

Panelo denies 'lawyering' for Albayalde

MANILA -- Presidential Spokesperson Salvador Panelo on Thursday denied allegations of acting as 'spokesperson' of resigned Philippine National Police (PNP) chief, Gen. Oscar Albayalde.

"It is unfortunate that the honest and objective observation by this representation on the ongoing investigation of the Senate Blue Ribbon Committee has been described by Senator (Richard) Gordon as lawyering for the embattled former Philippine National Police Chief Oscar Albayalde," he said in a statement.

Panelo lamented that Gordon had misunderstood his remarks about the case of Albayalde who came under fire for his supposed links to "ninja cops" or policemen involved in the reselling of seized illegal drugs.

Panelo explained that his earlier statement about a former police general's testimony against Albayalde was just an "honest assessment of a public proceeding" and an "exercise of the freedom of speech for which every Filipino citizen is entitled".

"Prior to making my comments that riled my friend Senator Dick, I precisely made clear that I was not lawyering for General Albayalde but was only expressing my personal views as a lawyer on a particular subject that I was queried about," he added.

Gordon, chair of Senate Blue Ribbon Committee, which conducted an investigation on Albayalde's supposed participation in the recycling of illegal drugs, told Panelo to stop speaking on behalf of the embattled police chief.

The senator's statement came after Panelo on Monday dismissed as "hearsay" the testimony of former Criminal Investigation

and Detection Group chief and now Baguio City Mayor Benjamin Magalong that Albayalde had attempted to influence the dismissal order against his 13 former subordinates accused of being "ninja cops".

During previous Senate hearings, Magalong claimed that Albayalde, former Pampanga provincial police director, lobbied against the order to dismiss 13 Pampanga cops supposedly involved in the recycling of seized illegal drugs from a 2013 police anti-drug operation against a suspected Chinese drug lord.

Other than Magalong, retired police general Rudy Lacadin also alleged that Albayalde made an admission, during a 2014 phone call, of receiving a portion of dirty money from the reselling of illegal drugs, an accusation already denied by

PH poverty projected to be at 18.7% in 2021: WB

MANILA -- Poverty incidence in the Philippines is expected to fall below 20 percent in 2020 and further decline until 2021, a year before President Rodrigo Duterte's term ends, according to the projections made by the World Bank (WB).

In its latest Macro Poverty Outlook for East Asia and the Pacific Report, the World Bank expects the poverty rate in the Philippines at 20.8 percent by the end of 2019, down from the estimated 24.5 percent in 2016.

The World Bank had estimated the Philippines' poverty incidence at 23.1 percent in 2017 and 21.9 percent in 2018.

In its latest report, the World Bank saw the poverty rate in the Philippines further declining to 19.8 percent in 2020 and 18.7 percent in 2021.

P r e s i d e n t i a l

the former PNP chief.

Panelo, defending his earlier statement, said in his latest remarks that fairness "should - and must always be the hallmark of a legislative inquiry".

He insisted that Albayalde remains innocent unless results of the Senate investigation prove otherwise.

"The constitutional rights of any resource person must be respected at all times - and on all accounts. That is what due process is all about," he said.

"It is basic that a conclusion of guilt should be pronounced only after an investigation or hearing, or a senate inquiry for that matter, has been terminated, with both sides being given the opportunity to be heard - and not while it is going on," he said.

He expressed optimism that Gordon would not let Albayalde "be adjudged guilty

Spokesperson Salvador Panelo on Thursday said the Palace welcomed as "good news" the latest report of World Bank, which "recognizes the strength and resiliency of our domestic economy."

Panelo also thanked Duterte's economic and poverty reduction teams for doing a "splendid job in the past three years in moving the Philippines onwards," despite criticisms hurled against the administration.

"We consider this projection as consistent with the goal of our Philippine Development Plan crafted in 2017 where our economic managers targeted to reduce poverty incidence to 14 percent at the end of the term of President Duterte in 2022. This is equivalent to about six million people that are to be lifted out of poverty," he said

even prior to the termination of the proceedings".

Panelo said his stance on the issue hounding Albayalde "cannot - and should not - be viewed as a challenge or an affront to the Senate Blue Ribbon Committee, its chairmanship or its present investigation".

"I categorically explained on national television that it is within the Senate's mandate, as well as its duty to conduct investigations to ferret out the truth of a controversy, in order to aid them in legislating and crafting instrumental laws of our land," he said.

"I stated at the outset that I was doing so with all due respect to the resource persons who were accusing General Albayalde of wrongdoings, as well as to my government colleagues in the Senate," Panelo added.

(PNA)

in a statement.

The number of Filipinos living below the poverty line fell to 21 percent in the first half of 2018, compared to the 27.6 percent registered in the first half of 2015, based on data released by the Philippine Statistics Authority in April.

The dramatic decline in poverty has emboldened Duterte's promise of reducing poverty incidence to 14 percent by the end of his term.

Panelo said Duterte's office was optimistic that state departments and offices would double their efforts in implementing the government's anti-poverty initiatives.

"While this is proof that genuine and palpable change has indeed come, the Palace expects all officials and employees of relevant departments and agencies to double their efforts as they strive to provide more programs that our country-

Duterte admits firing PNOC-EC chief

MANILA -- President Rodrigo Duterte admitted Thursday that he had sacked Philippine National Oil Company - Exploration Corporation (PNPC-EC) president and chief executive officer (CEO) Pedro Aquino Jr.

Duterte made the admission when he attended the 45th Philippine Business Conference and Expo at the Manila Hotel in Ermita, Manila on Thursday night.

Irked by the "idiotic" deal the PNOC-EC had entered into with Russian oil giant Rosneft Oil Company, the President said he asked Aquino to tender his resignation.

Duterte said he had discovered that Rosneft was left unaware of the supposed irregularities in the oil and gas development contract it signed with PNOC-EC in 2017.

"I just fired yesterday a subsidiary of PNOC. It's a company. Here is a guy (Aquino) who prepared a contract with the Russians. Well, the Russians thought that was all there is to it," he said.

On Tuesday, Presidential Spokesperson Salvador Panelo announced that Duterte had boot-ed Aquino out of the PNOC-EC due to "loss of confidence".

Aquino's firing stemmed from the multilateral agreement on development of multilateral deal signed by the PNOC-EC, Rosneft, and Hong Kong-based firm Pionaire Finance Limited in June 2017.

The deal was supposed to develop multilateral cooperation on oil and products trading among the three signatories, but Duterte stressed that he could not accept that Aquino acted on his own without getting permission from the

PNOC-EC Board.

Duterte said Aquino's act was clearly opposed to the government's rules and regulations.

"He wanted now the Board of Trustees to ratify what he prepared. Kaya sabi ko, 'Adre, abugado ka?' Sabi niya, 'Yes.' Sabi ko, 'Anong kalokohan mo na baligtad? (So I told him, 'Are you a lawyer?; He said, 'Yes.' I said, 'But it's a stupid act when you took the wrong direction)," the President said.

"Instead of you na given the power to draft, to prepare, whatnot, and then after that have it approved by the Board of Directors? Baligtad ang gusto mo eh. Ikaw ang [gumawa ng] contract (You went to the opposite direction. You crafted the contract) and you want the Board of Directors to ratify your idiotic contract," he said.

Earlier Thursday, Panelo said Rosneft has to forge a new contract with the Duterte administration, since its previous deal with the PNOC-EC to develop oil and gas resources in the Philippines was deemed invalid.

He noted that the Russian oil firm had already expressed intent to invest in the Philippines.

"Maganda nga 'yung proposal pero hindi nasunod 'yung stages of bidding and vetting (The proposal is good, but the stages of bidding and betting have not been followed). So they have to reapply to bid," Panelo said in a Palace media briefing.

"They have to start from kung among stage ang dapat na gawin nila. 'Yun ang gagawin nila (They have to start from the first stage. That's what they need to do)," he added.

(PNA)

Up to PH to request help on nuclear tech: Russian envoy

MANILA-- Russia is ready to provide the Philippines assistance in exploring nuclear energy in the country should it request, Russian Ambassador to the Philippines Igor Khovaev said on Thursday.

"I would like to emphasize that it's up to you Filipinos to decide whether you'll use sophisticated nuclear technology or not. As for us Russians, we are ready to discuss any

option of cooperation, we are ready to offer our sophisticated nuclear technologies, we are ready to help you build nuclear power plants, including the floating nuclear barges," he said in a CNN Philippines interview.

The envoy said Russian technology in terms of nuclear energy is one of the most sophisticated and safest in the world.

In around 30 countries, the envoy said nuclear facilities built by Moscow are functioning with no reported incident yet.

"The development of our nuclear industry has no incident. By the way, Chernobyl Power Station

is located in Ukraine, not in Russia," he said.

Russia and the Philippines recently signed a memorandum of intent to explore the possible construction of nuclear power plants in the country, which was among the 10 business agreements during President Rodrigo Duterte's visit to Sochi.

But according to Malacanang, a nuclear energy deal between the two states is still "uncertain" due to the issue of constitutionality.

On this area of cooperation, Khovaev, for his part, believes ties on energy should not be limited to nuclear technology.