

The Moro Times

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Evacuees in Maguindanao Rising: Reconstruction Underway

BY SAMIRA GUTOC

BARELY has all of over 7,000 evacuees of Midsayap town in Cotabato Province gone back home when a chain of displacement was again reported by the Bantay Ceasefire of the Mindanao People's Caucus, this time, expanding to other towns of Cotabato and some municipalities of Maguindanao.

Residents of towns in Sharieff Aguak, Kabacan and Pikit have been evacuated due to exchange of fire between armed forces.

This aggravates the plight of evacuees in Central Mindanao reeling from two all-out war policies in 2000 and 2003, resulting in internal displacement of 934,340 people in 2000 and another 411,000 in 2003, according to DSWD estimates.

The areas covered by the investigating team of the Bantay Ceasefire are the towns of Midsayap, Aleosan, Pikit, Kabacan and Carmen in Cotabato Province, and, Gen. Salipada K. Pendatun, (GSKP) Pagalungan, Shariff Aguak and Mamasapano, all of Maguindanao province in the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao.

The Midsayap case had been caused by skirmishes between government troopers and Moro Islamic Liberation Front guerrillas last month over land conflicts. But this time, the displacement is an offshoot of military pursuit operation against 52 inmates of the Cotabato Provincial Jail who escaped from prison last February 2, 2007.

Evacuees interviewed narrated that at around 5:00 in the morning of February 9, 2007, government soldiers belonging to the Army's 75th Infantry Battalion swooped down Barangay Pidtiguian passing through the village of Pembalayan in neighboring town of Lambayong in Sultan Kudarat province.

The evacuees, who claimed they were informed that the soldiers were running after the jail breakers from the Provincial Jail of Cotabato, said they had to vacate their homes because they feared being caught in a cross-fire, though they said that there was actually no armed encounter that happened.

They also relayed having been informed by soldiers that the jail breakers were allegedly being coddled by one Commander Rudy of the MILF who operates and resides in the area.

As of February 16, 2007, not one of the evacuees have returned home and served by relief goods. They said they were afraid to go back home because the soldiers reportedly told them they were coming back anytime.

In Langayen, Pikit are 57 families, its members mostly children who walked around three hours all the way from Rangaban-2 and Rangaban-3 in Midsayap to the house of Langayen Barangay

Councilor Datun Jamali, who is a relative of most of the evacuee-families. They left their respective residences on February 2, 2007 following a military operation against suspected MILF rebels who allegedly killed a military deep penetrating agent identified as Untong Abdul.

The evacuees are among around 30% of the residents of Rangaban who have yet to return home. They have not been served by any relief organization as of February 15. Among their needs include food relief, kitchen utensils, plastic laminated sacks for tent and medicines for children and women sick of diarrhea, cough, colds fever and skin disease.

Except for Rangaban, Mudseng and Tugal, where 30-40% of their residents are yet to go back to their respective homes, 90% of the residents in all other barangays of Midsayap have already gone back home.

The Bantay Ceasefire recommended that local government units ensure all barangays have their respective disaster management plans, especially in areas identified as potential hotspots. The report also recommended the strengthening of the Adhoc Joint Action Group (AHJAG) manned jointly by the MILF and AFP military units, an impartial investigation by the Commission on Human Rights on alleged human rights violations, including alleged torture, illegal arrest, and illegal detention against suspected rebel supporters. There were also reported cases of food blockades that also need to be investigated.

Since land disputes is a major source of conflict in all these cases, it is being recommended that the government and the MILF hasten their talks on the strand of ancestral domain so they could immediately institutionalize a mechanism that would address land-related conflicts.

In a related report, the Bangsamoro Development Agency (BDA) in conducting rehabilitation of conflict-affected communities said another twenty barangays is expected to benefit from the Mindanao Trust Fund-Reconstruction and Development Programme (MTF-RDP) Phase I this year, which is supported by AusAID, Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), New Zealand's International Aid & Development Agency (NZAID), World Bank (WB) and the European Union.

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■ One World Institute Moro Arts Competition



First prize winner Rizal Alimuddin explains the historical background of his painting *Battle in Bud Bagsak* to Sen. Aquilino Pimentel. The competition is sponsored by the One World Institute, a non-profit organization based in California, USA. (See related story on page D3)

PHOTO BY ROBERTA GONZALES

UN Rapporteur Meets Human Rights Groups in Mindanao

BY SAMIRA GUTOC

THE anti-terror bill may have been passed but human rights advocates are concerned that politically-motivated killings may not decline.

To alleviate the suffering of the families of dead activists and journalists, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Extrajudicial, Summary or Arbitrary Executions Prof. Philip Laston came to Davao City on February 18 to hear the testimonies of victims of extra-judicial deaths.

International concern over human rights violations in the Philippines was raised with the spate of political killings in the past years. The International Federation of Journalists tagged the country as the "second most dangerous country for journalists", with a record high of 7 journalists killed in 2005, citing UNESCO statistics.

Mindanao ranked the most number of deaths of journalists, with Sultan Kudarat-based editor Hernani Pastolero as the most recent casualty.

"Prof. Alston's visit to the Philippines is a big boost to the morale of the victims of extrajudicial killings and their families," said Amirah Ali Lidasan, vice-chairperson of the Suara Bangsamoro Partylist Organization.

The Bangsamoro Lawyer's Network reported cases in Sulu, which included the Padiwan massacre in Maimbung in 2005; a man from Patikul whose head was hacked on Oct. 4, 2006 by the Special Forces of the Philippine Army; 2 farmers killed by the military in Talipao, Sulu last Feb. 12, 2007. On Feb. 19, a 14-year-old boy, Hakim abbilul, was shot in Kasambuhan, barangay tagbak, Indanan, Sulu, by a member of the Scout Ranger of the Philippine Army.

Relatives of the victims of Moro inmates shot in Camp Bagong Diwa clashes with jail authorities last March 15, 2005 fled from Basilan to Davao to meet Alston.

Mrs. Jumdatul Mundi's son, Gaffar Mundi was one of the 23 inmates killed in Camp Bagong Diwa as a consequence of General Angelo Reyes' no negotiation policy in dealing with the Abu Sayyaf uprising in Camp Bagong Diwa.

"When the mother of Gaffar Mundi heard about the coming of Prof. Alston, it gave her hope that Prof. Alston's will be a big help in her pursuit of justice for the death of her son," said Lidasan saying that it took Mrs. Mundi four years to fight for her son's release from Camp Bagong Diwa prison and two year to seek justice for the death of her son because of the jail clashes at Camp Bagong Diwa in 2005.

See RIGHTS D3

Lamitan in Basilan: a new city in ARMM

BY HADER GLANG

ZAMBOANGA CITY: The Municipality of Lamitan in the Province of Basilan, once sieged by the extremist Abu Sayyaf group, will soon become city before the May 14 elections.

This came as the Senate approved on February 5, 2007 the cityhood of 12 towns in the country, including Lamitan and three other municipalities in Mindanao.

House deputy speaker for Mindanao Gerry Salapuddin, author of the cityhood of Lamitan, said he is very confident that President Arroyo would be able to sign the bills into law before the May polls.

"It will be a blessing to the people of Lamitan and Basilan, generally. We have long wanted this to happen," said Salapuddin, who is serving his final term as congressman.

Salapuddin, who also authored the cityhood of Isabela town, is reportedly seeking for gubernatorial post in Basilan under the ruling administration Lakas-Christian Muslim Democrats-Kampi coalition.

If signed into law, Lamitan will be the newly created city in the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) and the second city in Basilan Province next to Isabela City.

But the country's league of city mayors is questioning the legality of the bills converting 12 towns into cities. The league is also petitioning the Comelec from holding plebiscites.

The 12 towns include Lamitan, Basilan; Batac, Ilocos Norte; Baybay, Leyte; Bayugan, Agusan del Sur; Bogo, Cebu; Borongan, Eastern Samar; Cabadbaran, Agusan del Norte; Carcar, Cebu; Catbalogan, Samar; Tabuk, Kalinga; Tandag, Surigao del Sur; and Tayabas, Quezon.

The city mayors believe that the cities' share from the internal revenue allotment (IRA) would get smaller if the government would allow the conversion of 12 unqualified towns.

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■ all for keeping the peace



To improve police service in the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao, PNP Police Director Oscar C. Calderon (3rd from right) turned over 11 brand new police cars and six motorcycles to Local Chief Executives and Chief of Police of some Local Government Units in the province of Lanao del Sur during his visit today at the Police Regional Office-ARMM, Camp SK, Parang, Shariff Kabunsuan. Witnessing the turned over ceremony is PNP-ARMM Regional Director Joel R. Goltiao (left), Asst. ARMM Cabinet Secretary Mr. Samson Gogo (2nd, left).

PHOTO BY BPI-ARMM

Internship for young Muslims set to launch

BY REY TRILLANA

A NEW internship program is set to open new horizons for young Muslims. The Philippine Council for Islam and Democracy (PCID) and the Philippine Business Leaders Forum (PBLF) will launch The Muslim Youth Mentoring Program (MYMP) as a response to the need to provide Muslim youth with the skills and network to succeed in business, thus contributing to the economic development of Philippine Muslim communities. Participating businesses will provide Muslim interns with the necessary experience in the corporate world and the training they need to help them assume leadership roles in the future.

The House of Representatives, through the efforts of Speaker Jose De Venecia, currently administers the Congressional Internship Program for Young Muslim Leaders (CIPMYL). Ms. Amina Rasul, lead convener of PCID, noted the success of CIPMYL but stressed that "we

need more entrepreneurs, industrialists, and economic managers". She added that the Muslim youth should be encouraged to join the private sector as this will allow them to help their homeland in terms of encouraging business and spurring economic development.

This is especially significant in the face of stark economic and business realities in ARMM. It has the highest poverty incidence in the country at 54% and it is the only region to register a negative growth rate (-0.5) in its per capita income from 1988-2003. The business situation is not encouraging either. Based on the 2003 Census of Philippine Business and Industry (CPBI) conducted nationwide, of the total 20,554 establishments with an average of 20 or more workers in the country only 54 are located in ARMM. The National Capital Region expectedly cornered the majority of the businesses at 9,427.

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Who will speak for the Moro?

WHILE democracy cannot be measured by elections alone, neither can it be fully experienced without giving elections central focus. One important way by which da pipol exercise their power in democratic regimes is through elections. In theory, elections give da pipol power over those who will govern them. In theory, minority communities can use this power to push for increased representation in government or to influence policy directions of candidates in return for votes. In theory.

The Muslims of the Philippines have long suffered marginalization in terms of political participation and regional economic growth. In 2004 there were 1,057,458 registered ARMM voters, representing 2.43 percent of the total voting population. Who will speak for the Moros? Will Sultan Jamalul Kiram dare to speak about the worsening situation of his people under this administration? Or will he follow the official party line that this government has brought peace and prosperity? What is the Moro agenda?

The peace process

The recent detention of Gen. Benjamin Muhammad Dolorfino and Undersecretary Ramon Santos highlights the frustration of the Moro National Liberation Front with the lack of implementation of the 1996 GRP-MNLF Final Peace Agreement (FPA). Although the detention of the government officials was a grievous offense which has shaken the confidence of many in the MNLF, still we must understand what forced the MNLF to act so rashly.

The laws creating and "strengthening" ARMM have not improved the lives of its constituents. The defects of R.A. 9054 (ARMM Act) must be examined and amended so that the Organic Act actually conforms to the letter and spirit of the FPA. Most stakeholders, especially the MNLF, have complained about the deficiencies of the Organic Act. If these stakeholders are to fully subscribe to the 1996 Peace Agreement, government must be willing to examine and redress those grievances.

Continuing armed conflicts in Mindanao have resulted in the displacement of hundreds of thousands. The displaced are not simply statistics or collateral damage. They are farmers, ordinary citizens, children. Before the conflicts, they had homes and lands to till. Now they are refugees. They require adequate protection, financial and other resources to facilitate their return or resettlement including access to food, water and shelter, education, social and health services.

The peace process must be supported. The full potential of Mindanao cannot be real-

The Jihadist Amina Rasul

ized if hostilities and security risks prevent private sector investments in developing its natural resources, agriculture, manufacturing, trading, tourism and other sectors. There can be no real and lasting peace with a military solution.

ATB and Mindanao

The antiterror bill (ATB), recently adopted by both houses of Congress, and the human-rights situation in Mindanao must be weighed carefully. At the heart of the objections to the ATB is the fear that the ATB will open the doors to further human rights abuses. As it is, even without the extensive powers it now seeks under the ATB, government's anti-terrorism efforts have already caused much suffering within the Muslim community with documented cases of warrantless searches and arrests, continued detention without trials, and torture. By allowing warrantless arrests for terrorism (still undefined), the ATB will only legitimize that source of fear.

What about coercing government for "unlawful demand"? Is calling for the ouster of the President unlawful? If so, can all opposition groups who have made that call be labeled as terrorists and therefore be placed under surveillance, their phone calls bugged?

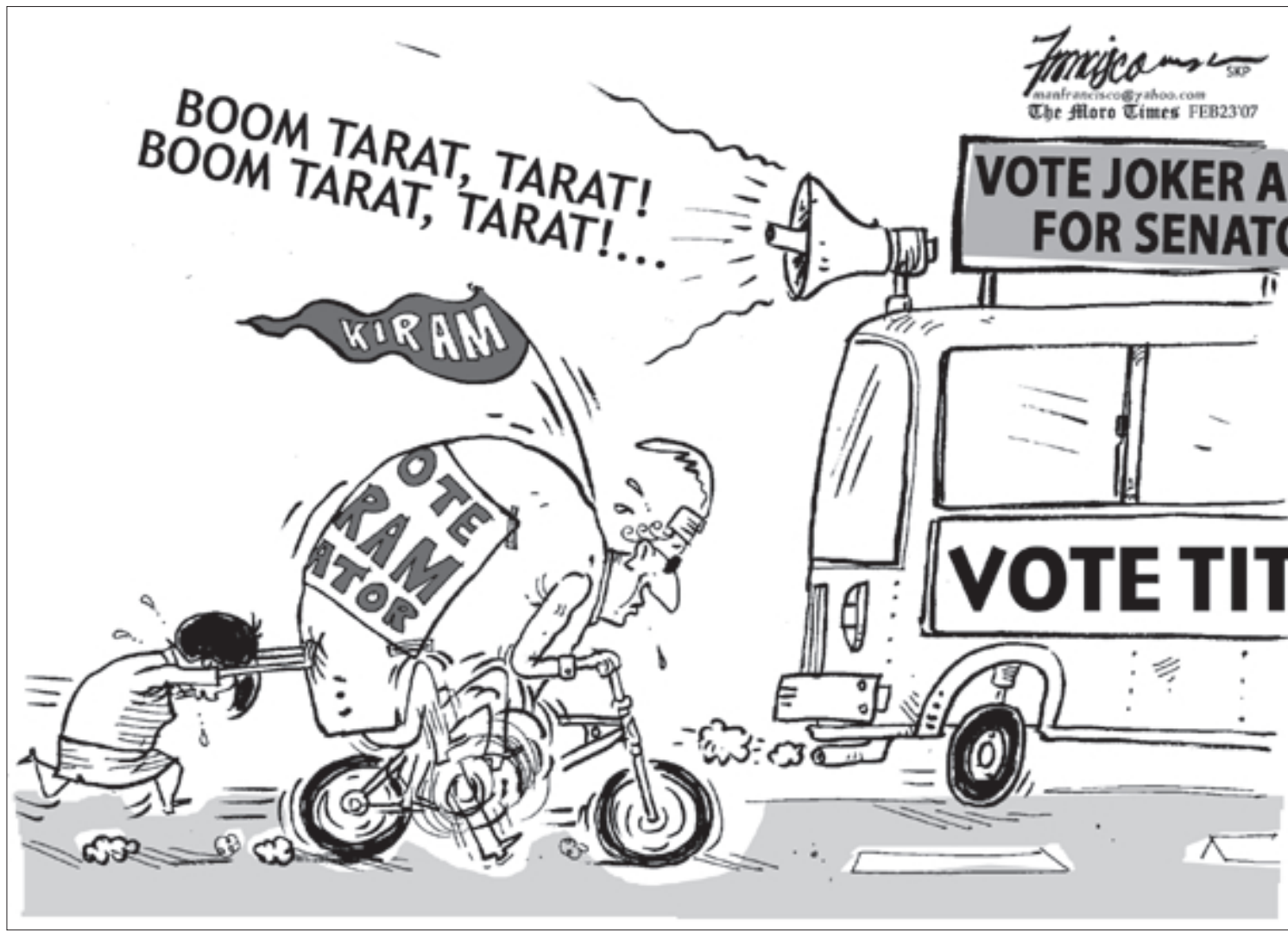
Since the ATB will most likely be ratified during the special session, the next Congress should seriously consider enacting a law that will grant enforcement and prosecutorial powers to the Commission on Human Rights, and support the creation of a CHR Office in the ARMM.

Democratic governance, accountability

Democracy building is desperately needed in ARMM. There can be no true autonomy if leaders are not accountable to their constituents, if citizens have no confidence in their government.

Budgetary appropriations remain a basic point of contention. Hence, there is a need to review budgetary appropriations for Mindanao based on its contributions to the national economy. Adequate funds must be provided to allow ARMM and the other Mindanao regions to catch up with the rest of the country. With more and more foreign aid flowing into the region, there also should be a study on the nature, impact and use or misuse of foreign aid to Mindanao. Development assistance needs to be more relevant to the needs of the citizens.

Mga kapatid, what is the Moro Agenda?
(Article taken from Durian.)



(Excerpts from the "Khutba" or sermon drafted by the ulama of the Darul Ifta of Central and Western Mindanao, delivered during the Friday congregational prayers)

KHUTBA

Islam: Peace is the Way, Terrorism No Way

ALL Praise is due to God. Any one who is guided by Allah, he is indeed guided; and anyone who has been left astray, will find no one to guide him. I bear witness that there is no deity but Allah, the Only One without any partner; and I bear witness that Muhammad is His servant, and His Messenger.

My respected Brothers and Sisters in Islam,

The subject of my khutbah is about where Islam stands in relation to terrorism. Sadly, terrorism and Islam have become so closely intertwined in most Western thought in these days, and this did not happen by accident. There are some people with ill agenda, who seek to discredit the good name of Islam, and who consider Islam as a threat to their global ambitions. There are, sadly, also some misguided Muslims who are playing directly into their hands, by committing acts of violence that are *totally forbidden* by the Holy Qur'an and the prophetic Sunnah. As to why they commit these acts of terror, the reasons may be debated on, but never justified.

Chambers English Dictionary defines terrorism as 'the systematic use of violence and intimidation to achieve some goal'. But in practice, the term is rarely used objectively. One man's terrorist is usually another man's freedom fighter. As Muslims, our only point of reference is our Holy Qur'an and Sunnah. What does Islam say about terrorism?

Islam, is derived from the Arabic letters 'seer' 'laant' and 'meent' which form the root word 'salama' meaning "Peace." Islam therefore means the state of being at peace, or to bring into peace. Thus, there is nothing in common between a way of life that stands for peace,

harmony, order, justice and compassion on the one hand, and acts of hatred, vengeance and evil on the other. Indeed, Islam and terrorism stand on opposite ends of the moral spectrum. In Islam, life is so sacred. It is a gift from God that He alone has the right to take it back. Murder and the killing of innocent civilians in warfare, is strictly forbidden.

The Holy Qur'an says, "if anyone kills a human being, unless it be [in legal punishment] for murder or for spreading corruption on earth, it shall be as though that person had slain the whole of humanity; whereas, if anyone saves a life, it shall be as though one had saved the lives of all humanity". (5:32)

One of the great moral debates in history has been the question of Means and Ends. Does the End justify the Means? Can one achieve moral ends by immoral means? Some people argue that the End justifies the Means. Islam is very clear on this. One cannot achieve *halaal* ends by *haram* means. The ends and the means have to inextricably be integrated with each other. Only moral means can achieve moral ends. This was the way of the Prophets and of all God's beloved servants, throughout the ages. However, much as we are provoked, much as we might be tempted to retaliate or to defend ourselves with forbidden actions, we cannot do so. Terrorism is evil. Terrorism is indiscriminate. An act of terror does not distinguish between combatant and civilian, innocent or guilty. By its very nature it is an act of cowardice. Islam does not promote or condone cowardice.

In warfare, sometimes, innocent people may get caught in the crossfire. Is this not just an unavoidable part of conflict? For true

Muslims, the answer is an emphatic *NO*. Muslims have clear guidelines on how to conduct themselves in battle. These Rules of Engagement were set by Prophet Muhammad himself, and were keenly observed by his followers. Muslims cannot dishonor a treaty; they cannot mutilate the dead; they cannot kill women, children, the elderly or any person who does not carry weapons. A Muslim cannot kill those engaged in worship, like monks or priests or Rabbis; we cannot cut down trees or burn crops or poison water supplies [i.e. use chemical weapons]. We are only allowed to kill those who physically attack or intend to kill us and thus act in self-defense.

Life is considered too precious to be taken carelessly. A Hadith according to Abu Dawood, says that the Prophet Muhammad came across a body of a woman after a battle, and he reprimanded his followers, saying, "She was not among those who fought us." Is it permissible to take the life of a non-Muslim?

The Prophet Muhammad said: "Whoever kills a *Dhimmi* [a non-Muslim citizen of an Islamic State] is not even going to smell the fragrance of Paradise"

In another important Hadith, the Prophet Muhammad said: "A Muslim is he from whose tongue and hands, other Muslims are safe; and a Mu'min, [a Believer] is he in whom all of humankind has a sanctuary for life and property"

Not only must other Muslims be safe from our words and our deeds, but the whole of humankind must feel safe in our custody! What an honor! What a big, big responsibility to answer for, on the Day of Judgment!

And, they call us terrorists! "Is-

lamic Terrorist" is a contradiction; a vulgar and mischievous travesty of language. Islam and terrorism should not even sit in the same sentence together!

Respected brothers and sisters in Islam! Islam has nothing to do with terrorism. Islam is indeed a religion spread all over the world recognized and accepted by the world as a religion that always advocate for peace and security and harmony.

The Prophet of Islam, Muhammad said: "You will never enter paradise until you become a true believer (mu'min). You will never become a true believer until you love one another. Shall I lead you to a deed that if you do it, you will love one another? Spread peace between and amongst you.

We must always seek the help of our Creator. Allah alone is able to facilitate any success. The formula is simple: we need meticulous planning, followed by hard work, prayer and supplication. Then we must be patient and persevere, entrusting our affairs to Allah. This is known as *Tawakkul*. It is our best guarantee of success.

Let us pray to Allah, to help us clear the good name of Islam. As Muslims and as true Believers, let our thoughts, our words and deeds, show convincing proof that Islam, the way of Peace, has no place for terrorism, whether it is individual, group or state terrorism. O Allah, in these difficult times, let us defeat the hate mongers and slanderers. In the words of your Prophet Moses, who prayed, "O Allah, expand my breast for me, and loosen my tongue." Help us also, by giving us wisdom and articulate speech. Let us personify noble character and good manners, and so win the war of hearts and minds, for Islam.

It is therefore high time for those who associate Islam with terrorism to look deeply into the teachings of Islam and peaceful message Islam.

MUSLIMS ACROSS THE NATION

■ **Educators were oriented on Islamic values at the National Participatory Workshop of ATEP** (Accelerated Teacher Education Program) Cycle 1, held in Regency Inn, Davao City on Feb. 9 convened by the Department of Education-National and BEAM-ESME (Basic Education Assistance for Mindanao-Extended Support to Muslim Education). ATEP Managers and ATEP Lead Trainers of the six partner universities (Mindanao State Universities of General Santos and Tawi-Tawi, Notre Dame University, University of Southern Philippines and University of Southern Mindanao) were trained on teaching basic Arabic and Islamic concepts to present to the prospective selected Teacher Education Institutions (TEI's) and Colleges of Education all over the country. The program is in accord with DepEd Order no. 51, series of 2004 which expands the offering of Arabic Language and Islamic Studies in DepEd to other regions in the country. DEPED Usec. Manaros Boransing headed the DepEd national while Dr. Ian D'Arcy Walsh and Mr. Noor Mohamad Saada led the BEAM.

■ **The Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) conducted a training at the Ateneo de Manila University on "Bridging Leadership Towards a Peaceful Muslim Community in the National Capital Region"** on February 13-15. Officials of government agencies such

as the Office on Muslim Affairs (OMA) and security forces were invited.

■ **The first Moro tenor, Abdul Candao of the Vienna Conservatory and pianist Najib Ismael** gave a series of performances in the Philippines starting February 8 at the Francisco Santiago Hall, PCI Bank, Makati and February 18 at Marawi Resort Hotel in time for Marawi Tourism Week with the theme, *A Night with World-Class Moro Talents*. Their performances are in coordination with the Department of Tourism of the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM).

■ **In time for Arts Month this February, A National Conference on Tausug Culture** was conducted on February 21-23 at the Ateneo de Zamboanga University. Angat Kultura will also be launched in Cotabato City by the ARMM through the Bureau of Cultural Heritage (BCH) with the support of the "First Ladies" of the Municipal Mayors of Maguindanao on February 13 to promote and preserve Maguindanao's culture. BCH Deputy Executive Director Omar Patadon said the BCH intend to discuss the concept of the program, "Angat Kultura" which will require every municipality to pinpoint musical instrument they would like to promote in their town.

■ **Young students mostly of Islamic Studies from Mindanao State Univer-**

sity (MSU)-Sulu, Basilan, Marawi and Cagayan de Oro converged on January 28 to February 1, 2007 at Mercedes, Zamboanga City for the 1st Risale-i-Nur Regional Reading Camp Facilitators' Training," with the theme: *Risale-i-Nur: A Mechanism Towards Self-Transformation and Eternal Brotherhood* in order to study and read the "Treatise of Light" known as the Risale-i-Nur collection written by a Bediuzzaman Said Nursi, a famous Muslim scholar who was seen as a *Marvel of Time* in Turkey.

■ **As part of the measures being undertaken by the Philippine government to improve the seaweeds industry** in the country, the Mindanao Economic Development Council (MEDCo) in coordination with the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR) has organized a mission tour to Sabah, Malaysia on February 11-17. The mission, which will be composed of public and private fishery officials from Mindanao and Palawan, is intended to bolster the performance of the country's seaweeds industry. The delegation will visit all the seaweed processing plants and some growing areas in Sabah and meet with their company officials. The group will also get into talks with officials of the Brunei-Indonesia-Malaysia-Philippines-Facilitation Center (BIMP-FC) pertaining to the conduct of the proposed 1st BIMP-EAGA Seaweed Conference in 2007.

■ **The Mindanao Peace Building Institute announces its call for applicants for its 8th training on May 21 to June 8.** This institute, which will run for three weeks, will bring together a wide range of people with experience, knowledge and skills in peace-related work in Asia and other conflict zones. Intensive training in areas such as religious peacebuilding, mediation, grassroots peace work, and conflict transformation will hopefully increase such skills, drawing on the shared knowledge of both the participants and the facilitators. Course fees are at \$400. Email mpi@ph.seapro.crs.org for application forms. The training is sponsored by Catholic Relief Services (CRS), Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) and Catholic Agency for Overseas Development (CAFOD)

■ **One World Institute announces the launching of the 2nd National Moro Art Contest** in Taguig this February. The theme is "Moro History - Past and Present." Many of the artists (mostly amateurs) are former rebels who laid down their swords for the paintbrush. Email YolandaOStern@aol.com for details.

■ **The Royal Sultanates of Maguindanao and Marawi City convened in Marawi City on February 18 for the 1st Mindanao Masuwara** (Consultation) for Solidarity, Peace and Development. Led by Sultan Kudarat

Governor Omar "Pax" Manguadatu, Rajah Buayan of Buayan, Maguindanao, the sultans passed a covenant to unify the Sultanates.

■ **The 6th ANNUAL QUR'AN COMPETITION will be held on MARCH 17, 2007, 9:00AM AT U.P.** Bahay Internasyonal, University of the Philippines. It is open to all students. Sponsorships, scholarships, cash prizes awaits the aspiring contestants is on process. Email shermanhis@hotmail.com; am12resh20@yahoo.com for details.

■ **The Young Moro Professionals Network (YMPN) with funding from the United States Institute of Peace will launch the 5th Young Moro Leader's Forum and Leadership Training** on February 28 - March 3 at Opol, Misamis Oriental. With the theme, "The Bangsamoro Future: Prospects and Challenges", the activity aims to facilitate the candid exchange of ideas among young Moro leaders on critical issues that impinge on the Bangsamoro future, strengthen the operational network among them and encourage their present and future efforts to improve the Bangsamoro welfare and solicit ideas for future collaborative activities that may help strengthen the potential for a lasting peace in Muslim Mindanao.

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Tractors bring hope to farmers in Maguindanao

BY SAMIRA GUTOC

PANDAG, Maguindanao: Rebel-turned farmers in the peace and development community (PDC) of Kayaga in this newly-created municipality are optimistic to increase their corn production come harvest time with a tractor provided to the community's cooperative.

The community has a land area of more than 2,200 hectares, most of which are farmlands planted to corn, palay, vegetables and palm oil.

Cooperative chairman Taib Kutia said the farm equipment would save time and money of the farmers as the tractor can complete the land preparation works of at least eight hectares a day while it takes nine carabao to get a hectare ready for planting given the same amount of time.

A number of the farmers have at least one carabao but some have no work animal at all. Farmers completed land preparation works after the

right planting season, thus suffering from failure in production and decreased income.

"Masaya kaming lahat dahil malaking tulong ito sa aming mga magsasaka (We're all happy as this equipment is a big help to us farmers)," said Kayaga Brgy. Captain Datu Abdulhamin Mangelen, Al Haj.

A farm tractor with plow, harrow and trailer was provided to the Bangsamoro MNLF Ummah Multi-Purpose Cooperative by the GoP-UN ACT for Peace Programme to improve corn production not only of the cooperative's members but also of other farmers in the community.

"Ngayon na meron na kaming tractor, matatapos na namin ang land preparation bago magsimula ang pagtanim (With this farm equipment, we can finish the land preparation before planting season)," Taib Kutia, chair of the cooperative, said.

The provision of tractor, according to Kutia, would also 'free' farmers from local traders whom farmers made arrangements with to help them during planting season. Traders would provide tractor services, seeds and fertilizer given that the produce would be sold to the trader the farmer is beholden to with the trader determining the price.

Kutia said cooperative members will receive 15% discount from the tractor services while other residents of the community will get 10% discount.

Aside from the farm equipment, the assistance also includes training on project monitoring and evaluation, im-

proved corn production and entrepreneurship.

"Dapat ginawa na natin ito nuon pa. Ipagpatuloy natin ang laban kontra kahirapan (We should have done this earlier. Let's continue the fight against poverty)," said Usec. Virgilio Leyretana, chair of the Mindanao Economic Development Council, which is the implementing agency of the ACT for Peace.

The need for farm tractor arose during a series of community consultations where people identified their needs and the resources available in the community. The need for farm tractor, as a priority, was presented and validated during the people's assembly participated by barangay officials, community organizers, and representatives from the municipal local government unit.

Kayaga is among the 263 PDCs, which are conflict-af-

ected and/or conflict-vulnerable areas being assisted by the ACT for Peace Programme to sustain peacebuilding initiatives in Southern Philippines.

Recently, the Programme, through various community organizers, helped these communities assess their needs and the available resources in their respective areas. The assessment served as a guide for economic and social interventions not only by the Programme but also of other donor and government agencies.

Supported by the governments of Australia, New Zealand and Spain, the Programme is also helping the PDCs to improve their access to integrated health program; strengthen their capacities to plan, implement and supervise economic initiatives; as well as providing training to enhance conflict transformation capacities of LGUs and CSOs. (ACT for Peace)

■ UNDERWAY From page D1

Evacuees in Maguindanao Rising: Reconstruction Underway

These twenty barangays will be distributed as follows: eight in Central Mindanao; five in Lanao, two in Sulu and Tawi-Tawi, two in Davao Region, one in Zamboanga Peninsula and another one in Southern Mindanao, according to BDA implementor Cotabato City-based Chairman Dr. Abas Candao.

The barangays to be selected will be based on criteria such as: number of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), incidence of conflict, poverty incidence, accessibility and security, availability of projects.

Meanwhile, the MTF-RDP is adjudged as one of the most fund-efficient projects of the World Bank as it has surpassed targets of at least one sub project but implemented six sub projects started as of December 2006. All these are done while minimizing cost and staying on schedule. MTF-RDP has no allocation for office and heavy equipment last year. It employs learning-by-doing strategy whose main result is people empowerment.

Currently, BDA is undertaking community-identified projects in Tipo-Tipo, Basilan; Sungayan, Dinas, Zamboanga del Sur; Momungan, Balo-I, Lanao del Norte; Sapad, Matanog, Shariff Kabunsuan (formerly under Maguindanao Province); Pacalundo, Tarragona, Davao Oriental; and Malisbong, Palimbang, Sultan Kudarat.

The MTF is a World Bank administered multi-donor fund that has been established to support transitional assistance, in the form of grants, for post-conflict reconstruction and development in conflict affected areas in Mindanao through a Reconstruction and Development Program (RDP). MTF-RDP refers to programs/activities funded by the MTF during its 2-phased implementation.

Activities/programs which will be implemented will be guided by the findings and recommendations of the multi-donor joint needs assessment that was completed in June 2005.

MTF-RDP is implemented by the BDA with the assistance of Community and Family Services International (CFSI) as Trust Fund Recipient (TFR).

BDA is a development agency organized by the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) Central Committee in accordance with the Humanitarian, Rehabilitation and Development Aspects of the GRP-MILF Peace Agreement of June 22, 2001. It has the mandate to determine, lead and manage relief, rehabilitation and development projects in areas affected by the war.

It has undertaken various economic programs such as seedling distributions, animal stock dispersal, post harvest facilities distribution, demonstration farms and has trained hundreds of families on cottage-based industries.

It is also identified as a major partner in the food-for-education, food-for-work and food-for-training components of the World Food Program by the United Nations.

It is also a partner in the implementation of the Japan-Bangsamoro Initiative for Reconstruction and Development (J-BIRD), a program of the Japanese Embassy, Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) and the Japan Bank for International Cooperation (JBIC) that includes crafting of the Comprehensive Bangsamoro Development Plan.

■ NEW CITY From page D1

Lamitan in Basilan: a new city in ARMM

"That has always been their (city mayors) position but they are not the law makers. We are the lawmakers," Salapuddin said.

"Why are they so selfish to deny what is due to others?" Salapuddin asked. "Everyone especially the depressed areas want also to be developed just like them."

He stressed the best way of equitable sharing of the national wealth and income of the government is by creating cities specifically those provinces without cities yet.

"As I have always said there is no better way of developing of countering rebellion and insurgency in the countryside than economically uplifting it."

Securing children's rights



Members of the Provincial Technical Working Group conducted on-site consultations with the Municipal Council on the Protection of Children (MCPC) in the provinces of Maguindanao and Shariff Kabunsuan. The MTWG visited the municipalities of Datu Montawal, Datu Odin Sinsuat, Matanog, Buldon, South Upi, Upi, Sultan Kudarat, Parang and Sultan sa Barongis. (Left) Emma Ali of DWSD-Maguindanao with Engr. Amy Dalandag (3rd, left) of DILG-Maguindano, Joy Bravo (2nd, left) from Commission on Human Rights 12 and a representative of the Local Government of Montawal (3rd, right) interviewed SPO1 Eddie Quia-ao of Datu Montawal on the needs of the law enforcement in terms of implementing the program for children under the MCPC. The on-site meetings is in partnership with the UNICEF. (BPI-ARMM)

■ LAUNCH From page D1

Internship for young Muslims set to launch

Even in micro enterprises—those employing less than ten workers—the region lags behind with only 5,339 out of the total 747,740 micro enterprises in the country. NCR has 168,167.

Number of Establishments with Average Employment of 20 or more, 2003

	Number of Establishments	Employment
Philippines	20,554	2.4 million
NCR	9,427	1.1 million
ARMM	54	6,584

Source: National Statistics Office

PBLF Chairman and CEO Dr. Michael Clancy for his part stressed that the program will also help private companies in terms of coming up with policies that are sensitive to the cultural diversity of the country.

Who Speaks for Mindanao?

The mentoring program will be launched on March 22 at a roundtable meeting to be held at the Manila Polo Club. The meeting will also include a forum that will feature Speaker Jose De Venecia, Senator Aquilino Pimentel, Jr. and senatorial candidates from both the administration and opposition tickets. The forum entitled "Who Speaks for Mindanao?" hopes to direct the attention of the public away from the personalities and negative campaigning of the elections to a serious discussion of issues that affect Mindanao.

One World Sponsors Moro Art Competition

BY SAMIRA GUTOC

CHILDREN frolicking on the beach; a mother hugging her child in fear while holding a copy of the Qur'an; various battles and historical scenes; and a boy Mujahideen cuddling an M16 rifle. In time for Arts Month, a Mindanao bares its soul, described the 50 entries that joined the 2nd Annual Moro Art Competition, unveiled at the Filipinas Heritage Library at the Ayala Center in Makati Ayala last February 15.

A brainchild of journalist from Sulu Nelly Sindayen of Newsweek, the Annual Moro Art Competition was sponsored by the One World Institute, a nonprofit California based public benefit corporation. Zamboanga-born Dr. Yolanda Ortega Stern is the president of the organization while her husband Thomas K. Stern, MD serves as chairman of the board. The Sterns, conferred a title symbolizing friendship by Sultan Kiram, said the Moro Art Competition was an important educational event for all sectors of Philippine and global society. Believing in the power of art to

break and transcend barriers, the Sterns poured considerable amount of resources to the project. All the art materials used by the participants are provided free, from canvas, oil paints, brushes, turpentine and linseed oil. The prizes for the winners are P20,000 for the first place; P15,000 for the second place; and P10,000 for the third place. All the non-winners will receive each a consolation prize of P1,000.

Former rebels held paint brushes instead of their guns to display their creativity. An accompanying note of the artwork with an rebel and a gun said it is "showing the eagerness of the Moro people to win the struggle for self-determination" and that they never wait to become old enough to fight for it. One work, depicting the traditional Tausug dance called Pangalay revealed little known facts denoting the valiant spirit of the Moros. The movements of Pangalay, a posted note explained, also comes in handy as a form of self defense for Tausug women. When used for combative purposes, the movements of the Pangalay are

called Langka Budjang, which has a martial connotation.

Grand prize winner Rizal Alimudin has an obvious penchant not only for art but also history. The 47-year-old Alimudin tried to capture in canvas the horror and glory of the battle of Bud Bagsak that occurred in January 11 to 15, 1913. Alimudin related that in the said battle, three valiant Moro leaders namely Nakip Amil, Datu Jami and Datu Sahipa fought to their last breath against the forces of American General Black Jack Pershing. The artist also told of a very interesting detail about the clash. According to Alimudin, it was in Bud Bagsak that the Americans first tried their new and most powerful handgun at that time' the .45 cal. pistol.

The second prize was bagged by 39-year-old Reynald M. Naluha with his entry portraying an old woman weaving a banig or native mat. A flamboyant dresser sporting a long hair and studded wrist bands, Naluha who is a native of Zamboanga del Sur used brilliant colors in his painting remi-

niscent of the vinta sails of Mindanao. His subject seems to have found peace and quiet dignity in the practice of her native craft.

Third prize winner 29-year-old Kamaruddin Bin Alawi Mohammad's entry "The Exotic Fruits of Sulu", the only canvas still life piece, in oil on canvas displays a subtle interplay of light and dark. Sulu is not just a place of brave people but a land abounding in nature's bounty as well. In addition to art, Kamaruddin is currently toiling for his master's degree at UP Institute of Islamic Studies.

Headed by noted art reviewer Joaquin Teotico, the contest's distinguished board of judges was composed of Rod Cornejo GMA 7 vice President; Parouk Husein, former ARMM governor; Dr. Mashur I. Jundam of the UP Center for Islamic Studies; Mrs. Marlene de Guzman; and Dr. Marlene Agaban.

The Sterns said that all entries in this year's competition will be exhibited in Davao, Zamboanga, Jolo and in San Francisco, USA.

■ RIGHTS From page D1

UN Rapporteur Meets Human Rights Groups in Mindanao

Eleven out of the 23 inmates were victims of illegal arrest and detention and have pending cases of torture against the army headed by General Hermogenes Esperon, then chief of 103rd IB in Basilan, that arrested

them in July 13, 2001.

The Commission on Human Rights has investigated the Camp Bagong Diwa clashes and presented their conclusion a year after which pointed the culpability of the PNP and General Reyes.

On August 21, 2006, President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo issued Administrative Order No. 157 creating an independent commission led by former Supreme Court Associate Chief Justice Jose Melo to probe the killings of media

workers and activists.

Citing the principle of command responsibility, the Melo report held Armed Forces of the Philippines chief of staff Gen. Hermogenes Esperon and other officers responsible for the spate of political killings.



Sultan Kiram: Candidate Royale

BY NASSER SHARIEF

HIS Royal Highness, Al-Sultan Mohammad Hadji Jamalul Kiram III, Sultan of Sulu, completed Team UNITY's 12th slot for the Senate. President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo unveiled Kiram's name at the KAMPI (Kabalikat ng Malayang Pilipino) national convention held at the Manila Hotel on February 12.

Sultan Jamalul Kiram's choice came like a magic wand. The sheer dead-weight of the Royalty tipped the balance in the Sultan's favor. When Gabriel Claudio, the President's political adviser, was asked an explanation how Sultan Kiram had edged out the popular actor Richard Gomez in the last senate slot, he had no words for it but to say: "Because he is the Sultan of Sulu."

Moro Times was able to catch the Sultan at the Ambassador Hotel in between engagement to get an exclusive interview. The Sultan, always crisp and direct to the point, and accommodating, wasted no words.

MORO TIMES: Your highness, what made you decide to run for the senate?

SULTAN KIRAM: This is the only chance for Muslims to be heard, the last train I believe. An opportunity, it is. As it turns out, I'm the only Muslim candidate so far. So I say, let's forget tribal exclusions—we're all one in this. *Hawaak natin and ating kinabukasan at huwag tayong maghiwa-hiwalay.* We really cannot forgo this chance—*baka next time around eh wala na tayong tsansa.*

MORO TIMES: How does your entry into the fray affect the Sabah question?

SULTAN KIRAM: This election is an exercise in politics. Let's not put the Sabah question on the agenda.

MORO TIMES: How did you find yourself in the UNITY ticket? Was this premeditated?

SULTAN KIRAM: I'm rather thankful to the UNITY ticket for including me. This is a coalition party, the PDSP. The party pushed me up. The President of the Philippines is keen on my running for the Senate because she believes I will be able to make a significant difference compared to the run-of-the-mill type candidates. I'm a fresh choice so to speak.

MORO TIMES: How do you assess your chances?

SULTAN KIRAM: My party, the coalition plus the Muslim voters will be a great factor. I'm confident. My relationship with the Christian populace in this country has not tarnished. I had touched the fate of many people around the country, albeit in less pompous ways.

MORO TIMES: What is your stand



■ His Royal Highness, Al-Sultan Mohammad Hadji Jamalul Kiram III, Sultan of Sulu in a relaxed mood while he listens to the supplications of visitors and courtiers. The Sultan is running for the Senate of the Philippines, the first time ever that a royal figure of the Sulu Sultanate makes a bid in the political scene.

PHOTO COURTESY OF THE OFFICIAL ROYAL ARCHIVES OF THE SULU SULTANATE

on the Anti-Terror Bill?

SULTAN KIRAM: The ATB? No comment. No, I don't have a stand on the Anti-Terror Bill. But I'm against any form or degree of terrorism. It's sad that terrorism is equated by others with Islam. It really gives us a bad name. I think we have to eradicate this naiveté.

MORO TIMES: What's your relation with the MNLF?

SULTAN KIRAM: I have no formal relation with the MNLF but of course I know many of them, especially those at the helm. My concern is the historical right of the Sultanate. I'm not about to espouse any political moves. The right of the Sultanate is beyond any politics. For as long as there are Muslims in this country, they are my constituents. Nothing can take that from us. It's as basic as the air we breathe.

MORO TIMES: How about the MILF?

SULTAN KIRAM: I used to have

working relationship with Hashim Salamat. He has consulted me on a number of occasions. As with many Muslims, I had good chemistry with him. As well, I get along with many national leaders. I'm willing to work along with anyone as long as it's for the common good of our people. Why not?

MORO TIMES: What are your thoughts on developments in Mindanao? What will be your approach?

SULTAN KIRAM: This may have been said many times and heard many times over, but there can't be transformations and progress in the South without solving the peace. Peace is the very key. Peace has to be layered first before any additional coating is applied in turning around Mindanao for the better. I want to unite people—Muslims and Christians—in working for the common good of the people in

the countryside. Through cooperation, respect for each other's right to pursue their own goal as long as they don't cancel out another's right, we can make the future bright for our children.

MORO TIMES: What would be your role in this?

SULTAN KIRAM: The Sultanate is an anchor for us. I want to work for Special Bills—Bills on Ancestral Domain, Restoration of the Historical Rights of our people, and bringing back our culture. We need the Sultanate more than ever. It's my pride that I was the first one to convene Moro leaders in Saudi Arabia in the eighties when there seemed to be no end to the impasse among the leaders. And I didn't ask to be compensated for the job.

MORO TIMES: How do you assess the current situation in Mindanao?

SULTAN KIRAM: Mindanao has worsened since the ditching of the Sul-

tanate. There ought to be a revival of our traditions. *Dapat huwag magalit ang ating Muslim leaders ngayon pero ang masasabi ko ay sila ay watak-watak.*

MORO TIMES: The other royalties in the South, how do they receive your candidacy?

SULTAN KIRAM: The Royal Houses of Lanao give me the utmost respect worthy of the Sultanate. Whenever I visit the lake, they go out of their way to make me and my entourage comfortable in every way possible. I daresay that my candidacy is their candidacy too. It's their fight. For the first time we will be taking up a common cause. One thing with the present setup is that we cannot be choosy with what we can have. We have to pivot our way round the system.

MORO TIMES: Who supports you initially?

SULTAN KIRAM: Let me be honest, even if blunt. We don't have budget for the election. I'm banking on my friends, supporters and the goodwill of the Sultanate to the people to give me a chance to provide the necessary angle in the political reckoning of this country, the Philippines.

MORO TIMES: What can you say for the country compared to other Asian countries?

SULTAN KIRAM: Ours don't look back. Look at Japan, no matter how modernized they are they always have schemes of incorporating their tradition in their homes, workplace, parks and the like. In 1985 I was guest of Don Sasagawa in Osaka. And I cried because of what I saw. Here is a people who don't betray the thread of their past.

MORO TIMES: How you came to be invited to Japan? As a royal guest?

SULTAN KIRAM: It came by accident. It started with the kidnapping of one Japanese in Sulu. I was asked to help work out the release of the hostage. He was I believe taken by a so-called "lost command" from the MNLF, a splinter group. It was a serious case. He was held for a year, so I was enlisted to help. It took 2 months to negotiate. Without any ransom, with just food and a few packs of cigarettes I was able to pull off a deal with the captors. As a token of goodwill, the Don Sasagawa foundation donated hospital equipment in the form of beddings, endoscopy machine, incubators and some minor instruments. And we also received a boat to go with the donation. All these, I have handed over to the Provincial Health Office.

MORO TIMES: So far how is your campaign doing?

SULTAN KIRAM: We will have our first salvo in Cebu. I was not floated. I am the surprise candidate of the UNITY ticket. So far my reception has been very encouraging. As sampler, Mayor Tinga of Taguig City has pledged that they will see to it that I will turn out Number One in Taguig. The same goes with every town I visited.

Aquilino Pimentel III: Will he Champion the Moro Agenda?

BY NASSER SHARIEF

CCANDIDATES are now busy wooing voters that you can hardly get at them this campaign season. But voters are equally not passive either. Much so in the case of Moro voters. Always mindful how their cause is always glossed over in the Senate and the Congress, they too shop for their own candidates to fill up their ballots—candidates who are willing to take up the cudgel in advancing their cause, or at least give it a try.

This election period is no exception. With only the Sultan of Sulu, his highness, Jamalul Kiram III running for the Senate from among the Muslims (see interview in this issue), Senatorial candidates who are mostly outside Mindanao are keenly aware it is open season to hunt for the Moro vote. One of the favorite choices is the young Aquilino 'Koko' Pimentel III of Cagayan de Oro, who already has formed an extensive relationship with the Muslims in the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) and the pockets of Muslim communities from around the country.

Koko's discipline and capacity for brain work made itself manifest to the public when he topped the bar exam in 1990. Koko, unknown to many Filipinos, is also a chess wizard. In the 80s, he competed in tournaments with seasoned masters and even internationally titled players. Koko was one who would never refuse a skittle game no matter how busy he was. Even when he was honeymooning with then Binibining Pilipinas Jewel May, the couple could be seen frequenting the Grandmaster Café near the rotunda of Timog in Quezon City where the

likes of Grandmasters Joey Antonio and Eugene Torre used to hang out.

Jewel said that if it could be called a weakness, Koko's rigid adherence to rules has few peers. "He respects the red, the green, and the yellow of the traffic light. My husband may not be pious but he is God-fearing. He is honest in dealing with people and he doesn't like underhandedness."

Why is he running for the Senate? "Koko is running because he wanted to be remembered for generations. He doesn't want to be just a flash in the pan. He wants to endure in the minds of the Filipinos. His vision spans generations, and I hope Filipinos will appreciate this side of him, especially the youth."

Although estimates are too early, Koko is seen to be topping the surveys in the race for the senate. He is an official candidate of the Partido Demokratikong Pilipino-Lakas ng Bayan, the party headed by his father and one of the parties allied with the United Opposition (UNO).

A day before Valentine's Day, Koko unveiled his 10-Point Agenda: Alleviate the problem of massive poverty of our People; Pursue a national peace agenda; Provide a universal health delivery system; Guarantee education as right; Empower the youth; enhance local autonomy; Improve the justice system; Strengthen the social services; Protect the environment, and; Support women's rights.

The young Pimentel said that his platform revolves around issues of the milieu in which he grew up: the justice system, science and technology, rule of law and local autonomy.

In his Rule of Law platform, Koko stated that "everyone—rich or



■ Aquilino Martin 'Koko' de la Llama Pimentel III and wife, beauty queen Jewel May Colmenares Lobaton-Pimentel, greet Moro supporters in Manila during the filing of senatorial candidacy. Koko is running under Partido Demokratikong Pilipino-Lakas ng Bayan allied with the United Opposition (UNO). Koko Pimentel is hoping to extend the services his father had done for the Muslim population in the Philippines. One of his priorities in the 10-Point Agenda he unveiled on the eve of his filing his candidacy is the "pursuit of peace to end the long Moro secessionist wars by instituting a federal system of government, and other rebel challenges by addressing their root causes. A B.S. Math major before he topped the bar exam in 1990, Koko Pimentel is reputed to process problems very fast and dish out solutions efficiently. He hopes to appeal to the youth by keeping abreast with information technology and making science education a keystone in his platform.

poor—must have access to competent legal assistance and advice. Rules are rules for both the governing class and the governed. All government officials must accept that they too are subject to the law. The government itself must be law-abiding. We must cultivate this culture..."

On education, Koko believes that the key to breaking the chain of poverty is science and technology. "Thoroughly a product of the internet age, Koko spends a decent amount of time keeping in-tune with every development in information technology. He has researched and attended courses on Cybercrime and Internet Laws here and abroad," Jewel said.

On Local Autonomy, Koko's fa-

ther, Senator Aquilino Pimentel, Jr., champions the federal form of government as an equitable system for the Philippines to solve the imbalance in allocating the country's resources, and giving certain groups a setup conducive to their unique needs. "Local Autonomy is the key to bringing development to the countryside. This will break the provinces' dependence on the central government represented by 'imperial Manila'... Why ask Manila what is best for Mindanao? For Bicol? For Visayas and the Ilocos Region?" said Koko. "In our increasingly complex world, Local Government need to be run more like corporations, with an emphasis on planning and competent management."

Pundits are of the opinion that in the coming election Moro voters should bank on the local autonomy agenda when making a decision whom to vote for among the candidates. In Point 2 of his 10-Point Senatorial Agenda, Koko said that "to end the Moro secessionist wars, a federal system of government must be put in place."

Paisalin P. Tago, Speaker of the Regional Legislative Assembly of the ARMM, who is also President of the Muslim Alliance For Pimentel (MAP), said that "Koko Pimentel espouses just the kind of agenda that occupies the mind of every Muslim in the country. He appreciates our needs that's why we are backing him. I'm confident that come May he will have us—lock, stock and barrel."