

## **FRONT NEWS**

# **Philippines House Mulls on Tax-free income of P250K, Abolish 13th Month Pay, Bonuses**

October 2 -- The Department of Finance (DOF) today, seeks repeal of provisions of the Tax Code that exempt from income tax the 13th month pay, Christmas bonus, productivity incentives and other benefits up to a maximum amount of P82,000 a year, if the House of Representatives and the Senate approve the tax reform package submitted this week.

Under the repeal, the current administration will take away the tax exemption on the mandatory additional one-month salary, bonuses and incentives.

Instead, the DOF is proposing that a gross income of P250,000 a year, or P20,833 a month, would be tax-free.

Under a law passed by the previous Congress and signed by then president Benigno Aquino III, annual bonuses of up to P82,000 are exempt from income tax.

Private sector workers get a mandatory 13th -month pay, and given a Christmas bonus.

Government personnel receive a mid-year bonus equivalent to one-month salary and a year-end productivity incentive aside from the 13th-month pay.

### **Advantage to Economy**

The DOF sees the proposed income tax reform measure of the Duterte administration as resulting in a simpler, fairer and more efficient tax system, and would "promote investment, job creation and poverty reduction."

"It will also fund," according to DOF Undersecretary Karl Kendrick Chua, "government projects in infrastructure, education, health and social protection. The proposed tax policy reform program which aims to lower the tax rate and increase the base of taxpayers is included in President Duterte's 10-point socioeconomic agenda."

Chua stressed that "With the current rates based on values prevailing decades ago, the updating of the income tax system would be reflective of modern economic realities and take into account inflation over the years."

The DOF's proposal, on its first year of implementation would result in income adjustments, including individuals with an annual income of less than \$250,000 - no income tax; with annual income between P250,000 and P400,000 equals 20 percent on the excess over P250,000; between P400,000 and P800,000 equals P30,000 plus 25 percent on the excess of P400,000; between P800,000 and P2,000,000 equals P130,000 plus 30 percent on the excess over P800,000; between P2,000,000 to P5,000,000 equals P490,000 plus 32 percent on the excess of P2,000,000; P5,000,000 - P1,450,000 plus 35 percent on the excess of P5,000,000.

For the second year of implementation and beyond: with annual income less than P250,00 equals no income tax; P250,00 and P400,000 equals 15 percent on the excess over P250,000; P400,000 and P800,000 equals P22,500 plus 20 percent on the excess over P400,000; P800,000 and P2,000,000 equals P102,500 plus 25 percent on the excess over P800,000; P2,000,000 to P5,000,000 equals P402,500 plus 30 percent on the excess over P2,000,000; over P5,000,000 equals P1,302,500 plus 35 percent on the excess over P5,000,000.

Also included in the tax reform package is the proposed lowering of the corporate income tax to 25 percent and the reduction of property and capital income taxes.

In order to recover the revenue that would be lost with the adjustments, the DOF would be imposing new taxes on sweetened beverages, chips, jewelry, mining, carbon, gambling, lottery and casinos, and increasing the excise tax on alcohol and tobacco.-  
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## **Philippines Prostitutes Promote Trillanes**

### **Plot vs. Duterte**

By Gina Villanueva, Associate Editor

October 2 - Some say it has all the hallmarks of a CIA-backed 'regime change,' as the Manila Standard reports that the Liberal Party, with unidentified businessmen and Senator Antonio Trillanes IV plot to oust President Rodrigo Roa Duterte.

Sounds like deja vu -- Marcos era?

Long-time ally and Cabinet Secretary Leoncio Evasco Jr. tells Manila Standard, "They are convincing the military and police (particularly) Senator Antonio Trillanes IV, to join in their cause to topple Duterte."

"They will fail," Evasco announces, explaining that the businessmen associated with the Liberal Party, still cannot accept the reality that they were defeated by some probinsiyano (rural boy) from Mindanao, adding that "That's because they look down on us, not knowing that our minds were molded by our experiences, our studies, and outlook. Sad to say, there are a lot of media practitioners who succumbed to the temptation of money. And we are talking of millions of pesos here."

Presstitutes, in other words. Time was when they were also dubbed 'envelop-mental' (instead of 'developmental') journalists, during the Marcos regime, (being on the payroll of the incumbent, elected government officials).

President Duterte earlier accused President Benigno Aquino III loyalists -- "yellow" people of stoking flames of intrigues against his administration by blaming him for the killings of illegal drug users, pushers, and druglords.

He said 'yellow" people, who he did not name -- are now laying the groundwork for his impeachment but he will press on because he has vowed to stake his life, his honor, and the presidency -- to fulfill his sworn duty to his people, of protecting his country, and saving the next generation from perdition.

Mr. Duterte called the foreign meddlers (U.S. and its leaders) "hypocrites," in his war against crime.

Evasco says they are now saying that Duterte is a communist enticing "armed adventurism."

### **Human Rights on the Wrong Premise**

In a separate development, reported by Rappler.com on October 1, in Cebu City, during the launch of Kilusang Pagbabago (Movement for change), Evasco told reporters, "Advocating human rights is always correct. But advocating human rights when the 5 pillars of justice has collapsed, will be unpopular. I'm not saying it's wrong, but you will be unpopular, why? Because your advocacy for human rights will always be perceived (as you being) on the side of the criminal."

No lapdog to the U.S.

On the matter of foreign meddling, "America and the Philippines are both sovereign states. The difference is they (U.S.) are rich, we are poor, but that doesn't give them a right to dictate how we run our affairs. We are not a lapdog of the U.S."

Duterte promised a war on drugs and corruption during the campaign, "This is what the people want," Evasco said, "so being elected on that platform makes it the people's mandate, as well."

Before accepting the position of Cabinet Secretary, Evasco served as the mayor of Maribojoc, Bohol from 2007 to 2016. He was also a member of the New People's Army (NPA) in the 70's before he was arrested. It was Duterte who prosecuted Evasco, but later recruited him to serve as campaign for his mayoral bids in Davao City, and than as chief of staff. He also served as Duterte's campaign chief during the 2016 presidential elections.

### **EU Still Supports Duterte**

Still, in another development, GMA News Network reports that despite verbal attacks, the European Union (EU) still supports Duterte's war on drugs.

This was disclosed October 1, the EU envoy to Manila, Franz Jessen.

In a letter posted on the EU 28-member bloc's Facebook page (<https://www.facebook.com/EUDelegationToThePhilippines/?fref=ts>), Jessen says, "Indeed, we are supporting the Philippines on many different fronts. We are working with the Department of Health, on fighting drug abuse in the Philippines. Our initial support concentrates on one area where we, the EU, has outstanding strengths; namely identification of International and National best practices in drug treatment practices."

Jessen continues, " Drug abuse is a shared problem, and it has international and national dimensions. our support to the Department of Health falls under our general development cooperation programme. Every year the EU supports developments in the Philippines to the tune of PHP3 billion."

He also reiterated the EU's support to Duterte's efforts to bring peace in Mindanao, and said he met with the Office of the Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process (OPAPP) Secretary Jesus Dureza, and discussed how the EU could best support the implementation of a peace agreement in Mindanao.

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## **INNERVIEW**

By Gina Villanueva, Associate Editor

### **The Alarming U.S. Marine Pilot Mortality**

'What Are You Doing the Rest of Your Life?' is a beautiful song penned by husband and wife team Alan and Marilyn Bergman.

But it's not what I want to write about.

Rather, I attempt to page the next U.S. (P)resident of 'Casa Blanca (White House), with 'What Are You Doing the Rest of Your Term?'

What are you doing about the excessive U.S. Marine pilot mortality borne of the increasingly dysfunctional, if not "aged" F/A-18 fleet?

It is an honest query addressed to Congress, the sitting (p)resident of the Free Masons palace, and next U.S. (P)resident of Casa Blanca.

That the U.S. Marine Corps (USMC), while being the smallest branch of service (who are The Few. The Proud), is an integral part of national defense, as the Marines play a key role in several missions that contribute overall to our national security, is indisputable.

What is disputable is that both Congress and the (P)resident are responsible for what is happening, (or not happening) to Marine Corps aviation.

The president submits budgets and Congress either pseudo-approves them or sends them back to the White House for revision.

The sitting president is not known to support additional military spending (with the exception of unquestioned servitude and aid to Israel, and the recent ransom money of \$1.3 billion paid to Iran, following the initial payment by plane, of \$400 million, to resolve a failed arms deal -- at the expense of the U.S. taxpayer).

The Republican Grand Old Party (GOP)-led Congress is responsible for passing sequestration that resulted in huge cuts on the U.S. military, leaving most other line items virtually untouched.

Some Americans complain that "the United States spends too much on defense," that more of our annual budget outlay should go to "benefits and infrastructure -- like healthcare and (free public) education." (sic!)

What education? Do you mean 'indoctrination,' (aka brainwashing)?

If you are a poor, average student requiring student loan (controlled by Congress), and after college graduation, you go flip burgers at McDonald's that passes as your 'first' job -- to pay back your student loan as long as you live -- perhaps you ought to opt joining the military where they teach you how to be a man, or, a woman imbued with discipline, principles and morality -- never mind if you are indoctrinated in 'serving your country by defending the flag, and the Constitution,' instead of actually serving the interests of the bankers owned by the oligarchy ( who hide behind the flag and the constitution). At least, you are paid at boot camp, and thereafter, instead of flipping burgers at McDonald's, or being a slave of Walmart, as you make the owners richer by the second, worldwide.

See, everything is a Catch 22 in the matrix we are in -- like it, or else.

As in the imminent global spectacle of the 2016 U.S. Campaign and Elections zarzuela. It is all just a matter of playing by the book of the Protocols of the Elders of Zion.

How does a nation with a \$17 trillion annual gross domestic product (GDP) still have military assets that are "aged, poorly maintained F/A-18, a less than state-of-the-art technology" for the world's hegemon? Doesn't that border on ludicrous irony?

The U.S. military is mostly despised by Americans who are ignorant of the fact that defense doesn't come at discount prices, and they believe that new investments in military technology and maintenance -- should better be spent elsewhere.

Fox News in April reported that "the vast majority" of Marine Corps air assets could not fly as they were beyond repair to the degree that renders them unsafe, such as 70 percent of the Corps' F/A-18 and CH-53 Sea Stallion helicopter fleet.

In August Fox News said that Marine Corps brass opted to suspend all air operations for 24 hours after two jets crashed in a week (killing the pilots).

Now, what exactly is an F/A-18 Hornet, and how does it work?

The Marine Corps Times says that the Hornet is unique in that it is the first U.S. strike fighter -- it can engage in air-to-air combat as well as serve in a ground support role bombing targets. The original Hornet and the newer F/A-18 E-F Super Hornet are supposed to be phased-out in the mid-2020s and 2035, respectively, but because the F-35 is so problem-plagued and behind schedule (and expensive), the USMC and the Navy have had to find ways - and the money - to keep the F/A-18 squadrons flying a lot longer. The situation has become worse that the USMC aviation brass are turning to 'boneyards' (in storage at the 309th Aerospace Maintenance and Regeneration Group at Davis Menthan Air Force Base in Arizona).

In the words of Capt. Sarah Burns, Marine spokesperson at the Pentagon, "We are very focused on our current readiness, and at the moment, we don't have enough Hornets for combat, flight instruction and day-to-day training."

In a recent post by the Marine Corps Times, the Pentagon plans to keep the Marine Corps at 184,000 strong through the next fiscal year in accordance with the 2016 defense budget, released in February. Barring another round of across the board spending cuts, the service will not drop below 182,000 Marines.

USMC Commandant General (and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff) Joseph Dunford announced that the budget constraints allow officials to assess the "impact of the four year drawdown on small unit leaders in the face of a continued high operational tempo."

A mandatory 'operational pause' for all Marine F/A-18 Hornet squadrons in August allowed the units to review procedures in hopes of reversing an increase in ground mishaps, Marine Corps Commandant Gen. Robert Neller told Military.com this month.

The 24-hour stand-down reported in early August, came after two Marine Corps F/A-18C Hornets crashed within a week of each other.

On July 28, Maj. Richard Norton of Marine Attack Fighter Squadron 232 was killed when his aircraft went down during training near Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center Twentynine Palms, California. Days later on Aug. 2, a Navy pilot was injured after ejecting from a Hornet from the same squadron that had been on loan to Naval Air Station Fallon, Nevada's Strike Fighter Wing Pacific Detachment.

The squadron also suffered tragedy last October, when Marine Maj. Taj Sareen went down with his Hornet near Royal Air Force Airfield Lakenheath in England while returning to the U.S. after a six-month deployment to the Middle East.

Three Hornet crashes in a year and the horrific collision of CH-53E Super Stallion helicopters in January killed all 12 Marines aboard the two aircraft.

Neller said, "We're digging ourselves out. It's not going to happen overnight. It's going to happen if we get consistent, stable funding of parts and sustainment, and we get new airplanes."

There is a consistent theme of continuity in this abysmal picture of today's Marine Corps aviation wing.

Retired Navy Cmdr. Chris Harmer, senior naval analyst at the Institute for the Study of War, opines the F/A-18s can certainly be inspected and reconstituted to full-mission status, but not without hazards. The Marine Corps aviation is "on the verge of systemic

failure," because the fleet has been overused since Sept. 11, 2011 -- that the F-35 is years - and tens of billions of dollars -- behind schedule, he adds.

"This is not the fault of the Marine Corps, but the Marines will pay the price for it through excess pilot mortality, and the U.S. will face a significant strategic risk in the near future if deployable Marine tactical aviation suffers a significant decrease in availability, which now seems inevitable," Harmer concludes.

Bottom line: how does the U.S. now maintain its much-vaunted, much-flaunted superiority over Russia and China if it allows even a single component of any military branch to disintegrate?

All the military branches are important as they all work together in perfect cadence, and all play a vital role in the country's defense.

Simply put, how do you expect a body to wholly and healthily function when one part of it is severely deficient in even its most basic sustenance?

If major changes do not commence, and soon, are we to lament the reality that the Marine Corps is at risk of lapsing into "irrelevance" to favor the "relevance" of the bread-and-circus zarzuela by those who are sworn to duty -- to take care of this colossal problem that begs urgent attention, and resolution -- while the royal thieves look the other way -- wining and dining in the filth of their wealth-- as they go through the motions of their dress rehearsal for the greatest show on earth?

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## **EDITORIAL**

OCT 3 2016

## **HARD EARNED RESPECT**

Philippine President Rodrigo "Digong" Duterte is learning it the hard way in leading the Philippines in all four major corners of maintaining the sanity in governing our country vis a vis, military, graft and corruption, economy, and the illegal drugs menace brought about by the inability of the past administration to address this major concern.

In shifting the foreign policy of the Philippine government to an independent one, President Duterte has played the game of searching for a better approach of searching for a better relationship not only from our traditional partner, the United States, but as well as developing our relationship with the big giants like China and Russia.

The Philippine government does not want to be stuck in just dealing with the Americans as if they are the only source of the Philippines' economic growth. President Duterte is on the right track in trying to source out for more opportunities that the Philippines can develop to advance and enhance its technology. There are other nations willing to share its resources to help the Philippines in its desire in transfer of technology.

Lately, President Digong has openly made his remark to do business with China. He is slated to fly to the biggest economy in the world and negotiate on how the Chinese can supply the Philippines with its needed infrastructure to develop Mindanao, the long forgotten island that is occupied by both the Muslims and the Christians.

Lest we forget that we are not in the business of giving up the Philippine claim in the West Philippine Sea in which the Philippines has gained a favorable advantage against China. Therefore, this issue is non-negotiable when the President is faced on how to tell the Chinese government that we cannot settle for less. The International Court of Arbitral has decided finally in the Philippine's favor.

Respect is what the President wants to show to all the free nations that everything is based on how mutual respect can be achieved without making any form of sacrifice, that way each nation can live peacefully without any provocation from other countries, big or small.

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## **STRAIGHT TALK**

By Ed Libranda

### **THE MOMENT OF TRUTH IS ALMOST THERE**

Former Department of Justice (DOJ) Secretary and now Senator Leila De Lima is finding herself in a very difficult situation both in the Lower House and in the Senate.

With her cohort, Senator Antonio "Sonny" Trillanes tags along with her, Sen. Leila De Lima fears the worst of her political life when her alleged sex video would be shown publicly both in the House as well as in the Senate.

Whether there is truth in it, then TO SEE IS TO BELIEVE as the old adage would state.

The testimonies of the inmates from Bldg 14 of the maximum area of the National Bilibid Prisons (NBP) where drug lords are incarcerated, shows the flow of drug money and

how the alleged drug money would find itself in the hands of Sen. De Lima and her confidant driver and alleged driver, Ronnie Dayan.

All the negative publicities generated by the House and Senate hearings have not only damaged the reputation of the feisty senator, but has undermined the integrity of our political system.

The government has to tighten its grip on how to come up with revisions on laws governing the proliferation of drugs in the Philippines. I never thought that there's more than 3 millions drug addicts in the Philippines. This is the most challenging job that is being faced by President Digong in his fight against illegal drugs and the never ending terrorism orchestrated by the Abu Sayyaf Group.

But with few more hearings left on how illegal drugs have become the source of millions of pesos for some drug lords who are supposed to be spending the remaining years of their lives in maximum security prison at NBP, we can only surmise that revision of laws must be enacted to finally overhaul the prison systems.

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## **SEE-THROUGH**

By: Yashika F. Torib, Manila Bureau Senior Correspondent

### **The stink of loosely spun lies**

The Senate Committee Hearing on Justice chaired by Senator Leila De Lima last Thursday was reeking with the stench of lies, cover-ups and attempts for justification.

Presenting “whistleblower” Edgar Motabato, who has been under the protection of the Department of Justice Witness Protection Program for several years, De Lima implied that the Davao Death Squad (DDS) is responsible for the drug-related killings under the Duterte Administration.

Motabato claimed, among others, that President Rodrigo Duterte heads the vigilante group DDS.

Matobato, however, made a spectacle of himself in the committee hearing that even senators, viewers and netizens outwardly sensed his apprehension to elaborate the lies he’d spun for several hours.

The self-proclaimed DDS assassin alleged that he killed an international terrorist named Sali Makdum by hanging, chopping and burying the body in Laud Quarry in Davao City. He furthered that Makdum was brought to the Presidential Anti-Organized Crime Task Force (PAOCTF) office, then headed by PNP Director General Ronald "Bato" Dela Rosa.

Former PNP chief Sen. Panfilo Lacson made an on-the-spot research of Makdum and revealed that even the global search engine Google cannot spew details on the said terrorist. Dela Rosa denied that his office ever had a target named Sali Makdum. He also denied knowing Matobato.

Meanwhile, Philippine Army spokesperson Col. Benjamin Hao said that he could not find Matabato in their database no matter how hard he checked. Matobato claimed that he is a former member of the Citizen Armed Force Geographical Unit (CAFGU) with the Scout Rangers before he was hired by Duterte to join DDS.

Early on the inquiry, Matobato stated that he killed 50 persons during his time with the DDS, but later said that it could be 1,000 or more.

The elderly "whistleblower" repeatedly faltered in his spun lies by not being able to say who brought him to the Senate to become witness. Matobato was evidently anxious in fumbling for answers that he ended up spewing contradictory statements like "Kaibigan pero hindi kilala, matagal nang kilala pero bago lang, si father sa simbahan ang nilapitan". (He was brought by a "friend" he refused to name, that he actually does not know the said "friend", that he knows the "friend" for a long time but only briefly, and he approached a priest to help him.)

He also claimed that he never kept a cellphone, television or radio during his hiding and had no means to learn the recent goings on in the country, the extrajudicial killings in particular (He claimed to not even know who the Vice President is). Later on in his statement, he said that the wife of a certain Richard King called him.

Matobato finally unraveled his spun of lies when he disclosed that he and his team of 30 men open fired on Hamizola, riddling him with an approximate of 200 bullets.

Even with such amount of gunshot wounds, the man was allegedly still breathing when then Davao City Mayor Duterte arrived and finished him with two more magazines from his Uzi submachine gun.

If true, Hamizola surpassed Gen. Antonio Luna's 30 stab wounds from bolos, bayonets and bullets.

Interesting.

When Matobato could no longer keep his statements straight and could only flash an indignant look on the inquiring senators, De Lima and Sen. Antonio Trillanes were quick to the rescue, suggesting for an executive session where Matobato could comfortably share his story.

De Lima's piercing look on the anxious Matobato was evident as her efforts to cover his failed testimonies are plain to the observer's eye.

Sen. Alan Peter Cayetano, former running mate of Duterte, was straight in pointing out that such hearing was simply a demolition job against the president who was openly criticizing and bashing De Lima.

He suggested that Matobato is an accessory to the yellow party's plot to overthrow the Duterte administration.

Amidst the stink of loosely spun lies, cover-ups and justification, Cayetano and Trillanes had a verbal bout of their own, with the former complaining that the latter is intimidating him.

Last week's senate hearing, awkward as it is, served as a week-long entertainment to netizens who peppered the social media with memes mocking Matobato, De Lima and Trillanes.

Everyone looks forward to another spell of "revelations" from more witnesses who might likewise exude another fit of mock dignity to coat their falsehoods and deceptions. Senate hearings can truly sometimes be theatrical, a brief diversion to our typical daily grit and grinds.

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## **NEWS AT A GLANCE**

### **Next Oslo Peace Talks: Land Reform, Industrialization**

October 2 -- The Philippine Star reports that the next round of Government-National Democratic Front (NDF) in Oslo, Norway will discuss land reform and industrialization.

The peace panels of the Philippines government and the Communist Party of the Philippines-New People's Army-National Democratic Front (CPP-NPA-NDF) resume their second round of talks October 8-12.

The first round of formal peace talks held August 22-26 in Oslo, had the two panels commit to resolve the armed conflict by addressing its root causes.

Sison said, "I think through the peace process, all the issues and things to be done (by the Philippine government), NDF, peasant organizations and broad masses will become clearer in framing and implementing a genuine land reform program."

Jose Maria Sison, founder of the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) criticized the former administration's land reform program, under President Benigno Aquino III -- describing it as "fake and complete failure," saying that farmers are incapable of paying the high redistribution imposed through the collusion between the landlords and the government.

"It should be popularized that lands grabbed from landless farmers by big landlords, high bureaucrats, and foreign corporations --will be distributed for free," he announced.

"The center of gravity of the peace negotiations is the twin necessity for national industrialization and land reform," Sison declared in a message to the Kilusang Magbubukid ng Pilipinas during the launching of its 'Campaign for Land and Peace,' stressing that "a self-reliant program for economic development cannot walk and advance without two legs: national industrialization and land reform."

Sison said land reform is needed to produce a definite and wealthy source of food, raw materials for industry and a broad market for industrial and agricultural products -- to produce machines and other equipment for agriculture, create numerous and new jobs for the increasing population and destination of surplus agricultural produce.

Similarly, the University of the Philippines (UP) committed to extend institutional support to the Office of the Presidential Adviser on Peace Process (OPAPP) making their academic personnel and resources available to help end the armed conflict in the country through political settlement -- formalized by UP president Alfredo Pascual in a Memorandum of Understanding with OPAPP secretary Jesus Dureza, during the closing ceremony, Friday, of the 2016 National Peace Consciousness Month at the Quezon Memorial Circle.

Dureza said, "This is another historic and unprecedented event in the history of the peace process in the Philippines, (that) the best minds of the country's premier university are on board to help end the decades-old armed conflict."

The involvement of UP in the peace process was a brainchild of Department of Labor and Employment Secretary Silvestre Bello III who also recommended to President Duterte the appointment of UP vice president Prospero de Vera Jr. as adviser to the government panel negotiating peace with the NDF.

Concurrent chairman of the government peace panel, Bello declared, "We are tapping the best and the brightest in the academe and other sectors of Philippine society to help us forge a final peace agreement that will be mutually acceptable to government and the communist guerrillas -- we will also hold public consultations to enable ordinary citizens and other stakeholders into the peace process to amplify their issues and concerns related to our negotiations with the NDF."

Government peace panel member Hemani Braganza said De Vera will not only sit as adviser but will also assume an active role as one of the five committee members who will negotiate the Comprehensive Agreement on Social and Economic Reforms (CASER) with their NDF counterparts.

A Joint Monitoring Committee (JMC) was also created to check on human rights and international humanitarian law violations of communist guerrillas and government forces, to oversee the implementation of the Comprehensive Agreement on the Respect for Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law.-GV

Read <http://www.philstar.com/headlines/2016/10/02/1629538/next-round-government-ndf-talks-tackle-land-reform-industrialization>

## **House Supports Narco Wiretap**

October 2 -- The Philippine Star reports that the House of Representatives committee on dangerous drugs has voted to endorse several amendments to Republic Act No. 9165, or, the Comprehensive Dangerous Drugs Act of 2012.

The amendment is aimed at strengthening President Duterte's anti-drug campaign.

It allows the Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency (PDEA) to wiretap drug dealers, their financiers and protectors or coddlers, according to Surigao del Norte Rep. Robert Ace Barbers, saying, "we want to allot it to improve the law enforcers' capability and effectiveness in gathering intelligence."

This developed as Justice Secretary Vitaliano Aguirre II complained that they could not monitor the mobile phone communications of convicted drug lords because it is against the law.

Barbers added that another proposal of his committee is to allow the PDEA to coordinate and make confidential report/recommendation to the Anti-Money Laundering Council in order to initiate action for freeze order, seizure and forfeiture, or, for

investigation, inspection, or, examination of financial transaction of any person found involved in drugs, including their financiers or protectors -- while also endorsing "legal presumptions," under which drug suspects would be presumed to have committed the the offenses they are accused of, as in the owner of a property where illegal drugs are found should be presumed to have knowledge of the presence of unlawful substances in his property, or the the conduct of illicit activities.

Read <http://www.philstar.com/headlines/2016/10/02/1629520/narco-wiretap-gets-backing-house>

## **Combat Pay Hike Retroactive to September 1**

October 2 -- Retroactive to September 1, Philippines soldiers and policemen will soon receive up to P5,000 across-the-board increase for combat operations.

This was announced yesterday by the Department of Budget and Management (DBM).

The Philippine Star sources said that President Duterte's pronouncement, however that the joint exercise between the Philippines and the United States will end this month -- was not well-taken by the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP).

The President is aware of it, and still has to make a written order of his pronouncement.

The holding of joint military exercises between the two countries is provided for under the Mutual Defense Treat forged in the 1950s, of which the President has asked the U.S. to clarify.

Sources of the Philippine Star say that some quarters in the AFP were not amenable to it as the training program or course for the soldiers in the next few years will be affected.

Mr. Duterte said the country was not benefiting from such joint exercises as the American forces were giving the Filipino soldiers nothing but their soiled clothes and not the needed support for their continued training.

On the combat pay hike, based on Executive Order No. 03 approved by Mr. Duterte, and signed by Executive Secretary Salvador Medialdea on Sept. 26, Budget Secretary benjamin Diokno declared that the soldiers and policemen would get a fixed P3,000 monthly combat duty pay plus P300 per day "combat incentive" pay for those directly assigned to operations against insurgents, terrorists and lawless elements.

The Philippines constitution "provides that professionalism in the armed forces and the adequate remuneration and benefits of its members shall be a prime concern of the state," the EO read.

"Laws and executive issuances have been enacted in cognizance of the heroism and sacrifices of the frontline soldiers and police officers who figure directly in actual combat against various groups which threaten national peace and security," it added.

The EO stated further, "There is an urgent need to increase the said benefits to improve the living conditions of the men in uniform who are engaged in combating threats to national security and public peace and order."

The increases are retroactive to Sept. 1 and will be given to all officers and enlisted personnel of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) and the Philippine National Police (PNP), and would cost the government a total of P12 billion for the first four months of implementation from September to December 2016, and are across the board regardless of rank, and tax free, said Diokno to Philippine Star.

However, the combat incentive pay is subject to certain conditions, including: the operation must be for a specific combat mission that is duly covered by an operations order (OPORD), or fragmentary order (FRAG\_O) for the military or mission order for the police, the personnel involved in combat must be in the published task organization of the AFP OPORD/FRAG\_O or the PNP mission order, and total for each individual shall not exceed P3,000.

Read <http://www.philstart.com/headlines/2016/10/02/1629525/rody-approves-combat-pay-hike>

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## **TOURISM**

### **High Adventure on Horseback in Taal Volcano**

By Randy V. Urlanda, Manila Bureau Chief Correspondent

Although I have watched countless Western movies, with cowboys and American Indians riding horses and galloping towards the sunset, I have never mounted a live horse before, except for a shiny wooden stallion in a carousel when I was a kid.

So you could just imagine how I felt when I climbed onto the back of a five-year-old chestnut mare named "Bonita," one of the 130 horses in Taal Volcano Island in the

middle of Taal Lake in Batangas that are being rented to trekkers. Bonita also happened to be the tallest among the herd inside their bamboo corral in the sleepy island village of San Isidro.

A big wooden signage of the Philippine Institute of Volcanology & Seismology (PHIVOLCS) in San Isidro greeted us after we disembarked from three motorized outriggers from Talisay town in northern Batangas.

Taal Volcano, rising a mere 400 meters above the lake waters, is considered to be the smallest volcano in the world because of its height. PHIVOLCS maintain an observatory there, similar to those in Mayon in Albay, Bulusan in Sorsogon, Hibok-Hibok in Camiguin, and Canlaon in Negros Occidental, locations of the four other most active volcanoes in the Philippines. San Isidro is the jump-off point for trekkers going up the three-kilometer trail to the main crater of the volcano.

Bonita's small and worn-out saddle was a bit small and uncomfortable for my extra large rump. But, I had no choice. I gripped hard onto its saddle horn as the horse strutted out of the bamboo mounting platform, right after my feet were slipped into the stirrups by Bonita's trainer.

Rommel, my 18-year-old horse "driver" nudged at Bonita's reins to sort of reassure me that he was in control. As we began our dusty trek across a parched cassava field, Rommel kept whispering reassuring words to Bonita, occasionally tugging its reins if the mare deviated from our rugged, ascending route. The lead group was already about a kilometer ahead of us under the scorching mid-afternoon sun.

After fifteen minutes of easy ride, the sloping cogonal track suddenly plateaued.

Before us was a "camel back" course that ascends and descends and vice versa, towards the craggy summit, about a kilometer away. The ridge has steep slopes on both sides. Instinctively, I hang on for dear life as my horse trotted towards the tailend of the ascending lead pack.

Rommel, who was now trailing behind us, hold onto Bonita's reins tightly to steady the agitated horse while I grabbed the saddle horn even more tightly with my sweating right hand. Meanwhile, my left hand gripped the pad of the saddle behind me to steady myself further.

For me, it was a white-knuckled horse ride, after all. Suddenly, it dawned on me why my horse, her wide nostrils flaring to inhale more air, and straining with her 100-kilo load along the tortuous uphill climb, kept on trotting. It turned out, the three-year-old grey colt ahead of us, was her object of interest!

Horses, I found out later, have good memories. And, like humans, they, too can fall hoof over heels on their opposite sex. With a good sense of smell, keen eyes and sharp hearing, my horse saw her inamorata even while we were about a kilometer away.

Lucky for her, but not for me.

After passing two hissing steam vents along the trail where the strong scent of sulphur hang heavy in the warm afternoon air, we finally arrived at the steep summit. The view from the tip of the crater was awesome. I stood atop PHIVOLCS' solar-powered seismograph, encased in a yellow steel drum, with an antenna pointing north towards the Tagaytay Ridge, rising 286-meter more above us in the distance. From our lofty position, we had a grand view of both the placid Taal Lake and the volcano's steaming water-filled crater.

Now came the most thrilling part of the trek, more terrifying than riding a cork-screw rollercoaster—going down to the camp on the same horse in heat.

Bonita, who has recovered its strength after half an hour of rest, suddenly neighed and quickened its pace along the steep, descending trail. Some ten meters down the dusty path, two horses ahead of us, was the colt. Remembering TV news clips on rodeos, my right hand grappled hard at the saddle horn again, leaned my torso backward to balance my weight, and flail my left arm in the air like a real rodeo cowboy.

Like a horse that just munched some locoweeds, we chased the grey colt like crazy. Rommel, who was running after us, with the reins fast slackening from his grip, kept shouting at Bonita to slow down, to no avail. Fortunately, the downhill track suddenly went through a narrow embankment, thereby slowing us down. Rommel caught with us and wound the reins tightly across his fist.

After that, my horse made two more attempts to snuggle close to the colt, but this time, Rommel was in command.

That one-and-a-half hour adventure filled the void of that phase in my young life, which should have been spent on horseback in our farm in Quezon. If not for that memorable Sunday afternoon trek in Taal Volcano, I would have missed that most unforgettable (and terrifying) experience in my life.

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## **COMMUNITY NEWS**

# **PHILIPPINE COAST GUARD AUXILIARY ATTENDS UNITED STATES COAST GUARD AUXILIARY 2016 NATIONAL CONFERENCE (NACON)**

By Edward B. Libranda

### **Phoenix, Arizona**

A delegation from the Philippine Coast Guard Auxiliary attended the 2016 National Conference of the United States Coast Guard Auxiliary held at the Arizona Grand Resort and Spa, 25-28 August 2016. The delegation was headed by Rear Admiral Gerry Reyes, deputy director for administration of PCGA. CDR Edward B Libranda PCGA; CDR Tanny Suerte PCGA; LCDR Jun Pascual PCGA, and LCDR Monte Valmores PCGA were part of the official delegation from the Philippines but stationed in Houston, Texas

The United States Coast Guard Auxiliary conducts annually its International Round Table composed by international delegates from several countries, notably,

Australia, Dominican Republic, Canada, Germany, and the Philippines. This year, the International Round Table was participated by Australia, Dominican Republic, and the Philippines. The International Affairs group of the USCGAux conducted the good exchange of information regarding aviation between the Dominican Republic and Capt Albert Rano of the Philippine delegation.

Cdr Hirigoyen also announced that further training on international affairs will be conducted in Guam, being the nearest station of the USCGAux from the Philippines.

The Commandant's Night held on the last day of the conference was held Saturday, 27 August 2016 at the Grand Ballroom of the Arizona Grand Resort and SPA. United States Coast Guard Commandant Admiral Paul F. Sukunft graced the occasion and attended also by outgoing USCGAux national commodore Vice Admiral Mark Simoni.

Rear Admiral Gerry Reyes presented a memento to Vice Admiral Simoni during the opening ceremony, Friday, 26 August 2016 at the Arizona Grand Resort and Spa Conference Room.

Vice National Commander Richard A. Washburn will take the helm during next year's NACON to be held at Orlando, Florida.