

# 6 PCG, Marina officials relieved over sea mishap

**MANILA** — Officials of the Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) in Iloilo and Guimaras and the Maritime Industry Authority (MARINA) in Western Visayas have been relieved from their posts following the sinking of three motorbancas in the Iloilo-Guimaras Strait over the weekend.

Department of Transportation (DOTr) Secretary Arthur Tugade on Wednesday ordered the relief of the officials to pave the way for an impartial probe into the tragedy.

"I want them immediately relieved from their posts so we can give way to a more thorough and impartial investigation. If they are found negligent, we will make sure that necessary criminal charges will be filed against them," Tugade

said during a visit to Iloilo and Guimaras to inspect various sea transport facilities and visit families of the 31 victims of the sea tragedy.

The relieved officials were:

- PCG District Western Visayas
  - Perlita P. Cinco
  - Joe Luviz V. Mercurio
  - Felixberto M. Salibio Jr.
  - Ricky John Eric V. Mijares
- MARINA**
  - Director Rizal J. Victoria, MARINA Regional Office VI (MRO-6)
  - Section Head Juliet S. Nacion, MRO-6 Franchising Section
  - PCG spokesperson, Capt. Armando Balilo said Cinco was replaced by Capt. Erlin Benliro while



**PORT INSPECTION.** Department of Transportation Secretary Arthur Tugade (3rd from left) and other government officials inspect Jordan Port in Guimaras on August 7, 2019. Tugade ordered the relief of some PCG and Marina officials to pave the way for an impartial probe into the Iloilo Strait tragedy that claimed 31 lives. (Photo courtesy of DOTr)

Mercurio was replaced by Jose Jacinto.

MARINA said Victoria will be replaced by Jose Venancio A. Vero Jr., director of the MARINA Central Office – Maritime Safety Service

(MCO-MSS) and Vero's previous responsibilities will be assigned to Bernardo A. Pollo, Division Chief of the MCO-MSS.

Nacion's replacement is awaiting an internal deci-

sion at the MRO-6.

During the visit, Tugade pledged assistance from the government to the bereaved families in the form of job offers from the Philippine Ports Authority, MARINA, and PCG.

"Tutulong tayo na mabigyan ng trabaho sa PPA, MARINA at Coast Guard ang mga miyembro ng pamilya ng mga biktima. Maliit na tulong lamang ho ito, ngunit nais ho naming maramdaman nila na narito ang go-byerno para sa kanila (We will help give jobs from the PPA, MARINA, and PCG to the family members of the victims. This is just a small help, but we hope that they feel the government is here for them)," Tugade said.

He also ordered MARINA to rush the release of permits of Roll-on/Roll-off (RoRo) and fastcraft vessels meant to replace the wooden-hull bancas suspended from the Iloilo-Guimaras route.

"I-release agad ang

mga permits para hindi mahirapan ang mga pasahero na maghanap ng kani-ang masasakyan (Immediately release the permits so that passengers don't have to worry about sea transportation)," Tugade said.

He said the tragedy in the Iloilo-Guimaras Strait calls for the modernization of all passenger sea transport vessels.

"Itong nangyaring ito ay isang wakeup call na kailangan na nating i-modernize ang ating mga bangka. Ang modernisasyon ay hindi lamang po para sa mga sasakyan sa kalsada. Kasama diyan ang ating mga sasakyang pandagat, lalung-lalo na ang ating mga bangka (What happened here is a wakeup call that we need to modernize our boats. Modernization is not only for vehicles on roads. What must be included are our sea-going vessels, especially our passenger boats)," Tugade said. (PNA)

## US Homeland Security lifts travel notice to NAIA

**MANILA** -- The United States Department of Homeland Security (DHS) on Thursday rescinded its public notice on travel to the Ninoy Aquino International Airport (NAIA) following the "significant improvements" in the Philippine gateway's security operations.

The rescission order "effective immediately" was made by Acting Secretary of Homeland Security Kevin McAleenan on Thursday and was posted on the DHS website.

"After months of direct engagement with the United States, the Government of the Philippines has made significant improvements to the security operations of MNL (NAIA)," the DHS said in a statement.

"Both the Manila International Airport Authority and the Government of the Philippines civil aviation security authorities have demonstrated they are willing to work toward sustaining those improvements," it added.

The DHS issued a pub-

lic notice regarding the deficiencies in NAIA's aviation security measures on December 27, 2018. That year, the US agency made an assessment that NAIA has failed to adequately implement and maintain international security standards and recommended practices established by the International Civil Aviation Organization.

The US State Department has since provided at least USD5 million to help fund security improvements and personnel training at NAIA.

The TSA has also assigned Aviation Security Advisors to the Philippine government to assist with the development and implementation of corrective measures at the Philippine airport.

"DHS and TSA remain committed to working with the Government of the Philippines to help ensure a strong security posture at MNL and enhance global aviation security," the DHS assured.

Foreign Affairs Secretary

Teodoro Locsin, Jr., for his part, thanked the US Embassy in Manila and some Philippine officials for their contributions in the travel notice's lifting.

"US Homeland Security lifted security concerns about NAIA. Congratulations US Ambassador Kim Sung for all the help; Philippine Ambassador Babe Romualdez in Washington for the unrelenting pressure; and DOTr (Department of Transportation) Secretary (Arthur) Tugade for doing in 6 months what US Homeland expected would take years. What a winning team," he said on his official Twitter account.

"In DFA, thank you Honey Isleta of American Affairs for not letting up with US Homeland in Bilaterals that it's gotta lift the restriction on travel to NAIA," he added.

To sustain the improvements cited by the US, President Rodrigo R. Duterte is planning to appoint an official to supervise the country's airport security, Romualdez told the Philippine News Agency. (PNA)

## Duterte Youth submits new set of nominees to Comelec

**MANILA** — The Duterte Youth party-list has submitted a new set of nominees to the Commission on Elections (Comelec) following the disqualification of its first nominee, former National Youth Commission chairperson Ronald Gian Carlo Cardema.

The party-list filed the Certification of Nomination with the Comelec on Tuesday, a day after the poll body's First Division cancelled Cardema's nomination for being over-aged.

Cardema was listed anew as first nominee followed by his wife Ducielle, Guillermo B. Villarreal, Jr., Krizza D. Reyes, and Robert D. Garcia.

Meanwhile, Comelec Commissioner Ma. Rowena Amelia Guanzon accused Cardema of deliberately misrepresenting his eligibility and qualification in his Certificate of Nomination and Acceptance (CONA).

"I have sent a memorandum to the law department

director to initiate an investigation on the probability that Ronald Cardema may have committed the criminal offense of material misrepresentation by stating under oath in his CONA that he is qualified to be representative of the youth sector," Guanzon said in a press conference on Wednesday.

Guanzon said the CONA submitted by Cardema to the Comelec shows that he is more than 30 years old on the day of the last May 13 mid-term national and local elections.

"Respondent Cardema is clearly not qualified to be a nominee of Duterte Youth," she said.

Under the Party-list System Act, a nominee of the youth sector must not be more than 30 years of age on the day of the election and Cardema himself has admitted that he is already 34 years old.

Guanzon said the Comelec will continue to withhold the issuance of

Certificate of Proclamation (COP) to the party-list group election due to pending legal issues surrounding the case.

"It is for the reason that there is still pending litigation over the fact that he was disqualified," she said.

She added the group may still file a motion for reconsideration before the Comelec en banc to appeal the First Division's ruling.

Guanzon said she will also ask the Party-list Coalition in Congress why they allowed Cardema to attend their meetings despite having a pending case with the Commission.

"Let Congressman (Mikee) Romero answer me. Why are you allowing him to attend your meetings when we have disqualified him already. In what capacity is he attending the meeting of the party-list coalition," she said.

The Duterte Youth won a seat after getting a total of 354,629 votes last May 13 elections. (PNA)