

Interesting Times

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PHL Arena to be the venue of 2023 FIBA World Cup, as PHL-Japan-Indonesia awarded hosting rights

The Philippine Arena will be the site of the 2023 FIBA World Cup after the three-nation consortium of the Philippines, Japan and Indonesia was chosen to host the prestigious international basketball competition.

The International Basketball Federation or FIBA on Saturday, December 9, awarded the hosting rights for the FIBA Basketball World Cup 2023 to Philippines/Japan/Indonesia.

“This marks the first time in the competition’s history that it is to be staged in more than one country,” said a news release from FIBA, the world governing body for basketball.

FIBA is an independent association formed by 213 National Basketball Federations throughout the world and is recognized as the sole competent authority in basketball by the International Olympic Committee (IOC).

The Philippines-Japan-Indonesia group and the Argentina-Uruguay group were the finalists to host the event due to take place in just under six years’ time.

The 2023 is now set to break attendance records for FIBA World Cup matches as the venue for the most awaited international basketball competition is at the 55,000-seater Philippine Arena, the largest mixed use indoor arena in the world. The Philippine Arena is the centerpiece structure of Ciudad de Victoria in Bocaue, Bulacan.

The decision was made by FIBA’s Central Board after the bidders gave final presentations to support their candidatures to host the 19th edition of basketball’s biggest competition.

After the presentations, the “Central Board voted unanimously in favor of the candidature put forward by Philippines/Japan/Indonesia,” FIBA said.

Manuel V. Pangilinan, Chairman Emeritus of the Philippines Basketball Association (PBA), headed the Philippines/Japan/Indonesia candidature.

“We are extremely happy that FIBA has decided to award the hosting right for the FIBA Basketball World Cup 2023 to Philippines/Japan/Indonesia,” Pangilinan said.



FIBA President Horacio Muratore shows the FIBA decision that the three-nation group of the Philippines, Japan and Indonesia will be the host of the 2023 FIBA Basketball World Cup. (Photo courtesy FIBA)

“The World Cup is an event that fans of basketball in these three countries are very proud of and hosting it will allow to spread the basketball fever across the three countries and the region,” he added.

FIBA President Horacio Muratore congratulated the Philippines and its partner countries Japan and Indonesia for winning the hosting rights for the 2023 FIBA Basketball World Cup.

“Congratulations to Philippines/Japan/Indonesia as they will host a first-of-a-kind FIBA Basketball World Cup in 2023, when it is staged across multiple countries,” Muratore said.

“This was a very difficult decision as both candidatures were of exceptional quality. We want to congratulate both bidders for their outstanding work,” he said.

Muratore said that they were “very pleased to see national federations team up and put to-

gether bids of the highest quality to host our World Cup.”

“We look forward to witnessing a FIBA Basketball World Cup Final played in a venue packed with more than 50,000 basketball crazy fans in the Philippines, a country where basketball is (like) a religion,” the FIBA president said.

The FIBA Basketball World Cup 2023 will see the Group Phase take place in Philippines, Japan and Indonesia, with the Final Phase to follow in the Philippine capital city of Manila.

There will be two rounds of eliminations, with the Philippines hosting 16 teams, while Indonesia and Japan will host eight teams each. Manila will host the quarterfinals up to the finals.

The bidding process for the FIBA Basketball World Cup 2023 saw two candidatures of

very high quality, with both vying to host FIBA’s flagship competition.

“Faced with such fortunate circumstances and acknowledging similar trends in the world of sport, the Central Board decided that Argentina/Uruguay will have the privileged opportunity to adapt their candidature for the FIBA Basketball World Cup 2027 and present it to the Central Board,” a FIBA release said.

“FIBA will communicate to Argentina/Uruguay the requirements for the hosting of its leading event at the beginning of 2018. Subject to meeting these, and following visits by a new Evaluation Commission and the submission of the required guarantees, the Central Board will vote to decide the host(s) of the FIBA Basketball World Cup 2027 at its next meeting in June 2018,” FIBA said. (Eagle News Service)

Former President Aquino should be asked to explain Dengvaxia vaccine mess, says Gordon



Former President Benigno Aquino III meeting with officials of Sanofi Pasteur in Paris, France on December 1, 2015. Photo from Senate Blue Ribbon committee hearing presentation of Senator Richard Gordon. Also in the photo is former Health Secretary Janet Garin and former Finance Secretary Cesar Purisima.

Senator Richard Gordon said former President Benigno “Noynoy” Aquino III should also be investigated, and possibly even invited to the senate hearing probing the government’s unusually hasty procurement and implementation of the anti-dengue vaccination program, particularly the Dengvaxia vaccine which has not completed clinical trials.

Gordon said that the P3.5 billion budget released for the Dengvaxia vaccination on more than 800,000 schoolchildren was also released with undue haste, or in just a matter of months when it would normally take this at least a year or two.

The vaccination of school children was even done in April 2016, when the school year was about to end, and just a month before the May 2016 national elections.

Senator Gordon said former President Aquino has a lot of explaining to do. He told re-

porters he is considering inviting Aquino in the next senate blue ribbon committee hearing.

“I’ll talk to the others and see whether we should pero if I were him, I’d go para mas maganda sa kanya na mapaliwanag ko ‘yung side ko,” Gordon told reporters.

According to the timeline on the Dengvaxia vaccines’ procurement, it was already December 22, 2015 when the Food and Drug Administration approved the certification for the Dengvaxia vaccine.

The following day, December 23, former Budget Secretary Florencio “Butch” Abad already issued a memorandum for President Aquino for the funding for the Dengvaxia vaccination using savings from the Miscellaneous Personnel Benefits Fund (MPBF).

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Trump tells NASA to send Americans to Moon

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Bitcoin rises in debut as SEC warns on digital money

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Over 6,000 firefighters battling southern California blaze

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Drilon: Congress' authorization of 1-year extension of martial law in Mindanao already "a foregone conclusion"



Congress' "authorization" of a one-year extension of martial law is already a foregone conclusion, Senate Minority Leader Franklin Drilon said on Tuesday, December 12.

Drilon, who spoke to reporters prior to a briefing of security officials on the proposal, noted that Congress, after all, was a "political body," and that President Rodrigo Duterte has a super majority in both houses.

tion, the Congress will authorize the extension of martial law for one year in the entire Mindanao," he said.

He said ultimately then, "the Supreme Court will have to decide the validity of the extension."

He said this was because he was certain several groups would question such before the High Court.

Duterte has already formally asked Congress to allow the one-year extension of martial law in Mindanao, starting January 1, 2018.

The imposition of martial law is set to expire in December, months after Congress gave the go-signal for a first extension. (ENS)

Former President Aquino should be asked to explain Dengvaxia vaccine mess, says Gordon

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The amount was P3,556,155,900 for the expanded program for immunization where the Dengue vaccine is to be used in three identified regions: NCR or National Capital Region, Region 3 or Central Luzon, and Region 4-a or Southern Tagalog region.

United Nations Conference on Climate Change. He was also with former health secretary Janet Garin and former Finance Secretary Cesar Purisima.

Gordon said the former President should be asked to explain this.

"Ang region 3, 4 tsaka NCR ang pinakamaraming boto eh, so kung hindi pera, boto. Wala pa akong sinasabi. Nakakapagtaka dun lang nila inilagay ang sample pagkatapos ang laki ng amount. Mukhang hindi pinag-aralan ng husto yung efficacy ng gamot," Gordon noted in an ambush interview with reporters.

Sanofi Pasteur had earlier released a statement that based on their studies, the Dengvaxia vaccine is not recommended for those who have not had dengue prior to vaccination since this would lead to a more severe type of dengue.

This had caused alarm for parents whose children had been vaccinated in the school-based dengue vaccination program. There had also been at least two reported deaths of school-children after they had been given Dengvaxia shots. (with a report from Meanne Corvera, Eagle News Service)

Former Health Secretary Janet Garin insisted, however, that there was no corruption in the procurement of the Dengvaxia vaccines. But she said she is open to an investigation.

"We are hoping that this would really be investigated ... Ako rin po ay nababagabag.



Four SC justices detail Sereno's unlawful acts; Treason, manipulation, lack of respect by CJ cited

More high court justices testified against Supreme Court Chief Justice Maria Lourdes Sereno, giving details on how she had acted "through unlawful means" in at least one instance in the West Philippine Sea controversy, and manipulated the Court several times without consulting her fellow justices, to the point of violating its own rules.

Chief Justice, she should've taken the initiative of bringing it to the attention of the en banc because, after all, it is the en banc that will decide on the matter," he said.

The request of Justice secretary Vitaliano Aguirre II was dated May 29, 2017. This was however not tackled during the SC's en banc on June 6. Instead, Sereno opted to bring this out during lunch with some of the magistrates on the same day.

"There is a distinct difference between discussing something important during the en banc session, where you have the docket folders, the materials with you and holding a caucus on an important matter where in front of you are plates, forks and food," Tijam said.

"I'd like to decipher why the Chief Justice did not act on it promptly, being the member in charge. I was not the member in charge but I acted more promptly by circulating a memorandum to the en banc and trying to force a vote," he added.

Tijam said that Sereno should have promptly referred the matter en banc, regardless of her position or thoughts on the case, thus a delay in the resolution of the petition could have been avoided.

"But the point is, regardless of the thoughts, the sentiments, the feelings of the

Justice's request to transfer the cases involving Maute terrorists to either Luzon or Visayas.

Supreme Court Associate Justice Teresita De Castro, on the other hand, point out on how Sereno in the last five years, has been repeatedly disregarding rules and procedures of the high court.

De Castro said she had been telling Sereno, the most junior among the justices, that she cannot do this, but Sereno did not heed her advice.

"Hanggang kailan ba kami magtitiis?" De Castro said during the House committee on justice hearing on the impeachment complaint against Sereno.

Treason

Another Supreme Court associate justice Francis Jardeleza said Sereno committed no less than "treason" for illegally obtaining classified information on the Philippine government's claims over the disputed West Philippine Sea.

He said Sereno committed not only treason but disloyalty to the public for referring

Dela Rosa to remain in gov't service even after retirement from PNP

Apparently, even after he retires, Philippine National Police Chief Ronald Dela Rosa will be in government service.

Dela Rosa told reporters on Tuesday that President Rodrigo Duterte has already told him which agency he would be transferred to after his retirement in January 2018. He, however, refused to divulge which agency this was exactly.

"Everyone failed in that agency. Bahala na kayo mag-ispip," Dela Rosa said.

Pressed, Dela Rosa only said that the agency was "corruption-laden (masuhol)."

"I don't run (away) from challenges lalo na kung pinaka-nirerespeto ko ang nagsabi," Dela Rosa said. Dela Rosa is set to retire on Jan. 21, 2018, the day he turns 56 years old.

This is the age of mandatory retirement in the uniformed service.

PHL consulate: No reports of Filipino casualties in New York subway blast



There are no reports of Filipinos injured in the subway attack in Times Square on Monday so far.

The Philippine Consulate General urged the Filipino-American community to contact 9172940196 should they know of any Filipino or Filipino-American affected by the attack police said was done by Akayed Ullah using a home-made pipe bomb.

At least four people, including the Bangladeshi suspect, were hurt in the attack.

PSA: Unemployment rate, bahagyang tumaas nitong Oktubre



Bahagyang tumaas ang unemployment rate ng bansa nitong Oktubre 2017 kumpara sa kaparehong panahon noong 2016. Ayon sa Philippine Statistics Authority, tinatayang nasa 5.0 percent ang unemployed na mga Pilipino.

Bahagya itong tumaas kumpara sa 4.7 percent na nailata sa kaparehong panahon noong nakaraang taon.

Katumbas ito ng 2.2 million Filipinos at 2 million naman noong nakaraang taon.

she learn of it? And what has the judiciary have to do with our case?" Jardeleza said.

"I just want to ask her: who is disloyal to the Philippine government?" said during the House committee on justice yesterday.

Jardeleza served as Solicitor General of the Republic of the Philippines from February 2012 until his appointment as the 173rd Associate Justice of the Supreme Court on August 20, 2014. He also served as Deputy Ombudsman for Luzon.

He also served as Agent for the Republic of the Philippines and Head of the Philippine legal team handling the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea Annex VII arbitration with China, in relation to the West Philippine Sea maritime disputes.

Jardeleza wondered how Sereno was able to get information that was confidential and restricted, and known only to lawyers in the executive department.

"My question is: how did

proper cases, the Court finds the subject shortlist as tainted with a vice that it is assigned to guard against. Indeed, the invocation of Section 2, Rule 10 of JBC-009 must be deemed to have never come into operation in light of its erroneous application on the original ground against Jardeleza's integrity," the high court's decision dated August 19, 2014, penned then by Associate Justice Jose Mendoza said.

"This rule may well be applied to the current situation for an opposing view submits to an undue relaxation of the Bill of Rights. To this, the Court shall not concede," the high court's resolution said then.

Sereno's lawyers, however, insisted that the Chief Justice did no wrong. (Eagle News Service)

"You are getting what you want through these devious means that are not right," Brion said of Sereno.

In the high court's decision on the case of former solicitor general Jardeleza against Sereno, it called the exclusion of Jardeleza because of Sereno's manipulation as a "defect" and a "vice" that the high court should guard against.

"As the branch of government tasked to guarantee that the protection of due process is available to an individual in



Congress approves Duterte proposal for 1-year extension of martial law in Mindanao

Congress on Wednesday, December 13 voted to approve President Rodrigo Duterte's proposal for a one-year extension of martial law in Mindanao.

The approval pushed through with a vote of 14-4-0 in the Senate, and a vote of 226-23-0 in the House of Representatives, with joint results of 240-27-0.

The four senators who voted against the 1-year martial law extension were Franklin Drilon, Bam Aquino, Risa Hontiveros and Francis Pangilinan.

The votes of Senators Cynthia Villar and Francis Escudero, who were unable to vote in the first round, were no longer counted after Drilon

posed an objection to the inclusion of their votes after the final results were already announced.

"Taimtim tayong nanumpa na matapat nating itataguyod ang pagtanggap sa Saligang Batas. Pinag-isa tayo ng Saligang Batas...Article 7, Section 18 of the Constitution states. Wala na hong aktwal na rebelyon, hindi kailangan ng bayan (ang extension ng martial law)," Pangilinan said in explaining his vote.

"For us to go after terrorists and those who disregard our laws we must do so consistent with the law and the Constitution, otherwise we become lawbreakers..." he added.

He said the approval was

an "abdication of our sacred duty" to act as a check and balance, and was contrary to

authorities themselves had already, according to her, said that the New People's Army nearer to peace. Sobra na ang pagdanak ng dugo sa ating lansangan," Hontiveros said.



was already a "spent force." "Martial law is not the solution..It will not bring us

Some dissenting opinions in House

Rep. Kaka Bag-a-o said that the declaration of martial law was a "big step backwards" from peace.

"Our soldiers deserve a better strategy..We do not match terror with another terror," Bag-a-o said.

Rep. Gary Alejano said he voted no because the Marawi crisis was over, and there was therefore no longer a legal basis for such an extension.

Rep. Christopher Belmonte, Rep. Arlene Brosas and Rep. Edcel Lagman echoed his argument.

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Brosas added that the extension would pave the way for what she said were more human rights violations.

"Ang target nito ay to silence critics..at di kampakni ng Pangulo," she said.

2nd time

This is the second time Congress voted to approve a proposal to extend martial law in Mindanao from President Duterte.

The first time was on July 22, when the 60-day martial law imposed on Mindanao lapsed.

President Duterte first declared martial law there after Islamic State-inspired groups overran Marawi in May. (Eagle News Service)

Guerrero: It's "overly ambitious" to think terrorism will be eradicated by end of my term

Armed Forces of the Philippines Chief Rey Guerrero on Friday, December 15 stopped short of saying he would be able to eradicate terrorism by the end of his term in April, saying making such a promise would make him "overly ambitious."

"I'm just being practical. Ang sabi ko nga sa inyo the AFP operates based on a campaign plan. We've set targets and timelines and right now may targets kami," Guerrero said in a press briefing.

He said, however, that "as far as the neutralization of terrorist threats is concerned, I'll do my best...(and) the most that I can give at the time that I am afforded



This photo taken on July 22, 2017 shows government troops patrolling a deserted street in Marawi on the southern island of Mindanao. In May, the city was overrun by terrorists inspired by the Islamic State. / AFP / Ted Aljibe/

as the chief of staff," Guerrero

public "can expect a more focused military" conducting "intensified focused military operations...nationwide, most especially in Mindanao." (Eagle News Service)

Pasay court allows Pampanga Rep. Arroyo to travel abroad



Former President Gloria Arroyo.

QUEZON CITY, Philippines (Eagle News) -A Pasay City regional trial court issued a decision allowing Pampanga Representative Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo to travel abroad for vacation and official business.

Judge Jesus Mupas of Pasay City Regional Trial Court Branch 112 issued the decision allowing the former President to go to Japan, Hong Kong and Myanmar from December 26, 2017 to January 12, 2018.

Mupas approved Arroyo's request after her lawyers Ferdinand Topacio and Joselito Lomangaya submitted a "very urgent supplemental motion for leave to travel abroad" and paid the travel bond of Php 700,000.

Topacio submitted Arroyo's motion to travel abroad in November 2017 after the Sandiganbayan dismissed her graft case over the botched national broadband project deal with the Chinese firm ZTE Corp.

Cebu Rep. Garcia says she requested for the dengue program expansion for her constituents

(Eagle News) - Cebu Rep. Gwendolyn Garcia on Friday said she was only trying to do what she could for her constituents when she asked then-Health Secretary Pauly Ubial to expand the government's dengue vaccination program to her province.

"Ginagampanan lang namin ang role namin as fiscalizer at mabigyan ng benefits ang constituents namin kung may government program na ganito," Garcia said in a radio interview.

She recalled telling Ubial during a session in 2016 that the dengue incidence in Cebu was "very high" and that there were already people dying.

"So sinabi ko sa kaniya, dalawa kayong nagtatalong schools of thought. As of now, ang (Department of Health), ang undersecretaries mo, parehong inendorse ito. Kaya sabi ko, if you stop this, e nabayaran na yan?" Garcia said.

She said if lawmakers like her asked, "that is our role."



"Sa kaniya po, as secretary of health (then), if she really believes na kailangang ihinto, paninigandin niya. Health e, buhay na ng mga bata ang nakasalalay dito," she said.

Ubial said on Thursday Garcia was among the lawmakers from the House of Representatives who "pressured" her into implementing the controversial dengue vaccine program.

She alleged that in one session in 2016, Garcia had

kept "badgering" her for almost an hour.

She said the other lawmaker was Iloilo Rep. Oscar Garin, former Health Secretary Janette Garin's husband.

The female Garin, however, noted that her husband was not a member of the Commission on Appointments that ended up rejecting Ubial's appointment as health secretary at that time. (Eagle News Service)

New federalism campaign administrator appointed



Eagle News) - The Department of the Interior and Local Government's Federalism and Constitutional Reform program has a new administrator.

Interior Assistant Secretary Jonathan Malaya has been appointed to the position, DILG Officer-in-Charge Catalino Cuy announced on Sunday.

Malaya was Assistant Secretary for Communication and Capacity Development of the DILG before the appointment.

"As directed by President (Rodrigo) Duterte, the DILG needs to let the local governments and the ordinary people appreciate and understand how federalism will be able to change the course of our

country and lead it towards development..And with ASEC Malaya at the helm of the campaign, I am confident that we can make this happen," Cuy said.

Malaya was assistant secretary of the Office of the President.

He was also executive director of PDP-Laban Federalism Institute.

Duterte to appoint Kariton Klasrum's Efen Peñaflorida as PCUP commissioner



Efen Peñaflorida, named CNN's hero of the year in 2009, making a speech. /Peñaflorida Twitter account/

(Eagle News)- President Rodrigo is set to appoint Kariton Klasrum founder Efen Peñaflorida as a commissioner of the Presidential Commission for the Urban Poor.

Duterte made the announcement days after he fired commissioners of the agency, including its chair, left-leaning Terry Ridon.

Duterte made the move after Ridon traveled seven times outside the country since he was assigned to the commission in September.

The President said the PCUP just met two to three times despite it being a collegial body.

Pag-dedeploy ng traffic enforcers sa gabi at madaling araw plano sa Quezon City



Pinagpaplanuhan ang pagdedeploy ng karagdagang traffic enforcers na magbabantay tuwing gabi hanggang madaling araw sa mga pangunahing kalsada sa Quezon City.

Ito'y matapos lumabas sa datos ng Metropolitan Manila Development Authority (MMDA), na nagaganap ang mga maubhang aksidente simula alas-onse ng gabi hanggang alau-na ng madaling araw kung kailan wala nang mga traffic enforcer.

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Dahil dito, iiniiti ni Philippine National Police-Highway Patrol Group (PNP-HPG) Police Community Relations Chief Glenda Lim, na dapat ikonsidera ng Inter-Agency for Council for Traffic (i-ACT) maging ng local government ng Quezon City ang pagdedeploy ng mga enforcer kahit gabi hanggang madaling araw.

Bukod sa EDSA at Commonwealth Avenue, madalas ding naitatala ang mga aksidente sa quirino highway, Katipunan Avenue, Quezon Avenue, Aurora Boulevard, Andres Bonifacio Avenue at E. Rodriguez Senior Avenue.

Mga transport group na tutol sa PUV modernization, muling binalaan ng Pangulo



Muling binalaan ni Pangulong Rodrigo Duterte ang mga transport group na tutol pa rin sa Public Utility Vehicle (PUV) modernization program.

Ayon kay Pangulong Duterte, tiyak na may kalalagayan ang mga transport group na hindi susunod sa batas dahil wawasakin niya ang mga sasakyan ng mga ito.

Maka-ilang beses ng naglunsad ng tigil-pasada ang mga grupong Piston at Stop and Go Coalition bilang protesta sa PUV modernization program.

Dela Rosa defends appointment of Ferro as anti-drug chief



Then- the head of the Philippine National Police Anti-Illegal Drug Group (PNP-AIDG) Senior Supt. Albert Ferro announces that the three other companions of police suspect SPO3 Ricky Sta. Isabel are now under restrictive custody inside Camp Crane in Quezon City. (Eagle News Service)

4 na katao, arestado sa drug buy-bust operation sa Tondo, Manila



Apat katao ang arestado makaraang mahulihan ng ipinagbabawal na gamot sa ikinasang anti-drug operations ng Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency (PDEA).

Sa bisa ng search warrant, isa-isang hinalughog ng Special Enforcement Service ng PDEA ang tatlong bahay sa Brgy. 112 Tondo, Maynila.

Sa bahay ni Ramil Paragas sa C.P Garcia St. Corner Dandan Street nakuha ang mga sachet ng umano'y shabu at drug paraphernalia.

Nakita din sa kaparehong kaye ang apat na sachet ng hinihinalang shabu malapit sa lababo sa kwarto

ni Vicente Anciado Jr. Habang sa drawer ng kwarto ni Ruel Maestro alias Yamson nakuha ang limang sachet ng illegal na droga.

Samantala, tatlong sachet ng shabu naman ang nakuha sa bahay ni Virgilio Estrada sa Osmeña Street.

Ayon sa PDEA, ginagawang drug den ang bahay nina Paragas at Estrada habang habang notoriyus na pusher naman sina Anciado at Maestro.

Dinala sa PDEA headquarters ang mga suspek na mahaharap sa reklamang paglabag sa Comprehensive Dangerous Drugs Act of 2002.

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By: Mar Gabriel, Eagle News Service

Villegas to the Anti-Kidnapping Group so he could tell all.

Ferro, he added, was a very competent officer.

"Some guys are lucky but not so competent but some guys are unlucky but very competent. Rarely can you find officers now (who) are both lucky and competent. Si ferro nakikita ko he is very competent sa trabaho pero naging unlucky siya kasi nasingitan siya," he said.

He noted the police official, who is currently the deputy chief of the Firearms and Explosives Office, "has established contacts with our foreign counterparts."

"So siya ay established na, pinagkatwalaan na siya and I hope sa pagbabalik niya, ganun din ang mangyari," he said. (ENS)

Dalawang magkahiwalay na ambush ng NPA sa pulis, nangyari sa Surigao del Norte

By: Jabes A. Juanite, Eagle News Correspondent



Dalawang magkahiwalay na insidente ng ambush ang nangyari sa Surigao del Norte nito lamang Linggo, Disyembre 10.

Papunta sana ang tropa ng Claver Municipal Police Station sa Surigao City para ipaayos ang kanilang service vehicle ng paputukan ang kanilang patrol car. Tinatayang nasa sampung kalalalahanian ang nagpapatok sa kanila.

Ang pangalawang insidente ay nangyari naman sa Brgy. Mabuhay, Sison, Surigao del Norte, kung saan nasa 15 kalalalahanian ang namataan ng mga miyembro ng PNP Provincial Mobile Force sa isang bundok.

Huminto ang mga miyembro ng otoridad para tiyakin ang sitwasyon kung ito ba ay

mga miyembro ng NPA, dito na nagkaroon ng putukan sa dalawang grupo na tumagal din ng ilang minuto.

Wala namang nasaktan sa panig ng gobyerno.

Samantala, patuloy naman ang isinagawang clearing operation ng PNP Mobile Force para matukoy ang kinalalagayan ng mga NPA.

Naaresto ng mga tunay na ahente ng PDEA ang suspek sa ikinasang buy-bust operation sa may kanto ng Mc Arthur highway at Lazatin Subd., Tarlac City kamakailan.

Ayon kay Tarlac PDEA Provincial officer Marie Fe V. Manto, ang suspect ay si Lorenzo Narbolita, taga-Brgy. Mapalacio, Tarlac City.

Matagal na umanong nasa PDEA target list ang suspek.

Modus operandi umano ng suspek na magpanggap bilang isang PDEA agent o kaya naman ay gagamit ng mga pangalan ng mga tunay na PDEA agent para makapang-extort ng ilegal na droga sa mga inaakala niyang mga tao na may kinalamang sa kalakalng ito.

Kapag nakakumpiska na siya ng ilegal na droga ay ide-deliver niya ito sa kaniyang mga customer.

Military truck na nag-rescue ng mga sundalong sugatan, nahulog sa bangin; 2 patay, 9 na katao sugatan

By: Ferdinand C. Libor, Jr., Eagle News Correspondent



Patay ang dalawa katao habang siyam naman ang sugatan matapos mahulog sa bangin ang kanilang sinasakyang military truck sa Sitio Dumalian, Barangay Lourdes sa Pagadian City.

Ayon sa report ng 53rd Infantry Battalion, ang nasabing sasakyan ay nag-rescue sa dalawang sugatan na mga sundalo na nakikipagbarkaban sa rebeldeng New People's Army (NPA) sa Brgy. Lison Valley sa nasabing lungsod.

Bandang 10:00 ng umaga nitong Linggo, Disyembre 10 ng magkapalitan ng putok ang tropa ng Charlie company ng 53rd IB sa mga rebeldeng grupo na tumagal ng apat na oras.

Dalawa ang sugatan sa hanay ng militar na kinakailangang madala agad sa ospital.

Habang binaybay ng nasabing military truck ang kahabaan ng Lison Valley patungo nang Pagadian City, pagdating nito sa lugar ay nawalan ito ng preno at aksidenteng nahulog sa isang bangin.

Agad dinala sa pinakamalapat na ospital ang labing isang sakay nito na mga sundalo ngunit dalawa dito ay idineklarang dead on arrival.

Hindi pa pinangalan ng mga awtoridad ang dalawang nasawi at maging ang siyam na sugatan dahil patuloy pa umano ang kanilang isinagawang imbestigasyon.

Sa ngayon ay nagpatuloy pa ang opensiba ng mga militar laban sa mga rebeldeng grupong NPA habang nagdadagdag na rin ng karagdagang puwersa ang militar sa lugar para tugisin ang mga bandidong grupo.

Isang barangay kagawad sa Dimataling, Zamboanga del Sur, patay matapos pagbabilin sa loob ng kaniyang bahay

By: Ferdinand C. Libor Jr., Eagle News Service



Dead on the spot ang isang barangay kagawad matapos pagbabilin sa loob ng kaniyang bahay sa Zamboanga del Sur.

Kinilala ang biktima na si Arao Bonga, 58 taong gulang, isang peace and order chairman sa Brgy. Poblacion, Dimataling.

Base sa inisyal na imbestigasyon, habang nanunood ng telebisyon sa loob ng kaniyang bahay ang biktima noong Lunes, bandang alas 8:00 ng gabi, isang di pa kilalang suspek ang biglang pumasok at pinagbabilin ang biktima gamit ang M16 armalite.

Nagtamo ng tama ang biktima sa ulo at sa iba't ibang bahagi ng katawan na siyang dahilan ng kaniyang agarang pagkamatay.

Agad namang tumakas ang suspek sa hindi pa matukoy na lugar matapos magawa ang nasabing krimen.

Nakuha sa crime scene ang 16 na basyo ng M16 armalite. Away sa pamilya naman ang tinitingnan na anggulo ng mga otoridad sa nasabing pamamail.

Nagtatapon ng wastewater sa Boracay, binalaan



Aerial View of Boracay. (Photo: en.wikipedia.org)

Hinihingi ng Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) ang mga permit ng mga establisimiyento sa Boracay na ilegal na nagtatapon ng basura.

Sinabi ni DENR Western Visayas Regional Director Jim Sampulna, ipapakansela nila sa Department of Tourism (DOT) at local government unit (LGU) ang mga permit ng mga establisimiyento kung patuloy na magtatapon sa lugar.

Bago nito, naglabas ng notice sa 12 establisimiyento sa lugar matapos masuri ng mga otoridad na may mga tubo na nagtatapon ng mga basura sa dagat. (Eagle News Service)

Pekeng PDEA agent arestado matapos nakuhanan ng iligal na droga

By: Aser Bulanadi at Godofredo Santiago, Eagle News Correspondent

Arestado ang isang 42 anyos na lalaki na nagpanggap na miyembro ng Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency (PDEA).

Naaresto ng mga tunay na ahente ng PDEA ang suspek sa ikinasang buy-bust operation sa may kanto ng Mc Arthur highway at Lazatin Subd., Tarlac City kamakailan.

Ayon kay Tarlac PDEA Provincial officer Marie Fe V. Manto, ang suspect ay si Lorenzo Narbolita, taga-Brgy. Mapalacio, Tarlac City.

Matagal na umanong nasa PDEA target list ang suspek.

Modus operandi umano ng suspek na magpanggap bilang isang PDEA agent o kaya naman ay gagamit ng mga pangalan ng mga tunay na PDEA agent para makapang-extort ng ilegal na droga sa mga inaakala niyang mga tao na may kinalamang ito.

Kapag nakakumpiska na siya ng ilegal na droga ay ide-deliver niya ito sa kaniyang mga customer.



Ang suspek na si Lorenzo Narbolita.

Nakumpiska kay Narbolita ang dalawang plastic sachet ng shabu, marked money at motorsiklong walang plaka.

Kinasuhan na ang suspek dahil sa paglabag sa Comprehensive Dangerous Drugs Act o R.A. 9165.

Nakakulong ngayon si Narbolita sa lock-up cell ng PDEA Regional Office 3 sa Pampanga.

Mga transport group na tutol sa PUV modernization, muling binalaan ng Pangulo

By: Meanne Corvera, Eagle News Service

"Here I come...I'm coming. See you there."

Philippine National Police Chief Ronald Dela Rosa had this to say to convicts still engaged in illegal drug activities in the Bureau of Corrections, which he is expected to head after his retirement from the police force in 2018.

"He is my boss ever since and he will be my boss forever. So hindi ako puwede na ayaw sa pagtatrabaho niya sa akin," Dela Rosa told reporters in explaining why he accepted the job President Rodrigo Duterte himself offered to him.

Although he has accepted the position, Dela Rosa said he will not be working as BuCor chief right after he retires on January 21, 2018.

He said he would ask the President for a vacation.

"Hihingi muna ako ng vacation time sa kaniya, kung papayag siya...sana mga two weeks mag-enjoy yung pamilya ko," he said.



Duterte to extend PNP Chief Dela Rosa's term "for two to three months"

(Eagle News) — President Rodrigo Duterte on Wednesday said he would extend the term of Philippine National Police Chief Ronald dela Rosa "for two to three months."

Dela Rosa is set to retire from the police force on January 21, 2018, when he reaches the mandatory age of retirement of 56.

After the extension, Dela Rosa is expected to assume the helm of the Bureau of Corrections.



President Rodrigo Duterte meeting with PNP Police Director General Ronald Dela Rosa in the Malacañan Palace, August 2016. (Photo: en.wikipedia.org)

Several senators welcome impending appointment of Dela Rosa as BuCor chief



Photo courtesy: hashgurur.com

"Drug lords...must be quaking in their slippers," Lacson says

(Eagle News) — Several senators on Wednesday welcomed the impending appointment of Philippine National Police Chief Ronald dela Rosa at the helm of the Bureau of Corrections.

"The drug lords serving time in the (New Bilibid Prison) must be quaking in their slippers at the thought of Bato in their midst practically 24/7," Lacson, a former PNP chief himself, said.

He added Dela Rosa's assignment as BuCor director "could very well serve its purpose what with his reputation preceding him

in the aspect of being hands on not to mention his track record of being mission-oriented."

Senator Sherwin Gatchalian, for his part, noted that Dela Rosa's qualities as a "tough and decisive leader" were needed to "completely overhaul the system inside BuCor and once and for all eliminate illegal drugs and corruption inside the facilities."

"That facility has been the face of illicit drug trade being perpetuated by convicted drug lords. I'm confident that he has experience and grit to put BuCor order," he said.

Trump tells NASA to send Americans to Moon

WASHINGTON, United States (AFP) — US President Donald Trump directed NASA on Monday to send Americans to the Moon for the first time in decades, a move he said would help prepare for a future Mars trip.

"This time we will not only plant our flag and leave our footprint," Trump said at the White House as he signed the new space policy directive. "We will establish a foundation for an eventual mission to Mars and perhaps someday to many worlds beyond."

The last time US astronauts visited the Moon was during the Apollo missions of the 1960s and 1970s.

On July 20, 1969, US astronaut Neil Armstrong became the first man to walk on the Moon.

Flanked by Pence and two female astronauts, Trump said the directive "will refocus the space program on human

exploration and discovery," and "marks an important step in returning American astronauts to the Moon for the first time since 1972."

The goal of the new Moon missions would include "long-term exploration and use" of its surface.

A White House statement said the US "will work with other nations and private industry to return astronauts to the Moon, developing the technology and means for manned exploration of Mars and other destinations in our solar system." (AFP)

Venezuela government, opposition hold new round of talks

SANTO DOMINGO, Dominican Republic (AFP) — Venezuela's government and opposition concluded a new round of talks Friday in an effort to bridge deep and entrenched differences to find a way to end the dire political and economic crisis tearing apart their country.

After eight hours of discussions at the foreign ministry in Santo Domingo, the two sides agreed to resume negotiations on January 11, Dominican President Danilo Medina announced.

It will be followed by a meeting of foreign ministers on January 12.

"There has been significant progress," said Medina, whose country is hosting the second meeting after a first on December 1 and 2 yielded what was similarly termed "significant advances."

"There are six major issues that we are discussing... We cannot announce any of the advances we have had because they are part of a package. As long as agreements are not reached completely, we cannot make an announcement."

Chilean Foreign Minister Heraldo Muñoz expressed hope that an agreement would be "finalized" by January 12.

The parties agreed to designate a spokesperson for each side: Communication Minister Jorge Rodríguez for the government and, for the opposition, Julio Borges, president of the opposition majority parliament.

In addition to the Dominican Republic and Chile, foreign ministers from Bolivia, Mexico, Nicaragua and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines are serving as guarantors of the process, along with former Spanish prime minister Jose Luis Rodríguez Zapatero.

Divided opposition and 'sabotage'

The Venezuelan government is demanding an end to what it calls economic "sabotage"



(L-R) Representatives of the Venezuelan opposition Luis Florido, Eudoro González, Deputy Simon Calzadillas and Julio Borges take part in a press conference after a meeting between Venezuelan government representatives and members of the Venezuelan opposition at the Dominican Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Santo Domingo on December 15, 2017. / AFP PHOTO / Erika SANTELICES

it claims is being waged by the opposition with support from the United States and Colombia.

The opposition is seeking guarantees that presidential elections next year will be transparent and fair.

The government of Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro is feeling politically strengthened after winning local elections last weekend in which the main opposition groups were excluded and after mostly triumphing in October gubernatorial polls.

However, an opposition advisor, Colette Capriles, said those victories merely showed that Maduro was using the tactics of "contemporary dictatorships."

Despite broad unpopularity at home and stern pressure from most countries in the Americas, Maduro has been able to tighten his grip on power in Venezuela, in large part because of a weak and fractured opposition.

The opposition is divided over the talks. Some in the coalition dismiss them as nothing more than an attempt by Maduro to buy time as he continues to consolidate power.

Over the last three months, his public support has risen from 24 percent to 31 percent, according to surveys by the Venebarometro firm.

Peru Congress to debate impeachment of president



A handout picture distributed by the Peruvian Presidency shows President Pedro Pablo Kuczynski appearing in Lima on a televised message to the Nation on December 14, 2017, surrounded by his Ministers of State and lawmakers to announce he would not resign his position, and ruled out having received illegal payments from the Brazilian construction company Odebrecht, an accusation that the political opposition is using to demand he steps down or face impeachment. / AFP PHOTO / Peruvian Presidency / HO

By: Carlos Mandujano / Moises Avila
Agence France-Presse

LIMA, Peru (AFP) — Peru's Congress voted overwhelmingly on Friday to consider impeaching President Pedro Pablo Kuczynski next week over allegations he received bribes from Brazilian contractor Odebrecht.

Ninety-three of the 118 legislators present supported the proposal to debate impeachment on December 21.

"This decision will be communicated to the president to exercise his right to defense (during the next session) and assist with a lawyer if required," said Luis Galarreta, the head of Peru's single-chamber Congress.

Dismissal of Kuczynski would require support from 87 of the chamber's 130 members.

The rightwing Popular Force party, which controls

the legislature, had already warned it would begin impeachment proceedings if the president did not resign by next Thursday.

But Kuczynski has brushed off the ultimatum.

"I am not going to abdicate my honor, my values or my responsibilities as president," Kuczynski said in a televised speech to the nation late on Thursday, backed by his ministers.

"I won't run, I won't hide nor do I have any reason to do so," he said, promising to cooperate with investigations by Congress and the office of the attorney general.

On Wednesday, Odebrecht said it had paid Kuczynski \$5 million (4.25 million euros) in consulting fees between 2004 and 2013.

For part of that period, Kuczynski was economy minister and head of cabinet for then-president Alejandro Toledo, whom Odebrecht paid \$20 million in kickbacks to win a contract managing a highway project, the company said.

Kuczynski denies any wrongdoing.

He is the third Peruvian president to become embroiled in the Odebrecht affair.

Former president Ollanta Humala is in preventive detention, accused of receiving \$3 million from Odebrecht to fund his political campaigns, while Toledo faces an order for his extradition from the United States.

The Odebrecht scandal has ensnared politicians in several other countries including Ecuador, Mexico, Panama and Venezuela.

Under investigation by the US Justice Department, Odebrecht agreed in December 2016 to pay a record \$3.5 billion fine after admitting to paying \$788 million in bribes across 12 countries to secure contracts. (Agence France-Presse)

Islamic State: What happened to all the foreign fighters?

By: Michel Moutat
Agence France-Presse

WASHINGTON, United States (AFP) — An estimated 40,000 people traveled from around the world to take up arms for the Islamic State group as it occupied territory in Syria and Iraq and declared a caliphate in 2014.

A few hundred are believed to still be fighting as IS struggles to survive, having lost most of its territory to campaigns by Western-backed Syrian and Iraqi coalition armies.

But what happened to the rest?



An undated picture taken from an online edition of the Islamic State's weekly magazine al-Nabaa, allegedly shows Abu Mohamed Al-Adnani. AFP PHOTO / AL-NABAA

Many thousands were certainly killed in the intense fighting, but US experts believe many have survived, posing a

formidable threat going ahead.

"The issue is: how many have died? How many are still there and willing to fight? How

many have gone elsewhere to fight?" said Seth Jones, director of the International Security and Defense Policy Center at the Rand Corporation.

"How many have given up? I don't think we have a good answer."

International counter-terror groups are putting huge efforts into answering those questions, working hard to name, count and track IS foreign fighters.

In France, officials say, around 1,700 people went to Iraq and Syria since 2013 to join IS. Of those, 400 to 450 have been killed, and 250 returned to France. (AFP)

Islamic State: What happened to all the foreign fighters?

NEW DELHI, India (AFP) — India's Rahul Gandhi took over Saturday as president of the main opposition Congress, becoming the sixth member of the Nehru-Gandhi dynasty to head the party that has ruled the country for much of its independent history.

Fireworks erupted over the party headquarters in New Delhi drowning out the voice of his mother Sonia Gandhi as she handed over the reins of power to

her 47-year-old son.

Rahul, wearing a long flowing white kurta, smiled and waved from the dais adorned with posters of his late grandmother and father, former prime ministers Indira and Rajiv Gandhi.

Slogans of "long live Rahul" were shouted as hundreds of supporters danced to drum beats and burst firecrackers.

Gandhi was elected unopposed to take over from his mother who has been at the



Newly elected President of the Indian National Congress party Rahul Gandhi gestures while speaking during a ceremony at the party headquarters in New Delhi on December 16, 2017. / AFP PHOTO / Prakash SINGH

helm since 1998 following the assassination of her husband Rajiv. She helped the Congress win the general elections in 2004 and 2009.

But the party was swept out of office by Prime Minister Narendra Modi's right wing Bharatiya Janata Party in 2014 and is now in a fight to win back support before a national election which must be held by 2019.

Rahul has been party vice-president since 2013 and led its campaign for the 2014

election. He was strongly criticised for what was Congress' worst-ever showing as it lost power to Modi.

Since then, the party has lost polls in many states to the BJP, exposing Rahul to further criticism.

On Saturday Sonia was handed a memento by former prime minister Manmohan Singh as a token of appreciation for her "astute leadership" over the years. (Agence France-Presse)

Bitcoin rises in debut as SEC warns on digital money

NEW YORK, United States (AFP) — Bitcoin experienced some big swings but finished higher in its debut on a major exchange Monday, while a leading US securities regulator warned investors about the risks of cryptocurrencies.

Bitcoin futures for January delivery finished at \$18,850.00 near 2115 GMT on its first full day of trading, a bit below session peaks but soaring well past the \$15,000 initial price when Cboe launched the platform on Sunday night.

The Cboe launch marked the first opportunity for professional traders to invest in bitcoin on a traditional platform and is expected to be followed in a week by a rival listing on Chicago Mercantile Exchange.

Still, in a sign of the unease generated by meteoric rise of the digital currency, the top US securities regulator Monday cautioned investors on the risks of cryptocurrencies and "initial coin offerings," a major fundraising tool of new currencies.

"Investors should understand that to date no ini-

tial coin offerings have been registered with the SEC," said Jay Clayton, chairman of the US Securities and Exchange Commission. "If any person today tells you otherwise, be especially wary."

"I encourage Main Street investors to be open to these opportunities, but to ask good questions, demand clear answers and apply good common sense when doing so," Clayton warned.

Many major banks stayed out of the Cboe trading and have generally kept their distance from bitcoin, the most prominent of a plethora of emerging cryptocurrencies.

Cboe chief Ed Tilly called on critics of the virtual currency to express their skepticism in the market.

"Whether it's a fraud, whether it's a bubble, whether it's legitimate... you will be able to express all of those thoughts in a transparent market place," Tilly told AFP in an interview several hours after the trading launch.

Bitcoin's Cboe debut, while largely uneventful, once again showcased its penchant

for volatility as the exchange was forced to suspend trading twice due to major price swings. But Tilly said that indicates the exchange was operating as intended.

The exchange set a pol-



icy requiring such halts due to major price moves, for example requiring a five-minute suspension due to a 20 percent move.

"So we hit those barriers on price movements and we did halt according to plans," Tilly said. "All things operated as they should."

"Digital gold" arrives
Bitcoin's breakthrough is the latest in a spectacular run

for the online money dubbed "digital gold" by its advocates, which began life in 2009 as a bit of encrypted software supposedly written by an unknown coder with a Japanese-sounding name.

Fidelity Labs, part of the giant Fidelity Investments, has been active in bitcoin for four years, said managing director Hadley Stern.

"It really started with our executive team starting to see what was going on in bitcoin," Stern said.

"And then we became very interested in the underlying blockchain technology. The root of it was this transformational ability to transfer value from software to software alone."

Investor interest has also risen in other digital

currencies, such as ethereum, ripple and litecoin, which employ the same "blockchain" software foundation as bitcoin.

The US Securities and Exchange Commission on Monday halted the ICO by blockchain-based food review service Munchee, that had been seeking \$15 million, after concluding that the company was attempting to sell securities without the required registration.

The SEC last week shut down another ICO, charging fraud against Dominic Lacroix, a Canadian with a history of securities law violations, and his company PlexCorps, charging the company that took millions from investors, "falsely promising" a speedy, 13-fold profit. (AFP)

"For the amount of bullishness surrounding cryptoassets, there appears to be an equal amount of doubt surrounding the vast majority of ICOs," said Canaccord analyst Michael Graham. (AFP)

But investors are also

Japan eyes \$46bn defense budget to counter N. Korea: report

TOKYO, Japan (AFP) — Japan plans a record \$46 billion defence budget for the next fiscal year to strengthen its missile defence against the threat posed by North Korea, a report said Saturday.

The government is expected to set aside 5.19 trillion yen for defence in the country's initial budget proposal for the fiscal year starting April 2018, the Nikkei daily said.

It will mark the sixth straight year of increases in defence outlays, topping the 5.12 trillion yen budget for the current fiscal year, the business daily said.

Much of the increase will go on protecting Japan against North Korea's nuclear weap-

ons and missile development, the newspaper said.

The extra funding will cover the cost of preparations for introducing the US military's Aegis Ashore land-based missile interceptor system, the Nikkei said.

Last week Japan's defence minister, Itsunori Onodera, said the country plans to purchase long-range cruise missiles with a range of some 900 kilometres (560 miles) from US firms.

The move is controversial as Japan's pacifist constitution bans the use of force as a means of settling international disputes.

Global anxiety about North Korea has steadily ris-



(FILES) A PAC-3 surface-to-air missile launch system is seen in position at Japan's Defence Ministry in Tokyo on September 11, 2017. / AFP PHOTO / Kazuhiro NOGI

en this year, with Washington calling on other UN members to cut ties with Pyongyang in order to squeeze the secretive regime.

The call, however, has

fallen short of persuading key North Korean backers China and Russia to take steps to isolate the regime. (Agence France-Presse)

Firefighter killed in massive California blaze



A helicopter drops water over a house on a hilltop in Bel Air, east of the 405 freeway on December 6, 2017 in Los Angeles, California. California motorists commuted past a blazing inferno as wind-whipped wildfires raged across the Los Angeles region, with flames triggering the closure of a major freeway and mandatory evacuations in an area dotted with mansions. / AFP / Frederic J. Brown

LOS ANGELES, California (AFP) — A firefighter was killed in one of the largest blazes in California's history, officials said Thursday, as emergency services spent another day struggling to contain infernos across the tinder-dry state.

San Diego-based Cal Fire engineer Cory Iverson died fighting the Thomas Fire in Ventura County, according to Cal Fire Chief Ken Pimlott, who gave no further details on the incident.

"I am very saddened to report that a firefighter fatality has occurred on the Thom-

as incident. Please join me in keeping our fallen firefighter and his loved ones in your prayers," he tweeted.

The Thomas Fire has blackened almost 250,000 acres (100,000 hectares) since it broke out ten days ago, Cal Fire said, making it the fourth-largest blaze in the state's history.

Thousands have had to evacuate and almost 1,000 buildings have been razed, most of them single-family houses, while another 18,000 are still seen as under threat.

The only other victim so

far is a 70-year-old woman who was in an accident as she fled in her car, and the blaze was considered 30 percent contained by Thursday, according to Cal Fire.

California's most devastating blaze remains the 2003's Cedar Fire, which scorched 270,000 acres and destroyed almost 3,000 buildings.

This year is the worst on record for wildfire devastation, with more than 40 deaths and around 9,000 structures destroyed, following fires that ravaged the Napa and Sono-

ma wine region in the fall.

California governor Jerry Brown told AFP on Tuesday wildfires ravaging his state should serve as a warning for other parts of the world threatened by climate change.

"The important fact is that these fires are going to become a very frequent occurrence, that's what the science is telling us," he said at the One Planet Summit in Paris, two years to the day after 195 nations signed an agreement to rein in global warming. (Agence France-Presse)

Film about poor kids at Disney's gates is fairy tale hit

By: Flachra Gibbons
Agence France-Presse



Director Sean Baker attends the Hammer Museum Presents The Contenders 2017 - "The Florida Project" at The Hammer Museum on December 13, 2017 in Los Angeles, California. Alberto E. Rodriguez/Getty Images/AFP

PARIS, France (AFP) — It is already the fairy tale of this year's Oscars race: A little film about homeless children living in the shadow of Walt Disney World in Florida that threatens to turn the tables on the big-budget favourites.

Director Sean Baker, who shot his last film on an iPhone, has scored a surprise hit with a gritty yet heartwarming tale, "The Florida Project".

It has already been showered with prizes by US critics, usually reliable pointers for the Oscars, and has made the lists for best film of the year on both sides of the Atlantic.

Not bad for a movie that no one initially wanted to back and whose rookie lead actor Baker found on Instagram.

Driven by the remarkable performances he drew from Bria Vinaite as a tattooed single mother living hand-to-mouth in a motel with her seven-year-old daughter (Brooklyn Prince), the film has built a head of steam since it premiered at the Cannes film festival in May.

"I am happy for my actors," Baker told AFP, "because they deserve it, but I try not to take anything too seriously."

"It is not why I made the film," said the director, who was partly inspired by the rascally spirit of the "Our Gang" street kid comedy films, which were hugely popular during the Great Depression of the 1930s.

Baker went to live in a budget hotel along the Kissimmee Strip that leads from Disney World to see for himself how people struggle to make ends meet within sight of the theme park that bills itself as "The Happiest Place on Earth".

"I am drawn to these kind of stories, the other side of the American Dream — those that are left behind," Baker said.

"You have this population living in budget hotels underneath signs trying to sell a dream to tourists, yet the people living there cannot afford the things being pushed into their face."

In this lurid landscape of gun shops, ice cream parlours and chain restaurants, the film's child heroes play, hustle and cause havoc, frequently testing the patience of the motel's long-suffering manager, played by Willem Dafoe.

Baker shot the film in almost a documentary style at the bright purple Magic Castle motel in Kissimmee, using mostly amateur actors, the hotel's residents and passing tourists as extras, even giving some of them small speaking parts.

"I wanted a real environment and I wanted the community to be involved," he said.

Baker insisted that his child stars also came from Florida, and even found one — the remarkable Valeria Cotto, then five — in a nearby Target superstore.

"I gave my card to her mother and I remember the look on her face. She obviously was very suspicious because my cards have my dogs on them. I will have to change that," he laughed. (Agence France-Presse)

Over 6,000 firefighters battling southern California blaze

LOS ANGELES, United States (AFP) — Thousands of firefighters were battling one of the most destructive wildfires in California's history Monday as it crept relentlessly up the Pacific coast and forced new evacuations. As a wildfire near Los Angeles was brought under control, fire crews were being redeployed to battle the Thomas Fire northwest of America's second-largest city.

Fixed-wing aircraft and helicopters were assisting nearly 6,400 firefighters trying to keep the Thomas Fire away from beachfront towns south of the historic city of Santa Barbara, the California Fire Department (Cal Fire) said.

"Gusty northeast winds will cause the fire to threaten areas of the city of Santa Barbara," which has a population of 91,000, Cal Fire said.

Eric Boldt, a meteorologist with the National Weather Service in Los Angeles, said he did not see any immediate respite to the dry, windy conditions that are fueling the blaze.

"The conditions are very critical," Boldt said. "Given

that we don't see any precipitation for the next two weeks at minimum, it could become the largest fire in the state's history."

The Thomas Fire has burned 230,500 acres (93,300 hectares) since it erupted a week ago, Cal Fire said, making it the fifth-largest fire in the state's history. It was only 15 percent contained as of early afternoon Monday.

The blaze spread over the weekend in the mostly uninhabited Los Padres National Forest, and was threatening the coastal towns of Montecito, Summerland and Carpinteria.

Mandatory evacuation orders were lifted for the inland cities of Ojai and Santa Paula in Ventura County, which has been the hardest hit by the Thomas Fire.

Comedian and talk show host Ellen DeGeneres was among those preparing to flee her beachfront home.

"Our house is under threat of being burned," DeGeneres said on Twitter. "We just had to evacuate our pets."

"I'm praying for everyone in our community and thankful to all the incredible firefight-

ers."

"Praying for my town," actor Rob Lowe, a Santa Barbara County resident, wrote on Twitter. Fires closing in. Firefighters making brave stands. Could go either way. Packing to evacuate now."

'New normal'

May Osher, a 66-year-old retired schoolteacher in Carpinteria, told the Los Angeles Times she had put photo albums and pet supplies in her car and was ready to evacuate if told to do so.

"I'm staying until it's time to go," Osher told the newspaper.

Cal Fire said 800 buildings have been destroyed by the fire, which is being fueled by tinder dry brush and strong and unpredictable Santa Ana winds.

Despite the intensity of the fires stretching from north of Los Angeles down to San Diego, authorities have reported only one fatality — a 70-year-old woman who died in a car crash while fleeing a blaze.

California Governor Jerry Brown has warned that climate change meant the state

was becoming increasingly vulnerable and wildfires were becoming the "new normal."

"The fire season used to be a few months in the summer," Brown said. "Now it's almost year-long."

Brown has been one of the most vocal critics of President Donald Trump's decision to pull the United States out of the Paris accord on global warming, and he renewed his attacks on the administration over its attitude toward climate change.

"Nature is not a political game. Nature is the ground on which we stand, it's the air which we breathe," he said.

"The truth of the case is that there's too much carbon being emitted, that heat-trapping gasses are building up, the planet is warming and all hell is breaking loose."

This has been California's deadliest year ever for wildfires. More than 40 people died in October when fires swept through the state's wine-producing counties north of San Francisco.

Trump has issued a state of emergency for California, authorizing the release of federal funds. (AFP)

Japan expands sanctions aimed at N. Korea



Japan's top government spokesman Yoshihide Suga gestures during his press conference at the prime minister's official residence in Tokyo on September 4, 2017. / AFP/

TOKYO, Japan (AFP) — Japan said Friday it had added 19 more entities to its list of organizations and individuals targeted by asset-freeze sanctions on North Korea.

The sanctions list now comprises 103 entities and 108 individuals in total, including seven Chinese entities, five Chinese individuals, one Singaporean entity and two Namibian entities, it said.

They include organizations involved in financial services, coal and minerals trading, transportation and sending North Korean laborers abroad, the foreign ministry said in a statement.

Japan has already imposed strict sanctions on North Korea, including a blanket ban on trade and port calls.

Top government spokesman Yoshihide Suga said: "North Korea launched an ICBM ballistic missile that landed in our exclusive economic zone and continues to repeat provocative commentaries."

"In light of this, as we host a ministerial meeting of the UN Security Council on December 15, we have decided on the asset freeze in order to further increase pressure" on the reclusive state. (Agence France-Presse)

China, S. Korea eye warmer ties following tensions

By: Becky Davis
Agence France-Presse

BEIJING, China (AFP) — The presidents of China and South Korea sought Thursday to repair ties strained over a US anti-missile defense system, but the beating of a South Korean photojournalist by Chinese security cast a pall over the summit.

Relations between Beijing and Seoul have been icy since South Korea allowed the United States to install the THAAD (Terminal High Altitude Area Defense) system to guard against threats from North Korea.

China considers THAAD a threat to its own security, and has imposed economic measures against South Korean companies in a move seen as retaliation.

South Korean President Moon Jae-In and Chinese leader Xi Jinping

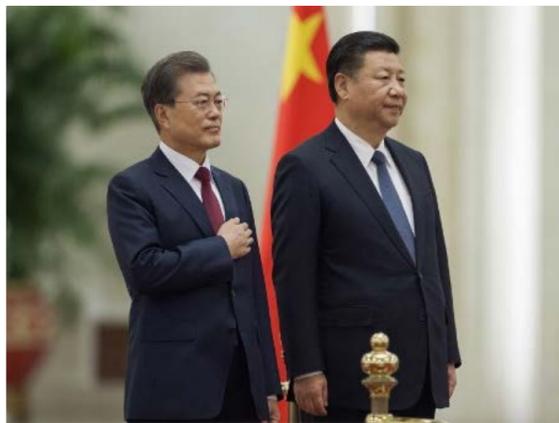
signalled their willingness to improve relations as they met at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing.

Xi said Moon's first state visit to Beijing was an "important opportunity to improve relations as we seek to find ways to carve a better path based on mutual respect and trust."

The Chinese president said he was willing to "step up" communication and coordination with Moon, stating that "we shall deepen the connection and accurately navigate the bilateral relationship."

He added the two countries could also support each other and increase cooperation as they prepared for their respective Winter Olympic games, to be hosted in Pyeongchang next year and in Beijing in 2022.

Moon praised Xi, calling him a "very sincere and reliable leader in terms of both words and behaviour".



South Korean President Moon Jae-In (L) and Chinese President Xi Jinping (R) listen to the South Korean anthem during a welcome ceremony at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing on December 14, 2017. / AFP/

China and South Korea were "partners set by destiny to walk the path of mutual prosperity and cooperate for world peace", he said, while acknowledging the recent "temporary difficulties."

North Korea talks?

Improving Sino-Korean ties has become increasingly important amid growing concern that bellicose rhetoric between Washington and Pyong-

yang could spark war on the Korean peninsula.

The two leaders met amid mixed US signals that Washington is willing to hold talks with Pyongyang.

"As friendly neighbors and strategic partners, China and South Korea have broad common interests in keeping the region peaceful," Xi said.

Moon noted that he expected to "reaffirm and discuss specific cooperation" with Xi on the issue.

Their meeting came after US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson said Washington was ready to talk to North Korea "without preconditions," though it was determined to force Pyongyang to give up its nuclear arsenal.

China and Russia welcomed Tillerson's remarks, even after the White House appeared to put his proposal in question by saying Trump's "views on North Korea have

not changed."

Injured journalist

Hours before the summit, Chinese security personnel beat and severely injured a South Korean photojournalist covering Moon's attendance at a trade partnership event, according to the Korea Press Photographers Association (KPPA).

Security blocked South Korean photographers from following his delegation, grabbing one photographer by the neck and throwing him to the ground, then seized another's camera, the KPPA said.

When the Chinese guards again tried to block journalists from entering another event hall, even though they showed identity cards, a photographer sur-named Lee objected. (AFP)

US House Speaker Ryan eyeing exit from Congress: report

WASHINGTON, United States (AFP) — Paul Ryan may be in his final term as speaker of the US House of Representatives and could leave Congress by year end, Politico reported Thursday, in a report that could set off a scramble for a successor.

The news outlet cited several people who know Ryan, including fellow lawmakers, congressional aides, conservative intellectuals and party lobbyists, saying they did not expect him to remain in Congress beyond 2018.

Asked directly after a Thursday press conference whether he would be stepping down soon, Ryan said, "I'm not... no."

A spokeswoman for Ryan's office, AshLee Strong, called the report "pure speculation."

"As the speaker himself said today, he's not going anywhere any time soon," she added.

But the report appeared to heighten the conjecture about the Wisconsin lawmaker's future.

Ryan, 47, made no secret about his hesitation in taking the top congressional job in



U.S. Speaker of the House Paul Ryan (R-WI) answers questions during a press conference at the U.S. Capitol December 7, 2017 in Washington, DC. Ryan answered a range of questions related to continued funding of the U.S. government and the pending tax reform legislation. Win McNamee/Getty Images/AFP

2015, after his predecessor John Boehner abruptly announced he was retiring when he faced a revolt from right-

wing conservatives.

He also spoke out critically against Donald Trump during the presidential race.

But Ryan has developed a better-than-expected relationship with Trump, and has worked with him on several

landmark issues including health care and the current big legislative push, tax reform.

The White House made

it clear Trump wants Ryan to stay.

"The president did speak to the speaker not too long ago, and made sure that the speaker knew very clearly, in no uncertain terms, that if the news was true he was very unhappy about it," White House spokeswoman Sarah Sanders said.

It is not known whether Ryan would run for his congressional seat in next November's mid-term elections. But should he announce his departure well ahead of time, it would dramatically diminish his deal-making leverage and his ability to raise money for the party.

"Ryan's preference has become clear: He would like to serve through Election Day 2018 and retire ahead of the next Congress," Politico reported.

Some Republicans in Congress were already anticipating a leadership battle.

"Brace yourselves for the mother of all barn cleanings," tweeted House conservative Thomas Massie, who has been a thorn in the Republican leadership's side. (Agence France-Presse)