51 cops on SONA field duty test positive for Covid-19

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MORE than half of the 82 Quezon City policemen who were deployed to secure President Duterte's State of the Nation Address (Sona) last Monday tested positive for Covid-19, a police official confirmed on Wednesday.

Brig. Gen. Antonio Yarra, director of the Quezon City Police, said during a news briefing that 51 policemen, who turned positive of the virus, have been part of the government's overall security during Duterte's address.

At least 2,000 policemen, who were augmented by soldiers from the military's Joint Task Force National Capital Region, were deployed during the President's address before the joint Congress, guarding areas near and surrounding the Batasang Pambansa.

A big number of the security contingent were tasked to hold rally participants and protesters along Commonwealth Avenue and prevent them from getting close to the House of Representatives where the President delivered his last SONA.

Yarra, however, did not say where the 51 policemen have been deployed during the event, but added they have also carried out other duties as part of their police functions, thus making it harder to trace those whom they have come into contact with as contact tracing begins.

The 52 policemen were part of the 82 members of the Quezon City Police Station 3 located in Talipapa, Novaliches who have been found positive of the Covid-19 although they were reported to asymptomatic. They were among the 161 members of the station who underwent RT-PCR tests.

Yarra's disclosure followed an earlier report of the Quezon City local government on the policemen's Covid-19 tests results, wherein it also said that those who were positive of the virus have been admitted in different quarantine facilities in the city.

In a news statement, the city government said that the 161 policemen were tested on Friday as part of its regular program to conduct "free routine testing of its frontliners who are often exposed and at high risk of acquiring the virus."

Quoting its City Epidemiology Surveillance Unit (CESU) chief, Dr. Rolando Cruz, the city government said a total of 161 personnel assigned to Station 3 were tested, wherein 79 members tested negative. 82 others who were assigned to the Police Station 3 (Talipapa), Police Community Precinct 1 (Unang Sigaw) and Police Community Precinct 2 (Bahay Toro), tested positive.

"The first 48 positive cases were already admitted to several of our HOPE facilities last night, July 27. The other 34 will be admitted today," Cruz said.

The statement said that The CESU is looking into communities near and around the station and the precincts to determine if "granular lockdowns are necessary, given that the source and extent of infection have yet to be identified."

Police Station 3 commander Lt. Col. Cristine Tabdi said the station will remain operational to receive reports or complaints in an outdoor receiving area but will be restricted to the public, and visitations are currently prohibited.

Tabdi vowed to investigate how the outbreak occurred in the station.

"The city government is prepared to contain the spread of the virus. Our CESU has the capability to deal with this situation. We request the public not to panic, especially the communities in which the precincts where these police personnel were assigned. We are appealing to anyone who is experiencing symptoms to please call 122 and inform CESU immediately," Mayor Joy Belmonte, for her part, assured.

Belmonte directed all 16 station commanders to ensure that minimum health protocols are stringently practiced by their personnel as the country is still in the middle of a pandemic amid a possible surge due of Delta variant cases.

At the Manila Police District, its director, Brig. Gen. Leo Francisco reported that six Covid-19 cases have also been recorded in their three police stations, Stations 6, 12, 13, at the District Mobile Force Battalion.

He said all of the six policemen are under quarantine.

At Camp Crame, officials reported that Covid- 19 took its latest fatality from the police organization in the person of a 40-year-old policeman from Quezon province.

Reports reaching PNP chief General Guillermo Eleazar said the patient was rushed to a local hospital on July 24 when he experienced fever and severe headache. He then underwent RT-PCR test, which yielded positive result.

On July 26, however, the policeman suffered difficulty of breathing and succumbed while being treated. He was declared dead by the attending physician due to severe pneumonia.