

Philippines

Pacquiao visits troops

Reinforcements caught sneaking into warzone

MANILA, July 29, (Agencies): Philippine troops have seized 59 suspected militants trying to reinforce Islamist gunmen holed up in the southern city of Marawi who have been battling government forces for more than two months, military officials said Friday.

The capture of the "suspicious persons" in the troubled Mindanao region has raised questions about how the Islamic State-inspired fighters have been able to hold out in Marawi for almost 70 days.

Thirty-two suspected militants were arrested at a military checkpoint in Ipil town while 27 others were taken at a house in Zamboanga City on Tuesday, regional military spokeswoman Captain Jo-Ann Petinglay said.

A total 59 police and military uniforms were also seized from the suspects, a military statement added.

The group is suspected of planning to sneak into Marawi to help militants who have been on a rampage since May 23, battling government troops, holding numerous hostages and burning buildings while flying the black IS flag.

"They (the troops) have just prevented these individuals from potentially compounding the operational challenges in Marawi should they (have) succeeded in sneaking into the city," a military statement quoted Lieutenant General Carlito Galvez, commander of the troops in Marawi, as saying.

He credited local governments and residents for reporting the suspects.

Although the government initially said there were only a few hundred militants in Marawi, the gunmen have held off the armed forces for weeks, resisting air strikes and artillery barrages.

The militants have surprised the military with their resilience and their continued supply of manpower, weapons and ammunition despite supposedly being surrounded.

Backgrounds

Petinglay said those arrested were all Filipinos but their backgrounds were still being checked.

The fighting has so far claimed 630 lives, including 471 militants, 45 civilians and 114 government troops, military spokesman Brigadier General Restituto Padilla said in Manila on Friday.

Galvez said efforts to secure the warzone were boosted by President **Rodrigo Duterte's** controversial declaration of martial law over the entire southern third of the country when the fighting broke out.

By law, martial law should have lasted only 60 days but last week Congress extended it till the end of the year.

"With martial law in force in entire Mindanao, we can validly restrict and effect arrests of suspicious persons and unscrupulous groups whose actions bear with the rebellion," Galvez was quoted as saying.



The Philippine military says only about 60 pro-Islamic State group militants are still fighting in a bloody siege of southern Marawi city that has left 630 people dead, including more than 470 gunmen, and dragged on for more than two months. Military spokesman Brig Gen **Restituto Padilla** said Friday that most of the militants' leaders are believed to still be with the main group of gunmen fighting in an area less than one square kilometer (0.4 square mile).

Troops and police have arrested 59 men suspected of being on their way to reinforce the Marawi militants. The suspects were flown under heavy guard Friday to the Department of Justice in Manila, where they denied before prosecutors that they were aiming to back up the extremists.



Boxing hero **Manny Pacquiao** lifted the spirits of Philippine troops in a visit on Saturday to a southern city where soldiers have been battling pro-Islamic State militants for over two months.

The boxer-turned-senator, dressed in a military camouflage uniform, joked that he would join the fight in the city of Marawi where militants have been on a rampage, holding hostages and burning buildings while flying the black IS flag. "You are the real heroes, not Manny Pacquiao. I am just a boxer but you give your lives for our country," he told soldiers in a camp in Marawi City.

Greet

"Hopefully, I can come back here and greet you again when the fighting is done and if it isn't finished when I come back, then I will be the one who will go over there," said Pacquiao, referring to a battleground outside the camp where gunshots and explosions could be heard.

The fighting in the Mindanao region has claimed 630 lives, including 471 militants, 45 civilians and 114 government troops, the military has said.

Pacquiao, who was made a lieutenant colonel in the military reserves in recognition of his boxing achievements, remains a hugely popular figure in the Philippines.



The Philippine president said his threat to launch airstrikes against tribal schools because they allegedly teach subversion would apply only when the buildings are empty, a clarification that still raised concern he was advocating a war crime.

President Rodrigo Duterte responded to a question in a news conference late Thursday that the bombings will be done at night and maintained that the schools were teaching students to become subversives and were operating without government permits.

Still, **Carlos Conde** of the US-based Human Rights Watch said Friday that bombing even unoccupied school buildings is still a violation of international humanitarian law and constitutes a war crime.

"I didn't say that I'll bomb those if there are people, so I asked them to go away from there, meaning I'll destroy those because you are using a school without a license," Duterte said. "I didn't say I'll kill the children. Far from it actually. I'll free the children from perdition because they'll learn to be like you." "I have every reason to stop it because you are producing another generation of haters," he said. "Don't fool me. You teach nothing there but socialism and killings."

In a news conference late Monday after delivering his annual state of the nation address, Duterte condemned the insurgents for destroying bridges and torching schools in the countryside.

But he said the rebels were sparing Lumad or indigenous schools, which he alleged were operating under guerrilla control without permits from the government's education department. "Get out of there. I'm telling the Lumads now. I'll have those bombed, including your structures," Duterte said then.



This July 28, 2017 picture released from North Korea's official Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) on July 29, 2017 shows North Korea's intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM), Hwasong-14 being launched at an undisclosed place in North Korea. Kim Jong-Un boasted of North Korea's ability to strike any target in the US after a second ICBM test that weapons experts said could even bring New York into range — in a potent challenge to US President Donald Trump. (AFP)



In this photo provided by South Korea Defense Ministry, US Army Tactical Missile System fires a missile during the combined military exercise between the US and South Korea against North Korea at an undisclosed location in South Korea on July 29. (AP)



Inada



Turnbull

Asia

4 arrested in Sydney raids: Four people were arrested in a series of raids across Sydney on Saturday which the prime minister said were carried out to foil plans for terrorist attacks in Australia.

Armed police stormed homes in at least four neighbourhoods, including in the inner city.

"The New South Wales Joint Counter Terrorism Team has conducted multiple searches across Sydney today, resulting in the arrest of four men," police said in a statement. "These searches and the broader investigation remain ongoing, and further information will be made available at the appropriate time."

The Seven Network reported 40 riot squad officers moved on one inner city home before an explosives team found a suspicious device, although police would not confirm this.

TV footage showed a man with a bandage on his head and draped in a blanket being led away by authorities.

National broadcaster ABC quoted a woman as saying her son and husband were arrested in the raids, but denied they had links to terrorism.

"I love Australia," she said as she was led away to a car.

Prime Minister **Malcolm Turnbull** urged people to "remain alert".

"These operations are designed to disrupt and prevent plans to undertake terrorist attacks in Australia," he said of the raids. "I have been kept closely briefed on the progress of the operations by the heads of our relevant security agencies."

"However, as the operations are ongoing, it is inappropriate to provide further detail at this stage."

Australian officials have grown increasingly concerned about the threat of extremist attacks and have prevented 12 on home soil since September 2014, with more than 60 people charged. (AFP)

Japan defense minister quits: Japan's defense minister resigned Friday, saying she accepted the responsibility for a cover-up in which her ministry concealed records of Japanese UN peacekeepers' activities and dangers they faced in South Sudan.

It was the latest blow to Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's scandal-stricken government. **Tomomi Inada** was Abe's protegee and her resignation came just days before the prime minister was expected to reshuffle his Cabinet in hopes of resurrecting his sagging public approval ratings.

"As defense minister, whose job it to

North Korea

China, Russia responsible for N. Korea threat: Tillerson

'All US within range after M-test'

SEOUL, July 29, (AFP): Kim Jong-Un boasted of North Korea's ability to strike any target in the US after a second ICBM test that weapons experts said Saturday could even bring New York into range — in a potent challenge to President Donald Trump.

China condemned the test but US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson said Beijing and Moscow bore "unique responsibility" for the growing threat posed by the reclusive North.

Under Kim's leadership North Korea has accelerated its drive towards a credible nuclear strike capability, in defiance of international condemnation and multiple sets of UN sanctions.

Kim said the test "is meant to send a grave warning to the US" and demonstrated the North's ability to launch "at any place and time," the official Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) said.

The "leader said proudly the test also confirmed all the US mainland is within our striking range," it said.

Trump denounced the launch as "reckless and dangerous" and rejected Pyongyang's claims that such tests helped ensure its security.

"The United States will take all necessary steps to ensure the security of the American homeland and protect our allies in the region."

Weapons experts said the altitude and flight time of Friday's missile suggested it was significantly more powerful than the July 4 test, with a theoretical range of around 10,000 kilometres (6,200 miles) meaning it might be able to reach east coast US cities like New York, depending on the payload size.

Forward

"North Korea seems to have made a logical step forward, as it tries to perfect the technologies to build and field an operationally-viable ICBM that can threaten the mainland United States," said Michael Elleman, missile defence specialist at the London-based International Institute for Strategic Studies.

Kim Dong-Yub, a defence analyst at the Institute for Far Eastern Studies at Kyungnam University, said the North

may have succeeded in miniaturising warheads down to 750 kilograms (1,650 pounds).

"If the missile carries a 750 kg payload, its range could be 10,000 kilometres. Taking into account the Earth's rotation, it means it could reach not only the western cities but New York and Washington as well," he told AFP.

Tillerson said Pyongyang's main ally Beijing, together with Moscow, bore responsibility for the growing threat from Pyongyang.

"As the principal economic enablers of North Korea's nuclear weapon and ballistic missile development programme, China and Russia bear unique and special responsibility for this growing threat to regional and global stability," he said.

Japanese Foreign Minister Fumio Kishida said he held telephone talks with Tillerson and agreed on the need to put "the heaviest possible pressure" on North Korea.

Resolution

"We confirmed that we will closely cooperate in adopting a fresh UNSC (UN Security Council) resolution, including severe measures, and working on China and Russia," Kishida told reporters.

In a standard response to the test, Beijing urged restraint by all sides, after the US and South Korea conducted a live-fire exercise using surface-to-surface missiles.

Meanwhile, US President Donald Trump on Friday decried North Korea's testing of an intercontinental ballistic missile as a "reckless and dangerous" action that will "further isolate" the country.

"The United States condemns this test and rejects the regime's claim that these tests — and these weapons — ensure North Korea's security. In reality, they have the opposite effect," Trump said in a statement.

"By threatening the world, these weapons and tests further isolate North Korea, weaken its economy, and deprive its people.

"The United States will take all necessary steps to ensure the security of the American homeland and protect our allies in the region."

France on Friday called on fellow members of the UN Security Council to swiftly adopt "strong and additional sanctions" against North Korea for its latest ballistic missile launch.

"Only maximum diplomatic pressure is likely to bring North Korea back to the negotiating table" and stop it from obtaining "an operational and guided nuclear arsenal," foreign ministry spokeswoman Agnes Romatet-Espagne said in a statement.

Determination

"This launch, like the one that North Korea carried out on July 4, shows the determination of the North Korean regime to place the entire international community within range of its missiles," the statement said.

"The pursuit of the North Korean nuclear and ballistic programme constitutes a growing and unacceptable threat for all."

China Saturday condemned North Korea's launch of an intercontinental ballistic missile and urged restraint by all sides after the US and South Korea held a military exercise in response to the test. "China opposes North Korea's violations of UN Security Council resolutions and (its actions) contrary to the general aspirations of the international community," foreign ministry spokesman Geng Shuang said.

Beijing "urged North Korea to abide by UN resolutions and stop taking actions that could worsen the situation," Geng said in a brief statement on the ministry's website.

"At the same time, (China) hopes that all parties concerned will exercise caution and avoid aggravating tensions and act together to preserve peace and stability on the peninsula," he said.

Japan's Prime Minister Shinzo Abe said on Saturday that the international community must raise the heat on North Korea over its latest ballistic missile launch.

oversee the organization, I feel serious responsibility over this," she said. "I'm stepping down."

Inada said the results of an investigation showed her ministry had covered up some military records documenting worsening security conditions for Japanese peacekeep-

ing troops in South Sudan during major clashes last summer.

Abe's government was facing criticism over possibly violating Japan's war-renouncing constitution and peacekeeping law by keeping Japanese troops in combat zones. Inada and Abe had insisted the

conflict did not involve combat or warfare, which would have required Japanese troops to withdraw. Critics say Abe wanted to keep the mission despite growing danger because he wanted Japan's military to take on a bigger role in the UN peacekeeping mission.

In May, the last batch of peacekeepers returned from South Sudan after completing their 5 6-year mission. Japan sent about 350 troops for a few months at a time and rotated a total of about 4,000.

Inada said the ministry's internal investigation showed "serious" mishandling of official documents in violation of the information disclosure law.

Foreign Minister Fumio Kishida took on the defense ministry portfolio after Inada's resignation, Abe said. The troubles come at a tense time for Japan given recent North Korean missile test launches, and Abe is expected to appoint a more seasoned security expert as his next defense minister.

Inada denied that she herself took part in the cover-up, although she acknowledged she might have been verbally informed of officials' plan to conceal the portion of the log.

The ministry's report showed senior ministry and Self-Defense Force officials tried to conceal some information. Twice last year they denied information disclosure requests, claiming the documents were destroyed and no longer existed when they still did.

The ministry officials were also slow in reporting problems to Inada, the report said. But it found no evidence that Inada approved the cover-up. (AP)



US Ambassador to the Philippines Sung Kim disembarks from a Cessna-208B Grand Caravan Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance (ISR) aircraft acquired through grant programmes by the US government to the Philippine Air Force (PAF) during a formal turn-over ceremony at the PAF headquarters in Manila on July 27. Two Cessna-208B Grand Caravan Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance (ISR) aircraft were acquired through the grant programmes. (AFP)