and that the government knew about this.

Such information also belies the government's claim that they were unaware of the alleged ties or links of Marwan with the MILF.

"At a proper time, in a few days, we will conclude our research but as early as now I can tell you we have evidence that government knew the MILF protected and coddled Marwan. This is the reason why the BBL is being rushed since as we get to know more, more and more people ask if we can trust the MILF," he asked.

The MILF leaders, the senator said, are also proving themselves

to be defiant and refuse to surrender those involved in the Jan. 25 encounter and this does not bode well with the MILF, as they cannot not even hold their members accountable for the incident.

Giving justice to the families of the 44 Special Action Force (SAF) operatives in the Mamasapano massacre should be the priority, vis-à-vis the ongoing peace process, he added.

Cayetano also pointed out that during the Senate hearings, the MILF has not given any credible and concrete answers especially on its alleged links to terrorists.

Meanwhile, Sen. Ferdinand "Bongbong" R. Marcos Jr. yesterday said his committee will not be stampeded into rushing the deliberations on the BBL, just so they could immediately wrap up the process following Malacañang's insistence to pass the bill by June.

Marcos, chairman of the Senate Committee on Local Government, maintained that his action on the measure will be based on his intention to craft a good law and not driven by a "deadline" set by other people.

He stood his ground even as the House and Senate leadership had agreed to pass the BBL by June before the end of the current second regular session of the 16th Congress.

"Haste could be a fatal waste. The BBL is not a magic pill to stop the war in Mindanao, although it's an important element in the quest for lasting peace. I will try to meet the proposed deadline. But I will not sacrifice the necessity of getting it right," Marcos said.

Marcos said the need to remedy the constitutional infirmities of the present BBL draft is one of the main reasons why prudence is the better course of action than merely trying to meet an obviously short timetable.

He noted that during a hearing conducted by the Senate Committee

on Constitutional Amendments and Revision of Codes, chaired by Sen. Miriam Defensor Santiago, many of the legal luminaries stated that several provisions of the BBL are unconstitutional.

Marcos suspended public hearings on the BBL after the January 25 Mamasapano clash where 44 SAF commandos were killed by the MILF and BIFF.

But before the BBL hearings can resume Marcos said he needs to wait for the reports of the inquiries on the Mamasapano incident conducted separately by the police, MILF, and the committee report of the Senate Committee on Public Order and Dangerous Drugs, chaired by Senator Grace Poe.

Likewise, Marcos said there are other practical considerations on governance and administration that need to be clarified.

The AFP is also struggling to bring back normalcy in Central Mindanao, requiring three more days to flush out the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF) in Maguindanao province.

Kakilala said AFP Chief of Staff Gen. Gregorio Pio Catapang Jr. has extended the conduct of clearing operations before a detailed operational assessment is done for the military's future actions.

"We would like to accomplish the clearing operations as fast as we can so that we can bring normalcy to the affected communities," said Kakilala in a press briefing.

"Once we have flush out the armed bandits and terrorists from the affected areas, we will facilitate the safe return of the civilians back to their homes," added Kakilala.

He cited the support extended by the MILF on the ongoing military operations along the Salvo, Pagatin, Mamasapano and Shariff Aguak box - a known stronghold of the MILF.

The AFP spokesman said that the MILF has voluntarily relocated from the affected areas.

Angie M. Rosales

MILF recruiting fighters, putting up new camps

By NONOY LACSON

ZAMBOANGA CITY – Senator Alan Peter Cayetano yesterday warned that the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) is recruiting fighters and establishing new camps while talking peace with the government.

"If peace they (MILF) are looking, why there is a massive recruitment and why they are establishing new MILF camps?" asked Cayetano who attended a memorial service marking the 40th day after the death of 44 police commandos.

Cayetano said the information was fed to him during his visit in the city where government troops battled Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) forces last year.

The Mass was held at the Forest Lake Memorial Homes in the village of Tumaga which was attended by local officials led by Mayor Maria Isabelle Climaco.

"It is now 40 days since the

massacre in Mamasapano, Maguindanao happened, not even their belongings, like cell phones, wallet, have been returned to them by the MILF," Cayetano said.

"Ang ating gobyerno sobra na nagmamadali sa Bangsamoro Basic Law (BBL) at nakalimutan na ang katarungan para sa mga 44 PNP-SAF na nasawi sa encounter sa Mamasapano," the senator lamented.

"Sila namatay para maligtas tayo, sana naman po, bigyan natin sila ng tunay na parangal," he added.

Cayetano said there will be no real peace without justice.

"We are for peace, and everybody wanted to have peace but I don't think BBL, as it is written now, will end up in peace, it might end up in civil war," he said.

Families of five fallen SAF commandos, led by Senior Inspector Ryan Ballesteros Pabalinas, took part in the memorial service.

Erika, wife of Pabalinas, shed tears as she remembered her late

husband.

"It's so hard for me and my family to accept that Ryan is no longer with us. Sometimes, when I was alone and lonely, my daughter approached me and said, 'mommy nandito lang ako, miss na miss na natin si daddy.'"

Erika said she has kept some of her husband's belongings.

"Yan nalang po ang naiwan na memories sa amin," Erika said.

Erika called on the national government to give the "Fallen 44" justice. She acknowledged the help and comfort given by government officials.

"Salamat po sa kanilang lahat," she said.

Also present were the relatives of Insp. Joey Sacristan Gamutan of San Jose Gusu, PO2 Amman Misuari Esmula of Kingdom Village, Pitogo, Barangay Sinunuc, PO3 Jedz-in Abubakar Asjali of Barangay Sta. Barbara and PO2 Glenn Berecio Bedua of Good Shepherd Village, Upper Calarian.

AFP, handa sa bagong breakaway group ng BIFF

Ni MADEL SABATER-NAMIT

Inihayag kahapon ng Malacañang na handa ang Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) na ipagtanggol ang bansa laban sa Justice for Islamic Movement (JIM), ang breakaway group mula sa Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF).

Sinabi ni Presidential Communications Operations Office (PCOO) Secretary Herminio Coloma, Jr. na ipagtatanggol ng militar ang bansa laban sa alinmang grupo na planong maghasik ng takot at kaguluhan.

"Ginagampanan ng ating Sandatahang Lakas ang tungkulin na tutukan lahat ng pagkilos ng iba't ibang armadong grupo, lalong lalo na 'yung mga naghahasilik ng ligalig sa ating bansa at sa ating mga pamayanan," ani Coloma. "Hindi sila pahihintulutang magsagawa ng mga aksyon na 'yan at pipigilan sila ng ating Sandatahang Lakas."

Sinabi ni Coloma na ang mga miyembro ng JIM ay kabilang sa mga tinutugis ng awtoridad.

Leader ng grupo si Mohhamad Ali Tambako, dating miyembro ng Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), Moro National

Liberation Front (MNLF) at BIFF.

Napaulat na nagbuo ng bagong grupo si Tambako matapos magkaroon ng hindi pagkakaunawaan sa mga kasamahan niya sa BIFF.

Napaulat din na kinakanlong ng grupo

ni Tambako ang teroristang si Abdulbasit Usman, na nakatakas sa operasyon ng pulisia sa Mamasapano, Maguindanao noong Enero 25.

Ang BIFF ay breakaway group ng MILF. 

BIFF seen in Liguasan Marsh after AFP attacks

By Florante Solmerin

SUSPECTED fighters of the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters have shown up at the other end of the Liguasan Marsh in Maguindanao after six days of ground, air and artillery strikes from the military, local officials said on Thursday.

Villagers in M'lang and Kidapawan City, both in neighboring Cotabato province east of the Liguasan Marsh, said dozens of armed men were seen in Barangay Dungu-an in M'lang town after the military offensive in the area around Mamasapano, Maguindanao at the western side of Liguasan Marsh.

M'lang Mayor Joselito Piñol urged security officials to reinforce the local police force to drive away the armed men who are roaming remote villages in the 20-kilometer stretch between M'lang and Kidapawan City.

Residents of Barangay Patadon in Kidapawan City have already reported seeing armed roaming their village, but the local police allegedly dismissed the report and said the armed men were far from "Muslim areas."

The reports of local officials bolstered claims that BIFF fighters have already left their encampments at the western side of Liguasan Marsh because of the ongoing military offensive.

But newly-appointed Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) spokesman Brigadier General Joselito Kakilala said the military is firming up its troops in cleared areas in order to prevent the BIFF bothering the local populace.

"The AFP intends to neutralize the BIFF through law enforcement actions in the so-called 'SPMS (Salvo, Pagatin, Mamasapano, Shariff Aguak) Box' and deny them influence in surrounding areas," said Kakilala, concurrent commander of the AFP Civil Relations Service.

Kakilala said the campaign against the BIFF has already resulted in the "neutralization" of 50 BIFF fighters in addition to 37 members of the Abu Sayyaf Group which is also the subject of another military operation in Sulu, 675 kilometers away.

No Noy, MILF authority to negotiate peace deal



By Angie M. Rosales

A senator questioned President Aquino's authority to negotiate the forming of a substate with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) as she said the peace agreement between the government and the MILF preceding the Bangsamoro Basic Law (BBL) needs the approval of Congress.

Removing all the infirmities of the BBL would need a reboot of the peace process from the start, Sen. Miriam Defensor Santiago said yesterday.

On what authority did President Aquino act on in negotiating with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front for a peace agreement and the crafting of the Bangsamoro Basic Law?

Santiago posed the question to stress the serious legal and other issues the BBL will have to hurdle even after Congress had already approved of it.

When asked if the BBL should be scrapped altogether due to

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SANTIAGO

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started the process all over again."

Santiago said putting timeline for the passage of the BBL is irrelevant.

"That's not important. You might finish passing a bill but it will immediately go to the Supreme Court. That's why we must take care to allow for this addendum, as it will immediately be questioned in the Supreme Court," she explained.

She said that even if the Senate passes the BBL within this year, it is expected to be questioned before the Supreme Court (SC).

"Let's assume it passes and it's petitioned right away in the Supreme Court. How many months will the Supreme Court need? Nobody knows. So to say, for example, that by this year, we will have peace in Mindanao because of the peace process is misguided," Santiago said.

"So the primary question really is the standing to negotiate. Where is the authority of the Philippines and the MILF to negotiate a sub-state? That is the first question," she said.

Whether the two Houses of Congress manage to meet the self-imposed deadline to pass the BBL in June, is irrelevant, Santiago said.

"Whether or not Congress passes the BBL, the matter will end up in the SC," she said.

"What is the constitutional basis for the authority to negotiate on the part of the Philippine government? The President simply assumed he had the authority to negotiate. That is not so. The President does not have sole power over the foreign policy of the Philippines," Santiago said.

She said Malacañang should have

asked authorization from Congress, particularly from the Senate, to negotiate with the MILF or any group in Mindanao.

"Let's start from the worst possible blockage to the BBL. It is the opinion of the Supreme Court. All roads lead to the SC. You cannot emphasize certain aspects of possible negotiated points between the two panels. Everything must begin and end with the SC," Santiago added.

"Unfortunately, we are dealing with the Constitution of the Philippines. The Constitution is immutable, it is unchangeable, it's non-variable. It's not like a rubberband. It does not have that flexibility," Santiago, chairman of the Senate committee on constitutional amendments, said in questioning the authority of Aquino in conducting negotiations with the MILF.

"A mere treaty would need the concurrence of the Senate, what more in the forming of a sub-state?" she stressed.

"If the Constitution requires that the President cannot move in foreign relations unless he has the concurrence of the Senate, how much more does the spirit of the Constitution require that there should be Senate concurrence when the President authorizes a so-called peace process to a so-called peace panel," she added.

"That is the very first question we tend to overlook. Who gave him the authority? It should be the Senate, at least we are representative of the people, he is not," Santiago added.

Likewise, the senator said, the issue on authority is also lacking on the part of the MILF in

representing the Bangsamoro people in the country considering that there are a number of breakaway groups among Muslim rebels.

"The first thing that would happen the moment the Bangsamoro law is passed is, there will be an internal war, another non international armed conflict, this time among those claiming to be leaders," she said.

"So we have to stop talking of negotiating the Constitution. That is heresy. The Constitution is supreme. It is a violation of the principle of constitutional supremacy. To say that we should negotiate, that should we negotiate about the Constitution, this is not done. The Constitution is non-negotiable, period," Santiago said.

Besides the process that led the government and the MILF in forging the Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro (CAB), Santiago stood her ground on her position on the provisions of the BBL being unconstitutional.

"I can draw up a list of all the unconstitutional provisions which I cannot do because there are so many of them at this point. There is an excess, there is an abundance of unconstitutional features because the negotiators of the Philippine panel thought that they could negotiate away certain parts of the Constitution," she said.

"In my personal view, it will be best to start the process all over again. First of all, let us find out from the Senate whether it is willing to grant the power to the President to negotiate a separate form of government, without specifying a substate and if so what form of government," she added.

"But since events have already taken place, it would be best if Malacañang would form its own review committee to review the BBL for unconstitutional features instead of letting other branches of government to do it for them. The worst branch of government to interview for this purpose is the judiciary because it has the power to enforce its position," she said.

"But since events have already taken place, it would be best if Malacañang to form its own review committee to review the BBL for unconstitutional features instead of letting other branches of government do it for them," Santiago said.

Santiago suggested that the committee be composed of the legal luminaries like those she invited when her committee on the constitutional amendments conducted hearings on the constitutionality of the BBL.

"If there are changes to be made, it will come from the Palace itself. There would be no embarrassment about being dictated to by another branch of the government," she said.

"The Constitution implies that the foreign policy is shared between the President on the one hand, the Senate on the other," the lawmaker explained.

Santiago also questioned if the MILF has the authority to represent the Bangsamoro.

"Who gave the MILF authority to represent the Bangsamoro among the MNLF, MILF, BIFF and other groups that are now springing into existence? Which one shall be validly allowed to claim that it represents the Bangsamoro or the entire Islamic peoples within the Philippine territory?", she asked.

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Renegotiate BBL— Santiago

Santiago denounces ‘unauthorized’ Malacañang-MILF talks

By Macon R. Araneta

SENATOR Miriam Defensor Santiago urged the government Thursday to scrap the Bangsamoro Basic Law and restart negotiations for peace in Mindanao, saying President Benigno Aquino III had no authority to enter into such talks without the concurrence of the Senate.

In a media briefing, Santiago said the President simply assumed he had the authority to negotiate with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) with Malaysia as a go-between.

“That is not so. The President does not have the sole power over the foreign policy,” Santiago said, noting that in the Constitution, the power is shared between the President and the Senate.

“Now, where is the Senate authorization for the President to conduct these negotiations, sometimes called the peace process? He does not have an instrument of such nature. He just assumed he has that power, but he does not,” Santiago said.

“If the Constitution requires that the President cannot move in foreign relations unless he has the concurrence of the Senate, how much more does the spirit of the Constitution require that there should be Senate concurrence when the President authorizes a so-called peace process through a peace panel? That is the very first question that tends to be overlooked,” she said.

She also questioned where the MILF got the authority to represent Muslims in the country, when there are other groups such as the Moro National Liberation Front and the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters.

“Which one shall be validly allowed to claim that it represents the Bangsamoro or the entire Islamic peoples within the Philippine territory?” Santiago said.

Santiago warned that a struggle would ensue among those claiming to be Moro leaders once the BBL is enacted into law.

She also said debates on the BBL in Congress were irrelevant because the law will end up in the Supreme Court, which she said would declare it unconstitutional.

The BBL, she said, creates a substate,

which divides sovereignty and reserves some powers only for the Bangsamoro.

“If their powers are exclusive, that means that they exclude the powers even of our own state,” she said.

Santiago said that when senators begin debating the BBL, she would produce a list of all its unconstitutional provisions.

These, she added, were the result of government negotiators who believed they could negotiate away certain parts of the Constitution.

“We have to stop talking of negotiating the Constitution. That is heresy! The Constitution is supreme. It is a violation of principle of constitutional supremacy to say that we should negotiate the Constitution. What are we supposed to negotiate about the Constitution? The Constitution is non-negotiable, period,” he said.

The Palace rejected Santiago’s view, saying the BBL has undergone at least 37 consultations among experts and stakeholders.

“If you will refer to the speech of President Aquino on EDSA Day, it was clear in his statement that he would like the peace process to move forward and the most significant step would be to go on with the process of enacting the draft BBL,” said Communications Secretary Herminio Coloma.

He also disputed Santiago’s characterization of the draft law as unconsti-

tutional, noting that 14 members of the Constitutional Commission who drafted the 1987 Charter supported the BBL.

The 14 framers of the Constitution, he said, stated that the BBL adhered to the supreme law of the land in two aspects, human development and social justice.

"The core principle of the 1987 Constitution in mandating a special status for the autonomous regions is the human development of the people of Muslim Mindanao and the Cordilleras. Hence, the public conversation should not be about semantics but about people—their needs, their aspirations, their choices—and about empowering them with the environment and institutional framework for social justice. Social justice that calls for genuine social change is the central theme of the 1987 Constitution," Coloma said, quoting the 14 members of the Constitutional Commission.

On Tuesday, Coloma said that the Palace is open to amending the BBL, noting that this was part of the legislative process.

At the same time, however, he appealed to the lawmakers to read the whole draft law and not to dilute the final version.

A Muslim leader on Thursday said claims that the BBL would create a separate Commission on Elections and Commission on Audit in the Bangsamoro region was part of

a disinformation campaign.

Former Ambassador Macabangkit Lanto said these agencies would act much like the regional offices of the Comelec and the COA, exercising powers derived from them along the principles of autonomy and devolution of powers.

He also said the BBL is explicit in stating that the region's police force will be part of the Philippine National Police, and that the Bangsamoro Police Board will be part of the National Police Commission.

Senator Ferdinand Marcos Jr. said Thursday he would not be stampeded into rushing public hearings on the BBL, regardless of the Palace's June target.

Marcos, chairman of the Senate committee on local government, said his actions would be based on his intention to craft a good law, and not be driven by a deadline set by other people.

Marcos added that the BBL is not a magic pill to stop the war in Mindanao, but an important element.

"I will try to meet the deadline, but I will not sacrifice the necessity of getting it right," he said.

He noted that during a hearing conducted by the Senate committee on constitutional amendments chaired by Santiago, many legal experts said they believed several provisions of the BBL were unconstitutional.

High Court likely to void BBL – Miriam

BY JEFERSON ANTIPORDA
REPORTER

THERE is a big chance that the Supreme Court (SC) may declare the proposed Bangsamoro Basic Law (BBL) unconstitutional because President Benigno Aquino 3rd has no authority to enter into a peace negotiation with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), Sen. Miriam Defensor-Santiago said on Thursday.

Santiago also sees as irrelevant moves by Malacañang or Congress to set a time frame for passage of the proposed law because no matter the constitutionality of the BBL will surely be questioned at the High Court.

The senator said the President does not have the authority to negotiate with another party for the creation of a sub-state. She noted that the agreement signed between

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the government and the MILF in March 2014 that eventually led to the drafting of the BBL is not binding.

Santiago, a constitutional law expert, believes that the establishment of a Bangsamoro government is akin to the creation of a sub-state.

The senator explained that Aquino does not have the sole power to negotiate on foreign policy. In fact, she said, the President needs the concurrence of Congress, specifically the Senate, to ratify a treaty.

"Even if the President already ratified a treaty, it [the treaty] cannot come into force in our country unless the Senate concurs in the ratification, so this shows you the attitude of the Constitution is that foreign policy power must be equally shared between the President and Congress [Senate]," Santiago added.

She pointed out that if the Constitution required the concurrence of the Senate on matters regarding foreign policy, the chamber's approval would also be needed if the President authorized a so-called peace process.

Santiago questioned the authority of the MILF to represent the Bangsamoro or the entire Islamic people within Philippine territory.

She explained that aside from the MILF, there are other groups that have surfaced and that raises the question of which among them has the authority to claim that it represents the people in region.

"The first thing that would happen the moment the Bangsamoro law is passed is there will be internal war, another non-international armed conflict and this time it will be among those claiming to be leaders in the region," the sena-

tor said.

Like the government, Santiago added, the MILF also has no process in choosing who will be true representatives of the Bangsamoro or how they will coordinate each other.

She said it would be best to scrap the BBL and start the process all over again. According to her, the Senate should first be asked if it is willing to grant power to the President to negotiate a separate form of government.

Since the BBL is already there, the senator said, the next best thing for Malacanang to do is to form its own committee that will review the measure and correct provisions that are considered unconstitutional.

Santiago said there is no reason for Congress to rush the passage of the BBL because even if it is able to meet the target date, it will

immediately be questioned before the SC.

"So to say for example that by this year 2015 we will have peace in Mindanao because of this process [BBL] is misguided," she added.

Santiago maintained that some provisions of the BBL are unconstitutional.

Senator Ferdinand Marcos Jr., chairman of the Senate Committee on Local Government, said his panel's action on the BBL will be based on his intention to craft a good law and not driven by a "deadline" set by other people.

"Haste could be a fatal waste. The BBL is not a magic pill to stop the war in Mindanao, although it's an important element in the quest for lasting peace. I will try to meet the proposed deadline. But I will not sacrifice the necessity of getting it right," Marcos added.

House panel drops poll body for Bangsamoro

BY WENDELL VIGILIA

MEMBERS of the House of Representatives have amended the proposed Bangsamoro Basic Law at the committee level by removing potentially unconstitutional provisions, such as the one granting the proposed Bangsamoro region the right to have its own Commission on Elections.

The move came amid the Moro Islamic Liberation Front's vow to reject any amendment in the bill and President Aquino's appeal for Congress not to dilute the measure in the wake of the Mamasapano incident that claimed the lives of 44 Special Action Force commandos last January.

Cagayan de Oro City Rep. Rufus Rodriguez, chair of the 75-man ad hoc panel tasked to review the measure, announced yesterday that the panel has removed the unconstitutional provision for another electoral body that would supervise election in the Bangsamoro region.

"That would be in violation of your (Comelec) constitutional mandate. We are upholding your exclusive jurisdiction on

matters related to election," Rodriguez told acting Commission on Election (Comelec) chairman Christian Robert Lim, who attended the hearing of the House committee on suffrage which was briefed on the poll body's preparations for the 2016 national elections.

Lim welcomed the ad hoc committee's decision, saying the lawmakers merely affirmed the Comelec's constitutional mandate over all election-related matters in the country.

"We share the same view that it is unconstitutional," he told Rodriguez, who said Congress has no business interfering with the Comelec's functions.

Rodriguez said the panel has also removed provisions allowing the Bangsamoro to create its own internal audit body which could undermine the authority of the Commission on Audit; having the power to discipline its own officials and employees or a power which would weaken the powers of the Office of the Ombudsman;

and establishment of its own civil service and human rights bodies and even its own police force.

The ad hoc panel chair, however, said changes will not dilute the measure because the most fundamental feature of the BBL "is the power sharing (of the national government to the Bangsamoro region), political autonomy and fiscal autonomy."

"That's the most important," Rodriguez said, noting that lawmakers have yet to decide on another provision that would permit other areas outside the Bangsamoro territory to join upon a petition of at least 10 percent of the constituents.

Sen. Miriam Defensor Santiago said the constitutional infirmities of the proposed BBL could lead it to the Supreme Court.

"It is irrelevant what date the Senate will hold its debates on whether or not we should pass this law. Eventually, whether or not Congress passes the BBL, the matter will end up in the SC," she said.

She said Malacañang should instead form a committee to review the BBL for its unconstitutional features, instead of letting other branches do it for them.

"The worst branch of government to review for this purpose is the judiciary because it has the power to enforce its position," she said, adding that senators are merely expressing their opinions.

She said Malacañang should appoint in its review committee the luminaries who were invited to the Senate hearing on the constitutionality of the BBL.

Among those invited by Santiago's committee on constitutional amendments and revision of codes and laws is retired Supreme Court Chief Justice Reynato Puno.

Santiago also said government could scrap the BBL and start peace negotiations with the Moro people.

Earlier, House majority leader Neptali Gonzales II said Malacañang should be open to the possibility of going back to the negotiating table with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front with which government signed a peace deal in March last year. The BBL will pave the way for the creation of the Bangsamoro region as provided in the peace agreement.

The MILF, along with forces of the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters, clashed with police commandos in Mamasapano town Maguindanao on January 25. Forty-four members of the PNP Special Action Force were killed in the police operation to get terrorists. Deliberations on the BBL were suspended following the Mamasapano clash.

Santiago said that before starting the process, the President should first seek authority from the Senate to negotiate a separate form of government.

"It will be best to start the process all over the again. First of all, let us find out from the Senate whether it is willing to grant the power to the President to negotiate a separate form of government, without specifying a sub-state and, if so, what form of government," she told reporters.

She said the Executive branch did not bother to examine itself on whether it has the power to negotiate with the MILF. "It just presumed that it did," she said.

"The President does not have sole power over the foreign policy of the Philippines," she said.

She said that under the Constitution, foreign policy power must be equally shared between the President and the Congress, specifically the Senate.

"Now where is the Senate authorization for the President to conduct these negotiations, sometimes the so-called peace process? He does not have an instrument of that nature. He just assumed that he had the power but he does not," she said.

"Treaty pa lang kailangan na ng concurrence ng Senado, 'yun pa kayang mag-gagawa ng sub-state?" she added.

MILF AUTHORITY

Santiago also questioned the authority of the MILF to represent the Bangsamoro people in the peace negotiations.

"Who gave the MILF authority to represent the Bangsamoro? Among all those scions of the breakaway group, MNLF, MILF, BIFF and others, which one of them shall be validly allowed to claim that it represents the Bangsamoro or the entire Islamic people within the Philippine territory?" she asked.

Sen. Ferdinand Marcos Jr. reiterated that he would not be forced into passing the BBL, saying his action will be based on his intention to craft a good law and not driven by a "deadline" set by other people. Marcos chairs the Senate committee on local government which is hearing the BBL.

"Haste could be a fatal waste. The BBL is not a magic pill to stop the war in Mindanao, although it's an important element in the quest for lasting peace. I will try to meet the proposed deadline. But I will not sacrifice the necessity of getting it right," he said.

Marcos said the need to remedy the constitutional infirmities of the present BBL draft is one of the main reasons prudence is the better course of action over meeting an obviously short timetable.

Marcos suspended public hearings after the Mamasapano incident.

OPENNESS

Rodriguez said he is still hoping the measure would be enacted under the Aquino administration, saying its constitutional defects can be remedied in Congress if the MILF will be open to amendments.

Rodriguez refused to entertain the possibility that the next administration will be left with no choice but to renegotiate the Aquino administration's deal with the MILF.

"Sana hindi naman (umabot sa susunod na administrasyon) because gusto natin ng kapayapaan (ngayon)," Rodriguez said. "Puwele naman 'yan magawa (amendments). So ang amin lang talaga dito, kung ang MILF ay 'di sila gagawa ng hakbang na maibalik 'yun tiwala sa kanila, mahirapang mapasa ang BBL."

BANGSAMORO BUDGET

Rodriguez said the constitutional defects and apprehensions over the possibility that the P75-billion annual budget of the proposed Bangsamoro autonomous region could be misused can all be remedied in both houses of Congress.

He, however, admitted that the annual fund has the nature of a lump sum fund because the Bangsamoro government will have a free hand in spending it under the proposed law.

He said the huge budget was included in the proposed law because the government trusts that the Bangsamoro parliament will be able to appropriate funds "for the exercise of their powers and functions to achieve development in the Bangsamoro."

Rodriguez said there will be a need for Congress to put safeguards on the provision to ensure that taxpayers' money will not be spent elsewhere.

"Atin lang i-improve ito, kunin natin 'yung mga unconstitutional provisions, lagyan natin ng safeguards like 'yung P75 billion na pondo na gagamitin for education, especially, health and social welfare and infrastructure," he said. — With JP Lopez, Ashzel Hachero and Jocelyn Mo, mayor

Unconstitutional BBL provisions scrapped

House dilutes peace measure to keep powers of Comelec, COA, Ombudsman, CSC, CHR, PNP

By CHARISSA M. LUCI

Despite appeals of Malacañang and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), the House Ad hoc Committee on the proposed Bangsamoro Basic Law (BBL) has decided to scrap the unconstitutional provisions in the peace measure that would have removed the powers of six government agencies – the Commission on Elections (Comelec), Commission on Audit (COA), the Office of the Ombudsman, the Civil Service Commission (CSC), Commission on Human Rights (CHR), and the Philippine National Police (PNP) – over the Bangsamoro territory.

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"In the proposed law, there's no more Bangsamoro COA, Comelec, Civil Service, Ombudsman, Human Rights, and police," Cagayan de Oro Rep. Rufus Rodriguez, the ad hoc panel chairman, said.

But the deletion of such provisions would now entirely dilute the BBL, Rodriguez said.

"The main fundamental of the BBL is the power sharing, political autonomy, and fiscal autonomy ... that's the most important," Rodriguez said.

"As far as the BBL is concerned, we have removed the unconstitutional provision providing another electoral body that would supervise election in the Bangsamoro region. That would be in violation of your constitutional mandate. We are upholding your exclusive jurisdiction on matters related to election," Rodriguez said.

"Congress has no business in interfering in your mandate," Rodriguez said.

Rodriguez said the other provisions that were deleted were creating their own internal audit body despite the presence of the COA; disciplining of public officials, a power to be taken away from the Office of the Ombudsman; establishing own civil service and human rights bodies, and creating the Bangsamoro Police Force.

At yesterday's House Committee on Suffrage and Electoral Reforms hearing, Rodriguez assured the Comelec that the 290-man Lower Chamber is keeping the poll body's "exclusive jurisdiction" on poll-related matters.

He also noted the position papers of the Deans, the five governors of the Muslim provinces, and the Philippine

Constitution Association (Philconsa) rejecting the creation of another electoral body for the Bangsamoro region.

"They believe in you, Comelec people, that you keep your constitutional mandate," he said.

In response, Lim said they are "happy" with the ad hoc panel's deletion of a provision allowing Bangsamoro to run its elections.

"We share the same view that it is unconstitutional," he said.

Under consideration

Rodriguez also said the panel is mulling over whether or not to scrap the provision allowing other areas outside the Bangsamoro territory to also join the entity upon a petition of at least 10 percent of its constituents as this may be declared illegal by the Supreme Court.

Negros Occidental Rep. Alfredo Benitez of Negros Occidental, head of the Visayan bloc in the Lower Chamber, said that the Department of Justice (DOJ) should be given bigger role in determining which provisions should be deleted.

"Let's ask the legal opinion of the DOJ for Congress to know what parts of the BBL are unconstitutional," he said.

Rodriguez said he is supportive of giving the Bangsamoro ₱75-billion fund allocation for its fiscal autonomy.

His panel is eyeing to pass the BBL in the committee level on May 18, which is three months late from its original Feb. 9 target.

The Rodriguez panel's resumption of its executive sessions this week was postponed as the PNP Board of Inquiry (BOI) is set to submit its report to Interior and Local Government Secretary Mar Roxas on March 6 for President Aquino's review.

Rodriguez said the chamber could hold a special session from June 11 to 25 if they fail to approve the BBL before the sine die adjournment of the second regular session of 16th Congress on June 11.

He warned that the Lower Cham-

ber may abandon the proposed creation of the Bangsamoro juridical entity if the MILF fails to surrender its erring commanders and members who were involved in the bloody anti-terror raid in Mamasapano, Maguindanao, last Jan. 25, branding the non-surrender of MILF's erring elements as "deal breaker."

He even asked Justice Secretary Leila de Lima to fast-track their comprehensive probe into the Mamasapano massacre.

He reiterated his panel's vow "to improve" the provisions of the BBL "so that we will not have another incident like Mamasapano."

Recast BBL – Miriam

As the House of Representatives started diluting the BBL, Sen. Miriam Defensor Santiago yesterday strongly advised President Aquino to recast the BBL because it is replete with constitutional infirmities.

In a press briefing for Senate reporters, Santiago said Malacañang, not by another branch of government, should unilaterally form a review committee to address the constitutional issues in the BBL as crafted by its peace negotiating panel and leaders of the secessionist MILF.

She strongly suggested that Malacañang invite the noted constitutionalists she had invited in her committee hearing to point out the

problematic constitutional issues that she felt should be done away with or addressed.

These same constitutional luminaries had testified before her committee that the BBL is unconstitutional, she said.

It's legal – Palace

But Malacañang stood firm on the legality of the BBL.

Presidential Communications Operations Office (PCOO) Secretary Herminio Coloma Jr. said 14 members of the Constitutional Commission that crafted the 1987 Constitution have said that there is nothing illegal with the proposed BBL.

Coloma noted that the members of the Constitutional Commission had said the proposed BBL focuses on human development and social justice.

Senators warned Malacañang that

rushing the passage of the BBL could be more fatal to the country's welfare.

Santiago said that as chairman of the Senate Constitutional Amendments Committee, it is not important to rush the approval of the BBL because those against it are certain to bring the constitutional issues surrounding the BBL before the Supreme Court (SC). She said she is confident that the SC would agree with her position that, among others, the creation of a sub-state within a state as provided the BBL is unconstitutional.

Sen. Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos Jr., chairman of the Senate Committee on Local Government, reminded Palace there are "critical issues that must be discussed in public hearings for the BBL to be inclusive and comprehensive."

"Haste could be a fatal waste. The BBL is not a magic pill to stop the war in Mindanao, although it's an important element in the quest for lasting peace. I

will try to meet the proposed deadline. But I will not sacrifice the necessity of getting it right," Marcos said in a statement.

Before the BBL hearings can resume, Marcos said he needs to wait for the reports of the inquiries on the Mamasapano incident conducted separately by the police and the MILF, as well as the committee report of the Senate Committee on Public Order and Dangerous Drugs, chaired by Senator Grace Poe Llamanzares.

Senate Majority Leader Alan Peter Cayetano for his part said there should first be justice served to the Fallen 44 SAF commandos before the BBL is passed.

"It should be the priority, vis-à-vis the peace process," Cayetano said.

Cayetano noted that MILF leaders remain defiant and refuse to surrender those involved in the January 25 encounter. (With reports from Mario B. Casayuran, Hannah L. Torregoza, and Madel Sabater Namit)

Bongbong, Bam vow Bangsamoro Law revision

WHETHER the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) likes it or not, Senators Ferdinand Marcos and Bam Aquino will amend the proposed Bangsamoro Basic Law (BBL), creating a Bangsamoro government in Mindanao, to protect the rights of the indigenous peoples (IPs) in Southern Philippines whose ancestral domain will be included in the core territories of the Bangsamoro entity.

Marcos, chairman of the Senate Committee on Local Government, tasked to deliberate on the BBL is set to resume the public hearings on the BBL which he suspended pending the result of the Senate's investigation into the Mamasapano clash in Maguindanao between Special Action Force (SAF) troopers and MILF rebels that left 44 police commandos dead.

Among others, Marcos

said he intends to include in the agenda of his panel's public hearings the issue raised by the IPs in Mindanao. The MILF leadership wants Congress to pass the BBL "without any amendments."

"Nandoon (sila) sa Senado kahapon (Wednesday) at sinasabi walang binabanggit tungkol sa kanila dahil sila naman daw ang tunay na orihinal na taga Mindanao. At baka mawala lahat sa kanila 'yung kanilang malupain, lahat ng kanilang kultura, lahat ng kanilang kasaysayan, lahat ng mga reportera na kanilang ginagawa," said Marcos in a radio interview.

Aquino said that even before the Mamasapano incident, some of his colleagues in the Senate wanted to amend the BBL to make it more legally acceptable.

"For example, may mga indigenous peoples group

na lumapit sa atin noon, hindi lang sa akin kundi sa marami pang senador, na nagre-request na maglagay ng probisyon safeguarding the rights of indigenous peoples in the Bangsamoro autonomous areas. Balak ko talagang ipasok iyon," Aquino told mediamen recently.

Marcos also said that he "will not be stampeded" to rush the public hearings on the BBL and to immediately wrap up the process following Malacañang's insistence on passing the bill by June. He maintained that his action on the measure will be based on his intention to craft a good law and not driven by a "deadline" set by other people.

Why hurry?

Senate Majority Leader Alan Peter Cayetano has appealed to his colleagues in both upper and lower chambers "not to rush" the passage of the proposed

Bangsamoro Basic Law (BBL) creating a Bangsamoro government in Mindanao.

He made the remark as Senate President Franklin Drilon and House Speaker Feliciano Belmonte earlier "committed" to approve the BBL by June this year or before Congress adjourns its second regular session on June 12.

Some critics of the Aquino administration claimed that Malacañang was pushing its allies in Congress to expedite the passage of the BBL so that it can be included in the last State of the Nation Address (SONA) of President Benigno Aquino III on June 22.

"Bakit naman ang ating gobyerno, sobrang nagmamadali sa BBL at nakalimutan na ang katarungan? Paalala natin sa mga kasamahan natin sa Kongreso at Senado – ipinangako natin noong

dinala ang SAF 44 sa Camp Bagong Diwa, na uunahin natin ang Mamasapano hearing, ang hustisya. Doon lang tayo makikipag-usap sa MILF pagkatapos," said Cayetano.

The senator also revealed that he received information that the MILF is conducting "massive recruitment" not for its political party but of combatants for its armed wing. He lamented that the MILF has not given any credible and concrete answers during the Senate hearings, especially on its alleged links to terrorists.

Cayetano flew to Zamboanga City yesterday to attend the 40th day mass for Capt. Ryan Pabalinas. He said giving justice to the families of the 44 Special Action Force (SAF) operatives in the Mamasapano massacre should be the priority, vis-à-vis the ongoing peace process. 2

‘Bangsamoro audit body will still be under CoA’

THE PHILIPPINE government's audit body will still have authority over an agency established to examine and verify expenses incurred by the proposed Bangsamoro region in Mindanao.

Government peace panel chair Miriam Coronel-Ferrer made this announcement to clarify reports regarding the amounts to be received by the proposed Bangsamoro government.

Although the Bangsamoro government will have its own audit body, “it will not take away the powers given to the national Commission on Audit (CoA),” Ms. Ferrer said in a phone interview. The Bangsamoro’s CoA will not be exempt from audit by the national CoA, she added.

The proposed law is expected to bring lasting peace in the war-torn region, replacing the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM).

During the sidelines of a forum about the Bangsamoro Basic Law (BBL) on Thursday, Ms. Ferrer also said that “P35 billion... will go directly to the Bangsamoro government.”

She said that the figure is derived from the annual block grant which is 2.4% of the national total revenue collection, estimated to reach P27 billion in 2016. Another P7 billion will come from special development fund for the first year of the Bangsamoro and another P1 billion for a transition fund.

To ensure proper use of the grants, House ad hoc committee chairman on the Bangsamoro and Cagayan de Oro Rep. Rufus B. Rodriguez (2nd district) said the committee will introduce provisions in the bill that will serve as the guidelines for earmarking the funds.

He added that it will have to be under the jurisdiction of the CoA.

“I am comfortable with the level of the amount given to them, as long as we audit them,” Mr. Rodriguez added in a separate interview.

Mr. Rodriguez also dismissed claims that the Bangsamoro funds will be spent at the discretion of parliament heads, similar to the earlier concept of the Congressional pork barrel.

He also said that the panel he heads will already remove the provisions in the BBL that will give the region its own set of constitutionally created bodies such as the CoA, Commission of Human Rights, Civil Service Commission, Commission on Elections, and Ombudsman.

The change, according to House ad hoc committee vice-chairman and Misamis Occidental Rep. Henry S. Oaminal (2nd district), is “the result of consultations” they had conducted.

Meanwhile, Senator Miriam Defensor-Santiago said that the proposed peace measure will only engender an “internal war” among the Moros.

“The first thing that would happen the moment that Bangsamoro law is passed is there will be internal war. Another non-international armed conflict, this time among those claiming to be leaders,” Ms. Santiago said in a press conference.

She also said that the representing bodies of the Philippine government and the Moros are “unauthorized.”

“Where is the Senate authorization for the President to conduct these negotiations sometimes called peace process? He does not have an instrument of that nature. He just assumed that he had the power but he does not,” Ms. Santiago said.

Getting in touch with the Senate, she said, should have been the first step since “we are representative of the people.”

Ms. Santiago’s concerns were allayed by Ms. Ferrer who said that the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) is an organized group that has a “constituency among them (Moros)” and can “balance the interest of all groups.”

While the MILF might be the face of BBL, the product of the peace negotiations will also serve the interests of the whole Bangsamoro, local government, indigenous people, and other groups indicated in the draft’s provisions, Ms. Ferrer said. — **M. L. T. Lopez, J. E. Villaruel and E. E. Escaño**