

International

# Japan offers Philippines aid for fighting terrorism, rebuilding

## Military campaign leaves over 1,100 fighters, civilians dead

TOKYO: Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte won pledges from Japan of help with fighting terrorism and assistance in building the country's crumbling infrastructure, as he met with Japan's prime minister yesterday during a visit to the country. Japan promised its support in the reconstruction of the strife-torn southern Philippine city of Marawi. A military campaign recently ended a five-month siege of the city by Islamic State group-aligned militants that left more than 1,100 combatants and civilians dead.

Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe welcomed the liberation of Marawi and gave credit to Duterte's leadership. "I express my heartfelt respect for President Duterte's leadership on the recent declaration of liberation in Marawi," Abe said. "We will provide full support for (the Philippines') counterterrorism effort and steps to ensure peace and stability" in the region. The two leaders also agreed to cooperate on various projects, including a subway system for metropolitan Manila, the traffic-jammed capital, energy development, maritime safety and the Philippines' fight against drugs and drug trafficking.

The assistance from Tokyo includes 15.9 billion yen (\$140 million) in low-interest financing for a water management project in the Philippines' flood-prone Cavite province, Japan's Foreign Ministry said in a statement. Before leaving the Philippines for Tokyo late Sunday, Duterte said he hoped to discuss concerns over North Korea with Abe and declared that someone should talk to North Korean leader Kim Jong Un, reassure him that

nobody is out to remove him or destroy his country, and ask him to stop threatening attacks.

"You must remember that he is a leader of his people," Duterte said, adding that "whatever he proclaims himself to be, somebody has got to talk to him." "So, if somebody could just reach out, talk to him and say, 'My friend, why don't you just join me in the table and we'll just talk about these things?'" Duterte told reporters in the southern Philippine city of Davao. "Nobody's talking to him."

Duterte echoed US President Donald Trump in saying he believes China has the greatest leverage with Pyongyang, a longtime Beijing ally. And he expressed concern over the potential for dangerous missteps in the stand-off with North Korea over its nuclear program. "We are worried, all of us, that you know, Murphy's Law, 'If anything can go wrong, it will go wrong.'" Apart from his talks with government officials, while in Tokyo Duterte is due to meet with Japanese business leaders and have an audience with Emperor Akihito and Empress Michiko. "I suppose that I have to limit my mouth there," the blunt-spoken Philippine president said.

He praised Japan as a "true friend of the Philippines" and said he would seek as much help as possible from Japan in rebuilding Marawi and the surrounding region. The siege in the southern Philippines displaced some 400,000 residents, including the entire population of Marawi, a bastion of the Islamic faith in the predominantly Roman Catholic Philippines. Military airstrikes, artillery



### Abe credits Duterte's leadership



TOKYO: Philippines President Rodrigo Duterte (left) delivers his speech beside Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe during the joint remarks announcement at Abe's official residence in Tokyo yesterday. — AFP

and heavy machine-gun fire turned the lakeside city's central business district and outlying communities into a smol-

dering wasteland of disfigured buildings and bullet-pocked mosques and houses. — AP

## Losses, looting as Filipinos return to Marawi city

MARAWI CITY: Khaliluddin Ismail returned home yesterday after five months of war in the southern Philippines to find his house ransacked. But he's still smiling. "At least we have something left," he said, standing in a room with clothes, toys, ornaments and damaged pictures strewn across the floor. "Others have nothing. They lost their homes, they lost their lives." Ismail, 44, the Imam of a nearby mosque, considers himself one of the luckiest people in Marawi.

The city was devastated by more than 150 days of battles between government forces and pro-Islamic State militants that killed more than 1,100 people and displaced some 350,000. His house is in Marawi's safe zone, an area long abandoned by residents but untouched by unrelenting shelling and military air strikes that have all but flattened the city's commercial heart, destroying thousands of homes, shops and vehicles. Six days after troops killed the last remaining rebels, Ismail was among about 4,000 people allowed to return to their homes on Sunday in Marawi's Basak Malutlot area.

Many like him have discovered their houses were looted and left in disarray. "I opened the door and I was shocked, but I'm still happy to be home," he said. Ismail fled with his family on May 24 during a fierce three-day firefight that erupted just 50 meters away, when security forces tried to raid the hideout of notorious militant leader Isnilon Hapilon, Islamic State's anointed "emir" in Southeast Asia. Hapilon escaped, then issued a call to arms to hundreds of insurgents to initiate their planned takeover of Marawi. It sparked the Philippines' biggest urban battle in recent history, and fears that Islamic State's extremist agenda had gained a foothold in the south of the mainly Catholic country.



BALO-I, Philippines: Young evacuees cook rice in front of their tent at an evacuation centre in Balo-i town, Lanao del Sur province, on the southern island of Mindanao. — AFP

### Happy homecoming

There were scenes of joy and chaos as a convoy of returning residents poured in to Marawi to a cacophony of horns and whistles, jamming what only a few hours earlier were deserted streets. Armed police at checkpoints cross-checked documents and pictures of each passenger from the 712 families, to guard against possible infiltration by militants.

Babies cried as officials at a public hall shouted on megaphones to try to establish order as hundreds jostled to register for the sack of rice and 5,000 pesos (\$97) allocated to each household. With a stern face, the district's elderly chairwoman, Jamallah Indol Saro, yelled in the local Maranao dialect at anxious residents to calm down. "I told them we have to thank Allah we're still alive," she said, smiling.

Some 6,500 families are due to return this week in a phased repatriation, a fraction of the 77,000 that fled to evacuation camps or nearby towns. Many face a lengthy wait for vast swaths of Marawi to be rebuilt. Retired government employee Mitomar Goling, 72, came home to

find jewelry, money, furniture and antiques had been stolen. He said he feared he would have starved or been killed had he stayed behind. "We felt the ground trembling from the air strikes. We didn't know if the army could protect us," said Goling, wearing sunglasses and a white skull cap. "If you don't believe in their ideology, ISIS sees you as the enemy," he said, referring to Islamic State.

### Destroy city to save it

He was among many people who said they understood that the military had to destroy the city to save it. Norida Manna's three-storey house was levelled by an air strike, but she's thankful she's alive. The office clerk and single mother of six will now live at her sister's home, from which she fled in May as troops outside battled hooded, black-clad gunmen who helped the escape of Hapilon. The rebel commander was subsequently killed in a military operation 13 days ago. "My home was destroyed, but I don't blame the military. They had a job to do," she said. "I have nothing left, but to us, every day is a happy one now." — Reuters

## Crackdown on Mumbai street vendors sparks a row over public spaces

MUMBAI: A crackdown on street vendors in Mumbai after they were blamed for a stampede at a train station last month highlights the diminishing access to public spaces for the city's poor and marginalized communities, activists said. A report on the rush-hour stampede during a monsoon downpour that killed 22 people, said vendors crowding a narrow footbridge were partly to blame. Since then, city officials have doubled a fine for illegal hawkers, and said they will introduce a mobile app for residents to register complaints about hawkers.

Members of a local political party have clashed with vendors outside train stations, saying they pose a risk to commuters. "City officials have not done anything to create hawking zones and issue new licenses," said Salma Sheikh of advocacy group Azad Vendors Union in Mumbai. "The law clearly states there can be no evictions till a survey is done. Yet vendors are being evicted, their wares destroyed; this is a blatant violation of our rights," she told the Thomson Reuters Foundation.

Vendors selling everything from snacks and tea to

toys, clothes and shoes are a common sight in India's cities, with their wares on pavements, outside schools and at traffic lights. Only about 20,000 hawkers in Mumbai are licensed, with the number unlicensed estimated at more than 150,000. Unlicensed hawkers often have to pay policemen bribes, and flee eviction drives which are becoming more common as cities are upgraded with high-speed internet and air-conditioned metro trains. A plan is being drawn up to regularize hawkers, a city official said.

"A survey has been done. We will be holding a meeting in coming weeks to decide on a committee to issue licences and demarcate hawking zones," said Ranjit Dhakne, a deputy municipal commissioner. India passed the Street Vendors Act in 2014, which protects from evictions and relocations. States were required to pass a law adopting the policy, but few have done so.

Informal street life that offers livelihoods to the poor are increasingly seen as a problem, even as officials ignore illegal parking and extensions of shops on to pavements, said an academic who has studied the issue. "It is a paradox that the same people who want the convenience of street vendors also want them removed," said Hussain Indorewala at the Kamla Raheja Vidyaniidhi Institute of Architecture in Mumbai.

"Decisions about who belongs in the city, and what streets and public spaces should be used for are increasingly being controlled through the privilege of property ownership." — Reuters

## Indians rescued from a farm after years of suffering

MUMBAI: Nearly 25 workers, including children, who worked 15-hour days for seven years, were rescued at the weekend at Baran in the western Indian state of Rajasthan, in a rare crackdown on farms where forced labor is ram-

nant. Campaigners said the workers were from a tribe in the central Indian state of Madhya Pradesh and were given loans ranging from 500 to 20,000 rupees (\$8 to \$308) before being taken to Rajasthan to work in the fields.

"These people were trafficked from their home state with the lure of good work but kept bonded on the fields. They believed they were repaying the loans," said Nirmal Gorana, convener of the National Campaign Committee for Eradication of Bonded Labor, that took part in the rescue. Rescued workers said while they worked in the fields, their children worked at the employer's house for no money. "The employers did not give them wages, but only packets of wheat." — Reuters




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