

The Moro Times

FRIDAY
October 27, 2006

Philippine Muslims celebrate Eid as Ramadan bids goodbye

BY AMINA RASUL, NASSER SHARIEF and SAMIRA GUTOC

EID' L FITR is the biggest celebration among Muslims. On October 23, the end of Ramadhan was announced by leading Muslim clerics such as Aleem Mahid Mutilan of the Ulama League of the Philippines and Ustadz Abdulkabi Abubakar, Grand Mufti of Sulu, TawiTawi and Basilan. In spite of government warnings, successive gun blasts and M16 rifle shots rend the air as early as 4 in the morning to mark the end of fast.

After the month long fasting, Eid' l Fitr is a time to relax and enjoy. Most Muslims had been awake for the 10 nights, praying from midnight to the wee hours of morning, with the belief that the Gates of Heaven are open and all prayers are heard.

The drone of *takbir* (chants of 'Allahu akbar!' God is great!) fills the closed-in space of the neighborhood with an almost electric charge. On the speakers of the minaret, the prayer is reaches a crescendo and the imam's voice cracks in an emotional tremor. Another Ramadan bids goodbye and every faithful hopes the lessons will last them until the next one comes along.

This is typical Eid' l Fitr, end of the fasting month of Ramadan. The event is replicated throughout the world wherever Muslims live—from Argentina to the tip of Canada, from Madagascar to the Alps of Scandinavia.

Ruben Guiling, a veteran martial artist from Lanao del Sur and a bicycling buff never missed a day of fasting in Ramadan since he was a teenager. "Ramadan had always been a staple in my regimen and I hope to maintain fasting even in old age, *insa Ulah*. The body is like an engine drained of its bad substance much like a car getting its periodic check."

But the wisdom of Ramadan goes beyond the mere physical and the material. Datu Zamzamin Ampatuan, Lead Convenor of the National Anti-Poverty Commission, called on all Muslims in the country to offer the last Friday of Ramadan (1426 Hegira) for the overcoming of extreme poverty. "For Muslims who are not well-off enough to offer their zakat on Eid, the least that they can do is offering their prayers along with their *dikrs*."

Here are snapshots of the Eid



Worshippers annexed the streets around Golden Mosque in Quiapo, Manila for the last rites of Eid' l Fitr marking the end of Ramadan. Here, a young man unlaces his shoes as he claims for a headroom in the crowd. The regulation segregation of men and women was temporarily suspended to accommodate more people coming in to pray.

celebrations in various places of the country:

Quiapo, Manila

The Globo de Oro street and a few adjacent streets are closed to traffic as hundreds of Muslims spill over into the streets beyond the mosque, their prayer rugs or broadsheets of newspapers spread over crunch of asphalt. There were the octogenarians hunched on their worry beads, supplicating in silence, their lips twitching in *takbir*, praising Allah for making it through another Ramadan year. There were the bleary-eyed children that kept tugging at the pants of their elders, the tag price on their brand new shirts still attached on the collar, flipping in the mild breeze. There were the medical students with their books attending the thanksgiving prayer before heading out to their classes.

Greenhills, San Juan

Over 2000 Muslim businessmen and women, their families and

children had taken break from their daily routine and gathered at the parking building of the Greenhills Shopping Center where the *musala* or prayer room is situated to celebrate the Eid feast, ending Ramadan. Since the *musala* is small, the imams conducted the prayers in the parking area itself, laying blue plastic sheets in rows on the rough cement floor. Blue plastic sheets also served as makeshift dividers between the men and women's sections. Blue plastic sheets also shielded the faithful from cars arriving to find parking space.

Businessman Pandao Ali, when asked how the Ramadan affected everyone in Greenhills, says that "We did have to make adjustments especially because we have to break fast at sunset. But, *alhamdulillah*, it's no big deal." The Greenhills Shopping Center is famous for its South Sea pearls and jewels.

Marawi City, Lanao del Sur

Ahmad Ali (not his real name), detained for 10 years in the Marawi City jail, had never

been happier. It was the first time he felt a joyous Eid in jail with donated items from Lanao NGO Maradeca's network.

Canadian NGO volunteers Yanik and Genevieve were also reveling in the Eid experience. They visited Maranao homes right after the early morning Eid prayers and were served sumptuous feasts at each stop.

The *khutba* sermon focused on thanking God for the blessings. At the Mindanao State University (MSU) Oval grounds where almost 5,000 gather, respected *aleem* Maulana Faisal touched on the social factors that makes fasting relevant. "What is the role of Ramadan to solve poverty?" he posed. He said the yearly fast reminded Muslims to remember the poor who go thirsty and hungry. Fasting also reminded man of God, death and the Hereafter. But he said, this does not mean passive worship. "We must lead a productive life. Work in line with Islam, which means support goodness. Unfortunately,

throughout the Muslim world, the beauty, peace and sweetness of Islam is ignored by Muslims themselves. There is no peace and order, economy and development."

Other sermons in congregations focused on forgiveness, *mririlai tanu* (let us forgive one another) and faith. Muslim faithful were encouraged to shake the hands of people around him after the prayers.

The provincial government arranged a traditional *kulintang* celebration at the entrance of the province capitol. But most families preferred celebrating in their own homes, with their own feasts. Get-togethers were arranged, and outings in nearby Iligan beaches and Cagayan de Oro malls.

The departure of Ramadan may be back to the grind for the many, preached an *aleem*, but the lessons learned—moderation, humility, kindness and patience—should be practiced the whole year through.

Civil society seeks ways to break GRP-MILF impasse

BY SAMIRA GUTOC and GANDHI KINIYO

DAVAO CITY: Civil society and government leaders convened by the Bishop Ulama Conference came together for an "emergency meeting" in the ALL-MINDANAO LEADERS' PEACE CONSULTATION last October 9-10 at Royal Mandaya Hotel to help break the impasse over ancestral domain and territory in the peace talks between the government and the MILF.

Military leaders led by GRP Adhoc Joint Action Group (AHJAG) chairman Gen. Benjamin Dolorfino meanwhile also met security forces—the International Monitoring Team (IMT), Joint GRP-MILF Committee on the Cessation of Hostilities, Local Monitoring Team (LMT), AFP ground commanders and their MILF counterparts in Iligan City to maintain the ceasefire.

Fears of renewed clashes were of concern when the government and MILF panels were held back on a consensus in exploratory talks last Sept. 6-7 in Kuala Lumpur on the technical aspect of territory, particularly on the delineation and demarcation of areas to be included in the Bangsamoro Juridical Entity, which require both validation and collection of additional data. It was agreed that both the GRP and MILF panels refer back to their principals to review their positions and submit their final proposals through the Malaysian Secretariat after Ramadhan, the Holy Month.

Invoking the search for a "new formula" agreed to by the MILF and the GRP in the 2001 Tripoli Peace Agreement, MILF panelist Michael Mastura said, "The Bangsamoro question is not a mere administrative problem. It involves defining the final status of the Bangsamoro people with options, ending in referendum results or closure."

Acknowledging a bogging down of the talks, Mastura presented lessons learned in past agreements in that "constitutional processes" were a narrow framework to negotiate the political settlement of the Mindanao conflict for self-determination." See SEEKS C2

Mindanao Halal Certification Board Launched

BY MAYA ABDULLAH

STEPS toward entering the global halal market pegged at \$10B are getting closer as the Muslim Mindanao Halal Certification Board, Inc. (MMHCBI) was formally launched by the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) - Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) and the Canadian-funded Local Governance Support Program in ARMM (LGSPA) at the Dusit Nikko Hotel, Makati City last October 16, 2006.

The MMHCBI, a joint creation of the DTI-ARMM, ARMM Business Council and

the Darul Ifta, will be fully responsible for ensuring that food and non-food products produced, catered, served or distributed in the region are halal.

"We have tapped people who know Shariah and science and technology to promote hygiene and good health to the *ummah* (Muslim communities) in particular and for the broader health-conscious Filipino community in general," said Ustadz Esmael Ebrahim, the Board's Managing Director.

The 15-member Board will certify products and services and accredit facilities which are deemed in full compliance with

Halal regulations.

The 48-page Operations Manual and Technical Guidelines finalized last August will be the primary instrument of the Board to ensure that food and non-food products made available to the Muslim ummah are halal. These guidelines, said DTI-ARMM Secretary Ishak Mastura, may soon be adopted as the Philippine National Halal Standards through the cooperation of the DTI's Bureau of Products Standards and the ARMM Government.

Mindanao business leaders hailed the board's creation as a 'signal' that ARMM is going to

be a major player in the estimated \$10 billion worldwide halal market

"The ASEAN halal market is one of the biggest in the world, and the Philippines is losing out in terms of investment," said Mastura. "We are now marketing and branding ARMM as the Halal-based food production and processing center as envisioned in the 2004-2010 Medium Term Philippine Development Plan (MTPDP)."

Mastura also noted that the Board is also supported by Indonesia, Brunei, and Malaysia, particularly the JAKIM, Malaysian Standards.



The official logo of the Muslim Mindanao Halal Certification Board is unveiled before reporters and participants at the Dusit Nikko in Makati.

Muslim OFWs contribute more remittances on the average

BY ABDULRAHMAN ISMAIL

THE Philippines is the world's third highest net remittance recipient country after India and Mexico. In 2005, remittances were officially recorded at \$10.7 billion representing about 10% of GDP, according to Dr. Ernesto Pernia of the UP School of Economics.

Studying remittance flows from 1994 to 2004, Pernia noted the pattern of average remittances per OFW by region is higher in poorer

regions such as the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao, Eastern Visayas and the Bicol region compared with those in Metro Manila, Southern Tagalog and Central Luzon.

Last 2004, ARMM ranked first in average remittance - about 1.4 times higher than the national average: higher than Metro Manila, Central Visayas, Southern Tagalog, Southern Mindanao, Eastern Visayas, Caraga, Northern Mindanao, Central Luzon and the Bicol Region.

Moro women demand greater participation in peace process

BY AMINA RASUL and SAMIRA GUTOC

BAI ZENAIDA is the third wife of Commander Tropical, who controlled the MILF bastion in barangay Polomolo, Columbo, Sultan Kudarat. She may not be a combatant herself but she suffers just as well. She had given birth to her three kids in the forests and had stayed beside her husband throughout the GRP-MILF clashes in 2002.

Fears of renewed clashes, if the peace talks fail, consume Zenaida. Women suffer the most in conflict. Zenaida recounted her harrowing experience: "Kinakailangan nating

matulog sa damuhan sa tuwing may operasyon ang mga military. Nung panahong iyon all-out-war campaign po sya ng gobyerno taong 2002."

The desire for peace has pushed women in Muslim Mindanao to embark on novel projects. Women involved themselves in setting up peace zones, where parties in conflict pass through without fighting. Women are active in post-rehabilitation work in the community and in capacitating rebels, vital in translating peace agreements into real terms.

Following the demands of women to be involved in the peace process, the Moro Islamic

Liberation Front has taken steps to involve women thru the Bangsamoro Development Agency (BDA), a government-acknowledged agency through which the MILF will conduct development programs in the South. Unfortunately, women leaders like Dr. Cabaybay Abubakar patiently await the appointment of a woman director.

The Muslim Women Peace Advocates (MWPA) of Sulu have organized MWPA Councils in Indanan, Patikul and Jolo. MWPA Sulu Council President Norma Abdulla said they have conducted training in conflict transformation for barangay women leaders thru

a grant from the US Embassy. Former Senator Santanina Rasul, the founder of MWPA, said "Women are natural mediators whose potentials have not been fully utilized". Last year, the MWPA pushed for the cessation of hostilities between the MNLF and the government after fighting broke out in February. The MWPA will be meeting on October 28 to organize their conflict transformation work.

Women like Zenaida and Cabaybay continue to look forward for a negotiated peace settlement. As of the moment, they await participation from the periphery.

My Jihad: A Continuing Effort to Improve My Self

"One day, the Prophet (peace be upon him) while coming back from a battle, said: 'we have come back from a small war, and we are now facing the big war.' He was then asked: 'But what is the big war?' He answered, 'it is the war against the self.'"
—Sheik Khaled Bentounes

"Sufism: The Heart of Islam"
Ah, I love solitude: It allows me to reflect upon the directions of my life; to absorb the lessons I have learned from day-to-day pursuits; to write poems and simple folk songs; to meditate upon the glory of the Almighty God/Allah; and to actuate my inner *jihad*—to continue to strive harder to attain a semblance of human perfection in my thoughts, actions, dealings with my fellow man, continuing education, service to mankind, and daily prayers. The "self"—which shelters laziness, ego, selfishness, anger, intolerance, narrow-mindedness, greed, ignorance, etc.—is a tough adversary to subdue.

This morning, for example, on a pretext of a grey cold dawn, it beckons me not to say my *dawn prayer*; it tells me to stay in bed and cuddle up with my wife. "It's Saturday, for God's sake," it tells me. "Let the clock tick away the hours until midday; stay in bed!" Ah, but if I did that, I would be breaking my resolve and discipline to practice my inner *jihad*: to be a better person in both body and spirit. "Be in the moment of things and savor every part of the here-and-now," a Zen Master once said. "Wake up! Just do it!"

I feel very spiritual, romantic, and blessed as I savor the fog's mist on my face: I feel God's presence in this beautiful, foggy morning. So I perform my *dhikr* (a prayer of remembering God by repeatedly saying his name) as I run up and down/criss-cross the court, while I dribble the basketball between my legs and behind my back: "*La ilaha illa Allah...* (There's no god but God)." This field has now become momentarily my place of worship, my sanctuary, and my source of spiritual and physical strength. And I'm loving every second of what I am doing!

As I recall a Sufi (Mystic Muslim) teaching to achieve "perfection" in every aspect of my life, I head home at 9AM to drive my wife, who is a Catholic, to her church to pray this morning. The Qur'an states: "There is to be no compulsion in religion." (2:256). "O humankind, We have created you male and female and made nations and tribes, so you might come to know one another." (49:13) or "Surely the believers and the Jews, Christians and Sabians, whoever be-

The Jihadist Morsidy Husin

believes in God and the Last Day, and whoever does right, shall have his reward with his Lord and will neither have fear nor regret." (2:62).

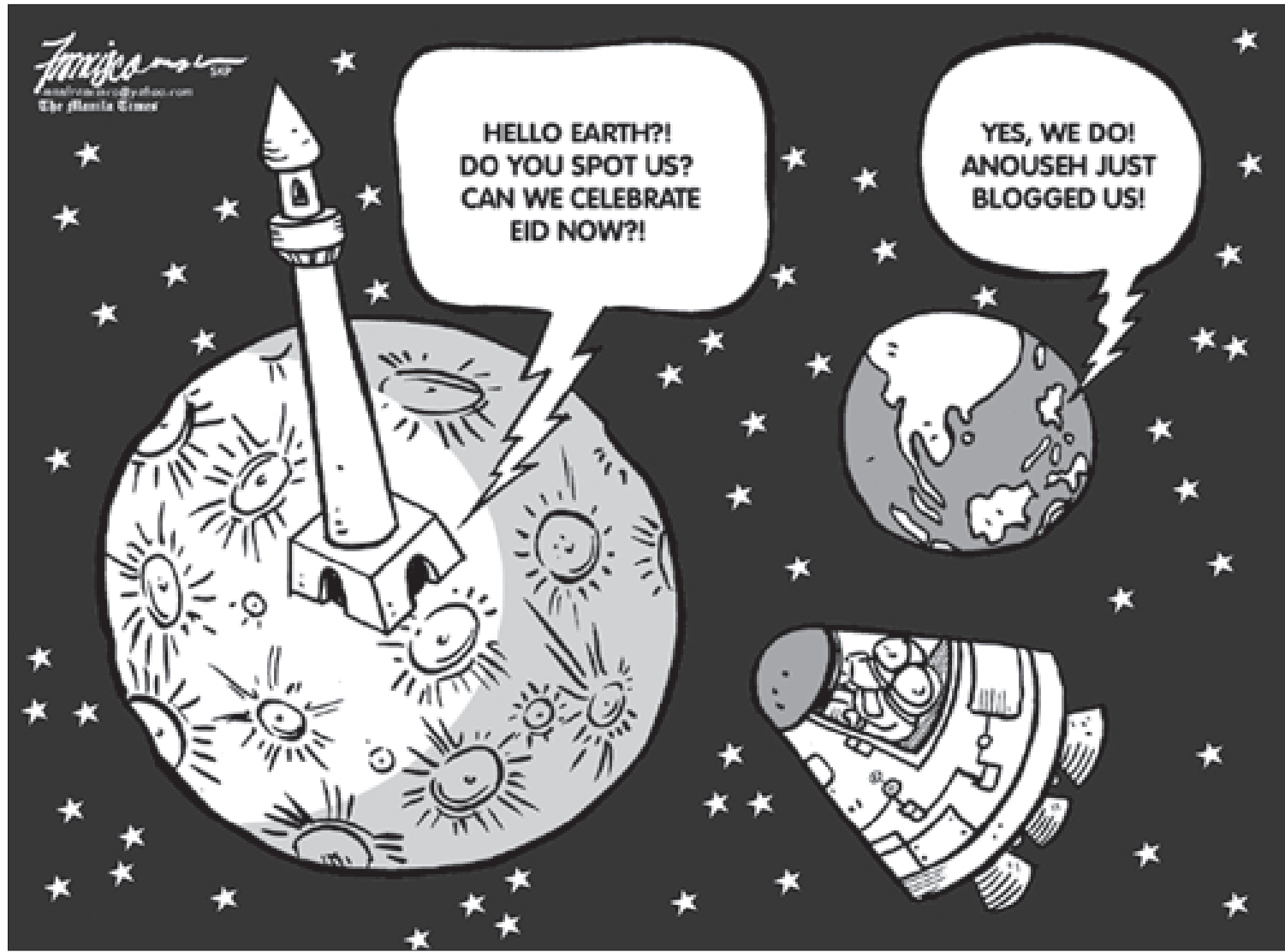
Thus I did not compel my wife to convert to my faith before and after we got married 25 years ago. I believe I was being true to the teachings of the Qur'an by not forcing her to do so. After all, faith is a personal thing; a thing which has been nurtured through childhood, traditions, and family up-bringing.

Islam never left my soul; it lies there patiently inside of me, waiting for me to wake up, giving me space to explore other philosophies and religions. But there is something about the simplicity of Islam that keeps me anchored to it; a simplicity that states: There is only one God. This one Almighty God sent a total of 1,024,000 messengers to mankind (According to Prophet Mohammad. The Message says: Do not worship the Messengers; worship the one who sent the message).

But let's get down to the basics about *jihad*. *Jihad* simply means "a struggle," "a striving," or "a great effort" in the path of God and the examples of

The *greater jihad* is basically the struggle of the soul to overcome its sinful tendencies, which precludes him from worshipping God, or from becoming a righteous human being. This type of *jihad* pertains to the struggle against the evil in one's life, a great effort to be virtuous and moral; a great effort to do good work not only for himself, but for his community as well.

The *lesser jihad*, on the other hand, is an exertion (military or otherwise) against oppression, injustice and tyranny. And while the lesser *jihad* is being constantly manipulated by the extremists to give religious sanction to their callous social and political agendas, this was not how Prophet Mohammad practiced *jihad* in his lifetime. The Qur'an clearly states that only defensive war is allowed (2:190): "Fight in the way of God those who fight you, but do not begin hostilities; God does not like aggressor." The Qur'an says (22:39): "Permission to fight is given only to those who have been oppressed...who have been driven from their homes for saying, 'God is our Lord'." The bottom line is: the so-called Doctrine of *jihad* does not apply to today's reality; most importantly, it clearly violates the peaceful and tolerant teachings of Islam.



Islam 101

Assalamu Alaykum Hamid Barra

believer to defend his membership in the community and for the community to defend the believer from harm.

Since we have just completed Ramadan, let us first explore the fourth pillar: *sawm* or fasting.

Sawm or fasting during the

only because it is during this month that Muslims are required to fast but also because it was during this month that the Glorious Qur'an was revealed. Thus, Ramadhan is a month of fasting, of revelation of the Glorious Qur'an, and hence, of Divine revelations. It is the month when a Muslim is trained to learn patience and perseverance, to practice sharing, caring and being compas-

testimony of faith, prayers and charity. When a Muslim testifies that he believes only in Allah as his God and object of worship, he thereby creates in his heart a feeling of submission and surrender to Allah's authority. When he fasts, he practices that faith when he does so without any person or authority telling to do so. What only requires him to suffer the pangs of hunger, thirst and desire for his spouse is the faith he has for Allah alone. Likewise, when a Muslim fasts, he reinforces his performance of the second pillar of Islam, that of prayers, by constantly joining the daily congregation, by performing supplementary prayers like the tarawih and the tahajjud. In the same manner, the pillar of zakat or charity is revitalized during the fasting season as Muslims are urged to share with others whatever they have in life. In fact, a Muslim is encouraged to spend in the way of Allah during the month of Ramadhan.

Finally, fasting during the month of Ramadhan teaches a Muslim self-restraint which is the most important provision a Muslim can have when he performs the Hajj, the fifth pillar of Islam. Allah emphasizes in the Glorious Qur'an that a Muslim should prepare provisions when he performs the hajj but the best provision to have is *taqwa* or self-restraint.

Hamid Barra is a fellow at the Philippine Council for Islam and Democracy, an author of books on Sharia, and is currently Dean of the King Faisal Center for Islam, Arabic and Asian Studies, Mindanao State University—Marawi City.

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month of Ramadhan, the fourth pillar of Islam, refers to complete abstinence from food, drink and sexual knowledge with one's spouse from early dawn to sunset. The daytime of Ramadhan is spent in fasting while its nighttime is spent in prayers, constant remembrance of Allah, reading and studying the Glorious Qur'an and sharing ones blessings with others. Muslims are required to learn self-restraint during this blessed month.

Ramadhan is significant not

sionate to others. It is also the month of triumph and victory for Muslims as all major battles fought between the Muslims in pursuance of the truth and their enemies who tried to block that struggle happened during this holy month. It is the month of worship and remembrance of Allah, of learning attitudinal change. It is a training institute for self-restraint and Allah-consciousness.

Fasting during the month of Ramadhan strengthens in the Muslim the performance of the first three pillars of Islam:

PILLARS OF ISLAM

Muslim of age must perform required religious obligations. These are: 1) the euphonious utterance of the *shahaadah* or testimony of faith: *ASH'HADUAN LAA ILAAHA ILLALLAAH WA ASH'HADU ANNA MUHAMMADUR RASULULLAAH* (I bear witness that there is no deity worthy of worship except Allah and I bear witness that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah). 2) performance of *salaat* or the five daily prayers; 3) payment of *zakat* or the required charity or poor-due; 4) *sawm* or fasting during the month of Ramadhan; and 5) performance of the hajj or pilgrimage to Makkah once in a lifetime for those who have the strength and means to do so.

The first pillar of Islam lays down the principles of *tauhid* and *risaalat*, which are expressed in the testimony of faith. The recitation of the *shahaadah* formalizes membership in the Islamic community, establishing a contract for the

Free From Fear and Free From Want

BY DR. PURIFICACION C. VALERA QUISUMBING

(Human Rights Chairperson Quisumbing assails human rights violations even after P1017 had been lifted with the government moving like it is still in place, with Muslims as the favourite target of anti-terror groups)

I dream of a giant human security blanket that will shield the Filipino race from any possible source of fear. I dream of a giant human security blanket that will serve as a carpet where everyone can live a good quality of life in dignity, comfort and peace—free from fear and free from want.

The reality, however, is starkly different.

The whole world is in a state of emergency where persons, families, communities, and nations are threatened by man-made disasters and natural calamities of catastrophic magnitudes. Measures have to be undertaken to stop these. Safeguards have to be put in place to ensure that every individual shall be undisturbed in enjoying his/her rights to life, dignity and self-development, and likewise, every society shall con-

tinuously exercise his/her rights to survive, self-determination and development.

Over the years, the concept of security—traditionally viewed as State security—has expanded to include human security as well as State security. The international community "urgently needs a new paradigm of security" because the security debate has changed dramatically since the inception of State security advocated in the 17th century. In the traditional idea, the State would monopolize the rights and means to protect its citizens. But in the 21st century, both the challenges to security and its protectors have become more complex. The State remains the fundamental provider of security. Yet it often fails to fulfill its security obligations—and at times has even become a source of threat to its own people. That is why attention must now shift from the security of the State to the security of the people—to human security.

Human security is a concept that focuses on the human being and seeks protection from threats to human life, liveli-

hood, and dignity, and the realization of full potential of each individual. It means focusing on individual people and building societies in which everyone can live with dignity by protecting and empowering individuals and communities that are exposed to actual or potential threats.

Respecting human rights is at the core of protecting and empowering people. Human rights identifies the rights and obligations to be upheld as legally binding responsibilities as well as moral imperatives. Human security, through the protection-empowerment framework gives better means to realize human rights. It gives equal importance to civil and political as well as to economic, cultural and social rights, and thereby addresses violations in integrated and comprehensive ways.

National Human Rights Institution (NHRI) such as the Commission on Human Rights of the Philippines (CHR) plays an active role in the realization and attainment of human security. With 15 regional offices, CHR can facilitate access to justice by monitoring human rights situations and providing the means

through which members of society can seek redress for their loss of human security that leads to violation of their human rights.

The CHR Region IX has remained steadfast in its Constitutional mandate in its fight against human rights concerns and continuing patterns of human rights violations against certain sectors (particularly women and children) brought about by the armed conflict within the borders of Mindanao as well as emerging trends of possible abuses in both civil-political and economic, social and cultural rights. These can be seen in the number of cases handled by the regional office. One example of this is the case of the Salvin Minors. In this case, the Military Intelligence Group's arrest and eventual neutralization of a notorious urban terrorist leader, led to the arrest also of several others including two minors. CHR ensured that they were placed at a separate cell intended for juvenile detainees and their case in the court is closely monitored. Another significant case is the one of the Subanens. Here, a group of Subanen and

small-scale miners from Zamboanga del Norte stood against a Canadian mining corporation, which operates drilling activities within an area claimed as an ancestral domain of the Subanens. The CHR resolved for the Petition for Cancellation and Revocation of an official agreement between the mining company and DENR and further investigation was made to determine possible criminal, administrative and other appropriate charges that can be filed. To this day, CHR continues to closely monitor the plight of the Subanens amid the threat of development aggression.

In summation, let it be emphasized that all of us should be decisive in ensuring the effectiveness of human security as a pillar of protection and share the responsibility in the challenges that threaten its continued existence. Human security is one of the prized freedoms that inhere in every human being and any framework aimed at placing it at risk must be approached head on with the commitment to uphold fundamental human rights and human dignity.

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[MUSLIMS ACROSS THE NATION]

■ **World Bank exec ambushed**

ARNEL DAKUTON, 50, the Executive Director of the World Bank and Japan Bank of International Cooperation-funded ARMM SOCIAL FUND, died October 4 from an ambush. He and his driver were sprayed with M-16 bullets when their car pulled up at a corner in Parang Road, Cotabato City. He was shot in broad daylight in a busy intersection by what witnesses say was a "motorcycle riding, military-uniformed, M16 totting assassin."

■ **First Moro women diplomat appointed ambassador**

MA. CORAZON YAP-BAHJIN, a Muslim career diplomat was confirmed as Chief of Mission Class II, making her the first female Muslim Ambassador of the Department of Foreign Affairs. Bahjin is currently the Acting Assistant Secretary for Strategic Planning and Policy Coordination.

■ **Jaycees honor Moro sculptor**

SCULPTOR JUAN SAJID IMAO will be honored by the Jaycees Chamber International (JCI) as recipients of the Ten Outstanding Young Persons (TOYP) of the world for this year, 2006. Awarding will be on November 12, 2006 in Seoul, South Korea at the 62nd JCI World Congress.

Partly blind, Juan specifically etches designs so that even the visually impaired can touch them like Braille, and appreciate the artwork. Incorporating this tactile quality to Inquirer's 90th anniversary mascot Guyito was important for Imao.

■ **Filipino filmmakers invited in Tehran festival**

FILIPINO filmmakers are invited to join the 2nd Urban International Film festival to be held in Tehran on December 16 to 19, 2006. Films may include documentaries, fictions and short and feature films. For further information on the festival, interested parties may contact: Mr. Iraj Taghipoor, festival secretariat, thru tel. no. (00-9821) 22264058, fax no. (00-9821) 22260692; or e-mail info@urbanfilmfest.org. Information is also available through its website: www.urbanfilmfest.org.

■ **MSU professor presented case study on coral reef resources**

Filemon Gueron Romero, Professor of Oceanography and Environmental Science of the Center for Oceanographic Studies of the Mindanao State University in Tawi-Tawi and fellow of the Philippine Council for Islam and Democracy, presented a case study entitled "Development of Collaborative Mechanism for Sustainable Use of Coral Reef Resources, A Model of the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao" at the Third International Marine Ecosystems Management Symposium at the island resort of Cozumel in Mexico on October 16-20, 2006.

■ **DOLORFINO From page C4**

Gen. Ben Dolorfino: Thinking Out of the Box

General Dolorfino came from a devout Catholic family in Dumangas, Iloilo. His parents were public school teachers. His conversion was certainly news to the family, but his father, Agustin Dolorfino, Sr., took it solemnly and respected the decision of the son.

"It was in the U.S. in 1987, that I felt the easy touch of Muslims. I had my Muslim classmates from all over the world when I was taking up Amphibious Warfare course with the US Marines in Quantico, VA". He had lengthy conversations on the faith with a Malaysian classmate and an Afro-American Muslim and has fond memories of his first Ramadan in U.S. in 1988.

Will a Christian understand Islam? "The Qur'an is replete with passages about Jesus (Isa) and the miracles about Mary (Mariam). There is even a chapter named after the Virgin Mary". He further said "I think Christians can read the Qur'an in good conscience without diluting their faith. I daresay it will even make them better Christians."

Did being a Muslim in the military present obstacles to his career path?

The General's grin was patently wide. "Yes, sometimes it does. For instance, when the army assigned me in Pikit, Cotabato for the rehabilitation of the Boliok complex in 2003, some complained in the hierarchy that I was 'too soft' on the belly, that there were no body counts, no skirmishes with the rebels, and no firearms recovered. I responded by saying that I accomplished my mission though, and that's what matters. The restoration and rehabilitation of the 20,000 evacuees in Pikit and Pagalungan."

"In record two weeks we were able to bring back the evacuees. Dinky Soliman and Secretary Deles were surprised that I and my men were able to bring back the evacuees and gain their trust."

■ **SEEKS From page C1**

Civil society seeks ways to break GRP-MILF impasse

"Explore extra-constitutional option," Mindanao leaders told the government panel.

In response, GRP peace panel chairman Sec. Silvestre Afable proposed to "come-up with a new paradigm in solving the problem to reconcile demands of the political structure and demands of self-determination of Bangsamoro."

Archbishop Fr. Orlando Quevedo suggested "creativity on both panels. The ball is entirely on the hands of both panels, refining and revising the package of each group. Look at what can be sacrificed so that a new whole can be made from both packages."

Quevedo said, "among the options is to go against or beyond the Constitution but not 'violative' of the Constitution. It seems to me that extra constitutional measures would be very appropriate. For instance, one cannot go without the phrase - the common ground of agreement - recognition of the right of people to self-determination. You will find that in several places in the Philippine Constitution. Once you accept that, there are many possible options that can follow and those options can either be against the Constitution or beyond the Constitution but not violative of the Constitution."

■ **Nationwide Survey on Muslims**

THE Social Weather Station (SWS) will be conducting a nationwide survey on perceptions of Muslim households with 1200 respondents on the question, "What issues on law and social justice are important to Muslims nowadays?" The project is an expansion of a survey on the perceptions of influential Muslims on the implementation of the Code of Muslim Personal Laws (CMPL) conducted in the past year.

■ **Young Moro Ramadan Fair**

THE Young Moro Professionals Network (YMPN) held its first ever *International Ramadhan Fair* at the Clamshell I, Intramuros, Manila on October 21-26. The first three days of the Fair coincided with the last two days of the month of Ramadan, hence Eid'l Fitr. The fair has the theme: 'Building A Socially Progressive Ummah, Strengthening The Universal Image of Islam.' The fair is supported by the Department of Tourism, the World Islamic Call Society, Manila Government, and the Office of Muslim Affairs.

■ **OMA Post-Eid Celebration**

MINDFUL that many of its Muslim employees took one-day leave from office to extend their Eid holidays, the Office on Muslim Affairs in Quezon City treated its employees to a post-eid celebration. Attorney Metalicop Domado, OMA Bureau Director on Muslim Cultural Affairs, said that among the guests are all government line agencies linked with OMA such as the Department of Foreign Affairs, Department of Tourism, The Landbank, and many hajj travel agencies. Personalities consist of the movie star Robin Padilla, Saudi charge d' affaire Mohammad Nabel Bukhari and Isabel Lopez Tobias, Secretary General of the Religious Affairs of the Office of the President. The Office on Muslim Affairs is now busy with its hajj operation. It advises would-be pilgrims to register ahead of schedule to avoid inconvenience and unnecessary delays

■ **Moro Stand-up Against Poverty**

SOME 4300 people strong participated in the Bangsamoro & indigenous STAND-UP AGAINST POVERTY on October 16, 2006 in Marawi City, Lanao Del Sur. The event is sponsored by ASSALAM Bangsamoro People's Association, Kamapiyaan Sa Ranao Center with Global Call to Action Against Poverty (GCAP-Philippines) as part of the World Poverty Eradication Day of the United Nation. Pendatun 'Penny' Disimban, ASSALAM President said "Let the world know that the Bangsamoro and the Indigenous peoples in Mindanao will continue to stand-up against poverty from now." According to the National Anti-Poverty Commission, the agency that keep tabs on poverty in the country, many Muslim provinces are among the destitute areas in the country, chiefly brought by the on-and-off war in the South.

What Ben Muhammad did next became a classic case study in the Marine schools. He worked with the GMA Kapuso Foundation and they were able to raise P2.5M for the repair of schools in the Boliok complex. To stabilize the livelihood of the people, he asked North Cotabato Governor Piñol for 1,000 sacks of seedlings and 25 tractors.

"The governor at first was skeptical, even joked that these people did not really vote for him. But he obliged." Today, the area is green with fruit trees. "I even planted a few mango trees hoping to eat one of the fruits when I come back." General Dolorfino also initiated the construction of the most beautiful mosque in the area.

"When I went back to Manila, napagdudahan ako. But General Senga heard me out", mused the General. "I think until now Pikit is still one of the more peaceful places in the area. It's already been five years and I still get text greetings from the natives asking how I'm doing and 'would I visit them someday?' Sometimes they told me that they have crop failure."

Brigadier General Ben Dolorfino is now the chief of the National Capital Region AFP Command and he hopes to use the same template he used in the countryside. "In the city, it's a bit complicated because you don't know where trouble is likely to erupt. My plan is to make various groups interact". Ben Muhammad believes Muslims must show that they are productive members of the community they live in. "We have to sell ourselves as good members of the society", he said. "God willing, we will pull through."

There were widespread prayers among Muslims that General Ben Muhammad Dolorfino would be once more assigned a Mindanao Command to help bring a just peace to the conflict areas. They continue to pray. Folks are awaiting his return. He still has to return to eat his mangoes.

The BUC and its lead convenor Archbishop Fernando Capalla together with its partners, the Initiatives for International Dialogue and the Mindanao Peoples Caucus gathered multi-sectoral leaders, among them Gov Manny Pinol, Mayor Omar Ali of the Muslim Mayors League, Joji Ilagan-Bian for the business sector, Fr Bert Layson for the civil society, Tommy Melanio Ulama for the indigenous peoples, Bishop Hilarion Gomez and Dr Mahid Mutilan for the ulama.

The participants agreed to hold a broad campaign for the resumption of the talks. The participants also supported a continued ceasefire, avoid setting of deadlines and exploring extra constitutional process.

The MILF had agreed with the government on the five-province and one city comprising the ARMM (Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao) as the core "Bangsamoro Homeland." The government offered 613 Moro-dominated villages, however the MILF wanted 3,000.

Taking the experience on the fate of the "areas of autonomy" listed in the 1976 Tripoli Agreement, the 1989 and 2001 plebiscites had reduced the size of such autonomous area when residents voted "no" for its inclusion in the ARMM.



Republic of the Philippines
House of Representatives
Quezon City, Metro Manila

MESSAGE

On the occasion of this holy month of Ramadan where the entire Muslim world observes fasting for self-enlightenment, and for spiritual and divine guidance, we in the LAKAS Christian-Muslim Democrats, the Muslim congressmen, and the Muslim populace in this country, wish to happily convey our sincerest greetings to everyone.

The LAKAS CMD leadership likewise hope that the blessings of the month of Ramadan be upon all the faithful. This Holy month is indeed a moment of recollection that reminds every Muslim not only of the pains of hunger and thirst, but also the true meaning of tolerance, patience, perseverance and forgiveness as well as repentance and humility.

Likewise, we humbly convey our sincerest greetings to the entire Muslim World in the forthcoming Eid'l Fitr Al Mubarak. And as we move forward in the face of this most challenging world, we trust that our unity in diversity will steadfastly reign.

Best wishes and may the Almighty bless us all.

JOSE C. DE VENECIA, JR.
Speaker

GERRY A. SALAPUDDIN
Deputy Speaker

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Lone District-Tawi-Tawi

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1st District - Sulu

MUNIR M. ARBISON
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1st District Maguindanao

ABDULLAH H. DIMAPORO
2nd District-Lanao del Sur

FAYSAH RPM DUMARPHA
1st District-Lanao del Sur

MUJIV S. HATAMAN
Party -List, Anak Mindanao

ACMAD M. TOMAWIS
Party-List, ALIF

BENASING O. MACARAMBON, JR.
2nd District-Lanao del Sur

Warmest Greetings and All the Best Wishes to:
The Moro Times
(and my compliments to The Manila Times)

Shalom, Assalamu Alaikum, Peace of God Be With You,
Kapayapaan Ng Panginoong Diyos ay Mapasa-Inyo,
Ang Kalinaw sa Ginoo Maanaa Kaninyo...

ALLAHU AKBAR
means
GOD IS GREAT

ALHAMDULLILAH
means
PRAISE THE LORD

INSHA - ALLAH
means
MAY GOD PERMIT IT

HE is called
God, Allah, Yahweh,
Jehovah, Eloi, Tao, Elohim,
Elli, Ella, Dios, Dei, Gott,
Pramatma, Ohm, Divine
Providence, Bathala,
El Shaddai, Diyos,
Tuhan, Poong Maykapal,
Atnatu, Apo Magbabaya
and other Majestic Names
that different languages
all over the world only
attribute to the Almighty,
the One and Only Creator

Sustainable
Economic Development,
Key To Lasting Peace...



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Happy Eid'l Fitr!!



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Yousuf Ledesma: Picking Up the Pieces

BY NASSER SHARIEF

JOEY LEDESMA was late. The time he set for the interview was 7:30 AM. Not that he woke up late. He had to catch the streak of the dawn to pray the *subh*, one of the five daily prayers required of a Muslim.

Born Jose Ernesto Ledesma from a prominent family, Joey—or Yousuf—is one of over two-hundred thousand Filipino Christians who have converted to Islam. They call themselves Balik-Islam.

The Balik-Islam community in the country has collectively suffered from suspicions of some members' involvement with terrorist bombings in the capital and around the country—an accusation they vehemently deny. Yousuf, vocal in human rights advocacy for Muslims, did not escape notice.

Ledesma was a Ph. D. candidate in economics of developing countries at the University of Massachusetts. He came home to gather materials for his dissertation and was caught in the maelstrom of anti-Muslim acts. "I just came back from the US at *napatol bigla ang* concentration *ko*." His name was included in "intelligence reports" on terrorist threats such as Oplan Green Archer.

His woes were compounded by personal problems. There were family members who could not accept his embracing

another faith. Joey comes from a devout Catholic family.

This does not deter Yousuf one bit, though. "We must have strong faith, family and livelihood. I worry that some converts get too immersed in the faith that they don't pay attention to the family". He believes that a sense of balance is necessary.

His vision is to create Muslim communities with sustainable economy "because this is the weakest link that needs strengthening." He sees Muslims caught in the vicious cycle of poverty. "The companions of the Prophet did not give up on their economic pursuit. They remained tentmakers, fishermen, and merchants".

Yousuf is donating 1 hectare of his 12-hectare land in Tarlac City to start his model community.

Gen. Ben Dolorfino: Thinking Out of the Box

BY NASSER SHARIEF

WHEN Benjamin Deocampo Dolorfino embraced Islam in 1981, many of his fellow young officers could not help but raise their eyebrows. They saw a love-lorn Navy officer. "What they didn't know was that as early as 1977, I had my first encounter with a convert, my XO Captain Robert Bruce. He was the first one, I think, who translated the Qur'an into Tagalog." However, it was in 1981, when interaction with another Balik-Islam in the service, Commodore Ismael Aparri, strengthened his decision to revert.

"I made sure that my decision to become a Muslim would be logged



■ Gen. Dolorfino

in the records, so I formally requested approval of the GHQ. Yes, there were some jittery moments but then my senior officers were able to establish that I was really serious about my decision."

Some were skeptical, so to allow

time for reflection, he was put into a seminar with the Imam in the AFP. He also had a seminar at the Maharlika Village in Taguig. He prevailed and emerged Ben Muhammad Dolorfino.

Twenty-five years have passed and Ben Mohammad and his wife Nur Aun (Mary Ann) who hails from Parang, Sulu have been blessed with three sons: Abraham, Jan Michael and Marvin.

Ben Muhammad went on to become a navy pilot familiar with the terrain of Mindanao and the fringes of its islands. "I fell in love with the place. I met my wife in Zamboanga. It was the height of the MNLF's rebellion in the late 70s. But I was not a bit discouraged."

See **DOLORFINO C3**

Ayala life
9 x40
c/o stripping