



Stop issuing mining permits in proposed Bangsamoro land'

COTABATO CITY - A ranking official of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) urged Malacañang yesterday to stop issuing mining permits in any area under the proposed Bangsamoro Juridical Entity (BJE) pending the outcome of the peace talks.

[STOP/p.11]

HELPING THE POOR --- A member of the US Forces involved in humanitarian projects in Central Mindanao treats with antibiotic a sick carabao of a Moro farmer in Pikit, North Cotabato, as part of the Philippine Army and the US Armed Forces humanitarian projects in the region.[]



BDA to push through with health programs: Study tour conducted

COTABATO CITY -In a bid to help improve the health condition of its communities, the Bangsamoro Development Agency (BDA) sent its team of medical professionals to a four-day study tour at Davao Medical School Foundation Resource Learning Center in Davao City early this month. The BDA team was headed by Social Services Program Head Ms. Julie O. Maliga. According to Maliga, the study tour was aimed at assessing the feasibility of establishing "Botika ng Barangay" in ten (10) barangays in Region XII, especially in the areas affected by the armed conflict which has been raging for over 40 years now.

Maliga also disclosed that the beneficiaries of the "Botika ng Barangay" project will come from the In-Depth Barangay Needs Analysis (IBNA) sites which were identified during the course of the Study on the Socio-Economic Reconstruction and Development of the Conflict Affected Areas in Mindanao (SERD-CAAM).

"We believe that this project will have a significant impact in the lives of the target rural communities for they need not spend their money for transportation just to buy

[BDA/p.11]

Multi purpose building, water system conferred to Malabang and Sultan Kudarat

Cotabato City – Still anchored on Japan government's commitment to support the peace process in Mindanao, the Japanese consultants together with the Bangsamoro Development Agency (BDA) as the lead implementer, have turned over the multi-purpose building and water supply system to the community people of Lanao and Sharif Kabunsuan provinces last February 26. After almost a year of implementation, finally the communities can now have the delight to utilize the "small present" extended to them by the Japanese government. The Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) funded for the two projects as one component of the two-year Study on the Socio-Economic Reconstruction and Development Program in the Conflict-Affected Areas in Mindanao (SERD-CAAM).

In his statement, BDA Executive Director Dr. Danda

[MULTI/p.10]

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World religious leaders give GRP-MILF talks big boost

The floundering Mindanao peace process involving the Government of the Republic of the Philippines (GRP) and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) got a needed boost when 17 members of the World Conference of Religions for Peace (WCRP) offered their help during a dialogue with MILF leaders headed by Chairman Al-Hajj Murad Ebrahim on March 29 in Sultan Kudarat municipality in Shariff Kabunsuan province.

Murad, chairman of the MILF Central Committee, the group's highest policy-making body, said the peace talks with the GRP "technically is on track" but is being delayed due to the GRP's change of heart on the previously agreed draft memorandum agreement on ancestral domain.

He was referring to the highly contentious issue on using the Constitution as parameter for the creation of the Bangsamoro Juridical Entity (BJE). MILF leaders are adamantly opposed to constitutional process in determining the scope of the BJE.

Murad also stressed that the Mindanao conflict has no religious character, but a political one with political solution.

On the other hand, lawyer Michael Mastura, a member of the MILF peace panel, said the Mindanao strife took on a religious color after "government-soldiers burned mosques, copies of the Qur'an and Islamic schools (madrassahs or madaris)."

[*WORLD*/p.9]

MILF says peace deal with Manila unlikely

BUTIG, Philippines — More than 10,000 armed Moro rebels put on their biggest show of strength since they began talks with the Philippine government in 2003, raising doubts that a peace agreement can be completed this year.

The Moro Islamic Liberation Front leadership said Tuesday they doubted a peace deal would be reached this year and blamed President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo's ongoing political crisis over alleged corruption as the main reason for constant delays in the negotiations.

The "uncertainty of concluding a peace pact with the government" was causing anxiety among the rebel ranks, said MILF chief Murad Ebrahim, flanked by his top military aide Abdul Aziz Mimbantas and political officer Ghazali Jaafar, at the end of a four-day meeting on Mindanao.

At least one faction headed by Hadji Samir wants an end to the talks and for the MILF to pursue its armed struggle for self-determination.

Samir is overall head of internal security within the MILF and as such wields considerable power.

The MILF has been waging a separatist rebellion on the southern island of Mindanao which has claimed 150,000 lives since 1978.

Manila and the MILF signed a ceasefire in 2001 but peace talks have been at a bitter impasse over the past year on disagreement over territories the rebels claim as ancestral lands.

MILF insiders told Agence France-Press that the MILF central committee was having trouble dealing with internal squabbling over the direction the talks were taking.

"We have been the government's whipping boys all the time, and some people within the MILF do not want that. They believe they are entitled to fight," one senior commander said.

"Right now, the MILF central committee can still keep those with dissenting opinions in line, but there is a sense of nascent radicalization among the ranks," he added.

Murad however denied there were any tensions within the rebel leadership saying: "I would like to declare to everyone that the MILF is as solid as ever."

He said the MILF would push for a lasting peace but warned they were also prepared for a longer struggle if a peace deal was not achieved, without giving a time frame.

Murad, 58, is seen by many as a pragmatic rebel leader who wants to see an end to the bloody conflict before he dies.

He told journalists that he doubted an agreement would be signed with the current administration.

"Given the delays in the resumption of peace talks, whether circumstantial or not, this prospect of signing is

[*SAYS*/p.11]

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Catholic-Muslim dialogue hailed

Philippine Islamic Council (PIC) president and United Nations Scientific, Educational and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) commissioner Professor Taha M. Basman, hailed yesterday the creation of a permanent Catholic-Muslim Forum which Pope Benedict XVI had approved early this year during Christendom's Holy Week.

Pope Benedict's "historic move" – approving the creation of a permanent Catholic-Muslim Forum, which is the first of its kind – came after three days of talks in Rome between Vatican officials and a delegation of Muslims that represented 138 Islamic scholars who, in 2007, sent a letter to the Pope and other leaders of Christianity seeking a dialogue.

Jordan's Prince Ghazi bin Muhammad Bin Talal spearheaded the Islamic initiative for dialogue with Christians after the Pope's controversial speech in Regensburg, Germany, in 2006 that deeply hurt Muslims.

News reports said the Catholic-Muslim Forum's first summit will be on Nov. 4-6, with the theme "Love God, Love of Neighbor" and the second summit in a Muslim country to be named later.

"Everyone should learn how to recognize and respect differences with integrity. Differences are what we are made of," said Prof. Abdulhussin "Jo" Kashim, another peace, human rights, and interfaith advocate like Basman, said.

Kashim welcomed the Catholic-Muslim dialogue, saying the hallmark of the 21st century should be dialogue.

He added the Qur'an mentions the foundational concept "lita'arafu," meaning "so that you may know each other, not that you may despise each other" as the central concept of dialogue.

Basman cited a similar dialogue hosted in Castel Gandolfo, Italy, by then Pope John Paul II, saying the present Pope's interest in dialogue with the 1.4-billion strong Ummah, the body of Islam's believers, is a continuation of that landmark initiative.

Basman said the Prophet Muhammad (Sallallahu Allaihi Wassalam) had preached tolerance and respect for other religions, adding that Christians and Jews are fondly called "Ahlul Kitab" or "People of the Book" in the Qur'an.

The Kitab or Book refer to the Jews' Torah (Old Testament), Christians' Injeel (New Testament), and the Qur'an (Manila Bulletin, EDD USMAN, published March 23, 2008)

MILF heeds OIC's call for unity Reaches out to MNLF and ARMM

With the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) pushing efforts to forge unity among the Bangsamoro leaders, the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) accepted the other day the OIC call and extended its hand to the leadership of the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) and the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM).

Ghazali Jaafar, MILF vice chairman for political affairs, said the OIC appeal is a welcome gesture because it is what Allah has commanded Muslims.

Thus, the unity of all the leaders of the Bangsamoro people and their organizations has been an MILF objective.

But Jaafar hastened to add that the OIC call has nothing to do with any political plan in connection with the August 2008 elections in ARMM.

Officials of the ARMM, including Gov. Datu Zaldy Uy Ampatuan, Vice Gov. Ansaruddin Adiong, and the 24 legislators of the Regional Legislative Assembly (RLA), are facing reelection at the end of their three-year terms in August.

ARMM governors, congressmen and mayors have endorsed to President Arroyo the anointment of Ampatuan as the administration's bet.

Other Moro leaders are now courting the President's support as the elections approach.

One of them, Basilan Assemblyman Hatimil Hassan, a senior MNLF leader, is offering himself as a candidate of the MNLF and MILF if there is still no peace agreement between the national government and the MILF by August.

Hassan said that in the absence of a peace agreement, the MNLF wants the fielding of an MNLF bet to be a tripartite decision by the OIC, Philippine government, and the MNLF.

On the call for unity, Jaafar said Muslims have been commanded by God to unite.

"For the MILF, what we are after is the unity of the Bangsamoro people and their leaders, their non-government groups and people's organizations because this is Allah's commandment to Muslims," Jaafar said.

"We have no idea about the OIC's supposed desire to field MNLF-MILF common candidates for the coming ARMM political exercise," Jaafar said, stressing his group does not participate in political exercises.

"In fact, MILF leaders met with MNLF Vice Chairman Jimmy Labawan and Attorney Randolph Parcasio on Tuesday to discuss the OIC appeal for

MILF officers, commanders gather in Lanao del Sur

BUTIG, Lanao del Sur (MindaNews/March 9, 2008) – Thousands of members of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) have converged at the erstwhile Camp Bushra Somiorang here for an “expanded Central Committee meeting” which started Saturday and ends Tuesday.

“The meeting will end on March 11th. It is aimed at educating all ranks of MILF on the relevance of the peace talks and processes,” said Ahmad Lao, chair of the Media Committee of the conference.

The MILF, most of them in full battle gear, their firearms highly visible, came from neighboring areas and as far away as Davao, North Cotabato and Sarangani, on board trucks, jeeps, motorcycles, vans.

Marawi residents waved green flaglets and chanted “Allahu Akbar!” as they passed.

A number of city’s traffic police enforcers also escorted them until they reached the city’s boundary.

MILF members from the three Zamboanga provinces,, Sulu, Tawi-tawi, and Lanao del Norte were blocked by soldiers when they reached Kapatagan town “to remind them that they ought not to display their high powered firearms” while on travel.

MILF members from the two Lanao provinces welcomed provincial delegates by lining up on the roadside in full-battle gear, the colors of their armbands signifying their battalion’s affiliation.

Even soldiers of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) stationed in detachments along the highway to Butig also came out and waved their hands as the MILF convoy passed.

As delegates reached Camp Bushra, agongs were played. Sports enthusiasts played sipa sa manggis, a traditional Maranao sports.

The erstwhile MILF camp was literally transformed into a village with various tents pitched to house delegates.

Maranao entrepreneurs also built stalls to sell food and malong, kumbong, and Maranao delicacies.

Today, March 9, MILF vice chair Aleem Abdulaziz S. Mimbantas officially welcomed all delegates to the conference whose theme is “One people, One struggle.”

MILF chair Al Haj Murad Ebrahim delivered his State of Jihad Address before his constituency but details of the speech have not been given to the media. The media is allowed entry only on March 11.

Tomorrow, March 10, Ebrahim will have an exclusive meeting with the MILF committees,

[OFFICERS/p.9]

The infamous 1968 Jabidah Massacre to Moro peoples is the trigger that led to the formation of the Bangsamoro revolutionary front which to this day continues to challenge government. Then President Marcos after recruiting Moro soldiers to be trained in Corregidor allegedly to fight against fellow Muslims in Sabah to enforce our Sabah claim, refused to fight. Thereafter, these young soldiers were led to a forest and shot by their military trainers with one Jibin Arula as the lone survivor, who lived to tell the story.

The Moros were enraged. In Manila, student protests were held. The Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) was organized and led by a charismatic professor Nur Misuari .

In commemorating this significant event in the nation’s history, civil society groups led by the Mindanao People’s Caucus, Anak Mindanao and its allied groups will visit Corregidor

on March 18 and place a marker there to remember those who died. The groups will then launch an island-wide caravan to promote peace in Mindanao, especially at a time of uncertainty in the peace talks.

Below is a timeline emailed by GZO Peace Institute culled from journalist’s writings on how the Corregidor incident came about.

TIMELINE: JABIDAH MASSACRE

1965 Marcos initially courted Malaysia by taking the initiative of resuming talks with Malaysia and won a concession: an anti-smuggling agreement that would control the trade between Sabah and the Southern Philippines. The border agreement meant higher revenues for the government and a declared silence over the Sabah claim. Marcos also played a role in forming the ASEAN. This legal cover would conceal the plans to invade Sabah.

Early 1967 Major Eduardo Martelino was informed by Marcos of his plans regarding Sabah. The commando group that was to be formed had one mission: destabilize Sabah and take over the resource-rich island.

Sabah is historically part of the Sultanate of Sulu but came under Malaysia’s stewardship under a lease agreement

The operation came to be known as “Project Merdeka” and the commando group “Jabidah.” Merdeka is Bahasa Melayu for freedom and Jabidah is the name of a stunningly beautiful woman in Muslim lore.

Mid 1967 Recruitment Phase: Rolando Abadilla, 2nd lieutenant from PMA, was one of the first recruits. Recruitment was not limited to soldiers. Martelino formed a medico-legal team to go with the troops during the invasion.

[JABIDAH/p.8]

Six governors support Ampatuan's poll bid

Urge GMA to anoint reelection bid of ARMM governor

COTABATO CITY — The six provincial governors in the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) affirmed yesterday Lakas-CMD endorsement of ARMM Gov. Zaldy Ampatuan's reelection bid as they urged President Arroyo to anoint him promptly to clear uncertainties in the August elections.

The Lakas-CMD's national directorate, at a meeting held Monday in Manila, passed unanimously a resolution endorsing the reelection bid of the ARMM governor and his vice governor, Ansaruddin "Hookie" Adiong.

"As we've upheld our consistent and unwavering support for the President, we hope that Her Excellency would act on the party decision with dispatch so as to clear the cloud of doubts over the ARMM elections scheduled this coming August," said Lanao del Sur Gov. Mamintal "Bombit" Adiong Jr.

Some sectors entertained speculations that the clamor for the reopening of the peace talks with the Moro Islamic Liberation (MILF) and the tripartite review of the provisions of the 1996 peace accord with the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) may cause a delay in the 6th ARMM elections and/or in the selection of administration candidates.

But Lakas-CMD, the administration's dominant party, assured full support for the reelection bid of Ampatuan, Adiong and their teammates.

A copy of the party national directorate's resolution was forwarded to the Palace for action by President Arroyo, the party's chairperson, Governor Adiong said.

The approval of the party endorsement was raised by Lakas-CMD bigwigs, including former congressman Prospero Pichay (vice president for Mindanao), Senator Migs Zubiri (secretary-general), and Rep. Simeon Datumanong (vice president for Muslim affairs).

Adiong said that elected provincial and municipal officials in ARMM are urging the anointment of the Ampatuan-Adiong tandem not only due to their "proven loyalty" to the Arroyo regime but also because the Ampatuan administration has performed well in its first three-year term.

Governors Sakur Tan of Sulu, Dick Sahali of Tawi-Tawi, Andal Ampatuan of Maguindanao, (OIC) Ibrahim Ibay Jr. of Shariff Kabunsuan, and Jum Akbar of Basilan corroborated Adiong's assertion, saying their constituents recognize the achievements of the incumbent ARMM officials.

Before the passage of the Lakas-CMD resolution, the six governors, two city mayors, and 113 town mayors in ARMM passed a petition seeking President Arroyo's blessing for the Ampatuan-Adiong team in the coming regional polls.

In a text message received yesterday, Sulu Governor Tan

[GOVERNORS /p. 7]

Moro youth to MNLF and MILF: unite!

CORREGIDOR ISLAND - "We challenge the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) to unite!"

This was the main message for both the MNLF and the MILF from around 200 Moro youth leaders gathered in this island to commemorate the 40th anniversary of the Jabidah massacre on Tuesday, March 18.

Some 50 youth leaders were part of around 60 participants of the Youth Caravan for Peace from Mindanao to Corregidor that was organized by the Mindanao Peoples Caucus from March 13 to 18.

In front of the respective representatives of the central committees of the MNLF and the MILF, who were invited to the commemoration to also deliver their own messages, the youth representatives shouted at the top of their voice their demand for unity by both political fronts.

Madhie Amelia, secretary-general of the United Youth for Peace and Development said they were aware that the MNLF and the MILF have been talking about possible unification, "but we want you to exert more efforts on it and hasten its processes."

Occasionally interrupted by Arabic chants of "Allah is great" that echoed in the old hospital building that was used as headquarters of the massacred Moro youths on March 18, 1968, Amelia said that "it is high time that the MNLF and the MILF consider this serious call from us — you should unite for our future."

This developed after the MNLF confirmed that a unity talks between them and the MILF has been going on for quite a time already.

MNLF Vice Chair Jimmy Labawan, who represents the MNLF in the "unity talks" with the MILF, said he was "optimistic we will achieve something concrete and laudable soon."

Labawan, who has been running the affairs of the MNLF since Chairman Nur Misuari's incarceration seven years ago, said that in their last meeting on March 15, the MNLF and the MILF already agreed to submit their respective "unity agenda."

"From our respective unity agenda, we will pick on what are worth commonly pursued," he said.

While Labawan was not keen on an organizational unification of both Fronts, he said that "an issue or agenda-based unity" was "very possible" between the MNLF and the MILF.

While he was confident on an "issue-based unity," Labawan said that "a unity or a merger of the two Fronts may not be possible though.

The youth leaders who came to unveil a marker for the Jabidah massacre victims were also joined by Jibin Arula, the lone survivor of that tragic event on March of 1968.

Arula, 67, also shared the call of the youths.

He said that he was no longer expecting the MNLF and the MILF to reunite in the near future but stressed in an interview that the "unification would be very advantageous

[MORO /p. 7]

Basilan offers Pres. Arroyo sanctuary

LAMITAN CITY - Local officials here are ready to provide sanctuary to President Arroyo in case the political tension in Metro Manila escalates, even urging the Chief Executive to consider transferring Malacañang to Basilan.

The proposal came after all of the 45 barangay chairmen of Lamitan City, now the apparent seat of the Basilan provincial government, signed last Thursday a manifesto of support for the President until her term ends.

The manifesto was also signed by Lamitan Mayor Roderick Furigay, who along with other political leaders from the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao, earlier signed a strongly-worded manifesto renouncing any attempt to oust Mrs. Arroyo based only on ipure allegations of corruption in her administration.î

Furigay said he was surprised when he learned that his barangay chairmen also drafted a manifesto of support for Mrs. Arroyo.

A copy of the manifesto was handed over to ARMM Gov. Datu Zaldy Ampatuan yesterday by Furigay and other local officials.

Ampatuan said the manifesto of support for the President by the barangay chairmen could be the first of its kind in the autonomous region.

îl felt emotional about it. I almost forgot that in the triangle of governance, the barangay leaders have a big voice, too, in everything that takes place in the country,î Ampatuan said.

îIn short, the mayor and local leaders in Lamitan, especially the barangay leaders, are not affected by the controversies hounding Malacañang stemming from the controversy on the cancelled national broadband network project with ZTE Corp. of China,î Ampatuan said.

About 80 percent of barangay officials in Lamitan belong to the Yakan tribe, one of seven Muslim groups in Southern Mindanao.

Foreign-trained Muslim preachers in the ARMM earlier said it is because of the strict Islamic teachings on respect for leaders that politicians and leaders of other sectors in the autonomous region remain loyal to Mrs. Arroyo.

In Islam, perceived errors in governance and misconduct of leaders of communities or any organization are resolved through peaceful dialogues and consensus-building.

The ARMM covers the cities of Lamitan and Marawi, Maguindanao, Shariff Kabunsuan, and Lanao del Sur, which are all in Central Mindanao, and the island provinces of Basilan, Sulu and Tawi-Tawi.

Basilan is seen as one of the strongholds of the Abu Sayyaf, which has been widely known for kidnapping both local and foreign tourists, among others. The government has intensified an all-out campaign against this group.

Lamitan City, an old historic municipality turned into a city by former House Speaker for Mindanao Jerry Salappudin, is now a booming agri-business location, where residents from surrounding Basilan towns trade their copra, coffee, corn and even rubber produced by nearby plantations.

Lamitan City's Muslim and Christian folks voted overwhelmingly for Ampatuan during the September 8, 2005 fifth regional elections.

Misuari airs plea at OIC Summit

Full membership of Bangsamoro in OIC sought

Professor Nur Misuari, detained chieftain of the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF), has appealed to the 57-member Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) during its 11th Islamic Summit in Dakar, Senegal last March 13-14 to grant the Bangsamoro people full membership in the OIC, saying it is the only means to achieve peace in Mindanao.

Misuari voiced the appeal in a speech sent to the OIC Summit, detailing the Bangsamoro people's decades-old struggle for self-determination.

Even with the peace agreements the MNLF signed with the government of the Republic of the Philippines in 1976, 1986 and 1996, Misuari said, genuine peace has not been attained.

He cited the centuries-old struggle of the Bangsamoro people against colonialism and oppression against the Spaniards, Americans, Japanese and, now the Philippine government to highlight their right to claim back their lost freedom, sovereignty, and independence.

"Because of the uncertainty we face, I now beseech you all, dear leaders, to please show us, once again, your genuine concern and support for our people's fundamental rights that I have mentioned earlier," Misuari said.

"Extend to us your praiseworthy benevolence and your collective Islamic unity and solidarity behind our longstanding application for Bangsamoro membership — through the MNLF representation, in its capacity as the 'sole legitimate representative of the Bangsamoro people,'" Misuari said.

Recognizing that this has no precedent in the OIC, the MNLF chairman said the pan-Islamic body can do this through "exceptional measure" like the grant of observer status to the MNLF during the OIC's 8th Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers (ICFM) on May 16-22, 1977, in Tripoli, Libya, through OIC-ICFM Resolution No. 2/8-P "to ensure safety of Muslim lives and property in the Philippines."

The Philippines has a pending application for observer status submitted to the OIC in 2003.

"Please give me a chance to prove my worth by availing myself of your unstinted collective and individual trust," Misuari said, adding that he will abandon MNLF participation in the OIC should he fail to turn a Bangsamoro full membership into a positive factor.

"Believe me, this is the only thing in the world, insha Allah, we need to enable us and our people to expeditiously win the peace," Misuari said.

The MNLF head also vowed to bring back to the organization the MNLF leaders who have been "lost" as well as restore genuine and lasting peace to the war-torn Bangsamoro homeland.

Sharif Zain Jali, who represented Misuari in the OIC Summit was to read the 11-page speech, but had to have it distributed instead to the Kings, Presidents, and Prime Ministers attending the OIC Summit when time did not allow

MUSLIMS . . . from page 12

campaign period had started, one in late April just before the elections in May, and one in June after the elections.

Each of these surveys had a national sample of 1,200 statistically representative adult respondents divided into random samples of 300 each in Metro Manila, the balance of Luzon, the Visayas, and Mindanao.

Each survey had an error margin of plus or minus three percent at the national level and plus or minus six percent at the major study areas.

In the latest survey, 76 percent of the respondents said they would feel more confident in the fairness of the process if the votes were immediately counted at the precinct, instead of being taken to the municipal level for counting, as was often done in the ARMM in the past.

Seventy-five percent of Mindanao Muslims say the 2007 voting was clean and orderly in their precincts, or much lower than the 97 percent response of all Filipinos in the June 2007 survey, the SWS said.

The survey also found 45 percent of respondents saying that a woman should get advice from her husband or father in deciding her vote. Muslim women have similar opinions as Muslim men, the SWS said.

Eighty-three percent said they prefer to be represented by a male rather than by a female congressman. The preference is slightly less among women (79 percent) than among men (88 percent), it said.

With respect to the role of ulamas or Muslim elders in the elections, 83 percent of Mindanao Muslims expect them to become more influential in the ARMM polls in August, the SWS said. (www.philstar.com, March 14, 2008, by Helen Flores)

ARMM . . . from page 12

presented during the meeting the fund's completed and planned projects for the years 2007 and 2008 through fundings provided by the World Bank and Japan Bank for International Cooperation (JBIC).

Sambolawan said the World Bank cited the ASFP as having "satisfactory" performance in the 7th, 8th and 9th Supervision Missions, with the last one in Cotabato City on January 21-28 this year.

ASFP, said Ampatuan, is one of the tools in building infrastructure projects in the ARMM component areas, such as the provinces of Basilan, Lanao del Sur, Maguindanao, Shariff Kabunsuan, Sulu and Tawi-Tawi and the cities of Lamitan and Marawi.

The regional governor welcomed the World Bank's extension of the ASFP component up to 2009 while JBIC has also given its "no objection letter" to future projects.

Five resolutions were approved by the ASFP board in the latest meeting.

As this developed, Antonio Mariano, executive director of the ARMM's National Housing Authority (ARMM-NHA), announced the forthcoming housing project for the poor residents of the region in Maguindanao's Mamasapano and Shariff Aguak towns.

GOVERNORS . . . from page 5

clarified that while he favored moving the August polls to a later date to give the regional electorate a respite from the affects of divisive politics and enough time for the resolution of electoral disputes in ARMM provinces, he remains "committed" to the Ampatuan-Adiong team. (By ALI G. MACABALANG)

MORO . . . from page 5

for the people of Mindanao.'

Arula, who narrated to the youths how he survived the massacre, said that while it was then President Ferdinand Marcos who was responsible for the massacre, he is "still holding the government accountable" for that killing 40 years back.

"Until now, the justice that I wanted to be accorded by slain brothers is nowhere in sight," Arula said in the dialect.

"I also call on this government to once and for all consider and prioritize Mindanao after several years of decade," the massacre survivor said.

Arula was part of the celebration as he was also honored both by the Moro elders and the youth. (Mindanao Peoples Caucus)

MISUARI. . . from page 6

it.

Jali and Ustadhz Muhaimen Abubakar were the only MNLF leaders admitted by the OIC to participate in the Dakar Summit because they were the only ones officially endorsed by Misuari.

Jali said other MNLF leaders who went to Senegal were not allowed by the OIC to get inside the Summit venue because they did not have Misuari's endorsement.

"I think the OIC only recognizes brother Nur as the MNLF chairman because it is only his endorsement that is recognized and accepted by the OIC officials. That is how I saw it during the 11th OIC Summit in Senegal," said Jali, chairman of the MNLF's Bangsamoro People's National Congress (BPCA).

"This initiative of the ARMM government and the national leadership would surely boost the Mindanao peace process. This is one of the many necessary activities to address the feeling of neglect among Mindanao's poor Muslim communities," Mariano said.

Since its creation in 1990, this is the first time a housing project will be implemented in the ARMM.

Representatives from the Presidential Commission on Urban Poor joined last Wednesday's inter-agency ocular inspection of the proposed housing sites.

Mariano added that other areas in the region are also being eyed for more housing projects envisioned for the "We should thank the national government and the office of ARMM Gov. Datu Zaldy Ampatuan for supporting the venture," Mariano said. (By EDD K. USMAN)

JABIDAH . . . from page 4

In the Summer of 1967, Philippine Constabulary officers were tasked to recruit medical students and they sourced personnel from the Cebu Institute of Technology. The main prospects for the top-secret operation were Muslims from Southern Philippines.

In 1967, the Sabah infiltration process also started. Recruits from Sulu and Tawi-tawi traveled on one of the 50 or more fast-moving fishing boats owned by big-time smuggler Lino Bocalan. The mission of the infiltrating team of 17 men is to start indoctrination and organization of communities that would support the invasion.

November 1967 Capt. Cirilo Oropesa was designated as a special operations officer for anti-smuggling operations in the South. Oropesa received an order designating him training director and directing him to organize a provisional Special Forces training unit, which aims to qualify recruits for unconventional warfare. Oropesa became the operations officer of the Merdeka project.

August to December 1967 1st Phase of Operation Merdeka Training: Around 1802 young Muslims (mostly Tausug and Samal) underwent training in Simunul, Tawi-tawi.³

Ernesto Sambas was the first Simunul recruit to be commissioned officer with the rank of second lieutenant. Sambas joined the combat training at Camp Sophia in Simunul island, Tawi-tawi.

December 30, 1967 Around 135 (Aquino's count) - 180 (Oropesa's count) Simunul Trainees boarded a Philippine Naval Ship to Corregidor for the 2nd Phase of Operation Merdeka's specialized training.⁴

January 3, 1968 Jabidah troops reach Corregidor. Before troops docked, Defense Undersecretary Syquico and Gen. Espino, Army commander, inspected the campsite. The old hospital was declared a restricted area and converted into military barracks.

Tausug recruits were discriminated. While Sambas got his pay, those from Sulu did not. The Sulu recruits were restless over their salaries.

February 1, 1968 Secretary of National Defense issued a special order assigning a PMA graduate, Lt. Eduardo Nepomuceno to the Special Forces training on Corregidor.

last week of February Trainees were not paid since their arrival in Corregidor. They were promised a monthly pay of P50. Food was miserable and every day, they ate dried fish with burnt rice. They complained and wrote a petition addressed to President Marcos, and signed by 62 trainees. The petition asked for their salaries and a better living condition. The four leaders

of the petition were brought to Martelino at the bottom side of Corregidor to talk about their complaints. After their dialogue, the leaders never returned to the camp.

March 1, 1968 The 58 signatories to the petition were disarmed and considered resigned by March 1.

1st week of March Around 60 to 70 trainees from Corregidor were sent to Camp Capinpin in Tanay, Rizal for the "advanced phase of training" according to Gen. Espino. These men were a cut above the rest and were not signatories to the petition.

March 16, 1968 Another batch of trainees left Corregidor. 24 recruits who were unable to withstand the rigors of the Corregidor training were sent home to Sulu and Tawi-tawi, according to Gen. Espino. On the other hand, Sen. Aquino's investigation showed that the recruits are proud of their achievements and are able to survive tough conditions.

March 18, 1968 Another batch of recruits was told to go home. At 2AM, the 12 recruits left camp. Another batch of trainees also left camp by 4AM. Around 145 to 236 (possibly 28)7 Muslims aged 18-30 years old were massacred near the airstrip of Corregidor.

Jibin Arula, the lone survivor of the massacre, ran off and swam out of the island. At 8AM, he is rescued by two fishermen on Caballo Island, near Cavite.

The Muslim recruits were executed for defying an order of then President Marcos to launch attacks on Sabah.⁸ When the men found out about Merdeka, they refused to participate and were promptly slain by the military.⁹

Some say the victims were executed because they mutinied against their officers in protest over the delay in payment of their allowances. But a more popular version of the story is that these young Moros, hoping to be members of the Armed Forces of the Philippines, found out that their mission was to invade Sabah, where many of their fellow Muslims, friends and families are living in peace. They protested and decided to back out of the training. Since the mission was a top military secret, and to prevent it from being exposed, their trainers brought them to a tiny airstrip, in groups of twelve and subsequently gunned them down.¹⁰

March 19, 1968 An officer, Lt. Eduardo Nepomuceno was also shot dead in unclear circumstances.

March 1968 Immediately after the massacre, Army Special Forces, led by Army Chief General Romeo Espino, engaged in a clandestine cover-up mission to erase traces of the event. Burned bodies tied to trees near the airstrip was cleaned up and cleared of all debris, even bullet shells were picked. Bodies were

[JABIDAH/p.9]

JABIDAH . . . from page 8

wrapped in dark colored ponchos and were thrown in Manila Bay the next day.

March 22, 1968 Gen. Segundo Velasco, AFP Chief of Staff, said that Dugasan Ahid, one of the four leaders, surrendered to defense officials. Ahid said he escaped with the three others in a pumpboat from the Corregidor landing. After reaching Bataan, they took separate ways.

March 1968-1971 As a result of the Jabidah Massacre, Muslims organize groups to fight for the complete separation of Mindanao and Sulu Islands from the Philippine Republic. Nur Misuari revives his group under the new name Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) and creates its military arm, the Bangsa Moro Army. Datu Udtong Matalam establishes the Muslim Independence Movement.¹¹

This incident gave birth to various Muslim groups including the Muslim Independence Movement of Datu Udtog Matalam, the Ansar el Islam of former Senator Ahmad Domocao Alonto, the Moro National Liberation Front of Misuari and later, the Moro Islamic Liberation Front of Hashim Salamat.¹²

Moro student activism grows. Moro consciousness, based on Islamic revivalism and knowledge of a distinct history and identity, gathers steam. Political organizations emerge to culminate eventually in the establishment of the MNLF under Nur Misuari with the goal of carving an independent muslim nation in the Southern Philippines.¹³

A year after the Jabidah massacre, Malaysia took its revenge on the Philippines by providing arms and military training for secessionist MNLF. Malaysia also abrogated its 1965 anti-smuggling agreement with the Philippines.

March 1968 The newly elected Senator Benigno Aquino told the Senate of a report that Christian army officers had shot dead a number of Muslim recruits on the island of Corregidor in Manila Bay.¹⁴

1968 8 officers and 16 enlisted men were court-martialed for the killings in Corregidor.

1971 Court-martialed military personnel linked with the Jabidah killings were acquitted. The case was closed.

1973 Eduardo Martelino was reported to have been imprisoned in Sabah.

1977 Marcos announced his intention to drop the Sabah claim during the Asean summit in Kuala Lumpur.

* Dates and events are taken from *Under the Crescent Moon unless indicated otherwise*. Figure 1. SIMUNOL ISLAND became the venue of the 1st phase of the Operation Merdeka training. Figure 2. CORREGIDOR ISLAND is where Jabidah Massacre took place.

WORLD . . . from page 2

The MILF website reported that Davao Archbishop Fernando Capalla said in the dialogue that "he thinks there are groups who do not want the problem in Mindanao solved."

They discussed the three-point agenda submitted by the WCRP, such as Asian Summit of Religious Youth Leaders in Mindanao on October 2008, to listen and explore possibilities of how the WCRP/Asian Council of Religions for Peace can help in the peace process; and to discuss conflict transformation, peace-building and sustainable development.

All the religions in the world, the MILF said in its website www.luwaran.com, are represented in the WCRP," an umbrella organization where all world religions are represented, especially Catholicism, Islam, Protestantism, Buddhism, Zoroastrian, Jain, Hinduism, Shintoism, Sikh, and several others from more than 16 countries in Asia and the Pacific."

WCRP is affiliated with the United Nations and joined peacemaking efforts in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kenya, Sierra Leone, among other conflict-affected countries.

The MILF said WCRP made an initial effort in helping the Mindanao search for peace in 1977 through a detailed report on the conflict in southern Philippines and disseminated around the world.

WCRP counts among its officials Libya's Dr. Ahmad Mohammad Shariff; Dr. Omar Naseef, former secretary general of the World Muslim League in Mecca, Saudi Arabia; Prince Rashid Bin El Hassan of Jordan, chairman of Jordanian Hashemoite Charity; and Ayatollah Seyyed Mostafa Mohaghegh Damad of Iran. (Manila Bulletin, April 1, 2008, Manila Bulletin, written by EDD USMAN)

OFFICERS . . . from page 4

provincial chairmen and front commanders for ground reports and assessment.

The MILF will also discuss updates on the Peace Process with the government.

Part of the program includes the "reading of the resolution of all provincial chairmen and MILF Base commanders reaffirming the mandate given to the MILF Peace Panel in the conduct of the ongoing peace talks between the MILF the government."

Ebrahim will talk with selected groups who want to pay a "courtesy call" on him on Tuesday afternoon. (Violeta M. Gloria/MindaNews)

MULTI . . . from page 1

Juanday reiterated BDA's call to the project beneficiaries to prove their worth for being chosen for these pilot development initiatives.

"We hope that this multi-purpose building will be the start of development for Barangay Manggahan", he said.

He further urged the community people to do their best to maintain and sustain the project so that it will be of use to them now and in the future.

Meanwhile, Dr. Hani Abdel-Halim, JICA Study Team Leader, elucidated that the project aims to promote peace in the community. He also pointed out that all their development efforts are in support of the peace process between the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) and the national government.

The community people represented by the Peoples' Organization expressed their sincere gratitude to the Japan government as well as to the BDA for what they have received. Moreover, they also regarded the "small present" as a "trusteeship" (amanah) on their part.

Meantime, a water supply system was also handed over to the community of Darapanan in the afternoon of the same day, February 26.

The turn-over was a little bit historic. BDA Board of Directors member Ustadz Abdulkadir Abdullah graced the occasion wherein he delivered his closing message in Arabic. Accordingly, he did so for the benefit of Dr. Abdel-Halim who is a Muslim, born in Egypt but eventually secured a Japanese citizenship. Uz. Abdullah expressed his gratitude for the "gift" received by the community.

He even appealed to them to "do good in a very perfect manner" referring to the action which calls for the maintenance and sustenance of the project in the coming times.

The communities admitted the benefits the project could give them given the difficulty and seemingly unsanitary condition of the water that they used to get.

Among those in attendance were Regional Management Office Manager Engr. Alioden Sangcopan, Engr. Ali Akbar Dimapuro, Aleem Abu Muslih Bandara, Aleem Nasrudin Raguibdib, PO president Sammy Ansao (Malabang turn-over); Uz. Munzir Salahuddin, Provincial Chairman-Maguindanao (MILF), Uz. H. Daud Moctar, Training and Education Committee member and Mr. Yahya Akas, BOD-PO member (Darapanan turn-over).

Ms. Julie Maliga, BDA-SERD-CAAM Coordinator, Katahira Engineers' International President Masakazu Ishiguro, Mr. Akmad Donia and Shigeru Takara and some staff from BDA were also present during the activity. (BDA News Agency)

MILF . . . from page 12

The government and MILF panels last held formal talks in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia late last year, but failed to reach a consensus on how to establish an area which the front wants to govern through the proposed Bangsamoro Juridical Entity.

Musa, right-hand man of MILF chief negotiator Muhaquer Iqbal, said the government merely handled its peace overture with the MILF as a "counter-insurgency tool," not as a decades-old problem that has peculiar political, socio-economic, racial and religious ramifications.

Musa insinuated, however, that there is still a chance for Mrs. Arroyo to strike a peace deal with the MILF as long as she would have enough political determination to pursue it.

Thousands of MILF guerrillas converged in Butig, Lanao del Sur the other day and discussed in a lengthy dialogue the prospects of the front's 11-year-old peace overture with the government.

MILF officials who took turns presiding over the "extended central committee meeting" in Butig have insinuated, one after another, that the peace talks now hang in the balance, as they challenged Malacañang to use its political and administrative powers to peacefully resolve the so-called "Bangsamoro problem."

The MILF wants remaining Moro-dominated communities in the South, including the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao, fused together and be placed under the BJE without a plebiscite.

The government has stood pat in asserting constitutional restraint, saying to concede to such a demand would not be consistent with the principle of national sovereignty and territorial integrity.

The MILF has persistently been demanding recognition of Moro lands in the South, which it says have long existed under the rule of the sultans, whose political and administrative principalities were already in place even before the coming of the Spaniards in the 16th century.

HEEDS . . . from page 3

unity," he said.

Jaafar added that since 2007 the MILF has also sent emissaries to the ARMM political leaders led by Regional Governor Ampatuan to discuss the Bangsamoro people's solidarity and try to find common grounds. (By EDD K. USMAN and ALI G. MACABALANG)

BDA . . . from page 1

ordinary medicines to town centers or city. edicines for common diseases will be brought to them for affordable prices." Maliga said.

She also added that selection of the recipient communities is based on criteria such as impact of conflict on the area, fair geographical distribution, social affinity distribution, area duplication with other development assistance and security and accessibility of the project sites.

Moreover, the team had the chance to visit the municipality of New Corella, Davao del Norte wherein pilot barangays received supportive empowerment towards development from the Institute of Primary Health Care-Davao Medical School Foundation (IPHC-DMSF). The teams were given an opportunity to make personal clarifications on the community members regarding the processes and the great efforts they went through and are going through to achieve their goals.

The Team members who joined the tour include: Dr. Zulqarnain Abas, Anisa Abdullah, Noria Salik., Maimona Ibrahim, Bai Dayang Panda, Sapura Mustapha, Shuhaiba Mamalac, Sitti Nhor Payupas, Tarhata Casilen, Jihad Abubacar, Ibrahim Abo, Annielyn Maliga (all from BDA); Dr. Analiza Guiapar-Alo (DOH-XII) Nagaishi Masafumi, IMT member and Akira Goto, Project Formulation Officer-JICA Davao, Mary Bernadette Suarez (JICA), Josephine Alindatao (IPHC-DMSF), Mariper Mercader (IPHC-DMSF).

Mr. Emran G. Mohamad of BDA helped facilitate the post tour assessment and planning-workshop held during the last day of the activity.

The study tour was conducted in coordination with the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), Bangsamoro Development Agency (BDA), International Monitoring Team (IMT) and the Institute of Primary Health Care-Davao Medical School Foundation (IPHC-DMSF). — — from a BDA press release

SAYS . . . from page 2

already suspect," Murad said at Camp Bushra just outside Butig town in central Mindanao where more than 10,000 MILF fighters had gathered.

Field commanders from 20 rebel fronts across Mindanao "reaffirmed a mandate" to continue with the peace process, Murad said but admitted many remained skeptical.

"This renewal of trust is not without the usual question," Murad said.

"Is the government serious in the peace talks?" he said to shouts of "Allah is great" from rebels sweating in their fatigues and carrying high powered weapons.

He said Arroyo's problems stemming from allegations

STOP . . . from page 1

The MILF proposes the BJE to be the governing mechanism for all areas which the government and MILF peace panels may agree to fuse together as one recognized Muslim homeland in the South.

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

In a statement, Datu Jun Mantawil, secretariat chief of the MILF peace panel, urged President Arroyo and Environment and Natural Resources Secretary Lito Atienza to freeze all applications for mining permits in areas inside the proposed BJE.

Mantawil said any favorable action from Mrs. Arroyo and Atienza will help restore the credibility of the 10-year-old peace process, often shaken by misunderstandings on how both sides are to establish a Muslim homeland which the MILF wants to govern.

Mantawil said wanton mining operations in the South may just leave the BJE with nothing to wisely exploit as source of income to sustain a strong, economically sound Moro community.

"What will happen to BJE if all the gold, silver, copper and other natural resources are consumed?" he asked.

Many areas in the proposed BJE, including the provinces of the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao, are known to have vast deposits of precious stones, metals, minerals and natural gas.

Mantawil said one of the areas that the MILF wants protected from encroachment by big mining firms is the 220,000-hectare Liguasan Marsh, a vast delta surrounded by the provinces of Sultan Kudarat, Maguindanao, Shariff Kabunsuan and North Cotabato.

The Liguasan Marsh is renowned for its scientifically surveyed oil and natural gas deposits.

"Spare the remaining natural resources for the sake of our people and not those of the huge multinational companies and their local contacts whose interests do not necessarily jibe with the interest of the masses," Mantawil said.

He did not say whether the MILF would work for the removal of existing mining ventures in the region.

of corruption involving her husband had affected the peace process, with government negotiators at one time pulling out of scheduled talks in Malaysia to help fix her problems.

The MILF leadership still believes that the "peace process is the most viable" way of solving the conflict on the mineral-rich island.

Both sides were to have met last December but it was cancelled over the thorny issue of ancestral domain, or the areas that the MILF says Muslims have historical rights and whose resources they should be allowed to freely control. (a report by the Agence France Presse, March 19, 2008)

MILF doubts peace pact by 2010

COTABATO CITY - The Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) is convinced that no final peace pact with the government would be signed until President Arroyo's term ends in 2010.

The MILF leadership doubted a peace deal would be reached this year and blamed President Arroyo's ongoing political crisis over alleged corruption as the main reason for constant delays in the negotiations.

"The "uncertainty of concluding a peace pact with the government" was causing anxiety among the rebel ranks, said MILF chief Murad Ebrahim, flanked by his top military aide Abdul Aziz Mimbantas and political officer Ghazali Jaafar, at the end of a four-day meeting by thousands of MILF members in Butig, Lanao del Sur..

In its guerilla website www.luwaran.com, MILF deputy information chief Khaled Musa said the Arroyo administration is running out of enough material time to conclude a peace settlement for Mindanao.

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

[MILF/p.11]

Muslims believe poll violence a 'way of life'

Most Muslims in Mindanao believe that election-related violence is "a way of life" there based on a survey taken barely five months before the elections in the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao.

Sixty-nine percent of "Mindanao Muslims," according to the Social Weather Stations (SWS), say that violence during elections "is a way of life" in their provinces, while 41 percent say they are worried about their personal security during the polling season.

The survey, conducted from Feb. 1 to 7, also showed 62 percent of the respondents saying it is good to have an unopposed candidate since it reduces campaign violence.

Meanwhile, the survey also found 68 percent satisfied with the results of the 2007 elections. Majority of the respondents believe that the official winners truly got the most votes.

This compares well with the 65 percent response among Filipinos in general when surveyed by SWS in June 2007, the SWS said.

The SWS special survey of Mindanao Muslims, sponsored by the Asia Foundation, had a total of 1,300 respondents.

In 2007, the Asia Foundation worked with SWS in carrying out three national surveys to measure citizen attitudes and experiences - one in February after the

[MUSLIMS/p.7]



PEACE IS WORK TIME --- An Army welder fabricates a 4x4 mini-cruiser jeep body from galvanized plainsheets, taking advantage of the ceasefire to do repair works for their vehicles. Soldiers, just like MILF guerillas, detest conflicts.[]

ARMM's Ampatuan laud ASFP for getting 'satisfactory' ratings

Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) Regional Gov. Datu Zaldy Uy Ampatuan on Wednesday commended the ARMM Social Fund Project for Peace (ASFP) for earning another "satisfactory" rating from the World Bank, saying the work of the ASFP will help improve the Bangsamoro people's economic condition.

"I am glad to note that you have been working effectively and efficiently for the betterment of the ARMM communities. Our Bangsamoro people need us to (Improve) their economic condition and we thank Allah subhanna wa taala that we have provided them the assistance in our little ways," the ARMM chief executive said.

On the other hand, Ampatuan expressed caution that the achievement of the ASFP has to be sustain to continue the fight against poverty.

"As chairman of the Board of Directors, which is the policy-making body of the ASFP, what we have accomplished is just the beginning, we still need to exert more effort to reduce, if not eradicate, poverty in the region. We still have a long way to go. We still have to accomplish and as your regional governor, I am confident that we will be able to reshape the region in its better form," the regional governor said.

Ampatuan presided over the 16th ASFP Board of Directors' meeting in a hotel in Manila on March 5. Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process Jesus Dureza, who was represented by Peace Process Undersecretary Nabil Tan, co-chairs ASFP.

Lawyer Mustapha Sambolawan, ASFP project manager, [ARMM/p.7]