

DUTERTE SACKS 20 OFFICIALS OVER ANOMALOUS DEALS

Military hospital execs facing court-martial

BY CATHERINE S. VALENTE, TMT ON AUGUST 14, 2018 HEADLINES

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PRESIDENT Rodrigo Duterte has fired 20 military officials, including a general, over supposed anomalous transactions at the V. Luna Medical Center in Quezon City, Malacañang announced on Monday.



Military Chief of Staff Gen. Carlito Galvez, Jr. holds a press briefing in Camp Aguinaldo on alleged corruption in the health service command. With Galvez is Inspector General Lt. Gen. Valencia Rafael.

PHOTO BY ROGER RANADA

In a news conference, Palace spokesman Harry Roque Jr. said Duterte ordered the “relief and court-martial proceedings against top military brass,” including Brig. Gen. Edwin Leo Torrelavega, commander of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) Health Service Command, and Col. Antonio Punzalan, commander at the V. Luna Medical Center.

Chiefs of the health service command’s management and fiscal office and the logistics office, he said, were also ordered relieved over alleged anomalous equipment purchases.

“It was brought to the President’s attention that alleged corruption activities have been taking place at the V. Luna Medical Center... Apparently, it’s a conspiracy. It was institutional corruption in V. Luna,” Roque told reporters.

“Based on the reports, several high-ranking officials and employees of the V. Luna Medical Center, health service command of the Armed Forces of the Philippines undertook anomalous purchases of equipment and engaged in fraudulent transactions, including ghost purchasing, splitting of contracts to circumvent mandatory bidding processes, and conceiving fictitious suppliers,” he added.

Roque said one case involved P1.49 million, and an upcoming report would detail several other transactions amounting to hundreds of millions of pesos.

“That’s just one case. We’re talking of — according to the chief-of-staff, and I had a conversation with him — hundreds of millions of pesos,” he said, referring to military chief Carlito Galvez Jr.

Galvez, he added, assured the Palace of the immediate implementation of the order “without prejudice to the investigation to be conducted by the [Office of the] Ombudsman.”

Galvez relieves 22 officials

Galvez told reporters the case cost him sleep for five days, as Torrelavega was his classmate in the Philippine Military Academy “Sandiwa” Class of 1985.

“[Torrelavega] has been a good soldier but it just so happens that there was systemic corruption,” he said.

Galvez said he had ordered the relief of 22 officials of the Armed Forces of the Philippines Health Service Command.

He said he had directed the Intelligence Service of the AFP (ISAFP) to conduct a “discreet investigation.” The ISAFP produced a report in June.

Galvez cited one example of overpricing – the purchase of artificial legs worth P330,000 to P1.4 million from supplier AutoBot.

“I was told that there was a single entity, like a supplier, that everytime that there is bidding, this supplier is also rigging the bidding that is why I told the ISAFP to conduct further investigation,” he said.

According to Roque, the “institutional corruption” in the Quezon City-based military hospital did not start during the Duterte administration as “apparently it has been going on for a very long period of time.”

“He (Duterte) is ballistic because only recently, he ordered that the sum of P50 million a month be released to V. Luna to make sure that V. Luna will have sufficient funds to cover all medical requirements of members of the Armed Forces of the Philippines, of course, only to find out bulk of the funds or much of the funds may be going to the pockets of the corrupt officials of the armed forces,” he said.

Roque said the anomalies were disclosed by a whistle-blower and subsequently investigated by the military and the Presidential Anti-Corruption Commission.

“The reports came in last Monday (August 6), which explains why the President is very aggravated in talking about corruption in the last Cabinet meeting because there was the issue of both Nayong Pilipino and V. Luna, information which he had just received concerning fraudulent activities in both agencies,” he said.

The President has fired a number of his appointees over corruption allegations.

Last week, the President axed the board members and management of Nayong Pilipino Foundation for entering into a supposedly disadvantageous lease deal with a Hong Kong-based developer for an casino-resort project.

The President had fired former tourism secretary Wanda Teo, former interior and local government secretary Mike Sueno, justice secretary Vitaliano Aguirre 2nd and labor undersecretary Dominador Say, among others, as well as a number of undersecretaries and assistant secretaries.

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