

Duterte to fire more officials next week

MANILA -- There is no stopping President Rodrigo R. Duterte from purging corrupt government officials from office as he threatened to fire more of them next week.

"Lessen ang corruption but I will fire more next week," Duterte said during the turnover of grants to beneficiaries of the Department of Social Welfare and Development's (DSWD) unconditional cash transfer program in Koronadal City on Tuesday (March 26).

Duterte did not give any details but hinted at waiting for a "report" before making a decision to fire the said government officials.

"Hinihintay ko lang 'yung report nila. But sabi ko na (I'm just waiting for their report. But I said), 'You give me your report and if I find it justifiable, you can stay. Pero kung may (But if there is) corruption, I'm sorry," Duterte said.

"Hanggang ngayon nagpapaalis pa ako ng tao (Until now, I'm firing officials). I'm trying my best," he added.

Last week, Presidential Spokesperson Salvador Panelo bared that Duterte threatened to fire officials of state regulator Metropolitan Waterworks and Sewerage System (MWSS) and terminate the contracts of its two water concessionaires if they failed to properly explain the reason for the water shortage problem in Metro Manila.

Panelo said the President was "obviously outraged" in his meeting with MWSS, officials of water concessionaires Maynilad and Manila Water, in Malacañang on March 19.

"In a stern message delivered without even once looking at the officials, the obviously outraged President threatened to fire the MWSS officials and terminate the concessionaires' contracts," Panelo said in a statement.

Panelo said the President also ordered MWSS and the two water concessionaires to submit a report on the water shortage before April 10.

MWSS Administrator Reynaldo Velasco, however, he is willing to resign if the water shortage problem in Metro Manila persists.

Velasco said members of the MWSS serve under the pleasure of the President and he has his prerogative to remove officials anytime he wanted.

The water shortage started affecting residents in Metro Manila in the second week of March with some areas having their water supply completely cut off.

MWSS said the shortage is due to the increase in population, demand of consumers, on top of the early onslaught of the dry season. (PNA)

51 mayors sued over unorganized, low performing drug councils

MANILA -- The Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG) on Wednesday filed administrative cases against 51 mayors over their failure to create anti-drug abuse councils (ADAC).

Filed ahead of the May elections, DILG Assistant Secretary Ricardo Echiverri expects this move to influence other towns in "taking seriously" the organization and strengthening of ADACs in their respective areas.

In an interview, he underscored the importance of setting up an ADAC in every community, saying it signifies commitment and collective action to eliminate the problem of illegal drugs.

The official filed at the Office of the Ombudsman administrative charges of misconduct and dereliction of duty against the mayors.

The agency pointed out in the complaint that "the failure of the respondent to create the local ADAC can be classified as a misconduct in office or a dereliction of duty which is among the grounds for discipline, suspension, or removal from office of a local official."

In a list of sent to the Philippine News Agency, Echiverri said the DILG also filed administrative charges against nine respondents from municipalities with low functioning anti-drugs council.

The DILG filed the complaint against the mayors of the following:

Non-compliant:

- Province of Tawi-tawi
- Lacub, Abra
- Burdeos, Quezon
- San Narciso, Quezon
- Sariaya, Quezon
- Lopez, Quezon
- Perez, Quezon
- Rizal, Palawan
- Kalayaan, Palawan
- Taytay, Palawan
- Quezon, Palawan
- Tagkawayan, Quezon
- City of Toledo, Cebu
- San Francisco, Cebu
- Irosin, Sorsogon
- Santa Magdale-na, Sorsogon
- Magallanes , Sorsogon
- Langiden, Abra
- Lagangilang, Abra
- San Isidro, Northern Samar
- Las Navas, Northern Samar
- City of Borongan, Eastern Samar
- Malabang, Lanao del Sur
- Kapai, Lanao del Sur
- Manabo, Abra
- Pidigan, Abra
- Licuan-Baay, Abra
- Tagaloan II, Lanao del Sur
- Amai Manabilang, Lanao del Sur
- Marogong, Lanao del Sur
- Poona Bayabao, Lanao del Sur
- Marantao, Lanao del Sur
- Diadi, Nueva Vizcaya
- Bambang, Nueva Vizcaya
- Bagabag, Nueva Vizcaya
- Dupax del Norte, Nueva Vizcaya
- Aritao , Nueva Vizcaya
- Alfonso Castaneda, Nueva Vizcaya
- Santa Fe, Nueva Vizcaya
- Kasibu, Nueva Vizcaya
- Kayapa, Nueva Vizcaya
- Dupax del Sur, Nueva Vizcaya

Low functionality:

- Hadji Muhtamad, Basilan
- Palimbang, Sultan Kudarat
- Saudi Ampatuan, Maguindanao
- Ampatuan, Maguindanao
- Maguing, Lanao del Sur
- Lasam, Cagayan
- San Fernando, Cebu
- Bay, Laguna
- Camiling, Tarlac

PRRD ‘in a hurry’ to strike deal with Misuari

MANILA -- President Rodrigo R. Duterte said that he is "in a hurry" to strike a deal with Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) founding chairman Nur Misuari to finally end the long-drawn Moro rebellion and achieve lasting peace in Mindanao.

"I am in a hurry to strike a deal with Nur Misuari," Duterte said during the PDP-Laban campaign rally in Koronadal City on Tuesday (March 26).

Duterte bared this, a week after meeting with Misuari in Malacañang to discuss the shift to federalism, which the MNLF founder was pushing for.

While the government has "come to terms" with Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) chair Al Haj Mu-rad Ebrahim in terms of the Bangsamoro Organic Law (BOL), Duterte said he wanted to do the same with Misuari.

Ebrahim now heads the Bangsamoro Transition Authority (BTA) and acts as interim minister of the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM).

"The BOL is satisfactory according to Murad, as it is. So long as it is implemented correctly. Kay (With) Misuari naman, medyo (maybe) we have to deal with him again," Duterte said.

"And I hope that we could find the space, the time, and the issues that would be more acceptable to everybody, to both the Lumads, the Christian, and the Moro," he added.

Last week, Duterte said he asked Misuari to form a negotiating panel to address his group's concerns.

This, after the MNLF leader told the President that he will go to war if the proposed shift to a federal system will not happen.

Presidential Spokesperson Salvador Panelo said Misuari "was very happy" with the President's response to form a negotiating panel. (PNA)

PH won’t fall into China’s debt trap: DOF

MANILA -- Officials of the Department of Finance (DOF) on Wednesday allayed critics' fears anew that the Philippines could fall into China's debt trap saying the government never reneged on its debt obligations.

They made this assurance following concerns raised by Senior Associate Justice Antonio Carpio that China can seize patrimonial assets if the Philippines fails to pay the PHP3.69 billion loan extended by China to fund the Chico River Pump Irrigation Project.

Finance Undersecretary Bayani Agabin explained that Philippine laws, particularly Presidential Decree No. 1177, requires automatic appropriation in the national budget for debt obligation.

"May probisyon tayo sa batas PD 1177 na automatikong naglalaan ng pambayad ng utang na nakapaloob po ito sa taunang General Appropriations Act (We have a provision in the law, PD 1177 that automatically appropriates payment for debt in the annual) General Appropriations Act. Meaning all our indebtedness -- it's automatically appropriated in our budget," Agabin said in a press briefing in Malacañang.

"Lahat ng mga nabanggit na probisyon sa loan agreement ay mangyayari lamang kung ang gobyerno ng Pilipinas ay hindi na makabayad ng utang nito (All the provisions in the loan agreement will only happen if the government of the Philippines fails to pay its debts)," he added.

Agabin challenged critics of the Chinese loan agreements to review the Philippines credit history and consult with experts before jumping into conclusions that the country is in danger of falling into China's debt trap.

Moreover, he said none of the foreign loan agreements include the surrender of Philippine assets to the lender country.

Agabin reiterated that the Philippines did not offer any of its natural resources as collateral in securing the Chico River Pump Irrigation Project.

"Ang waiver of sovereign immunity ay hindi nagpapahintulot sa sinumang dayuhan o foreign party na kunin o angkinin ang ating mga likas na yaman. (The waiver of sovereign immunity does not allow any foreign party to claim our natural resources)," Agabin said.

The Chico River irrigation project aims to provide a stable supply of water to around 8,700 hectares of agricultural land in the provinces of Kalinga and Cagayan.

Finance Undersecretary Mark Dennis Joven also rejected concerns that the Philippines will fall into China's debt trap the same way Sri Lanka did, stressing the Philippines does a better job in managing foreign loans.