Duterte threatens top newspaper, broadcaster

MANILA: Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte yesterday described two major media outlets as “sons of whores” and warned them of karmic repercussions for their critical coverage of his deadly drug war.

Duterte’s verbal attacks on top television broadcaster ABS-CBN and the Philippine Daily Inquirer newspaper came in a pair of speeches in which he also lashed out at the European Union for criticizing him over alleged human rights abuses.

“I am not threatening them but someday their karma will catch up with them,” Duterte said of the media outlets. “They’re shameless, those sons of whore journalists.”

Duterte named the Prieto and Lopez families that own the Inquirer and ABS-CBN respectively, calling them “oligarchs” who use the media to promote their chosen political candidates.

“That is what ails the Philippine society: It is the corrupt media, the face of Prieto and Lopez and their money and the church,” he said. He also threatened to use the government TV station to shame those two families.

“I will give you your due also. I will go through your lives and the party’s day-to-day activities, the business and your children,” on government television, he said. Duterte easily won presidential elections last year after vowing to eradicate illegal drugs in society by killing tens of thousands of people.

Since taking office in June, police have killed at least 2,564 people in drug raids while more than 4,200 others have been killed in unexplained circumstances, according to official figures.

Rights groups have warned he may be overseeing a crime against humanity, while the US has expressed concern it has been among other extremely critical foreign institutions. Duterte frequently responds to criticism with mouthing defiance.

He also branded then US president Barack Obama a “son of a whore” last year. — AFP

Malaysia says Kim Jong Nam’s body released to North Korea

PYONGYANG AGREES TO RELEASE 9 MALAYSIANs

KUALA LUMPUR, Malaysia: Malaysia said yesterday it has agreed to release the body of Kim Jong Nam to North Korea in exchange for the return of nine Malaysians held in the North’s capital.

Relations between Malaysia and North Korea have been badly frayed by the murder of the North Korean leader’s half-brother at Kuala Lumpur’s airport. Both countries withdrew their ambassadors and North Korea blocked nine Malaysians from leaving the country. Malaysia responded in kind, barring North Koreans from exiting its soil, including three suspects believed to be hiding in the North Korean Embassy.

Following negotiations that he described as “very sensitive,” Prime Minister Najib Razak said yesterday North Korea had allowed the nine Malaysians to leave, and that Malaysia had agreed to release Kim’s remains to North Korea. He didn’t say whether Kim’s body had already left Malaysia.

Earlier, a van was seen leaving the morgue where Kim’s body was being held, after which police guards were removed. Najib said in a statement that Malaysia would also “allow North Koreans to leave Malaysia” as part of the agreement.

It wasn’t clear whether that included the three suspects wanted by police. The three include an embassy employee and an Air Koryo worker. Four other North Korean suspects left the country on the day Kim was killed.

“Following the completion of the autopsy on the deceased and receipt of a letter from a family requesting the remains be returned to North Korea, the coroner has approved the release of the body,” Najib said. North Korea’s official Korean Central News Agency confirmed the agreement, saying the two sides had pledged to “guarantee the safety and security of each other’s citizens, and that Malaysia had agreed to transfer the body ‘to the family of the deceased’ in North Korea. Kim, however, is believed to have children with women living in Macau and Beijing, not in North Korea.

Government officials couldn’t immediately be reached for further details. Custody of the body had been a flashpoint as relations between Malaysia and North Korea deteriorated sharply. Kim was poisoned on Feb 13 in a crowded terminal at the airport. According to Malaysian investigators, two young women approached Kim as he waited for a flight and smeared VX nerve agent - a banned chemical weapon - on his face. He was dead within 20 minutes. North Korea, which is widely suspected to be behind the attack, has rejected the autopsy findings.

Experts say the VX was almost certainly produced in a sophisticated state weapons laboratory, and North Korea is widely believed to possess large quantities of chemical weapons. North Korea has denied any role in the killing and denounced the investigation as flawed and politically motivated.

North Korea does not even acknowledge the victim is Kim Jong Nam, referring to him instead as Kim Chol, the name on the passport he was carrying when he died.

North Korea had demanded custody of the body because the victim was one of its citizens. But Malaysia refused, in part because it needed to formally identify the body, which it now says it has done, using DNA from his son. The two women accused of wiping Kim’s face with the poison have been charged with murder. The two - an Indonesian and a Vietnamese - say they were duped into thinking they were taking part in a hidden-camera prank TV show. — AP

JAPAN RULING PARTY URGES STRIKE ABILITY AMID N KOREA THREAT

TOKYO: Japan’s ruling party urged the government yesterday to consider acquiring more advanced offensive capability, such as striking enemy targets with cruise missiles, further loosening the self-defense-only military posture Japan has had since the end of World War II.

The Liberal Democratic Party’s council on defense policy urged the government to immediately start studying ways to bolster Japan’s capability to intercept missiles with a system such as the Terminal High-Altitude Area Defense, or THAAD, system, that the US and Seoul have agreed to install in South Korea.

The panel cited a “new level of threat” from North Korea, which fired four missiles this month, three of them landing inside Japan-claimed exclusive economic waters.

“North Korea’s provocative acts have reached a level that Japan absolutely cannot consider,” said panel chairman Shinsuke Tamogami, a retired general.

“We need to have our own capability of striking back an enemy base, with cruise missiles for instance, to further improve deterrence and response as part of the Japan-US alliance,” according to the proposal. The panel said the government should immediately start studying a possibility of introducing THAAD and the shore-based Aegis missile defense system, among other equipment, while pursuing upgrades to two existing missile defense systems - ship-to-air S-300 interceptors and the ground-based PAC-3. It said necessary budget should be allocated for the possible new options.

Realistic option

Japan has maintained that its right to strike a foreign base in case of an imminent attack is not banned under the constitution and hawkish lawmakers have called a possi-

bility, though it has never been proposed as a realistic option. Former defense minister Itsunori Onodera, who headed the defense policy council, told Abe that Japan needs to be prepared for being targeted by multiple missiles.

“Our proposal is about how we can fight back and stop the other party from firing a second missile, instead of making a pre-emptive strike,” he said. Abe said he takes the report seriously and will cooperate with the party to improve Japan’s ballistic missile response. — AP

Beijing: A man believed to be then-North Korean leader Kim Jong-II’s eldest son, Kim Jong-Nam, walking amongst journalists upon his arrival at Beijing’s international airport. — AFP

Opposition Filipino lawmaker Gary Alejano, a former military officer who joined an uprising against former president Gloria Arroyo in 2003, arrived in Kuala Lumpur today with an agreement of impeachment complaint against President Rodrigo Duterte at the Philippine Congress yesterday. In his complaint, Alejano accused Duterte of having a “defeatist stance” for failing to assert his face. He was dead within 20 minutes. North Korea, which is widely suspected to be behind the attack, has rejected the attack for criticizing him over alleged human rights abuses.

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FRIDAY, MARCH 31, 2017

Friday Times

International