

Philippines

War on numbers

7,800 police punished for 'deadly' drug raids

MANILA, July 18, (Agencies): Thousands of Philippine police officers have received administrative punishments with more than 2,000 dismissed for wrongdoings during raids where drug suspects were killed under the president's crackdown, officials said Thursday.

Communications Assistant Secretary Marie Rafael Banaag told a news conference that 14,724 police were investigated for their involvement in police operations that led to deaths from July 2016 until last April. She said 7,867 of them received administrative punishments for unspecified lapses.

A tally presented by Banaag showed that 2,367 police officers have been fired, 4,100 suspended while the rest were reprimanded, demoted, had their salaries forfeited or deprived of certain privileges.

Banaag did not say how many officers have been criminally charged for serious lapses or outright crimes committed while enforcing the crackdown, which was launched by President **Rodrigo Duterte** as his centerpiece program when he took office in mid-2016.

Philippine police officials say about 6,600 drug suspects have been killed in raids carried out by the police mostly in gunbattles that ensued after the suspects fought back and endangered the lives of law enforcers. Banaag and other officials reported a lower death toll, more than 5,500, saying authorities were still verifying other drug-related deaths.

Last year, a Philippine court found three police officers guilty of killing a student they alleged was a drug dealer in the first known such conviction under the crackdown.

The court ruled the officers murdered Kian Loyd delos Santos during a raid in Caloocan city's slums in the Manila metropolis and rejected the policemen's claim that the 17-year-old fired back while resisting arrest. Delos Santos's family and witnesses testified in official investigations that he was shot in a dark alley near a creek as he pleaded for his life.



Duterte

Drugs

Delos Santos's killing and that of a South Korean was allegedly strangled to death by an anti-drugs officer in an extortion attempt prompted Duterte to briefly suspended the drug crackdown amid outcries.

"There are certain flaws probably in what happened during operations but these are actually being addressed," Undersecretary Severo Catura, an official dealing with human rights issues, said in the news conference.

"That's why we are saying here that however we're concerned with regard to apprehending criminals, we're also that concerned with regard to ensuring that the rule of law is followed," Catura said.

He added that more than 200 policemen have been killed and 700 others wounded in drug raids - statistics that Duterte himself has often cited to counter allegations by human rights activists that police have killed suspects beyond the law because they violently resisted.

Banaag said it was the first time authorities disclosed the full extent of police who have been disciplined for lapses in the anti-drug crackdown.

Former Commission on Human Rights chairwoman Loretta Ann Rosales, however, said the high number of erring enforcers involved in raids where lives were lost in alarming levels should prompt the government to immediately suspend and review the crackdown.

"It's terrible, it's alarming, it's unconscionable," Rosales said.

Duterte had rejected those calls and warned drug suspects that his campaign would be more dangerous in the final three years of his six-year presidency.

Facing a UN human rights investigation into its bloody war on drugs, the Philippines presented a new death toll on Thursday to counter much higher numbers given by critics.

But rights groups accused the government of using partial data to mislead and said that even the official figure of more than 5,500 police killings in drug operations was far too high and there must be accountability for every death.

President Rodrigo Duterte's administration has challenged activists' death tolls of the three-year-old drug war that rise as high as 27,000.

Under the banner of #TheRealNumbersPH, officials told a news conference that 5,526 "drug personalities" had died in anti-drug operations between July 1, 2016, and June 30, 2019. That was below a previous police figure of more than 6,700 dead.



Top: People injured in a fire are treated near a Kyoto Animation building in Kyoto, western Japan on July 18. (Above): Smoke billows from a Kyoto Animation building in Kyoto, on Thursday. (AP)

Japan

'Too appalling for words'

33 killed in arson attack

TOKYO, July 18, (RTRS): A man shouted "die" as he doused an animation studio with fuel and set it ablaze in Japan on Thursday, public broadcaster NHK said, killing at least 33 people in the nation's worst mass murder in nearly two decades.

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe called the attack in the city of Kyoto - the latest grisly killing in a nation widely known for its low crime rates - "too appalling for words" and offered condolences.

Police detained a 41-year-old man who shouted "die" as he poured what appeared to be petrol around the three-storey Kyoto Animation building shortly after 10 am (0100 GMT), public broadcaster NHK reported.

Thirty-three people were confirmed dead, an official for the Kyoto City Fire Department said. Fire engulfed the building and white and black smoke billowed from its charred windows. It was Japan's worst mass killing since a suspected arson attack in Tokyo in 2001.

Shiro Misaki, a 47-year old owner of a neighbourhood bar five minutes from studio, said he was driving

nearby when he saw the thick smoke. "Policemen were stopping traffic and it was really hazy with smoke," he said. "Even after I got back to my restaurant I could smell the smoke."

The prime minister said the cause was arson.

"Today, many people were killed and wounded in an arson murder case in Kyoto," Abe said in a post on Twitter. "It is too appalling for words."

The motive was not yet known. The suspected arsonist was injured and was being treated in hospital, so police could not question him, NHK said. Kyoto police declined to comment.

Kyoto, some 450 kilometres (280 miles) west of Tokyo, is the ancient capital of Japan and major tourist draw for its ancient temples and cultural sites.

The dead were found on all three floors of the building, including in the studio, and on a staircase leading up to the roof, the fire department said. It was not clear if the roughly 10 people found dead on the staircase had been trying to escape.



An Indian woman puts food grains in a sack after sun-drying them in Jhargana, east of Guwahati, Assam, India on July 17. Officials said floodwaters have brought misery to some 4.5 million in this north eastern state. (AP)

Subcontinent

**Flood death toll nears 100:** One of Bangladesh's main rivers breached an embankment, flooding a northern district and forcing thousands from their homes, an official said on Thursday, as the toll from monsoon rains in neighbouring India climbed to 97 in two flood-hit states.

Several million people are living in camps and makeshift settlements in India's eastern state of Bihar and northeastern Assam, officials said, with heavy rains and flooding since last week driving even animals to seek shelter in people's homes. (RTRS)

**Pakistan arrests ex-PM Abbasi:** Authorities in Pakistan have arrested a former prime minister over alleged irregularities related to the import of natural gas from Qatar.

**Shahid Khaqan Abbasi** served as prime minister for nearly a year after Nawaz Sharif was removed from office in July 2017 for failing to disclose foreign assets. Sharif is currently serving a seven-year jail term for corruption, and authorities have pursued a number of his allies on corruption allegations. (AP)

**World Court orders review:** The World Court on Wednesday ordered Pakistan to



Abbasi



Modi

review the death penalty given in 2017 to former Indian navy commander Kulbhushan Sudhir Jadhav who was convicted of being a spy.

The 16-judge panel said Pakistan has to provide an "effective review" of the case and added that a "continued stay of execution" of Jadhav was needed for that to happen.

Indian Prime Minister **Narendra Modi** welcomed the ruling, tweeting that "Truth and justice have prevailed". (RTRS)

Europe

**'Merkel in good health':** Chancellor **Angela Merkel** is in good health and on track to serve her full term in office through to 2021 in coalition with her Social Democrat (SPD) governing allies, her chief of staff told Reuters on Wednesday.

Merkel, who turned 65 on Wednesday and has been in office since 2005, has suffered several bouts of shaking at public ceremonies in recent weeks that have fuelled speculation about her health, though she has insisted "I am fine."

Chancellery chief Helge Braun stressed that Merkel had stood for a fourth term with the intention of completing it.

"She is in good health," he said in a television interview, adding that "of course" she was fit to serve out her term, due to run until federal elections in October 2021.

"She stood for four years in office and the tasks we face make it necessary that we complete this time in office," he said.

In addition to speculation over her shaking episodes, Merkel's fourth term is being dogged by questions about whether the SPD will pull out of the loveless ruling alliance, which many in the left-leaning party want to quit.

The SPD suffered its worst showing nationwide since the return of democracy after World War Two in a European election on May 26, prompting its leader to resign and throwing the party into a fresh round of soul-searching.

An end to the coalition could yet be precipitated by regional elections in three eastern states in the autumn. Polls show the SPD is set to perform poorly.

But Braun expected the SPD to remain in the government with Merkel's conservative bloc, known as the Union. (RTRS)



Merkel

**'Italy govt to survive':** Italy's government, formed by the 5-Star Movement and the League party, will not fall as it is "the only possible one", Deputy Prime Minister Luigi Di Maio told the daily Il Corriere della Sera in an interview published on Thursday.

Di Maio, who is also the 5-Stars' leader, said the party would never form an alternative majority with the centre-left PD party.

In a separate interview with the paper, Matteo Salvini, the other deputy prime minister and League leader, said there was still time to dissolve parliament and go to elections after the summer break, but that it was up to 5-Stars to decide whether Rome's populist government would survive. (RTRS)

**Netherlands burqa ban in Aug:** The so-called burqa ban comes into effect in The Netherlands on Aug 1, with EUR 150 (USD 168) fine for people caught wearing it in schools, on public transport, in hospitals and public buildings, Dutch media reported Thursday.

The ban requires public officials and public transport workers to ask people caught covering their faces to remove the burqa or leave the building, DutchNews.nl website reported today. If they refuse, the police will be brought in.

Dutch Senators voted last June in favour of the controversial proposals; 13 years after a burqa ban was first mooted in the country, it noted.

The Council of State, which is the Dutch government's most senior advisory body, had recommended against introducing a burqa ban, arguing that there are already sufficient provisions in law to require people to show their faces. (KUNA)

**15 migrants killed:** Fifteen illegal migrants were killed and more than 20 injured in a minibus crash in southeast Turkey on Thursday, a local governor said.

The minibus carrying the migrants went off the road and rolled into a ditch in the province of Van. Footage from the scene showed the minibus in the ditch, with the casualties laid out on the side of a road.

Broadcaster NTV said some of the passengers had fallen off the bus as it rolled into the ditch.

The destination of the migrants were not immediately clear. NTV quoted Van Governor Mehmet Emin Bilmez as saying the migrants were thought to be Afghan, Pakistani and Bangladeshi. (RTRS)

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