

PH urged to allow nurses deployment to Libya

MANILA -- The Libyan government has asked the Philippines to consider the deployment of more nurses and other Filipino workers to the Mediterranean state, the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) said Wednesday.

The request was made by Libyan Health Minister Ahmed Mohamed Omar who met with Foreign Affairs Secretary Teodoro Locsin Jr. in Manila on Tuesday.

In a bulletin sent to reporters, the DFA, through Assistant Secretary Emmanuel Fernandez, said Locsin "promised to look into the request."

At present, Alert Level 4 is in place on Libya's capital Tripoli and its nearby areas, effectively banning deployment as well as the return of at least 1,000 Filipino workers in Tripoli to the state should they decide to return to the Philippines.

During their meeting, Locsin and Omar also discussed the steps made by the Libyan government to address the Filipino workers' concerns over remittances and salaries, which include the delay and non-payment of salaries of the more than 1,000 Filipino nurses and hospital workers in Libya.

Before his trip to Manila, the Libyan official already assured the Philippine embassy in Tripoli that the Libyan government is addressing the issue and that he is coordinating closely with the Office of the Prime Min-

ister and with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Labor, and the Ministry of Finance.

Omar also told the embassy that a "comprehensive review of existing policies in the payment and remittance of salaries and benefits of expatriate health workers is now ongoing."

A focal person has been designated to work closely with the embassy in resolving monetary claims of Filipino

hospital workers.

"Minister Omar also said representations have been made with the Central Bank of Libya to allow Filipino and other expatriate nurses and hospital workers to remit as much as 70 percent of their salaries," Embassy Chargé d'Affaires Elmer Cato said.

"He said the Libyan government is also planning to adjust the salaries of foreign hospital workers to

ensure that they will continue to get the original dollar equivalent indicated in their employment contracts," he added.

Omar, who was accompanied by Libyan embassy in Manila Chargé d'Affaires Ahmed Eddeb met with officials of the Department of Labor and Employment and the Department of Health during his trip to Manila and visited some pharmaceutical companies in the country. (PNA)

Panelo denies hand in ex-mayor Sanchez's release

MANILA -- Presidential Spokesperson Salvador Panelo denied that he was involved in the possible release of former Calauan, Laguna Mayor Antonio Sanchez, who was convicted for rape and murder in 1993.

Panelo was part of Sanchez's legal counsel when he was accused of raping a University of the Philippines Los Baños student Eileen Sarmiento and murdering her companion, Allan Gomez.

In 1995, Sanchez was sentenced to seven terms of reclusion perpetua or 20 to 40 years of imprisonment.

In a phone interview with Palace reporters, Panelo said he withdrew from the case before Sanchez appealed his case.

"Wala na ako doon e, nag-withdraw na ako (I am no longer a part of the case, I withdrew) 27 years ago so I don't think I will be in any position to make any comment," Panelo said.

Panelo, also the Chief Presidential Legal Counsel, said he no longer had any communication with Sanchez but was glad to hear about the news that he would soon be set free.

"Matutuwa ang isang abogado na ang kliyente niya 27 years ago ay makakalaya na. Magkakaroon na ng bagong buhay (An lawyer would be happy to know that his client 27 years ago would soon be set free. Would have a new life)," Panelo said.

"I wish him well kagaya ng lahat ng abogado (just like any other lawyer)," he added.

Asked if Sanchez deserved to be released, Panelo said he and the Duterte administration would always abide by the rule of law.

"Kung (if) the law as it is crafted says that all the inmates who are qualified to be released, then that's what the law says and we have to as we always repeatedly say there's a rule of law and we have always to abide by the rule of

law," Panelo said.

Panelo was referring to the Good Conduct Time Allowance (GCTA) or Republic Act 10592 which deducts an inmate's prison sentence due to good behavior.

Panelo, however, said he was unsure whether Sanchez would still have a chance to run as mayor again.

"We have to study that. I think hindi na siya pupuwedeng tumakbo unless meron siyang kagaya ng iba na humingi ng absolute pardon pero kung wala di siya puwede tumakbo (he cannot run unless he has what others have when they ask for absolute pardon but if he doesn't, he can't run)," Panelo said.

Justice Secretary Menardo Guevarra, meanwhile, said Sanchez's release did not need the approval of President Rodrigo Duterte.

"Hindi kailangan ng approval ni (It does not need the approval of) PRRD. NBP/BUCOR (The New Bilibid Prison and/or Bureau of Corrections) will review Sanchez's good conduct time allowances, kung meron (if there is)," Guevarra said in a text message to reporters.

follow the law of the Chinese territory.

"We also reiterate to our OFWs -- always follow the instructions of our DFA consulate there and stay safe. Respect and observe the rule of law," he added.

Government data show that more than 200,000 Filipinos work in Hong Kong, majority of whom are household service workers.

Protests continue across the island as residents demand the total scrapping of a bill that would allow extraditions to mainland China. (PNA)

664 PDEA employees, negative in surprise drug test

MANILA -- None of the 664 employees of the Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency (PDEA) tested positive for narcotics in a surprise drug test, the agency said Friday.

PDEA Director General Aaron Aquino said the test yielded negative results for the presence of illegal drugs from urine samples that were taken from key officials, drug enforcement officers, administrative/technical personnel, contractual employees, including security and maintenance personnel at the PDEA National Headquarters in Quezon City on Thursday.

"The surprise mandatory drug test is done once to twice a year, or even more when there is reasonable suspicion of drug use by PDEA personnel. This is the second mandatory drug

test for calendar year 2019. The first was done on January 18, 2019," Aquino said in a statement sent to reporters.

The test was administered pursuant to Section 36 (e), Article III of Republic Act 9165, or The Comprehensive Dangerous Drugs Act of 2002, which states that officers and members of the military, police and other law enforcement agencies shall undergo an annual mandatory drug test.

The drug test was also conducted in accordance with the Drug-Free Workplace Policy of the agency.

"PDEA must be drug-free. It should be because we are the prime implementers of the anti-drug law. It establishes our credibility and moral ascendancy to lead the national anti-drug campaign," Aquino said. (PNA)

Surrender high-powered arms or stop ops, PNP warns security firms

MANILA -- The Philippine National Police (PNP) on Thursday called on security agencies to surrender high-powered firearms in their possession or have their licenses to operate revoked.

"We will issue cease to operate and we will not renew their licenses to operate. We will conduct an 'Oplan Tokhang' on these agencies that have high-powered firearms for them to surrender it. Surrender it while we are asking nicely," Civil Security Group (CSG) director Brig. Gen. Roberto Fajardo said during a press briefing in Camp Crame.

The move came after guards of AY76 security agency of power firm Minergy Power Corporation in Balingasag town in Misamis Oriental were caught flat-footed, offering no resistance when suspected New People's Army (NPA) rebels stormed the power plant last August 19.

The attackers disarmed the guards of five AK-47 assault rifles and several rounds of ammunition, and looted the facility of radio transceiver sets, and other equipment.

A probe on the possible lapses of the security guards of the facility is now underway.

"The President himself ordered that security agencies must not have high-powered firearms. It's because they are not trained to use it," he stressed.

Since 2017, civilians and security agencies are no longer allowed to possess high-powered and long firearms.

Fajardo explained that communist rebels may be able to use the seized firearms against government forces.

He said a shotgun is the longest firearm a security agency can possess. (PNA)

No disruption of masses in HK despite protests: CBCP

MANILA -- Filipino Catholics working in Hong Kong continue to attend masses on the island despite ongoing protests, an official of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines (CBCP) said Friday.

"Our priest in Hong Kong is Father Jay Flanders, an SVD. There are still normal Holy Masses schedules and many more are coming, especially in the morning," Bataan Bishop Ruperto Santos, CBCP-Episcopal Commission on Migrants and Itinerant People chairman, said in an interview.

Santos added that the Filipino faithful remain devoted to attending masses despite the suspension of train operations in the Chinese territory, especially in the afternoon.

"This only shows their strong faith in God that in those trying and difficult times our OFWs (overseas Filipino workers) still fulfill their Sunday obligations, trust Him and place their hope in God," he added.

At the same time, Santos lauded the concern expressed by employers for OFWs.

"And I also inform that their

employers are so concerned with the welfare and safety of their household service workers (HSWs) that they are limiting their free time, except going to Holy Masses," he said.

"They are advised to stay home and avoid those places where rallies are held. We are appreciative and grateful for the compassionate gestures of their employers," the CBCP-ECMI head added.

Santos also reiterated his earlier appeal to OFWs to obey the orders of the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) and