

Mindanao and BIMP corridor growth up

BY SAMIRA GUTOC

Bangsa, tuhan, tao, salamat. These are just some of the shared words across Asia's largest regional grouping, the BIMP-EAGA. In a bid to revive cultural ties of centuries back through trade, governments of Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines (BIMP) entered into an economic cooperation called East Asean Growth Area (EAGA) formalized in Davao City 13 years ago.

This year, the nations are focusing on ICT (Information, Communication and Technology) to strengthen regional exchange. The first of its kind, an ICT fair was on display at the BIMP EAGA Confab held on October 23-27 alongside the Mindanao ICT Congress in the island's trade center in Davao City.

The working theme of the 6th congress is "Borderless ICT Collaboration on Human Resources, Infrastructure and Technology Innovation." The event aimed to explore the possibilities of synergizing the ICT initiatives of the EAGA member nations.

This coincides with the EAGA Senior Officials and Ministers Meeting (SOMM) discussion points: developing ICT infrastructure; strategic business development via e-commerce; human capital development; and e-governance. The event was a good opportunity for Mindanao ICT players to get to know their counterparts in Sabah, North Sulawesi, Brunei, and other areas covered by the EAGA.

BIMP-EAGA has so far engaged in

cooperation in industries such as tourism, shipping, agriculture and travel. Air links in EAGA expanded to 11, from only five before the EAGA initiative. According to the BIMP-EAGA's Secretariat website, the Davao - Kota Kinabalu route in particular registered an incoming and outgoing passenger load increase of more than 50 percent while the Davao - Manado link grew an estimated 20 percent in terms of incoming and outgoing passenger load. Two more routes connecting Brunei and Palawan, and Kota Kinabalu and Manado have been proposed. A new airline is already linking Palawan and Brunei link. EAGA has also seen the birth of another airline in Sarawak-based SAEAGA Air, but was unfortunately driven to closure by the Asian financial crisis.

EAGA's sea transport industry also has marked developments. An addition to EAGA vessels plying the fast-growing Zamboanga - Sandakan sea link is a Malaysian-registered fast ferry. A small economic boom between these two cities has grown



Moro coeds in Lanao del Sur wear their traditional dresses after the dawn prayer marking the end of Ramadan. Eid' l Fitr is an opportunity for asking and dispensing forgiveness and making fresh resolution for the months ahead. Lanao del Sur is well within the East Asean Growth Area (EAGA) block which seeks to revive the old route of trade among Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines. Photo Courtesy: Nasser Sharief/MSU Information Office, Manila

notable, where with increased shipping had generated more opportunities. The volume of Mindanao-bound cargo along this route has shown an average quarterly growth rate of more than 160%.

Links between Indonesia and the Philippines have led to the increased movement of people between Indonesia and the Philippines. The

Mindanao Economic Development Council (MEDCO), Philippine Secretariat for EAGA, reports more than 50 percent increase in local shipping's incoming and outgoing.

There is likewise a link from Cotabato to Labuan, which serves as a transit point for Philippine goods bound for Brunei. Traditional craft also continue to sail the Zamboanga

- Labuan and Zamboanga - Manado routes.

Uniform port dues for Bruneian, Indonesian, and Philippine EAGA-plying vessels are already being levied in selected ports around these countries.

BIMP-EAGA is eyed as a major location in ASEAN of high value added agro-industry, natural re-

source-based manufacturing, and high-grade tourism as well as non resource-based industries.

Spanning Asia's largest regional grouping, the BIMP land area is roughly 1.54 million square kilometers and is home to more than 50 million.

Mindanao contribution and investment

Mindanao and Palawan are the Philippine islands that are members of the BIMP-EAGA. Mindanao accounts for over 40 percent of the Philippines' food requirements and contributes more than 30 percent to the national food trade, according to MEDCO.

A total of P5.2 billion were invested in Mindanao in 2006, which generated at least 3,000 more jobs to Mindanawons, according to MEDCO specialist Ever Abasolo. More than

►GrowthD2

Book Review: Clan Conflict in Mindanao

CLAN feuding, one of the leading causes of violence in Central Mindanao and Sulu, is the subject of a 384-page book released by The Asia Foundation (TAF) entitled *Rido: Clan Feuding and Conflict Management in Mindanao*, launched at the Intercontinental Hotel Manila on October 24.

Conflict-resolution scholars offer in the book an in-depth analysis of *rido*, which is defined as feuding between families and clans and is characterized by sporadic outbursts of retaliatory violence between families, kinship groups, and communities.

Contrary to stereotypes, Muslim-Christian conflict in Mindanao is not as serious as clan conflicts which are actually more interwoven in the daily lives of the people. "*Rido* is only one aspect in the complex web of violence in Mindanao, which also includes Muslim separatism, communist insurgency, and banditry. The interaction of these different conflicts has explosive consequences for the long-running separatist war in Mindanao. A deeper understanding of specific conflicts is crucial in disentangling the blurred lines of conflict and to enable communities and the government to effectively address the problem," said the book's editor, Wilfredo Torres of TAF.

Three research institutions inventoried *rido* cases in 11 provinces and documented a total of 1,266 *rido* cases that killed over 5,500 people and displaced thousands more. The case studies illustrate how *rido* escalates from petty offenses to more serious crimes, oftentimes accelerated by land disputes and political rivalries.

The volume chronicles the result of extensive research conducted by The Asia Foundation beginning in 2002. The coordinated study on clan conflicts began with a household survey in

the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) and adjacent areas on the local citizens' perceptions of conflict. Findings showed that citizens are more concerned about the prevalence

of clan conflict and its negative impact on their communities than the conflict between the state and rebel groups in Mindanao.

With support from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the Foundation spearheaded a set of diagnostic activities to help design strategic interventions that enable communities and government agencies to promote the important long-term benefits of cooperation among all stakeholders.

Results from the survey and the research have been provided to such institutions as the Joint Coordinating Committees on the Cessation of Hostilities, which is responsible for maintaining the ceasefire between the government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front. Currently, the studies are helping local governments, civil society groups, and local communities to design more effective strategies to address these conflicts.

The Asia Foundation, funded by USAID, has supported Muslim organizations like Cotabato-based United Youth for Peace and Development (UNYPAD) and Marawi-based Reconciliatory Initiatives for Development Opportunities (RIDO) settle clan feuds and prevented the escalation of violent conflicts. In 2007, within a span of eight months, The Foundation was able to support capacity building for 253 local peace mediators, and its local partners were able to resolve 23 *rido* cases.

Mindanao, home to a majority of the country's Muslims, is a region suffering from poor infrastructure, high poverty, and violence that has claimed the lives of more than 120,000 in the last three decades.

Explosion investigation 'a malicious play' on Muslims

BY SAMIRA GUTOC, HARIJA RIZA KHAMAL

"WE'VE been slandered," says Yusuf Ledesma, spokesperson of Balik-Islam Unity Congress, after reports on the 'Glorietta bombing' investigations leads to a conclusion that it was an accidental explosion.

"It was a malicious play, kawawa naman kami," adds Ledesma in an interview with the Moro Times. "It was very underhanded of the government to blame the bombing on the Balik-Islam and make someone pose as Sheikh Omar, and to link Sheikh Omar to the opposition via cell phone. That was a martial law scenario which did not fly."

Philippine Muslim civil society groups condemned the Glorietta bombings as "one of the most horrific acts of terrorism perpetrated here in Metro-Manila."

On October 20, 2007, a suspected bomb ripped through the Glorietta mall killing eleven people and wounding more than a hundred. The explosion put the country's business district at a standstill as the posh shopping center's nearby shops was damaged as well. Debris from the blast were scattered on the streets.

In a statement released by the Philippine Council for Islam and Democracy with support from local religious leaders, the Muslim group cited pro-



Yusuf Ledesma, spokesperson of Balik-Islam Unity Congress, stresses a point during an open forum at the Club Filipino on the plight of the Balik-Islam community. Photo Courtesy: Nasser Sharief/Philippine Council for Islam and Democracy

visions in the Holy Qur'an which prohibited violence. "Allah says in the Glorious Quran: ... (that if) any one slew a person - unless it be for murder or for spreading mischief in the land - it would be as if he slew the whole people; and if any one saved a life, it would be as if he saved the life of the whole people" (Quran 5:32)

"We would like to assure our brothers, sisters and compatriots that no true Muslim could ever have commit-

ted the Glorietta bombing, and that the bombers and perpetrators do not come from our ranks. We are as much in grief as anyone in this country because of the many innocents sacrificed by the heartless perpetrators of this crime."

Shariah lawyers of the Shariah Bar Association-Lanao del Sur called for a fair investigation and "treatment of Muslims as any other Filipinos." "We call for a thorough investigation by

both local and international law enforcement experts to expose the real perpetrators of this crime, and we pray that these criminals will be caught and punished to the fullest extent permissible by law," said the PCID.

National Security Adviser Norberto Gonzales told the media that there's high certainty that the explosion that killed 11 people and wounded more than 100 on October 20 was "a failure [in] public safety." Although, according to him, terrorism is not completely ruled out yet, reports heavily show that it's an accidental explosion.

Mikhail Abdul Aziz Abrera, Executive Director of Billah Islam, says the organization is in unity with the Muslims in the country in condemning the criminal acts.

"Islam gives great respect to life and property, not only that of Muslims but also that of other religions," he says.

Islam does not tolerate depraved ideologies that breed terrorism. Muslims are governed by Islamic values, oppose all forms of terrorism and will never allow any group of perverse terrorists to harm any country and undermine the safety of citizens and residents, he added.

As such, Jamil Almares of Islamic Call and Guidance [Iscag], also a Balik-Islam, expressed that it's unfair to tag and blame Muslims in any criminal act without proper investigation.

►MuslimsD2

WE CONDEMN TERRORISM WE CALL FOR TRUTH, PEACE AND JUSTICE

On October 20, 2007, one of the most horrific acts of terrorism was perpetrated here in Metro-Manila when a bomb ripped through the Glorietta mall killing eleven people and wounding more than a hundred.

Allah says in the Glorious Quran: "... (that if) any one slew a person - unless it be for murder or for spreading mischief in the land - it would be as if he slew the whole people; and if any one saved a life, it would be as if he saved the life of the whole people" (Quran 5:32)

Therefore as Muslims: We condemn in the strongest possible terms this wanton and reckless act of murder and mayhem. There can be no justification for the slaughter that took place in Glorietta that claimed so many innocent lives and maimed so many innocent bystanders. This barbaric act advances no worthwhile political goals and diminishes us all as a people.

While we condemn, without reservation, this detestable act of terrorism, we are concerned about the

insinuations made by irresponsible and malicious sources that the Glorietta bombings were committed by Muslim groups. We would like to assure our brothers, sisters and compatriots that no true Muslim could ever have committed the Glorietta bombing, and that the bombers and perpetrators do not come from our ranks. We are as much in grief as anyone in this country because of the many innocents sacrificed by the heartless perpetrators of this crime.

We call for a thorough investigation by both local and international law enforcement experts to expose the real perpetrators of this crime, and we pray that these criminals will be caught and punished to the fullest extent permissible by law.

Finally we support the call for a moral renewal in our country. The Noble Quran states, "... God does not change a people's lot unless they change what is in their hearts. But when (once) God willeth a people's

punishment, there can be no turning it back, nor will they find, besides Him, any to protect." (Quran 13:11) Unless we change our moral values and act upon them, there can be no development, either physical or spiritual in our country. Hence, let us turn away from the culture of corruption, greed and power-seeking, and let us build a country based on God's straight path of truth, justice and peace.

(Sgd.)
Engineer Nassif Malawani (Greenhills Muslim Traders Association); Atty. Nasser Marohomsalic (MUSLAF); Atty. Rex Panumpang (MUSLAF); Mikhail Abdulaziz Abrera (Philippine Normal University); Yusuf Ledesma (PCID); Muhammad A. Soria (Muhana Foundation); Hannah L. Soria (Muhana Foundation); Atty. Randolph Parcasio (Bangsamoro Lawyer's Network); Mariam Abdullrahem-Molina (Billah Islam); Jamil Almarez (Islamic Studies Call and Guidance); Abdurrahman Senoron (Fil Imam); Hassan Garcia (Fil

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SOURCE: PHILIPPINE CENTER FOR ISLAM AND DEMOCRACY (PCID) AND NETWORK OF ALLIED ORGANIZATION

Can Filipino Muslims achieve economic self-sufficiency?

ALI AL-RASCHID

THE Muslim consumer base is large. Asian Muslims account for much of the Muslim world's population, what with Indonesia's more than 210 million Muslims and India's 450 million.

Interest-free banking is practiced in many parts of the Muslim world. Some Muslim bankers and religious leaders suggested ways to integrate Islamic law on usage of money with modern concepts of ethical investing, which prohibits support for un-Islamic activities such as gambling.

With Muslim nations reeling from colonization, can economic independence for Muslim-Filipinos be viable? It depends.

In attempting to answer the question, I asked a few Muslim and non-Muslim friends for their thoughts.

The first said, "No Muslim, Christian, any race, religion or political regime is in a position of advantage as to attain economic self-sufficiency, permanently. The world is retreating. Business, being profit-motivated, banks on capitalistic modalities, is monopolistic, autocratic, yet devoid of resolve to benefit all. The Almighty has yet to end all greed, pride, prejudice for us to prosper."

The second said, "The Bangsamoro must regain control of the natural resources of their ancestral homeland. They have to recover their homeland first, or what's left of it."

Another said, "We must work all our resources. We must work, work, work; work those lands, fish the oceans."

"One among the many things we can do, just institutionalize the zakat system for a start, and be a true Muslim."

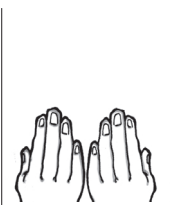
"Learn that everybody cannot be boss."

There is a lot of value in these thoughts. Collectively, they have put forward a framework for providing some answers to the question at hand.

There are several clarificatory questions which must be asked first. Since the question involves Muslims, the answers must necessarily be made utilizing an Islamic perspective.

Question 1: By itself, is economic sufficiency a goal worth pursuing?

No, because by itself, it contravenes God's purpose in the creation of man, which is to worship Him alone. However, if it is merely a component of a wholistic vision and plan for individuals and societal transformation of a community of Muslims, to establish Islam, as a way of life, then it becomes an acceptable goal.



JIHADIST

Question 2: What steps are necessary to achieve such a goal?

A community consensus and Action Agenda to pursue the goal must be first prepared. Other steps will proceed from there.

Question 3: Are these steps within the grasp and control of the community?

Assuredly, the Muslims community has within its grasp and control the capability to undertake the steps necessary to successfully pursue this goal.

Question 4: What resources are necessary over what period of time?

Dedicated volunteers and self-funded operations over a period of five years, starting from the grassroots will be necessary.

Question 5: What form of community organizational structure will be required to achieve this goal?

Community organizations already exist at the grassroots and urban centers. They should be motivated and organized into some form of collegial, collective structure featuring accountability, transparency and competence.

Is the goal of economic sufficiency doable? Let me quote the Holy Qur'an for the answers.

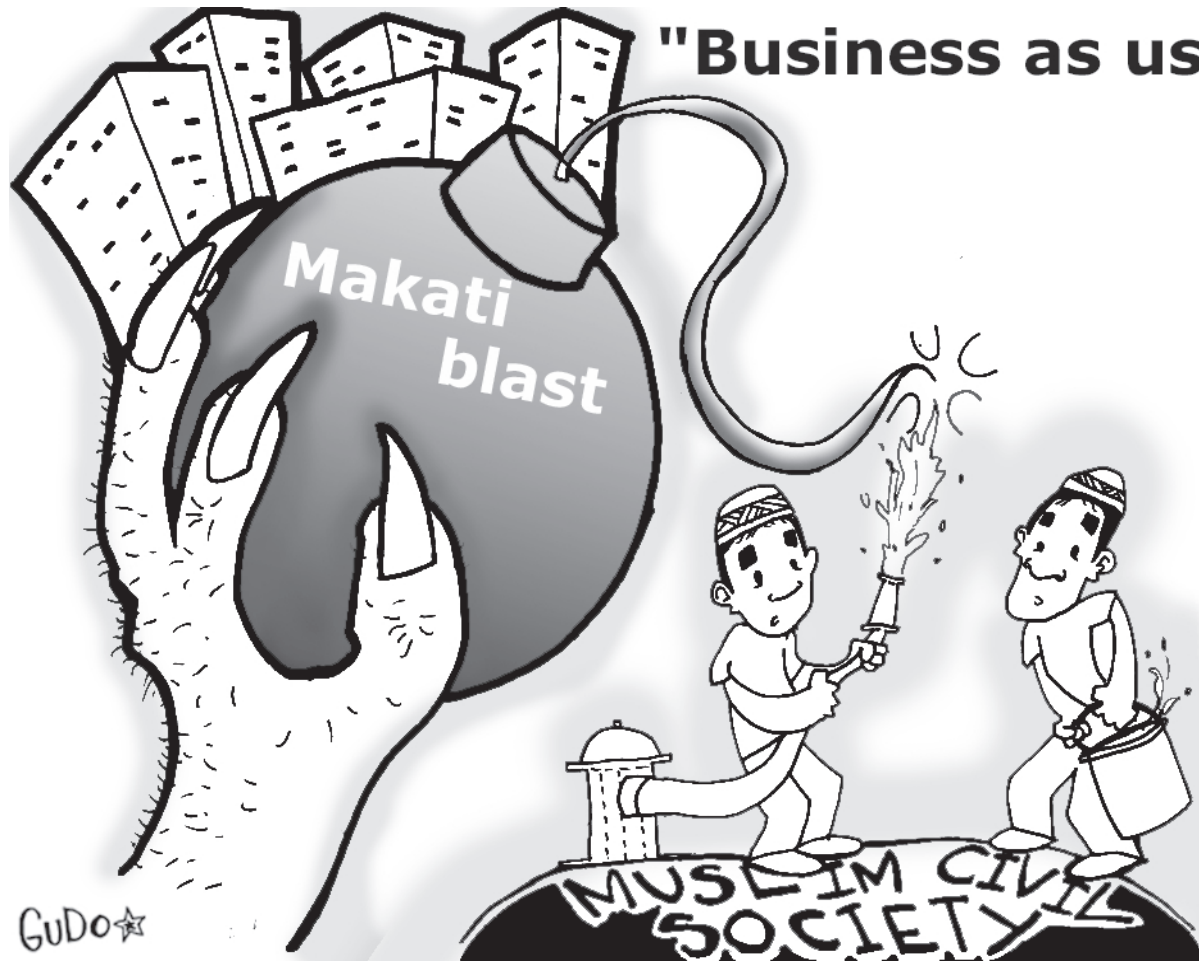
"God promises those among you who believe and work righteousness that He will make them kings on earth as He did for those before them, and that He will establish for them their religion that He chose for them, and that He will substitute security in place of their fears. All this because they worship Me alone, without idolizing anything besides me. If anyone disbelieves after this, then these are the wicked." Qur'an 24:55

"You shall observe the Salat (Prayers) and ZAKAT (Charity), and obey the messenger that you may attain mercy." Qur'an 24:56

"As for those who disbelieve, do not think that they will ever escape. Their final abode is hell; What a miserable destiny! Qur'an 25:57

Given God's promise to righteous Muslims, how can our community fail to achieve the goal of economic self-sufficiency. Remember, God operates on a different timetable than mankind. All in God's time.

(Al-Raschid, a co-convenor of PCID, obtained his Masters in Business Management at the Asian Institute of Management.)



Striving for the rizq (bounties) of Allah

O brothers and sisters in Islam, Islam is a complete way of life. It seeks to install an economic order within the larger socio-economic sphere that imposes fairness in its operations and one that strengthens the social order.

Islam views man as the agent of change as a vicegerent (khalifah) who bears greater task and responsibility over the rest of the creations. Through rational deeds, man must learn and relearn and mold his intellectual, social, emotional, spiritual factors that best suit his environment to serve Allah's purpose of creating him. The Prophet Muhammad is quoted as having said: "To seek for lawful sustenance is obligatory upon every Muslim."

The foundation of Islam's concept of economy lies in the following principles laid by the Holy Qur'an.

1. Allah is the Creator and ultimate Owner of all human and material resources. The Qur'an says, "To him belongs whatever is in the heavens and on earth, its layers beneath, and all that is between them." (20:6)

2. Allah is the Provider and Sustainer of all; Creator of human and non-human alike. He has created the means - human faculties to sustain the natural resources, and endowments. Allah said in the Qur'an, "And so many a moving (living) creatures there are, that carry not their own provision! Allah provides for it and for you. And He is the All-Hearer, the All-Knower." (29:60)

3. The human and natural



KHUTBA

factors of production are bestowed freely in equity. Allah said: "And wish not for the things into which Allah has made some of you to excel (over the) others. For men, there is reward for what they have earned, (and likewise) for women there is rewarded for what they have earned; And ask Allah of His Bounty. Surely, Allah is Ever All-Knowing of everything." (4:32)

4. Man is the khalifah (God's agent), whose function is to extract produce, usufruct, consume, share, and distribute God's provisions in a just and equitable manner to all humankind, over which His servants have equal rights. Allah said: "O mankind! We have created you from a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that you may know one another. Verily, the most honorable of you with Allah is that (believer) who has At-Taqwa [i.e. one of the Muttaqun (pious - see V.2:2)]. Verily, Allah is All-Knowing, All-Seeing." (49:13)

Allah has provided all the means necessary for the sustenance of all His creations - human faculties as well as the environment. Man's function is to apply his faculties rationally and utilize the resources to

produce enough to meet his needs.

In many verses that I have quoted, Allah is so rich that no man can ever comprehend the vastness of the bounties of Allah, so that man should give thanks to these bounties.

But what is happening in the midst of the Muslim community? We tend to beg before the powerful ones and ignore the might of Allah. This is not what Allah wanted to happen. As the trustee of Allah on earth, man should exert all possible efforts to make the environment of worship conducive for every believer.

Take Sulu. High poverty, unemployment and illiteracy are all here yet the Tausugs have all the resources in the province - the agricultural vastness of the province, the unending wealth of the sea, the mineral resources in the Sulu sea.

The situation becomes more complicated with the absence of peace and order in the province. We were asked by the Almighty to look into the bounties of Allah, but the presence of the terrorist group deprives our economy.

What shall we do now?

The Qur'an explicitly points to basic needs of man. Addressed to Adam (peace be upon him) the first human, Allah said: "Verily, you have (a promise from Us) that you will never be hungry therein nor (be) naked. And you (will) suffer not from thirst therein nor from the sun's heat." (20:118-119). Thus, the Qur'an establishes the provision of physiological needs of man - food, clothing, water and shelter.

The Qur'an points to man's live-

lihood to be provided from the riches of the Nature. Allah said: "And surely, We gave you authority on the Earth and appointed you therein provisions (for your life). Little thanks do you give." (7:10)

The Earth has been made subservient to man so that he may work and find convenience of life in it. Allah also said: "And All Hath subjected to you all that is in the Heavens and all that is in the Earth; it is all as a Favour and Benefit from Him. Verily, in it are signs for a people who think deeply." (45:13)

The Qur'an provides for man's rest and urges quest. Allah said: "And among His Signs is the sleep that you take by night and by day, and your seeking of His Bounty. Verily, in that are indeed signs for a people who listen." (30:23)

To work for livelihood is an individual obligation of every Muslim male with physical ability. Allah said: "Then when the (Jumu'ah) Salât (prayer) is finished, you may disperse through the land, and seek the Bounty of Allah (by working), and remember Allah much, that you may be successful." (62:10)

Man can have nothing but what he strives for. Allah said: "And that man can have nothing but what he does (good or bad)." (53:39)

Man's earnings must come through his effort, whose fruits will be completely rewarded. Allah said: "And that his deeds will be seen, then he will be recompensed full and the best of recompense." (53: 40-41).

(This Khutba is facilitated by the Canadian supported-Local Government Support Program in ARMM).

Common beliefs key to uniting old religious foes

BY BARNEY ZWARTZ

AT THE core of both Christianity and Islam is the double command to love God and neighbor. Last week 138 Islamic leaders wrote to the Pope and "leaders of Christian churches ev-

erywhere" saying world peace depended on recognizing that.

The letter, which some scholars hailed as unprecedented, was signed by Grand Muftis, theologians and academics from Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Iraq, Iran, Europe and the US, representing Islam's Sunni, Shiite and Sufi traditions — and scores of millions of followers.

Written to build bridges and defuse tensions, the letter was sent at a highly symbolic time, the Eid festival that celebrated the end of Ramadan last weekend. Titled *A Common Word Between Us and You*, it says: "Muslims and Christians together make up well over half of the world's population. Without peace and justice between these two religious communities, there can be no meaningful peace in the world."

"The basis for this peace and understanding already exists. It is part of the very foundational principles of both faiths: love of the One God and love of the neighbor." The leaders write that with the terrible weaponry of the modern world — and with Muslims and Christians intertwined everywhere as never before — no side can unilaterally win a conflict. "Thus our common future is at stake. The very survival of the world itself is perhaps at stake."

They quote Jesus' words in the New Testament, "for he who is not against us is on our side", and invite Christians to consider Muslims as "not against" them, and therefore with them.

There is a caveat. "We say to Christians that we are not against them and that Islam is not against them — so long as they do not wage war against Muslims on account of their religion, oppress them and drive them out of their homes."

This reflects the widespread opinion among the Muslim world that

the West's war on terror is really a Christian war on Islam.

Some of their grievances are real, but the enemy is not Christianity. It was once, but Christianity has lost most of its political power in the West.

The Pope and most church leaders argued strongly but vainly against invading Iraq, and the most active advocates for disadvantaged Muslim communities in the West are usually Christian. What the caveat shows is that the Islamic world struggles to understand the secular nature of the West, just as the West struggles to understand the diversity of religious attitudes within Islam.

But the leaders also remind Muslims that the Koran commands religious freedom for Christians and Jews, and they rebuke extremists who seek "conflict and destruction". They say: "Our very eternal souls are all also at stake if we fail to sincerely make every effort to make peace and come together in harmony."

As well as the Pope, the letter was sent to Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams, Orthodox patriarchs, and several Protestant world leaders. Williams, the Anglican spiritual head, welcomed it; so did the Vatican, though more cautiously. Cardinal Jean-Louis Tauran, who heads the inter-religious department, called it encouraging and said it showed "good will and dialogue are capable of overcoming prejudices", but Pope Benedict has not commented.

Benedict has — rightly in my view — focused on what he calls reciprocity, seeking the same rights for Christians in Muslim countries as Muslims have in Christian countries. It is not acceptable that Muslims in the West face prejudice, disadvantage or violence, but in the main they are considerably better off — and safer — than Christians in most Muslim

countries. These Christians need an advocate.

Some commentators greeted the letter with suspicion. Hal Lindsey of World Net Daily viewed the overture as an ultimatum: make peace with us or we'll kill you. Others doubted the signatories' sincerity, seeing it as a ploy to pretend peace, or dismissed their analysis of Christian theology. And the letter acknowledges irreconcilable theological differences remain.

In *The Times*, Simon Jenkins said the letter encouraged militarist fantasies of extremists on both sides because it implied Islam had political and military power to match the West, feeding jihadist ambition and Western paranoia.

I think suspicion is misguided; the letter should be warmly welcomed. This sort of initiative is exactly what critics in the West have been demanding Muslims do. Why not take it at face value, as a genuine attempt by a broad cross-section of very senior Muslims to improve relations? Why assume implicit threats or a hidden agenda — what could such an agenda achieve? Why rebuff such an overture? The letter doesn't propose any particular action; it's simply a proactive gesture of goodwill. The sheer labour involved in getting 138 leaders from around the globe who disagree on all sorts of issues to agree to this statement shows how seriously they mean it.

A discussion between religious leaders and theologians might seem peripheral to skeptics, but it's a good start. It might reduce antagonism at the grassroots level, and could lead to more fruitful interaction between policy-makers and politicians. And it's much better than the alternatives.

(Barney Zwartz is religion editor of *The Age* in Melbourne, Australia.)

■ GROWTH FROM B1

Corridor growth up

one-third of the island's labor force is employed in the agriculture, fishery and forestry sectors.

He also reported an almost 16 percent increase in Mindanao's exports this year, based on the freight on board (FOB) value.

The region's production is dominantly agriculture and fisheries-based. According to MEDCO, agriculture is the driving force behind Mindanao's economy with close to a third of its land area devoted to agriculture.

The island's top exports are marine and agricultural products from Western Mindanao and canned pineapple products from Northern Mindanao. The intra-regional Halal industry is being improved.

Mindanao's agriculture, fisheries and forestry sectors posted a growth of 3.8 percent. Its exports to Indonesia grew by 96.89 percent in 2003, \$12.5 million, than in

2002, \$6.4 million. Export to Malaysia for the same period also grew by more than 6 percent.

Exports in 2004 were valued at \$1.4 billion while in 2003 it was \$1.2 billion. Its major exports are coconut oil, banana, tuna, pineapple, iron ore agglomerates, pineapple juice concentrates, rubber, nickel ores, and desiccated coconut.

Mindanao's six regions collectively posted a 5.2 percent growth in 2006, with five of its six regions posting higher growth rates, according to figures released by the National Statistical Coordination Board (NSCB). Abasolo said the Mindanao rate is even higher compared with Luzon's 4.5 percent and the Visayas's 4.9 percent.

Mindanao's growth rate was a marked increase from the 4.2 percent in the island's gross regional domestic product (GRDP) in 2005. (WITH MINDANEWS REPORT).

■ MUSLIMS FROM B1

A malicious play

Meanwhile, according to a source, the attack on the Balik-Islam was not new. The source added that the government really wants to declare martial law by linking the opposition and the Balik-Islam to the bombing.

"We are being used as scapegoat for political purposes," adds Ledesma, who together with other Balik-Islam group calls for a thorough investigation on the incident and punish the real perpetrators.

"We call for a thorough investigation by both local and international law enforcement experts to expose the real perpetrators of this crime, and we pray that these criminals will be caught and punished to the fullest

extent permissible by law."

Balik Islam group in the country also calls for a reprimand on Retired Commodore Rex Robles who implicate the Muslims to the Glorieta explosion.

Ledesma said, "If indeed it was an accident, shouldn't Rex Robles and the military be reprimanded for blaming the Balik-Islam? There should also be an investigation on the one calling and posing as Sheikh Omar."

Manila has largely been spared a spate of bomb attacks by suspected terrorists that have plagued the southern Mindanao region. But it has been hit in the past. A series of bomb blasts that hit the Metro railway transit (MRT) in 2000 killed at least 22 people.

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“What would it take for the Philippines to be a developed country?”

The Manila Times National Essay-Writing Competition 2007

Winning entries will be published in
The Manila Times and will receive cash prizes

A. Theme and content

1. The essay must be written in English. It must be original, not previously published in print or online.
2. The theme for the essay is: “What would it take for the Philippines to be a developed country?”

B. Eligibility

1. The Manila Times national essay-writing competition 2007 is open to all Filipinos, 12 to 20 years old who are residing in the Philippines. The competition has two categories.

- Category A is for ages 12 to 15 years old. A participant in this category shall write an essay of 800 to 1,000 words.
- Category B is for ages 16 to 20 years old. A participant in this category shall write an essay of 1,000 to 1200 words.
- The age limit must be met not later than the December 15, 2007 deadline.

2. Children of employees of The Manila Times and its sister companies, KBS Printing Corp., The Manila Times School of Journalism and The Manila Times Language Institute, and relatives of employees up to second degree of consanguinity are disqualified from joining this competition.

C. Submission

1. Only one entry per person will be accepted.
2. Entry must be encoded/typewritten using Times New Roman Font, size 12, double space format and must be printed on 8 1/2 inches x 11 inches bond paper, one side only.
3. Four copies of the entry must be submitted together with an **entry form**. The **entry form** is printed in The Manila Times. It may be downloaded from the website, www.manilatimes.net. It can also be secured from The Manila Times editorial office in Manila. The article must not bear the name of the author but every page **must be initialed by hand**. The fully accomplished **entry form** should be placed in a sealed envelope.
4. Each entry submitted must be the work of only one person and may not be the collective work of a group. By signing the **entry form**, parent/guardian/teacher certifies that the essay is an original work of only one person and does not infringe upon the rights of any third party.
5. All entries will become the property of The Manila Times.
6. Entries should be mailed to:
The Manila Times National Essay Writing Competition 2007
c/o The Manila Times
371 A. Bonifacio Drive, Port Area
Manila 1018

7. Deadline of submission of hand delivered entries will be 5 p.m., of December 15, 2007. Mailed entries or entries sent by mail, courier or messengerial service should be post dated not later than December 15, 2007. The Manila Times shall not be held accountable for entries sent by mail, courier or messengerial service not received before December 28, 2007. Receipt of entries may be verified at 524-5664 local 122 or 113.

D. Prizes

- Category A P10,000 plus plaque
Category B P15,000 plus plaque

Consolation prizes for honorable mention:
The Manila Times will award subscription for the school or barangay/parish of the winning author (if author is out-of-school)

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The Manila Times

AND

The Manila Times SCHOOL OF JOURNALISM

Preparing our youth to become better journalists



E. Judging

1. Entries shall be judged by a panel of judges selected and approved by The Manila Times Editorial Team.
2. Entries will be judged according to the following criteria:
2.1. Content: *Substance and originality*: 60%
2.2. Form: *Writing style, composition and organization*: 40%
3. The Manila Times reserves the right not to award a prize or any prizes where entries do not meet contest standards or criteria.
4. The winning essays will be announced in The Manila Times printed and Internet edition on February 10, 2008. Prizes shall be awarded to the winners on February 22, 2008 in appropriate ceremonies at The Manila Times School of Journalism.

F. Others

All essays submitted may be used or published in whole or in part by The Manila Times or by other parties with its written permission. The Manila Times reserves the right not to publish any essay it deems inappropriate for whatever reason.

ENTRY FORM The Manila Times National Essay-writing Competition 2007

1 x 1
RECENT
PHOTO

*Name: _____ Sex: _____

*Address: _____

*School: _____ *Year _____

*School Address: _____

*Birthday: _____ Age: _____

*Telephone Number: _____ *CellPhone: _____

*Email address: _____

*Total word count: _____

I certify that the information provided above is true and that I agree
to all the terms and conditions of this competition.

*SIGNATURE OVER PRINTED NAME

*Initial (by hand)

Where did you learn about this contest?

The Manila Times Radio (Please write name of station) _____

_____ LRT/MRT station others

This is to certify that the person above is known to me personally and that the above information are true and the essay submitted is the original work of the said person.

*PRINTED NAME: _____

*RELATION TO THE AUTHOR (Check one)

Parent Guardian Teacher Barangay official

*SIGNATURE: _____ Date: _____

* Required information, if applicable.

Presented by



The Real Bank
A Thrift Bank

Gift ideas from the Moro world

BY NASSER SHARIEF

HOLIDAY season is in the air and everyone is already beginning to sniff floating Styrofoam snowflakes in every window showcases in shopping malls around the country in anticipation of Christmas. Tired of the usual gifts to give your friends, boss and loved ones? Tired of the cheap tin-can quality and the enamel smear of the Weapons of Morolandia that you see hanging on the wall in your house?

Well, we offer you what you might just find if you had just stumbled on a treasure chest in a wrecked ship marooned in an atoll in the Pacific.

The swish-hiss of the kris

How about presenting your visiting multinational executive a kris that he can proudly display in his home back in Sacramento, California? The kris made of the sturdy local Banati wood comes with a stand to lend it an imperial and mysterious aura. It may not be one of the actual ones used by the Moro warriors of old in their raiding spree (those have long ago been tucked in the vaults of museums in Tokyo, San Francisco and other big cities) but at least they are a faithful replica of the old weapons. Who knows, your visiting executive hangs on his wall a sepia picture of his scout ranger grandfather who had joined General Woods or 'Black Jack' John Pershing in their campaigns in the Moro provinces of the Philippines. The kris will fit nicely to the theme.

To obtain this product, call Abdul Daromimbang at +639205068809. Abdul's shop is along Arlegui in Quiapo, Manila, the only surviving souvenir shop on Moro wares in the area that had not been overrun by the DVD phenomenon. As they say, stock is available while supply lasts. This is a good buy considering that many traditional Moro artisans had given up the trade for modern gadgets.

The saturan and the ajedrez

For the indoor sport, we recommend the saturan. The saturan or chess set is a faithful replication of the centuries old sets in pre-Hispanic times. Contrary to popular belief, chess was introduced in the country by the sultans and datus of the south. The Spanish ajedrez came only later. In fact, the configuration of the pieces on the saturan (chatur) board requires that the opposing Kings be on adjacent squares. The ajedrez follows the European reform of the game in the 16th century (Magellan bumped into one of our islands in 1521) when it was discovered that the game can have more strategic character if the opposing Kings are set directly against each other on the same file at the start of the game. Until the 60s, the old rule was still popular among the Moro population before tournament chess caught up with the advent of Bobby Fischer.

So much for rules.

The white pieces of the saturan are made of Banati wood while the black ones are carved out of authentic buffalo horns. The set comes with a rotating stand so the players can just rotate the board when changing colors. The workmanship is fine, using traditional Moro chisels to mimic the state of workmanship of the ancient Moro artisans.

To obtain more detail of this product call Bashier Hassan at +639154603777. Bashier is one of the last okir artists in the country living today.

Tons of pearls

There was a time when Tausog children used to play marbles with pearls on the sandy shores of the islands. Well, you've also heard of the world's biggest pearl weighing 14 pounds (6.4 kg) and measuring about 10 inches in diameter. It was actually a Muslim chieftain who named it Pearl of Allah getting the inspiration from its turban-like baroque form. Much nobler was what ensued two year's later when his son, Pula, contracted malaria. A visiting archeologist Wilburn Dowell Cobb saved the boy. The father was so happy that in gratitude he gave Cobb a gift that forever changed the later's life: the Pearl of Allah. In 1939, Cobb wrote about it in the American Natural History Museum magazine, detailing the circumstances surrounding his acquisition of the pearl.

According to the Guinness Book of Records, the San Francisco Gem Laboratory has valued the pearl at \$40 million tops. Those were the days. Nowadays to get your pearls you go to the Greenhills shopping center which is now world-famous with its south sea pearls. You will find myriad of pearls designs and other gem products in the place. In fact, visiting the place even if you don't intend to buy is therapeutic in these desperate times.

For more details you can contact their organization, Greenhills Muslim Traders Association thru its President, Nassif Malawani at +639198290344 or Amira Jewelry at +639209700364.

Ja or Tinagtag or Tiathag

You are in an island, marooned with just a lone palm tree for company, remember? There is plenty of sunshine sure but you are hungry. Thank Allah, you got Ja! Yeah?

Ja is a Tausog term for Tinagtag (Maguindanao) or Tiathag (Maranao). Ja is a crispy rice pastry. The Golden Brown Rice Tinagtag is produced by the Malapatan RIC Cooperative to promote traditional Moro pastries. To order in quantities, contact Olive Martos at +639174515025.

All these items can be had at reasonable prices without having to fly the skull and crossbones. Now if our tips are not treasures in themselves...



■ Moro antiques had long ago been towed away into distant worlds. The older versions of the above chess set can be found at various museums dotting around Madison Square Garden in downtown Manhattan, New York. The drum below is 20-foot long suspended horizontally along the beams of Moro longhouses and used to warn the population of an impending invasion or some important announcements.

