

China ‘checking’ reports vessels driving away PH fishers

MANILA -- Chinese government is verifying reports that Chinese vessels are driving away Filipino fishermen from sand bars near Pag-asa Island in the disputed West Philippine Sea or South China Sea.

Chinese ambassador Zhao Jinhua made this assurance, stressing the Chinese government has committed to settle sea disputes peacefully.

“We are checking and we are in close coordination with DFA (Department of Foreign Affairs) and we will be checking whether it is true or not,” Zhao said in a chance interview with reporters in Malacañan Palace on Wednesday.

“Rest assured China is committed to peacefully settle the disputes we have and we are working very well in managing our differences,” he added.

Meanwhile, Zhao said Chinese government is also working with DFA to polish the Code of Conduct (CoC) on the WPS meant to prevent misunderstanding in the contested maritime area.

The draft framework of the COC was approved during the ASEAN Summit held in Manila in 2017.

“In the meantime, we are working on the COC, Code of Conduct, and the Filipino side is the country coordinator for China-Asean relationship so we are hoping that we can make further progress in our joint efforts to maintain peace and stability in the South China Sea,” Zhao said.

Zhao emphasized the importance of keeping freedom of navigation in the contested waters open.

“I think it is in the common interest of all countries, including China, the United States and Asean countries, that we keep the peace

and stability there and we keep the freedom of navigation in the whole South China Sea open,” Zhao said.

Last week, US State Secretary Mike Pompeo vowed to defend the Philippines if forces are attacked in the disputed sea.

Zhao said that Chinese government is not concerned about Pompeo’s remark.

“Maybe that you would expect the Chinese side to be very concern about these

remarks. We are concerned more, it’s about the peace and stability in the South China Sea,” Zhao said.

“Everybody, every country will suffer if peace and stability become something to the opposite, that it’s chaos or conflict,” he added.

Asked if Philippines should be concerned about possible attacks from China, Zhao said he was more concerned about attacks coming from “the other

side”.

“Well, we are worried about possible attacks from the other side. We don’t worry about China attacking anybody because it is not our policy,” Zhao said.

“The other side use your imagination,” he added, refusing to elaborate what he meant by “other side”.

The Philippines, China and other states have overlapping claims in the West Philippine Sea. (PNA)

Bong Go surges into solo 3rd place in latest SWS poll

MANILA — With a little over two months remaining before the May 2019 elections, former Special Assistant to the President Christopher Lawrence “Bong” Go surged to break into the top three slots in the latest Social Weather Station survey for the midterm senatorial race.

“Maraming salamat po sa dumarami nating kababayan na nagtitiwala sa aking kakayahan at intensyon na mag-serbisyo ng tapat at lubos. Kayo po ang nagsisilbing inspirasyon at lakas sa akin upang dagdagan ang pag-sisikap na maipaabot sa mas nakararami ang mga ‘serbisyong Tatak Duterte’ na aking ipagpapatuloy para sa kapakanan ng bawat Pilipino,” Go said in an interview.

An SWS survey conducted Feb. 25-28 showed the administration bet receiving the approval of 47 percent of the respondents to claim solo third place.

This reflects a continuous improvement from his 5th to 6th place ranking with 41 percent conducted by the same survey firm in Jan. 23-26 and coming from a 15th-16th ranking back in December 2018.

Go said he is humbled by the consistent rise in the survey results as he also thanked the people for trusting in his capability and sincerity in serving the nation.

He also reiterated his gratitude to his mentor, President Rodrigo Duterte, who vouched for his integrity and endorsed his candidacy.

“Malaki ang tiwala ng ating mga kababayan kay Pangulong Duterte, na pinagsilbihan ko sa loob ng mahigit na 20 taon, kayat hindi matatawaran ang tulong ng kanyang pag-suporta sa aking kandidatura,” said Go, who vowed to support the programs and policies of the Duterte administration.

“Ipagpapatuloy po natin ang tunay na pagbabago na sinimulan ng ating Pangulong Duterte,” he added.

Despite his strong showing in the survey, Go said it is no time to rest, adding that he would work double time to pursue his campaign and help the unfortunate, particularly fire victims.

“Tulad po ng pangako ko, kahit saang eskinita papasukin ko para matulungan ang mga nangangailangan,” said Go, who has been visiting fire victims to help them in between his busy campaign schedule.

“Mas importante sa akin ang makatulong at makapagserbisyo sa tao, higit pa sa pangangampanya,” he added.

Meanwhile, Go reiterated his appeal to his supporters to refrain from posting campaign materials in unauthorized areas and to follow the law.

“Inuulit ko ang panawagan ko sa mga supporters namin: I am begging you, huwag ninyo ilagay ang mga campaign materials sa mga bawal na lugar. Kapag may

nakita kayong ilegal na kakabit, pakitanggal na kaagad,” Go stressed.

While using campaign materials in support of a candidate is a right protected under the freedom of expression, Go said it must be done in accordance with the rules and regulations promulgated by the Commission on Elections.

“Freedom of expression po yan na magpakita ng suporta at pagtitiwala sa aming kakayahang magingkod. Pero gawin po natin ito ng naaayon sa batas at mga patakaran ng Comelec,” Go said.

It would even be better, according to Go, if his supporters would use the funds intended for his campaign materials for construction materials, like plywood, and other relief goods for fire victims.

“Kung gusto niyo tala-ga ako suportahan, suportahan ninyo ang mga adhikain namin ni Pangulong Duterte. Unahin natin ang pagbigay serbisyo at tulong, magmalasakit tayo sa kapwa, dahil higit na mas importante ito kaysa sa kampanya. Ibili niyo nalang sana iyan ng plywood para sa nasunugan kaysa gastusin para sa pangangampanya,” he said.

Go also stressed anew his commitment to abide by the election laws and play fair.

“Clean and honest elections have always been the trademark of the President even when he was still Mayor of Davao City and it will be the hallmark of this administration.

Gordon lauds efforts to close immunization gap

MANILA -- Senator Richard Gordon on Thursday lauded the efforts of both the Department of Health (DOH) and the Philippine Red Cross to close the immunization gap, amid the vaccination hesitancy caused by the controversial anti-dengue vaccine, Dengvaxia.

Gordon, also chairman of the Philippine Red Cross, said the health department is gaining ground to regain the public's trust in its immunization program amid the measles outbreak affecting different parts of the country.

"I am glad that

through our efforts, both the DOH and the Red Cross, we are narrowing down the vaccination gap, which was made wider by the debacle of the Dengvaxia vaccine. I'm glad that the people's belief in vaccines is now being restored," he said.

Gordon cited a report that some 9,394 children have been vaccinated from February 16 to March 5 through the community-based vaccination program launched by the Red Cross, in coordination with the DOH.

Data from the DOH Epidemiology Bureau showed that there were 11,459 measles cases

recorded in the country between January 1 to February 21 this year.

It reported a total of 189 deaths, with Cavite, Laguna, Batangas, Rizal, and Quezon (Calabarzon Region) logging the most number of deaths at 61. It was followed by the National Capital Region (NCR) with 52 deaths, Central Luzon with 25 deaths and Eastern Visayas with 16 deaths.

Meanwhile, Health Secretary Francisco Duque III said the department, in coordination with other government agencies, the Philippine Red Cross and other medical societies, is doing its best to bring back birth immunity nationwide to 95 percent.

"So, this is where we are and hopefully we see a reverse of the outbreak trend, but it is not going to happen soon it may probably take another four to six weeks. I think about first week of April," he said.

Duque added that around 462,000 children, or 30 percent of the population in the National Capital Region, have been vaccinated, saying the vaccination hesitancy level nationwide is slowly going down. (PNA)

save up to almost PHP170 monthly. More or less, almost four kilos of rice can be saved up by an ordinary family)," Gatchalian said.

'Murang Kuryente' bill gets bicam nod

MANILA -- The congressional bicameral conference committee on Thursday approved the "Murang Kuryente" bill, which seeks to reduce the country's electricity rates.

Senator Sherwin Gatchalian, chair of the Senate committee on energy and co-author of the bill, said it proposes the use of the PHP208-billion Malampaya Fund to pay off the stranded contract costs and stranded debt of the National Power Corporation.

The said items are passed on to consumers through the universal charge in the monthly electric bill.

He said around 60 to 70 percent of the total PHP208-billion Malampaya fund will be used to pay for the said items while the remainder will be

used to fund the exploration of energy resources.

Gatchalian said the bill would help lower the cost of electricity and provide significant consumer savings for Filipinos. For a household consuming 200 kilowatt hours (kWh) per month, Gatchalian said this would result in savings of almost PHP170 per month.

"Almost PHP1 ang matitipid ng ating mga consumers at para sa ordinary consumers, yung mga kumukunsumo ng 200 kWh per month, almost PHP170 ang matitipid niya kada buwan. More or less lumalabas almost four kilos of rice yung matitipid ng isang ordinaryong pamilya (Consumers can save up to PHP1 [per kWh] and those who consume 200 kWh per month can

PhilHealth intensifies anti-fraud drive for UHC implementation

MANILA -- The Philippine Health Insurance Corporation (PhilHealth) has intensified its campaign against fraud to ensure full implementation of the Universal Health Care law, an official of the agency said on Thursday.

In a statement, PhilHealth acting president Roy Ferrer said it has partnered with government agencies, including the National Bureau of Investigation (NBI) to go after health institutions and professionals involved in misconduct, breach in accreditation, claims for deceased patients and other grounds for punishment.

Ferrer added PhilHealth has signed a memorandum of agreement with the NBI in line with their anti-fraud campaign. He said the Philippine Medical Association and Philippine Hospital Association helped PhilHealth confront concerned hospitals while the Professional Regulation Commission sanctioned the dishonest health professionals.

"Last year, PhilHealth filed about 5,000 cases against health care institutions and professionals. The corporation only takes 17 days to process a case build-up that entails a thorough data-gathering method. Fraudulent transactions spanning from professionals recruiting members into a bogus "Free Wellness Program" only to be paid for by PhilHealth to hospitals and dialysis centers including filing claims for deceased patients were exposed," Ferrer said.