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PEACE PANEL HIT OVER BBL 'MESS'

By Bernadette E. Tamayo

IT is now up for the Senate and the House of Representatives to "clean up the mess" created by government peace negotiators in succumbing to the demands of their counterpart in the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) with regard to the latter's desire to establish their own government in Southern Philippines.

Sen. Francis "Chiz" Escudero stressed this point as he scored the government peace panel, headed by Prof. Miriam Ferrer and Secretary Teresita Deles, for not doing their job. He told them to relay to the MILF the work Congress needs to do on the draft agreement on the creation of Bangsamoro.

"Now let OPPAP (Office of the Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process) and the GRP panel work and impress upon their counterparts that Congress reviewing the draft BBL and amending provisions is fairly part of our democratic process," said Escudero. Deles heads the OPPAP.

Sen. Grace Poe shares the observance of some sectors that the government peace panel, became very "generous" to the MILF in terms of what the Muslim Filipinos would gain under the proposed Bangsamoro Basic Law (BBL) creating a Bangsamoro entity in Southern Philippines.

Under the BBL, the proposed Bangsamoro government, to replace the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM), will have its own police force, Commission on Audit (CoA), Commission on Elections (Comelec), Civil Service Commission (CSC), and Ombudsman. However, some groups argue that such proposal is unconstitutional since the powers of the national constitutional bodies "cannot be diminished."

Escudero said that Ferrer and Deles should also be forthright about the limitations of their negotiating jurisdiction. The senator made the move in reaction to the demand of the MILF chief negotiator, Mohagher Iqbal, for the Senate and the House of Representatives to pass the BBL "without any revisions."

"Nung may sulat na lumabas na ang pagkakaintindi ng MILF nung nakikipag-usap sila sa GRP (government) panel, ang kausap nila ay buong executive, legislative at

judiciary. Ito ba ang ipinaunawa sa kanila ng ating mga negoziators? Ni walang pumalag sa ating panel at sinabing hindi ganyan 'yan. Ngayon nakuha na lahat ng MILF ang gusto nila tungkol sa BBL kaya hindin namin p'wedeng baguhin?" Escudero said.

He was referring to a December 29, 2014 letter from MILF chair Al Haj Murad Ibrahim to the House of Representatives, as cited by Sen. Alan Peter Cayetano in the Senate Mamasapano hearing last February.

In a letter dated Dec. 29, 2014, MILF chair Al Haj Murad Ibrahim told the House of Representatives that when they negotiated the peace agreement they had "the understanding it was negotiating with the totality of the Philippine government or the whole of government especially since the Commander-in-Chief powers of the President allow him to bind the whole government including its different branches."

Asked whether the government should be blamed for allowing the inclusion of some provisions in the BBL which are deemed unconstitutional, Poe said: "Iyun ang isang sa mga issue na ni-re-raise. Ayokong husgahan o sabihin, alam ko sapat ang kanilang pananaliksik, maganda ang kanilang resume. Mayroon silang alam, institutional knowledge tungkol diyan."

"Pero yun nga ang sinasabi; naging masyado tayong mapagbigay, so ako may opinion akong ganon, mayroong opinion na iba na ganun din pero yun nga. Hindi lang naman ako ang bumubuo ng Senado—lahat naman kami ay kinakailangang magbigay ng aming opinion ukol diyan," said Poe in a chance interview.

Escudero said Congress will not simply rubber stamp the draft BBL without sifting through its facts to resolve contentious issues, as what the MILF seems to fancy from the legislators.

"Let the MILF be reminded that we in Congress are not dictating, we are legislating," Escudero said. He underscored the need for a thorough review of the BBL draft since Congress has no participation in the crafting of the proposal put together by Philippine and MILF negotiators.

"Sila-sila lang ang nag-uusap nung ginagawa ang laman niyan. We were actually kept in the dark, and now they give us this take-it-or-leave-it stance. This is demanding; they are the ones demanding," said Escudero, chairman of Senate Committee on Finance.

Gov't negotiators hit for BBL 'mess'

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posed Bangsamoro government, to replace the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM), will have its own police force, Commission on Audit (CoA), Commission on Elections (Comelec), Civil Service Commission (CSC), and Ombudsman. However, some groups argue that such proposal is unconstitutional since the powers of the said constitutional bodies "cannot be diminished."

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Justice before passage

By BERNADETTE E. TAMAYO

SENATE Majority Leader Alan Peter Cayetano has appealed to his colleagues in both upper and lower chambers "not to rush" the passage of the proposed Bangsamoro Basic Law (BBL) creating a Bangsamoro government in Mindanao.

He made the remark as Senate President Franklin Drilon and House Speaker Feliciano Belmonte earlier "committed" to approve the BBL by June this year or before Congress adjourns its second regular session on June 12.

Some critics of the Aquino administration claimed that Malacañang was pushing its allies in Congress to expedite the passage of BBL so that it can be included in the last State of the Nation Address (SONA) of President Benigno Aquino III on June 22.

"Bakit naman ang ating gobyerno, sobrang nagmadali sa BBL at nakal-

imutan na ang katarungan? Paalala natin sa mga kasamahan natin sa Kongreso at Senado -- ipinangako natin noong dinala ang SAF 44 sa Camp Bagong Diwa, na uunahin natin ang Mamasapano hearing, ang hustisya. Doon lang tayo makikipag-usap sa MILF pagkatapos," said Cayetano.

The senator also revealed that he received information that the MILF is conducting "massive recruitment" not for its political party, but combatants for its armed wing. He deplored that the MILF has not given any credible and concrete answers during the Senate hearings, especially on its alleged links to terrorists.

Cayetano flew to Zamboanga City yesterday to attend the 40th day Mass for Capt. Ryan Pabalinas. He said giving justice to the families of the 44 Special Action Force (SAF) operatives in the Mamasapano massacre should be the priority, vis-à-vis the ongoing peace process.

Pabalinas, together with 43 fellow police commandos, were killed in a firefight last Jan. 25 with combined forces of Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) and Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF) in Mamasapano, Maguindanao. They clashed with the Muslim rebels after they killed Malaysian bomb maker Zulkifli Bin Hir alias Marwan who was then hiding in the BIFF lair.

"Lahat naman tayo ay naghahanap ng kapayapaan. Pero walang tunay na kapayapaan kung walang katarungan. All throughout history, iyan po ang magkatugma, katarungan patungo sa kapayapaan," said Cayetano during the Mass for Pabalinas.

He noted that MILF leaders remain defiant and refuse to surrender those involved in the encounter. Cayetano said this does not bode well with the MILF, as they could not even hold their members accountable for the incident.

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Muslim leader slams BBL critics

BY JULMUNIR I. JANNARAL CORRESPONDENT

COTABATO CITY, Maguindanao: A prominent Muslim leader slammed on Thursday efforts of some sectors to discredit a proposed Bangsamoro Basic Law (BBL), which could end the war in Mindanao and serve as "roadmap to peace" for the region.

Macabangkit Lanto, a former Justice Undersecretary, said inaccurate reports in the media

about certain provisions of the proposed law could misled the public about its real purpose

and importance.

"I appeal to them to be fair, to stick to the facts and to avoid speculations and innuendos," Lanto said.

Congress was set to pass the measure early this year, but it hit a snagged when the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) and the terrorist group Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters killed 44 policemen in a clash in Maguindanao in January.

The Aquino Administration has endorsed the measure as a priority measure. Implementation of

the law would require the MILF to lay down their arms and join the government.

Lanto corrected claims that the new law will create an independent Commission on Elections, Commission on Human Rights, Civil Service Commission, Ombudsman and police force in the propose Bangsamoro government.

He said the heads of the Bangsamoro commissions will be appointed by the President and will operate as regional offices exercising pow-

ers and authority derived from national agencies.

The devolution of the powers of the national commissions did not dilute its powers as mandated by the Constitution but strengthened it to facilitate implementation in the regional level, Lanto said.

Lanto said the Bangsamoro police will not operate as an independent force but "shall be part of the Philippine National Police and the Bangsamoro Police Board will be part of the National Police Commission."

He said some people were

alarmed by the word Bangsamoro but it was a matter of semantics and it could be amended but the substance of the proposed measure must be retained as agreed upon by the negotiating parties that drafted the Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro.

Lanto echoed the appeal of the people in Mindanao on legislators to separate the debates on the Mamasapano incident from the discussions on the proposed law because it might becloud the noble purpose of the BBL.



Legal ang BBL—Malacañang

NI MADEL SABATER – NAMIT

Nanindigan kahapon ang Malacañang sa legalidad ng panukalang Bangsamoro Basic Law (BBL) sa kabilang pagkuwestyon ni Senator Miriam Defensor-Santiago kung naaayon ang panukala sa BBL.

Sinabi ni Presidential Communications Operations Office (PCOO) Secretary Herminio Coloma, Jr. na 14 na miyembro ng Constitutional Commission na bumuo sa 1987 Constitution ang nagsabing walang ilegal sa BBL.

"Ayon sa kanila, 'the core principle of the 1987 Constitution in mandating a special status for the autonomous regions is the human development of the people of Muslim Mindanao and the Cordilleras. Hence, the public conversation should not be about semantics but about the people, their needs, their aspirations, their choices and about empowering them with the environment and institutional framework for social justice,'" ani Coloma.

"An interpretation of any relevant provision of the Constitution that results in war and abject poverty will be contrary to its intention," basa pa ni Coloma. "In this manner, Bangsamoro can be a model for us to do the same for the rest of the country and thereby build together a more just and peaceful

nation."

Kirukuwestyon ni Santiago ang legalidad ng panukalang BBL, sinabing dapat na inaprubahan ng Senado ang mga pakikipagnegosasyon sa pagtatatag ng Bangsamoro entity.

Sinabi pa ni Santiago na dapat na bumuo ang Palasyo ng isang komite na magrerebyu sa legalidad ng BBL.

Gayunman, tiniyak ni Coloma na siniguro ng gobyerno na naaayon ang

panukalang BBL sa mga probisyong 1987 Constitution.

Nasa balag na alanganin ang pagpapasa sa BBL kasunod ng engkuwentro sa Mamasapano, Maguindanao na 44 na miyembro ng Philippine National Police-Special Action Force (PNP-SAF) ang napataw ng mga kasapi ng Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) at Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF). 3

Treason raps vs Aquino, et al. won't fly – Miriam

By Angie M. Rosales

Sen. Miriam Defensor-Santiago yesterday expressed pessimism whether the treason charges filed against President Aquino and several others, including leaders of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) can prosper in court, mainly for being baseless.

"That is baseless because they are being punished for what seems to be a failure of judgment. They made the wrong judgment, that cannot be treason," the senator said in an interview with reporters.

By its mere definition, Santiago pointed out that treason means an overt act and therefore, "there is a specified act that can be proved in court that shows he has no loyalty left for the Philippines."

Although she herself repeatedly noted the "unconstitutionality" of the proposed Bangsamoro Basic



SANTIAGO

Law (BBL) and even questioned the authority of the President and the MILF to explore a peace agreement, Santiago said the matter of slapping Aquino, some of his concerned Cabinet members and leaders of the Muslim rebel

groups with treason does not seem to be applicable in the situation.

"It is too far away from the language of the Penal Code. Treason is a crime punishable by Penal Code. It cannot fit under the language employed there in definition of treason. Of course it basically is a treacherous behavior against the country," she pointed out.

Even the matter of pursuing the approval of the BBL by Congress cannot be used as an issue to support the charges of treason, Santiago said.

"At most they can be charged with is poor judgment in office and in that way the remedy is political not legal. You cannot sue them in court. Just boot them out of office," she said.

Meanwhile, Santiago urged Malacañang to form its own committee that will review the constitutionality of the proposed BBL.

Santiago made the suggestion as she described the whole process of peace process between the Philippine government and the MILF as unconstitutional.

"But since events have already taken place, it would be best if Malacañang form its own review committee to review the BBL for unconstitutional features instead of letting other branches of government do it for them," Santiago said.

Santiago suggested that the committee be composed of the legal luminaries like those she invited when her committee on the constitutional amendments conducted hearings on the constitutionality of the BBL.

"If there are changes to be made, it will come from the Palace itself. There would be no embarrassment about being dictated to by another branch of the government," she said. **With PNA**

Malacañang not bothered by treason raps vs PNoY

By Efren Montano

UNFAZED.

Thus declared Malacañang as it brushed aside a treason complaint filed

by Atty. Homobono Adaza and Herman Tiu Laurel against President Benigno S. Aquino III and several others over the government's peace negotiations with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF).

In a text message yesterday to Palace reporters, presidential communications Secretary Herminio Coloma Jr. said the accusations made by Adaza and Tiu Laurel did not have any solid basis.

"Hindi natitinan ang determinasyon ng Pangulo na isulong ang prose-song pangkawayaan sa kabila ng mga paratang na walang matibay na batayan," Coloma said.

The complainants accused Aquino of allowing the MILF, which they described as a "terrorist organization," to have a "territory, more powers and more new institutions" through the comprehensive peace deal signed by the group and the Philippine government last year.

The complainants cited Article 114 of the Revised Penal Code, which states that an individual is guilty of treason when he or she "levies war against the Philippines or adheres to her enemies giving them aid or comfort within the Philippines or elsewhere."

Other respondents named in the complaint as respondents were peace

adviser Teresita Deles, peace panel chairperson Miriam Ferrer, Senate President Franklin Drilon, House Speaker Feliciano Belmonte Jr., as well as members of the MILF, including Murad Ebrahim, Mohagher Iqbal, Ghadzali Jaafar, and John Does.

Senator Miriam Defensor-Santiago earlier described the treason complaint as baseless "because they [respondents] are being punished for what seems to be a failure of judgment."

"They made the wrong judgment... That cannot be treason," she said, stressing that treason is an overt act which shows a person has no loyalty left for the Philippines.

She also said pushing for the peace process with the MILF is "too far away" from treason. "At most they can be charged with poor judgment in office and in that way the remedy is political not legal. You cannot sue them in court, just boot them out of office," she said.

The government is pushing for the approval of the Bangsamoro Basic Law, which was the result of the peace negotiations with the MILF. The proposed law aims to replace the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao and create a Bangsamoro political entity.

PNox, dedma sa reklamong treason

NI GENALYN D. KABILING

Hindi nababahala ang Malacañang sa reklamong treason na inihain laban kay Pangulong Benigno S. Aquino III kaugnay ng palpak na operasyon ng pulisya sa Mamasapano, Maguindanao at pagpasok sa kasunduan para sa pagbuo ng Bangsamoro Basic Law (BBL).

Sinabi ni Presidential Communications Operations Secretary Herminio Coloma Jr. na walang basehan ang reklamong inihain ng dating assemblyman na si Homobono Adaza sa Office of the Ombudsman.

"Hindi natitinanag ang determinasyon ng Pangulo na isulong ang prosesong pangkapayapaan sa kabilang mga paratang na walang matibay

na batayan," sinabi ni Coloma kahapon sa mga mamamahayag sa media briefing sa Palasyo.

Sa reklamo, iginiit ni Adaza na dapat na kasuhan ng treason si Pangulong Aquino at ang iba pang matataas na opisyal ng gobyerno sa pagsusulong ng kasunduan sa Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) atsa panukalang magtatatag sa Bangsamoro political entity, na ayon sa kanya ay paglabag sa Konstitusyon at pagtulong sa mga kaaway ng estado.

Inakusahan din ang commander-in-chief sa pagpapalabas ng standing order laban sa pagpapadala ng reinforcements sa Special Action Force (SAF) na naka-engkuwentro ng MILF sa Mamasapano noong Enero 25 para lamang maprotektahan ang BBL.

Inihain ni Adaza ang reklamo

bagamat may immunity ang Pangulo sa anumang kasos.

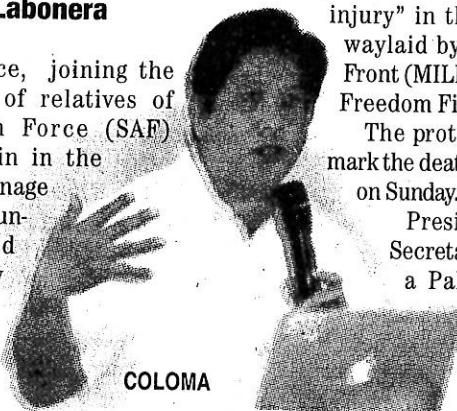
Matatandaang binanggit ng Pangulo sa kanyang pagdalo sa ika-29 na anibersaryo ng EDSA People Power Revolution ang patuloy na pagsusulong ng prosesong pangkapayapaan sa Mindanao sa kabilang sagupaan sa Mamasapano.

Ilang mambabatas ang nagpahayag na ng hindi katiyakang susuportahan ang pagpapasa sa BBL kasunod ng pagkakasangkot ng MILF sa insidente sa Mamasapano na ikinamatay ng 44 mula sa SAF. Nais ng ilan na amyendahan ang mga probisyon ng priority bill ng Pangulo, habang tumatanggi naman ang ilan na ipasa ito dahil sa umano sa kawalan ng sinseridad ng MILF sa prosesong pangkapayapaan. 2

Palace warns 'opportunist' to join SAF protest march

By Joshua L. Labonera

To the Palace, joining the protest march of relatives of Special Action Force (SAF) commandos slain in the Mamasapano carnage would be opportunism, as it warned groups which may join the march that they are "adding salt to



injury" in the loss of the policemen waylaid by Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) and Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF) last Jan. 25.

The protest march will be held to mark the deaths of the police commandos on Sunday.

Presidential Communications Secretary Hermino Coloma Jr., in a Palace briefing yesterday warned the groups that seek to capitalize on the

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grief of those left behind by the SAF troopers who died in the Mamasapano incident and told them not to take advantage of the sentiments of the bereaved.

Coloma said the government fully supports calls for justice for the SAF 44.

"While we are one in commemorating the heroism of the PNP (Philippine National Police) - SAF troopers, it is also important that we be observant of groups taking advantage and using the

opportunity to push their doubtful objectives," Coloma said.

Malacañang earlier warned militant groups after they used the incident in Mamasapano, Maguindanao as a springboard to hit President Aquino, thus calling for his resignation over the incidents.

Meanwhile, the Palace official said the police and military will take all necessary steps to thwart groups seeking to commit illegal acts like illegal assembly and inciting to sedition during the march.

An apolitical march, according to Malacañang, will be held by the PNP

Academy Alumni Association, Inc. for justice for the 44 slain SAF officers.

The march will be held in lieu of seeking swift delivery of justice for the 44 SAF troopers that were massacred in Mindanao during an anti-terrorism operations.

Families of the fallen SAF commandos had assailed Aquino's "indifference" by not attending the arrival honors of the fallen commandos.

Aquino, during ceremonies for the arrival of the bodies of the slain SAF commandos to Manila, instead attended an inauguration of an

automobile production company in Laguna.

Malacañang reasoned that Aquino respected the privacy of the families in grief, over his absence on the ceremonies.

The incident wherein the SAF troopers perished was made in an attempt to serve an arrest warrant on international terrorist.

Eighteen MILF fighters and at least five civilians were also killed in the clash with the SAF commandos.

The Palace earlier anchored on statements made by Justice

Secretary Leila De Lima cautioning groups, like the National Transformation Council (NTC), calling for the President's resignation against crossing the line of "legitimate dissent."

She said that while they have a right to express their sentiments, calling for a coup is a different thing altogether.

Malacañang has used De Lima's unconstitutional claims to threaten groups protesting Aquino from continuing with their actions, bearing on the possibility of being charged over their actions, wherever by

treason, sedition or rebellion.

"While we sympathize in remembering the heroics of PNP-SAF 44, it is important to be watchful and watch the groups that might take advantage of the mourning and use it as an opportunity to push their respective agenda," Coloma said.

Coloma said the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) and the Philippine National Police (PNP) will not allow any group from using illegal means to express their sentiments.

"The government is appealing anew to maintain justice and calmness," the Palace official said.

A1

Landmine blast kills

3 soldiers in Sulu

By Mario J. Mallari

As if taunting the military, the Abu Sayyaf on Wednesday exploded a landmine against an Army convoy, killing three soldiers, including two junior officers, while six others were wounded in Patikul, Sulu.

The landmine attack happened while Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) Chief of Staff Gen. Gregorio Pio Catapang Jr. was in Sulu to get briefing in connection to the ongoing all-out offensive operations against the Abu Sayyaf group.

Elements of the Army's 32nd

Infantry Battalion (IB), aboard three military trucks, were on a resupply mission in Patikul town at around 11:55 a.m. when they hit an improvised explosive device (IED) along Sitio Bud Bunga, Barangay Pansul.

Col. Restituto Padilla Jr., former spokesman of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP), said that the troops were out to resupply soldiers securing the Pansul-Panglayahan road project when they were waylaid.

Padilla said that the troops were aboard two KM450 troop carriers and one M35 truck when

they hit the landmine.

Reports showed that one of the KM450 carriers hit the IED.

"The result was three soldiers killed and six wounded in action," said Padilla.

Padilla, however, refused to reveal the identities of the military casualties pending notification of their immediate families.

But reports identified those killed as Lt. Emerson Somera, commander of Alpha Company of 32nd IB; Lt. Ferman James Magbanua and Sgt. Niel Daez.

Wounded were SSgt. Julieto Payumo, Cpl. Carlos Baguio, Pfc.

Jay Sumagang, Pfc. Nasser Adian, Pfc. Ramil Akyatan and one Pfc. Quinonez. They were already airlifted to Camp Bautista in Jolo for treatment.

Padilla expressed belief that the terrorist Abu Sayyaf group was behind the attack.

Padilla said that troops were reminded to maintain high level of alertness all the time amid the ongoing all-out offensive operations against the Abu Sayyaf in Sulu.

"The dangers faced by our troops on the ground as they continued with their mission remains high, that's why the AFP

leadership encourages our troops to always be on the alert, to maintain a high level of alertness," said Padilla.

Padilla said that reinforcements from the Joint Task Group-Sulu were immediately dispatched to aid the ambushed troops. He said a two-hour firefight erupted after the explosion.

Col. Alan Arrojado, commander of JTG-Sulu, said that pursuit operations against the terrorist Abu Sayyaf group are still ongoing.

Arrojado said that the ASG suffered undetermined number of

casualty during the clash.

The ambush came a few days after the military claimed that the Abu Sayyaf group, which is now the target of the all-out offensive operations in Sulu and Basilan, are on the run.

The military claimed that at least 24 Abu Sayyaf bandits have been killed since the launching of the all-out offensives last week.

Newly-installed AFP spokesman Brig. Gen. Joselito Kakilala downplayed the ASG attack during Catapang's visit to Sulu. "It was a target opportunity to conduct bombing," said Kakilala.

Suspected ASG land mine kills 3, injures 2 soldiers

SUSPECTED members of the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) welcomed on Wednesday the visit of Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) Chief of Staff Gen. Gregorio Pio Catapang Jr. in Sulu by detonating a land mine that killed three soldiers, including two junior officers.

Six other soldiers were also wounded during explosion, according to newly installed spokesman and concurrent commander of the AFP Civil Relations Service, Brig. Gen. Joselito Kakilala.

The attack happened while Catapang was in the province to get developments on the ongoing military operations against the local terrorist group, which he had earlier ordered pursued.

The chief of staff later proceeded to Maguindanao to also get reports from commanders on the ground about the success of the "all-out offensive" that he had ordered against the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF).

The soldiers, all members of the Army's 32nd Infantry Battalion (32nd IB), were aboard three military vehicles and were on their way to Barangay Pansul, Patikul, at around 11:55 a.m., when their vehicle triggered a land mine. The public affairs office of the AFP identified the soldiers killed as 1st Lt. James Magbanua, Sgt. Niel Daez and 1st Lt. Emerson Somera. Magbanua was the commander of the Alpha Co. of the 32nd IB.

According to former military Spokesman Col. Restituto Padilla, elements of the 32nd IB were also

securing a road construction projects at Barangay Pansul.

"It could have been the handiwork of the usual group, the ASG," he said.

The military is currently conducting an operation against the ASG in Sulu following the orders of Catapang and Defense Secretary Voltaire T. Gazmin due to the spike of criminality, including kidnapping in the province that was attributed to the ASG.

Kakilala said the military has already killed a total of 36 ASG members and wounded 78 others in Sulu since January this year.

Meanwhile, Padilla also said the operation against the BIFF and even against the Justice for Islamic Movement (JIM) will continue amid the efforts to bring back the families affected by the conflict to their homes.

The JIM, which is headed by former acting BIFF chief Ali Tambako, is not different from the BIFF, and it was only founded by Tambako because he had been removed from the BIFF leadership, according to Kakilala.

"It is one and the same group. It was only a product of rivalry between Tambako and Kagi Karialan, the chief of staff of the BIFF," he said.

Tambako, a Cairo-educated Muslim scholar, is a nephew of Ameril Umbra Kato, the founder of the BIFF.

Kakilala said all of the displaced families in Pikit, North Cotabato, have already returned to their homes, while 70 percent of the families who left their homes in Pagalungan, Maguindanao, have gone back to their residences. *Rene Acosta*

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3 soldiers killed, 6 wounded in Sulu blast

By Zaida delos Reyes-Palanca

THREE soldiers, including an Army commander, were killed while six others were wounded when an Improvised Explosive Device allegedly planted by the Abu Sayyaf Group exploded last Wednesday in Patikul, Sulu.

The fatalities were identified as 1Lt Emerson Someira, commander of the Alpha Company of the 32nd Infantry Battalion of the Philippine Army, 1Lt Fernan James Magbanua and Sgt. Niel Daez.

Rushed to the nearest hospital for treatment were SSgt

Julieto Payumo, Cpl Carlos Baguio, Pfc. Jay Sumagang, Pfc. Nasser Adian, Pfc. Ramil Akyatan and Pfc. Quinonez.

Initial investigation showed that the victims were in two KM450 and one M35 truck carriers conducting a resupply and securing a road project when they hit the landmine in Sitio Datag, Bgy. Panglayahan, Patikul town.

The bandits then fired at the wounded troopers, who traded gunshots with the ambushers.

The gunfight lasted for at least 30 minutes until the bandits fled. 13

3 sundalo utas sa landmine ng Abu

NORTH COTABATO - Tatlong sundalo kabilang ang dalawang tinyente ang napatay habang anim naman ang nasugatan makaraang masabugan ng landmine na itinanim ng mga bandidong Abu Sayyaf Group ang convoy ng militar sa kahabaan ng highway sa Barangay Pansul, bayan ng Patikul, Sulu noong Miyerkules.

Kabilang sa mga napatay ay sina 1st Lt. Emerson Somera, 1st Lt. Ferman James Magbanua, at si Sgt. Niel Daez na pawang mga nakatalaga sa Army's 32nd Infantry Battalion.

Isinugod sa Teodulfo Bau-

NINA RHODERICK BEÑEZ AT JOY CANTOS

tista Station Hospital ang mga nasugatang sina S/Sgt. Julieto Payumo, Cpl. Carlos Baguio, Pfc. Quinonez, Pfc. Jay Sumagang, Pfc. Nasser Adian at si Pfc. Rami Akyatan.

Tatlo naman ang dinala sa Camp Navarro Hospital sa Zamboanga City dahil sa seryosong kalagayan.

Naganap ang insidente dakong alas-11:55 ng umaga habang bumabagtas ang convoy ng resupply provision ng tropa ng Joint Task Group Sulu sa road project sa Barangay Pansul ng sumambulat ang patibong na landmine ng mga bandido sa

bahagi ng Sitio Bud Bunga kung saan sinundan naman ng pananambang sa mga sundalo.

Sa kabilang ng sorpresang patraydor na pag-atake ay

pumosisyon ang tropa ng militar na agad nakipagsagupa sa mga umaatakeeng kalaban kung saan umabot ng 30-minuto ang bakbakan hanggang sa umatras ang mga bandido. 8

3 sundalo patay, 6 sugatan sa pagsabog ng landmine

Tatlong sundalo ang namatay, kabilang ang dalawang opisyal, at anim na iba pa ang nasugatan makaraang masabugan ng landmine sa pananambang ng Abu Sayyaf sa Patikul, Sulu, noong Miyerkules ng hapon.

Sa ulat na tinanggap ng Sulu Police

Provincial Office (SPPO), nangyari ang incidente sa Sitio Wani, Barangay Pansol, Patikul, dakong 1:15 ng hapon.

Ayon sa report, pauwi na ang Alpha Company ng 32nd Infantry Battalion ng Philippine Army sa headquarters sa Dalag, Barangay Panglayahan, nang tambangan

silang mga armadong lalaki sa naturang lugar.

Matapos pasabugan ay pinaputukan pa ng mga armado ang mga sundalo na nauwi sa engkuwentro hanggang umatras ang mga rebelde makalipas ang 30 minuto.

Fer Taboy

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• Winning peace in Mindanao

CAMP SIONGCO, Datu Odin Sinsuat, Maguindanao — Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) chief of staff General Gregorio Pio Catapang Jr. on Wednesday said that the government is winning peace in Mindanao and urged the constituents to "hold on and be steadfast and never lose hope." "We are now fighting two fronts, the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) and the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF)," Catapang said in a ceremony held at the 6th Infantry Division headquarters here. Catapang led the awarding of soldiers who reinforced and saved the 84 members of Special Action Force (SAF) of the Philippine National Police (PNP) in the Jan. 25 Mamasapano encounter. Last week, Catapang ordered an all-out offensive against the BIFF. As of press time, more than 8,000 individuals have already evacuated for fear of being caught in crossfire. (Alexander D. Lopez)

MILF committed to peace

By EDD K. USMAN

The good news is that the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) is still constant in its adherence to the peace process with the Government of the Philippines (GPH) despite the proposed Bangsamoro law continuing to hang in the balance.

A member of the MILF peace panel gave this assurance yesterday at a forum dubbed "Implications of Mamasapano on the Peace Process: Moving Forward" in Makati City.

But the bad news, perhaps, is that implementation of the historic 2014 Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro (CAB) through the Bangsamoro Basic Law (BBL), the CAB's legal interpretation, is still overwhelmed by the fallout of the Mamasapano

incident of Jan. 25.

The Institute for Autonomy and Governance (IAG) organized the forum with support from the international community.

In an interview with Prof. Abhoud Syed Lingga, MILF peace panel member, he said the Moro revolutionary group is not about to abandon the 18-year-long negotiations to resolve the Bangsamoro's struggle for self-determination and attain peace in Mindanao.

"We still believe in the peace process, we still believe that both parties have obligations in the implementation of the agreements (signed). We are still counting on that the government will fulfill its obligations in the agreements," he said.

He suggested ways on how to move forward now that the passage of the BBL is stuck in con-

gressional limbo.

One, Lingga said, separate the issues about Mamasapano from the BBL; two, continue legislative proceedings on the BBL; and discussion should be on a higher level.

At the same time, he said investigations on the incident should continue to answer some questions, such as "what were the accomplishments of the SAF (police Special Action Force), what went wrong that led to the death of 44 SAF members, 18 MILF forces, and several civilians."

Lingga contended that the Mamasapano incident has "no substantial link with the BBL, only peripheral issues," such as on coordination and ceasefire violation.

The MILF negotiator said "it is better for Congress to pass the BBL this year." 

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MILF won't abandon peace process

By EDD K. USMAN

The Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) will not abandon the peace process despite uncertainties on the proposed Bangsamoro Basic Law (BBL).

A member of the MILF peace panel gave this assurance at a forum dubbed "Implications of Mamasapano on the Peace Process: Moving Forward" in Makati City yesterday.

But what appears to be big stumbling block in the implementation of the historic 2014 Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro (CAB) through the BBL is the tragic Mamasapano carnage in Maguindanao last January 25.

In an interview with Prof. Abhoud Syed Lingga, MILF peace panel member, he said the Moro revolutionary group is not about to abandon the 18-year-long negotiations to resolve the Bangsamoro's struggle for self-determination and attain peace in Mindanao.

"We still believe in the peace process. We still believe that both parties have obligations in the implementation of the agreements (signed). We are still counting on that the government will fulfill its obligations in the agreements," he said.

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One, Lingga said, separate the issues about Mamasapano from the BBL; two, continue legislative proceedings on the BBL, and discussion should be on a higher level.

Lingga contended that the Mamasapano incident has "no substantial link with the BBL, only peripheral issues," such as on coordination and ceasefire violation.

The MILF negotiator said "it is better for Congress to pass the BBL this year."

Government chief negotiator Prof. Miriam Coronel Ferrer agreed with Lingga that BBL should be passed this year, or else

there will be implications, such as on the decommissioning of MILF combatants and their weapons and the implementation of socio-economic development programs.

She cited the connection of the various aspects of the peace agreements with each other.

"They are all connected. All the other components are in tune with each other. As we move forward legislating the Bangsamoro Basic Law and instituting the Bangsamoro government, we will have the gradual and phased decommissioning process," Ferrer said.

"So if the political or legislative process is delayed, all the other aspects are delayed, including in the security and socio-economic components. In the security component, it includes the decommissioning," she emphasized.

But like the MILF peace panel, the GPH side has not lose hope on the BBL's passage.

Meanwhile, Ferrer spoke about what she dubbed "the trending lies on the BBL."

The No. 1 lie, she said, is that the Bangsamoro government will have its own police force and the MILF will become the police force.

"That is not true; the Bangsamoro police will be the regional command of the Philippine National Police (PNP), so it will be part and parcel of the Philippine National Police (PNP) and they will still be under the administrative supervision of the Napolcom (National Police Commission).

Ferrer said the No. 2 lie is about the alleged P75 billion that would be given to the Bangsamoro government, or sometimes being claimed to be given to the MILF.

"The computations are not like that. Our computations are as follows: It is an annual block grant, which is 2.4 percent of the national total revenue collection, and for 2016 that is estimated to come up to P27 billion,

plus the P7 billion Special Development Fund, for the first year alone in 2016, plus the P1 billion transition fund... for a total of P35 billion," she clarified.

Ferrer hastened to add that the envisioned Bangsamoro government will be paying for the salaries of the (tens of thousands) of teachers and health workers, unlike other local governments whose teachers and health workers are being paid for by the Department of Education (DepEd) and Department of Health (DOH), unless they are local high schools or local universities.

Ferrer said there is hope the BBL will pass, particularly with the support of President Aquino and peace process supporters in both chambers of Congress.

She said, however, that "no BBL is the same with a mangled BBL." We have to find an alternative.

"Why do we have to have (something) that is worse than the ARMM?" she asked.

Cayetano: Seek justice and peace

By NONOY E. LACSON

ZAMBOANGA CITY — The mood of sadness hangs in the air yesterday morning as the families of the five Special Action Force (SAF) commandos who were killed in the Mamasapano massacre observed the 40th day after the tragic event.

Erika Pabalinas, who celebrated her 26th birthday yesterday, unashamedly shed tears, still unable to accept the death of her husband, PNP-SAF Sr. Insp. Ryan Ballesteros Pabalinas. "It's so hard for me and my family to accept that Ryan is no longer with us. Sometimes when I am alone, my daughter would approach me and say - 'Mami nandito lang ako, mis na mis na natin si daddy,'" she said.

To observe the anniversary, a mass was celebrated at Forest Lake Memorial Homes in the village of Tumaga which was attended by local officials and Sen. Allan Peter Cayetano.

Sen. Cayetano told reporters here that "It is now 40 days since the massacre happened, yet not even the belongings of the SAF commandos, like cell phones and wallets, have been returned by the MILF.

"Ang atin gobyerno sobra na namamadali sa Bangsamoro Basic Law (BBL) at nakalimutan na ang katarungan para sa mga 44 PNP-SAF na nasawi sa encounter sa Mamasapano (Our government is rushing to push the Bangsamoro Basic Law and has forgotten to seek justice for the SAF men killed in the Mamasapano encounter)," the senator lamented.

"Sila namatay para maligtas tayo, sana naman po, bigyan natin sila ng tunay na parangal (They died to protect us, I hope they will be given true recognition)," the senators said.

Cayetano said that if peace will go first and justice will be second only, there will be no real peace.

Cayetano also said that while in the city he received information that the MILF is conducting massive recruitment.

The senator said the recruitment is not for a political party but a military recruitment to add combatants.

If it is peace they are looking, why is there recruitment and why are they establishing new MILF camps, the senator asked.

We are for peace, and everybody wants peace, but I don't think BBL will

end up in peace, it might end up in civil war, the senator warned.

With Pabalinas, also killed in the Mamasapano massacre were Insp. Joey Sacristan Gamutan of San Jose Gusu : PO2 Amman Misuari Esmula of Kingdom Village, Pitogo, Barangay Sinunuc; PO3 Jedz-in Abubakar Asjali of Barangay Sta. Barbara; and PO2 Glenn Berecio Bedua of Good Shepherd Village, Upper Calarian.

"I am still keeping some of Ryan's personal things. Yan nalang po ang naiwan na memories sa amin," Erika said. "It's very hard for us to accept even up to this day that my husband is already dead and has left me and my daughter."

In between tears, Erika remembered the help and comfort that many government officials extended to them. "Salamat po sa kanila lahat," she said. ¶

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VP: Addressing poverty key to lasting peace in Mindanao

By JC BELLO RUIZ

Reducing poverty incidence is vital in the pursuit of "lasting peace" in Mindanao, the camp of Vice President Jejomar C. Binay said yesterday.

Binay's spokesman for political affairs, lawyer Rico Paolo Quicho, said the country's second highest official believes that giving Mindanao residents livelihood opportunities is vital in the pursuit of peace in the region.

"Naniniwala po tayo na ang kapayapaan ay makakamit lang natin kung mayroon din tayong maayos na pamumuhay sa ating pa-

mayanan (We believe that peace can only be achieved if there are enough livelihood opportunities in the community)," Quicho told reporters in an interview in Orani, Bataan, where Binay had consultation meetings as part of his responsibilities as President Aquino's housing czar and adviser on overseas Filipino workers' concerns.

Binay's spokesman, however, did not mention ways which the Vice President thinks could help address poverty in the southern part of the country.

But the Vice President, in his previous interviews, underscored the need to promote new investments outside urban

centers and invest in the productivity of the agriculture sector to address poverty in the countryside.

Binay pointed out "the need to ease the pressure on the incomes of the less fortunate by expanding the coverage and extent of health, education, transportation, and other services."

Meanwhile, Quicho reiterated Binay's call for the administration to consider the sentiments of other stakeholders like indigenous Mindanaoans or "lumads" and the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) in the ongoing discussions of the Bangsamoro Basic Law (BBL).

The Vice President said including other stakeholders could help ensure peace in Mindanao.

Quicho maintained that certain features of the draft BBL should be carefully reviewed as it could run counter to provisions of the Constitution and compromise national sovereignty.

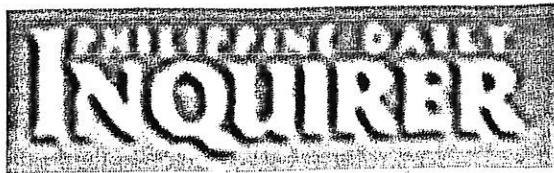
He stressed that the congressional approval of the BBL should not be bound by a deadline.

Binay had earlier said that the BBL, which is the legal translation of the Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro (CAB) that will entrench the Bangsamoro region, should be "ripened" by time and should not be bound by a deadline.

The CAB was signed by the government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) on March 27, 2014.

The Aquino administration is targeting the early passage of the BBL, hoping that an election will be held in Bangsamoro by 2016.

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State of calamity declared in Maguindanao

DAVAO CITY—The provincial government of Maguindanao has declared a state of calamity as the military operation continues to uproot residents from their villages.

In a report released by the Maguindanao provincial board, the number of displaced people across 11 towns had now swelled to over 40,000, according to board member

Abubakar Katambak.

Katambak said the crisis has pushed the Sangguniang Panlalawigan to pass a resolution during an emergency session on Tuesday to declare a state of calamity in the province.

"This (declaration) gives the provincial government an authority to fully use its calamity fund to provide relief assistance to internally displaced per-

sons," Katambak said by phone.

Maguindanao Gov. Esmael Mangudadatu said the declaration would speed up the delivery of services to displaced residents from the interior villages of the towns of Mamasapano, Shariff Saydona Mustapha, Datu Unsay, Datu Saudi, Shariff Aguak, Datu Salibo, Datu Hoffer, Datu Piang, Radjah Buayan, Sultan-sa-Barongis

and Pagalungan.

Jo Myrna Henry, media liaison of the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao's Humanitarian Emergency Action Response Team, said the regional government was especially concerned about the education and health of some 18,448 students as schools had turned into evacuation centers. *Allan Nawal, Inquirer Mindanao A3*

P-Noy: I didn't send SAF on suicide mission

By Christian V. Esguerra

HE DIDN'T send the Special Action Force (SAF) on a "suicide mission" in Mamasapano, and neither would he order one in the hunt for other high-profile terrorists.

President Aquino made this clear when he sat down for more than three hours with SAF troopers on Wednesday in his second

meeting with them since 44 of their comrades were slaughtered by Moro rebels in Maguindanao province on Jan 25.

"I think the group was satisfied," said the source, who requested anonymity because he was not authorized to speak

commands.

One SAF trooper spoke up and told the President that his team was "happy" to capture terrorist Zulkifli bin Hir, alias "Marwan," and that they would be willing to go even on a "suicide mission" next time.

"I don't order suicide missions," replied Mr. Aquino, who also denied that he had asked government troops to "stand down" while Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) fighters and other Moro rebels were raining bullets on the SAF men.

The source said the meeting at Camp Bagong Diwa in Taguig City was arranged to help provide "closure" between Mr. Aquino and the SAF troopers.

'Guidance'

Mr. Aquino noted that he had given "guidance" for the SAF operation to be "coordinated" with the military and other appropriate government agencies.

But there were problems with the "execution," he told the SAF officers.

A Senate inquiry earlier showed that the then SAF chief, Director Getulio Napeñas, had failed to coordinate "time on target" with the military shortly before his troops moved in on Marwan and another terrorist, Basit Usman.

'Operations review'

In the Camp Bagong Diwa meeting, the source said, the troopers also informed the President about weapons and other equipment they needed as the PNP's frontline unit against terrorism.

In Malacañang, Communications Secretary Herminio Coloma said the meeting was in part an "operations review" for the SAF.

"There was also a free exchange (between Mr. Aquino and the SAF troopers). There was an exchange of observations and suggestions," Coloma said.

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with media about the meeting.

The President recalled that he got the impression that the SAF troopers had been properly reinforced based on initial text messages he received through Interior Secretary Mar Roxas, and then Philippine National Police chief Alan Purisima.

Purisima was under suspension for corruption at that time. He subsequently resigned.

In the first meeting on Jan. 30, none of the SAF troopers spoke. But an INQUIRER source present on Wednesday said the President took the opportunity to assure the SAF troopers that he did not leave them behind during the ill-fated operation.

It just so happened that there were "loopholes" in the operations that led to "improper reinforcement," the source quoted Mr. Aquino as telling the police

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Noy won't protest MILF's act of giving Malaysia its findings

By Joshua L. Labonera

Malacañang portrayed itself yesterday as being indifferent to the issue of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) delivering and presenting its investigation's findings on the deadly Mamasapano mission of the

Special Action Force (SAF) which led to the massacre of 44 SAF commandos to Malaysia, instead of the Philippines.

Such a snub from the MILF not only to the Senate committee that had asked the MILF to submit its findings to the panel for

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the members and chairman to be able to start the hearings on the Bangsamoro Basic Law, as well as snubbing the Department of Justice that had also earlier asked the MILF to submit its findings on the Mamasapano massacre for the DoJ to continue with its own investigation.

Also the MILF showed arrogance and a complete disrespect to the sovereignty of the Philippine Republic, in essence bowing to the dictates of the Malaysian government.

The Palace in virtually dismissing the disrespectful action of the MILF by maintaining its distance on this, also showed the weakness of the President and his reluctance to protect the integrity and sovereignty of the country by not even protesting the MILF's act of providing Malaysia with its findings first.

The Palace maintained its distance on Thursday straying from answering queries over the MILF's adoption of the notion to send its findings on the deadly Jan. 25 Mamasapano clash to Malaysia, that acts a mediator in the peace process between the Moro group and the Philippine government.

Malacañang, like weakling administration, for its part, said that it does not have any jurisdiction over the actions of the MILF, noting the results of the group's findings over the Mamasapano incident given to Malaysia instead of the Philippine agencies or even to Malacañang are not violative of the Aquino administration's powers and authority.

Presidential Communications Secretary Herminio Coloma Jr. reiterated this position, saying that this is the group's interpretation

of the peace agreements it had signed with the Philippine government.

"It is better that we wait for it. We have no jurisdiction on their actions," he said, as though the MILF is a different state, and that they are not citizens of the Philippines.

Coloma answered directly when the question bordered on the MILF having already committed to give the government a copy of its findings on the bloody encounter.

He said it will be Malacañang that will rely on the recommendations made by government peace negotiators in connection with the MILF's findings.

It is known that the government negotiators go by the dictates of the MILF and Malaysia.

Earlier in the week, Sen. Ferdinand Marcos Jr., who heads the deliberations on the BBL at the Senate, said he had heard reports that the MILF had already sent its findings on the Mamasapano clash to Malaysia.

SAF troopers, 44 of them, were massacred by the MILF fighters along with their comrades in arms, the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF), when the troopers entered the rebel group's territory in pursuit of terrorists Marwan and Basit Usman. The MILF's breakaway group, the BIFF, was also involved in the clash.

Coloma, on the part of the Aquino government, said the administration respects the views expressed by Marcos on the MILF's actions on its Mamasapano probe findings.

The Palace downplayed challenges for the MILF to prove its sentiments, saying President Aquino had already challenged the group to continue being a partner in the peace process.

Iqbal: Should we scrap 17-year-old negotiations?

By Jeoffrey Maitem
Inquirer Mindanao

COTABATO CITY—"Seriously, can we allow letting go of the 17-year-old negotiations?" Mohagher Iqbal, chief peace negotiator of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), asked.

Iqbal was responding to a suggestion by Sen. Miriam Defensor-Santiago on Thursday that the government and the MILF to restart the peace negotiations to rid the proposed Bangsamoro Basic Law (BBL) of its "unconstitutional features."

Santiago told reporters in Manila that as it is written, the BBL could be challenged in the Supreme Court immediately after clearing Congress and the high court may declare it unconstitutional.

"In fairness to the senator, she is a good lawyer. But let's wait and see what the Supreme Court will say about the bill," Iqbal said.

The MILF Central Committee remains optimistic the BBL will be passed without changes, Iqbal said. A20



NO INTRUDERS Residents of Tukanalipao village in Mamasapano, Maguindanao province, have become accustomed to members of an Armed Forces of the Philippines security team walking among them during site inspections of the Philippine National Police board of inquiry.

REM ZAMORA

No Moro police, no P75B, says peace exec

By Nikko Dizon
and Christine O. Avendaño

THE GOVERNMENT chief peace negotiator, Miriam Coronel-Ferrer, yesterday clarified two misconceptions in the provisions of the proposed Bangsamoro Basic Law (BBL) that she called the "top two trending lies."

Those lies, she said, were that the proposed Bangsamoro autonomous region would have its own police force and army, and that the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) would receive a P75-billion fund under the BBL.

Ferrer said that under Article XI Section 2 of the draft BBL, a Bangsamoro police would be established for "law enforcement

and maintenance of peace and order in the Bangsamoro.

It is clear in the provision that the Bangsamoro police "will be part of the Philippine National Police," she said.

Special development fund

Article XIV Section 2 of the proposed BBL states that the central government would provide for a special development fund to the Bangsamoro "for rehabilitation and development purposes upon ratification" of the draft law, Ferrer said.

The special development fund amounts to P7 billion for the first year following ratification of the BBL, she said.

In the second year, she said, the fund will amount to P10 billion, "to be paid out to the Bangsamoro government over five years at the rate P2 billion per year."

Under the draft law, the Bangsamoro Transition Authority (BTA), will also receive P1 billion "to carry out the requirements of transition" from the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) to the Bangsamoro autonomous region.

The central government will also provide an annual block grant to the Bangsamoro, its share in the national internal revenue of the government.

Emphasis on the bad

"What is going on now, what are being emphasized, are the supposed bad things of the BBL without the bigger picture of what's good about it. This is my lament to the mass media, they only discuss the demerits without emphasizing the merits," Ferrer said. "The discussions are inaccurate or total falsehood, but the text of the BBL is clear."

In a separate interview, Senen Bacani, a member of the government peace panel, said the local governments under the Bangsamoro autonomous region would continue to receive their internal revenue allotments (IRA).

"The IRA would not go to the Bangsamoro political entity," Bacani said.

The salaries of teachers, social and health workers would come from the Bangsamoro government, he said.

Bacani said the misinformation hurt the BBL discussions.

"There's really no basis for all this wrong information," he said.

But Sen. Miriam Defensor-Santiago believes the draft BBL is riddled with an "abundance of unconstitutional features" that it is bound to be challenged in the Supreme Court immediately after its passage in Congress.

And its fate there has no time limit because "you could not hurry" the Supreme Court, Santiago said yesterday.

Santiago urged Malacañang to form a body to review the unconstitutional features of the BBL, including the provision that would establish a new, autonomous region in Mindanao called Bangsamoro.

Palace says no

But the Palace rejected calls for a review of the BBL, insisting that the Office of the President reviewed and revised the measure before submitting it to Congress last year.

Communications Secretary Herminio Coloma said it was clear in President Aquino's speech during the 29th anniversary of the EDSA People Power Revolution last month that he wanted the peace process to move forward.

"And the most significant step would be to go on with the process of enacting the draft BBL," Coloma told reporters.

President Aquino told congressional leaders earlier not to "dilute" the BBL, apparently echoing the position of the MILF.

Leaders of the Senate and the House of Representatives have agreed to pass the BBL by June, before the end of the regular session of the 16th Congress.

Santiago said what was important was not the date that Congress would pass the

BBL but the date that the Supreme Court would decide on its constitutionality.

"To say for example, that by this year 2015 we will have peace in Mindanao because of this process, is misguided," Santiago told reporters.

Review committee

She said the only way to save the BBL and the peace process itself was for Malacañang to form a committee that would review the proposed law for its unconstitutional features, which she added were "so many at this point."

She also disagreed with the notion that the BBL would spell peace in Mindanao.

"Right now what I hear around me is calls for appeasement, as if peace equals the BBL. That is not so. That is wrong mathematics," Santiago said.

The peace process itself was illegal from the get-go, she said.

For one, both President Aquino and the MILF did not get proper authority to negotiate with each other for peace in Mindanao.

In the case of the President, Santiago said Mr. Aquino should have asked the Senate because under the Constitution, foreign policy power was shared between the President and Congress, specifically the Senate.

"It should be the Senate of the Philippines, at least we are the representatives of the people. He is not... A treaty not concurred in by us is invalid, what more the creation of substate?" she said, adding that there was "no question that what is created in the BBL is a substate."

Who authorized MILF?

In the case of the MILF, Santiago questioned who authorized the group to represent the Bangsamoro people in the peace table.

And because of this, her forecast was that should the BBL be passed in June, there would be an "internal war" this time "among those claiming to be leaders" of the Bangsamoro people.

She said the normal procedure for the two sides was exhibiting and exchanging credentials to show that they were authorized to sit at the peace table so as that they would start in the "proper legal footing."

Speaking about the unconstitutional features of the BBL, Santiago mentioned creation of a substate—apparently in reference to the establishment of a Bangsamoro political entity that, she stressed, was "never mentioned once" in the Constitution.

She said the Constitution provided for only an autonomous region and thus she questioned the constitutional basis for the promotion of a substate.

"Unless the BBL is first of all transformed into a document for more regional autonomy or autonomy under guises, it has no legal basis at all from the very start," she said.

Sovereignty

Another unconstitutional feature of the BBL, she said, was that the proposed law "infringes on sovereignty of our country because there are certain powers reserved in the parliament under the BBL that is exclusive to them."

"If their powers are exclusive that means they exclude even the powers of our own state," Santiago said.

Santiago said that the constitutional problems besetting the BBL "will prove to be [its] undoing."

She maintained that the Constitution was "immutable" and cannot be changed.

On remarks by MILF chief negotiator Mo-hagher Iqbal that the MILF and the government panels should negotiate the Constitution, Santiago said this was "not intelligent" as the Constitution was "nonnegotiable."

"They recognize we have a Constitution ... and yet they tell us we must negotiate first. We cannot negotiate a constitutional provision no matter how solitary it is, no matter how minor it seems to others," she said.

"So to summarize, we have a big problem. To paraphrase, Houston, we have a big problem," Santiago said.

Start again

Asked whether the government should then scrap the BBL and restart the peace negotiations, Santiago said that personally she would "start the process all over again" with Malacañang asking the Senate if it was willing to grant the President the power to negotiate a separate form of government.

This is in effect telling the President that he is "limited to what the Constitution [says]," she said.

"But since events have already taken place, it's best if Malacañang forms its own review committee to review the BBL for unconstitutional features," she said, adding this was the best alternative, instead of the judiciary or the Senate giving its own suggestions.

Consult with legal experts

Santiago said the Palace could consult with the law experts she invited when her committee on constitutional amendments tackled legal and constitutional questions on the BBL.

She also said she was ready to submit her committee report to Sen. Ferdinand Marcos Jr., who chairs the committee on local government and was tasked to be on top of the BBL hearings. *With a report from Christian V. Esguerra*

BOI to submit Mamasapano probe results on Monday

By JUN ELIAS

CAMP FLORENDO, La Union – The Philippine National Police's Board of Inquiry (BOI), formed to investigate the death of 44 police commandos in an encounter with Muslim rebels in Mamasapano, Maguindanao last Jan. 25, will conclude its probe today and submit its findings to Interior Secretary Manuel Roxas II on Monday.

PNP officer-in-charge Deputy Director General Leonardo Espina said the BOI has thoroughly checked on the operational audit of the police Special Action Force (SAF) Oplan Exodus that was launched to get Malaysian bomb maker Zulkifli bin Hir, alias Marwan, in his hideout in Mamasapano.

The raiding team killed Marwan while his Filipino cohort Basit Usman escaped. The SAF commandos later encountered members of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) and the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters that resulted in the death of the policemen, 18 rebels and several civilians.

"The BOI's importance is on the operational audit which is to check what happened every minute of the operation until it was finished," said Espina, who was guest speaker at the turnover ceremonies of 52 patrol motorcycles to the Police Regional Office 1 (PRO1) here.

He said the BOI would reveal those responsible for the operation and those who committed mistakes, liabilities and culpabilities.

"We have to find out what really happened during the operation," he added.

Espina has called on the entire police force to move on amidst the controversies brought about by the death of the 44 SAF troopers.

"Let's move on. We've done a lot of inquiry (on the incident). It's my responsibility to carry on my people. Let's move on towards what we have to do," Espina told the members of PRO1 headed by Chief Superintendent Roman Felix.

Secretary Roxas said the BOI should answer at least five questions in its report.

He said the BOI headed by Director Benjamin Magalang, chief of the PNP Criminal Investigation and Detection Group (CIDG), should find out if Oplan Exodus was properly planned and properly implemented; were the equipment of the SAF troopers efficient; did SAF officials ignore instructions of President Aquino and what happened to the President's instructions to relieved PNP chief Director General Alan Purisima and relieved SAF chief Director Getulio Napeñas during their meeting in Malacañang.

Roxas reiterated his commitment to find the truth and the immediate completion of the investigation on the Mamasapano incident.

Malacañang believes President Aquino's no-holds-barred meeting with the SAF troopers will be productive, being part of a regular management process to ensure that operations will be carried out better in the future.

At the same time, the needs and concerns of SAF members would be addressed.

"It is a sound management practice to conduct an operations review," Presidential Communications Operations Office Secretary Herminio Coloma Jr. said in a press briefing yesterday, a day after Aquino had a bull session with the PNP and SAF officials and staff on the Jan. 25 Mamasapano operation and other concerns.

Coloma said the President mentioned the need for an operations review with the PNP and SAF when he met with the leaders and members of the House of Representatives about two weeks ago.

Coloma confirmed the discussions at Camp Bagong Diwa in Taguig City were "freewheeling" and that there was an exchange of "observations and suggestions."

But he denied the President scolded the police commandos as he was not the type to give in to "any type of emotional outburst."

Coloma also explained the President did away with a speech because he went to Camp Bagong Diwa primarily to conduct the operations review and witness the assumption of command ceremony for the new SAF commander, Chief Supt. Moro Virgilio Lazo.

Meanwhile, Espina went to Central Luzon and met local police officials and their men after visiting police units in Ilocos.

Espina is also scheduled to visit the Visayas and Mindanao in the next days to confer with local police units.

— With Aurea Calica, Cecille Suerte Felipe, Non Alquitran (6)

EDITORIAL

EDITORIALS are written more spontaneously and impulsively than columns. They reflect the editor's immediate thoughts and feelings on current events.

Another breakaway group

The Moro Islamic Liberation front broke away from the Moro National Liberation Front during the original peace process with Muslim secessionists. When it was the MILF's turn to talk peace, another group also broke away – or at least that's what the nation has been led to believe – and formed the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters or BIFF.

MILF commanders have claimed to have no control over the BIFF, attributing to the splinter faction armed attacks on government forces during a ceasefire and coddling of top terrorists. The true nature of ties between the MILF and BIFF has been questioned after the two groups joined forces in Maguindanao against police commandos who tried to capture Jemaah Islamiyah bomb makers Zulkifli bin Hir or Marwan and Basit Usman, the former MILF special operations group commander.

No explanation seems to be forthcoming from the MILF. Now there are reports that the BIFF itself has its own splinter group, calling itself the Justice for Islamic Movement or JIM. Like the MILF when it broke away, the new rogue faction tends

to be more violent and vicious than the mother unit, further complicating a peace process badly shaken by the slaughter of 44 police commandos in Mamasapano, Maguindanao on Jan. 25.

Malacañang has vowed to nip JIM in the bud. Going by the record in neutralizing the BIFF, however, there are valid concerns that the government will be unable to deliver. The government said the MILF would help fight the JIM. Again, after what happened in Mamasapano, this is hardly reassuring.

The new group is supposed to be headed by a commander who had a falling-out with the BIFF's ailing leader Ameril Umbra Kato. The commander is said to be a radical Islamic cleric trained in extremist violence in the Middle East and who used to raise foreign funding for the BIFF. The new group is allegedly providing sanctuary to Usman, who escaped the police commando raid in Mamasapano, and at least five other terrorists. The JIM's emergence raises more questions about the extent of control that the MILF has over the armed groups operating in Mindanao. /4

E D I T O R I A L

Hole gets deeper for Noy

Bizarre occurrences continue to happen in the aftermath of the Mamasapano massacre as the death of the 44 Special Action Force (SAF) commandos continues to haunt Noynoy—likely out of his wits.

The other day, Noynoy again spent more than three hours with the survivors of the mission to bring down Marwan that went horribly wrong as it resulted in the loss of lives due to Noynoy's folly to preserve a peace agreement with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) and possibly snatch a Nobel Peace Prize for it.

The meeting took place during the turnover ceremony for the new SAF commander after the head of the Philippine National Police (PNP) elite force Director Getulio Napeñas was relieved as part of his role as Noynoy's scapegoat.

Instead of mending relationships with the disgruntled policemen a month after the carnage happened, Noynoy likely fueled more discontent as he seems to have unloaded his guilt feelings by turning on the survivors of the Mamasapano incident.

One of those inside the closed-door meeting said a great part of their meeting with Noynoy was spent on scolding the SAF while Noynoy kept referring to his own feelings when he lost his father, former Sen. Ninoy Aquino, who was assassinated in 1983.

Lately, Noynoy has been frequently referring to his bitterness toward those who have persecuted Ninoy, from his incarceration as the chief political opponent of former President Ferdinand Marcos to his brutal death which up to now remains unresolved, despite two Aquinos holding power.

Many of those inside the closed-door meeting described their new encounter with Noynoy as being weird since it appeared that it was Noynoy who can't get over what is bottled up inside him.

It would appear that the frequent meetings with the SAF were done more to relieve Noynoy of what has been tearing up inside him instead of the SAF members ventilating their grievances to Noynoy.

The meeting, which one yellow paper described as a bull session, was also likely about the flow of information on the Mamasapano incident since those in the closed-door conference with Noynoy were part of Oplan Exodus.

Noynoy is increasingly being boxed in as details of the mission against Marwan unravels that shows his huge involvement in the operations, including the crucial hours when the reinforcements did not show up for the beleaguered members of the 55th SAF company.

The Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) that appeared to have been a main participant in the charade said the police failed to provide the military with enough information to establish the correct location of the SAF commandos pinned down by a combined force of the MILF and the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF).

It turned out that calls for reinforcement were sent out early in the morning of Jan. 25 but it only came in the late afternoon. Would it be a testimony to the skills of the AFP to take nearly a day to finally fix the location of troops asking for aid?

Shortly after the day of the massacre, several accounts had it that Noynoy himself ordered the military to "stand down" as his worries about the peace agreement being violated outweighed the preservation of the lives of the SAF commandos.

Noynoy, thus, is expected to continue having long fruitless meetings with the SAF in his effort to lighten the burden he currently carries while at the same time intimidating the policemen to toe the Palace line on the script being peddled to absolve Noynoy from the incident.

Noynoy, however, is finding himself in a bigger trouble each time he holds what can be described as therapy sessions with the SAF.

He should heed the saying "when you find yourself in a hole, stop digging."

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MARAMI ANG KONTRA SA BBL

Bert De Guzman

DUMARAMI ang mga mambabatas, kabilang ang taumbayan, na sumasalungat ngayon sa Bangsamoro Basic Law (BBL) kasunod ng Mamasapano massacre. Maging si Sen. Antonio Trillanes IV na alyado ni Pangulong Noynoy Aquino ang nagsabi sa isang radio interview na ang prosesong pangkapayapaan sa Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) ay baka sa susunod na administrasyon na magkaroon ng kaganapan. Samakatwid, goodbye sa Nobel Prize na pinakakamithi raw ng Pangulo kung kaya "binasbasan" niya ang SAF operation na ang pinamahala ay si suspended PNP Chief Director Alan Purisima.

Paalam sa kapayapaan sa Mindanao, ang Lupang Pangako. Mahirap daw pagkatiwalaan ang mga Moro o Muslim (hindi naman lahat) sa matinong pag-uusap. Remember, nagtiwala rin ang grupo noon ni Army Brig. Gen. Teodulfo Bautista kay MNLF Commander Usman Sali sa mapayapang pag-uusap sa Patikul, Sulu noong 1977. Walang magdadala ng armas.

Sa lugar ng usapan, minasaker ng pangkat ni Usman Sali ang mahigit sa 30 kasamang militar ni Gen. Bautista, ang ama ng noon ay kadete sa PMA na si Emmanuel Bautista, na naging AFP chief of staff sa ilalim ng Aquino administration. Maniniwala ba kayo sa pahayag ni MILF chief negotiator Mohagher Iqbal na hindi nila alam na naroroon sa kanilang territoryo sina Marwan at Abdul Basit Usman? Kay Hitler mo sabihin iyan!

Lalong pinaiigting ng AFP ang pag-atake laban sa Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) at BIFF kasunod ng matagumpay na opensiba ng militar laban sa mga armadong grupo noong nakaraang linggo. Sa utos ni AFP Chief of staff Gen. Gregorio Pio Catapang, sinabi niyang bago siya magretiro ngayong taon, nais niyang mapawi ang kakayahan ng mga bandido sa paghahasik ng karahasanan at kaguluhan sa Mindanao.

Batay sa ulat, may 24 tulisang ASG ang napatay at dalawang sundalo ang nasawi sa mga bakbakan nitong nakaraang linggo. May report pang ang lider ng ASG na si Radulan Sahiron ay nasugatan. Tulad ni Marwan, si Sahiron ay may patong na \$5 milyon sa ulo ng US government kapag siya ay nahuli o napatay. 7

TERORISTANG GRUPO

Erik Espina

SA palitang naganap sa pagitan ni Senador Alan Peter Cayetano at sa barkadahang Teresita Deles, Miriam Coronel-Ferrer, at Mohaquer Igbal sa hearing patungkol sa Mamasapano, ang aming buong tahanan pumalakpak sa una. Habang sa ibang banda, nakakalungkot ang naging reaksyon ni ARMM Governor Mujib Hataman na porke pinasaringan ni Cayetano ang MILF bilang teroristang grupo, damay daw siya bilang isang Moro pati mga taga-suporta ng Senador sa ARMM. Siyempre pa, may koro agad sa Katimugang Mindanao na agad bumatikos kay Cayetano, at sabay pakulo (larawan) na lumabas sa mga pahayagan na ang mga "Muslim hindi terorista". Maitanong nga, ang sinipat ni Cayetano ang frente ng MILF, hindi ang mga Moro. At hindi rin ang kapatirang Muslim.

Kaya bakit nagpamalas ng sama ng loob si Hataman? Na parang pinipersonal niya ang turing? Hindi naman siya kasapi ng MILF. Huwag na kasi tayong lahat magbulag-bulagan. Kahit ipagsigawan pa natin na hindi teroristang grupo ang MILF, subalit kung namumugot ng ulo at ari; katawan ng mga sundalo ginagawang litson sa kawayan, at nagpapasabog ng bomba na ang puntiryang mga sibilyan hal. madre at bata sa mga matataong lugar, hindi ba asal ng terorista yan! Wala akong paki-alam kung MILF pa yan, BIFF o kahit Christian Liberation Front, basta ang tinuran ng grupo ay ang mga nabanggit, tumapak lang na ibansag sa ganitong grupo ay "terorista".

Para magising ang sambayanan, saliksikin ninyo sa Google lahat ng pambobombang ginawa sa deka-dekada ng MILF. Pati si dating Kalihim ng DILG Rafael Alunan naglabas din ng kanyang "Intel Report" tungkol sa MILF: 1) Noong 1995 kausap niya ang Pakistan Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto at kanyang katapat sa nasabing bansa, inamin ng mga ito batay sa sensitibong impormasyon na si MILF Chair Hashim Salamat may direktang ugnayan kay Osama Bin Laden 2) May mga dayuhang nagtuturo sa mga Kampo ng MILF mula Jemaah Islamiyah at Al Qaeda 3) Pagawaan ng baril 4) Pagpapalakas ng pwersa 5) Nag-recruit ng mga alagad mula Pilipinas, OFW's sa Gitang Silangan at mga iskolar sa Islam sa Saudi at Egypt at ipadala sa Islamabad para sa karagdagang pag-aaral. Tapos sa mga Madrassah sa Peshawar para "military training"; dadaan sa Khyber Pass sa Afghanistan upang makatikim ng labanan; tsaka smuggle pabalik mula Sabah Malaysia papasok sa Katimugang Mindanao.



Oops! Another Noynoy blunder

Yet another constitutional blunder appears to have been committed by Noynoy, and of course, the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) in inking a peace pact that has led to Malacañang's drafting of the evidently unconstitutional Bangsamoro Basic Law (BBL), which will, if passed by the Congress, establish an Islamic substate within the Philippine state—that is, if Sen. Miriam Santiago's argument is constitutionally spot on.

Santiago, in a press conference yesterday, challenged the power and authority of Noynoy when she questioned his authority, along with the MILF's to negotiate peace and create a substate for the armed Islamic forces.

Santiago was quoted as saying: "What is the constitutional basis for the authority to negotiate on the part of the Philippine government? The President simply assumed that he had the power. That's not so," she stressed.

She pointedly said that "the President does not have sole power over the foreign policy of the Philippines," explaining that following the Constitution, "foreign policy power" must be equally shared between the President and the Congress, specifically, she stressed, the Senate.

She then went on to ask where the Senate authorization came from for Noynoy to negotiate with the MILF on the peace process, saying the President does not have this authorization from the upper Chamber as he merely assumed he has that the power, even when he does not.

She questioned as well the dubious



authority of the MILF to represent the Bangsamoro in the peace negotiations.

As she pointed out: "Who gave the MILF authority to represent the Bangsamoro? Among all those scions of the breakaway group, MNLF, MILF, BIFF and others..., which one of them shall be validly allowed to claim that it represents the Bangsamoro or the entire Islamic people within the Philippine territory?"

Santiago does have a good constitutional point when she argues that if a treaty needs the concurrence of the Senate, what more when it comes to creating a substate for the MILF?

If Santiago is constitutionally correct in her argument that negotiations for the creation of a substate for the MILF must have the authorization of Congress that would give the President the authority to negotiate for peace with the goal of creating a substate for the Moro rebel force, and the Supreme Court agrees with her, then the BBL should be dead in the water, or to use a legal term, the negotiations and the peace pacts are *void*

ab initio.

But. And this is a big but. If Santiago is constitutionally correct, and perhaps she is, what this means is that every negotiation that has a bearing in foreign affairs entered into by the Executive branch, with the imprimatur of the President, without the Senate authorization is null and void.

Would the EDCA then fall under the same argument? Probably, if Santiago is spot on and if the SC upholds her argument since the Senate has been insisting that the EDCA is a treaty and therefore, Senate concurrence is needed.

Still, the issue at this time is not in question, but the BBL is, and from all accounts, the two houses of Congress, from all indications, being the certified puppets of Noynoy, will pass into law the BBL, while claiming falsely that all the unconstitutional provisos will be deleted and replaced with provisos that are all constitutional.

This is patently false advertising, considering the fact that virtually from start to finish, the annexes themselves, plus the BBL are all filled with unconstitutional provisos, and it would be a virtual impossibility to merely make changes for these to become constitutional.

If the Congress wants a constitutional entity for the Bangsamoro, then it would be best to just let the MILF chieftains run for election for seats to the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (ARMM), or amend the Charter completely, to make the BBL right.

Crisis of survival deepens

PRESIDENT B. S. Aquino 3rd's fight for political survival appears to have taken a turn for the worse after the Philippine National Police-Special Action Force (PNP-SAF) survivors of the January 25 massacre in Mamasapano, Maguindanao reportedly asked him "behind closed doors" to resign. Until then, the call on Aquino to "step down" has come from the National Transformation Council and various other groups who want him to account for his numerous constitutional violations and for his role in the Mamasapano massacre.

Highly informed sources said the SAF resignation call came on Wednesday during an early three-hour-plus "bull session" with the commandos at the PNP-SAF Headquarters in Camp Bagong Diwa,



FIRST
THINGS
FIRST
**FRANCISCO
S. TATAD**

Camp Bicutan, Taguig City, before the assumption of command by the new SAF director, Chief Superintendent Moro Virgilio Lazo, in place of Chief Superintendent Getulio Napenas, who was sacked immediately after the Mamasapano debacle, and Chief Superintendent Noli Talino, who had taken over from Napenas as Officer-in-Charge

The call came, the sources said, after Aquino had complained

►TatadA5

Crisis of survival deepens

about the "poor planning and execution" of Operation Exodus, which resulted in the death of 44 SAF commandos, while trying to capture two international terrorists ---the Malaysian Zulkifli bin Hir and his Filipino associate Abdul Basit Usman---who had found shelter near the camp of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front.

Aquino had taken direct control of the police operation and put suspended and now resigned PNP chief Alan Purisima "in command."

Aquino also broke the PNP operational chain of command by cutting out the Secretary of Interior and Local Government Mar Roxas, who is legally in charge of the police, and the acting PNP chief Leonardo Espina, who had taken over after the Ombudsman suspended Purisima on corruption charges.

The Congress hearings, which tried to cover up Aquino's accountability for the massacre and treated the nation to the most outrageous lies, had studiously avoided pursuing reports that Aquino, who monitored the actual fighting from a military station in Zamboanga City on January 25, personally ordered the reinforcement for the Fallen 44 "to stand down." But Malacañang itself has not denied those reports.

The PNP top officers were not present during the "bull session." They waited at the open-air quadrangle fronting the SAF

headquarters while Aquino spoke to the commandos. The closed-door meeting was supposed to last no more than half an hour, but ended only after more than three hours. Nobody spoke to the media after the meeting.

Aquino had apparently expected the session to be stormy, for although on Tuesday, Malacañang advised the media that he would be making a speech during the command turnover, by Wednesday morning they were told the speech had been cancelled. A podium had been set up with the presidential seal on it but this was eventually removed.

The officers did not clap when Aquino emerged from his closed-door meeting, and the turnover was done in 15 minutes. Only Talino and Lazo spoke. The press did not see Napeñas at all.

The cashiered SAF commander's last famous appearance was on video, which showed him briefing top defense officials on Jan. 26, a day after the massacre, about the illegal role performed by the suspended Purisima, and the briefings he had given the President on the ill-fated operation. This video had gone viral on many social media sites, allowing more people to see Aquino's actual culpability in the whole fiasco.

The dean of the San Beda College of Law Graduate School has said that Purisima clearly usurped authority, and that Aquino could be prosecuted for "condoning"

Purisima's usurpation of authority. Others, however, have pointed out that Aquino did not merely "condone," but in fact "caused," "ordered," "authorized," and "facilitated" the usurpation.

Apparently Aquino's meeting with the commandos had such a deep impact on him that the crisis committee meetings inside Malacañang have not had any letup since. "The grand picnic is over," said one source. The mood of some Malacañang insiders, according to this source, is that Aquino may not long survive, and may be ultimately compelled to step down, if offered "a good deal." This could include immunity from arrest and imprisonment, exile to a country of his choice, and freedom for himself and his immediate kin to enjoy whatever money they had made in the last four years.

Others, however, fear that even his life may now be in danger from the very troops that are supposed to protect him. This issue was recently publicly raised at Tapatan, a well-attended press forum at the Aristocrat Restaurant on Roxas Boulevard, where Aquino's secretary for political affairs, Ronald Llamas, and I, among others, were present. The question referred to what happened to Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi who was assassinated by two of her own bodyguards on Oct. 31, 1984, while on her way to be interviewed by Peter Ustinov, the British actor.



Her assassins were Sikhs, and the assassination was seen as an offshoot of the Indian army's assault on the Golden Temple in Amritsar three months earlier which heavily damaged the Sikh temple.

All of us at the forum could only express our hope and our prayer that nothing of the kind should happen.

But passions continue to rise, particularly in the face of Aquino's determined effort to push for the passage of the Bangsamoro Basic Law (Babala), which seeks to create a new political entity for the MILF, even after it has been disowned by so many of its original authors in the Senate and the House of Representatives, and amid reports of deception and double-dealing on the part of the MILF and its backers; with respect to certain important issues.

For instance, with respect to the MILF returning to the government the weapons taken from the fallen SAF 44 by its fighters, authoritative sources have reported that Gov.

Mujib Hattaman of the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao, Aquino's own handpicked political leader, is the one paying for the weapons, using government funds, through his regional secretary of the environment, to be "returned" to the government. "We are being fried in our own oil," said one source.

With respect to the government's demand that the MILF surrender for criminal prosecution all its men who had taken part in the Mamasapano massacre, the latest news is that the government would soon be told that all of them had broken away from the MILF and defected either to the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters or to the so-called Justice for Islamic Movement (JIM), which was supposedly organized by breakaway elements from the BIFF. This obvious ruse is reported to have the "blessings", if not the "connivance," of some of those running the Office of Presidential Assistant for the Peace

Process (OPAPP).

In addition to the endless "crisis committee meetings," Aquino has decided to travel his untraveled path. He is now asking for prayers, and asking prayer groups to pray with him (assuming he will be there) or to pray for him in Malacañang on Monday. Until now, he has shown more indifference to, than sympathy for, men and women of faith and prayer; he insisted on making Pope Francis's apostolic visit to the Philippines a state visit also, so he would not be left out while millions of Filipinos pour out of their homes to be with the Pope. But he revealed his real self when he attacked the Church as a whole, and some unnamed churchmen in particular, in welcoming the Pope in Malacañang.

This is probably not as grave as any of Aquino's unpunished constitutional violations, nor his culpability for the Mamasapano massacre. But nothing he has done could be denied forgiveness if he genuinely and sincerely asks for it. The trouble with Aquino, though, is that he wants and expects to be forgiven without doing penance, and without restituting (giving back) what he has illegally taken away from others (the people). He has to learn to give up the illegitimate power that he values so much in order to be returned to the trust and confidence of the people. He must learn to argue against self-interest, and put the interest of the country and its people above his own. The country must rise, and he must step down.

fstatad@gmail.com

TRUTH TIME

LOWDOWN
JOJO A.
ROBLES

SOMEONE has to speak the truth sometime. I'm just glad that the truth-teller is Miriam Defensor Santiago, who has the brains to express the harsh realities of which she speaks.

Santiago cut loose on the proposed Bangsamoro Basic Law, which the Aquino administration is pushing despite the massacre of the 44

Special Action Force commandos in Mamasapano, Maguindanao last Jan. 25. The fiery senator urged the government to scrap the BBL and to return to the negotiating table with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front, things President Noynoy Aquino should have done after Mamasapano, if he did not have his head stuck too far up his nether orifice.

"In my personal view, it will be best to start the process all over again," Santiago said. The senator questioned both the legitimacy

as well. Malacanang's best strategy at this point, she explained, is to review the questionable provisions in the law by itself, after consulting legal luminaries and starting its negotiations from scratch with the MILF.

"Malacanang can form a review committee [so that]

MILF, apparently because it believes that the BBL is already perfect and because going back to the negotiating table will set back its deadline for the approval of the law that will basically hand over huge chunks of the country to the Muslim secessionists. I expect that, despite Miriam's cogent analysis (and the festering public outrage), the Aquino administration will not back down on its beloved BBL.

But it's good to know that we still have people like Miriam Santiago who will argue in favor of the people, who are always in danger of being overwhelmed by the palace's formidable propaganda machine and its co-opted majorities in both Houses of Congress. It's possible that Malacanang will still have its way and get Congress' approval for the BBL; but the people know that what's wrong is wrong —

of allowing the President to authorize "a so-called peace process to a so-called peace panel" and "the authority of the MILF to represent the Bangsamoro [people]."

Both the peace panel and the MILF negotiated without the proper credentials, she said. This could very well have doomed the proposed law.

"[The panels should have said to each other:] Here is my power to negotiate with you, show me your power so we can start at a proper legal footing," Santiago said. "That was not done in this case."

if there are changes to be made, it will come from the Palace itself," she explained. "There will be no embarrassment about being dictated to by another branch of government."

On cue, Malacanang's spokesmen have ruled out any renegotiation with the

and Miriam is there to explain to them why.

It's wrong for the Metro Manila Development Authority and the government of Quezon City to withdraw the permits that they already issued to the members of the Philippine National Police Academy Alumni Association who are staging a march in honor of the 44

Continued on A11

**It's good to know
that we still have
people like Miriam
Santiago who will
argue in favor of
the people.**

“ ”

As for letting the Supreme Court decide on the legality of the law once it is passed by Congress, Santiago took a dim view of that proposal,

Truth.. From A8

SAF members slain in Maguindanao. After all, the retired police officials leading the march, led by former General Tomas Renton, have repeatedly declared that they are not calling for the resignation of President Noynoy Aquino or anything like that.

The march, which will start at the national police headquarters in Camp Crame and end at the Quezon Memorial Circle, will be staged on a Sunday, when traffic is minimal. And the retired police officials have promised to guard their ranks against provocateurs, especially from the Left, who may attempt to hijack their protest action.

Malacanang's chief spokesman, Herminio Coloma, raised the specter of "opportunistic groups" trying to use the decidedly apolitical protest for their own ends, like calling for the overthrow of the government. Coloma's statement mirrors the paranoia of Aquino himself, who is deathly scared of a mass action that could turn into some sort of "people power" rally that will unite the people against his incompetent and unfeeling administration.

That same paranoia is what led Aquino and

his minions to close off the main circumferential highway of Metro Manila for most a midweek working day last Feb. 25, causing untold suffering and grief among workers who lost time and productivity. Because of as yet undeclared "national security threats" that day, Malacanang and the MMDA converted most of Metro Manila into a giant parking lot for an event at which Aquino spent 15 minutes.

And now that same government has decided that it cannot allow a bunch of retired cops to show their solidarity with their fallen comrades because of "opportunistic forces" that it cannot even identify? What manner of paranoid behavior is this?

The denial of permits for legitimate public gatherings is a hoary tactic of oppressive administrations to scare the people that they may be violating the law when they gather. The threat of a rally being hijacked by other forces for their own purposes is another such trick.

The retired cops know all of these gimmicks, having used them in the past. They know it is their right to peaceably assemble - and they should not allow themselves to be hoodwinked just to assuage Aquino's paranoia.

Congress should not pass BBL under duress

CHIEF NEGOTIATOR Mohagher Iqbal of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front said Congress should not set conditions and should not dictate to the MILF what to do in exchange for the passage of the proposed Bangsamoro Basic Law (BBL), yet he is the one dictating and setting conditions.

"If the BBL is watered down, you will not be solving the problem," he said, the problem being the Moro rebellion. Earlier, he had said: "If the BBL is watered down, we will not accept it."

Told that some provisions of the draft BBL is unconstitutional, Iqbal retorted: "Then amend the Constitution."

What arrogance! How disrespectful of our Constitution!

The reason that the public has little sympathy for the BBL is the arrogance being displayed by the MILF negotiating panel. "Let's negotiate," said Iqbal—but he is not negotiating, he is dictating. In effect, he is threatening: Pass the BBL untouched, or else...

He keeps repeating that the MILF remains a revolutionary organization in spite of the peace agreement it has signed with the Philippine government, implying that the MILF will continue to wage war against the latter if its wishes are not met.

In any negotiation, there must be a feeling of trust by both sides. But the MILF's arrogant attitude does not instill trust, considering the way it has cowed and browbeaten the two women negotiators of the government, such that some Filipinos now doubt which side they are representing.

Sen. Alan Peter Cayetano was prompted to ask the two government negotiators, Miriam Coronel-Ferrer and Teresita Quintos-Deles: "Which side are you representing in the peace talks?"

They replied: "We were appointed to represent the Philippine government."

To which Cayetano said in jest: "I will sue

As I SEE IT



Neal H. Cruz

them for perjury," meaning they were not telling the truth.

Indeed, it seems to many Filipinos that the two negotiators are representing the MILF, not the government. Like Lola in the song, whatever the MILF wants, it gets, including the controversial BBL. The two government negotiators are not negotiating, they are surrendering. They are bending backward so far that their spines may be in danger of cracking.

In fact, even President Aquino is bending back too far to please the MILF, although he is supposed to represent not only the MILF but all Filipinos, including everyone living in Mindanao—and that includes the Christians, the lumad, the Badjao, the Tausug, and other tribes who are not represented in the negotiating panels.

P-Noy has called congressmen and senators to separate meetings to twist their arm into passing the BBL, even giving them a June deadline. Who is he representing anyway, the MILF or the whole Filipino nation?

But how can Congress pass a bill that is unconstitutional? Even if it is passed, somebody will surely question it at the Supreme Court, as was done to the earlier peace pact concluded under the sponsorship of Malaysia and the United States. The high court declared that pact unconstitutional.

One scary part of the BBL is that the national government will give the MILF a lump sum of P79 billion, no questions asked. The Bangsamoro will not be audited by the Commission on Audit; it will have its own auditor.

The P79 billion to be given to the Bangsamoro is bigger than the P70-billion budget of the whole Armed Forces of the Philippines. It would be like one gigantic pork barrel (already outlawed by the Supreme Court) that Bangsamoro officials can spend any which way they want. They can build mansions with it or buy arms for its own army (yes, the Bangsamoro will have its own army or police force), with the national government helpless to do anything. With a budget bigger than the AFP, the Bangsamoro will have the advantage and all the scary things that that implies.

The Constitution says that the nation can have only one police force, but under the BBL, the Bangsamoro will have its own police force independent of the Philippine National Police. International terrorists like Marwan can therefore hide in the Bangsamoro and teach its people how to make bombs, and the PNP cannot go after them and will just have to wait for the bombs to explode in Christian communities.

Congress should not pass a BBL under duress. It should not approve an unconstitutional BBL because of blackmail or arm-twisting. The President should not force Congress to approve an unconstitutional BBL to please the MILF. He and Congress represent the whole Filipino nation, not only the MILF. Congress should not pass a BBL because it is afraid of what the MILF threatens to do. (*The draft BBL may be read online at [Who does not want peace? Everybody wants peace. But it should not be like the peace that British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain concluded with Hitler's Germany just so he could go home with the slogan "Peace in our time." Look what Hitler did after that.](http://www.scribd.com/doc/239239617/DRAFT-Bangsamoro-Basic-Law—ED.</i>)</p>
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P-Noy should learn the lessons of history. He should not let what Hitler did to the world to happen to us just so he could tell the nation: "Peace in our time." A14



VIRTUAL
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CONGRESS CAJOLED ON BBL

CAJOLED by Malacañang, the presidential palace, the Senate and the House of Representatives have agreed to pass the draft Bangsamoro Basic Law bill into law by June, in time for President BS Aquino to brag about its passage in his last State of the Nation Address (SONA) in July, also this year. The BBL is known as House Bill No. 4994 in the House.

Passing HB 4994 this time is like pouring gasoline on a burning house. In terrorist terms, passage of the BBL is like that viral video in which a fallen Special Action Force commando, later identified as Police Officer 1 Joseph Sagonoy, is being shot mercilessly point-blank by an unidentified Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) fighter while filming the blatant murder, in Mamasapano, Maguindanao province. It is a coup de grâce (pronounced *ku d??r?s*) of the worst kind.

If the BBL sees the light of day, through Congress, in its present or whatever form, I think it will be the coup de grâce of this unlamented Aquino administration.

Even before the Mamasapano Massacre of Jan. 25, 2015, in which 44 SAF commandos died during a 12-hour gunbattle with an overwhelming number of enemy fighters of the MILF and its terrorist arm, the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters, there was already widespread resistance against the BBL and cynicism about its desirability. "Every provision of the BBL is unconstitutional," declared the Philippine Constitution Association (Philconsa).

There are only about 7,000 MILF fighters. The Armed Forces has 130,000 combat soldiers. The Philippine National Po-

lice has 148,500 members. The country has a population of more than 101 million. Muslims number no more than 4 million or 4 percent of the national population.

Yet, the BBL will cede to the MILF 32 percent of the national territory – Mindanao, the Sulu archipelago and Palawan. The MILF, which represents barely half of total Filipino Muslims, will have their own state, the Bangsamoro; their own people (called the Bangsamoro people; nobody knows who they are); their own citizenship (called again the Bangsamoro); their own territory (land mass, as well as maritime, terrestrial, fluvial and alluvial domains, and the air above them); their own government (which will be parliamentary, unlike the Philippines, which is presidential).

Continued on A11

Congress..From A9

Like a separate state, MILF will exercise powers covering defense, external security, foreign policy, foreign loans, issuance of IOUs, justice system, elections; and awards of licenses for casinos, free ports, power plants, water rights, and natural resources.

Mindanao alone is the Philippines' second largest island, after Luzon where Manila, the national capital, is. Already, Mindanao is the eighth most populous island in the world, according to Wikipedia. Mindanao, in fact, is larger than more than half of the nations of the world – larger than at least 125 countries, including the Netherlands, Austria, Portugal, Czech Republic, Hungary and Ireland.

Together, Mindanao, Sulu and Palawan are the richest region of the Philippines. They can feed the entire Philippine population for the next 30 generations.

These three island groups are predominantly Christian, not Muslim.

Repeatedly in the past, the Christian-dominated Mindanao, Sulu and Palawan rejected inclusion in the present Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) which the BBL will abolish and replace with the same animal, also called ARMM.

This new ARMM will be infinitely richer in cash – with more than P100 billion a year in Manila subsidy, four times the present P24 billion budget of the present ARMM.

The Mamasapano Massacre triggered outrage of unprecedented scale, probably even surpassing the outrage that attended the assassination of opposition leader Benigno "Ninoy" Aquino Jr.

The strongman Ferdinand Marcos was widely blamed for Ninoy's 1983 murder. In 30 months, Marcos was out of office, ousted by People Power.

Yet, looking back, what crime did Marcos do? Did he really mastermind the murder of Ninoy Aquino? Six years and four months of the Cory Aquino presidency failed to link the late strongman to the assassination. Almost 57 months of the

BS Aquino presidency also failed to pin Marcos down for the crime. If Ninoy Aquino was not felled by a bullet, would he have died just the same, a victim of heart attack, and therefore, not a hero?

After Mamasapano, calls have escalated for BS Aquino's resignation, if not outright ouster, by People Power III.

Beleaguered, Aquino blocked all roads leading to the EDSA shrine at the corner of EDSA and Ortigas Ave. on Feb. 25 this year. As the entire Metro Manila fumed, caught as they were in unprecedented traffic gridlock lasting for a day, the President asked the top generals of the AFP and PNP to join him at the EDSA People Power monument a block away from the EDSA Shrine.

Soldiers and policemen were told to stand shoulder to shoulder, abrazo style, what Filipinos call kapit-bisig.

I remember in early 1986, days before his ouster, Marcos also assembled his commanding generals of the AFP - the army, air force,

navy, and the PC-INP (fore-runner of the present PNP), which was then headed by then Major Gen. Fidel V. Ramos, also the vice chief of staff of the AFP. They all pledged commitment and devotion to duty for the commander-in-chief.

In four days in February 1986, without anyone firing a single cannon shot, their loyalty melted away and the soldiers and the policemen joined the people to end Marcos's rule of 20 years.

The army and the police know when a ruler's days are numbered. The authority to withdraw obedience and loyalty is right there in the present Constitution

Section 3, Article II of the Constitution declares it in no uncertain terms: "The Armed Forces of the Philippines is the protector of the people and the State. Its goal is to secure the sovereignty of the State and the integrity of the national territory."

Integrity of the national territory. More than Mamasapano, BBL is about that.

biznewsasia@gmail.com

Commonsense

By MARICHU A. VILLANUEVA

Indecision

There is no clear indication yet how soon and who President Benigno "Noy" Aquino III will appoint to replace resigned Philippine National Police (PNP) director-general Alan Purisima. Though he is due to retire on Nov. 21 this year, the erstwhile PNP chief jumped the gun and tendered instead his resignation.

Actually, Purisima's resignation came while he was still serving 60-day preventive suspension by the Ombudsman in connection with ongoing investigation of a graft case filed against him. But while placed under preventive suspension since Dec. 4 last year, it turned out Purisima was directing a top-secret mission in which he deployed men and resources of the PNP's elite anti-terrorism troopers from the Special Action Force (SAF).

However, the operation turned tragic when 44 elite SAF policemen were killed in action while trying to arrest two most wanted terrorist bombers hiding in the town of Mamasapano, Maguindanao last Jan. 25. Holding himself "accountable" for the high casualty turnout, Purisima resigned as PNP chief.

With admitted great reluctance, President Aquino announced his acceptance of Purisima's resignation effective Feb. 6.

In his first TV address three days after the tragic incident, President Aquino relieved SAF chief Director Getulio Napeñas who was finally replaced last Monday by Chief Superintendent Virgilio Moro Lazo. It is a homecoming of sorts for Lazo, who first joined the SAF upon graduation from the Philippine Military Academy (PMA) in 1984 and stayed until 1989.

The appointment of Lazo came more than a month after the tragic mission assigned by Purisima to Napeñas. The execution of Oplan Exodus – to capture one of the most wanted international terrorist bombers, Zulkifli bin Hir, alias Marwan – turned bloody when Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) and other private armed groups entered into battle with outnumbered SAF troopers.

In the meantime, PNP officer-in-charge Leonardo Espina remains at the helm while their Commander-in-chief has yet to make up his mind. President Aquino has reportedly interviewed Espina, one of two candidates for new PNP chief.

Unlike his Armed Forces counterpart, the PNP chief is not among government officials subject to CA confirmation. So this could not be the reason for President Aquino's indecision in appointing a permanent PNP chief.

PNP directorial staff chief Deputy Director General Marcelo Garbo Jr. is the other front-running candidate interviewed by the President last Monday. Garbo reportedly first impressed Mr. Aquino when the former PNP regional director of Central Visayas outmaneuvered then suspended Cebu Gov. Gwen Garcia into leaving her office at the provincial capitol without violent incident.



While Espina is also retiring this July, a much younger Garbo, on the other hand, is set to retire on March 2, 2016. Like Purisima, both Espina and Garbo are members of PMA Class 1981. There are at least five other members of that class in the PNP that could qualify as next PNP chief but they are also about to retire in the coming months.

Next in line are members of PMA Class 1982 who are all currently occupying key positions in the PNP. They include Director Benjamin Magalang, head of the Criminal Investigation and Detection Group (CIDG) and the Board of Inquiry formed to investigate the Mamasapano encounter; Director Carmelo Valmoria, chief of the National Capital Regional Police Office (NCRPO); and Director Ricardo Marquez, head of Directorate for Operations. Each of them has stood out in his merits and accomplishments in the last five years of the Aquino administration.

Valmoria led SAF forces that drove away Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) rebels from Zamboanga City. He was also credited for restoring order in Tacloban City when it was hit by massive looting after Super Typhoon Yolanda. He, however, will reach the mandatory retirement age of 56 on July 16 this year.

Another candidate to the top PNP post is Police Director Juanito Vaño, currently deputy chief for logistics. Vaño belongs to PMA Class '83 and is due to retire in May 2016. Vaño's detractors, however, identify him as one of the protégés of Purisima.

If retirement age is considered, Magalang and Marquez fit in the transition period when President Aquino steps down from office on June 30, 2016 and gives way to the new Commander-in-chief who will be sworn into office on the same day. Magalang and Marquez will both retire in 2016 yet, on Dec. 15 and Aug. 28, respectively.

Actually, retirement age should be of no consequence since President Aquino is allowed by existing laws to extend the tour of duty of the PNP chief. If the Commander-in-chief so wishes, he could also apply "deep selection" process to appoint much younger officers.

There are also quite a number of vacant top posts in key constitutional offices that President Aquino has yet to fill following the retirement one after the other of their previous holders last month. But obviously, the Chief Executive is intentionally delaying it because the 16th Congress is slated to go on Lenten break starting March 21.

The chairman's post in three constitutional offices is vacant up to now. These are the Commission on Audit (COA), the Civil Service Commission (CSC) and the Commission on Elections (Comelec). Aside from the vacant chairman's post, two more commissioners are needed to fill the seven-man Comelec en banc.

These presidential appointees must pass through the confirmation wringers of the 25-man Commission on Appointments (CA). So while Congress is in recess, President Aquino can issue ad interim appointments to allow the appointees to assume their posts immediately.

Unlike his Armed Forces counterpart, the PNP chief is not among government officials subject to CA confirmation. So this could not be the reason for President Aquino's indecision in appointing a permanent PNP chief.

Even if he resigned as PNP chief, Purisima has not retired yet. The chief PNP – a four-star rank general – becomes vacant only after Purisima retires. So, the successor of Purisima, once appointed as new PNP chief, would remain in "acting" capacity.

The latest official pronouncement is that President Aquino is still in a vetting process. The Commander-in-chief's indecision stems from his trying to pick the best replacement to approximate the rabid loyalty and trustworthiness of his disgraced PNP chief. [5]

With MILF help, AFP will stop new Moro rebel group – Palace

By Louis Bacani (philstar.com) | Updated March 5, 2015 - 3:20pm

Communications Secretary Herminio Coloma Jr. said the AFP is pursuing all armed groups sowing disorder, including the newly-formed rebel group Justice for Islamic Movement (JIM).

MANILA, Philippines - The Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) will stop the new Moro rebel group formed by a previous leader of the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF), Malacañang said Thursday.

Communications Secretary Herminio Coloma Jr. said the AFP is pursuing all armed groups sowing disorder, including the newly-formed rebel group Justice for Islamic Movement (JIM).

"Hindi sila papahintulutang magsagawa ng mga aksyon na yan at pipigilin sila ng ating sandatahang lakas," Coloma said during the regular Palace press briefing.

Coloma also said that the AFP is also coordinating with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) for its campaign against JIM.

He said the MILF is knowledgeable about the areas in Mindanao where the AFP is conducting its operations against rebel groups.

"Kinikilala naman ng AFP yung pagtulong ng MILF sa kanila sa pagbibigay ng impormasyon," he said.

The JIM was organized by Mohamad Ali Tambako, a radical Muslim cleric trained in the Middle East who is considered one of the leaders of the BIFF.

Tambako broke away from the BIFF after reportedly having irreconcilable differences with its founder, Ameril Ubura Cato, over issues affecting Muslims in Mindanao.

Tambako's new terror group is now reportedly providing sanctuary to bomb expert Basit Usman and at least five foreign militants, according to the military.

READ: New Moro rebel group emerges

Usman survived the January 25 police operation in Mamasapano, Maguindanao that was aimed at capturing him and international terror suspect Zulkifli bin Hir, also known as Marwan.

The operation led to a deadly armed encounter between troopers of the Philippine National Police Special Action Force and MILF combatants.

Following the bungled operation and Usman's escape, the AFP launched an all-out offensive against the BIFF, which broke away from the MILF after opposing the latter's peace negotiations with the government to create a Bangsamoro region.

The BIFF wants to set up an Islamic state governed by strict Sharia laws. It was not clear if the JIM shares the BIFF's secessionist agenda.

Read more: <http://www.philstar.com/headlines/2015/03/05/1430333/milf-help-afp-will-stop-new-moro-rebel-group-palace#ixzz3TXNTVbrQ>

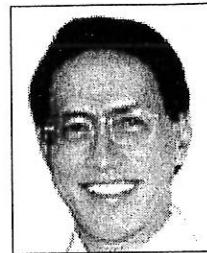
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A Law Each Day (Keeps Trouble Away)

By JOSE C. SISON

We never learn

As the facts continue to unfold on the brutal killing of the SAF 44, I find it more and more difficult to understand so many issues surrounding the stubborn and obsessive attempt of this government to attain peace in Muslim Mindanao. No Filipino perhaps opposes the quest for peace started by this administration. We are, after all, peace loving people. But there are so many aspects in the on-going peace process which are quite perplexing and raise doubts on whether we can finally have true peace in that part of our country.



It is really difficult to understand why this government continues to talk with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) when it has unabashedly and openly admitted that its forces were the ones who savagely massacred the government's Special Action Force commandos trying to arrest an international terrorist hiding in a Philippine territory. More confounding in this regard is that MILF was even assisted by the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF) the very splinter group that broke away from it precisely because of disagreement on the terms of the peace agreement. The BIFF wants a separate Islamic State under the Sharia law.

It is also quite hard to understand why this government still trusts that the MILF will faithfully comply with the peace accord when it has even defiantly refused to surrender its members who perpetrated the inhuman and bestial acts on the SAF 44. If, at this stage, this group has already put up stumbling blocks to the attainment of justice for our fallen heroes and their families, it is already quite clear that the peace to be achieved with this group will be a sham. For without justice there can be no true peace.

More difficult to understand in this connection is the government peace panel's efforts to take up the cudgels for the MILF up to the extent of overlooking or refusing to see its belligerent and defiant attitude. And more confounding here is that our peace panel, particularly Ferrer and Deles, appear to be supporting and siding with the MILF and trying very hard to appease them amidst the growing public outrage over what their forces have done to our law enforcers operating within Philippine territory. People cannot help but see traces of treason in this kind of reaction.

Another perplexing stance of this government is its unrelenting attempt to push for the passage of the constitutionally flawed Bangsamoro Basic Law (BBL) up to the extent of setting a deadline for Congress to enact it. More puzzling here is that it has kept quiet with respect to the aggressive demand of the MILF to pass the BBL without amending or correcting some of its provisions that are clearly unconstitutional. Such attitude clearly appears as acquiescence to the MILF demand and an endorsement of the BBL without any correction.

But what makes the unfolding developments on the BBL more difficult to comprehend is the veiled threat of Iqbal, the head of MILF peace panel, that they cannot control their men in waging an all out war if the BBL will not be approved by Congress as is. This is clearly a form of coercion by one party over the other when both are supposed to be on equal footing.

Aggravating the problem about the BBL is that it was drafted by a National Transition Council outside of the Philippines, without any public hearing and under the auspices of Malaysia. It seems that our country is already negotiating peace with another independent State in the presence of a Third Party State acting as mediator. The term "Bangsamoro" itself already connotes the existence of a separate and independent State in that part of Mindanao. "Bangsa" is a derivative of the tagalong word "Bansa" which is "country" or "state" in English. In fact in the BBL, the MILF will already have its own Commission on Audit (COA), Civil Service Commission (CSC) and Commission on Elections (COMELEC).

What is gradually becoming clearer at this stage is that the BBL and the other documents accompanying the peace treaty signed by the MILF and the peace panel solely formed by Malacanang, are mainly intended to lay the groundwork for the eventual establishment of a separate Muslim State that will be carved out of Mindanao. And this will arise because of this administration's obsession to give as its alleged legacy and to present as one of its greatest achievements, the attainment of peace in Mindanao after centuries of armed conflict; never mind if it is perceived as weak and fearful of the threats hurled by the MILF whose actions and statements clearly indicate that it cannot be trusted.

In this connection, let me just cite the words of Retired Supreme Court Chief Justice Reynato Puno about this on-going peace settlement with the MILF. For once perhaps P-Noy and his cohorts should listen and heed his call. He said:

"I do not understand why it seems that we are the ones who are scared and negotiating from a position of weakness. We are the State. If this will lead to war, if this is the price for defending the Constitution and preventing the dismemberment of the Republic, so be it."

Indeed P-Noy and his government's position in negotiating this peace with MILF has even resulted in the emergence of another radical terror group that broke away from the BIFF, known as the Justice for Islamic Movement (JIM). They are anticipating that the MILF will also succeed in its mission of forging peace with this government where it will be allocated billions of pesos to spend like what was given to the MNLF by virtue of an earlier peace treaty that has now been violated. When will we ever learn? VS

* * *

Almonte: Cory resuscitated Muslim insurgency

BY RIGOBERTO D. TIGLAO
COLUMNIST

First of Two Parts

FOR most journalists of my generation, Jose Almonte –ex-President Fidel Ramos' most trusted confidante, even his ideologue, some say—was a shadowy figure, the former president's top spook.

He was the strategist behind such historic moves as the formation of the RAM during the Marcos dictatorship, the "Big Bird" project that would have hoodwinked the strongman in surrendering

his Swiss accounts right after Cory Aquino assumed power, Ramos' unexpected victory helped by the infamous "Sulo Hotel" operations in the 1992 elections, and the breaking of the PLDT monopoly during Ramos' watch.

What isn't too widely known, though, is that he is one of the very few persons I know who have managed to reach the heights of power, yet with a kind of thinking I share. This is that the country's "core

►TiglaoA4



Aquino meeting with MNLF chairman Misuari, 1986 in Jolo.



Aquino meeting with MILF chairman, 2011 in Tokyo.

Is it in the genes? Cory in 1986, Ninoy in 2011.

problem," as he puts it, is the fact that the nation has been ruled by oligarchs who have controlled the government apparatus for their own personal agenda.

He is a believer of the "strong-republic" view, that only through strong government institutions, independent of the elites, and not through any single strong leader would our nation finally develop. The nation owes "Joal" not only for his deeds, but for planting the seed of that strong-republic view in our consciousness, and now for enlightening us on the significant aspects of our modern history.

Almonte's book *Endless Journey: A Memoir*, "as told to," and excellently written by my esteemed colleague and friend from way back, Marites Danguilan Vitug, is a must-read for every Filipino who cares about the future of our country.

Because it is the burning issue of the day, though, I quote at length Almonte's report on how the Muslim insurgency unfolded starting in the late 1980s:

Start of Almonte's account

A problem loomed as President Cory Aquino announced her intent to bring back the MNLF to the negotiating table. Misuari had been away from the Philippines for about a decade as an exile in Saudi Arabia and Libya. He left after the peak of the MNLF battles with the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) in the early 1970s.

From then on, clashes with the military had been sporadic. The MNLF was in its death throes. Marcos had already neutralized Misuari and his forces, including the Muslim community that supported him, spending so much money and at the cost of so many lives. Support for Misuari even in Saudi Arabia and Libya was not as robust as it used to be.

Eduardo Ermita, who rose to become Deputy Chief of Staff of the AFP after the People Power Revolution, Fidel V. Ramos, who was appointed defense secretary and I, met with President Cory to impart a single message: her idea of reviving Misuari and the MNLF would cause the country troubles.

The President felt it was her obligation to her husband to talk



RIGOBERTO
TIGLAO

to Misuari because that was supposedly Ninoy's promise to him: if he became president, he would talk to Misuari and reach some kind of understanding.

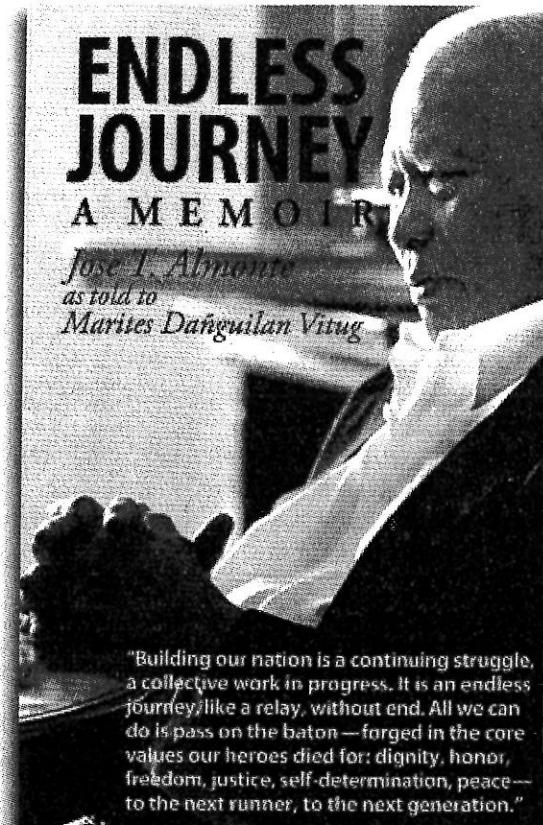
We told the President that it would hurt the government. It was best to leave the situation as it was. Anyway, the Muslim community in the south no longer looked up to Misuari as their leader. She was convinced. "You have a point," she said, "but talk to my brother-in-law." She was referring to Agapito "Butz" Aquino, whom she designated as her special emissary to the MNLF. Butz was a businessman who became one of the leaders of the anti-Marcos protests after the assassination of his brother in 1983 and who allied himself with Norberto "Bert" Gonzales, an activist with close ties with the MNLF. In fact, he trained with them in Malaysia in the 1970s. Bert's group of social democrats entered into an alliance with the MNLF as part of their strategy to resist Marcos.

Our meetings with Butz were spread over a few days. On the second day, we were joined by Bert. He showed us video clips of the MNLF members with their firearms, projecting the MNLF as a strong group to contend with. He let us know that he had deep contacts with them. This worried me.

Ramos was very firm and explained the foolhardiness of resuscitating the MNLF, citing the facts on the ground. I followed up and told Bert, "Look, I don't think you can impress me with those things. It's the political side that we have to resolve."

Seeing that he was facing a wall, Bert waxed personal. "When we were in the anti-Marcos struggle, Nur helped us escape." Then he went into the details of how it happened.

"Alright, I understand that," I said. "Do you know that if we continue the fighting, one helicopter will cost us \$5 million? In just three days of fighting, we will be wasting billions of pesos.



"Building our nation is a continuing struggle, a collective work in progress. It is an endless journey/like a relay, without end. All we can do is pass on the baton — forged in the core values our heroes died for: dignity, honor, freedom, justice, self-determination, peace—to the next runner, to the next generation."

That's going to be the cost of reviving Misuari."

Butz Aquino did not budge. He and Bert proceeded with their trip to Saudi Arabia to hold initial talks with Misuari.

Months later [in September 1986], President Cory met with Misuari in Jolo [the MNLF leaders' hometown] and they agreed to extend the truce that she announced when she assumed power... She asked me to be present [in her meeting with Misuari]. I stayed on the sidelines as she and Misuari talked in the convent of the Carmelite nuns. The President told me that this was her commitment to her husband...

Sadly, true to our fears, Misuari continued the attacks. And we suffered casualties, on both sides—again.

The reasons for deciding to talk to Misuari seemed very personal — honoring a dead man's word and paying a debt of gratitude—when protecting people's lives should have been paramount. That was why the MNLF rebellion unfolded the way it did.

End of Almonte's account. Postscript

A month after Cory's meeting with the MNLF, the Moro Islamic

Liberation Front (MILF), which broke away from it in 1977, launched a series of attacks on government installations in their strongholds in Maguindanao. It sent a message to Aquino that the MNLF might have control over Sulu, which was, after all, the homeland of the Tausugs who dominated that organization. The MNLF, though, was powerless in the bigger area of Maguindanao at the center of the Mindanao mainland, where the Maguindanaon MILF was based. There won't be peace as they were totally excluded

from the peace talks.

Cory sent another relative to talk with the MILF, and discussed arrangements for a ceasefire.

On Jan 19, 1987, Cory met with then MILF vice chairman (now chairman) Murad Ibrahim in Cotabato, accompanied by 100 heavily armed bodyguards. "We presented her with a flower as a symbol of peace. We are pinning very high hopes on her," he was quoted by the media.

"Aquino gives us hope," Murad would say 24 years later, and after the MILF grew from a rag-tag guerrilla group of about 2,000 to an estimated 30,000 uniformed regulars with modern firearms, among them, the 50-mm Barrett sniper rifle that killed our commandos in a turkey shoot in Mamasapano.

Murad was referring, of course, to Cory's son he met not in Philippine territory but in a neutral foreign land, Tokyo, in a signal that the MILF had become another state.

What irony of history. Aquino resuscitated the Muslim insurgency. Her son strengthened it and even gave it steroids. He would be surrendering Philippine territory to that insurgency if we do not stop him.

M'danao: Complex woes, experimental cures (3)

THE problems in Mindanao are complex, and the solutions applied by the government for the past five decades -- from President Marcos, to President Corazon Aquino, to President Fidel V. Ramos, to President Arroyo, and now President Benigno Aquino III -- with the exception of President Estrada who launched an all-out-war -- were mostly experimental and fraught with danger.

In his time, President Marcos adopted a war-and-peace policy, killing thousands of Moro rebels, wounding many of them, and forcing the MNLF leadership to surrender while a handful fled to the Middle East, Pakistan, and North Africa.

When he was deposed in 1986, the rebels, leaderless, were already on the run, and many of them have returned to the fold of the law.

His successor Corazon C. Aquino, the housewife who was swift to the presidency by the 1986 military-led EDSA Revolution that saw the end of the Marcos regime, inherited the Mindanao conflict but applied the wrong solution and merely compounded the problem.

Upon assumption of office, Mrs. Aquino allowed the return of Misuari and other members of the MNLF Central Committee from Libya, arbitrarily abolished the 1973 Philippine Constitution, under which the MNLF agreed to discuss and resolve the Mindanao

ANALYSIS By Cecilio T. Arillo

issue as mandated in the Tripoli Agreement, dismantled the unicameral Legislative Assembly, hand-picked 48 men and women, including communists and prelates, formed her own Constitution (1987), organized a bicameral Congress, called a national election to elect the 24 members of the Senate and the 200 members of the Lower House and, among others, created the provinces of Sulu, Tawi-Tawi, Maguindanao, and Lanao del Sur into an Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao without proper consultation with the key political leaders in Mindanao.

40,000 more lives lost

The creation triggered a similar demand from Christians to create their own autonomous region as the MNLF demanded that their territory be expanded. Before she left office, many parts of Mindanao were again raging in battle between government forces and MNLF rebels whose armed strength increased to 25,000 combatants.

The death toll in Mindanao under President Aquino's regime was estimated at more than 40,000, mostly innocent civilians.

Pressured by Libya, Saudi Arabia, and some other OIC members, Presi-

dent Ramos, after taking over the presidency from Mrs. Aquino, forged a truce with the MNLF and acceded to its demands to create the Southern Philippines Council for Peace and Development to expand ARMM's territory, and to integrate more than 7,000 MNLF fighters into the armed services.

Ramos also allowed MNLF Chairman Nur Misuari to run for governor of the ARMM in what appeared to be a one-sided election.

On Sept. 22, 1992, Ramos apparently unmindful of its consequences, repealed Republic Act 1700, otherwise known as the anti-subversion law, the country's only national security law that criminalized communist and separatist organizations and membership thereof, as part of his reconciliation and accommodation policy, hoping that in time all subversive elements, including the 25,000-strong communist New People's Army, would come down from the hills, give up their arms, settle in peace, and give him a chance to win the most coveted Nobel Peace Prize.

The repeal actually created a national security vacuum, and soon two terrorists organizations in Mindanao, the Moro Islamic Liberation Front headed by Hashim Salamat, Misuari's rival, and the Abu Sayyaf, surfaced with the latter sowing terror, attacking

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M'danao...

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Christian villages, killing and beheading innocent civilians and staging kidnapping and armed robberies in Basilan, Sulu, Tawi-tawi, Palawan, and the Zamboanga Peninsula.

For its part, the MILF with more than 10,000 fighters, including veterans of the Afghan conflict, declared war against the Ramos government, occupied more than 500,000 hectares in Central Mindanao, established 47 military camps, and declared them as their own Bangsa Moro Republic.

But because of the repeal of the anti-subversion law by the Ramos government, the police could not do anything, forcing the government to employ its armed forces to check the

expansion of the MILF.
Another 20,000 people dead

As fighting erupted in many areas of Central Mindanao between soldiers and MILF rebels, the Ramos government declared a unilateral ceasefire, asked the MILF to talk peace and as a gesture of sincerity, turned over some of the government irrigation projects in Maguindanao and Cotabato provinces to the MILF to improve their farming capability.

But instead of doing that, the MILF converted the irrigation canals into a network of underground tunnels and bunkers, using them to interdict government forces. Then they set up roadblocks and taxed commuters from Marawi City passing through the Narciso Ramos Highway, a long stretch of national road

built by the government and named after President Ramos' father.

Between 1992 and 2000, close to 20,000 more people died in Central Mindanao, Zamboanga Peninsula, Basilan, Sulu, and Tawi-Tawi.

The Ramos administration spent more than P29 billion in Mindanao, but most of this could not be accounted for, and leaders from both houses of Congress demanded the investigation of Misuari and other key MNLF leaders.

In reaction, Misuari and his MNLF fighters met in Jolo, denounced the government for persecuting him, and soon fighting erupted again between the MNLF and government forces, who at the end of the Ramos regime in 1998, were fighting five fronts:

against the MNLF, MILF, Abu Sayyaf and Jemaah Islamiyah in Southwestern and Central Mindanao, and the communist rebels in the Davao provinces and Northern Mindanao.

Misuari was subsequently arrested and detained.

President Estrada, upon assumption of office, ordered the MILF fighters to surrender their arms if they really want peace, but instead of heeding his call, the MILF attacked two Christian towns, Kolambungan and Kauswagan, in Lanao del Norte, killing scores of military men and innocent civilians.

As a result, Estrada adopted a total-war policy despite restraint applied on him by some misguided American officials in

Washington and exacted a heavy toll on the rebels, recovered the 47 camps they occupied, and before he was deposed from power by a conspiracy, the rebels appeared to have capitulated.

With his camps in ruins and the military in hot pursuit, Hashim Salamat, the MILF head, then 68 years old, was constantly on the run, thus taking a toll on his failing health. In July 2003, he died of a heart attack. Ibrahim Murad succeeded Salamat as chairman of the MILF.

Arroyo's turn

For her part, President Arroyo naively revived the policy of reconciliation and accommodation and returned most of the recovered camps to the rebels as a pre-condition to another peace process with the intervention of the US and

Malaysia.

In short, Arroyo was back to square one with no concrete end in sight to stifle the Mindanao conflict.

Shortly thereafter, MILF terrorists attacked the mining and fishing town of Siocon, killing 34 soldiers, policemen, and civilians, including two priests, Marino Acedo and Rhuby Mar Buagas, both assigned to the Holy Cross Parish, in an apparent act of treachery and complete disregard to the scheduled peace talks.

In reaction, GMA called the Siocon attack "an act of terrorism" and swore to pursue the perpetrators.

Aside from the attack on the town in Zamboanga del Norte Province, the MILF was also linked to a similar raid in the town of Maigo in Lanao del Norte

Province in which 13 civilians died.

Jesus Dureza, presidential assistant for Mindanao affairs, said the government has decided to take "punitive action" and will give rewards for the arrest of the top brass of the MILF.

"The government feels that it is its bounded duty to protect the civilians and also prevent further similar incidents to take place," Dureza said of the Siocon and Maigo incidents.

Included in the arrest order were MILF chairman Hashim Salamat, vice chairman for military affairs Al Haj Murad, vice chairman for political affairs Ghazali Jaafar, chief peace negotiator Ali Mimbanas and spokesman Eid Kabalu.

They each carried a bounty of P5 million with

an additional P25 million by the government as reward, Dureza said.

Curiously, the reward announcement was made amid a debate on whether to push through with a second round of exploratory talks with the MILF in Malaysia or elsewhere outside the country on the possibility of opening formal peace negotiations.

In the nine years of the Arroyo regime, the MILF had engaged the government in a cycle of peace talks, ceasefires, expansion of territories, attacks, and other acts of terrorism, prompting a ranking military officer to say that the "negotiating table is just an extension of the battle field by the MILF and a strategy to create for its fighters a belligerent status and finally, a statehood."

Congress takes aim to slay MILF ‘monster’

MOHAGHER IQBAL, chief negotiator of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front, had the gall to reprimand Cagayan de Oro Rep. Rufus Rodriguez for setting conditions for the approval of the draft Bangsamoro Basic Law (BBL) under review by Congress.

Delivering a tongue-lashing to a senior member of an independent Philippine institution, Iqbal said in an interview with the *Inquirer*: “We need to respect each other. When you make demands, you are no longer negotiating. You are dictating.”

Iqbal warned that “if the BBL is watered down, you will not be solving the problem,” and added: “Our relationship is based on the documents we signed,” referring to the agreements that have set protocols on how the negotiating parties would deal with one another.

Iqbal was speaking on behalf of the MILF with an authoritative tone, which left the impression that it was acting as if it were an entity on equal footing with the Philippine republic, from which it is seeking to carve out an autonomous Bangsamoro substate.

Based on the signed agreements, Iqbal claimed that the MILF’s relationship with the Philippine government is “political and legal”—an assertion for which he has not provided a factual basis. All he could say was that the MILF remains a revolutionary group until the peace agreement that it signed with the government last year is validated by an enabling legislation (the BBL). It was Iqbal who was dictating to Congress how it would review legislation infringing on the sovereignty of the Philippine state, which is not subordinate to the claims of the proposed Bangsamoro substate.

Iqbal’s comments were in reaction to the statement of Rodriguez, chair of the House of Representatives’ ad hoc committee on the BBL, that its passage would depend on the surrender of the firearms seized by MILF fighters from 44 members of the Philippine National Police-Special Action Force killed during the Jan. 25 clash in

Mamasapano, Maguindanao. Rodriguez also said the MILF should surrender its fighters involved in the slaughter of the SAF troopers who were then going after Malaysian terrorist Marwan and his Filipino associate Basit Usman. The two men were then in MILF-controlled territory.

The comments of Iqbal represent a challenge to the powers of Congress to review legislation. The new controversy over the massacre has hardened the impasse in the Mindanao peace process, with Congress suspending deliberations on the BBL.

Iqbal’s insolence has touched a raw nerve in a Congress jealously asserting its independence and power of the purse, and served to polarize the nation over the creation of a new autonomous Bangsamoro inside the territory of the Philippine state, and, as well, to alienate congressional support for the BBL.

This insolence has prompted Rodriguez to stand firm on the House decision suspending deliberations on the BBL. He insisted that the House would not vote on the BBL unless the MILF surrenders the fighters responsible for the slaughter. “It really is the deal breaker, if they will not cooperate to achieve justice in this country,” he said.

Senators were similarly adamant. Sen. Antonio Trillanes IV, echoing the resistance in the House, said the Senate should not be rushed into passing the BBL. “We will make sure that we will not create the monster everyone is afraid of,” Trillanes said, pointing out that the MILF should not be allowed to have its own security force “outside” of the PNP and the military. He rejected claims that the peace process would bog down

and hostilities would erupt if Congress did not pass the BBL with terms dictated by the MILF.

Sentiment was gaining ground in the Senate that if the MILF finds the BBL version coming out of Congress unacceptable, it can be revised and the two panels can go back to the drawing board, with the negotiations spilling over into the next administration. But the problem is that President Aquino wants the impasse resolved before his term ends. In his speech during the Edsa anniversary last week, the President was adamant on the passage of the BBL despite the fiasco in Mamasapano. He claimed that there may not be a similar opportunity to do so. But the President faces strong resistance in Congress to his policy of appeasement of the MILF.

Senators have also warned that the BBL is not going to leave Congress unchanged, especially with the Mamasapano slaughter raising concerns over the powers that the MILF would have. Peace negotiators are fearful that Congress might dilute the BBL as a result of the massacre. But Senate President Franklin Drilon allayed their fears, saying that “dilution” is “not the correct term.”

“We have to modify and look at each provision carefully,” Drilon told reporters. “[The BBL] will not be passed untouched.”

Some senators have called for the replacement of the government peace negotiators, whom they perceive to be siding with the MILF rather than speaking up for the government. One of those who have expressed this concern is Sen. Francis Escudero, who noted that the term “coordination” appeared 26 times in the articles of the draft BBL. He argued that the government’s lack of coordination with the MILF in launching its raids inside MILF-controlled areas ended in the “death penalty” for the SAF operation of Jan. 25.

The implication of this coordination clause seems to be that the government has to seek the permission of a nonsovereign substate to enter its “territory” to arrest terrorists and enforce the laws of the republic. A15

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S.A.F. RESCUERS — General Gregorio Pio Catapang (left), Armed Forces of the Philippines Chief of Staff, awards in Camp Siongco Odin in Datu Odin Sinsuat, Maguindanao last Wednesday the army troopers from the 6th Infantry Division who had rescued trapped Philippine National Police-Special Action Force members during the operation in Mamasapano, Maguindanao, last January 25. (Alexander D. Lopez)



ARMED Forces of the Philippines chief of staff General Gregorio Pio Catapang (left) leads the awarding of medals to the officers and men of 6th Infantry Division who saved PNP-Special Action Force (SAF) members who survived the January 25 Mamasapano encounter. The awarding of medals was done on Wednesday, March 4, at Camp Siongco in Datu Odin Sinsuat, Maguindanao. (Alexander D. Lopez)

Strengthening the CAFGUs

By Danilo Suarez | Mar. 05, 2015 at 12:01am

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Last February, during the 65th founding anniversary of the 5th Infantry Battalion (whose area of operations covers Lanao Norte, Lanao del Sur, Misamis Occidental, Zamboanga del Norte, Zamboanga Sibugay and Zamboanga del Sur), Tabak Commander Brigadier General Gerardo Barrientos Jr. gave recognition to the vital role of Citizens Armed Forces Geographical Units or "CAFGUs" in support of the Armed Forces of the Philippines' (AFP) Internal Peace and Security Plan (IPSP) "Bayanihan."

As a backgrounder, CAFGUs are components of the AFP Ready Reserve detailed to Military Auxiliary Service as provided by Article X, Sec. 61, sub-paragraph 2 of Republic Act 7077 (AFP Reservist Act). Their service as part of the AFP Reserve Force covers those rendered in meeting local insurgency threat. Hence, they are issued and allowed to carry firearms with the clear guidance that their services will only be utilized for the defense of their respective localities and will not be employed outside thereof.

The CAFGU, which replaced the Civilian Home Defense Force (CHDF) of the Marcos administration, was created on July 25, 1987 by virtue of Executive Order No. 264 entitled "Providing for the Citizen Armed Force" under the Cory administration. As provided by RA 7077, CAFGU units are to be administered by, and under the operational control of, regular units of the AFP. Philippine Army (PA) infantry battalions assigned to this function, like the 5th IB, are also referred to as "Cadre Battalions". Acting as force multipliers, and guides for the AFP, they also ameliorate the link between the national army and the local population. In 1993, the Philippine government considered deactivating the CAFGU units due to allegations of human rights abuses and other systemic problems, hence 60 CAFGU units comprising 10,000 troops were disbanded. The government in 1996, recognizing the strategic value of these reserve units in achieving its internal security objectives, eventually reconsidered its decision to completely disband the CAFGU units. To date, many are still very active in its support role to our government's peace and internal security initiatives.

The strategic value of the CAFGUs to our internal peace and security plan lies in the fact that they are derived from the local population and they provide an immediate and reliable force multiplier for our military and police forces. They play a vital role in protecting the communities since our regular troops could not cover the entire area in the Philippines. Moreover, our military units are rotated and are not permanent in one area; the CAFGUs thus act as the military's "stay-behind forces" and our first responders in times of calamities. Therefore, they not only have a better knowledge of the local residents, customs and areas to cover in terms of human intelligence. They also provide an able pool of warm bodies to augment emergent manpower gaps against insurgency, terrorism and protection of civilians and government facilities from lawless elements and syndicated groups.

This point is made more significant in light of the growing number of reports about ambushes and business establishments or equipment being burned and destroyed which all point to these terrorists increasing the heat to collect their own version of taxes. We need to keep in mind that the victims of these terrorist activities are not only rich business establishments but also our poor farmers and their families. And although we will not discount that cases of human rights violations and other irregularities have been encountered involving members of the CAFGUs, these actually reflect systemic problems that can and should be addressed through proper legislation and program support and do not warrant the abolition of the CAFGU as espoused by some sectors.

For this reason, I would like to reach out to our friends in both the Senate and the House of Representatives in coming out with the appropriate legislation aimed at strengthening key capabilities of CAFGUs to meet mission requirements, enhance their professionalism, morale and welfare as well as in addressing the lack of accountability checks that have resulted in the abuse of their utilization by local political clans.

They are, after all, putting their lives and those of their families on the line (due to retribution from lawless elements) for the safety and welfare of our local residents. For this reason alone, this should merit due support from our government.

2 NPA leaders bagged in joint AFP, PNP operations in Caloocan

March 5, 2015 10:35 am

Two New People's Army (NPA) leaders wanted for a series of crimes in Quezon, Antique, and Occidental Mindoro, were arrested by combined elements of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) and Philippine National Police (PNP) during operations in Caloocan Wednesday night.

Arrested were Emmanuel Bacarra and Ruben Saluta, AFP public affairs office chief Lt. Col. Harold Cabunoc said.

Both are NPA commanders operating in Mindoro and Panay, respectively. They carried out extortion activities like burning of buses and facilities in their localities.

"The said personalities (also) have criminal records ranging from murder to arson and were issued warrants of arrest by courts in provinces Quezon, Antique and Occidental Mindoro (Criminal cases nos. 2646-S, 14-6573-C to 14-6573-C and Z-1405)," he added. Records also show that the two were also charged for violating Republic Act No. 6968, otherwise known as the Anti-Rebellion Act of the Philippines.

"Our operatives have been working on these cases for several months to identify the suspects engaged in different criminal activities in Southern Tagalog Regions. Our operatives from PNP and AFP shared intelligence information, compared notes until they were able to positively identify these personalities," Cabunoc added.

He said that law enforcers have ensured that the basic rights of the suspects were protected during their arrest.

"The AFP and PNP will continuously work together to protect the people from lawless elements, to bring justice and to maintain peace and order in our communities," Cabunoc said. PNA – The Manila Times

Nurse testifies vs alleged Abu Sayyaf financier

By Jewel Reyes, ABS-CBN News Posted at 03/05/2015 9:01 AM

ZAMBOANGA CITY - A nurse from this city who was kidnapped in 2008 has testified against Khair Mundos, alleged finance officer of Al-Qaeda linked group Abu Sayyaf.

Preciousa Feliciano, who was kidnapped by Mundos, arrived at the Zamboanga City Regional Trial Court Branch 12 on Wednesday.

Feliciano, who was escorted by two Americans going in and out of the court, declined to be interviewed by the media.

Sources said Feliciano, who was held by Mundos for four months, identified her abductors during the hearing.

From Manila, Mundos was brought to Zamboanga City on March 3 for his trial. He is tightly guarded at the Zamboanga City Reformatory Center.

It was the prosecution's turn this week to present the evidence against Mundos and four others, including the nurse's erstwhile friend who allegedly helped stage the abduction..

Authorities said they are awaiting orders from the court if Mundos will be flown back to Manila on Friday, as his trial will be suspended from March 6 and resume on March 23.