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MANILA -- The Philippine National Police (PNP) on Wednesday said security measures are in place to ensure the successful conduct of the special plebiscite on the renaming of the province of Compostela Valley to Davao de Oro on Saturday.

PNP spokesperson, Brig. Gen. Bernard Banac said PNP officer-in-charge, Lt Gen. Archie Francisco Gamboa, through the PNP permanent liaison with the Commission on Elections (Comelec), has assured the readiness of the Compostela Valley Police Provincial Office under Col. Joselito Loriza, to perform official functions as deputized agents of Comelec for this plebiscite.

"The PNP high command has alerted the PNP Regional Office in Southern Mindanao, particularly the Compostela Valley Police Provincial Office (PPO), to provide all available assistance as deputized agents of the Commission on Elections for the holding of a special plebiscite," Banac said in a statement.

He said the ComVal PPO will be primarily responsible for enforcing rules and regulations of

the Comelec, particularly the implementation of the province-wide gun ban, liquor ban and other rules against prohibited acts.

The other Police Provincial Offices and Regional Mobile Forces under PRO-11 were also alerted to provide possible augmentation to ComVal for this security operation.

Under Memorandum Order (MO) 42 dated November 28 but released on Tuesday, Duterte concurred with the Commission on Elections (Comelec) in the deputation of the PNP and the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) for a referendum on the renaming of Compostela Valley to Davao de Oro province.

"Pursuant to Section 2(4), Article IX-C of the Constitution, the Comelec is empowered to deputize, with the concurrence of the President, law enforcement agencies and instrumentalities of the Government, including the AFP, for the exclusive purpose of ensuring free, orderly, honest, peaceful, and credible elections," Duterte said in the memorandum.

"By virtue of the powers vested in me by the Constitu-

tion and existing laws, [I] hereby concur with Comelec Resolution No. 10616, deputizing the AFP, the PNP, and other law enforcement agencies and instrumentalities of the Government, in connection with the 07 December 2019 Plebiscite in the Province of Compostela Valley," he added.

On April 7, 2019, Duterte signed Republic Act 11297 renaming Compostela Valley to Davao de Oro.

Presently, Compostela Valley is the only province in Davao Region that does not bear the name "Davao."

The Davao Region is composed of Compostela Valley, Davao del Norte, Davao Oriental, Davao del Sur, and Davao Occidental.

Under RA 11297, changing the name of Compostela Valley to Davao de Oro will need the nod of a majority of residents of the province through a plebiscite that will be conducted for its eventual ratification.

Duterte's MO 42 directs law enforcement agencies and other concerned agencies to "coordinate and cooperate with the Comelec in the performance of their duties and functions."

House OKs bill lowering gov't retirement age on 2nd reading

MANILA -- The House of Representatives on Wednesday approved on second reading a measure lowering the optional retirement age of government employees from 60 to 56. Voting via voice vote, the chamber passed House Bill 5509, which seeks to amend Section 13-A of Republic Act 8291, otherwise known as the "Government Service Insurance (GSIS) Act of 1997."

Government workers who have reached the age of 56 years may file for retirement and be entitled to an old-age pension for life from the GSIS.

ACT Teachers Party-list Rep. France Castro, principal author of the bill, said earlier retirement is one of the demands voiced during consultations with public school teachers.

Castro noted that teachers in the Philippines retire five years later than those in most countries, noting that retirement age is 60 in most North American, European and Asian countries.

"Respect and humane consideration demand that a person of 55 years -- a few years shy of being a senior citizen -- should not be required to perform the arduous functions expected of a public-school teacher in the Philippines. At such stage of their lives, public school teachers should at least be given the choice if they wish to rest from the profession and enjoy better and healthy years ahead," Castro said. (PNA)

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Sotto backs criminal raps vs. water firms

MANILA -- Senate President Vicente Sotto III on Wednesday said he fully supports President Rodrigo R. Duterte's move to amend the alleged "one-sided" concession agreement between the government and water companies Maynilad Water Services, Inc. and Manila Water Co., Inc., and hold all persons behind the contract accountable.

"After hearing his explanation last night on how we are being taken for a ride by these concessionaires, I told him I'm supporting him 100 percent on the issue," Sotto said in a text message to reporters.

President Duterte on Tuesday assailed the provisions in the 1997 water concession agreements with the two private firms that are allegedly disadvantageous to the government.

Among the assailed provisions are those that prohibited government interference in rate-setting and the provision for indem-

nity in case of such government interference.

"Ang kontrata napaka-tagilid na tagilid (The contracts are very one-sided) because if they fail to realize the profit enduring the lifetime of the contract or at any period, babayad tayo sa nalugi nila (we will pay for their losses)," Duterte said at the Palace following the signing of two laws.

An arbitration court in Singapore recently asked the Philippine government to pay Maynilad PHP3.6 billion and Manila Water PHP7.4 billion over losses due to the disapproved rate increase.

"We are being milked by billions and pinapabayad pa tayo ng mga (yet we are still ordered to pay) fines and penalties," he said.

Duterte said he has asked Solicitor General Jose Calida to craft a new water contract that will be both "favorable" to the public and the government.

"Ibigay mo sa kanila (Give it to them). This is the amended contract. Accept it or nothing to it. Pero... hababulin ko talaga sila (But I will really run after them) for economic sabotage," the President said.

Meanwhile, Senator Imee Marcos also expressed her support for the President on the issue.

"Water is universally recognized as a human right, not merely a commodity. I support PRRD's desire to assail these onerous contract that deprives Filipinos of both their right to water, as well as impose liabilities upon government even when service and supply fail," Marcos said.

On the other hand, Senator Francis Tolentino said the Senate should look into the matter.

"As the one who gave the franchise, it (conducting a probe) is part of the oversight function of Congress," he said in a news forum.

The neophyte senator said he is set to deliver a privilege speech concerning the water issue on December 9.

“Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and He will flee from you.” – James 4:7