

The Moro Times

FRIDAY
May 25, 2007

Islam and Democracy Forum:

Asian Observers share experiences in Democracy

BY REY TRILLANA

IN preparation for their election monitoring activities, the 21-member election observers from Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand attended last May 6 an *Islam and Democracy Forum* in Zamboanga City organized by The Asia Foundation and the Philippine Council for Islam and Democracy (PCID). The forum gathered election observers from the Asian Network for Free Elections (ANFREL) and Muslim civil society groups in a discussion of electoral democracy in Muslim communities.

Dr. Zahurul Alam from Bangladesh noted that Islamic civil society organizations could act as a catalyst for promoting improved governance, strengthening democratic institutions and ensuring human rights should they be properly guided, funded and monitored. "They should make people aware about the fact that the very basics of Islam condemn injustice, terrorism, anarchy, corruption, intimidation, misuse of power and dictatorship and other non democratic acts".

Democracy and Women's Rights

Rashida Banu Rashad of Pakistan's People's Action for Free and Fair Elections (PAFFREL) took pride in her country's democracy (see full text of her speech on page 2). She said that any ethnic or religious group in her country has the democratic liberty to form their own organizations or political parties. Mrs. Rashad lamented that while there is constitutional safeguard to equality, still some Muslim men treat their wives as

inferior. While the educated, intelligent, understanding and broadminded Muslim men really treat their wives with "real freedom of democracy", the "uneducated extremist husbands misinterpret the true values of Islam and keep their wives for the bed and kitchen".

Islam and Democracy

Imam Subkhan of Indonesia's People's Voter Education Network (JPPR) explained that Indonesia Islamic civil society, like *Muhammadiyah* and *Nahdlatul Ulama*, plays significant role in promoting the values of democracy and a pluralistic way of life.

He said that a debate as to the compatibility of Islam and democracy still rages among scholars and democracy advocates in Indonesia. There are some, he averred, who fully accept democracy with the strong belief that Islam is compatible with democracy. Then there are those who believe that Islam



■ A party poll watcher is carrying the ballot box in the town of Matanog when an inspector of the Board of Election should have been the one carrying it.

PHOTO NATALIA WARAT

and democracy are compatible but stressed "the importance of contextual democratic values in Islamic countries". But there are also those who reject democracy because they think that it is contradictory to both values and practices of Islam.

Yunus Ali from Malaysia for his part explained that the multi-ethnic and religious pluralism in Malaysia has protected Malaysian democracy from turning into an Islamic theocratic State, watering down one-party dominance and putting a curb in their march to political power. He admitted, however, that the present democratic process in Malaysia is not an ideal democracy and that there are many areas need improvement.

Dr Suria Saniwa of Thailand meanwhile praised the virtue of democracy in preventing radicalization. Citing his own studies, he argued that the democratization of the system became the major probable cause which has influenced the ethnic Malay-Muslim movement to change its strategy towards moderation.

Rule of Law versus Law of the Jungle

Former Senator Santanina T.



■ Marines patrol the town of Sulu. Comelec stopped the canvassing after suspecting anomalies.

PHOTO NASH MAULANA

Rasul emphasized the importance of the midterm elections. She said that "the May 14 election will determine whether Muslim Mindanao will still maintain a semblance of a democracy, or become strengthened as an oligarchy. It will determine which will prevail: the rule of law or the law of the jungle."

Despite the problems in electoral; democracy in Muslim Mindanao, Dr. Rasul remained hopeful that current efforts from civil society can start a process of improving the state of affairs in ARMM.

"The seed of a challenge to the existing fraudulent electoral practice has been planted, with Muslims and Christians working together, to attain the objectives of clean and honest elections."

Amb. Henrietta de Villa for her part recalled how PPCRV capitalized on the residue of the EDSA One People Power high to invite volunteers and work for democracy. In the 2007 elections, PPCRV is well prepared to combat what she referred to as "shadows" and "dark forces" out to frustrate the will of the people.



■ Participants of the Islam and Democracy Forum in Zamboanga City pose for a group photo. The forum was attended by Dr. Santanina Rasul (middle, seated), PPCRV Chair Henrietta De Villa (second from left) and 21 election observers from 6 Asian nations.

Asian Network for Free Elections

Excerpts from preliminary statement on 2007 election

DURING the last elections, we visited 500 precincts, observed preparations for May 14 until the counting process by interviewing candidates, election and other government officials, non-government organizations, and citizens.

Observations included some localities where Election Day was properly conducted by all stakeholders, upholding law and order, freedom of expression, and freedom of choice. Observers appreciated the good media cooperation and coverage about electoral information.

Despite the enthusiasm and determination of voters to choose their government, the active support of Muslim and Christian

leaders, and the best efforts of most COMELEC officials and teacher/poll workers, ANFREL observed an election day process plagued with problems, and an environment marred by intimidation, threats and violence. The low quality of elections in the ARMM, the general impression that the process is manipulated by outsiders, and the culture of impunity for election and political crime, can fuel calls for alternative government that can provide justice for the people.

ANFREL still would like to see significant reform in the election process and the legal and political environment to ensure the establishment of free and fair elec-

tions in the future.

There was very little voter education in the ARMM. To create a fair competitive environment for all candidates, it is important to enforce the law and to punish those government officials who use government facilities, vehicles and staff to support the campaigns of incumbent candidates or parties.

Since in political campaigns there is always risk of conflict and violence, candidates and parties should not involve children because this contrary to the Child Rights Convention.

All candidates should respect the election law by not campaigning on the day before and polling

day. No poll watchers, voters and members of the parties should distribute campaign fliers inside or outside the precincts on election day.

The supporters, poll watchers, members and party agents should not assist the candidates with unethical means, i.e., intimidation, harassment, discrimination, revenge etc.

COMELEC and Board of Election Inspectors (BEIs) in all levels must perform their work effectively and transparently so that no candidate or party will be able to influence the Commission and its officers.

Erring officers who cooperate with the candidates and poll

watchers to manipulate the voting and results must be punished and dismissed from their work.

Poll watchers should not be allowed to assist or intervene in the activities of voters during the election time. The number of members on a BEI could be increased to more than three persons if it is not compatible to the amount of work on the election day, so they will not ask for assistance from the poll watchers.

To make the voting process run in an orderly way, all voters should form a queue, and voters should not be assisted to vote except for illiterate and disabled voters. The COMELEC should con-

See ELECTION D3

Military urged to uphold "primacy of peace"

BY SAMIRA GUTOC

"AN atmosphere of relative peace in Mindanao." With this statement the Office of the Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process (OPAPP) in its 2006 accomplishment report outlined the successes of talks between the government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) citing the components of negotiations on ancestral domain, rehabilitation, the Ad-hoc Joint Action Group (AHJAG) and the International Monitoring Team (IMT) which has expanded to include Sweden and Japan.

President Gloria Arroyo recently issued a statement saying, "Without impairing the operational flexibility and quick response of the AFP in countering threats of terrorism, insurgency and criminality, all commanders in the field are enjoined to be constantly aware of the strategic implications of tactical actions in the proximity of MILF areas. I have also ordered restraint in the use of artillery and aerial bombing in the conduct of military operations."

In line with government's pro-peace agenda, General Hermogenes Esperon, Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) issued a memorandum on the Primacy of the Peace Process framework to guide field commanders in Moro areas. The main tenets of the guidelines include: Operational mode of the AFP is active defense—"only the conduct of show of force, threat to use force, hot pursuits and authorized preemptive strikes for self defense and protection of civil-

See PEACE D3

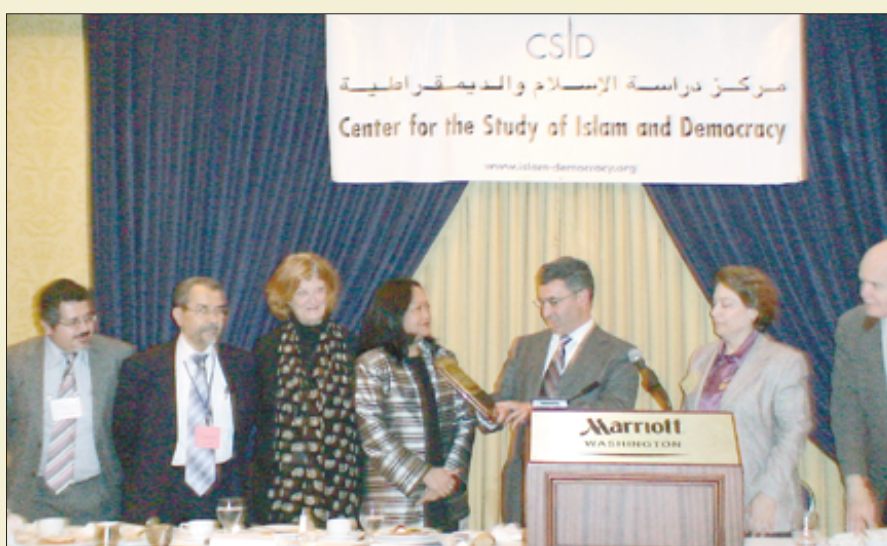
PCID Lead Convenor gets Muslim Democrat Award

BY NASSER SHARIEF, BAI SALINA KHARA R.PENDATUN

THE Lead Convenor of the Philippine Council for Islam and Democracy (PCID) and Editor of the Moro Times, Ms. Amina Rasul-Bernardo, was awarded Muslim Democrat of the Year by the Center for the Study of Islam and Democracy (CSID) in ceremonies held last April 27. The awarding ceremony was the highlight of the CSID 8th annual conference. This year's theme was "Women's Rights in Muslim Communities and Islam".

The Muslim Democrat of the Year award is given by CSID to one outstanding advocate for democracy in the Muslim world; particular those individuals who overcome hardships or challenges in his/her efforts to promote democracy. The Center for the Study of Islam & Democracy (CSID) is a non-profit organization, based in Washington DC, dedicated to studying Islamic and democratic political thought and merging them into a modern Islamic democratic discourse.

Ms. Rasul follows a distinguished list



■ Amina Rasul is being presented with the plaque of Muslim Democrat of the Year by the officers of the CSID in their 8th Annual Conference in George Washington University, DC. Rasul is the first Filipino recipient of the annual award.

PHOTO CSID, WASHINGTON, D.C.

of past Muslim Democrat awardees which includes: former Malaysian deputy Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim, Mr. Saadeddine Elothmani, Secretary-General, Party of Jus-

tice and Development of Morocco, Iranian scholar Abdolkarim Soroush, and Egyptian democracy activist Saad Eddin Ibrahim.

In her keynote speech during the 8th CSID Annual Conference held at the George Washington University, Ms. Rasul emphasized that the rise of violent extremism in Muslim communities can be abetted by genuine democratization.

"Killing the terrorists will not end terrorism", she warned, "Genuine democracy, which will provide more space for the marginalized (like Muslim women) will be better able to temper this inclination towards extremist advocacies".

"Stable, democratic, just societies," she added, "can best deal with extremism." She stressed that the litmus test for a democracy is how it treats women.

Comparing women with canaries, she explained "women's rights in democratizing or democratic Muslim societies are like canaries in a coalmine during the industrial age of the West. If the canaries are safe, so is the coalmine. Thus if women's rights are strong, so is the society".

Although she does not see herself as a Muslim feminist, Rasul has been a champion of women and minority rights. She

See AWARD D3

Different in faith, equal in freedoms

I AM a Muslim from Sri Lanka, an island in the Indian Ocean. It is the country of the Sinhalese whose mother tongue is Sinhala who consist approximately 76% of the whole population with predominant Buddhist populace who call themselves Sinhala Buddhists. Sri Lankans live in peace and harmony with Hindus, Roman Catholics, Muslims, Christians and others. I am one of them. To be honest, I not only drive cars, but also ride push bicycles. It was my husband who is a Muslim taught me to drive. That is my democracy and I have a moral right to it and no one hinders me. I have a son 14 years and a daughter 12 years and she has her own push bicycle and takes part in school athletics, oratorical contests and etc.

They can form political parties and be part of our Provincial Councils and Districts that fall under a Central Government which is headed by the Executive President. We have a Prime Minister too.

The Legislator is the Parliament with 225 seats and it is 100% Democratic. In our Parliament one will find members of all religions and races though it is predominant with Sinhala Buddhists. I must say here that about 2% of the Parliament Members are made up of Muslim men and women. They work in solidarity with all ethnic and religious groups towards the betterment of the country and her people.

As Sri Lankans, we are equals and enjoy the same Constitutional Democracy, Freedom and Independence as the predominant Sinhalese. But unfortunately these values are lost in many a Muslim household, due to the fact that still the Muslim men treat their wives as an inferior vessel.

The educated, intelligent, understanding and broad-minded Muslim men treat their wives with real freedom of democracy. Due to these democratic values and attitudes practiced by Muslim parents, their sons and daughters have become doctors, lawyers, academics, teachers, university lecturers, politicians, businesspersons and also Ministers and Deputy Ministers in our Parliament and etc. Many educated Muslim men and women hold high posts in Government Ministries and Offices and in Private Organizations. Truly it brings pride and joy to the Sri Lankan Muslim community. What an achievement!

It is an absorbing sight to witness how Muslim women of Sri

The Jihadist Rashida Banu Rashad

Lanka driving their own vehicles in the streets of busy Colombo and other cities and villages in and around Sri Lanka, and I am one of them. To be honest, I not only drive cars, but also ride push bicycles. It was my husband who is a Muslim taught me to drive. That is my democracy and I have a moral right to it and no one hinders me. I have a son 14 years and a daughter 12 years and she has her own push bicycle and takes part in school athletics, oratorical contests and etc.

She is a popular athlete in her school. As my son, my daughter too is studious. Her present ambition and dream is to become a doctor and we are giving her our best to achieve it. Our children though Muslim are very friendly and move freely with all our neighbours, the majority of them being Sinhalese.

During our festivities, we exchange gifts in the form of rich food and this we all enjoy. And when it comes to death, we join and share the sorrows of the bereaved and prove our brotherhood and friendship at this most desperate time.

We value and enjoy much the enriched constitutional democratic freedom of Sri Lanka and pass the same to our children to enjoy it too.

In Sri Lanka, we can easily without any hindrance venture out with true determination to achieve our educated goals as we live in a country of real democracy. If at all there is a hindrance, it is from the uneducated extremist husbands who misinterpret the true values of Islam and keep their wives for the bed and kitchen. I am happy to be a Sri Lankan and to be in the Sri Lankan Society.

(Excerpts from remarks given by Mrs. Rashad during the May 6 forum on Islam and Democracy organized by the Philippine Council for Islam and Democracy, The Asia Foundation and the Canadian International Development Agency in Zamboanga City. Mrs. Rashad is a member of the People's Action for Free and Fair Elections (PAFFREL), the first citizen-based election watchdog in Sri Lanka.)

IMT officer says Islam teaches unity in diversity

BY NORODIN M. MAKALAY

GENERAL SANTOS CITY (Philippines)—Unity in diversity can no longer be avoided in the “global village” and it is in fact one of the teachings of Islam, said Lieutenant Colonel Abubakar Bin Abdmalik, team leader of Headquarter Site 4 of the Malaysian-led International Monitoring Team which oversees the implementation of the ceasefire agreement between the Moro

Islamic Liberation Front and the Philippine government.

“There is diversity among human beings. They have variety of genders, colors and language and multiplicity of races and tribes. These diversities are considered natural and are called God’s signs,” Abubakar told the audience in a Qur’an reading competition here.

“It is not only that people in different parts of the world are diverse, but now we have a lot of diversity in our own cities, towns, indeed in our neighborhoods. People who live next door to us are often very diverse in colors, cultures and religions,” he said.

“Other cultures and religions should not be misrepresented. Educational institutions and media outlets should be held responsible not to propagate or perpetuate hate against any group of people and their recognized faiths and values; and tolerance must be practiced on all levels: individual, groups, and states. It should be a political and legal requirement. Tolerance is the responsibility that upholds human rights, pluralism, including cultural pluralism, democracy and the rule of law,” he continued.

Abubakar cited the UNESCO principles on tolerance, which says, “Consistent with respect for human rights, the practice of tolerance does not mean toleration of social injustice or the abandonment or weakening of one’s convictions. It means that one is free to adhere to one’s own convictions and accepts that others adhere to theirs. It means accepting the fact that human beings, naturally diverse in their appearance, situation, speech, behavior and values, have the right to live in peace and to be as they are. It also means that one’s views are not to be imposed on others.”



Leadership in Islam

WHAT is leadership in Islam? Let us read some verses from Allah and the Hadith of Prophet Muhammad regarding the term Khalifa (vicegerent) as used by Allah in reference to man.

Allah said: “Behold! Thy Lord said to the Angels; I will create a vicegerent (Khalifa) on Earth”. They said: Wilt thou place therein one who will make mischief and shed blood- Whilst we do celebrate Thy praises and Glorify Thy Holy (Name)?” He said: I know what ye know not”. (2:30)

Leadership is the level of highest trust in communities. It is not used to oppress other people, nor defraud the government or the community. We call on the true believers, men and women, to help spread the good deeds and the prohibition of the wrong.

Another label used by the Quran for leader is Rasool. Allah said in the Holy Quran: “When the hypocrites come to thee, they say we bear witness that thou art indeed the Messenger (Rasool) of Allah.” yea, Allah knoweth that thou art indeed His Messenger. And Allah beareth witness that the hypocrites are indeed liars.” (63:1)

Also the Most High ad-

Khutba

dressed Ibrahim as Imam (leader) in the Quran: “And remember that Abraham was tried by his Lord with certain commands, which he fulfilled: He said: I will make thee an imam to the people. (Abraham) pleaded: And also (imams) from my offspring!” He answered: But my promise is not within the reach of evil-Doers”. (2:124)

The fourth address of the leader is, as used by the Prophet is Sultan. The Prophet said:

“The Sultan of the Muslims is the guardian of those ladies who have no guardians.”

Fifth, the Prophet used the word Amir: “When three persons travel on land they must appoint one as their Amir.”

O! Ye, Muslims. Whoever of you becomes the leader has to learn and practice the qualities and requirements of Allah and the way other Prophets lead their people specially the Sunnah of Prophet Muhammad. Other models are the leadership of the Companions (Sahaba), from Abu Bakr As Siddik, Omar Ibn al-Khattab Al Farouk, Uthman Ibno ‘Affan

Dhun Norain, and ‘Ali ibni of

Abi Talib.

The Prophet Muhammad said: “Verily, the leader among you is the vicegerent of Allah on that community; he shall protect the rights of the wronged among the populace. If the leader judges justly he will receive the reward of Allah and the people should be grateful for it. While if the leader judges unjustly, he is sure to receive the Wrath from Allah and the people must be enduring and patient.”

Dear Muslims, be just in this life, be you as the head of the family or you being the community leader. All of you are responsible for everything that is entrusted to you.

Leadership should be in the hands of those who are qualified to serve the community, has compassion and empathy, has high consideration for others, and has no pride and not seeking to be different or superior to his followers. A leader should avoid hurting his followers and constituents. These characteristics of were exemplified by the Prophet (peace be upon him) during his lifetime.

In Islam, it is considered as worship once you respect, follow and demonstrate allegiance

to the Muslim leaders as I have mentioned in the other Khutbas.

Our dear Prophet said: “He who obeys me, obeys Allah, and he who disobeys me, disobeys Allah. He who obeys the chief, obeys me, and he who disobeys the chief, disobeys me. The Imam (leader) is like a shelter for whose safety the Muslims should fight and where they should seek protection.”

Before I end this Khutba, allow me to share the sayings of Shafiq al-Balkhi, a learned scholar, once he told Harun al-Rashid, the Abbasid Caliph and ruler of the largest state of his time:

“You are a fountain and the other officials who help you to govern the world is the stream (which flows from it). If the fountain is clear, there can be no damage from silt in the channels; if the fountain is turbid, there will be no hope of maintaining the channels.”

May Allah direct me and you to the blessings of the Glorious Quran and benefit me and you in whatever is in it of the Ayat and Wise Dhikr. I say this and ask Allah the Great and the Most Honored for forgiveness for me, you and all Muslims. Invoke Him for forgiveness, for He is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful.

[MUSLIMS ACROSS THE NATION]

THE Institute of Bangsamoro Studies (IBS) and Bangsamoro Development Agency (BDA) with the support of the World Assembly of Muslim Youth - Philippines are organizing the Second International Bangsamoro Development Conference with the theme, “Towards Rebuilding the Bangsamoro Economy” at El Manuel Hotel, Cotabato City, Philippines on June 19-21, 2007. The conference aims to draw strategies to “bring back control of the economy into the hands of the Bangsamoro - strategies that will extricate them from the vicious cycle of exploitation, conflict, poverty, ignorance and ill-health and introduce them into a virtuous cycle of enlightenment, good governance, spiritual and material progress and peace.” Registration fee is P5,000 (US \$100) which will cover conference materials, lunch and snacks. Contact the Secretariat at Hadji Daud Bldg., Campo Muslim, Cotabato City 9600, Philippines, Telefax: (+63-64) 421-7886 Email: morostudies@yahoo.com

Applications are open for the Australian Leadership Awards (ALA) - Scholarships for studies commencing in January 2008 are now open starting 1 May 2007. ALA-Scholarships is a component of the Australian Government’s A\$1.4 billion Australian Scholarships initiative that will provide about 19,000 scholarships to the Asia-Pacific region over five years. ALA-Scholarships will be awarded to people who have potential to assume leadership roles that can influence social and economic policy reform and development outcomes, both in their own countries and in the Asia-Pacific re-

gion. Scholarships are provided for postgraduate studies at Masters or Doctoral level. Scholars also participate in a unique Leadership Development Program. Managed by the Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID), ALA-Scholarship undergo a highly competitive selection process and are open to citizens of Asia-Pacific countries where Australia has an active aid program. Deadline for paper applications is on 16 July 2007. Online applications close on 31 July 2007. For further information on how to apply for an award and for a list of participating Australian Universities, please visit the ALA website: www.ausaid.gov.au/scholar/ala.cfm, www.ausaid.gov.au/scholar/ala_institutions.cfm

Twelve new lawyers among the more than 30 Muslims who passed the 2006 bar examinations joined the Bangsamoro Lawyer’s Network (BLN), a newly-organized association of concerned legal advocates. BLN convenor Raissa Jajurie of SALIGAN, a Davao-based alternative law group, said they tendered a testimonial for these new lawyers last April 26 in Manila to raise awareness on the plight of human rights violations in Mindanao, particularly of Muslim evacuees.

The 3rd Mindanao Grassroots Women’s Conference with the theme “Kababaihan, Karapatan, Kapayapaan” was convened at St. Joseph Retreat House, Tamontaka, Dos, Sharief Kabunsuan Province on May 4-7, 2007 Hosted and organized by Mindanao Tri-people Women Resource Inc. and Mindanao Tri-

people Women Forum, with the support from Women’s World Day of Prayer (WWDP), International Fellowship of Reconciliation (IFOR) & Entraide et Fraternite (EF), the conference output included strengthening the capacity of women to respond to local conflicts bred by all-out-wars. The Mindanao Tri-People Women Forum (MTWF) is a network/alliance of women organizations from the Moro, Lumad and migrant settlers of Mindanao. It was organized in year 2002 by seventy pioneer member-organizations.

USAid released an environmental sourcebook, entitled, “AlKhalifa” (The Steward), with an Islamic perspective, the first of its kind for Muslim religious leaders to guide them in the advocacy for ecological protection and conservation. The US Agency for International Development (USAid), through its Philippine Environmental Governance 2 Project (EcoGov2), worked with Muslim community leaders, Department of Environment and Natural Resources, educators, and Qur’anic experts to develop Al Khalifa. USAid released introductory copies of the sourcebook in Zamboanga City last April 22 to coincide with the global celebration of Earth Day. Aiming to promote good environmental governance practices in Mindanao, the resource book documents the efforts of 20 local government units (LGUs) in the provinces of Basilan, Lanao del Sur, Zamboanga del Sur, and Zamboanga Sibugay, which all have received substantial technical assistance from the EcoGov 2 project. Earlier, in the Islamic

City of Marawi, Al Khalifa was used as a reference in a khutbah (a religious sermon) delivered on April 13, 2007 at Masjid Bubong Lilod by Amrola Diambangan, of the Young Moro Professional Network.

On the occasion of the 18th Anniversary of the passing away of Imam Khomeini (R.H) the Cultural Section invites everyone to present a paper on any of the following topics: *Imam Khomeini (R.H.): Worship and Prayer; Worship Commonalities in Abrahamic Religions; Worship and its effects on human’s life; Learning Towards Creator Through Prayer; Worship as means of evolution and nurturing of human soul*; and *Status of Prayer and Worship in Persian Literature*. Prizes will be awarded. Winning entries will be presented in a seminar to be held on June 2, 2007 at 5:00pm at the Leandro Locsin Hall, NCCA Building. Reference materials regarding the topic are available at the Cultural Section, Rumi Library or refer to www.manila.icro.ir. Email: culsec_iri@yahoo.com or call the Cultural Section, Embassy of the I.R. of Iran Manila. Telephone Numbers 818-9756, 812-5696, 8125697.

Lawyer Reza Sinsuat is the only Filipino Muslim grantee who qualified for the Fullbright Scholarship this year. He will take up Executive Masters in Public Administration at the prestigious Syracuse University, New York. A graduate of AB Political Science at the De la Salle University, Sinsuat served as Executive Assistant of Secretary Zamzamin Ampatuan of the National Anti-Poverty Commission.

The Manila Times The Moro Times

Fred de la Rosa
Publisher and Editor in Chief

Dante Francis M. Ang II
President and CEO

Amina Rasul
Editor

Samira Gutoc-Tomawis
Managing Editor

Nasser Sharief
Aliyya Sawadjaan
Editorial Team

Arnold B. Moss
Chief Copyeditor
Brian M. Aftuang
Art Director

Telephone 524-5665 to 67
Telefax 521-6897 • 521-6872
Subscription 528-1319

URL <http://www.manilatimes.net>
E-mail newsboy@manilatimes.net

The Moro Times is published by
Manila Times monthly at 371 A.
Bonifacio Drive, Port Area,
Manila, 1018

T1-20, Governors Place
Condominium, Shaw Blvd.,
Mandaluyong City

Telefax 532-6058
E-mail mki@pildtdsl.net

Moro voices on the elections: How they saw it

ARMM: Erring COMELEC officers resurface

Atty. Dalomilang N. Parahiman

OLD habits die hard. As a former senior election officer who had gained intimate knowledge on the operation of the Office, I can't understand why erring election officers in the ARMM cannot be punished by the COMELEC. When they should have been incarcerated, instead, you see them resurrected on the day of election. It is about time that the COMELEC investigate their rank. In Lanao some election officers who had just been relieved of their post because of election fraud resurfaces out of the blue, engaged in the same anomalies as if nothing had happened.

I agree with the statement of COMELEC Executive Officer Pio Jonson that Ray Sumalipao, an official of the agency of dubious repute, should not have been assigned in the Autonomous Region considering the allegation of his involvement in the electoral fraud in the 2004 elections.

(Atty. Parahiman is an Executive Officer of the Ranao Friday Club)

Cotabato City: Same tired old story

Harija Riza U. Khamal

"Walang nabago," this was the response of Atty. Anwar Malang, reelected as councilor of this town for the third time, when asked about this election. "People still ask money [from candidates]. Although, *depende siguro sa kandidato, lalo na kung alam nilang walang mapapalang serbisyo.*"

The councilor also observed a low turnout. He believes that people might have become tired of elections. Most people are adamant that participating in this election won't improve their lives. Malang believes that the Mindanao situation can improve only if Mindanao will have national representation "*kung magiging regionalized ang Senate para magkaroon ng kinatawan ang bawat rehinyon.*"

Ustadz Esmail Ebrahim, provincial chair of Parish Pastoral Council for Responsible Voting (PPCRV), also agrees that this election will not do any changes in Mindanao. As part of the PPCRV monitoring team, he roamed the city. He confirms Malang's assessment. "In Cotabato City it was peaceful, although there's a very low turnout," says Ustadz Ebrahim. He said the low turnout was because most voters did not find their name on the list. He said the only violation he saw during was the wearing of baseball caps emblazoned with the names of candidates and political party names.

Meanwhile, Cotabato City Police Senior Superintendent Pañares Adap confirmed that election in the city ended peacefully. "From the voting to bringing of the ballots to the Sangguniang Panlalawigan office for the canvassing there was no untoward incident," says Sr. Supt. Adap.

Maguindanao: For want of opposition

Harija Riza U. Khamal

PEOPLE lost faith in elections. This accounts for the low turnout of voters in Maguindanao, according to Mahdi Amella, Executive Director of United Youth for Peace and Development (UNYPAD) in Maguindanao.

"*Kaunti ang bumoto dahil hindi na sila naniniwala sa eleksyon,*" says Amella, a four-time board of election inspector. He is also part of the monitoring team of the PPCRV and Legal Network for Truthful Elections (LENTE) that is monitoring the canvassing process nationwide. He believes that elections won't improve the situation in Mindanao. "*Parang hindi ko nakikita na magdadala ng pagbabago ang eleksyon sa Mindanao. Dahil hindi pa rin mabibigyan ng karapatan ang Bangsamoro. Lalo't maraming lider na hindi makatarungan,*" relates Amella.

Although the monitoring team did not witness any irregularities, untoward incident or election violations during the voting day, several cannot categorically say that no violations were committed.

Nuruddin Mijuyao, UNYPAD Vice Chairman for Internal Affairs - Maguindanao and a PPCRV poll watcher volunteer, says he is not sure of what this election will bring to Mindanao. Meanwhile Yusuf Lumambas, a UNYPAD PPCRV coordinator in Pagalungan, also agrees.

"*Kung ganito ang takbo ng pagpili ng lider hindi mababago ang situasyon ng Bangsamoro,*" says Lumambas. "*May nag-agawan ng balota, may mga tumanggap ng pagkain pero sinasabi nilang hindi nila alam kung kanino galing. Anila, 'binigay eh.*"

"*Kahit sino ang maging lider, maging local man o nasyonal, maharap nang aahon ang mamamayan dahil tila naging policy na ng gobyerno ang pandaraya,* not only to their opponents but constituents," says Lumambas.

Sulu: Grabe ang cheating.

Atty. Raissa Jajurie

I AM now in Jolo, using the internet of Notre Dame of Jolo College, the same facility that will be used for Namfrel's operation quick count. I am the sole LENTE (Legal Network for Truthful Elections) lawyer assigned to Sulu (in fact, there is no

taker for Tawi-Tawi or Basilan).

This morning, after voting in Jolo where I am registered, I visited a cluster of precincts in Barangay Pasil, municipality of Indanan, Sulu. *Grabe...*I was really taken aback by the massive cheating in the area. Earlier that day, a voter had been shot dead by a policeman who refused the voter entrance to the precinct.

When I arrived, many of the rooms where the precincts were conducting business were closed, with a military guard right outside the door. When I tried to get in, I was told by the military that I could not, even if I showed him my (canvassing) ID. I peeped in and saw that there were people inside. I tried my luck in another building. I was able to get in... And I was shocked to see the BEIs writing on the ballots which had already been thumb-marked. They were writing the same list of candidates on each of the ballots. A man with a bolo was also near the BEI. A ballot box was open (without padlock) while ballots were being placed inside it.

I saw the same thing (BEI writing on the ballots) being done in 2 precincts stationed on a stage (it is a school campus). When the BEI and other people around them realized that I was watching them, they whispered to each other but continued their task. When I left, someone approached me and asked me what I was doing. I told him I was a watcher, and showed him my IDs.

PPCRV/CCARE was there, but there was so much fear in there that I could not blame the watchers if they did nothing. The son of the politician whose name was being written on those ballots was present in the vicinity and was going around the school rooms.

I left for another school, also in Indanan. While the BEIs were not writing on the ballots, there was also massive cheating. Other people were "assisting" the voters. There was no vote secrecy and voters, watchers and "other people" were mingling in the rooms.

I was told that there were other areas where massive cheating also happened but I did not have the opportunity to visit other municipalities.

Counting will be centralized in Jolo. I am sure there will be other ways of cheating that I will see in the counting...This makes me reflect that elections do not work here. We will have to reflect on this some more.

Moro youth speak out

BY ALIYYA SY

THE youth today have become wiser with their decisions and with technology at their side they have selected candidates who they believe are more worthy to be in office than others.

The view from Manila

Shahana Abdulwahid

As a concerned citizen, I believe it is my duty to exercise the right to vote. I never base my votes on looks, popularity, or campaign ads of a candidate. I base my choices on the platforms they presented, their stands on critical issues and their programs for the marginalized sectors of society. These criteria are of secondary consideration for many people as there are still a lot of concerns, which are to be considered. Examples of which is the educated vote. The mere exercise of my right to vote is a manifestation of my desire for changes in the way our government addresses the concerns of our people. The proliferation of political and extra-judicial killings, which the government fails to address, is a concrete display of the government's inability to condemn these acts and to immediately act upon it. The misappropriation of our national budget leaves many deprived of education and basic social services. The chunk of our national budget given to debt servicing is a manifestation of the government's priority to appease the foreign investors and not its own people. The ongoing conflict in Mindanao must be put to an end. Development in many areas in Mindanao in various aspects must commence.

(Abdulwahid is the current UP Student Council President)

Lanao del Sur: cheating perfected

Faisal Pacalna Cali

Lanao del Sur is well-known for election anomalies, thanks to exposés on national television. Cheating is done openly, shamelessly, and without fear. This election is probably the worst election yet to date. Things have worsened. Vote buying is so evident and what is worse, the candidates who should have won didn't (although they were really qualified) because of power hungry candidates with bad reputations who have strong influence and money to back them.

There are 13 municipalities announced by the COMELEC still to

hold election scheduled for today. Among pundits in Banggolo, the rumor hub of the Islamic city of Marawi and among the armchair analysts in Manila, speculations run wild. Naguib A. Munder, Sec. Gen. of the Manila Muslim Chamber of Commerce and Industry said, "What else is new? The high-rollers smell a closely contested fight among those who hang on to the 10th to 12th slots in the senatorial race, so they are going to milk them for all the province is worth. The gavel goes bang to the highest bidder."

In the local scene, the postponement will be an opportunity for realigning votes. It goes like this: a trailing or bottom-ranked candidate will try to recoup some of his spending by bargaining with any of the top candidates to try to sell-off his votes for the 13 municipalities still to hold election. Failing that, he will wring an agreement to be accommodated once the leading candidate whom he is getting a bargain from wins the election. This is the high-noon of jockeying from the governor, down to the Vice-Governor, Board members and of course the Congressmen of the 1st and 2nd districts. Clans will visit other clans, expounding how they are closely knitted by blood, or lacking that, try to arrange wads of money withdrawn from the banks of Cagayan de Oro or Iligan for the posture. And when everything fails, some theatrical intimidations take place for the inevitable showdown.

On the municipal level where elections in some barangays are postponed, the ante goes up as much as 20,000 pesos per head. An octogenarian in the municipality of Maguing confirms. "The hapless population gobbles whatever is offered on the twisted justification that this money ought to have been spent generally to improve the roadways and the clinic of the town, if there is any."

Despite the placards around the city renouncing bribery and dirty politics, the local politicians showed no shame in doing the same thing. The city streets are plastered wall to wall with posters and tarpaulin, and other election paraphernalia. These candidates spent more money in putting up a good image during the election rather than serving the public and helping the unfortunate. They keep claiming that the money they give away during the elections are donations for charity. Who do they want to fool?

(Faisal Cali is the president of the Mindanao State University (MSU) - Main Supreme Student Government)

Across the sea: I voted from Penang

BY AYESAH ABUBAKAR/MINDANEWS

PENANG, Malaysia (MindaNews)—I am glad that the "absentee voting" is working. Last Thursday (May 10) I followed up with the Kuala Lumpur Embassy that I have not yet received my "balota" from the Commission on Elections (Comelec). They said that many of the mails sent to "absentee voters" here in Malaysia were sent back by the Malaysian Postal Service (or POSLAJU) perhaps due to

incomplete address, or, that the registered voter was not present at the time of the delivery.

In my case, I suspect it was the incomplete address. Anyhow, I requested that they send the mail to my home address the following day, a Friday. If they send it in the morning, before noon, for sure I will get it by Saturday. And I should even be able to mail it back on Monday since I know of a same day delivery service from Penang to Kuala Lumpur.

Thankfully, Butch, the Philippine embassy staff heeded my request. I stayed and waited at home last Saturday and my mail arrived by 1pm. Immediately, I posted my "balota" at the POSLAJU office at TESCO, a big supermarket near my house. Hopefully, my vote should have been received this morning by the embassy just before their 3 pm deadline!

I didn't really want to vote in the beginning but I changed my mind at the last minute. Mainly, I wanted to prove if this "ab-

sentee voting" system would work. And secondly, I wanted to support a Mindanao party-list candidate.

Thank goodness for an efficient postal system here in Malaysia and Butch of the Philippine Embassy in Kuala Lumpur!

Ayesah Abubakar is the coordinator of the Mindanao Peace Program at the Research & Education for Peace Universiti Sains Malaysia or REPUSM in Penang, Malaysia. E-mail ayesah@bangsamoro.com

■ ELECTION From page D1

Excerpts from preliminary statement on 2007 election

sider establishing no more than two or three precincts in any one location to instill order. Voters can then easily find their precinct and name in the voter's list.

Because of a crowded precinct, the lack of secrecy in writing one's vote in the ballot can be very intimidating, and can facilitate vote-buying, by allowing voters to demonstrate their adherence to a previously struck bargain.

Voters who had completed their ballots sometimes handed them

over to the chair of the precinct, who would keep them in a stack next to unmarked but folded ballots until he had time to register the voter and put the ballots in the box. Ballots must be personally deposited it in the ballot box.

Too many precincts had candidate materials and candidates themselves hanging around polling centers.

To check voters voting again, most polling stations should check the voter's index finger,

whether it was already inked.

The problem is mostly about the implementation and law enforcement. Impunity for election offences must be addressed; Overspending must be discouraged, and the source of funding should be clear; In order to cut down the cost of campaigning, and enhance accountability and representation, Senators could be elected by region rather than nationwide; The provision of the 1987 Constitution against politi-

cal dynasties should be implemented by law to limit the number of politicians from same family or political clan; COMELEC must be more professional and disqualify those who misuse their power; The local election should be separated from the national one, to make the process more simple and transparent; The law on electoral modernization should be implemented for counting to prepare for coming elections.

■ AWARD From page D1

PCID Lead Convenor gets Muslim Democrat Award

has represented Muslims as a Commissioner with the National Commission on the Role of Filipino Women. One of the organizers of the Muslim Women Peace Advocates, she has worked to link Muslim women's organizations with national and international agencies and to lobby for women's issues.

During her speech at the awarding ceremony, she spoke of the ongoing hostilities in Jolo. "A few weeks ago, fierce fighting between the two sides has led to 50,000 displaced persons. As usual, it is the women who bear the burden of caring for their families as they escape the fighting,

Last week, Muslim women led the lobbying for government and the MNLF to declare a ceasefire and return to negotiations. Our plea has fallen on deaf ears".

Ms. Rasul, who is the daughter of the first and only Senator from Muslim Mindanao Dr. Santanina T. Rasul, said that one of the difficulties encountered by democracy advocates in Muslim is the perception that democracy, being a western concept and Islam are incompatible. "It is critical to show that Islam can be a source of democratic values," she added. She also asserted that genuine democracy should "include the elites and masses, as well as mod-

erates and extremists, in our Muslim communities".

Ms. Rasul was the first Chair of the National Youth Commission. Under her leadership, the NYC grew as an institution from a small agency with a budget of P18 million to a highly regarded national policy oriented body with a budget of P140 million. She is the editor of the "The Road to Peace and Reconciliation: Muslim Perspectives on the Mindanao Conflict", a book published in 2002 as the end product of almost 2 years of research and consultations. She is presently finalizing a book on the implementation of the Final Peace Agreement between the

government and the Moro National Liberation Front. She earned her master's degree in business management from the Asian Institute of Management in the Philippines and Master of Public Administration from the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University

Ms. Rasul is currently in Auckland, New Zealand to present a paper at the Alliance of Civilizations High-Level Symposium. With the aim of exploring a regional response to the Alliance of Civilizations initiative, the symposium is chaired by the Prime Minister of New Zealand, co-sponsored by the Norwegian

■ PEACE From page D1

Military urged to uphold "primacy of peace"

ians and vital installations;" The Philippine National Police (PNP) takes the lead role in confronting criminal syndicates, including "Lost Commands" in coordinating with the AHJAG. The AFP takes a supporting role; AFP commanders should ensure safety of all accredited MILF members with safe conduct pass; AFP commanders must be aware of "strategic implications of their tactical operations on the ground. In case of doubt, "they shall seek clearance first from higher commanders before initiating any military actions."

While the MILF noted the government's positive posture, MILF Chairman Al-Haj Murad warned of "spoilers of the peace process" such as selfish strategic or economic interests that do not auger well for the comprehensive political settlement. "That is why the Central Committee and I have publicly declared to match the recent Government pronouncement "to keep combatants in place". On the part of MILF, war is not being stepped up. But the MILF will keep a short list of "those intent at breaking the peace" including hawkish military officers and policymakers."

The MILF also noted as a breakthrough the fact that "the

Macapagal-Arroyo administration made a spectacular start on reversing the "all-out war policy" of its predecessor. This paved the way for resumption of talks between the MILF and the GRP, with the third party facilitation of the Government of Malaysia towards a real peace process. Negotiating principles and implementing mechanisms are clear enough on this point."

The OPAPP Accomplishment Report also cited the ongoing implementation of Republic Act 9054 or the ARMM Act which includes - Rehabilitation and development of conflict affected

Areas, Health development ; Educational development; Livelihood support and SME development, Land tenure development; Agricultural development ; Operationalization of the Regional Economic Zone Authority (REZA) ; As of April 17, DBM recommended the release of P15 million budgetary support to REZA from the President's Contingency Fund; Infrastructure development for interconnectivity; Conduct of healing, reconciliation and reintegration programs .

GRP-MILF peace talks which started in 1997 have been on hold since the September impasse on the issue of ancestral domain.



Faces of Moro elections

A night scene in Tagbak, Indanan: The Panglima Mamamah Elementary School which had become an evacuation center for 8,500 people. The MNLF charges that many people in evacuation centers around the islands of Sulu, the real stakeholder of the May 14 election which they claim were all supporters of detained MNLF Chairman Nur Misuari, were not able to cast their vote.

PHOTO COURTESY RYAN ANSON



Voters in animated discussion while filling up the ballots

PHOTO NATALIA WARAT



School teachers and youth volunteers update themselves on the proceedings of canvassing in Marawi City, Lanao del Sur. The town, self-dubbed as the Islamic City of the Philippines, is also notorious for being christened the Cheating Hub of the South. At least 13 towns of Lanao del Sur are at stake, still to hold election which many analysts believe could swing the results of the lower bracket of the senatorial race.

PHOTO COURTESY MINDANNEWS



Governor-elect Abdul Sakur Tan is seen being congratulated by residents, sans the usual sight of firearms in the strife-torn island, at the Sulu Provincial Gymnasium.

PHOTO NASH MAULANA



Counting votes in Matanog

PHOTO NATALIA WARAT



Poll watcher carries a ballot box to another building, a function of an inspector of Board of Election.

PHOTO NATALIA WARAT



A voter holding several ballots



Counting both national and local position

PHOTO NATALIA WARAT