

ABE ENJOYS DUTERTE'S FOLKSY DIPLOMACY

DAVAO, Philippines: With a visit to Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte's bedroom, having one of the world's rarest birds named in his honor and guided by a sockless host, Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe had a morning to remember yesterday.

Duterte, a charismatic politician known at home for his folksy charm, dropped many of the formal protocols normally associated with visits by a head of government as he took Abe on a tour of his beloved southern home city of Davao. Abe's day began with a visit to Duterte's "simple home" for a breakfast of sticky rice cakes and mung bean soup, a presidential aide said, with the leaders dining at a wooden table before heading for a look around Duterte's house.

"We also showed him how the president enjoys the comfort of his own bed, including his old and favorite mosquito net," Duterte's aide, Christopher Go, wrote on Facebook alongside a photo of the leaders smiling while standing next to the bed.

The leaders later had a casual meeting at a hotel overlooking the sea, where Duterte was photographed in a checkered shirt and long pants but no

socks a familiar look for the 71-year-old who takes pride in his informal fashion style. Abe's next activity saw him standing in front of a stuffed Philippine eagle, the national bird and one of the world's most endangered. A ceremony saw a two-year-old eagle named Sakura after the famous Japanese cherry blossom.

Abe was given a photo of the eagle, which is kept at a nearby sanctuary, as well as a fluffy toy version draped in indigenous clothing. Abe, normally blue-suited and politically conservative who nevertheless showed off his fun side last year when he dressed up as video game icon Super Mario at the Rio Olympics' closing ceremony, appeared to enjoy the day.

He smiled and laughed throughout the eagle ceremony, and ended his Davao trip at a Japanese-language school where he was greeted by singing and flag-waving children.

Abe was the first foreign leader to visit the Philippines since Duterte took office just over six months ago. His two-day trip began on Thursday with a much more formal itinerary in the capital of Manila, where he held meetings with Duterte at the presidential palace.

Abe was also the first head of gov-



DAVAO: Japan's Prime Minister Shinzo Abe (C) greets teachers at the Mindanao Kokusai Daigaku in Davao City yesterday. Abe is the first foreign leader to visit the Philippines since President Rodrigo Duterte took office just over six months ago. —AFP

ernment to visit Davao, the largest city in the southern Philippines that is 1,500 kilometres (900 miles) from Manila. Duterte, a longtime mayor of Davao before becoming president, has made developing the southern

Philippines a top priority, arguing the region has been neglected by "imperial Manila". Abe flew from Davao to Australia yesterday afternoon as part of a trip that will include Indonesia and Vietnam. — AFP

MYANMAR'S RAKHINE MPs REFUSE TO MEET UN ENVOY

LEE PROBING ROHINGYA ABUSES IN REGION

SITTWE, Myanmar: The ruling party in Myanmar's Rakhine state government said yesterday it refused to meet a UN envoy who is probing allegations of horrific abuse of Rohingya Muslims by security forces in the region.

Yanghee Lee, the UN special rapporteur on Myanmar, was expected to hold talks with members of the Arakan National Party in the state capital Sittwe, before travelling north to an area under military lockdown today. Lee has faced threats and been branded a "whore" by Buddhist hardliners on previous visits for her criticism of how Myanmar treats the Rohingya, a stateless group that has suffered years of poverty and repression. They have been targeted by security forces during a three-month crackdown in northern Rakhine that the UN said has seen at least 65,000 Rohingya flee across the border to Bangladesh.

"They offered to meet with us from their side but we have no plans to meet them," the vice president of ANP, Khine Pyi Soe, said of Lee's arrival. "I don't think that meeting with them is very important," he added. Lee's spokesman could not be immediately reached for comment.

Parts of northern Rakhine have been under military control since October as the army launches "clearance operations" to find Rohingya insurgents allegedly behind deadly raids on police border posts. The crisis has drawn a storm of international criticism from the elected government of Aung San Suu Kyi, which took power in March. Lee has slammed the lockdown as "unacceptable" and called for an international investigation



This handout from the Joint Strategy Team, a consortium of nine local Kachin humanitarian organizations shows Chinese security forces (front) watching Myanmar residents, who fled from fighting between ethnic rebel groups and military troops, arrive at the river boundary of Myanmar and China at Lung Byen village near China's Yunnan province. — AFP

into claims troops have raped, murdered and tortured civilians from the Muslim minority. Ahead of her trip, she said violence in Rakhine had contributed to "disquiet regarding the direction that the new government is taking in its first year". Muslim-majority Malaysia has lashed out at Nobel laureate Suu Kyi for not stopping the violence, and next week will host foreign ministers from the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation for talks on the crisis.

Bangladesh has urged Myanmar's government to end the violence and

take back the thousands of refugees that have entered already overcrowded camps along the border.

"Bangladesh has demanded (the) quick restoration of (a) normal situation in Rakhine state so that Myanmar nationals... can quickly go back home," foreign minister A.H. Mahmood Ali said after meeting Myanmar's special envoy in Dhaka this week. Myanmar's foreign ministry said the two sides had "agreed to commence consultations for verification and repatriation" of those who had fled the lockdown. — AFP

INDONESIA NARCOTICS CHIEF FAULTS PILOTS ON DRUGS FOR CRASHES

JAKARTA: Most of Indonesia's airline accidents have involved pilots who tested positive for drugs, including a Lion Air jet that slammed into the sea four years ago while trying to land on the tourist island of Bali, the chief of the national narcotics agency said. Budi Waseso made the comments Thursday at a ceremony on Bali to inaugurate traditional village security guards as anti-drug volunteers.

The comments are another blow to the image of the country's airline industry after a video circulated online last month showing an apparently intoxicated pilot in the cockpit of a Citilink passenger plane. News reports this week said two pilots of another airline, Susi Air, owned by the country's fisheries minister had recently tested positive for drugs. "Almost all air accidents in Indonesia, whether it was just a skid or whatever, the pilots are indicated to be positive for drugs," Waseso told reporters.

Earlier in the day he told the event attended by Bali's governor that a Lion Air pilot in the spectacular 2013 crash had "hallucinated" that the sea was part of the runway.

His comments are at odds with other official accounts. After the crash, which miraculously caused no fatalities among the 108 people on board, the transport ministry said the pilots had not tested positive for drugs. The final report blamed the accident, which occurred in rain, on poor communication between the pilots and inadequate trading. Lion Air, the National Transport Safety Committee and the Ministry of Transport declined to comment.

Indonesian airlines were previously barred from flying to Europe and the United States but foreign air safety regulators have upgraded the country, allowing some airlines to resume flights. The US aviation regulator upgraded Indonesia's safety rating in August. However, the International Air Transport Association's former chief executive, Tony Tyler, who stepped down in June, said in 2015 he was very concerned about airline safety in Indonesia. His comments reflected worries about rapid growth in the number of planes in the skies and the need to upgrade air traffic management systems. — AP