



Southern sectors want GRP-MILF talks resumption



COTABATO CITY (Jan.9) – Traders in the south today asked the peace panels of the government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front to immediately resume with the GRP-MILF talks, now on standoff due to misunderstandings on how both would establish a Muslim homeland.

Bai Sandra Basar, a key official of the Metro Kutawato Muslim Chamber of Commerce, said their contacts abroad again have doubts on the stability of Mindanao’s business climate as a result of the impasse.

“Most of our contacts abroad have been keenly observing the GRP-MILF talks and any undue development about it gives them jitters. The GRP and MILF panels should resume with the talks to keep the momentum of the economic growth in Central Mindanao,” said Basar.

The MILF’s peace panel balked from pushing
[SOUTHERN /p.11]

CALL FOR PEACE --- Participants to thee January 7 peace rally in Cotabato City carry placards as they listened to speakers in the gathering.

Multi-national peace monitors expands operation

It was in 2007 when Canada and Japan joined the multi-national contingent monitoring the ceasefire between the government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front, in what could now possibly be the longest ever peace overture in contemporary Asian history.

But for how long the International Monitoring Team (IMT) shall stay to observe the 10-year-old ceasefire, neither the government nor the MILF can tell.

The IMT, originally composed only of police and military officers from Malaysia, Brunei and Libya, started

[MULTI/p.10]

Hope remains for gov’t-MILF peace talks

The call of Libya’s Saiful Islam Muammar Al-Gadhafi to leaders of the Bangsamoro people to unite and work as one in resolving the Mindanao conflict provides a ray of hope in 2008.

Saiful Islam, son of the leader of the Al-Fateh Revolution, Col. Muammar Al-Ghadafi, made this call on Dec. 13 in a meeting in Makati City with officials of the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) and leaders of the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF).

However, the MILF, which reportedly has 12,500 fully armed fighters, sees “a very grim year for the peace process after the Arroyo administration reneged

[HOPE/p.11]

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BDA to undertake full implementation, dev't. initiatives after pact signing

(a verbatim reprint from www.luwaran.com, reprinted as is)

COTABATO CITY - A full scale implementation of the peace initiatives and development efforts are expected to take effect after a comprehensive peace pact is signed between the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) and the national government.

This was the pronouncement of the high ranking officials of the Bangsamoro Development Agency (BDA) during a luncheon meeting with the World Bank delegates who paid visit to Mindanao to assess the ongoing implementation of the Mindanao Trust Fund-Reconstruction and Development Program (MTF-RDP) in some pilot areas in Mindanao.

"Political solution to the Mindanao problem is imperative - that's the only way we can achieve peace which will eventually pave the way for the all-out delivery of development efforts to the war-ravaged Bangsamoro communities", said BDA Chairman Dr. Abas A. Candao.

Dr. Candao emphasized that though they are mandated to deliver the socio-economic needs of their communities, BDA's operation can only fully take off once a COMPREHENSIVE COMPACT is ARRIVED AT. The Socio-economic Development Plan for the conflict-affected areas of Mindanao for which a study is

currently being conducted by a JICA Study Team together with BDA is expected to become a very useful guide and reference aside from the WB-sponsored Joint Needs Assessment.

He also added that BDA, as a development arm of the MILF, ensures that development projects IMPLEMENTED in the Bangsamoro-dominated areas would not undermine the MILF's clamor for self-determination.

Moreover, the meeting also allowed the BDA to explain to the visitors about the past and current undertakings relative to MTF-RDP and other programs when the latter inquired about how BDA is working in terms of serving its communities.

Specifically, Dr. Juanday reported that BDA has been working closely with the different stakeholders in Mindanao particularly the LGU and other government line agencies.

Meanwhile, WB representative Christian Delvoie expressed concern over the plight of still many communities whose needs for development has been taken for granted or worse, neglected by the government. Delvoie asked BDA how they will reach out to these marginalized sectors of the society.

In response, BDA Executive Director Dr. Danda N. Juanday cited the fielding of the regional project management offices (RPMOs) as a big step towards alleviating if not totally eradicating the socio-economic burden of the communities.

"We are optimistic that with the resumption of the peace negotiation this month, we can also work tremendously and achieve positive results", Juanday added.

He also stressed that BDA exert all efforts to ensure that they are prepared to take the lead once a full-blown implementation will take place.

MTF Mindanao Team Leader Ms. Mary Judd was also among the delegates together with World Bank consultant Mr. Roberto Tordecilla and Rural Development Unit Head - WB Ms. Carol Geron.

Other BDA officials and staff in attendance were: Ustadz Abdulkadir Abdullah, Windel Diangcalan, Aida Silongan; BDA adviser Mr. Dan Dimakenal; Education and Training Division Chief, Prof. Abdul Lantong; Admin and Finance Chief Ms. Ruby Andong; Programs Div. Chief, Mr. Emran Mohamad and Social Services Div. Chief Ms. Julie Maliga.

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Kenney spends Thanksgiving Day in Zamboanga

ZAMBOANGA CITY - For the second year now, United States Ambassador Kristie Kenney has chosen Zamboanga City to spend Thanksgiving Day, America's most important day, to give thanks to God and for the things people should be grateful for.

"I am an adopted daughter of Zamboanga and it feels like home in Zamboanga," Ambassador Kenney said when asked why she decided to celebrate Thanksgiving Day in the city for the second straight year.

The American envoy was in the city Thursday to turn over a computer package to the Southern City Colleges under the computer Literacy and Internet Collection (CLIC) program of the Growth with Equity in Mindanao (GEM).

At noon, she invited American and Philippine military officials, including city government officials led by Mayor Celso L. Lobregat, to the Officers Club at the Western Mindanao Command headquarters for the Thanksgiving feast.

"It feels like home in Zamboanga," the ambassador reiterated. "People are very friendly and warm," she said, "and I can understand a little Chabacano."

Last year, the lady envoy also spent Thanksgiving Day in Zamboanga after witnessing the signing of a comanagement agreement for two watersheds between the city government of Zamboanga and the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR). She also invited city officials led by Mayor Lobregat, American and Philippine military officials to the same officers club for the feast.

Kenney is the only envoy who has visited Zamboanga City many times over to inaugurate or turn over projects funded by US. She finds comfort in the young children and the poor.

Last July 15, the city government conferred on the Ambassador the title of adopted daughter of Zamboanga or Hija de Zamboanga as a tribute to her significant contribution to the city and its people. ((Manila Bul. By VIC AREVALO)

DepEd allocates P200 million for Muslim education

ZAMBOANGA CITY - The national government has strengthened Madrasah Education (ME) in the public school system as it earmarked in the 2008 General Appropriations Act R200 million for the program's nationwide implementation in school year 2008-2009.

This was bared by Education Undersecretary for Muslim Affairs Manaros Boransing during the fourth Mindanao Educators Congress which ended at the Garden Orchid Hotel here recently.

Boransing said the government appropriated P150 million in 2006 and P100 million in 2007 for the pilot implementation of the ME and production of reading materials, teacher's guides, and assorted instructional devices.

The P200-million fund allocation, Boransing said, will be utilized for production of additional instructional materials and payment of honoraria of Asatids (Madrasah class teachers).

Boransing said the institutionalization of ME in the national education system is designed not only to provide Filipino Muslim children with Islamic-friendly curricula and quality basic education but also to help hasten national unity as sought by the 1996 Peace Agreement.

He said the education department first implemented the ME program on an experimental basis in school year 2004-2005 in compliance with DepEd Order No. 51, series of 2004, which also mandated the use of a standard curriculum for public elementary schools with Muslim pupils and private Madaris (plural for Madrasah) or Islamic institutions of learning.

Under the standard curriculum Boransing said, Muslim-populated public grade schools offer Arabic Language and Islamic Values Education (ALIVE) in addition to the regular basic subjects of English, Science, Mathematics, Filipino and Makabayan.

Boransing reported that the ME program is currently enforced in public elementary schools with Muslim pupils in 12 regions - including all those in Southern Philippines, National Capital Region, Calabarzon, Mimaropa, Central Visayas, Western Visayas, and Central Luzon.

Next school year, all the DepEd's 17 regions will implement the program with the addition of Ilocos, Cordillera Administrative Region, Cagayan Valley, Eastern Visayas and Bicol.

The Muslim Affairs education executive said the implementation of the ME plan was preceded by training of Asatids in every region through the leadership of education directors and schools division superintendents.

GMA designates Moro professor as MSU head

COTABATO CITY (Jan.8) -- Moro communities are elated with President Arroyo's designation of Professor Macapado Muslim as the new president of the Mindanao State University.

Muslim will replace Ricardo de Leon, whose brief stint was tainted with intrigues spawned by his being a non-academician and an outsider in Mindanao.

Highly-placed sources from the executive department of the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao said Muslim, a Maranaw, was chosen by President Arroyo from among many recommendees by MSU insiders and the ARMM's religious and political communities.

The sources said Muslim will take over from the outgoing De Leon the MSU presidency on January 21, an event to be attended by representatives from the ARMM's local government and education departments.

ARMM Gov. Datu Zaldy Ampatuan, in a text message to the Star, said he is elated with President Arroyo's appointment of a "Mindanaon" as head of the biggest state-run university in the south.

"We in the ARMM have never been bereft of qualified leaders the national government can harness to help in the field of education," Ampatuan said.

Ampatuan said he is ready to help in the peace-building activities of MSU, whose students are mostly from the autonomous region, which, covers the cities of Marawi and Lamitan, and the geographically-scattered Maguindanao, Shariff Kabunsuan, and Lanao del Sur, all in Central Mindanao, and the island provinces of Basilan, Sulu and Tawi-Tawi.

The MSU in Marawi City operates as "umbrella organization" of all other MSU outfits in different parts of Mindanao.

Today's radio reports here said Macapadu, who hails from Marawi City, was chancellor of the MSU in Gen. Santos City prior to his installation as president of the university in Marawi City.

De Leon was subject of criticisms when he was at the helm of the MSU's rank and file for being a "stranger" and for having been appointed in 2005 by Malacañang despite the availability of dozens of Moro academician qualified to become president of the state-run university. ()

Misuari hopes he can post bail

COTABATO CITY (Jan.5) -- Jailed Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) founder Nur Misuari is optimistic he would soon be allowed to post bail, just as the court litigating the rebellion charges against him set free on bail his seven close aides also implicated in the case.

Misuari has been detained for almost six years now for allegedly leading a failed mutiny in Jolo, capital town of Sulu, in November 2001 in protest of what was for him non-compliance of the government with certain provisions of the September 2, 1996 GRP-MNLF final truce.

Leaders of the MNLF in Central Mindanao, among them members of Misuari's regional cabinet when he was governor of the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao from 1996 to 2001, said Misuari is confident he would also be allowed to post bail just as how the judiciary set free his seven lieutenants on a P100,000 bail each.

"Chairman Misuari is full of hope, full of optimism that he would also be set free soon. Setting him free, even on bail, will surely boost the cordiality between the government and the MNLF," said a Maranaw follower of Misuari, who was a key regional official when the jailed MNLF founder was ARMM governor.

Misuari's detained spiritual adviser, Ustadz Abuharris Usman, has reunited with family in Patikul, Sulu after having been allowed by Judge Winlove Dumayas of the Makati Regional Trial Court Branch 59 to post a P100,000 bail.

The six other detained followers of Misuari, Johan Sansibar, Haron Bakil, Ismael "Maeng" Uddin, Kamar Abdurajak, Omar Abdullah and Abdu Akil, have also allowed to post bail and, subsequently, allowed to return to their respective towns in Sulu, a component province of ARMM.

Cotabato City Mayor Muslimin Sema, who is the MNLF's secretary-general, said the prisoners released on bail were only "crew members" of the small vessel that attempted to ferry Misuari to Malaysia after revolting MNLF members loyal to him attacked police and military positions in Jolo in 2001.

"The freedom of the crew of the boat, although temporary, is already a big relief to them and their families. They were only dragged into the 'blind adventure' of Misuari to use Sabah (in Malaysia) as an escape route," Sema told Mindanao Cross via text message.

Members of the Malaysian coast guard intercepted Misuari and his companions just as they were entering the territorial waters of Sabah.

Misuari and his companions, who were turned over by Malaysian authorities to the Philippine government on the behest of President Arroyo, are now undergoing litigation in a Makati court. ()

European Union aid to Mindanao peace cited

DAVAO CITY – A delegation of the European Union (EU) composed of ambassadors and members of parliament, visited the sites of some of their EU-funded projects in Mindanao and expressed satisfaction that their efforts are contributing to the Mindanao peace process between the Philippine government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) which is now reportedly reading a “positive” conclusion soon.

The European Commission delegation to the Philippines was led by Ambassador Alistair MacDonald of the United Kingdom, while the parliamentary delegation was chaired by Hartmut Nassauer of Germany.

During a brief dinner and program at the Marco Polo Hotel, Secretary Jesus Dureza warmly welcomed the EU group, expressing the sincere appreciation of Mindanaoans and the Philippine government for the European community’s important contribution to the peace negotiation in Mindanao, which he hoped could soon reach a mutually-agreed solution.

Ambassador MacDonald said his group is glad to know that the situation today in Mindanao is a lot better than some years ago when the conflict was almost completely blocking development efforts. Mindanao’s negative image was highlighted by intermittent encounters between MILF and government forces, and this discouraged new investors from coming in despite Mindanao’s rich natural resources.

Dureza himself, who is the Presidential Adviser on the Peace process, confirmed the EU delegation head’s statement, adding however that the Mindanao situation is now changing for the better.

Credit to the positive change to increasing efforts to help Mindanao, like what the EU is now doing. At the same time, it was learned from Gabriel Munuera Viñals, head of the delegation’s political, economic, trade and public affairs section, that the European Union has already contributed an estimated 200 million euros since the start of its assistance program to help Mindanao and up to the present.

Other members of the EU parliamentary delegation are Giovana Corda, vicechairperson representing Belgium; Seaholes Fazakas and Csuba Ory, Hungary; Jean-Pierre Audy, France; Barbara Weiles, Germany; Glyn Ford, United Kingdom; Jules Maaten, The Netherlands, and Dariusz Grabowski, Poland.

The dinner and meeting was also attended by representatives of non-government organizations (NGOs) and other stakeholders of the Mindanao peace process, who informally briefed the European delegation on what they are trying to accomplish in helping push the peace process and development agenda here, (manila bul, Nov.25, By GIL ABARICO)

Citizens’ ID system in Sulu?

COTABATO CITY (Jan. 8) Local executives in Sulu have asked Malacañang to help them establish a provincial identification system in all of its 18 towns to hasten the government’s local pacification and development thrusts.

Sulu’s governor, Hadji Sakur Tan, chairman of the provincial peace and order council, said it is only by way of imposing a province-wide ID system that they can identify terrorists and criminal gangs from peace-loving people.

Some towns in Sulu are known hotbeds of the Al-Qaeda-linked Abu Sayyaf and religious extremists with links to radical Islamists and jihadists abroad.

The Moro Islamic Liberation Front has earlier questioned, through its website (www.luwaran.com), the propriety of a reported on-going experiment by the 3rd Marine Brigade on a citizens’ ID system in the town of Patikul, Sulu.

The MILF identified the 3rd Marine Brigade, under Col. Natalio Ecarma, as the alleged proponent of the ID system for Tausog folks in Patikul.

Tan, himself an ethnic Tausog from Sulu’s Maimbung town, defended the Marines saying “only criminals, lawless elements and terrorists” oppose an ID system.

“That’s simply because this ID system, as a consequence, will marginalize, if not totally stop, their satanic activities,” Tan told The Star via mobile phone.

The MILF said residents of Patikul have construed the ID system experiment as a violation of their right to privacy.

Tan said local officials in Patikul and surrounding towns are in favor of a provincial ID system.

“Law-abiding citizens of Sulu are not opposed to such a system,” Tan said.

Tan said they have also been involving the dozens of Tausog youth leaders and officials of student governments in private and public schools in the provincial government’s peace-building efforts as part of a more comprehensive scheme to educate Tausog folks on the need for cross-section cooperation in furthering the peace process.

“If we have an efficient provincial ID system, supported by all sectors, including the Tausog youths we are helping develop now as potential leaders, we can effectively address the nagging security problems in the province,” Tan said. []

GRP ready with forthcoming tripartite sessions

COTABATO CITY (Jan3) – The government is now ready for its January 14 second tripartite dialogue with the Moro National Liberation Front and the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) in Manila, but MNLF's jailed founder Nur Misuari want it held in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia.

The first tripartite meeting, aimed at addressing misunderstandings in the implementation of the September 2, 1996 peace pact between the government and the MNLF, was held November 10-12 in Jeddah, where the headquarters of the OIC is located.

The second tripartite meeting will be preceded by the January 3-7 sessions of the five GRP-MNLF "joint working groups," or JWG, tasked to come out with in-depth assessment of the issues and concerns that affected the implementation of the 11-year-old truce.

Representatives of the GRP, the MNLF and the OIC have agreed, during the first tripartite meeting, to focus on five key concerns – education, Sharia jurisprudence, regional security force, political representation of Moro communities, and natural resources – as parameters for the review and subsequent "refinement" of the peace pact.

Misuari, jailed for five years now for leading a failed mutiny in Jolo, Sulu in November 2001, is against the holding of the second tripartite meeting at the Indonesian embassy in Manila.

The MNLF, in a statement e-mailed to selected reporters in Mindanao, said Misuari has informed the OIC's secretary-general, Ekmeleddin Ishanuglo, of his opposition to the venue of the second tripartite meeting.

Some MNLF leaders in Central Mindanao were surprised on why Misuari, governor of the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao from 196 to 2001, is insisting to have the second three-way conference held in Jeddah, even if he is aware the judiciary would not allow him to leave the country to attend the meeting.

Misuari failed to attend the Nov. 10-12 tripartite meeting in Jeddah after the Saudi Arabian government refused to issue the judiciary a "sovereign guarantee" he would return to the Philippines immediately after the culmination of the conference.

Misuari's legal counsel, Randolph Parcasio, said they are still waiting for the reply of the OIC to Misuari's request.

Highly-placed government sources said Malacanang, through the Office of the Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process, is prepared to participate in the January 14 meeting at the Indonesian embassy.

Indonesia leads a group of 11 OIC-member states comprising the Southern Philippines Peace Committee, which is in the forefront of the tripartite review of the

[GRP/p.10]

GRP-MNLF joint working groups end review

DAVAO CITY (MindaNews/08 January) – The joint working groups of the government and Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) ended today their review of the implementation of the 1996 final peace agreement, for presentation at the tripartite meeting with the Organization of the Islamic Conference on January 14.

The joint working groups on Shari'ah and Judiciary met at the Indonesian Embassy in Manila on January 3, Special Regional Security Force (SRSF) and Unified Command for the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao met January 4, Natural Resources and Economic Development issues (including mines and minerals) on January 5, Political system and Representation on January 6 and Education on January 7. These are the same issues listed in Phase 2 of the 1996 Final Peace Agreement.

Lawyer Randolph Parcasio, acting head of the MNLF delegation to the November 2006 Tripartite Meeting in Jeddah, told MindaNews the reviews were filled with "cordial exchange."

"Issues have been joined, time to resolve them hopefully in the Tripartite Meeting," Parcasio said.

The joint working group on Political System and Representation which met on January 6, took the longest in reviewing, Parcasio said.

Nabil Tan, Peace Process Undersecretary and head of government delegation to the November 2006 Jeddah meeting, declined to comment on the reviews. "I think there will be a press release from the Peace Committee after the secretariat meeting," he told MindaNews.

The review was proposed in May 2006 by a Fact-Finding Mission sent by the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), where the MNLF sits as an observer, to look into the implementation of the September 2, 1996 peace agreement, given the conflicting reports from the government and MNLF.

The Tripartite Meeting, supposedly scheduled for July 2006 finally pushed through only in November 2007 in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia.

As a result of that meeting, five joint working groups were created to review the implementation.

The working groups were tasked to look into the provisions of RA 9054, the law that was supposed to have incorporated the provisions of the 1996 Final Peace Agreement, and compare this with the Agreement's provisions.

The joint working groups, composed of three representatives each from the government and the MNLF, are expected to submit their reports on January 10 for deliberation by the next Tripartite Meeting on January 14. The venue for the meeting has yet to be announced.

The working groups' meetings were attended by representatives of the OIC's Peace Committee for Southern Philippines (PCSP), an 11-nation expanded version of what used to be the Ministerial Committee of the Eight headed by Indonesia. (MindaNews)

No sked yet for GRP, MILF talks resumption

DAVAO CITY (MindaNews/08 January) – Retired Army general Rodolfo Garcia, government peace panel chair in the negotiations with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), is optimistic the peace talks can resume soon but MILF peace panel chair Mohagher Iqbal is not as optimistic.

“GRP (Government of the Republic of the Philippines) must abide by consensus points to proceed. If not, talks will die,” he warned.

Civil society groups have responded to the stalled peace negotiations with rallies calling on both sides to resume the talks.

The government and MILF peace panels were supposed to have met on December 15 and 16 in Kuala Lumpur to finalize the draft of the Memorandum of Agreement on Ancestral Domain, in preparation for the signing of a comprehensive peace pact.

But the talks, scheduled to start at 10 a.m. on December 15 at the Sheraton Imperial, did not push through. Instead, Datuk Othman bin Abdul Razak, the Malaysian facilitator informed government peace panel chair Garcia that the MILF had called off the meeting.

Iqbal in a December 15 statement from Kuala Lumpur which he signed as MILF information chief, said the government’s draft agreement was “totally unacceptable.”

He said the government panel “releged from the consensus points on the four strands of Ancestral Domain ... This stance of the GRP Peace Panel has virtually jeopardized the integrity of the peace process and to continue with the talks would virtually turn it into a circus. The government Peace Panel has introduced extraneous and new matters not discussed and taken upon by the Parties during the previous exploratory talks on Ancestral Domain that led to the signing of several consensus points on Ancestral Domain.”

The Ancestral Domain agenda was divided into four sections – concept, territory, resources and

Iqbal told MindaNews in a telephone interview on December 18 that they opted to call off the meeting because “if we did not, we would have ended in an impasse again.”

The talks had ended in an impasse in September 2006 on the aspect of territory under the ancestral domain agenda. It was only on October 24, 2007 when the two panels finally broke the 13-month impasse, expressing “deep satisfaction over the successful resolution of major issues to overcome the impasse.”

In their October 24 Joint Statement, Garcia and Iqbal said the peace process “is firmly back on track towards the holding of the Formal Talks before the end of the year, thereby concluding the negotiations on Ancestral Domain.”

The two panels met again in Kuala Lumpur in November and were supposed to meet December to finalize the Memorandum of Agreement on the consensus

Peace Advocacy Forum held in Zamboanga City

(verbatim reprint from www.luwaran.com)

ZAMBOANGA CITY (Jan. 9) – The Bangsamoro Solidarity Alliance of Zamboanga City and adjacent islands hosted a peace advocacy forum on January 5 and a round table panel discussion on January 6, 2008. This was the first peace advocacy forum held at this city, known as the flower city of the Philippines, which was attended by members of the MILF peace panel. Zamboanga City is known as the bastion of the worst critic to the ongoing GRP-MILF peace talks especially its inclusion in the territory of the future Bangsamoro Juridical Entity (BJE). Mayor Celso Lobregat is known for his hardline stance against the BJE and the MILF.

The peace advocacy forum on January 5 was held at the Octagon Conference Hall, Mindanao Regional School of Fisheries, Rio Hondo, Zamboanga City. Members of the MILF Peace Panel were invited as resource speakers, namely: Datu Michael O. Mastura, Atty. Mohd. Musib M. Buat, Robert Maulana Alonto. Two MILF Technical Working Group (MILF-TWG) were also in attendance as resource persons. They were Hadji Abdulla U. Camlian, MILF-TWG Chairman and Dato Antonio P. Kinoc, TWG member, representing the Indigenous peoples. For some urgent reasons, Mr. Alonto failed to attend.

Mayor Celso Lobregat of Zamboanga City who was invited as guest speaker gladly accepted but he has sent a representative on the last hour due to his inability to attend on account of a prior engagement. He sent one of his Executive Assistants, Amilpasa Bandaying who was a former Regional Director of the Office of Muslim Affairs, to read and deliver his written speech. In his written speech, Mayor Lobregat underscored the need for the unity of all residents of Zamboanga City in working for peace and unity. He, however, reiterated his position for Zamboanga City’s exclusion from the Bangsamoro Juridical Entity (BJE) or any proposed Bangsamoro homeland. His stand was directly opposed to the popular clamor of the Bangsamoro residents of Zamboanga City which the Bangsamoro participants during the peace advocacy forum have openly advocated. They presented to the MILF Peace Panel members a position paper/petition for the inclusion of the Bangsamoro dominated Barangays before the end of the forum.

Atty. Buat who spoke on the GRP-MILF Peace Advocacy Campaign discussed its goals and objectives, particularly the need to generate public awareness in supporting the peace advocacy campaign and to update the public, particularly the Bangsamoro constituents on the dynamics of the peace process, and the issues to be addressed during peace forums from the MILF point of view. Dato Kinoc spoke on the subject of ancestral domain in the context of the peace process from the indigenous peoples’ perspective. He clarified the misconceptions and perceptions by some of his co-tribal members regarding the Moro Islamic Liberation Front’s (MILF) struggle for a homeland which includes those of the indigenous peoples’ ancestral rights over their ancestral lands and domains.

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He urged the indigenous peoples to be catalyst of change by supporting the peace process and the peaceful struggle of the MILF and not to be just passive onlookers. He recalled the policy statement of MILF Chairman Al Haj Murad Ebrahim who had assured leaders of the IPs that their rights over their ancestral domains and ancestral lands will be respected by the MILF. With respect to the Bangsamoro identity, Dato Kinoc pointed out that the indigenous peoples are given the "freedom of choice" whether accept or not they wish to be identified as Bangsamoro. He pointed out that the identity Bangsamoro is an ethnic and political configuration parallel to the Bumiputra of Malaysia (meaning child of the soil) who owned Malaysia's federal lands to the exclusion of the Chinese migrants.

Hadji Abdulla U. Camlian discussed the historical role played by the Bangsamoro people of Zamboanga City in the history of the Mindanao region and the role they have to play in the current peace talks. He recalled the historical fact that Zamboanga is home to the Sama-Bangingi Bangsamoros and other Islamized Moros since time immemorial. The arrival of migrant-settlers from the Visayas and Luzon has altered the demography of the City. He therefore urged his fellow Sama to unite in order to restore the Bangsamoro hegemony in the City.

Datu Michael O. Mastura during the afternoon session spoke on the GRP-MILF Updates in the on-going peace process. He also discussed some possible options in the resolution of sovereignty-based disputes, citing international peace agreements such as those of Bougainville, South Sudan, Western Sahara Baker Peace Plan and the Belfast Peace Agreement (Good Friday Accord) for Northern Ireland. He pointed out that the suspension in the GRP-MILF exploratory talks in Kuala Lumpur last December 15-16, 2007 was that the MILF Peace Panel refused to meet and face the GRP Peace Panel when the latter reneged from previously agreed, crafted and signed consensus points on the ancestral domain aspect by introducing in their draft of memorandum of agreement new and extraneous matters not previously agreed upon by the Parties.

The peace advocacy forum was attended by about 454 participants based on those who registered from the records of the Program Secretariat, excluding those who have stayed outside for lack of seats. There were a hundred who preferred to stay outside and listen to the speeches. More came in the afternoon session which was scheduled for the part of the last speaker Datu Michael O. Mastura, and followed a very lively open forum. The questions asked and raised from the participants were frank and candid. One participant observed that they were very glad to note that the MILF Peace Panel members who took turns as speakers have satisfactorily responded to all the questions the participants have raised. The exchange of ideas was indeed lively and emotional at times when it touched on the government's sincerity in concluding a final peace agreement with the MILF.

Participants came from all over the Sulu archipelago which included former MNLF combatants and members, the MNLF Reformist Group, the Islamic Command Council of the MNLF, and reportedly some independent groups. Various peace advocacy groups in Zamboanga City sent representatives. They actively participated in the open forum.

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points on the four aspects of Ancestral Domain: the earlier agreed upon concept, resources and governance, and the last to be resolved - territory.

Garcia told MindaNews they're "still working harder" on the draft agreement. But he stressed "hindi na natin patagalin yan" [we won't allow this to drag on].

He, however, declined to give details on the new draft they will be presenting. (MindaNews)

These were the Salam Peace Foundation, headed by its President, Hadji Ahmad W. Sakaluran, the Interreligious Solidarity Movement for Peace and the Mindanao Peaceweavers. Fr. Angel Calvo, an active peace advocate also attended. About a third of the participants were Bangsamoro women. Some of them cried or were in tears after Hadji Abdulla U. Camlian spoke on the plight of the Bangsamoro people in Zamboanga City. The speaker who was touched by the sight of the crying Bangsamoro Women was also in tears, as he concluded his talks and left the podium.

The participants before the forum ended presented to the MILF peace panel members a position paper/petition urging the MILF and the GRP the inclusion of about thirty-three (33) Muslim dominated Bsrangays with Muslim Barangay Chairmen, plus two Muslim settlements that has been officially proclaimed by the government and the ARMM property at Kabatangan, Zamboanga City. They further urged the inclusion of forty (40) more Barangays out of the total ninety-three (93) Barangays in Zamboanga City which has a significant Bangsamoro Muslim population. The position paper/petition was jointly addressed to both the GRP and MILF Peace Panels. They requested the MILF Peace Panel to forward a copy of their position paper/petition the GRP Peace Panel. This was signed by about 12,569 Bangsamoro Barangay representatives and residents of Zamboanga City.

The roundtable panel discussion on the second day, January 6, 2008, hosted by the Salam Foundation, held at the Amil's Tower conference room was attended by selected Bangsamoro professionals of Zamboanga City or the 'cream of the crop'. The MILF Peace Panel members acted as panelists. Similar to the previous forum, the exchange of ideas was also frank and candid. There were two Moro ladies who were invited and they actively participated in the discussions. Two participants from Sulu attended, three from Basilan together with Vice Governor Alrashid Sakkalahul, a former MNLF Commander, and currently the chair of the Joint Monitoring Action Team Group (JMAG), set up by the Joint GRP-MILF Coordinating Committee (CCCH) and the International Monitoring Team (IMT), for the Province of Basilan to monitor ceasefire violations.

Vice Governor Sakkalahul brought up to the MILF Peace Panel members the rampant human rights violations by the military authorities on the civilians and the indiscriminate arrest, harassment and filing of criminal charges against known members of the MILF-BIAF. He requested the members of the MILF Peace Panel present to take up this matter with their counterparts in the GRP. He said that they have already submitted their report to the CCCH.

(Some data and information were supplied by *Hj. Salih I. Hayre and Hj. Idris Yasin, Zamboanga City*).

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Manila.

Just last month, combined operatives of the Army's 6th Infantry Division and the Criminal Investigation and Detection Group arrested an Egyptian, preacher Mohammed Al-Sayyid Ahmed Musa and a Maguindanaon companion, Moham-mad Saed, in a dawn raid at a house adjacent to an Islamic school in Campo Muslim here.

Senior Superintendent Willie Dangane, director of the city police, and Lt. Col. Julieta Ando, spokesman of the Army's 6th Infantry Division, said the raiding team recovered from the possession of Hussein and Saed assorted materials for home-made bombs, incendiary and blasting charges, detonating cords, and reading materials espousing religious extremism.

The Egyptian national, however, denied keeping the materials for fabrication of bombs. Friends and neighbors of Musa said the raiding team could have planted them at his rented house to make it appear he is indeed a terrorist.

Eid Kabalu, spokesman of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front, said Hussein was an ordinary preacher and "could not be a terrorist" as labeled.

Text messages have been circulating recently, purporting that the bomb-making paraphernalia recovered from the rented house of Hussein and Saed were "planted" just to pin them down and make it appear that they were plotting to bomb selected targets in the city and surrounding areas.

It was also in the city where an elite team from the national headquarters of the Philippine National Police in Camp Crame arrested in 2004 Indonesian-born Taufik Rifki, an alleged member of the Jemaah Islamiya, a known cell of the Al-Qaeda in Southeast Asia.

It was only then that local residents found out that Rifki and his companions even used a rented house in San Pablo area here as their headquarters, received money from the Middle East through several bank accounts, and even studied the Tagalog and Maguinda-naon dialects with the help of tutors.

Rifki was even said to have enrolled at a government school here using the name Ami Irza.

"The arrest of these alleged terrorists in Central Mindanao have 'demoralizing effects' on our business partners abroad. It makes them entertain doubts on the safety of their capital inputs for various ventures abroad," said a Chinese trader, who asked not to be identified, told Mindanao Cross.

Businesswoman Bai Sandra Basar, a key official of the Kuwato Muslim Business Chamber, said the government should focus deeper on why it is in Central Mindanao where alleged foreign terrorists seem to be

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He said various local government units have extended full support to the ME program by paying the honoraria of Asatids from their local school board funds.

Boransing named Metro Manila and Davao City executives as among the commendable ME stakeholders. (from: www.mb.com.ph, December 2, 2007 edition, story by Tony Rimando)

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GRP-MNLF peace accord.

The OIC, a pan-Islamic block of more than 50 Muslim countries, including oil-rich Arab nations, helped broker the GRP-MNLF final peace agreement.

The ARMM is to be represented by Gov. Datu Zaldy Ampatuan and Paisalin Tago, who is the speaker of the region's 24-seat Regional Assembly.

Ampatuan and Tago both said the ARMM has representatives in each of the five JWGs that would evaluate the perceived kinks in the GRP-MNLF peace pact and formulate measures that could address them.

Tago said the four-day JWG sessions at the Indonesian embassy has started today (January 3) and members of the working groups are optimistic they can have a comprehensive output that would be the basis for the discussions in the January 14 tripartite meeting. []

holding out.

"We also need a closure to all of these arrests by announcing if the arrested individuals are indeed terrorists. It's the poor people that will suffer most if Central Mindanao's economy will suffer recession as a result of the presence of suspected terrorists in the area," Basar said.

Almost two years ago, four Turkish nationals working as teachers at a private religious school in Tamontaka were also arrested by police and Army agents in the city, but were just subsequently deported after they were proven to be only missionaries and not terrorists.

An irate Cotabato City Mayor Muslimin Sema, chairman of the city peace and order council, has told the Oblate Media he is sad with the recent arrests of foreign Islamic missionaries labeled as "terrorists."

"This could be a sabotage to the effort of propagating peace education through Islamic da'wah activities," Sema said.

The economy of Central Mindanao was twice downed by conflicts in recent years - first when President Estrada declared an all-out war against the MILF in 2000, which resulted to a year of hostilities in many areas in Mindanao that displaced about a million people, and subsequently in 2003, when the the government restored its control over guerilla enclaves around the vast Liguasan Marsh at the center of the region.()

MULTI . . . from page 1

overseeing the ceasefire in many flashpoints in the South in 2003, just after the Malaysian government began mediating in the GRP-MILF talks.

Formal talks between the government and the MILF opened January 7, 1997, but gained headway only on 2003 with the participation of Malaysia both as facilitator and mediator.

Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process Jesus Dureza, whose office is directly involved in the on-going talks between the government and the MILF, said the involvement of different countries in monitoring the ceasefire is a good showcase of international cooperation in addressing the domestic Mindanao problem.

"Multi-national cooperation in resolving conflicts is now a global trend and it's a very effective means of helping peace processes succeed," Dureza said.

The latest addition to the IMT's rank and file is a rehabilitation expert from Japan and a Canadian governance specialist.

The IMT has been an important icon of peace in the troubled south. Businessmen, religious, political and traditional Moro leaders have been looking up to the group -- now led by Malaysian Gen. Datul Mat Yasin Bin Mat Daud -- as key deterrent for military-MILF confrontations in hostile areas.

The yearly tenure of the IMT was to end last October, but the Malaysian government agreed to have it extended on the behest of the GRP and MILF peace panels.

Malaysian Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak has been quoted by newspapers as saying, after agreeing to the extension of the team's peacekeeping mission Mindanao, that the IMT's stay in the South is "not indefinite" and that the Malaysian government wants to see progress in the talks.

Foreign and local donors engaged in peace-building activities in the region, such as the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung and its local funding beneficiary, the Institute for Autonomy and Governance (IAG), have actively been involving the IMT in cross-section peace dialogues and roundtable discussions on the prospects of the GRP-MILF talks.

The MILF's news website, www.luwaran.com, has earlier said Sweden and the United States are also both keen on sending their contingents to the IMT.

The MILF's spokesman, Eid Kabalu, said they would welcome the participation of more countries in the IMT.

"The presence of the IMT will also show to the whole

RESUME . . . from page 12

Last year, the government and MILF rebels agreed on the composition of the Bangsamoro Juridical Entity (BJE) during talks in Kuala Lumpur.

The list of villages to be included in the Moro territory was never made public although the MILF has been demanding the inclusion of some 1,000 predominantly Muslim villages in the BJE.

The MILF said it would only go back to the negotiating table if the objectionable phrase was removed.

Benito blamed the government for the MILF's decision to back out of the peace talks, noting that it was government negotiators who inserted the objectionable phrase in the draft agreement for territory.

Fears

Benito said the government must act now to preserve the gains of the peace process by sticking to the agreements reached with the MILF.

He said unless the peace talks got back on track, the lives of innocent civilians would continue to be threatened by hostilities.

"We fear for the resumption of armed conflict in Mindanao now that the peace process appears to be going nowhere," Benito told reporters.

He said civilians have grown tired of the violence.

"We the civilians are the end losers, we want peace and we want development," he said.

Prominent Bangsamoro analyst and civil society leader Prof. Abhoud Syed M. Lingga also said the government must do something to salvage the peace process.

Lingga, executive director of the Institute of Bangsamoro Studies here, said President Macapagal-Arroyo should exercise political will to prevent the situation from getting worse.

Secretary Jesus Dureza, peace process adviser, said the government has been trying to find ways to restart the peace process.

One of these, he said, was an offer for the setting up of a federal state for the Moro people. The MILF has rejected the proposal, branding it as trickery. (From Philippine Daily Inquirer, Edwin O. Fernandez, Charlie Señase, Nash Maulana and Jeoffrey Maitem, Inquirer Mindanao)

world how serious is the MILF in addressing the Mindanao problem through peaceful negotiations," Kabalu said. ()

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on the consensus points on ancestral domain, which the two parties have jointly “crafted, agreed, and signed since December 2004.”

An unnamed MILF leader in www.luwaran.com was quoted in this gloomy forecast in 2008. He said it was “unlikely” the peace talks will be completed this year.

He remains hopeful though. “It is still salvageable, provided the government will reconsider its decision and abide by their commitment to honor the consensus points.”

MILF leaders, since the aborted 15th Exploratory Talks in Malaysia on Dec. 15, have been raising the spectacle of renewed hostilities.

The Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) has launched limited attacks in Sulu against the Moro separatists. So far, the truce between the two sides has been largely holding for now.

The MNLF, which has fractured into several factions since its once monolithic days, has a final peace agreement (FPA) with the national government, while the MILF, which the late Ustadhz Salamat Hashim formed out of the MNLF in 1978, is still talking peace with Malacañang.

Mindanao’s internecine conflict did not die even after the FPA’s signing because of the MILF’s separate struggle for independence. Intense fighting between the AFP and the MILF have often erupted, particularly in the all-out wars of 2000 and 2003.

The Manila-MILF peace process was in danger of falling into another impasse due mainly to the same cause in the past: The highly contentious issue on constitutional process to determine the size of the proposed Bangsamoro Juridical Entity (BJE), or the Muslim Filipinos’ so-called ancestral domain.

Then came Saiful Islam, president of the Ghadafi International Foundation for Charitable Associations (GIFCA), who visited the Philippines on Dec. 12-14. Saiful Islam pledged that Libya will provide more assistance for the Moro people once they unite and successfully resolve the Mindanao problem. (from www.mb.com.ph, story by Edd Usman, published January 2, 2007)

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Despite this, Ermita said the government continued to be upbeat about the peace process.

Ermita also said the option to convert the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao into a federal state might be included in the agenda for the next exploratory talks with the MILF.

Ermita said recent statements from the MILF appealing to Filipinos to support amending the 1987 Constitution to

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through with last December’s supposed formal talks with government in Malaysia when it found out that the GRP panel has again insisted on the conduct of a plebiscite in the setting up of the Moro domain which the front want covered by the Bangsamoro Juridical Entity.

The apprehension of merchants in the city and elsewhere in the business sector in the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) heightened yesterday following reports that hundreds of soldiers and MILF forces in Kauswagan, Lanao del Norte are gearing up for a possible showdown, borne by a spate of violent incidents in the area involving local criminal gangs and members of feuding families.

It was in Kauswagan, home to mixed Muslim and Christian residents, that the bloody MILF-military conflict in 2000 started, which, subsequently, spilled over to surrounding provinces, including the South Cotabato-Sarangani-Gen. Santos City (Socsargen) area, left about a thousand Moro guerillas and soldiers dead, and displaced more than 500,000 civilians.

“The best way to solve the present impasse on the GRP-MILF talks is to talk and talk and talk about possible solutions to it, not suspend the GRP-MILF talks,” said businessman Antonio Santos, chairman of the Brunei-Indonesia-Malaysia-Philippines East Asian Growth Area Business Council.

Santos said their Muslim contacts in Brunei, Indonesia and Malaysia are ready to come to Mindanao and pour in capital inputs for various projects if the GRP and MILF panels can forge a final peace agreement.

“There is an assurance from them to come in. In fact, they are also easily affected by the ups and downs in the peace talks just like us, Mindanaon businessmen,” Santos said.

Peace talks between the government and the MILF started January 7, 1997, but gained headway only in 2003 with the help of Malaysia as mediator.

The economy of Central Mindanao and ARMM was twice downed by conflicts in recent years — first in 2000 when then President Estrada declared an “all out war” against the MILF, and, subsequently, in 2003, when government forces and Muslim guerillas squabbled for control of strategic areas in the region.

pave the way for a shift to a federal system would be taken into consideration by the government panel hammering out the new agreement on territory. (By Lira Dalangin-Fernandez, INQUIRER.net)

Gov't seeks new proposal on territory for MILF peace pact



GMA's GIFT --- A farmer receives from Agrarian Reform Secretary Nasser Pangandaman (right) and Maguindanao Gov. Datu Andal Ampatuan during a gift-giving program, as joint Christmas and Eid'l Adha offering from the President for 15,000 residents in the province last January 5.

Resume talks with MILF, gov't urged

(Reprinted as is from Philippine Daily Inquirer)

COTABATO CITY – Hundreds of people gathered at the city plaza here starting 9 a.m. in a bid to convince the government to resume talking peace with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF).

The demonstrators organized by the Consortium of Bangsamoro Civil Societies (CBCS) also urged the government to save lives and properties in Mindanao by restarting the talks.

Bobby Benito, CBCS spokesperson, said the “50,000 Muslims from the provinces of Maguindanao, Lanao del Sur, North Cotabato and Shariff Kabunsuan, who attended the peace rally, were wary about the recurrence of violence because of the continued suspension of the talks.”

The MILF backed out of the negotiations in protest of what it said was the illegal insertion of the phrase “constitutional process” in the draft of the agreement for territory.

[RESUME /p.10]

MANILA, Philippines (12/26/2007) – The government is determined to save negotiations with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) which had been stalled by the issue on ancestral domain, a senior Malacañang official said Wednesday.

Executive Secretary Eduardo Ermita said the government peace panel would present a new draft proposal to President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo at the National Security Council Cabinet cluster meeting Thursday at 10 a.m.

During exploratory talks in Malaysia two weeks ago, the Muslim separatist group rejected the draft memorandum of agreement by the government, which said that the determination of the territories would have to go through the constitutional process.

[GOVT/p.11]

Foreigners with alleged links to JI, al-Qaeda arrested in Central Mindanao

COTABATO CITY – More than a dozen foreigners, said to have links with both the Jemaah Islamiya and al-Qaeda, have been arrested in Central Mindanao since 2003, a trend businessmen fear could adversely affect the local economy.

Surprisingly, those arrested were never proven by courts as terrorists indeed, and ended up being deported to their countries of origin only due to violations of the country's immigration laws.

One of those who hogged the headlines was Egyptian-born Dia Algabre, who married a Maguindanaon woman and stayed here for years and was, subsequently, arrested at the Cagayan de Oro airport more than three years ago, along with foreign-trained Maranaw bomber-maker Muklis Yunus, while on their way to Manila for an alleged bombing mission.

Two Arabs – an Iraqi and a Palestinian – were arrested by members of the Army's 12th Intelligence and Security Unit, led by then Major Alden Juan Masagca, in a raid at nearby Simuay District in Sultan Kudarat, Shariff Kabunsuan about two years before Al-Gabre and Yunus were intercepted by government agents in Cagayan de Oro while on their way to

[FOREIGNERS /p.9]