

PHILIPPINE COMMUNIST LEADER SEEKS RENEWED PEACE TALKS

MANILA: The leader of the Philippines' communist insurgency has called on President Rodrigo Duterte to revive collapsed peace talks as his rebels launched new attacks. On Saturday, Duterte angrily scrapped talks with communist insurgents aimed at ending their decades-long conflict after both the government and the rebels called off unilateral ceasefires. "Even if the armed conflict between the armed forces of the two parties has resumed, peace negotiations can and must continue," Jose Maria Sison, rebel leader and Communist Party of the Philippines founder, said in a statement issued from exile in the Netherlands late Thursday.

Sison, a former university instructor of Duterte, asked him to "encourage and allow back-channeling efforts to clarify misunderstandings and solve immediately the current problem". On Thursday communist rebels killed a man, kidnapped a policeman and another man, and burned construction equipment in the southern island of Mindanao, a military report said. They also burned a mining company's trucks in a northern mountain region.

Duterte, a self-described socialist who once boasted of his links to the communist rebels, had jump-started the 30-year-old peace process, initially vowing to end over four decades of fighting. The president released captured rebel leaders and both sides had called separate ceasefires to pave the way for peace talks overseas. But Duterte called off the peace talks after communist attacks left four soldiers dead last week. Duterte has since called for the arrest of the rebel leaders he released as clashes between the 4,000-strong communist New People's Army and government forces have increased.

"There should have been a measure of restraint in his reaction in order to preserve the (government-communist) peace process," Sison said in the statement posted on his Facebook page. There was no immediate response from the government. The communist insurgency in the poverty-stricken country began in 1968 and is one of the longest running in the world. It has claimed an estimated 30,000 lives, according to the military.—AFP



MANILA: This photo shows volunteer firefighters dousing a truck with water which was burned allegedly by members of the communist's New People's Army in Itogon town, Benguet province, north of Manila.—AFP



JAKARTA: A motorist rides past the wreckage of a truck partially buried under the mud following a landslide in Songan village on Bali island, Indonesia, yesterday.—AP

12 DEAD IN LANDSLIDES ON INDONESIA'S BALI

EXTREME RAIN TRIGGERED LANDSLIDES

JAKARTA: Twelve Indonesians, including three children, have been killed on the holiday island of Bali after landslides triggered by heavy rains engulfed several villages, an official said yesterday. Several houses were also buried and badly damaged in the incident, which took place overnight from Thursday to Friday in Kintamani district in central Bali. "The extreme rain that occurred all day on Thursday has triggered landslides in three villages and 12 people have died," disaster agency spokesman Sutopo Purwo Nugroho said.

Three children, aged one, seven and 10, died in two of the villages. Five people were injured, three of them seriously. Local disaster agency officials said villagers had been evacuated from the affected areas—far from the popular beach resorts of southern Bali—and no one else was believed to be missing. Landslides and flooding are common across the sprawling Indonesian archipelago, particularly during the months-long rain season which peaks in Jan and Feb.

In Dec, 29 people died and 19 others were left missing when floods and landslides hit Garut in the west of Indonesia's main island of Java. Bali, a pocket of Hinduism in Muslim-majority Indonesia, is a popular tourist destination that attracts millions of foreign visitors to its palm-fringed beaches every year.—AFP

US, CHINESE AIRCRAFT IN UNSAFE ENCOUNTER OVER S CHINA SEA

BEIJING: A Chinese early warning aircraft and a US Navy patrol plane had an "unsafe" encounter over the South China Sea this week, the US Pacific Command said yesterday, in the first such incident known to have taken place under President Donald Trump's administration. The interaction between a Chinese KJ-200 and a US Navy P-3C plane took place on Wednesday in international airspace, Pacific Command spokesman Robert Shuford said. He did not say what was unsafe about the encounter, although the term usually implies planes flying too close to one another.

Shuford says the US plane was on a routine mission and operating according to international law. The Department of Defense and the Pacific Command "are always concerned about unsafe interactions with Chinese military forces," he said. The Chinese Defense Ministry did not immediately respond to a faxed request for comment. However, the website of the Communist Party newspaper Global Times quoted an unidentified ministry official as saying that the Chinese pilot had responded in a "legal and professional manner."

"We hope the US side will focus on the relationship between the two

countries and two militaries in their entirety, adopt concrete measures and eliminate the root causes of accidental incidents between the two countries on sea and in the air," the unidentified official was quoted as saying. Philippine Defense Department spokesman Arsenio Andolong also expressed concern because the incident happened near Scarborough Shoal, which is located within the Philippines' 200 mile exclusive economic zone but claimed by China, which seized it in 2012 after a tense standoff with Philippine vessels.

"We're worried of possible miscalculation and it's good to know that nothing untoward happened," Andolong said by telephone. If such foreign aircraft venture into Philippine airspace, "we deserved to be told out of courtesy." Such incidents have occurred occasionally over and within the South China Sea, which China claims virtually in its entirety. Although China says it respects freedom of navigation in the strategically vital area, it objects to US military activities, especially the collection of signals intelligence by US craft operating near the coast of its southern island province of Hainan, home to several military installations.—AP

S KOREA PROSECUTORS PUSH AGAIN TO SEARCH PARK'S COMPOUND

SEOUL: South Korean prosecutors filed a suit yesterday to try to force aides of impeached President Park Geun-hye to stop blocking searches of the presidential compound. Prosecutors tried last week to enter the Blue House with a court-issued search warrant to check for material connected with a corruption scandal involving Park and a confidante. Park's aides turned them away, citing a law that can block searches of sites containing state secrets. The suit was filed with the Seoul Administrative Court to determine whether blocking such searches is legal, prosecution spokesman Lee Kyu-chul said.

He expects the court to make a ruling next week. The court confirmed the filing of the suit but gave no further details. The move came after prosecutors said Park scrapped plans to let authorities question her on Thursday, to protest media leaks about the timing and location of the interview. The two sides had agreed not to disclose such information before the questioning was over. Prosecutors said they did not leak the information. By law, South Korean presidents have immunity from prosecution while in office, except in cases of grave crimes such as treason.—AP