

Defying Vatican, Flemish bishops allow blessing of same-sex unions

VATICAN CITY — Flemish Roman Catholic bishops on Tuesday issued a document effectively allowing the blessing of same-sex unions, in direct defiance of a ruling against such practices by the Vatican's doctrinal office.

The document published on the website of the Bishops' Conference of Belgium suggested a ritual that included a prayer and a benediction for stable same-sex unions. But it stressed that it was not "what the Church understands by a sacramental marriage."

It said the Church wanted to be "pastorally close to homosexual persons" and be a "welcoming Church that excludes no one."

The ritual would start with prayers and includes a commitment by the two people in front of family and friends to be faithful to each other. It would end with more prayer and what the document called a "benediction."

A Vatican spokesman had no immediate comment.

In March 2021, in response to formal questions from a number of Roman Catholic dioceses on whether the practice of blessing same-sex unions was allowed, the Vatican's doctrinal office, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF), ruled that it was not.

At the time, the CDF said its ruling was "not intended to be a form of unjust discrimination, but rather a reminder of the truth of the liturgical rite" of the sacrament of marriage and the blessing associated with it.

In response to that ruling, Bishop John Bonny of Antwerp said he felt "shame for my Church" and apologized to those he said had been hurt by the "painful and incomprehensible" decision.

POPE SUPPORTS CIVIL UNIONS BUT NOT MARRIAGE

Pope Francis has said he is opposed to same-sex marriage in the Church but supports civil union legislation to

give same-sex couples legal protection and rights such as inheritance and shared health care.

A spokesman for the bishops, Geert De Kerpel, said their intention was not to defy the Vatican ruling.

"This is first and foremost a positive message," he told Reuters, adding that it conformed with the pope's calls for a more inclusive Church.

The Flemish bishops document said that some Catholic gays remained celibate and that the Church appreciated it. The Church teaches that while homosexual orientation is not sinful, homosexual acts are.

But the document added that "some prefer to live as a couple, in lasting and faithful union with a partner" and that such a relationship "can also be a source of peace and shared happiness."

The bishops denounced "homophobic violence," and said they wanted to "structurally anchor their pastoral commitment to homosexual persons."

They announced the appointment of Willy Bombeek, a gay Catholic, as an additional staff member to their department for pastoral care of families to oversee care of gay Catholics.

One with similar duties would be appointed to each diocese in Flanders, the Dutch-speaking part of Belgium.

"I'm proud to belong to the Flemish Church," Bombeek told Reuters. "I hope that religious people in other countries will also get to experience this, and hopefully, this is only the beginning."

Francis DeBernardo, executive director of US-based Catholic LGBTQ group New Ways Ministry, said the move would be a blessing for both the couple and for the Church.

"These prelates recognize that love is love. Love is more important than sexual behavior, and love is something that the Church should always bless," he said in a statement. — Reuters

Putin mobilizes more troops, says West wants to destroy Russia

KYIV/LONDON — Russian President Vladimir Putin on Wednesday announced a partial military mobilization, as Russian forces battle a Ukrainian counter-offensive that has regained some occupied territory.

In a televised address, Mr. Putin said the partial mobilization of its 2 million-strong military reserves was to defend Russia and its territories, claiming the West wants to destroy Russia and did not want peace in Ukraine.

"To protect homeland, its sovereignty (...), I consider it necessary to support the decision of the General Staff on partial mobilization," he said.

Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu said on Wednesday that President Putin's decree on partial mobilization would see 300,000 additional personnel called

up to serve in Russia's military campaign in Ukraine.

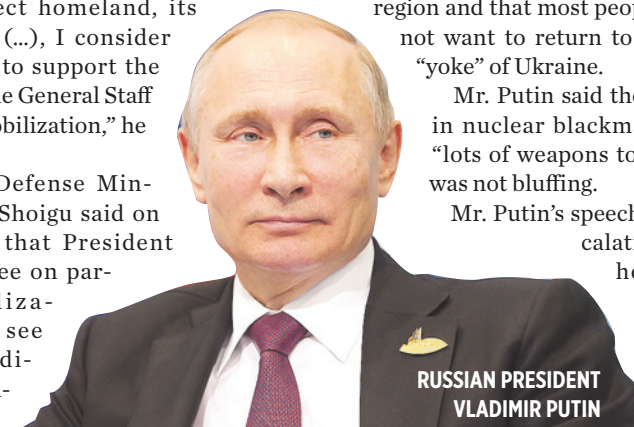
In an interview with Russian state television, Mr. Shoigu said that students and those who served as conscripts would not be called up, and that the majority of Russia's millions-strong reserves would not be drafted.

NOT BLUFFING

Mr. Putin restated his aim was to "liberate" east Ukraine's Donbas industrial heartland region and that most people in the region did not want to return to what he called the "yoke" of Ukraine.

Mr. Putin said the West had engaged in nuclear blackmail, but Russia had "lots of weapons to reply" and that he was not bluffing.

Mr. Putin's speech was a worrying escalation and the threats he made in it must be taken seriously, British foreign office minister Gillian Keegan told Sky News.



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China willing to make effort for peaceful 'reunification' with Taiwan

BEIJING — China is willing to make the utmost effort to strive for a peaceful "reunification" with Taiwan, a Chinese government spokesperson said on Wednesday, following weeks of military maneuvers and war games by Beijing near the island.

China claims democratically governed Taiwan as its own territory. Taiwan's government rejects China's sovereignty claims and says only the island's people can decide their future.

China has been carrying out drills near Taiwan since early last month, after US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi visited Taipei, including firing missiles into waters near the island.

Ma Xiaoguang, a spokesperson for China's Taiwan Affairs Office, told a news conference in Bei-

jing ahead of next month's once-in-five-years Communist Party congress that China was willing to make the greatest efforts to achieve peaceful "reunification."

"The motherland must be reunified and will inevitably be reunified," Mr. Ma said.

China's determination to safeguard its territory is unwavering, he added.

China has proposed a "one country, two systems" model for Taiwan, similar to the formula under which the former British colony of Hong Kong returned to Chinese rule in 1997.

Mr. Ma said Taiwan could have a "social system different from the mainland" that ensured their way of life was respected, including religious freedoms, but that was "under the precondition of ensur-

ing national sovereignty, security, and development interests."

All mainstream Taiwanese political parties have rejected that proposal and it has almost no public support, according to opinion polls, especially after Beijing imposed a national security law on Hong Kong in 2020 after the city was rocked by sometimes violent anti-government and anti-China protests.

China has also never renounced the use of force to bring Taiwan under its control, and in 2005 passed a law giving the country the legal basis for military action against Taiwan if it secedes or seems about to.

China has refused to talk to Taiwan President Tsai Ing-wen since she first took office in 2016, believing she is a separatist. She

has repeatedly offered to talk on the basis of equality and mutual respect.

But Ms. Tsai's predecessor Ma Ying-jeou held a landmark meeting with Chinese President Xi Jinping in Singapore in 2015.

Speaking at the same news conference, Qiu Kaiming, head of the research department at the party's Taiwan Work Office, said the Xi-Ma meeting showed their "strategic flexibility" towards Taiwan.

That "showed the world that Chinese people on both sides of the Strait are absolutely wise and capable enough of solving our own problems," he added.

Taiwan's government says that as the island has never been ruled by the People's Republic of China, its sovereignty claims are void. — Reuters

Peso, from SI/1

With the dollar's strength causing the peso to hit a fresh all-time low, the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas (BSP) may need to deliver a larger rate hike at its Thursday meeting to keep inflation expectations anchored, former Philippine central bank deputy governor Diwa C. Guinigundo said.

"US Fed is expected to do a 75 to 100 bps while the consensus here is a BSP move of 50 bps. It might even be necessary to outdo the market and deliver a higher blow to inflation," he said in a Viber message.

"That would further assure the market of monetary policy decisiveness, help firm up the currency and cement inflation expectations," Mr. Guinigundo added.

He said while the BSP "remains on the tightening offensive," aggressive actions from the Fed would make the dollar more attractive.

"The external payments position at nearly \$5.5-billion deficit for the first eight months of 2022 is not helping any because imports remain so much more substantial than our export earnings, and the decline in FX (foreign exchange) reserves to just about \$97 billion could further fan market nervousness and contribute to the peso weakening further. Given the exchange rate pass through, that could further be inflationary even as the pass through has shown some reduction since 2002," Mr. Guinigundo added.

The BSP Monetary Board will meet to revisit policy settings on Sept. 22, Thursday, where it is

widely expected to fire off another 50-bp rate increase to tame inflation. It has hiked borrowing costs by a cumulative 175 bps since May.

Headline inflation eased to 6.3% in August from a near four-year high of 6.4% in July, bringing the eight-month average to 4.9%, both above the BSP's 2-4% target for the year.

Meanwhile, for the first eight months of the year, the country's balance of payments deficit widened to \$5.492 billion from the \$253 million seen in the same period in 2021, latest central bank data showed.

This reflects the final gross international reserves level of \$97.4 billion at end-August, down by 2.4% from \$99.8 billion as of July.

Rizal Commercial Banking Corp. Chief Economist Michael L. Ricafort likewise said in a Viber message that a bigger-than-expected increase from the BSP will support the peso, inflation and price expectations.

"Rate hike expectations continued to put pressure on the peso today (Wednesday), and as such, the BSP should opt for a stronger message by way of clearer forward guidance beyond the actions tomorrow (Thursday)," Security Bank Corp. Chief Economist Robert Dan J. Roces said, noting a weaker peso poses upside risks to inflation.

For Thursday, Mr. Ricafort gave a forecast range of P57.85 to P58.05, while the first trader expects the local unit to move from P57.80 to P58 per dollar. — Keisha B. Ta-asan

Cybersecurity, from SI/1

Melchor T. Plabasan, director and head of the Technology Risk and Innovation Supervision Department of the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas, said the Philippines is still "evolving" in terms of cybersecurity.

"There are some pending legislation or measures right now, which can help address the known gaps in addressing cyber threats," he noted.

Francisco "Cocoy" Claravall, vice-president for Partner Ecosystem for Globe Business - Enterprise Group, said there is a need to "increase awareness and education about threat problems and how to protect ourselves."

This also means that Philippine organizations, both private and public, need to train more cybersecurity professionals to keep up with the growing number of threats.

"In the Philippines, we've seen an average of 2,115 weekly attacks against companies and organizations, higher than the standard in Southeast Asia," Mr. Claravall said.

He stressed that all stakeholders should prioritize countermeasures and identify where resources are needed to defend against sophisticated attacks.

Organizations also need to "deploy technology to continuously validate the legitimacy of digital interactions and establish rapid response capabilities to quickly address the early signs of a breach," he added.

Allan S. Cabanlong, founder and chief executive officer of CyberGuardians, Inc., said the government already has cybersecurity awareness programs and a cybersecurity plan in place, but implementation is difficult.

"The main challenge now with the government is the implementation. All the plans and guidelines have already been laid out," he said.

"The laws are there already, although there are some proposed measures that we also need. The question now is how these [policies] are implemented."

He stressed that the approach to implementation should be "whole of society."

"The government is expected to be able to change the mindset that cybersecurity should not be operated under the radar, but with strong participation of stakeholders."



MARKETS AND SECURITIES REGULATION DEPARTMENT

IN THE MATTER OF
CEBU LANDMASTERS, INC.

REGISTRATION OF SECURITIES
Shelf Registration of Fixed Rate Bonds

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NOTICE

Notice is hereby given that, in connection with the sworn Registration Statement filed with the Securities and Exchange Commission on July 1, 2022 on behalf of CEBU LANDMASTERS, INC. (the "Corporation") for the shelf registration of up to FIFTEEN BILLION PESOS (P15,000,000,000.00) of FIXED RATE BONDS, to be issued at face value within three years from effectivity of the Registration Statement, the aggregate principal amount of the first tranche of the bonds to be issued by the Corporation will be FIVE BILLION PESOS (P5,000,000,000.00). The bonds are intended to be listed in the Philippine Dealing and Exchange Corporation.

This notice amends the previous notices, published on August 26, 27 and 29, 2022 and September 3, 2022 in newspapers of general circulation, stating that the first tranche of the bonds to be issued by the Corporation would have an aggregate principal amount of "up to EIGHT BILLION PESOS (P8,000,000,000.00)."

In order to implement necessary health protocols consistent with the directives and guidelines of the relevant government agencies, the Commission hereby suspends, until further notice, the physical inspection of the RS and other papers/documents attached thereto (collectively referred to as the "Documents") as well as the provision of physical copies thereof to interested parties. In lieu thereof, the Commission has adopted an alternative mode of viewing and/or downloading the said Documents and any subsequent amendments thereto by enabling interested parties to access the same through the Securities and Exchange Commission's website (www.sec.gov.ph) and the Company's website (<https://ir.cebucklandmasters.com/investor-relations/disclosures/>).

VICENTE GRACIANO P. FELIZMENIO, JR.
Director