

Manila bleeds in chain explosions

FROM DOLLY AGLAY

Manila, Dec. 30 (Reuters): A series of bombs exploded in the Philippine capital Manila today, killing at least 13 people, wounding almost 100 and plunging the city into panic.

Ambulance sirens wailed as police rushed to the bomb scenes on a suburban train, a bus, a park bench near the US embassy, a warehouse at the main airport and outside a luxury hotel.

One person has been arrested and President Joseph Estrada said he had had placed the armed forces and police on full alert nationwide.

Asked if the attacks would force him to declare martial law, he told reporters: "I don't believe so, not yet, that's still far off." The first four almost simultaneous explosions were at around noon (4 am GMT). A fifth bomb, about two hours later, killed a policeman who was trying to defuse a device

in a gift-wrapped package.

"This is the work of animals, people without souls," said Manila Mayor Lito Alienza in a radio interview. "They have no compunction about killing innocent civilians."

A government spokesman said earlier that authorities were working on the possibility the bombs had been placed by the Abu Sayyaf Muslim separatist group which operates mostly in the south of the country.

Police and television reports said 13 people had been killed and 95 injured. Panic spread in the city of 12 million people after news of the explosions. Streets were deserted by early evening and the usually crowded shopping malls virtually empty. Estrada appealed for calm.

"We are going to use the full force of the law to suppress this violence," he said. He blamed the blasts on "desperate and cowardly people" whose only aim was to ad-

vance a political agenda.

He did not elaborate and no group has so far claimed responsibility.

The presidential palace dismissed opposition concerns that it was the work of government agents trying to prepare the ground for the imposition of martial law.

Estrada is being tried by a Senate impeachment court on charges of bribery and corruption and analysts have said the trial is going against him.

One of his most senior Cabinet ministers has said Estrada will find it difficult to govern even if acquitted. The court resumes proceedings on Tuesday after a 10-day recess.

Holiday trauma

The most devastating explosion was in the front coach of a crowded elevated train as it was pulling into a station. At least 11 people were killed and about 60

wounded, officials said.

Reuters photographers saw bodies laid out on the platform, including one of a young girl.

Another bomb went off on a park bench near the US embassy, injuring nine people. Only a few hours earlier, Estrada had addressed a public function near there to commemorate the martyrdom of 19th century independence leader Jose Rizal.

A third bomb exploded on a bus as it neared a terminal, killing one person. "It was so powerful it stood the bus up on end," an ABS-CBN reporter said. Several cars were badly damaged.

A fourth explosion damaged a warehouse at Manila's international airport, some 700 metres from the passenger terminal.

Six people were injured, officials said. A fifth bomb was found in a gift-wrapped package near the Dusit Hotel in the Makati financial area.

It was seen by a security guard

and taken to an abandoned petrol station to be defused, where it exploded. A policeman was killed and another injured.

No martial law

Presidential spokesman Mike Toledo denied the bombings were an attempt to impose martial law. "There are some people, and I understand it's some members of the opposition, who have already taken advantage of this situation by blaming the administration... that somehow these are a prelude to martial law," he said.

A statement from a coalition of opposition parties said it was feared "these attacks are coming from people who fear the truth that is coming out at the impeachment trial".

"We warn Malacanang (the presidential palace) not to allow these terrorist attacks as an opportunity to create conditions of martial law or a state of emergency."

THE TELEGRAPH

31 DEC 2000

Estrada in a spot over false name

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AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

MANILA, Dec. 24. — The Philippine President, Mr Joseph Estrada, had to face mounting pressure today to explain the devastating allegations that he had used a false name on a bank account allegedly built up from criminal activities.

Prosecutor, Mr Joker Arroyo, said the "burden of proof" had now shifted to Mr Estrada's camp at the leader's corruption trial in the country's Senate, whose members will decide if the President is still fit to govern.

He said the evidence of Mr Estrada possessing wealth far beyond his professed means, left him needing to explain how it was acquired, increasing the likelihood that the leader will have to take the witness stand at the trial.

Members of the defence panel were not available for comment when contacted by AFP.

The bombshell for Mr Estrada had come on Friday when a senior bank official testified that she had personally seen the President repeatedly sign documents relating to a 500 million peso (\$ 10 million) trust account using the alias Jose Velarde.

THE STATESMAN

25 DEC 2000

It's a trial for the nation

IT IS not often that the trial of a President is beamed into the homes of ordinary citizens. In the case of the Philippines, every development in the impeachment trial of the President, Mr. Joseph Estrada, is being closely watched and discussed by millions.

As the Senate sits as a trial court to try a clutch of charges against the President, it is clear that till a verdict becomes available, politics in the country will continue to be dominated by news of the trial. Almost every day, there is something new to report, something new to comment about for the Philippines press. So far, as witnesses come and present their case, it is not clear which way the 21-member Senate will vote — for or against the President.

A key piece of evidence on which the prosecution was relying seems to have come a cropper. A cheque reportedly signed by "Jose Valhalla" or "Jose Velarde", it had been claimed, was similar to the signature of the President. However, when after days of wrangling, documents from the Equitable PCI Bank were opened, the contents did not hold out much for the prosecution. The specimen signatures for the account bore no resemblance either to that of the President or to the writing on the cheque. After the documents became available for scrutiny, prosecutors alleged that account information appeared to have been tampered with. The entries in the documents, said Mr. Romeo Capulong, one of the prosecutors, "appear to be recently written" and contained "erasures".

The presiding officer in the Senate trial, the Chief Justice of the Philippines, Mr. Hilario Davide, said it was unfair for prosecutors to make evaluations or pronouncements outside the Senate court that could cast doubts on the integrity of the Senate trial. For their part, defence lawyers have said the bank documents would have no effect on their case. The documents only proved that the account in question did not belong to the President.

Another issue that has rocked

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The impact of the Estrada trial on the Philippines' economy has been severe, writes AMIT BARUAH. Business confidence is low and the peso has fallen sharply.

taking the stand in his own behalf and giving the people his own version of events?"

Mr. Estrada's rejoinder was quick. The President stated that Ms. Aquino had no business daring him to take the witness stand since she was not his lawyer. "How many times do I have to tell you that I am ready to face (trial)

anytime," the President was quoted asking reporters. "If it were up to me, I am ready to appear anytime." Pressed for a comment on the Senate proceedings, Mr. Estrada said he had decided to keep silent about the issues in the trial. "Let's just wait for the results, especially the verdict in the case."

While the Estrada trial runs its course (the Senator judges will now take a Christmas break), the impact on the country has been severe. Business confidence is low; top businessmen have taken the lead in calling for the President's resignation.

The peso value to the dollar has fallen sharply since October; foreign interest in the Philippines economy appears restricted to monitoring the "news" from the trial.

The Catholic Church, a leading institution in the country, has openly called for the President to resign — something it has been demanding much in advance of the Senate trial getting underway.

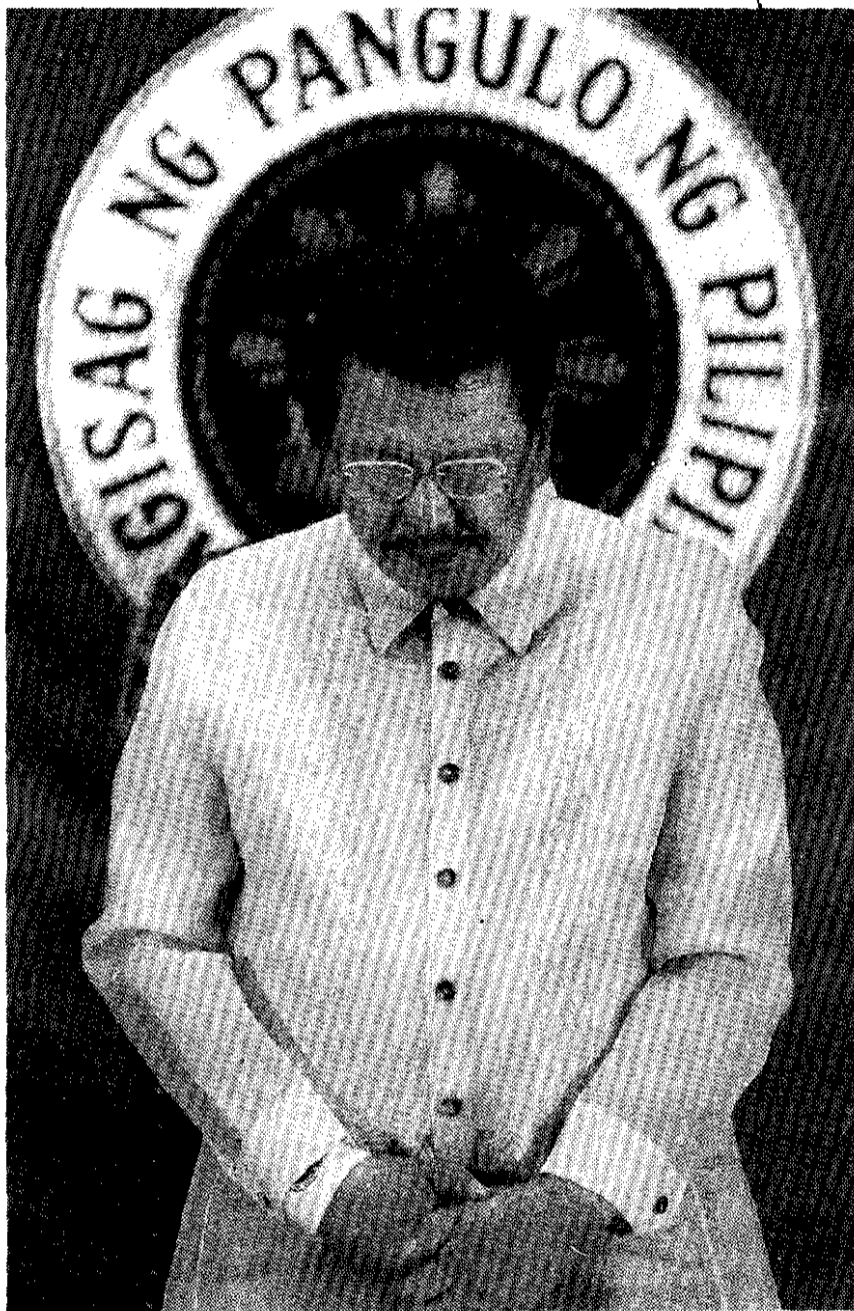
Importantly, the protests in the country have not gotten out of hand. The powerful military, which staged several coup attempts during the presidency of Ms. Corazon Aquino, back in the late 1980s, has been sitting and watching.

There have been statements and counter-statements for and against the President, but these have mercifully

been confined to newspapers and television channels.

According to available information, the Estrada trial is likely to continue through January and may even go into February.

Given such a prospect, Filipinos are expected to be glued to their televisions or radio sets — watching and hearing the unfolding drama.



Mr. Joseph Estrada... discredited.

the trial is the charge that the Estrada Government is responsible for the tapping of telephones of Senator-judges, leaving out a select few whose pro-President posture was not in doubt.

Even as the drama continues inside the Senate court, the Opposition is not letting up in its protests and demands that

"Erap" as Mr. Estrada is known, must "go".

At a recent public function, the former President, Ms. Corazon Aquino, dared Mr. Estrada to take the witness stand in the case. "If the President has nothing to hide, then he has nothing to fear."

If he has nothing to fear, then why should he think twice about

THE HINDU

24 DEC 2000

57-8
14/12
ON THE MAT

S. Estrada
Philippines
Estrada faces impeachment

EX-MOVIE star and current President of the Philippines, Joseph Estrada is adept at playing roles where despite being thrashed by opponents he picks himself up and eventually triumphs, but it remains to be seen whether he can replicate the feat in real life. He is now on trial in the Senate, having been impeached in the lower House of Representatives on a number of counts including having accepted \$ 9 million from illegal gambling syndicates, triggering the gravest political crisis the Philippines has faced since the toppling of Marcos. Two leading lights of that revolution are lined up against him, with both former president Corazon Aquino as well as Cardinal Jaime Sin, leader of the powerful Roman Catholic Church, calling for his resignation. Political opinion in the country is polarised, with the media and the business elite against him, but the poor still largely in his favour. Although Estrada has accumulated considerable wealth and leads a lavish lifestyle, he retains his appeal among ordinary Filipinos, who find his middle class origins, populist politics and movie star image more conducive than some former presidents like Ramos and Aquino, drawn from the patrician, landowning classes.

A recent poll found that 44 per cent of Filipinos are against his resignation, against 29 per cent in favour, but that could change if new evidence emerges against him at the trial which is as much a political as a judicial process: 16 out of 22 senators have to vote against him for impeachment, and senators in turn are subject to a national poll and have to reflect public opinion. Estrada is known to be a flamboyant womaniser and the trial might display certain piquant similarities with Bill Clinton's impeachment ordeal as it proceeds, except that, as a congressman is reported to have said, there are at least "six Monicas" in this case. With Luis Singson, the governor of a province who admits to having collected and passed on gambling money, willing to testify against Estrada, the dice appear to be loaded against him. The good part, however, is that the issue will be settled by constitutional methods, with the military having no role. This has few precedents in Filipino history.

THE STATESMAN

14 DEC 2000

Prosecution drops a \$3mn bombshell as Estrada's trial begins

REUTERS
MANILA, DEC 7

96/8
THE Philippine prosecution dropped a bombshell at President Joseph Estrada's impeachment trial on Thursday, producing a cheque for some \$3 million as alleged proof that he had amassed

wealth in office.

8/12
Prosecutor Joker Arroyo showed the Senate impeachment court a copy of a cheque for 146 million pesos which he said was signed by Estrada, albeit in a false name. As tens of thousands of protesters demanding Estrada's resignation marched on the Senate building

at the start of the historic trial, another of the prosecutors accused Estrada of running a criminal syndicate from his presidential palace.

"The prosecutors will expose the existence of a criminal syndicate directed



from the highest office of the land," prosecutor Sergio Apostol told a hushed court.

The defence likened Estrada to Julius Caesar and decried the "lies and innuendo" which had led many to rush to

judgment. Estrada is threatened with removal from office on charges of bribery, corruption, betrayal of public trust and culpable violation of the constitution. He has denied all the charges and has said he will be vindicated at trial. Prosecutor Arroyo suggested the cheque was used to purchase a mansion

for one of Estrada's mistresses.

The cheque, Arroyo said, was made out to Jose Luis Yulo, a friend of Estrada, who in turn used part of the funds to finance purchases made by a company called St Peter's Holdings, of which he was the owner.

The company bought a 86-million peso mansion in Manila

Fate is in hands of 23

MANILA: Estrada's fate is now in the hands of 23 jurors, one of whom has starred opposite him in a film. Fifteen votes are needed to throw him out. He needs eight to survive. Ten are with the opposition, seven are pro-Estrada.

which newspapers have said is occupied by former starlet Laarni Enriquez, who Estrada has acknowledged is the mother of three of his children.

The reports have called the mansion "Boracay" because it has a large swimming pool with artificial waves and surrounding white sands.

INDIAN EXPRESS

8 DEC 2000

Senate 'no' on move to quash Estrada trial

By Amit Baruah ^{HD-46}

SINGAPORE, NOV. 28. The Philippine Senate, sitting as a tribunal, today rejected a motion to dismiss the impeachment proceedings against the President, Mr. Joseph Estrada, on corruption charges.

The presiding officer, the Supreme Court Chief Justice, Mr. Hilario Davide Jr., announced the decision to dismiss the motion on grounds of "lack of merit". The impeachment tribunal, following the rejection of the motion, adjourned its sitting to meet again on Dec. 7 when the formal trial against Mr. Estrada will get under way.

Some reports from Manila suggest that the Estrada defence team might now move the country's Supreme Court in a bid to put a legal spoke in the wheel to delay the commencement of the trial.

In another development today, the Science Secretary, Mr. Filomon Uriarte Jr., announced his decision to resign from the Cabinet, but said it did not have anything to do with the current crisis in the country.

A spokesman for Mr. Uriarte Jr. was quoted as saying in Manila that the Science Secretary wanted to return to the private sector.

In turn, the President stated that he had requested the Science Secretary to stay on for some months and take leave of absence if necessary.

It may be recalled that the Vice-President, Ms. Gloria Macapagal Arroyo, had resigned from the Cabinet after the sensational allegations that Mr. Estrada accepted



The Philippines President, Mr. Joseph Estrada, speaks on his mobile phone during a handover ceremony of low cost houses in Trece Martirez, south of Manila, on Tuesday. — AP

over \$ 8 millions in illegal lottery proceeds.

The pressure on Mr. Estrada continues to be unrelenting as his trial begins on Dec. 7. A wide coalition of forces — from the country's left-wing to big business to the influential Catholic Church — are ranged against Mr. Estrada.

Even if Mr. Estrada manages the eight votes in his favour in the 22-member Senate during the trial, the public outrage against this one-time film actor may prove difficult to handle.

Days before the trial gets under way, a series of rallies and demonstrations is planned in Manila in a continuing effort to put pressure on Mr. Estrada to resign.

So far, he has given no indication that he is prepared to resign and has described the corruption charges against him as false.

THE HINDU

29 NOV 2000

Senate gives Estrada time to answer charges

By Amit Baruah

SINGAPORE, NOV. 20. The Philippine President, Mr. Joseph Estrada, was given 10 days to reply to charges of corruption, bribery, betrayal of public trust and culpable violation of the Constitution, as the Senate began the formal trial against him today.

The Senate, whose 22 members took oath as judges acting in a tribunal, now has the Supreme Court Chief Justice presiding over the Upper House as a non-voting member. The Upper House said the President must "answer the impeachment charges within a non-extendable period of 10 days". Day-to-day hearings in the trial are to begin in the first week of December. Earlier, the Lower House of Representatives had "impeached" Mr. Estrada on the same charges and sent the case against him to the Senate for trial. A Senate verdict is final and cannot be appealed.

A Senator and senior member of the beleaguered President's party quit the group today hours before the Senate trial got under-



The Philippine Senate President, Mr. Aquilino Pimentel Jr. (left), and the Supreme Court Chief Justice, Mr. Hilario Davide (right), browse through articles of impeachment being read by the Senate Secretary, Mr. Lutgardo Barbo, at the formal start of the impeachment trial against the embattled Philippine President, Mr. Joseph Estrada, in Manila on Monday. — AP

way. Mr. Francisco Tatad, Senate majority leader, announced his "neutrality" in the forthcoming trial — stressing that he had not joined hands with anti-Estrada forces. The President, meanwhile,

said he was ready to accept the verdict from the Senate, which will act as the court of impeachment. "I will accept whatever is the verdict of the Senate...nobody's above the Constitution. No-

body's above the law," Mr. Estrada was quoted as telling reporters in Manila. "I leave my fate to God and to the judgment of the Senate," the President said.

At a time when the Opposition needs 15 votes to convict Mr. Estrada, the announcement of neutrality by Mr. Tatad will definitely come as a blow to the President. With Mr. Tatad's announcement, the Opposition could muster the magical number of 15, the two-thirds strength required in the 22-member Upper House to ensure the exit of Mr. Estrada from office. "I will vote to convict if the prosecutors succeed in proving their case. I will vote to acquit if they fail to do so. Until that happens, I will not know what my vote will be," Mr. Tatad said in a statement.

Mr. Estrada's troubles have mounted after Mr. Luis Singson, a provincial Governor, alleged that he had personally handed over \$8 million in bribes to the President from illegal "jueteng" (lottery) proceeds.

THE HINDU

21 NOV 2000

Estrada loses ally as trial begins

REUTERS



Mr Estrada

MANILA, Nov. 20. — The Philippine Senate launched the impeachment trial of the President, Mr

Joseph Estrada, on corruption charges today hours after a key ally deserted him.

With the defection of Senator Mr Francisco Tatad from government ranks, the trial promises to be a cliffhanger with no clear indication on whether Mr Estrada will be convicted or acquitted.

Mr Estrada has been under tremendous pressure to resign since a provincial governor said in October that he had handed the President millions of pesos from illegal gambling syndicates.

The governor, Mr Luis Singson, said Mr Estrada had also diverted funds from excise taxes to his personal use.

Prosecutors meanwhile have said mistresses of Mr Estrada, a self-confessed womaniser, will be summoned to testify

who has funded the luxury houses they are living in.

In an historic session marking the first impeachment trial of an Asian leader, Senate members put on black robes and formally converted themselves into a tribunal to judge the former movie star.

The trial proper, when prosecutors start presenting evidence, is to begin in early December. Mr Estrada has said he is innocent of corruption charges and has vowed to clear his name.

"I will accept whatever is the verdict of the Senate," Mr Estrada told reporters. "Nobody's above the constitution. Nobody's above the law. I leave my fate to God and to the judgment of the Senate."

Earlier, Mr Tatad announced his defection from Mr Estrada's coalition, but stressed he was not joining the Opposition.

A two-thirds vote of the 22-member Senate - or at least 15 - is required to convict and remove Mr Estrada from office.

Mr Tatad is the seventh member of the President's coalition to defect since the bribery scandal broke last month.

THE STATESMAN

21 NOV 200

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From hero to villain

If he does manage to cling on to power, Mr. Estrada will only prolong the chaos in the Philippines, writes AMIT BARUAH.

THE PHILIPPINES President, Mr. Joseph Estrada, is on trial. Literally. After being impeached by the House of Representatives on November 13, Mr. Estrada's fate hangs in the balance as the Senate begins his trial. As the end-game played itself out in Parliament, protests mounted in the streets. A united Opposition, from left wing groups to business organisations, was unrelenting in its demands for the President's resignation. Mr. Estrada too has taken to the streets — even getting the former first lady, Ms. Imelda Marcos, to speak up for him at a public rally.

There remained, for the Opposition, the fear that the 63-year-old Mr. Estrada may just manage to defeat the trial in the Senate. A two-thirds vote is required in the 22-member Senate to ensure the exit of Mr. Estrada. In the lower House of Representatives over 40 legislators, including the Speaker, Mr. Manuel Villar, had defected.

Earlier in the week, the Vice-President, Ms. Gloria Macapagal Arroyo, daughter of a former Philippine President, said recent protest rallies clearly indicated that people had lost faith in the Head of State. Ms. Arroyo, who will step into the shoes of Mr. Estrada in case he resigns or is forced out of office by the Senate, told reporters in Manila: "He (Mr. Estrada) will remain in office tainted, ridiculed, distrusted and protested against. He will no longer be able to govern with any degree of effectiveness."

"For the sake of the people and the economy, the earlier he resigns the better," she said, adding that the economy already ailing from the onslaught against Mr. Estrada, "will go into a tailspin, a deep recession."

The Opposition campaign snowballed into a major movement after Mr. Luis Singson, a provincial Governor and one-time close friend of Mr. Estrada, alleged that he personally paid over \$8 million in *jueteng* (an illegal lottery) bribes to Mr. Estrada. The powerful Catholic church and the popular former President, Ms. Corazon Aquino, joined the campaign against Mr. Estrada, reminiscent of the "People Power" movement which led to the ouster of Ferdinand Marcos



Philippines' Vice-President, Ms. Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, proclaims her solidarity at an oust-Estrada rally. (Below) The President, Mr. Joseph Estrada... untenable position.



in 1986. Ms. Aquino's involvement lent considerable credibility to the campaign since she is officially out of power politics, and is looked upon as a pro-democracy icon in the country. For Mr. Estrada, corruption allegations have dogged him ever since he became President two years ago. The official list of charges mentioned in the impeachment motion approved by the House of Representatives shows that the allegations are wide and varied. According to the House motion, Mr. Estrada received "10 million pesos (US \$208,300) a month as bribe money from the bosses of *jueteng* illegal gambling operation channelled through his friend, provincial Governor Luis Singson, from November 1998 to August 2000."

The President, who is known to have a string of mistresses and

several illegitimate children (Mr. Estrada has never hidden this side of his life from the Filipino people), was also accused of "having unexplained wealth and thereby committing perjury because records show that he and his wife and mistresses and their children have interests in companies outside of the three firms listed in his statement of assets and liabilities".

The impeachment motion, which was approved by over one-third of the strength of the lower House, claimed that the President had betrayed the public trust by "intervening in the Securities and Exchange Commission probe into alleged stock manipulation of gaming firm BW Resources Corp on behalf of a Presidential crony".

The public trust had also been betrayed by Mr. Estrada "violating his own official pronouncements during his inaugural speech when he declared that he would not favour any relatives, pals or friends in the running of his Government." Mr. Estrada, the impeachment motion added, committed culpable violation of the Constitution, by "ordering the Commissioner of Customs to turn over 52 luxury vehicles impounded from smugglers to the Presidential palace for distribution to Cabinet members and other senior officials" and "appointing certain members of the Cabinet, their deputies or assistants to another office or employment".

For his part, Mr. Estrada has

stated that he will not resign and wants a quick trial in the Senate. While there is little doubt that the President cannot be forced to step down, he certainly appears unable to contain the fall-out of the Singson allegations. The President did not help his case when he said that some of the money, apparently coming from Mr. Singson, was deposited in the account of a charity and had not been touched by him.

However, as the Senate prepares to frame rules for the trial, Mr. Estrada's fate will be decided more by political loyalties than the evidence against him. It is still not clear which way the Senate vote will go. In case Mr. Estrada does manage to hold on to power, he can only frustrate the Opposition, which is anxious to see him go. If the President is voted out by the Senate, then Ms. Arroyo will take over.

In a larger sense, the Philippines, which was struggling to put the economic crisis of 1997-98 behind it, has been hit hard by the gambling scandal which threatens to consume Mr. Estrada's Presidency.

The influential business community too is now ranged against Mr. Estrada. The final moves in the end-game are being made in the Philippines. Its outcome, of course, will depend on how the Senate votes. If he does manage to cling on to power, Mr. Estrada will only prolong the chaos in the Philippines and fuel further street protests by the Opposition.

THE HINDU

19 NOV 2001

Estrada ready to face trial

Photo
HO-18
1811

MANILA, NOV. 17. In his most clear-cut denial to date, the Philippine President, Mr. Joseph Estrada, swore today that he did not receive payoffs from illegal gambling and said he was prepared for a Senate impeachment trial.

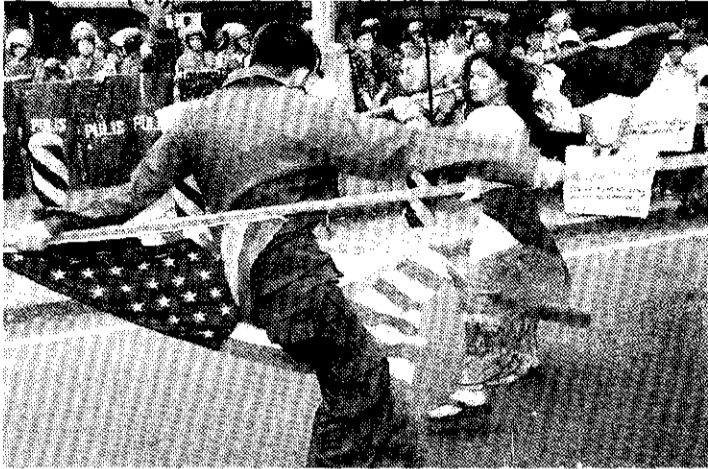
"I repeat to all of you, I have not received a single cent from any kind of illegal gambling," he told troops at a military medical center where he visited wounded soldiers.

"As your commander in chief, that is what I solemnly swear. My conscience is clear. I am not hiding anything from our soldiers and our countrymen," he said.

On Monday, the House of Representatives forwarded articles of impeachment against Mr. Estrada to the Senate for a trial.

The Senate plans to issue a summons to the President next Monday instructing him to answer the allegations in 10 days, and expects to begin the trial early next month.

Mr. Estrada is being accused in the impeachment trial — the first in the country's history — of having accepted millions of dollars



A Filipino man and a woman, representing the United States and the Philippines, mock-fight with their flags during a demonstration demanding that the U.S. stay out of Philippine presidential politics, in front of the U.S. embassy in Manila on Friday. — AP

from illegal gambling operators and tobacco taxes, and of other misdeeds.

"I am prepared for the impeachment process in our Senate," Mr. Estrada told the soldiers. "And I believe that in the end the

truth will prevail." Mr. Estrada did not refer directly to tobacco taxes.

The allegations have plunged the country into its worst political crisis in at least a decade and badly hurt financial markets. — AP

THE HINDU

18 NOV 2000

Estrada bracing for Senate trial

By Amit Baruah

SINGAPORE, NOV. 13. The Philippine President, Mr. Joseph Estrada, who was impeached by the House of Representatives in Manila today, will have to face a trial by the Senate.

The Speaker of the House of Representatives, Mr. Manuel Villar, ordered the House Secretary-General to "transmit to the Senate" the articles of impeachment. He said the impeachment motion had received the minimum 73 votes in the 218-member House as required to begin the Senate trial.

In the next stage of the process, which could result in the President's removal from office, the Senate, which is the upper House, will hear charges against Mr. Estrada and decide whether he is guilty of corruption. A two-thirds majority, at least 15 Senators in a House of 22, will be required to oust the one-time film actor from office. Following the recent

defection of over 40 ruling party legislators, including the Speaker, the result of the impeachment process in the lower House was a foregone conclusion. Today's proceedings took just eight minutes.

Mr. Estrada, however, has resisted all pressure being exerted by the Opposition and the Catholic Church to quit office after a provincial Governor accused him of taking over \$ 8 millions in illegal gambling proceeds.

In a bizarre defence, the President has claimed that \$ 4 millions was forced on him by Mr. Luis Singson, the Governor and one-time friend, and went into a charity account and had not been touched by him.

"I have told the lower House, especially my partymates, to speed up the process of impeachment and bring it to the Senate so I can face the trial and end the whole thing," Mr.

Estrada was quoted as saying, adding his conscience was clear.

"I will prove wrong those who have put their personal and political interests above the interests of our country by demanding my ouster..." Mr. Estrada said. His six-year term as President officially ends only in 2004.

Such a statement for expediting the impeachment process in the Senate can only indicate that Mr. Estrada is confident of the support of those loyal to him in the 22-member upper House.

There have been a couple of defections to the Opposition, including that of the Senate President (a new one was elected today), but Mr. Estrada appears confident of the numbers for the moment.

If he is indeed confident of the majority, then the President may well like to have a quick trial in the Senate and "end" the controversy once and for all. Such a move, however, is not certain. As far as the impeachment motion approved by the House of Representatives is concerned, it contains a large number of corruption charges.

Mr. Estrada is accused of accepting 10 million pesos (\$ 2,08,300 a month) as bribe from the "jueteng" or illegal gambling operation controlled by Mr. Luis Singson from November 1998 to August 2000.

The President is also accused of "having unexplained wealth and thereby committing perjury because records show that he and his wife and mistress and their children have interests in companies outside their three firms listed in his statement of assets and liabilities."

According to the impeachment motion, Mr. Estrada allegedly participated in real estate business through a family-controlled corporation which constructed 36 town houses in Antipolo City, Manila.

The list of charges against Mr. Estrada is a long one. The President, however, has been unfazed by the charges, and has sought the support of evangelist preachers to shore up his public support by addressing one massive rally.

The Opposition is slated to respond in the same coin. As the process to remove Mr. Estrada moved into the trial stage in the Senate, the battle also continues in the streets of Philippines -- with both the ruling party and the Opposition stepping up their political campaign.

THE HINDU

14 NOV 2001

THE cascading call for the resignation of President Joseph Estrada plunged the country into its gravest political crisis in October, since the overthrow of President Ferdinand Marcos in the 1986 People Power Revolution, and the December 1989 military coup attempt on the government of President Corazon Aquino.

At stake in all these crises was the survival of sitting governments. Marcos did not survive the crisis. Aquino's government teetered on the edge of collapse. The Estrada government is just about holding, but it is under heavy siege as pressure from the streets and civil society groups, sections of the business community and the international press mounts for his resignation.

It is a dangerous omen for the Estrada government that the discourse in the national debate, sparked by charges that he had received illegal gambling payoffs in millions of pesos is no longer about whether he will go but how soon.

The debate focussed on possible exit scenarios, indicating that there was widespread belief his days are numbered. This perception, that assumes his fall is a foregone conclusion is dangerous because it has a bandwagon effect and can be self-fulfilling.

It has led to a dynamic political mobilisation that has spun a life of its own, independent of whether the Ilocos Sur Governor, Luis "Chavit" Singson, can back his charges against President Joseph Estrada with evidence demanded by lawyers.

It is important to put the impeachment process in the context of the crises faced by previous Philippine governments in the post-war years to appreciate the gravity of the crisis engulfing the Estrada government, and to understand the nature of the crisis.

Mr Estrada is the first

Silver lining for democracy



Filipinos demonstrate in a Hong Kong park on Sunday, demanding President Estrada's resignation over corruption allegations. — AP/PTI.

President in the post-Edsa era to face a broad-based public demand for his resignation. He is also the fourth President in the post-war years against whom impeachment charges were laid in Congress. Before him was Elpidio Quirino in 1949, Diosdado Macapagal in 1963, and Ferdinand Marcos in 1986. Quirino was charged with corruption.

The Opposition Nacionalista Party sought in 1963 to impeach Macapagal, of the Liberal Party, for allegedly cov-

ering up the Stonehill case involving payoffs by Harry Stonehill to many government officials and legislators identified in Stonehill's notorious Blue Book, noting the payoffs. Macapagal was not directly involved in the payoffs but he hastily deported Stonehill after allegations that Stonehill financed the withdrawal of the presidential candidacy of Senator Rogelio de la Rosa, averting the splitting of votes of the Opposition and allowing Macapagal to defeat President

With the Filipino President's impeachment by the House of Representatives, AMANDO DORONILA shows how history repeats itself, albeit, in a different format. Joseph Estrada has gained the distinction of being the first President of the country whose faults, shortcomings and dubious ethical standards are catching up on him swiftly

Carlos Garcia, Nacionalista, in the 1961 election. But Macapagal's integrity was never seriously challenged, and his administration was not embroiled in corruption scandals.

Although the Marcos administration was under a cloud for corruption and cronyism, the impeachment complaint came late — in the twilight days of his regime, in 1986, when his government was mired in a deep economic recession and was sliding towards political collapse.

He was accused, among other things, of corruption, crony capitalism and human rights violations. Quirino, Macapagal and Marcos had solid majorities in the legislature during the two-party system prevalent from 1946 to 1972. The impeachment complaints never reached first base; they were promptly thrown out by their allies in the legislature.

In all these impeachment cases, corruption was an underlying threat, but this shouldn't come as a surprise. Graft has always been a key issue in all Philippines elections, without precluding other issues that contributed to the exit of its Presidents, either through elections or, as in the case of Marcos, removal by people's power.

Of all the corruption charges that plagued the Quirino and

Marcos administrations, none is more serious and sordid than the payoff charges exploded by Governor Singson.

In the articles of impeachment filed by Lakas Congressmen and endorsed by civil-society groups, Mr Estrada stands accused of not only taking bribes in the gambling syndicate kickbacks, the articles also catalogued impeachable acts, including unexplained wealth, interference in the quasi-judicial process in the investigation conducted by the Securities and Exchange Commission on insider manipulation of the stock market in the BW Resources scandal.

In the impeachment moves against Quirino and Macapagal, there was no clamour in the streets for their resignation. The impeachment move against Quirino was initiated against the backdrop of a Communist (Hukbalahap) rebellion that threatened the survival of the government and an economy in shambles. In Macapagal's case, the economy was robust; it achieved its highest growth rates during his administration, but there was relative calm in the law and order situation.

In the case of Marcos, the impeachment move came when the economy had plunged to negative growth, and political turmoil sparked by the assassi-

nation of former Senator Benigno Aquino in 1983 was intensifying.

Of all the administrations, the Marcos and Estrada administrations — both plagued by corruption and cronyism charges — stand out for generating mass protests building up to demands for removal, either through resignation or impeachment. In both cases, they were bogged down by economic crisis. In fact, it was the Marcos regime against which the efficacy of people's power was tested to topple governments that have lost the people's confidence.

If it had taken 14 years before the people took to the streets to bring down Marcos, it has taken only less than three years for people to be primed for mass mobilisation in a street-initiated call for his removal. This should be a healthy sign for the often turbulent and unstable Philippines democracy.

This means that the people have quickly realised that they have made a mistake in electing Mr Estrada President, and are now taking action to cut short his term to correct a mistake before his corrupt and inept presidency can inflict more damage to the economy and the nation.

Given that the presidential system is a rigid structure giv-

ing a fixed term to the President, the call for resignation is a movement towards extra-constitutional change. It is again a manifestation of people's power, although the mobilisation in the streets is not likely to repeat history in its precise form. Nothing in history is repeated with the same format.

This crisis is looking like it will be resolved soon by another street mobilisation stoked by the flames of economic deterioration and the outrage over the payoffs scandal.

What's certain is that the economy is becoming the decisive factor in the present crisis. The fate of the Estrada government is being decided on the foreign exchange counters and the stock exchange floors that can't be bribed or manipulated by political authority. If the dam crashes on the peso and the stock market falls deeper, impeachment may become irrelevant.

But Mr Estrada has already gained the distinction of being the first Filipino President whose faults, shortcomings and dubious ethical standards are catching up on him swiftly.

In less than three years, Estrada has not only been engulfed in a series of scandals over corruption, he has also opened a war with the Muslim separatists in Mindanao, and the gambling payoffs scandal blew up in his face even before he could win his war in Mindanao, which has exacted a heavy toll on the economy not yet recovered from the 1997 financial crisis.

The people gave previous Presidents, except Marcos, a chance to complete their terms and repudiated them at the polls.

They are not giving Mr Estrada that much of a chance. That is the silver lining for democracy in this crisis of confidence in the Estrada presidency.

— The Philippine Inquirer/Asia News Network

THE STATESMAN

14 NOV 2000

Joseph Estrada impeached to face Senate trial for graft

PHILIPPINE PRESIDENT Joseph Estrada was impeached by the House of Representatives on Monday, paving the way for a Senate trial for alleged corruption. House Speaker Manuel Villar said.

The 63-year-old Estrada, accused of taking \$8 million in bribes from illegal gambling operators, is the first Philippine leader to be impeached. He would remain in office but will face a Senate trial.

Villar ordered the House secretary-general to "transmit to the Senate" the articles of impeachment, saying the impeachment motion had already received one third



majority from the 218-member lower house. He said the House's task became "peremptory" as its justice committee had already endorsed the impeachment motion on November 6 after exhaustive debate. Villar's speedy approval of the impeachment motion caught pro-Estrada legislators by surprise.

Villar, who resigned from Estrada's Lamp coalition party recently, took the podium on Monday, after House members sang the national anthem and, ignoring attempts by Estrada allies to raise a point of order, proceeded to formally approve the motion.

As he approved the impeachment resolution, the House gallery broke out in loud applause. anti-Estrada legislators embraced each other while the President's allies rose up in an uproar.

AFP Manila

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

14 NOV 2001

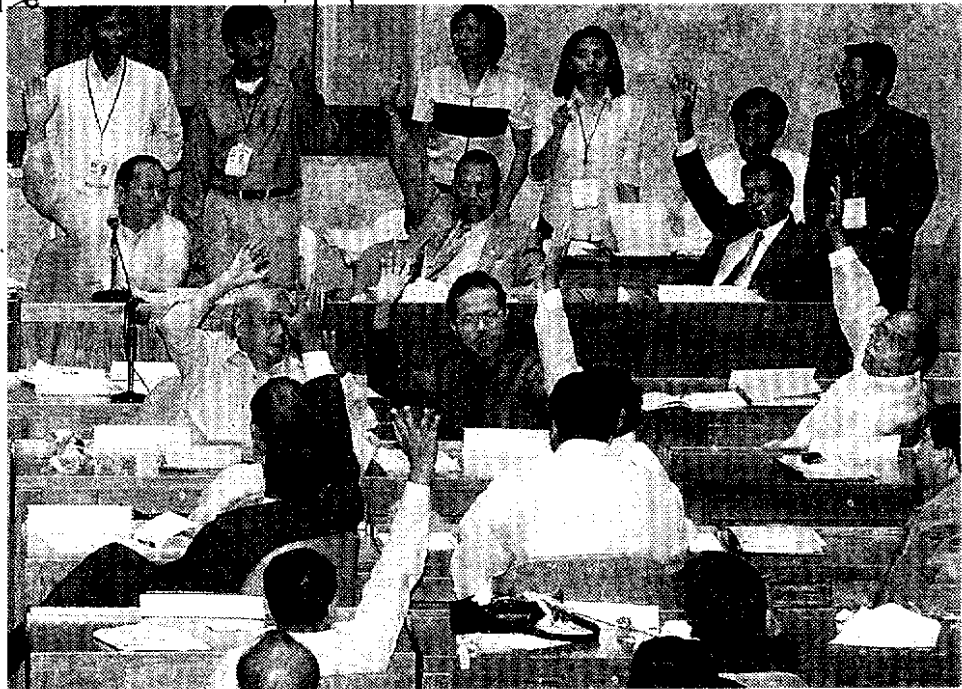
Debate on Estrada impeachment begins

MANILA, NOV. 6. Philippine legislators today began debates on an impeachment motion against the President, Mr. Joseph Estrada, as financial markets staged a dramatic rally on expectations the chief executive would be removed from office over bribery allegations.

The House of Representatives' 51-member Committee on Justice was locked in heated discussions on whether to immediately elevate the impeachment complaint to the plenary session for approval or to hold hearings on the case. Opposition legislators insisted that the committee must do away with hearings because 99 Congressmen already had endorsed the complaint, which charges Mr. Estrada with bribery, graft and corruption, betrayal of public trust and violations of the Constitution.

Only 73 votes in the 218-member House of Representatives are needed to indict Mr. Estrada and submit the Articles of Impeachment to the Senate for trial. In the 22-seat Senate, 16 votes are required to remove Mr. Estrada from office. But some administration Congressmen opposed the move, which they claimed would violate the rules of impeachment. The start of the impeachment proceedings was welcomed by the country's stocks and currency markets. Philippine stocks soared 16.5 per cent in a record one-day gain of 212.25 points to close at 1,500.10. The peso surged to a midday average of 49.219 to one dollar from 51.68 on Oct. 31, the final day of trading last week before the market closed for public holidays.

Analysts said the remarkable performance of the Philippine stocks and the peso was due to expectations that the impeachment proceedings would result in the resolution of the controversy, which has battered financial markets. "The positive reaction was in anticipation of a change in government," said Mr. Astro del Castillo, research head at A & A Securities.



Members of the Lower House raise their hands to vote on an issue as endorsement of the impeachment procedure against the Philippine President, Mr. Joseph Estrada, over allegations that he received millions of dollars from illegal gambling operations on Monday at the House of Representatives in suburban Quezon City. — AP

The impeachment bid stemmed from allegations that Mr. Estrada received more than \$8 million in bribes from illegal gambling operations and pocketed \$2.6 million in tobacco taxes intended for the northern province of Ilocos Sur. Mr. Estrada, a 63-year-old former movie action star, has insisted he did not receive "a single centavo" from illegal gambling operations or steal money from the national

coffers. He vowed to answer all charges at the Senate trial.

The expose fuelled mounting calls for Mr. Estrada's resignation and led his top allies in Congress — the House Speaker, Mr. Manuel Villar and the Senate President, Mr. Franklin Drilon — as well as more than 40 Congressmen and five Senators to desert the chief executive. — DPA

THE HINDU

7 NOV 2000

Opposition launches post-Estrada agenda

DPA & REUTERS

MANILA, Oct. 28. — Philippine Opposition leaders led by Vice-President, Mr Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, officially launched a "new alternative agenda" for the government in anticipation of the resignation of Mr Joseph Estrada.

Mr Arroyo with Opposition leaders Mr Renato De Villa and Mr Lito Osmena, unveiled an action plan to force his ouster in the central Philippine city of Cebu. "It is imperative that the President resign immediately to avoid irreparable damage to the economy and to restore the people's faith and confidence in government", Mr Arroyo said.

The "new alternative agenda" includes programmes to revive the country's ailing economy, stamp out graft and corruption, and maintain peace and order, the Opposition leaders said.

Mr Estrada has been accused of receiving millions of pesos in payoffs from illegal gambling operations.

The accusation, made by a self-confessed "bag man," Mr Luis Singson, governor of Ilocos Sur province, fueled what analysts say is Mr Estrada's worst crisis since he assumed office in June 1998.

Mr Joseph Estrada, meanwhile called for a let-up in the campaign for his resignation over a gambling payoffs scandal. He said it was having a disastrous effect on the economy. But his call was to no avail.

In Manila, supporters of Mr Estrada staged a demonstration before the official residence of Manila archbishop Jaime Cardinal Sin and urged him to drop his calls for Mr Estrada's resignation.

The supporters asked him to respect the constitutional separation of the church and state, and cut his involvement in the country's politics.

THE STATESMAN

29 OCT 2000

Philippine army to reduce troops in Jolo

PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER
ASIA NEWS NETWORK

MANILA, Oct. 25. — The Armed Forces of the Philippines is considering reduction in the number of troops taking part in a massive operation in Sulu. The military is yet to complete its mission of crushing the Abu Sayyaf rebels and rescue their remaining five hostages.

"I think the situation in Jolo has improved a lot since we started that operation. So that is one thing we are looking at", AFP Chief Gen Angelo Reyes yesterday said in a briefing.

But Gen Reyes did not say how many troops would be pulled out from the AFP's Joint Task Force Trident which is spearheading the mission. Nor did he give a time-table for the downsizing.

More than 5,000 soldiers and policemen were deployed in Jolo for the operation which began on 16 September to rescue 19 hostages, the remnants of a near five-

month kidnaping spree by Abu Sayyaf rebels. The operation included air and artillery bombardment of their positions.

About 600 members of the police special action force have already been pulled out. The operation has led to the recovery of two French journalists and 12 Christian evangelists.

But the Abu Sayyaf rebels still hold captive three Malaysians, American Jeffrey Schilling and Roland Ullah and a Filipino who is the last of the hostages taken from the Malaysian island resort of Sipadan, last April.

It had ransomed off more than a dozen other hostages for millions of dollars according to independent accounts. The government, however, has denied paying any ransom.

Gen Reyes said the AFP "has all reasons to believe" that Abu Sayyaf leaders and their remaining hostages were not able to slip through the naval cordon thrown around the island-province and were still

in Sulu.

According to the "combat scoreboard" issued by Camp Aguinaldo, 74 armed engagements have been recorded from 16 September up to 7 a.m. yesterday.

It said government forces had killed 136 Abu Sayyaf gunmen, wounded 11 and captured 124.

It added that 83 had surrendered. The Abu Sayyaf had lost 506 pieces of firearms while the government lost only one radio, the scoreboard indicated.

Sporadic clashes between troops and rebels continue. On Monday, soldiers encountered about 20 Abu Sayyaf members led by Ghafib "Robot" Andang, who, along with Mujib Susukan, were said to have received about \$15 million in ransom for a group of hostages taken from Sipadan.

Soldiers recovered ammunition, food and personal belongings from the rebels after an hour's clash. No casualties were reported.

THE STATESMAN

26 OCT 2000

Impeachment case moved against Philippine President

MANILA: The Philippine lower house has formally set in motion an impeachment case against President Joseph Estrada on Monday, and promised speedy hearings to find out if it was true he took bribes from gambling syndicates.

"The nation cannot afford a circus-like exchange of bitter accusations from both sides so we have to resolve this in the soonest possible time," said house speaker Manuel Villar, a member of Mr Estrada's ruling coalition.

"We are here to get to the bottom of all allegations, so the whole truth may be known... Let us allow the truth to come out so justice will prevail," he added.

Mr Villar has set the impeachment case rolling, by formally including it in the order of business of the house of representatives, which means the house committee on justice could begin hearing the bribery and corruption charges against the beleaguered former movie actor.

Lawmakers and analysts have said the impeachment proceedings are certain to set off bitter debates in the Congress that could last for months, heightening political turmoil, which could deeply divide the country and further damage an already prostrate economy.

The bribery scandal has sparked almost daily street protests against Mr Estrada and calls for him to step down. It has also savaged financial markets.

"I will not allow partisan political interests to dominate proceedings," Mr Villar said in a statement. "It is not in the streets, in newspapers or on radio and television that this very important issue, on which the future of our country depends, will be resolved".

He urged the justice committee to hold sessions even during the Congressional recess from October 27 to November 12 to speed up the impeachment process.

Mr Estrada denied allegations that he took \$ 8.5 million in payoffs from gambling syndicates running an illegal numbers game called "jueteng" and vowed to fight the impeachment case. He also rejected church calls for him to resign.

On Sunday, Mr Estrada suggested he might agree to a snap presidential election if there was public support for such a poll. This is the first sign the President has given that he might be willing to ease up on his uncompromising stance which has threatened to deeply divide the country.

The constitution vests in the lower house the sole power of initiating an impeachment action against a President and in the senate the power to try and unseat him.

Under the impeachment rules, the 51-member house committee on justice, where only about a dozen opposition lawmakers sit, will decide if sufficient ground exists for impeachment. (Reuters)

THE TIMES OF INDIA

24 OCT 2000

Estrada 'ready' to face election

HD-19

By Amit Baruah

SINGAPORE, OCT. 23. The Philippine President, Mr. Joseph Estrada, has expressed his readiness to face a snap election to end the political crisis even as fresh allegations of nepotism have been levelled against him.

A report prepared by the Philippine Centre for Investigative Journalism (PCIJ) claims that Mr. Estrada's cronies have acquired land and houses valued at about \$2.5 millions in metropolitan Manila's "poshest and most exclusive districts" during the last three years.

"Although none of these properties are registered in (Mr.) Estrada's name, the President or one of his wives would later live or be seen visiting the properties, sometimes even supervising construction," the PCIJ report alleged.

The latest charges come at a time when the President is fighting for his political survival and the lower House of Representatives has formally taken up the impeachment motion against



Mr. Estrada. His willingness to consider a snap election, a provision not permitted by the Constitution is a good indicator of the pressures the President is facing.

Many of those ranged against him, including the Vice-President, Ms. Gloria Macapagal Arroyo, are not in favour of snap elections. They favour an outright resignation from Mr. Estrada for allegedly accepting over \$8

millions in "jueteng" (an illegal lottery) proceeds from an ex-crony, Mr. Luis Singson, a provincial Governor.

It is Mr. Singson who fired the first salvo against Mr. Estrada after the two reportedly fell out over the collection of gambling proceeds in the province.

In the present report, the PCIJ claimed quoting corporate and land record that over 18,500 square metres of the country's choicest real estate had been acquired by close cronies of Mr. Estrada.

"The purchases were made from the country's oldest families...these purchases, if they were indeed made on (Mr.) Estrada's behalf, raise questions about the sources of the President's wealth and the possibility that the amounts used to buy them were illegally obtained...."

"The fact that none of these three businessmen (the Estrada cronies named in the report) or their families actually live in these houses and that it is the

President or his mistress who is seen in those areas raise questions about who the properties' real owner is. Moreover, the companies that own the land and houses appear to be merely convenient cover for the purchases," the report claimed.

Whatever be the truth behind the latest round of allegations, the fact is that such charges can only add to the pressures on Mr. Estrada.

The President's statement that he was not averse to a snap election shows that the pressure on him from different sections of the polity is beginning to tell. It appears that the political uncertainty in Philippines is unlikely to dissipate in a hurry.

The statements from the Catholic Church and the former President, Ms. Corazon Aquino, have proved very damaging. It also appears that Mr. Estrada is in no mood to give up without fight, suggesting that those who were calling on him to take a 'vacation' should take the vacation instead.

THE HINDU

24 OCT 2000

HD-16
2-2/10

Estrada fights for political si

By Amit Baruah

SINGAPORE, OCT. 21. The Philippine President, Mr. Joseph Estrada, is fighting to stay in office after being accused of accepting millions of dollars from an illegal gambling lottery by Mr. Luis "Chavit" Singson, a provincial Governor and close associate.

Earlier in the week, Opposition legislators brought an impeachment motion against the President in the Lower House of Representatives as angry protesters from the left and the right took to the streets demanding his resignation. No stranger to controversy, Mr. Estrada, however, has never faced such serious charges in the 27 months he has been President of the country. Several charges of "helping" his friends have been made earlier, but none so grave as those levelled by Mr. Singson.

The dramatic resignation of the Vice-President, Ms. Gloria Macapagal Arroyo, the rising clamour of voices from the Church and the public standing of the former President, Ms. Corazon Aquino, are all factors that Mr. Estrada has to contend with. Ms. Arroyo, a member of Mr. Estrada's Cabinet, had been silent about Mr. Estrada, but the latest allegations of accepting over \$8 million from "jueteng" (an illegal lottery) proceeds were too much for her to stomach. Daughter of a former President, political analysts in Manila believe that she is positioning herself to take over the President's job in case he is forced to resign or doesn't finish the remainder of his term.

The President himself has said that he is ready to face an impeachment motion "anytime, anywhere" and said he will not resign his office. Mr. Estrada also claims that he has not accepted a single cent from illegal gambling proceeds. While the Archbishop of Manila, Cardinal Jaime Sin, the first to seek the ouster of the President, said Mr. Estrada had lost the

moral authority to govern, Ms. Corazon Aquino, who led the Philippines to democracy in 1986, said Mr. Estrada should take a "leave of absence" while the charges are investigated.

"The fear is that the righteous anger of discerning Filipinos, the outright disgust of the moral authorities of our nation at such corruption so close to the highest office of the land, will spark a ceaseless round of protests that will write off the Philippine economy. And yet that anger cannot be discouraged because this country cannot live with the charges that have been made. They must be answered," Ms. Aquino said in a speech in Manila. "And, finally there is the process which it is our hope to avoid (the remarks were made before October 18 when the impeachment move was initiated)...this is impeachment. From this process we expect the worst. It will be long drawn-out; it will put the truth at the mercy of numbers; and it will leave justice in the hands of those whose single overriding concern is their re-election," she said. "The process may yet surprise us by achieving a fair and just result. But we think it will meet our worst expectations..." Ms. Aquino maintained.

With Mr. Estrada's party having a brutal majority in the Lower House, it seems difficult for the impeachment motion to reach the Senate without a major chunk of the President's supporters voting along with Opposition legislators. The fears expressed by Ms. Aquino about the impeachment process are grounded in the reality of numbers. As of now, the Opposition is in no position to get the motion passed in the Lower House and then in the Senate. In an editorial, *The Asian Wall Street Journal* said: "Simply no good will come out of a protracted political wrestling match that misdirects Government's attention for over a year. Before this crisis sinks the whole country in the mire, Mr.

Estrada at least

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THE HINDU

22 OCT 2000

THERE is a strange, twilight-zone quality to the goings on in the Philippines these past few days. True to the macho image he has of himself, President Joseph Estrada is fending off the US \$ 11-million pay-off allegations made against him by a provincial governor, Luis Singson.

But each time Mr Estrada throws a punch -- for instance, insinuating that friends and associates of former Presidents Corazon Aquino and Fidel Ramos have had improper dealings with government banks -- he diminishes bit by bit the office of the President.

That runs counter to the survival handbook that says big guys don't fight dirt with dirt. They wear down those who mean harm with lordly contempt, after having made the standard denials.

Sadly, in this case, even Mr Estrada's most abiding supporters do not think he has the stature to pull that off. He fights the only way he knows how, which is at gut level.

The bottomline is that the media, the Church, influential retired politicians, business leaders and the chattering classes are all baying for his blood. They think Mr Estrada, who is never one of them, is bad for the country. What a ball the elite must be having in Manila.

The matrons of Forbes Park with their morning coffee, hauling their unseemly President over the coals. The Makati business set, sensing the tide is about to turn, pouring on the vitriol. Opposition politicians snacking their lips in vengeful delight for the rout they received in the congressional elections. The greatest moral force for Mr Estrada's departure from office -- by falling on his sword -- has been supplied by two people, Mrs Aquino and Jaime Cardinal Sin, Archbishop of Manila.

Mrs Aquino is the virtual

Erap, the tide may turn



Demonstrators shout slogans as they picket the Senate in Manila on Friday over the testimony given against Joseph Estrada by his friend regarding payoffs in gambling operations. -- AFP/PTI.

patron saint of the Philippines' movement for the acclamation of the righteous. She has enormous prestige as the person who, with little practice and lots of courage, did what she could to cleanse the system of Marcos toxins.

She chose the EDSA Shrine, commemorating the EDSA revolution of 1986 which drove President Ferdinand Marcos from office, to ask that Mr Estrada make the "supreme self-sacrifice" of resigning his office. It was the "sordid company" he kept which had brought the country to such a pass, she said.

This was strong language, but Cardinal Sin's admonition of the Philippines nation topped that.

"May we all strike our breasts and bow our heads in shame

The bottomline is that the media, the Church, influential retired politicians, business leaders and the chattering classes in Philippines are all baying for Joseph Estrada's blood.
CHUA HUCK CHENG says why

because we have brought all this upon ourselves. We have no one to blame but ourselves for being complacent, easy-going and uncaring."

Philippines would not like what that says of their personality, but would they have the moral conviction to take on their principle churchman?

The prelate is the conscience of the Philippines, as he was when leading the crusade to rid the country of the Marcos scourge.

In asking Mr Estrada to do the "heroic" thing, regardless of guilt or innocence, Cardinal Sin was articulating an incontrovertible truism about his country: The people deserve the leaders they get. The reality check for Mr Estrada is this: The miasma of dishonour is so

strong that, to thinking Filipinos, it hardly matters anymore whether he did or did not take the gaming bribes of US\$ 8.6 million and the US\$ 2.8-million cut of the tobacco tax. This is the people's real trauma.

But out in the provinces and the slum quarters of the metropolitan areas of Luzon, the man they call Erap (Mr Estrada) has substantial support. He is one of them.

It was on their backs that Mr Estrada won the presidency in 1998 with a showing that surprised the pundits. In another assault E-Strada-style, he had spoken of offering them titles to government land the state did not have a use for. He must pray that the value of the peso does not fall much further. It has dipped 20 per cent against the US dollar since the beginning of the year.

Interest rates are rising and the Asian Development Bank, with its Manila headquarters, warned that the fundamentals supporting the economy would be lost if the morality crisis did not have a clear conclusion.

If that happens, rising prices of food, petrol and transport, which would hurt the masses most, could alter the political scenario.

Mr Estrada will not be troubled by the congressional move to impeach him, as the government majority in both chambers can see off the threat.

Neither has he said anything about suing Governor Singson. That has obvious courtroom risks, but his handlers will probably plead *gravitas* and say it is beneath the President to take just any scallywag to court. Why, Mr Singson himself has allegedly been implicated! Mr Estrada means to ride out the storm, from all indications. But if the people take a hand, as happened in 1986, he might rue the day he ever became a film actor.

-- The Straits Times/Asia News Network.

THE STATESMAN

22 OCT 2000

22 OCT 2000

Impeachment move on

By Amit Baruah

SINGAPORE, OCT. 18. In what appeared to be a long shot, Opposition legislators brought before the House of Representatives an impeachment motion against the embattled Philippine President, Mr. Joseph Estrada, today.

Accusing the President of receiving bribes amounting to over \$8 millions from gambling profits, the 12-page impeachment motion said: "The respondent committed bribery...committed graft and corruption...betrayed the public trust (and)...culpably violated the Constitution."

If the impeachment move is to pass muster in 218-member Lower House, 72 legislators must approve the measure. It then goes to the 22-member Senate or Upper House, which acts as a jury. In turn, for the President to be impeached, two-thirds of the Senate must vote in favour of the motion. Today, 41 members of the lower House — 39 from the Opposition and two defectors from the ruling party — moved the motion. The fact that just two ruling party members joined up with the Opposition indicates the ruling group is still behind Mr. Estrada.

THE HINDU

19 OCT 2001

Estrada accuses Ramos of terror campaign

18/10 By Amit Baruah HD-2

SINGAPORE, OCT. 17. Faced with growing pressures to quit, the Philippines President, Mr. Joseph Estrada, has accused the former President, Mr. Fidel Ramos, of planning a campaign of bombing and arson to force his resignation.

Mr. Estrada's statement came even as the head of the influential Catholic Church, Cardinal Jaime Sin, renewed his call for the President's resignation. "May God show him the heroic value of relinquishing his post for the sake of our people," Cardinal Sin, who played a major role in the 1986 ouster of Mr. Ferdinand Marcos, said at a mass in Manila today.

In his statement, a defiant Mr. Estrada maintained he had received information that there were forces -- especially in the erstwhile administration -- who wanted to "destabilise" the country. "They are planning to burn, throw bombs in the streets to sow terror and confusion in our country. We should be careful about



The former Philippine President, Ms. Corazon Aquino (second from left), and the Vice-President, Ms. Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo (left), Mr. Butch Abad (second from right), a congressman, and an unidentified supporter hold hands during a "mass for enlightenment" celebrated by the country's leader of the Catholic Church, Cardinal Jaime Sin (not in picture) at suburban Mandaluyong on Tuesday. — AP

this," the President was quoted as saying. These groups, he claimed, would use the "Indonesian mod-

el" in destabilising the country. The President stated that he was not afraid of the "arming

demands for his resignation, citing the heavy mandate that he received in the 1998 elections. "They can go ahead in their impeachment (initiative). I will face (it) anytime, anywhere. I'm not afraid. I'm not nervous," Mr. Estrada said. "But they should not say I should resign because I am not a dictator. I did not cheat in the elections," he stated. According to him, the people should simply "pray and work", adding: "The people do not need to demonstrate. We have a procedure in the Constitution to follow. The people should just stay calm."

In a related development, Mr. Eufemio Domingo, outgoing chief of the Presidential Commission Against Graft and Corruption (PCAGRC) has said Mr. Estrada should set an example among public officials by disclosing his wealth. Mr. Domingo was quoted as saying in Manila that the President should "behave in a manner befitting the highest magistracy of the land, now that he is President of 75 million Filipinos."

THE HINDU

18 OCT 2000

Impeachment bid against Estrada

ASSOCIATED PRESS

MANILA, Oct. 15. — The Philippine Opposition will file an impeachment complaint against the President, Mr Joseph Estrada, despite his apology for a scandal over alleged gambling payoffs.

The impeachment complaint and a separate criminal suit will be filed this week, said a lawmaker Mr Ernesto Herrera.

Mr Estrada apologised yesterday for the escalating scandal involving allegations by a provincial Governor, Mr Luis Singson, that the President received more than 400 million pesos (\$8.6 million) in payoffs from illegal gambling operators.

The President promised to end the government's extensive involvement in gambling operations by privatising the Philippine Amusement and Gaming Corp, or Pagcor, the government agency that controls legal gambling and runs casinos.

"I'm sorry it had to come to



Mr Joseph Estrada

this," he said in a television speech. "Obviously the Filipinos do not approve of having the government itself involved in any form of gambling, no matter what its intentions may be."

Mr Herrera said the President's vague apology and decision to privatise Pagcor didn't address the question of whether he received the payoffs. "He skirted the issue and was trying to divert public

attention from allegations," Mr Herrera said. On Thursday, Mr Estrada issued a statement, denying he received "even a cent" from illegal gambling. Mr Estrada's wife, Loi, denied in a separate speech accusations by Mr Singson that shopping bags filled with gambling payoffs had been carried into the President's house and that 20 million pesos (\$420,000) had been given to her.

The government's gambling operations have expanded rapidly under Mr Estrada's administration, and gambling dominates prime-time broadcasting on the government's television network. Last month, Pagcor introduced a numbers game designed to replace a highly popular illegal game called 'jueteng'.

Mr Singson said he had delivered at least 10 million pesos (\$215,000) a month from 'jueteng' operators to Mr Estrada. He also alleged Mr Estrada had received 130 million pesos (\$2.8 million) as a cut from tobacco taxes.

Bomb threat lingers after hijack ends

AFP & PTI

BAGHDAD, Oct. 15. — The Jeddah-London Saudi Boeing 777 hijack, which ended here late last night after all the 103 passengers and crew members were released unharmed, is still carrying a bomb.

The two hijackers were arrested, but one of them said: "I have a detonator in my pocket which I can activate to trigger a bomb placed on the plane."

The warning from the hijackers, who declined to give their names but who Iraq said were both Saudis, was backed by an Iraqi official following the end of yesterday's high drama.

"They threatened to blow up the plane and the threat is still valid," interior ministry official Mr Tahar Jalil Habbush said in the control tower of Saddam International Airport.

The other hijacker, concealing a part of his face with a scarf, said their aim was "to demand justice and equality in Saudi Arabia". He also

called for an inquiry into alleged corruption and human rights abuses in the kingdom.

They also denounced "the presence of US and British armies" in Saudi Arabia, echoing a common theme of protest from Iraqi authorities.

The hijackers said they ordered the plane to fly to Baghdad because Iraq rejects "US hegemony". According to the hijackers, the passengers had been treated well during their seven-hour ordeal. "We treated them like brothers."

State television and airport officials said the 7-and-a-half hour crisis ended after top government officials negotiated with the two hijackers, who then surrendered peacefully.

The hijackers said they hadn't asked for political asylum, countering an earlier report. They also said they didn't intend to stay in Iraq. Word of the hijacking first emerged in Cairo.

Egyptian civil aviation officials said the pilot informed them that the hijackers had taken over the plane and were insisting that it fly to Damascus.

THE STATESMAN

16 OCT 2001

Troops free 12 Filipino hostages

REUTERS

MANILA/KUALA LUMPUR
Oct. 2. — Government forces have recovered all 12 Filipino evangelists held for more than three months by Abu Sayyaf rebels on Jolo island in Philippines, defence secretary Mr Orlando Mercado said today.

The rebels still hold Mr Jeffrey Schilling, three Malaysians and another Filipino.

The recovery of the evangelists occurred on the 17th day of the military assault on the jungle hideouts of guerrillas.

Earlier today, the military said its forces had found one of the evangelists who had apparently escaped from his captors.

Malaysia today said it had detained two gunmen off the eastern state of Sabah since stepping up patrols to block the entry of rebels operating in the southern Philippines.

Two men with M-16 rifles were among 200 foreigners detained since 16 September for encroaching into Sabah's waters, navy chief Mr Abu Bakar Abdul Jamal said.

He said it was not known if the gunmen were part of the Abu Sayyaf group. Malaysia has ordered troops on Sabah to shoot suspected armed foreign intruders on sight to prevent any fleeing rebels entering its waters.

THE STATESMAN

3 OCT 2000

Estrada
refuses
to resign

ASSOCIATED PRESS

MANILA, Oct. 31. — The Philippine President, Mr Joseph Estrada, will not resign over a corruption scandal despite Opposition leaders' rejection of his offer to them to participate in reforms, his spokesman said today.

The Vice-President, Ms Gloria Macapagal Arroyo, who heads an Opposition coalition, turned down Mr Estrada's offer that she head a powerful Cabinet economic policy group.

Ms Arroyo, who resigned from a Cabinet post several weeks ago because of corruption allegations against Mr Estrada, said it would be useless for her to take leadership of the Economic Coordinating Council if he remains in office because of the lack of business confidence in him.

THE TELEGRAPH

1 OCT 2000

7 NOV 2000

5 OCT 2000

AFTER THE CARROT

5/18/04 Abu Sayyaf gets the stick

LAST month, Ronaldo Zamora, executive secretary to the Philippines government, said military action against Abu Sayyaf would be envisaged as soon as the hostages taken from the Malaysian resort of Sipadan were released, irrespective of what happened to the other hostages taken subsequently. The thinking was that the latter had gone looking for trouble despite warnings from the government. There were about a dozen evangelists, two French journalists who got a bit too close to the action and an American Muslim crackpot whose wife is related to one of the Abu Sayyaf and who now lies tethered in the space beneath a traditional house on stilts. If we go by what President Estrada said on television, the military action is being undertaken mainly to instil in the rebels a degree of respect for the state. This is all to the good because, as chief negotiator Robert Aventajado said, hostage taking had become a revolving door with people constantly coming in and going out. The idea is to simply let Abu Sayyaf know that the government means business and leave the door to negotiations slightly ajar, just in case.

The problem is one of logistics. The Abu Sayyaf are deep in the jungles, divided into several groups all of whom hold some hostage or the other. They are not necessarily in communication with each other. For instance, Jeffrey Schilling, the American Muslim, was released by one faction and promptly captured by another who say he is a CIA agent. Also their hideouts are surrounded by villages whose inhabitants have already taken shelter in the Jolo town hall. There are going to be more civilian casualties and, if things get too hot for Abu Sayyaf, they may not think twice about beheading a few people as they have done in the past. That may not bother the Philippines too much. This time round the release of the remaining hostages is a relatively low priority. It is being reported that Abu Sayyaf grew from 200 to 3000 during the four month long hostage crisis and the \$ 15 million from Libya must have helped. The Filipinos are right in concluding that it has shown too much courtesy to what is essentially a bunch of extortionists masquerading as Islamic rebels.

THE STATECMAE

9 1 11 2004

The greedy group of guerrillas has not only kidnapped more hostages for more ransom but also to use them as human shields and bargaining chips. President Estrada realised he had to do something besides talk if he was to retain the respect of the international community, says

NEAL H CRUZ

NOW that the Philippines President, Joseph Estrada, has given his green signal and the much-awaited attack on the Abu Sayyaf has

5-17-1919 Abu Sayyaf reaping the whirlwind



Joseph Estrada salutes as he is escorted by the Army chief, General Narciso Abaya during an arrival ceremony at Zamboanga City in southern Philippines. The President was there to attend a command conference on the ongoing military operation in Jolo against the Abu Sayyaf. — AP/PTI.

been unleashed, we can only pray that the casualties remain at a minimum and that the hostages are rescued unharmed.

It was a hard decision for any commander in chief to make. One can understand the dilemma that faced the President.

On the one hand, the lives of foreign and Filipino hostages and those of government soldiers and innocent civilians will be put at risk. On the other, members of the Abu Sayyaf have shown that the millions of dollars in ransom paid them for the released hostages have not satisfied them. That only made them greedier.

They have kidnapped more hostages not only for more ransom but also to use them as human shields and bargaining chips with the government when the attack came.

Obviously, the cycle of kidnapping, negotiations and payment of ransom will continue. When will it all end? The Philippines leadership has been exposed to the world as weak and helpless against a small group of bandits.

This helplessness and the huge amount of ransom so easily paid, have only spawned a cottage industry of kidnappings for ransom.

Agreeing to pay ransom was a mistake in the first place, even if it was Libya's money. Now more people would be put at risk of being kidnapped.

The vicious cycle had to be stopped. President Estrada had to do something. His choices were: to continue giving in to

the demands of the Abu Sayyaf, or risk lives to put an end to the reign of terror of the bandits.

It was to show the people that either crime pays or it doesn't. The choice was obvious. A majority of citizens have grown tired of the arrogance and greed of the Abu Sayyaf and government weakness.

Even Mindanaoans, including Muslims, and the Catholic bishops wanted the bandit group taken to task. And so the President took his decision.

Chances of casualties among soldiers and civilians have been considered. One can only hope the Abu Sayyaf bandits surrender rather than getting killed.

The President's popularity ratings will depend on the outcome. It rose when he ordered the capture of all 46 camps of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front. A civilian and maligned as a mere film actor, Me Estrada has proved that he can be a stronger and braver commander in chief than his predecessor, Fidel Ramos, a professional soldier and a General no less. It was the latter's weakness and refusal to fight that allowed the MILF and the Abu Sayyaf to grow.

The Abu Sayyaf made several mistakes in this crisis. The most important is that it thought that with all the money it had collected, the high-powered weapons it bought, and the thousands of mercenaries who flocked to their camp because of the loot, it is now in a position to challenge the Philippines armed forces. True, the mountainous jungle terrain that the bandits know like the back of

their hands works to their advantage.

But they forgot that the Armed Forces of the Philippines would surely field elite, battle-hardened, specially trained combat units. Against them, the Abu Sayyaf has thousands of new members with high-powered firearms. But these are raw recruits with hardly any training. Most likely, they didn't even have enough target practice.

Automatic firearms are particularly inaccurate and hard to handle. Most of these raw recruits will probably run when the going gets tough.

And one doubts if they have been able to build bunkers and other defences around their camps. They have been busy spending their loot in Jolo.

Another mistake is that the

Abu Sayyaf thought that the AFP will not dare attack while they are holding hostages. Or that no attack will come while they are still talking with government negotiators. It was obvious that Mr Estrada's statement that he would opt for peaceful negotiations, even while the AFP was putting its forces in place, was only to mislead the enemy. This is standard practice in war.

A third mistake is that it was the Abu Sayyaf that forced the President's hand by kidnapping three more Malaysians. The President had to do something besides talk if he was to retain the respect of the international community. Now the Abu Sayyaf is reaping the whirlwind.

— Philippine Daily Inquirer/Asia News Network.

THE STATESMAN

1919

HD-12 PHILIPPINES / ENOUGH IS ENOUGH, SAYS ESTRADA 17/9

Massive raids on Abu Sayyaf bases

By Amit Baruah

SINGAPORE, SEPT. 16. The Philippines today launched a massive military operation against the Abu Sayyaf group on the southern island of Jolo, deploying infantrymen, helicopter gunships and bombers in the battle against the rebels.

Though reports from Jolo said scores of people were killed or wounded, a senior Filipino official claimed that 17 Abu Sayyaf men had been nabbed during the course of the operation. One of the objectives of the military operation was the recovery of two French journalists, three Malaysians, one Filipino and one American being held as hostages by the Abu Sayyaf. However, there is little news on the fate of the hostages while the French Government in a statement said it would hold Manila responsible for the safety of its kidnapped nationals.

Following the kidnapping of three Malaysians from Sabah province on September 11, a

military operation had looked imminent though Filipino negotiators, along with Libyan intermediaries, were still trying to free the two Frenchmen. Earlier, all the foreign nationals taken captive by the Abu Sayyaf on April 23 from the Malaysian resort of Sipadan had been freed following ransom payments in the range of \$15 million.

In a broadcast over national television, the Philippines President, Mr. Joseph Estrada, said today: "Enough is enough. I make this difficult decision to authorise the military operation aware of the great risks that the hostages and our soldiers will face.

"It is clear that the efforts of our Government towards a peaceful, long-term resolution of the problem are being scoffed at by the Abu Sayyaf group....this situation cannot last one second longer. I will not allow this to continue," Mr. Estrada said.

The Philippines, which had to negotiate for several months and finally oversee the pay-

ment of millions of dollars for the release of foreign hostages, could not stomach the latest kidnapping of the three Malaysians by the Abu Sayyaf. In what has proved to be the proverbial last straw, the kidnapping has forced Manila to use the military option against the rebels who have turned kidnapping into a flourishing business.

Reports from Jolo stated that thousands of troops took up positions in and around Jolo town last night, a signal that the crackdown on Abu Sayyaf strongholds was imminent. "The Abu Sayyaf crossed the line when they raided again a resort in Malaysian and brought in fresh hostages," Mr. Robert Aventajado, till recently the Philippines negotiator, said. "There is a price for this action but I am sure overall there must have been some risk assessment done and perhaps the final advice was presented to the President and the President opted to take military action," Mr. Aventajado said.

THE HINDU

17 SEP 2000

Abu Sayyaf frees four hostages

100-14 By Amit Baruah 109
SINGAPORE, SEPT. 9. The four-month-long kidnapping crisis in the southern Philippines lurched to a near end, with the Abu Sayyaf group handing over four European hostages to go-betweens on Jolo island.

A Frenchman, Mr. Stephane Loisy, two Finns Mr. Seppo Farenti and Mr. Risto Vahanen and a German, Mr. Marc Wallert, were later flown from Jolo to the Philippine city of Zamboanga, from where they will travel to Tripoli tomorrow.

Millions of dollars are reported to have changed hands, with Western Governments being reportedly involved in "purchasing" the freedom of their

nationals through Libyan intermediaries. Flush with funds, the Abu Sayyaf have purchased new weapons.

Six other hostages, of the original 12 captured on April 23 from the Malaysian resort of Sipadan, had been freed on August 27.

Today's release comes amidst reports of a internecine shoot-out between Abu Sayyaf factions over ransom money. One bodyguard of the go-betweens was reportedly killed in the shoot-out while Abu Sayyaf leaders escaped unhurt.

Following today's release, two French journalists, one American and another Filipino, are being held by the Abu Sayyaf. The journalists (one woman crew member

9 & Asia - Philippines
was freed on August 27) were taken hostage while covering the original, April 23, kidnapping.

Though a "composite deal" had been worked out for the release of all the 12 hostages in the hostages-for-dollars deal, the Abu Sayyaf refused to free all their captives in one go, fearing a massive military operation.

Western Governments have, however, ensured that no such operation was launched.

In any case, the fact that two French nationals and one American are still in the custody of the Abu Sayyaf, which specialises in "serial" kidnappings, will ensure that no immediate military action will ensue against them.

RECEIVED

10 SEP 2000

57-12
269

Abu repeats death threat to hostage

REUTERS & AFP

ZAMBOANGA, Sept. 2. — Muslim extremists in the southern Philippines today said the American, they are holding hostage, had gone on a hunger strike, and reiterated a threat to kill him warning the Philippine government to open negotiations soon. Jeffrey Schilling, (24), was seized in the southern city of Zamboanga by a faction of the Abu Sayyaf group.

The spokesman for the separatist Abu Sayyaf rebels, Abu Sabaya, however denied reports that his group was demanding \$ 10 million in ransom for the youths. He however said an unidentified anti-US group had offered them money to kill him.

In an interview with local radio station, he said: "We're waiting for an emissary (from the government)"

Sabaya was referring to earlier threats to behead American hostage Mr Jeffrey Schilling who was taken by the extremists on Monday, reportedly after entering their hideout in the southern island of Jolo with his Filipina fiancée, who is related to Sabaya.

"The delay in sending the negotiator here is just making things better for us because other foreigners have come in. These anti-Americans have offered to us ... They will give us money and arms (if we) just

kill this CIA (agent) here,' Sabaya said.

The Philippine government's chief hostage negotiator, Mr Robert Aventajado, and an official at the US embassy in Manila said they could not confirm that Mr Schilling had begun a hunger strike.

Philippine officials have said Mr Schilling, a Muslim from Oakland, California, suffers from asthma, an eye ailment and could have some heart trouble. Release on the cards: Chief Philippine government hostage negotiator, Mr Robert Aventajado, today said he hoped six Europeans and a Filipino held for months by Muslim rebels would be released next week. "By next week, by God's grace, we can get the six foreigners and one Filipino out," Mr Aventajado told a local radio station.

Mr Aventajado said Mr Schilling's seizure had not affected negotiations for their release. All but two of whom were kidnapped by Abu Sayyaf gunmen from the Malaysian diving resort of Sipadan in April. They include German Mr Marc Wallert, Frenchman Mr Stephane Loisy, Mr Finnish Seppo Juhani Franti and Mr Risto Mirco Vahanen and Filipino Mr Roland Buaco ulah. They were among 21 mostly foreigners kidnapped on Sipadan and whisked to Jolo Island in the Philippines, 960 km south of Manila.

Philippine govt hopeful of end to crisis

THE STAR
ASIA NEWS NETWORK

569 119
ZAMBOANGA CITY, Aug. 31. — Philippine government negotiators are confident that the release of the remaining hostages taken from Pulau Sipadan 132 days ago are on track after receiving written assurances from their Abu Sayyaf abductors.

Chief government negotiator's media consultant Robert Mananquil said Abu Sayyaf leader Ghalib Andang Comm. Robot sent a letter to the negotiating panel stating that he would be releasing the remaining four European captives.

Mr Mananquil today said this was stated in Robot's letter to Mr Aventajado that was brought by emissary retired Army Col Ernesto Pacuno who went to the Abu Sayyaf hideout in Bandang, Talipao, last Friday.

"In that letter, Robot and Mujib (Susukan, another Abu Sayyaf leader)

stated that they had nothing to do with the kidnapping of American (Jeffrey) Schilling," he said.

Mr Mananquil said Mr Aventajado was waiting for the return of former Libyan envoy Dr Rabjab Azzarouk from Tripoli to Manila on Thursday evening to discuss the releases of the remaining Sipadan captives expected within the next 10 days.

He said the reported abduction of the son of Talipao mayor Mr Tambrin Tulawi, Abdul Aziz Tulawi, outside a discotheque in this southern Philippine city early Thursday morning would not affect the release of the Sipadan captives.

"These latest abductions have nothing to do with the Sipadan hostages," Mr Mananquil said, adding that the Sulu provincial peace and order council headed by governor Mr Abdusakur Tan had been delegated by the government to handle Schilling's abduction.

Abdusakur had also ordered the Philippine National Police to probe into Mr Abdul Aziz's reported abduction while defence secretary Mr Orlando Mercado had also asked the military to verify the incident.

The gunmen have to date released 16 of the 21 people they snatched from Sipadan on April 23, including all nine Malaysians.

Those being held by Robot are a German, a French, two Finns and two journalists of a French television crew abducted on July 9 apart from twelve Filipino evangelists.

A Filipino resort worker on Sipadan Rolland Ullah was freed by Robot but later held by another Abu Sayyaf leader Radullan Sahiron in Patikul where Schilling has been sighted by villagers.

In Manila, executive secretary Mr Ronaldo Zamora said the government would take a stronger stance against the gunmen once the European captives were freed.

THE STATESMAN

1999

Rebels want U.S. to release convict

By Amit Baruah

SINGAPORE, AUG. 29. After releasing six hostages held for the last four months, the Abu Sayyaf guerilla group, which operates in the southern Philippines, announced today that it had taken an American hostage.

An Abu Sayyaf spokesman told a Filipino radio station that Mr. Jeffrey Craig Schilling, who he claimed was a CIA agent, would be killed if the United States did not release Ramzi Yousef, convicted of the 1993 World Trade Centre bombing in New York, and two other convicts. Mr. Schilling, who was kidnapped in the city of Zamboanga, has reportedly been taken by boat to Jolo island, the hideout of the Abu Sayyaf.

While Philippine authorities stated that a man who matched the identity given by the group had entered the country in March, a U.S. embassy spokesman said the report was being checked. "We have heard of this (kidnapping) report and obviously we are checking it. But we can't confirm it yet," a U.S. Embassy spokesman was quoted as saying in Manila. The other two convicts, whose release is being demanded by the guerilla group, have been identified as Abdurrahman Omar and Abu Haider.

The group's spokesman also told the local radio station that two more demands would be made in the next three days. "We will not hesitate to execute this American guy if the Philippine and U.S. Governments don't listen to our demands. If the Philippine President, Mr. Joseph Estrada and the U.S. President, Mr. Bill Clinton do not listen to our demands, we will shame the Governments," the spokesman maintained. According to him, one American was "equivalent" to 10 Europeans, the spokesman said ransom was not the main objective behind the kidnapping. He said the Abu Sayyaf group wanted to "try" the super power.

The guerilla group still holds six Western hostages, whose release is expected in the

coming week. The released hostages, who have arrived in Tripoli, were freed following Libyan mediation. The new kidnapping, if true, could also have a bearing on the release of the remaining Western hostages. In the past, the Americans have taken the position that the Abu Sayyaf group was a bunch of terrorists with whom there could be no negotiations.

A spokesman for the Philippine President said in Manila: "If it is true that there is really an American (taken captive) and if he is really CIA, they (the Abu Sayyaf) should not gloat. They're going to galvanise international opin-

ion against them. The world will unite in the realisation of what a big problem the Abu Sayyaf poses," Mr. Ricardo Puno said.

Yet another angle to the capture of the American could be the Abu Sayyaf fear that a massive military operation would be launched against the group the moment the last Western hostage is freed. However, today's development could mean that the Estrada Government may have to be more circumspect in the short-term in giving the military the go-ahead for an operation to hunt down the Abu Sayyaf, who are flush with funds and weapons.

THE HINDU

30 AUG '98

Abu Sayyaf frees another hostage

DPA & THE STRAITS TIMES/ANN

JOLO ISLAND/MANILA, Aug. 28. — A South African hostage, held for more than four months by Islamic extremists was freed today in time to catch a plane out of the country with his wife and four other captives released ahead of him.

Mr Carel Strydom, a 36-year-old accountant, said, "I was very sad to leave the other hostages", but added, "I am really overwhelmed with joy. I am excited to see my wife now". His wife, Monique, was freed yesterday with French mechanical engineer, Sonia Wendling, France 2 Television political correspondent Maryse Burgot, Franco-Lebanese Marie-Michel Moarbes and German geography teacher Werner Wallert.

Muslim extremists yesterday freed five Westerners among 31 hostages held in the dense jungles of southern Jolo — the same day a voluptuous starlet offered the rebels a "week of pleasure" in an unusual bid to liberate the captives.

Although government negotiators insisted no ransom was paid, sources said that money — at least US \$1 million per person — did change hands.

THE STATESMAN

29 AUG 2001

Hostage to the situation

The Islamic Abu Sayyaf outfit in the Philippines has shown that kidnapping is a lucrative business. For their hostages, the trauma seems never-ending. AMIT BARUAH on the ongoing crisis.

HOSTAGE-TAKING HAS been turned into an industry by the Abu Sayyaf (bearer of the sword) extremist group. Holding 12 Caucasian hostages for the last four months, the avowedly Islamic outfit, operating in the southern Philippines, has shown that kidnapping is a lucrative business.

For the 12 holiday-makers taken hostage, the trauma seems never-ending. Hopes were raised last week that some "good news" was imminent following the involvement of Libyan intermediaries, but that deal fell through. Frustration and anger seems high among the hostages, if the latest video images are any indication. Their respective Governments, too, are showing the same emotion.

Despite the collapse of the Libyan-brokered deal, there are renewed hopes of a possible release. However, these "hopes" appear to have frustrated the hostages and their families more than anything else. The last deal, which envisaged the payment of \$ 12 million, collapsed in the face of open suggestions that the Philippines Army would launch a major operation against the rebels once the captives were freed. Also, there have been reports that the Libyan intermediaries were not carrying "sufficient cash" to meet the requirements of the Abu Sayyaf group.

There is little doubt that the Philippines Government will launch an operation once the hostages are freed by the Abu Sayyaf, which split from the parent Moro National Liberation Front in 1991. In such a scenario, the Abu Sayyaf leadership is aware that not only must it ensure that it collects the ransom, but it must also be able to make a getaway from Jolo island before the situation becomes "too hot".

Regarded as the smallest and most radical of the groups in the Philippines, Abu Sayyaf was formed by Abduragak Abubakar Janjalani. A veteran of the Afghan "jihad", Janjalani was killed on December 18, 1998, by the police in Lanitan village on Basilan island. A power struggle ensued after Janjalani's death, with his brother, Khadafy Janjalani, finally taking control. The group which was reported to have a strength of 200 armed fighters some years ago has grown in stature and wealth since the kidnapping.

Following the payment of some \$ 5 million, the group's strength has reportedly grown to a couple of thousand, though this figure has not been corroborated. New and more lethal

to have successfully negotiated its way to massive ransom payments playing on the sentiments of the Western Governments and their "influence" on the Estrada administration not to use force against the rebels. While there are reports that more money is to be paid out as ransom, several countries, including the U.S., have offered to help and the hostage crisis, an offer the Philippines has politely declined.

A U.S. Embassy spokesman was quoted as saying that Manila had already informed Washington that its offer had been turned down. "terrorist group" and that Washington was "committed to helping in any way to combat these groups". The nature of assistance, he said, would depend on the kind of help that was sought. "We don't need their help," the Philippines President, Mr. Joseph Estrada, responded. A Philippines official was quoted as saying that Manila had already informed Washington that its offer had been turned down.

Mr. Estrada, meanwhile, in response to a joint letter from the leaders of France, Germany and Finland, assured them that no military action, which could jeopardise the lives of the hostages, would be taken. In their joint letter dated August 22, the French, German and Finnish leaders had said: "We use this opportunity to underline our firm view that the safe and early release of the hostages is the first priority... the safety of the hostages may not be undermined by the use of force." "Their (the hostages) release must not be jeopardised by any action or any announcements the abductors on Jolo island could perceive as a reason not to implement a negotiated solution to this drama... we are deeply concerned that the envisaged release of the hostages failed last weekend," the three leaders stated while thanking Mr. Estrada for his country's effort to end the hostage crisis.

The Libyan involvement, through the Gaddafi International Association for Charitable Organisations, headed by Col. Muammar Gaddafi's son, Mr. Seif-al-Islam, is being seen as a major act of diplomacy by Tripoli. Prodded by the French Government, the Libyans possibly see this "humanitarian act" as an opportunity to win brownie points with the international community. As things stand, there is little doubt that without Libyan involvement a new deal looks extremely difficult.

For the 12 hostages held by the Abu Sayyaf, their mode of release, whether in batches or in one go, would hardly be an issue of concern.

But this seems to be a crucial issue which led to the breakdown of the agreement between the Philippines Government and the rebels. Also, the Abu Sayyaf has reportedly complained that the Libyans paid less than what was promised.

It's time that the hostages made their way to safety and their families. Since the principle of paying money is not under dispute in the present instance, all will be relieved when a workable deal is struck and the kidnapping drama is brought to an end.

in the southern city of Zamboanga. In 1993, the group bombed a cathedral in Davao City, killing seven people.

Also in 1993, the Abu Sayyaf kidnapped Mr. Charles Walton, a researcher at the U.S.-based Summer Institute of Linguistics. Mr. Walton was freed after 23 days in captivity. The following year, the group kidnapped three Spanish nuns and another Spanish priest in separate incidents. In 1998, the Abu Sayyaf kidnapped two Hong Kong men, a Malaysian and a Taiwanese woman. In April 1995, the outfit carried out a major attack on the Christian town of Ipi in Mindanao, killing 53 persons and razing the town centre.

In the present case, Abu Sayyaf seems

firearms have also been purchased by the Abu Sayyaf.

The Abu Sayyaf, which has never participated in any peace talks with the Philippines Government, has used piracy, robbery and kidnappings to fund itself. It also has reported links with a large number of Islamic fundamentalist organisations such as Osama bin Laden's Al-Qaida group and with Ramzi Yousof, convicted of the 1993 bombing of New York's World Trade Centre building.

The outfit's first major terrorist operation was a grenade attack in 1991 in which two foreign women were killed. In 1992, the Abu Sayyaf hunted about at the mv Doulous, an international floating bookstore manned by Christian preachers

Arrests threaten to delay Jolo hostage release

Zamboanga, Philippines, Aug. 26: Muslim rebels in the Philippines threatened to delay the release of foreign hostages after two suspects believed to have links with them were arrested, sources close to the negotiations said on Saturday. The two suspected rebels held by the police were said to be carrying \$245,000, believed to be part of the ransom money used to secure the hostages' release, sources said.

Abu Sayyaf rebel chief Idris Ghalib Andang was fuming when he called government emissaries by phone on Friday and warned "I

will cut off their (the hostages) heads," if the pair was not freed immediately.

The sources, who asked not to be identified, said the outbreak by Andang did not sound like a serious threat to harm the hostages and appeared to be an expression of anger.

They said they expected the two suspects to be released on bail later on Sunday. The sources added that their release should be enough to satisfy Andang and clear the way for the freeing of six of the 12 foreign hostages held by the fundamentalist group in their jun-

gle hideout on nearby Jolo island in the southern Philippines.

Mantala's chief negotiator, Robert Avencado on Friday denied that the rebels had demanded the release of their two suspected colleagues as a condition for freeing an investigation.

PHILIPPINES CRISIS

Andang — also known as Commander Robot — talked to government emissaries using a satellite phone taken from the captives.

The 12 foreign hostages include nine tourists who were among a group of 21 people snatched by the Muslim group in April from a Malaysian diving resort on

Sipadan island and brought to Jolo, 960 km south of Manila.

The three others are members of a French television crew seized last month while covering the hostage crisis. Of the Sipadan captives, the rebels have freed 11 but are still holding three French nationals including a Lebanese born woman, two Germans, two Finns, two South Africans, and a Filipino.

Sources said the deal worked out by Manila's negotiating panel, which includes Libyan envoy Rajab Azzarouq, calls for the release of the 12 in two batches (Reuters)

27 AUG 2000

THE ASIAN AGE

Libya offers help in Philippine hostage crisis

PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER
ASIA NEWS NETWORK

MANILA, Aug. 19. — Libya has reportedly offered to extend some US\$25 million in livelihood assistance to Abu Sayyaf strongholds in exchange for the release of the hostages.

But *Business World* yesterday quoted Mr President Joseph Estrada as saying that the Muslim rebels would not be able to avail of the Libyan offer unless they released all hostages taken from a Malaysian diving resort in April, as well as the three French journalists the group abducted last month.

Libyan leader Gen Muammar Gaddafi was said to be involved in working out an arrangement with the president of the European Union, Mr Jacques Chirac, to end the four-month long crisis.

Executive secretary Mr Ronaldo Zamora confirmed that the leaders had been coordinating with "our leaders and emissaries" including former Libyan ambassador and negotiator Mr Rajab Azzarouq.

He also said Mr Estrada was in "constant contact" with the former Libyan diplomat and had had several phone discussions with Gen Gaddafi and Mr Chirac on the safe release of all

hostages. Although the President wanted Libya to seek the release of all 20 captives of the Abu Sayyaf, the arrangement eventually covered only the remaining 13 hostages abducted from Sipadan, Mr Zamora said.

Other reports said Libya wanted France to pay separate ransom for a three-member French television crew that is in the rebels' hands.

The Sipadan hostages include two French nationals and a Lebanese-born woman who was granted French citizenship during her captivity.

A Libyan jetliner in the Philippines to evacuate foreign hostages on their release by

Muslim extremists, has received diplomatic status and fee exemption, airport officials said yesterday.

Libya has insisted it had no role in the hostage mission, but "the parking fee has been waived based on an administrative order exempting foreign-owned aircraft on diplomatic missions," said an airport official. Press secretary Mr Ricardo Puno, justifying Libya's key role in the negotiations said, "Libya has a history of helping the Philippines."

Mr Azzarouq has said Libya was helping purely for humanitarian reasons.

RELEASE DELAYED

JOLO, Aug. 19. — Negotiators returned empty-handed today from an attempt to win the release of 25 hostages held by Muslim rebels in the Philippine jungle and said they would have to negotiate further.

The Abu Sayyaf guerrillas insisted on freeing the hostages in two batches instead of one because of security concerns, said former Libyan ambassador Mr Rajab Azzarouq, a member of the negotiating panel who traveled to the rebels' camp.

"We have to re-negotiate," Mr Azzarouq said.

— AP

THE STATESMAN

20 AUG 2000

Envoy hurt, two killed in Jakarta blast

By Amit Baruah *SSR 110-17*

SINGAPORE, AUG. 1. The Philippine ambassador to Indonesia, Mr. Leonides Caday, was wounded and two others were killed in a powerful bomb blast that rocked Jakarta today.

Soon after the blast, which came on a day when 23 Christians were slaughtered in the troubled Indonesian island of Ambon, the Indonesian President, Mr. Abdurrahman Wahid, pointed the finger at Muslim separatists battling the Government in the southern Philippines.

"This, I think, is related to the problem in the southern Philippines, maybe related to the kidnapping in Jolo or the problem of the MILF (Moro Islamic Liberation Front)," Mr. Wahid was quoted as saying.

The injured ambassador, meanwhile, was said to be in a "stable condition". He was being treated for broken thigh bones and facial injuries.

The blast is said to have taken place some 1.5 km away from the official residence of the Indonesian Vice-President, Ms. Megawati Sukarnoputri.

While the MILF has denied any role in the bomb attack, a senior Philippine Government functionary described the blast as a "senseless terrorist act that will achieve nothing for its perpetrators".

Reports from Ambon today said that 23 Christians were killed by Muslim attackers in the disturbed Moluccas. A Christian activist said that the killings took place between Monday and Tuesday morning in the jungles near Waai village.

In a separate development, the "big five" of Indonesia met at Yogyakarta and pledged to "rebuild the spirit" of solidarity between all components of the country.

Mr. Wahid, Ms. Sukarnoputri, the National Assembly Chairman, Mr. Amien Rais, the Parliament Speaker, Mr. Akbar Tanjung, and the host, the Yogyakarta Sultan Hamengkubuwano X, met to tackle the mounting opposition against the President.

A joint statement issued after two hours of talks stated that the leaders realised that the sharpening conflict among political elites was crippling efforts to improve the welfare of the people. "Therefore, we agreed to rebuild the spirit of solidarity between all components of the nation in safeguarding the territorial integrity of the unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia, while being aware that differences



The Philippine Ambassador to Indonesia, Mr. Leonides Caday, is pulled out of the wreckage of his car, parked in front of his residence in Jakarta, after a bomb went off. — AP

are essential to the attainment of progress," the statement said.

"Overcoming the worsening socio-economic conditions of the people has become the main priority and the remedy is the joint responsibility of all components of the nation," it added.

As the warring Indonesian leaders made an effort to work together, the U.S. ambassador to Indonesia, Mr. Robert Gelbard, launched a sharp attack on Jakarta for its failure to crack down on West Timor-based militias operating in East Timor.

"What is particularly worrisome is that on June 21 when there were attacks against Australian soldiers and now with the tragic killing of (New Zealand Private Leonard Manning) we have seen increasingly well-planned, well-organised attacks with sophisticated automatic weapons," Mr. Gelbard said in remarks published in an Australian newspaper today.

"What that demonstrates to my Government is that the Indonesian Government is still not prepared to take control of the sit-

uation. That is something Indonesia must do if it is to achieve the necessary long-term support for its own situation," he stated.

"There are still elements within the TNI (the Indonesian military) that are continuing to support the militias...it is lamentable and inexcusable that they do not take measures to enforce the territorial integrity and sovereignty of East Timor..." the ambassador remarked.

Reuters reports:

Three persons were killed and dozens wounded when unidentified attackers bombed a town festival and a commercial centre in the southern Philippines, police said today. The bomb went off in the middle of a crowd in Monkayo town, 950 km from Manila. Police said two of the victims died on the spot while one died in hospital.

An hour before the Monkayo blast, a businessman was injured when a grenade exploded at a commercial section in Jolo town in Sulu Islands. Police said they did not see any connection between the two blasts. The attackers escaped, police said.

THE HINDU

2 AUG 2000

Manila envoy injured in Jakarta blast

Jakarta, Aug. 1 (Reuters): A bomb exploded outside the Jakarta residence of the Philippines ambassador to Indonesia today, killing a woman and wounding dozens of people, including Manila's envoy. *S. H. M. (C)*

Reuters reporters at the scene in central Jakarta said the residence had been partially destroyed, while nearby homes and government buildings were also damaged in an attack that adds to political tensions in the embattled country. *(S. H. M.)*

Paulus Waterpauw, police chief for Jakarta's Menteng district, said Philippines Ambassador Leonides Caday and his driver had been taken to hospital. Police said the two had been in a Mercedes car that was virtually destroyed outside the residence.

When asked if the envoy was badly injured, he said: "It seems so."

He gave no details on their condition. Police refused to say if the blast was caused by a bomb in the vehicle or what the motive for the attack might have been.

The bomb exploded in a street which is home to a number of ambassadors and other senior diplomats. The Bulgarian ambassador's house next door was damaged, while the official residence of Indonesian Vice-President Megawati Sukarnoputri is a few blocks away. The National Election Commission was damaged.

THE TELEGRAPH

F 2 AUG 2 00

Jolo rebels declare jihad against Manila

Negotiators say talks to free remaining hostages still on

Jolo (Philippines), July 28: Muslim rebels holding hostages in the southern Philippines have declared a jihad, or holy war, against the government but negotiators said on Friday that talks to free the captives were continuing.

The Abu Sayyaf rebels said in a statement sent to reporters that they supported a call for a jihad by a larger Muslim rebel group fighting for an independent Muslim state in the southern Philippines, the Moro Islamic Liberation Front. "This (jihad) has already been overdue," the statement said, without any reference to the hostages. The MILF declared a jihad two weeks ago, saying it was not a true war against other religions but a struggle against oppression, exploitation and injustice.

Robert Aventajado, the government's top negotiator working for the release of the hostages, said the call for a jihad would not affect his talks with the rebels. "We cannot dictate to them," he said. "But from my point of view, it will not affect the negotiations."

The rebels are holding three Malaysians, two Germans, three French nationals including a Lebanon-born woman who was given French citizenship while in captivity, two Finns, two

South Africans and two Filipinos kidnapped from Malaysia more than three months ago.

From a group of 21 kidnapped on April 23 and spirited to their hideouts on Jolo, they have released a German woman and six Malaysians.

They have also released three Filipino hostages kidnapped on nearby Basilan island. On Thursday, the rebels set free a German reporter who was kidnapped earlier in July while covering the hostage saga. They however still hold five other journalists similarly abducted, three

French and two Filipino.

Mr Aventajado renewed appeals to journalists to leave Jolo, a rugged island 960 km south of Manila, and report on the hostage crisis from the nearby city of Zamboanga because of the danger of more kidnaps. "I appeal to people in media to voluntarily go to Zamboanga so that you will not be exposed to this kind of situation," he said. About a dozen journalists, mostly Filipinos working for local and international news organisations, remain in Jolo.

Local officials have said large ransoms of up

to \$1 million per person have been paid for the freedom of those already released and that the rebels are in talks for more money. Manila has denied that cash has been paid for any of the releases. A

Meanwhile, the Philippine President Joseph Estrada has secured a new batch of military supplies including a Coast Guard patrol boat and eight helicopters after talks with US secretary of defense William Cohen.

Pentagon spokesman Ken Bacon told reporters on Thursday that among other issues, the two men discussed terrorism and the possibility that Philippine forces could be offered US training on hostage rescue operations.

Mr Estrada is visiting the United States as security forces in the southern Philippines are locked in a standoff with Abu Sayyaf Muslim extremists holding more than 20 mostly foreign hostages. Philippine officials said before the visit they hoped the United States, a close ally, would help bolster their forces to deal with a costly Muslim insurgency raging in the south of the country. Mr Bacon said the surplus military equipment being transferred to the Philippines. (Reuters/AFP)

PHILIPPINES CRISIS

THE ASIAN AGE

29 JUL 2000

Presidential aide to hold talks with Filipino rebels

Jolo (Philippines), May 22

226/5 HC-14
THE PHILIPPINES' chief Government negotiator today took personal charge of efforts to win the release of 21 hostages from seven nations held by Muslim extremist rebels in a steamy southern jungle.

Roberto Aventajado, a senior adviser to President Joseph Estrada, travelled to the designated venue for formal talks with the Abu Sayyaf extremists upon arrival in Jolo island, Sulu province, 1,000 km south of Manila.

Aventajado was not accompanied by four other Government negotiators, who have held face-to-face meetings with the Abu Sayyaf in past weeks.

He was escorted by the Army and police, backed by an armoured personnel carrier.

"It will just be me," he told a Manila radio station before flying into Jolo from consultations with Estrada in Manila.

"I have to personally talk with the Abu Sayyaf commanders so I can look into their eyes and find out which among their demands are hard and soft and I can advise the President," he added.

A total of 500 armed policemen was earlier deployed to secure the village of Taglibi in Patikul town, which sources have identified to be the venue of the talks.

Sulu provincial police chief superintendent Candido Casimiro said 70 special action forces from the nearby island of Basilan have arrived in Jolo and were also on standby "just in case additional security is necessary".

With the Abu Sayyaf demanding that the military be kept out of the site, Army brigadier general Narciso Abaya said soldiers will only escort Aventajado up to a certain point.

While Aventajado was already on his way to Patikul town, it was not clear if the formal negotiations with the Abu Sayyaf will immedi-

ately start. He told reporters he still has to be briefed by "my people".

Asked what was Estrada's directive, Aventajado said, "the word of the President is to release the hostages".

Aventajado said he would prioritise the release of two ailing European hostages - German, Renate Wallert, who is suffering from hypertension, and Frenchman, Stephane Loisy, who has a urinary tract infection - in talks with the Abu Sayyaf.

"I am confident we will have results in the next few days," he said.

Wallert and Loisy are being held captive with two other Germans, a French woman, two Finns, a South African couple, a Lebanese woman, nine Malaysians and two Filipinos.

They were abducted from the Malaysian diving resort of Sipadan on April 23.

(DPA)

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

23 MAY 2000

Blasts kill 5 in S Philippines

SF 9
19/5

JOLO, May 18. — Bombs exploded today in two southern Philippine cities, including the capital of an island where Muslim rebels have kept 21 hostages, killing five people and injuring 57.

Three grenades exploded in a public market on Jolo island, where Abu Sayyaf guerrillas are holding the 21 captives, foreigners. At least four people were killed and 37 injured in the explosions, police said. Many of the injured were vendors in the Jolo city market.

Abu Sayyaf rebels are holding nine Malaysians, three Germans, two French, two South Africans, two Finns, two Filipinos and a Lebanese in hills above Jolo town, where two of the three explosions occurred.

The rebels were reported to have demanded a ransom of \$2 million for the release of an ailing German woman, Mrs Renate Wallert, among their captives but negotiators rejected it, saying the Philippines and the hostages' government were unanimous in adopting a no-ransom policy.

Negotiators earlier said they were hopeful the talks would start today but later said they might not be held until tomorrow or Saturday.

Jolo police chief said three men threw the grenades from the market's second floor. Two of them exploded in a rice stall and the third in crowded alley.

Around the same time, another bomb exploded in a confectionery shop in front of an unoccupied police station in Zamboanga city on neighboring



Volunteers rush a woman to hospital after she was injured in grenade explosions at a public market in Jolo on Thursday. — AP/PTI

Mindanao island. A woman was killed and at least 20 people were injured. The explosion gouged a one-metre hole in the wall. Police were investigating the type of explosive used.

In Jolo, many of the injured, some unconscious and some with serious head wounds, were taken to hospital.

Malaysian doctors: While the government team was preparing to begin full-scale negotiations, a team of Malaysian and Filipino doctors headed today for the rebel lair to examine the hostages.

Besides medicine, food and clothing, a four-member medical team from the Malaysian Red Crescent and three local doctors brought two ambu-

lances but didn't say why.

Government negotiators too brought ambulances with them when they drove up to the rebel stronghold last week, hoping the guerrillas would free Mrs Wallert. But the rebels refused to do so.

The hostages were kidnapped from a Malaysian diving resort on 23 April and taken to Jolo.

Abu Sayyaf is also holding nine Filipinos, mostly schoolchildren, on the nearby Basilan island. Fifteen of their other captives were rescued by the military but six were killed by the guerrillas; two beheaded.

On Tuesday the rebels said their "struggle" was to force Manila to sign a peace deal and recognise an Islamic state.

19 MAY 2000

Abu rebels, govt set new terms for talks

ASSOCIATED PRESS

JOLO, May 15. — The Philippine government and Abu Sayyaf rebels today set new conditions for starting talks on the release of the 21 hostages being held in a southern Philippine jungle.

The military must stop all operations in provinces where the rebels are holding captives and allow them to meet the armed forces chief of staff and the national police chief face to face, Abu Sayyaf spokesman, Abu Ahmad, said. The government must also allow Abu Sayyaf leaders on the Basilan island to travel to Jolo so that they can take part in the talks, Ahmad said.

The government, meanwhile, insisted on a single written set of demands from the rebels rather than the piecemeal, informal demands they have been making. "We want them to make collective decisions ... otherwise how can we hold negotiations," Mr Robert Aventajado, one of the negotiators, said. Mr Aventajado who flew to Manila late yesterday to consult President Joseph Estrada, said he has the President's blessing to return to Jolo tomorrow and hopes to begin formal talks based on written demands from the rebels the following day.

Mr Estrada, who is to fly to China on an official visit tomorrow, has been criticised for leaving the country at a time of crisis.

The Moro Islamic Liberation Front announced today that it would withdraw its forces from the highway, bordering its main camp, so that negotiations could resume.

The Abu Sayyaf is yet to present formal demands for the hostages' release but has indicated it will put forward several conditions already rejected by the government.

Scribes warned: The Philippine foreign secretary today warned that his government cannot take responsibility for the safety of journalists who attempt to visit the hide-out where the hostages are being held. "We informed the journalists' respective ambassadors that if there are additional hostages, we cannot really be responsible," Mr Siazon said.

THE STRAITS TIMES

16 MAY 2001

Philippines Moro rebels free 183

REUTERS and AFP

COTABATO (Philippines), May 14. — Moro Islamic Liberation Front guerrillas today withdrew from a village they had seized yesterday in southern Philippines and abandoned 183 civilians they had taken hostage, an army spokesman said.

"Our troops are now occupying the area and all the 183

hostages are safe," Captain Noel Detoyato said. The estimated 100 guerrillas of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front, who had occupied the village of Pamantingan yesterday, retreated in two groups into nearby mountains when soldiers moved in early today.

The village lies about 390 km northeast of Jolo island, where the Abu Sayyaf guerrillas have held 21 mostly foreign hostages for three weeks.

Both the MILF and the Abu Sayyaf are fighting for an independent homeland in the largely Catholic nation.

'Missing' journalists return: Eleven of the 13 foreign journalists feared captured by

Muslim rebels on a Philippine island returned to the regional capital today.

Officials said the remaining two might not have been abducted.

After a day of conflicting reports, President Joseph Estrada's office in Manila said earlier today that 13 journalists had gone missing yesterday on Jolo island where

Abu Sayyaf rebels are holding 21 hostages from various countries. Sulu police chief, Mr Candido Casimiro, said security has been stepped up to prevent foreign journalists from reaching the Abu Sayyaf hideout.

The journalists were among the many who have converged on the island since the 21 hostages were seized on 23 April.

Presidential adviser Mr Robert Aventajado, who is

one of the negotiators, said "We tried to control the journalists' movements but they managed through sheer resourcefulness to get there. It has happened in the past. Perhaps they are still doing their journalistic work."

ABU HOSTAGES

KUALA LUMPUR, May 14.

— Nine Malaysians, who are among 21 people held hostage by Filipino Muslim rebels, have urged the Malaysian government to get the Philippine army to halt attacks against Abu Sayyaf rebels. They have also appealed to Manila to ask its troops not to attack the rebels so that talks for their release may begin.

Meanwhile, negotiators who were holding talks with the rebels on Jolo island left today for consultations with President Joseph Estrada and warned not to expect a quick settlement to the crisis. Libyan negotiator Mr Rajab Azzarouq said "it could be a long-drawn session of talks." — DPA

THE STATESMAN

15 MAY 2000

Abu rebels flee with hostages

DPA & AFP

51-5 1215 5 6 AM - 2000

JOLO, May 11. — Abu Sayyaf rebels again gave the army the slip, moving 21 hostages — most of them foreigners — to a new hideout late yesterday, as the military and police prepared to re-deploy forces around the guerrillas. Negotiators are set for a second round of talks with the rebels today.

A police Intelligence officer said the extremists left an encampment on Mount Tunggol in the coastal town of Patikul, Jolo island late yesterday. The hostages are now being held on the adjacent Mount Gasam, 8 kilometres from where Filipino and Libyan negotiators yesterday held the first face-to-face meeting with the kidnappers.

"The hostages are being guarded by an estimated 400 fully armed Abu Sayyaf guerrillas," the officer said. "The rebels are very mobile to prevent the military and police from setting up another drag-

net around them."

Abu Sayyaf men had on Monday eluded another military cordon in the nearby town of Talipao, when they drove through a post manned by former Muslim rebels working with government forces.

The rebels are expected to meet negotiators for a second round of talks today, amid conflicting signals about the fate of a German captive who needs urgent medical attention.

The Abu Sayyaf had told Philippine negotiator Ghazali Ibrahim and retired Libyan diplomat Rajab Azzarouq at a groundbreaking meeting yesterday that they needed 24 hours to decide on a request to release 57-year-old teacher Mrs Renate Wallert. Mrs Wallert, who is believed to have suffered a stroke, is being held along with her husband and son.

Just hours after the negotiators raised hopes for Mrs Wallert's release, an Abu Sayyaf spokesman said in a

surprise announcement over radio that she was feigning her illness and would not be freed.

Philippine officials, however, are confident of her freedom. "If we are lucky we should win her release this afternoon," President Joseph Estrada's adviser, Mr Roberto Aventajado, said. Mr Estrada has sent Mr Aventajado with a jet to fly the hostage to hospital in Manila if necessary.

(Reuters quotes Mr Aventajado as saying that Philippine troops on patrol may have discouraged the rebels from responding to a government request to free the ailing German woman. "It's possible the 24-hour deadline was not followed because of some kind of misunderstanding by the military," he said. Mr Aventajado said the military had patrolled the wrong area today. "That may have sent the wrong signal. We have asked the military to go somewhere else while we are doing the negotiations.")

THE STATESMAN

12 MAY 2000

Abu men breach army cordon

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
JOLO (Philippines), May 9. — A group of Islamic rebels have broken through a military cordon in the southern Philippines taking three of their 21 hostages with them.

Details of Sunday's breakout were only released today after the new government negotiator headed for the Abu Sayyaf camp, and special European envoy Mr Javier Solana arrived in Manila to try to end the 16-day hostage crisis.

The armed forces said in a statement that Abu Sayyaf terrorists with "three Caucasian-looking hostages" — two women and one man — broke through a section of the cordon controlled by forces allied with government troops. There was no word on the fate of the other 18 mostly foreign captives.

The cordon was being manned by former Islamic guerrillas who are helping government forces surround the rebels on Jolo island. The army report blamed the former rebels of the Moro National Liberation Front for not taking "appropriate action or put up resistance against the Abu Sayyaf, allowing the latter to escape from the dragnet put up by government forces".

Defence secretary Mr Orlando Mercado said he was trying to confirm the report. The army said two Abu Sayyaf rebels were seen passing with three hostages near a MNLF camp in a village in Talipao town on Jolo island. They were seen running towards the adjacent



Former Muslim rebels, now integrated into the Philippine armed forces, on Monday with residents, as they guard a road that leads to the hideouts of the 21 hostages in Patikul, Sulu province. — AP/PTI

town of Patikul. "The group even destroyed the perimeter fence of the camp," the report said.

The MNLF signed a peace pact with the government in 1996. Since then, some 7,000 ex-guerrillas have been integrated into the military and the police.

Mr Nur Misuari, who was appointed as chief government negotiator, is a former MNLF chieftain. Earlier, he had deployed at least 3,000 non-integrees to the area to reinforce the entrapment aimed at preventing the kidnapers from moving their captives to

another hideout. A report on the breakout was sent to the armed forces chief of staff last night, the statement said.

Former Nato secretary-general Solana arrived in Manila with blankets, food and medicines for the hostages. He is to meet Philippine President Mr Joseph Estrada and other senior officials late today, and is expected to convey the EU's support for Manila's efforts to free the hostages.

The 21 hostages were kidnapped from a Malaysian diving resort on 23 April and taken to Jolo island.

THE STATESMAN

10 MAY 2000

Hostages run as army shells Abu hideout

RICHARD BEESTON
THE TIMES, LONDON

JOLO, May 8. — Twenty foreign hostages held outside a southern port in the Philippines were caught up in a battle yesterday after their jungle hideout was shelled by soldiers and they ran for cover.

Harrowing pictures taken by two Filipino journalists showed the hostages looking exhausted and scared as they raced for safety beneath trees, surrounded by scores of armed rebels.

One middle-aged German woman appeared to be unable to endure her ordeal much longer. Writhing in agony and laid out on a makeshift stretcher, Mrs Renate Wallert, who has a heart condition, was tended to by her father and son, who could only comfort her using tree leaves as fans. A Filipino reporter who met her said he doubted that she would survive much longer.

At least five mortar rounds landed close to the hostages, who are believed to be held near Mount Daho, a wooded

volcanic mountain 13 km east of the port of Jolo.

Sunday night's TV pictures made a mockery of attempts by President Estrada to resolve the crisis. Just as the shootout was taking place, he arrived in the nearby city of Zamboanga wearing combat fatigues and promising to take charge of the crisis personally, before it causes further damage to his presidency.

Abroad, foreign governments are running out of patience with Manila's handling of the hostage-taking, in part because the negotiations have failed to make headway while the army has been pressing to resolve the stand-off by force.

On Sunday, Mr Estrada said he was willing to make peace with the rebels operating across the southern province of Mindanao, but if not he would "give them the full might of the armed forces".

The hostage drama is by far the most serious international crisis he has faced since coming to power two years ago and the general upsurge in violence

across the southern Philippines is turning into his greatest test at home.

Part of the problem is that the negotiations have been so badly handled it is still not clear what exactly the kidnapers want. Mr Nur Misuari, the local Governor and chief negotiator, has been accused of having his own personal agenda in the talks and appears to be at odds with the military.

A military document, seen by The Times at an army base in Jolo at the weekend, left little doubt that the army is itching to finish off the rebels in battle. After a detailed description of clashes last week between the abductors and army special forces, the report ended with an appeal from a senior officer asking for permission to order "the final assault" on the rebel base.

Local soldiers and politicians agree that the primary objective of the kidnapers is to secure a large cash ransom and that their political demands are irrelevant.

The lack of any sense of movement has prompted foreign

governments whose nationals are being held to take their own initiative. Over the weekend a delegation from Malaysia arrived in Jolo, and made it clear that if it could negotiate a deal for Malaysians it would do so.

The European Union also seemed ready to take its own initiative. Javier Solana, its foreign policy representative, will fly to Manila "to convey to the Philippines Government the EU's message concerning the safety of the hostages".

The German, French, Finnish, Lebanese, South African and Malaysian nationals were on a diving holiday in a neighbouring Malaysian island when they were seized by Muslim rebels of the Abu Sayyaf group two weeks ago.

Since their captivity they have been forced to endure primitive conditions in Jolo's thick forest, where food and water are scarce. They have been attacked repeatedly by the army, while their kidnapers have refused appeals to free the two sick hostages.

THE STATESMAN

9 MAY 2000

Philippine troops try to head off escaping kidnappers ⁹⁶⁻⁹

ASSOCIATED PRESS
TALIPAO, PHILIPPINES, MAY 6

PHILIPPINE troops on Saturday attempted to head off Muslim rebels who broke through military lines and are believed to be escaping with 21 hostages, including 10 foreign tourists, military officials said.

The officials confirmed that at least some Abu Sayyaf rebels had been able to escape through a military cordon around the area on Jolo island in the southern Philippines where they had been holding their captives.

The Muslim extremists were believed to be taking the hostages, abducted April 23 from a resort island in neighbouring Malaysia, into the hills of Patikul town, the officials said. A group of escaping rebels clashed briefly last night with Army troops, but there were no casualties, Lt Hassam Laquian said.

A team of negotiators at-

tempted to meet with the kidnapers late on Saturday, but were unable to reach them because of the rising tensions in the area. Representatives of the negotiators who visited the rebels on Thursday said the guerrillas were already outside the military cordon and had all 21 captives with them.

Contacts between the kidnapers and the negotiators were cut earlier this week after hundreds of troops encircled the area where the hostages had been held in a simple bamboo hut. A series of clashes erupted on Tuesday and Wednesday as the rebels attempted to escape. The rebels have threatened to behead two foreign hostages if the military does not remove its troops from the area.

AFP adds: COMMERCIAL flights to this southern Philippine island, where 21 hostages are being held by Muslim extremists, are to be suspended due to security problems, an official said on Saturday.

Asian Spirit, the sole carrier running flights out of Zamboanga to the islands of Jolo and Tawi-Tawi, will suspend operations indefinitely from Sunday, Cesar Ventura, the airline's station supervisor, told AFP. This is "because of the escalating Mindanao crisis," he said, as the last flight left here for Zamboanga early on Saturday.

Abu Sayyaf Muslim rebels kidnapped 21 people from a Malaysian resort on April 23 and brought them across the sea border to Jolo. The military has tightened its cordon around the abductors. "The ATO (Air Transportation Office) cannot guarantee our security so the company decided to stop flight operations indefinitely. We cannot take any risk," Ventura said. Asian Spirit used a turbo-prop YS-11-500 aircraft for its flights to Jolo and Tawi-Tawi four times a week. Without the Air link, travellers to and from Jolo will be confined to ferries.

INDIAN EXPRESS

7 MAY 2000

Philippine rebels declare 48-hour ceasefire

ASSOCIATED PRESS

COTABATO, May 5
Muslim separatist rebels who
battled government troops in
the southern Philippines this
week today declared a 48-hour
ceasefire.

Mr Al Haj Murad, vice-chair-
man for military affairs of the
Moro Islamic Liberation Front
(MILF), said the cease-fire
would take effect tomorrow
morning.

Mr Murad said the unilateral
cease-fire was a response to
public appeals, including from
Manila Archbishop Jaime,
Cardinal Sin, former president
Mrs Corazon Aquino, and
Muslim religious leaders, to
halt armed hostilities and
return to the negotiating table.

The MILF is the larger of two
Muslim groups fighting for an
independent Islamic nation in
southern Philippines. Separately,
the government is trying
to free two groups of hostages
held by a smaller Muslim rebel
group, the Abu Sayyaf.

THE STATESMAN

- 5 MAY 2002

Hostages: pressure on Manila not to use force

By P. S. Suryanarayana

SINGAPORE, MAY 4. Even as the Philippines Government reaffirmed its resolve to treat the hostage crisis as a fight against 'terrorism,' irrespective of the political complexion of the separatist group suspected to be behind it, Manila today came under international pressure to refrain from using force to ensure a safe release of the captives.

The Malaysian Prime Minister's special envoy, Mr. Amin Mulia, today visited the Filipino city of Zamboanga where he held talks with Mr. Nur Misuari, the designated chief negotiator appointed by the Philippines Government to try and secure the release of 21 international hostages, including 10 Malaysians, being held by a suspected faction of the Abu Sayyaf group of Muslim separatist rebels. Mr. Amin Mulia had earlier met the Philippines President, Mr. Joseph Estrada, in Manila, and Malaysia indicated its preference for non-military means of resolving the crisis.

A representative of Germany, whose nationals were among the



Relatives cry over the body of hostage Edltha Lomame, a school principal in the Basilan Island, during a church service on Thursday in Isabela, the capital of the province. Lomame was found dead along with a Roman Catholic priest and two other teachers following a riverside firefight between Government troopers and the Abu Sayyaf rebels (who held him as hostage) on Wednesday. — AP

international hostages, today emphasised the need for an avoidance of force which could 'jeopardise the security' of the captives.

Mr. Nur Misuari, who is also

the Governor of the Muslim Mindanao Autonomous Region, indicated to the Malaysian special envoy that the negotiators were at present trying to re-establish contact with the band holding the

international hostages. These contacts snapped during the clashes between the Filipino military units and the hostage-takers.

Mr. Nur Misuari, who had earlier wanted to give up the job of chief negotiator if the captors in question would not like to deal with him, today indicated his inclination to renounce the mandate of an intermediary and a peace emissary if a military solution were the option preferred by the Filipino authorities to tame these captors operating in the Jolo island in southern Philippines.

As for the logistical ground realities, there was no official word even today on whether or not two of the international hostages had died as suspected in the wake of reported claims by the rebels. There was also no confirmation about the 'escape' of two other hostages.

Regarding the other batch of all-Filipino hostages in the hands of the Abu Sayyaf group in the Basilan segment of southern Philippines, at least four adult captives, out of an estimated 27, were reported to have been found executed by the rebels.

THE HINDU

- 5 MAY 2000

Philippine Army clashes with captors

DEUTSCHE PRESSE AGENTUR

JOLO (Philippines), May 2. — Government troops today clashed with Muslim extremist rebels holding 21 ailing hostages in a southern Philippine jungle, but there was no immediate information about the captives, police said.

At least one soldier was killed, while four others and an undetermined number of Abu Sayyaf extremists were wounded in the skirmish in the remote village of Tiis Kuttong in Jolo island, Sulu province, 1,000 km south of Manila, a police report said. There was no immediate information on the hostages, since fighting raged between the two sides.

The report said the firefight was triggered by "a chance encounter" between the soldiers and the guerrillas in Tiis Kuttong, one km away from Bandang village where the hostages were being held in a small bamboo hut.

But a wounded soldier said the troops were just resting in their camp when two Abu Sayyaf groups attacked them.

The clash erupted amid an appeal by the hostages for the Philippine government to pull out some 1,000 soldiers and policemen patrolling around the Abu Sayyaf's hideout. The hostages also said that the Philippine government must "not undertake any stupid action".

"We do not want to die here," said German hostage Werner Wallert, echoing sentiments of the other captives from France, South Africa, Finland, Lebanon, Malaysia and the Philippines, seized from the Malaysian island resort of Sipadan by the Abu Sayyaf.

"We are in a very serious situation," added an exhausted Wallert, a 57-year-old teacher. "This is not an adventure. We are risking our lives here. If the Philippine government should try to march in, this will be a bloodshed, nothing else."

THE STATESMAN

3 MAY 2000

~~Philippine rebels surrounded~~

Negotiator says no to attack

SF-5
1/5

S. Misuari
Abdurahman

[Handwritten signature]

REUTERS

ZAMBOANGA, April 30. — The Philippine government's chief hostage negotiator today said soldiers had surrounded the Islamic rebels holding 21 captives on southern Jolo island but repeated his warning against military intervention.

Mr Nur Misuari, a former rebel, also threatened to end negotiations unless the guerrillas started releasing the captives. "These people...are already encircled from all sides," he said, adding that this was a tactical move intended to limit the movement of the guerrillas.

"Either we expedite the release of these people or we terminate the negotiations," Mr Misuari remarked.

He also repeated his threat to resign as negotiator if the military launched an attack. The military have said they are not planning any intervention.

Mr Misuari's emissaries have reported that most of the hostages have diarrhoea and one of the Finnish hostages was "sick with bleeding ulcer."

Earlier, one of the emissaries who met the rebels said the latter had submitted a fresh list of demands but Mr Misuari denied having received them. Asked if the demands included a ransom, Mr Abdurahman said, "I don't know".

He said the written demands were "additional" to the previ-

ous demands, which included full autonomy for Muslim areas in the country's south and a ban on fishing by big foreign vessels in the Sulu sea.

Indonesia help: Indonesia today offered its help to rescue the 21 people kidnapped from the Sipadan island resort, adding that it considered the island an Indonesian territory.

"The Indonesian government is deeply concerned over an act by a suspected Filipino armed rebel group that makes Sipadan island an arena of achieving political gains," the foreign ministry stated.

"The kidnapping of innocent persons at the island is a dangerous act which threatens human lives and therefore should not be tolerated. Indonesia is prepared to co-operate to immediately save the hostages."

A journalist who saw the captives yesterday said they were all still alive but many had fallen sick.

Peace talks suspended: Reports from Cotabato say that the biggest Philippine Muslim rebel group have suspended peace talks with the government today after weeks of fighting with the military on the southern Mindanao island. The Moro Islamic Liberation Front, one of two groups fighting for an Islamic state in the south of Philippines, accused the military of violating a 1997 ceasefire agreement by attacking several of its camps.

6 1 MAY 2001

Stand-off continues in Philippines

By P. S. Suryanarayana

SINGAPORE, APRIL 29. The stand-off between the Philippines Government and the hostage-takers remained unresolved until nightfall today, even as Manila did not rule out military action to rescue the 21 captives being held presumably at a mountain hide-out in Sulu province in southern Philippines.

On a separate but related front, there was no rollback of the military offensive against the bases of the "Abu Sayyaf" group of Muslim separatists in the neighbouring Basilan province, where

a different batch of an estimated 27 Filipinos, including children, was being held captive by elements of the outfit.

Manila continued to suspect that "Abu Sayyaf" was behind the swoop last Sunday night on the motley group of 21 persons at the Sipadan diving resort under Malaysian jurisdiction. After being taken hostage, the 21 were later ferried to southern Philippines by the abductors.

The Philippines Government did not accede to the demand by the Sipadan raiders that it should replace its designated chief nego-

tiator by representatives of Malaysia as also some Western and West Asian countries whose citizens were being held in captivity.

However, the chief negotiator, Mr. Nur Misuari, said today he would be willing to step aside if need be. As for the political dimension of the hostage crises, confusion persisted in regard to the actual demands of the group holding international hostages as distinct from the other all-Filipino group of captives.

Mr. Misuari's emissaries were said to have been handed some demands in writing by the Sipadan raiders but he did not outline any details in this regard.

There were also conflicting indications about the condition of the international hostages, while the day's quest by the authorities for a way out of the stalemate in the twin crises was punctuated by a purported message to a radio network from a person being held captive by the Sipadan raiders. The message, made available to others, was in effect a demand that the current military operations against the "Abu Sayyaf" be halted. There was no official comment on this.

THE HINDU

30 APR 2000

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Hostage to separatism

A POLITICAL agenda of separatism with international implications is behind the twin hostage crises facing the Philippines President, Mr. Joseph Estrada, as also the affected citizens of different states and their Governments. At stake are the passions defining the Islamic identity of the 'Moro' people in a predominantly Catholic Philippines and the relevance of the United States as both a hate-target of the abductors and as a powerful friend, not master, of the Filipino state.

Treating one of the two challenges as an ugly manifestation of an insurgency against the Philippines, Mr. Estrada has opted for a military solution after failing through parleys to secure the release of an estimated 27 surviving captives from the hands of the dreaded "Abu Sayyaf group." As for the other trauma — the abduction of 21 persons of various nationalities by a band of suspected pirates with links to "Abu Sayyaf" — Mr. Estrada has appointed a leader known for his erstwhile links to the anti-Manila rebellion itself for negotiations.

The Estrada administration's prime concern is to secure the release of all hostages in both cases without agreeing to the demands which, in Manila's view, will compromise the international fight against terrorism. Manila's message to the 'Moro' militants in southern Philippines is that their distinctive Islamic identity can be fostered in other ways.

Mr. Estrada's chief negotiator — Mr. Nur Misuari who formerly headed the Moro National Liberation Front (MNL) and signed a peace accord with Manila in September 1996 — said on April 28 that he would use his skills at "Islamic persuasive diplomacy" to try and secure the phased release of the 21 taken hostage from Sipadan island off the Sabah coastline of Malaysia on the night of April 23. Malaysians and foreign tourists (including Western and West Asian holiday-makers) at a hotel in the diving resort of Sipadan were kidnapped and ferried to Sulu island in southern Philippines. Manila and Kuala Lumpur, acting in concert to rescue these hostages, zeroed in on their location through aerial and naval surveillance.

Significantly, with Muslim-

A political agenda of separatism with international implications is behind the hostage crisis the Philippines is facing. At stake are the passions defining the Islamic identity of the 'Moro' people.

P. S. SURYANARAYANA reports.

nationals, has for the present gone beyond the option of negotiations. The captors, clearly identified as an 'Abu Sayyaf' band, snared their victims in the southern Basilan island nearly a month ago and demanded that the U.S. release three prisoners including Ramzi Yusuf who had been convicted of masterminding the World Trade Centre bombing in New York in 1993. The U.S. and Manila would not oblige. The group was reported to have executed at least two of the 31 persons it took captive.

Mr. Estrada, already witnessing a rising tide of protest at home over his

brandishing a sword, was founded in 1991. According to those who had known him, the 'Abu Sayyaf' founder, Adul Rajak Janjalani, since killed in a police ambush in Basilan, was actually renowned for bearing a string of beads for Islamic prayers and for maintaining that he was engaged in "a sacred struggle" which would be carried forward by someone else in the event of his death as "a martyr."

The rise of 'Abu Sayyaf', despite the existence of the MNL since 1969 and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) since 1980 following a split two years earlier, is in itself a telling commentary on the disaffection



Ultras belonging to the 'Abu Sayyaf' tell the press of their demands... maximalist posturing.

majority Malaysia seeking to explore all search-and-rescue options and indicating its disinclination to strike a unilateral deal with the Islamist captors. Manila has felt emboldened to seek negotiations with those who raided Sipadan as the first method. As the present Governor of the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao which was sanctified by the 1996 Accord, Mr. Misuari has also sent a signal to the Sipadan raiders that he would deal with them in a "brotherly" fashion.

The parallel case of the 27 surviving hostages, all Filipino

actions on various fronts, yielded some ground to 'Abu Sayyaf' at that stage by sending a film star to negotiate with it.

The movie actor had earlier embraced Islam during a brief prison term, and this had endeared him to the group. But the talks made no headway and the Filipino military launched an offensive, still on, against one of the bases of the group where the hostages were suspected to be held.

Beyond these aspects of high drama with explosive overtones lie the Filipino political undercurrents with wider diplomatic ramifications. 'Abu Sayyaf', meaning the one

of the 'Moros', or Muslims of the Philippines, with Manila and on the power struggle among themselves.

For the Philippines, arguably a frontline State in Washington's calculus of "constraining" communist China, the 'Abu Sayyaf' issue is not just an aspect of "global terrorism". On the politics of Muslim discontent within its borders, the Philippines is exploring a possibility of diplomatic intervention by the Organisation of Islamic Conference. In this, it is a question of capitalising on the expanding frontiers of Islamic politics.

THE HINDU

30 APR 2002

Philippines for talks to free 21 hostages

Jolo (Philippines), April 27

THE PHILIPPINES today sought talks with Islamic gunmen holding 21 hostages, including foreign tourists, while the military fine-tuned contingency rescue plans should negotiations fail.

Officials said the hostages, abducted from a Malaysian diving resort on Sunday, were held in sep-

arate hideouts on Jolo island in the Sulu sea, a stronghold of separatist Abu Sayyaf guerrillas 960 km

Faulty boat blocks hostages' release

TEN MALAYSIANS among 21 hostages held by gunmen in the southern Philippines were to have been released but a boat due to take them home broke down, a Filipino moslem leader said on Thursday.

Manila, Reuters

south of the Philippines capital Manila. Defence Secretary Orlando Mercado said the kidnap

gang was a mixture of Abu Sayyaf rebels and former guerrillas turned bandit. "We have a military contin-

gency although our president (Joseph Estrada) has ordered us to negotiate," acting armed forces chief General Jose Calimlim said in a radio interview.

"We are looking at an early solution of this problem.

(Reuters)

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

28 APR 2000

'Hostages safe, held in S. Philippine province'

A GROUP of hostages abducted last weekend from a Malaysian resort island are being held in the remote southern Philippine province of Sulu, Philippine officials said on Wednesday.

"They're safe. I can assure you of that," said military intelligence chief Maj. Gen. Jose Calimim.

Sulu Governor Abdusakur Tan said the 21 hostages, including at least 10 foreigners, are probably being held by local members of the Abu Sayyaf, a Muslim extremist group.

The Abu Sayyaf is the smaller of two groups fighting for an independent Islamic state in the predominantly Catholic Philippines. They are currently under attack at their stronghold in nearby Basilan province by Philippine troops attempting to rescue 27 other hostages kidnapped more than five

weeks ago.

The kidnappings, the worst the Philippines has experienced in years, have drawn attention to the country's long-simmering Muslim rebellion.

Tan said he would meet later today with military officials, including Defence Secretary Orlando Mercado, to discuss whether to negotiate for the hostages' release.

A military report said the kidnappers were on Talipao in Sulu province. They include 12 Malay speakers, two speakers of Tausug, a Philippine language, and one Caucasian-appearing person, the report said.

Abu Sayyaf leader Galid Andang is suspected of masterminding the kidnappings of three Hong Kong fishery workers in 1998.

AP, Zamboanga (Philippines)

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

27 APR 2000

Estrada rules out host

REUTERS

MANILA, April 15. — Philippine President Joseph Estrada today rejected Muslim rebels' demand that he intercede for the release of five Islamic extremists in exchange for the freedom of 29 hostages.

"It is impossible. We will not compromise with them," Mr Estrada told reporters in response to the five-point demand of the fundamentalist group Abu Sayyaf.

"I'm warning them: they will be met with the full force of the law and full force of the military," he said in nearby Tagaytay city, where he attended a golf tournament.

In a letter to Mr Estrada, Abu Sayyaf had demanded the release of five of their "brothers", who are in jail in the USA and the Philippines, including a "Youseff Ramsy".

It was unclear if the Abu Sayyaf, which is fighting for a separate Islamic state in the Philippines' southern Mindanao region, was referring to Ramzi Ahmed Yousef, a guerrilla convicted of the 1993 US World Trade Centre bombing.

The demand letter of the Abu Sayyaf was sent to movie star Robin Padilla, who converted

to Islam a few years ago.

He trekked to the mountain lair of the guerrillas in Basilan island earlier this week to hear the demands of the Abu Sayyaf.

The hostages were among more than 70 people, mostly children, abducted by the Abu Sayyaf from two Basilan schools on 20 March. More than 40 were later released.

Meanwhile, the Philippine defence chief, Mr Orlando Mercado today said the demand for the release of three militants from US jails were "illogical," adds AFP.

Rebel camp busted: Defence officials today hoisted the Philippine flag over a major Muslim camp in southern Philippines, signifying the official government takeover of an area that has long been claimed by the country's largest Muslim rebel group, adds DPA from Amboanga city.

About 4,000 marine and army troops yesterday overran Camp Bilal in Lanao del Norte province, some 920 km south of Manila, after a week of continued offensives on the Moro Islamic Liberation Front. The military also cleared out nine MILF satellite camps.

"Soldiers are flushing out guerrillas in the province, and

mopping-up operations are going on after government forces overran Camp Bilal,"

said Col Hilario Aten military spokesman. "C is now hoisted and there

16 APR 2003

Talks postponed amid fighting in Philippines

Manila, February 20

HTK14
FORMAL PEACE talks between Muslim separatist rebels and the Philippine government have been put on hold amid escalating hostilities in the south, where at least 33 people have been killed, officials said today.

Defence Secretary Orlando Mercado said he was told by retired Lieutenant General Edgardo Batenga, the chief government negotiator, that the talks with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) tomorrow have been cancelled.

"The resumption of talks will not push through," Mr Mercado said.

According to Mr Batenga, the talks with the MILF had to be postponed until "a more conducive environment" prevails in the southern region of Mindanao.

The two-day talks would have been the second round of formal peace negotiations between the MILF and the government aimed at reaching a political settlement

to the rebel group's fight for independence.

The postponement of the talks follows five days of fierce fighting between the MILF and the military, during which soldiers overran critical rebel positions in Maguindanao province, 960 kilometres south of Manila.

Colonel Rafael Romero, a military spokesman, said at least 31 bodies of slain MILF rebels have been recovered from at least five towns in Maguindanao, the site of the clashes. At least two soldiers were also killed in the fighting.

Mr Romero said the rebel death toll could be higher as soldiers continued clearing operations in the area. Despite the postponement of the talks, Mr Mercado said he and armed forces chief of staff General Angelo Reyes would still fly to Cotabato city in Maguindanao tomorrow.

"We will be briefed on the situation there as well as the prospects for the resumption of talks," Mr Mercado said. (UNI)

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

21 FEB 2000

America's ally

40-17 207 2

For the present, the Philippines has come back to playing Man Friday to Uncle Sam.
P. S. SURYANARAYANA
on the recent joint military exercises by the two countries.

THE CENTREPIECE of the strategic calculus in South-East Asia is often believed to be economic security. Japan is active in promoting this, as evident once again on the sidelines of the 10th session of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) that ended in Bangkok on February 20. However, the recent resumption of military exercises involving the U.S. and the Philippines, besides a diplomatic offensive that China embarked upon some time ago, have now brought into sharper focus the criticality of longer-term political security issues.

The strategic mindgames of the U.S., as also China and Japan, in relation to the larger Asia-Pacific spectrum, in general, besides the South East Asian segment, in particular, can be discerned behind the scenes. These games may assume greater visibility as the 21st century wears on.

Outwardly, the mainstream ASEAN members, as distinct from Vietnam and Myanmar on certain occasions, do not contend with the bogey of a U.S. militarist hegemony. This is so despite the frequent anti-West jibes by the Malaysian Prime Minister, Dr. Mahathir Mohammad. However, the Indonesian President, Mr. Abdurrahman Wahid, surprised the West at the UNCTAD meeting by endorsing Dr. Mahathir's economic philosophy, which in the South-East Asian context, is the other side of a pristine but undefined political ideology.

Indonesia, in particular, needs to be wary of a possible attempt by the U.S. to press for a Wilsonian self-determination in Aceh or elsewhere. For Indonesia, there is also the lingering apprehension that the West might yet impose an international human rights tribunal to prosecute Jakarta's generals for alleged atrocities in East Timor, now under the U.N.'s tutelage. Historically, independent Indonesia, the largest South-East Asian State, has not become a frontline State for Washington's strategic games in the Far East. Jakarta's "non-alignment" and also its failure to capitalise on its resources were the reasons. Yet, the U.S. and Jakarta are aware of new possibilities of a strategic synergy.

But, for the present, the Philippines has come back to the forefront of playing Man Friday to Uncle Sam in the



Protests in front of the U.S. Embassy in Manila against the military exercises... geopolitics at work.

strategic sphere. Simple is the explanation for the move by the Filipino President, Mr. Joseph Estrada, to opt for facilitating Washington's strategic presence in the Far East at this time. Given the lingering memories of the Filipino opposition in the early 1990s to the U.S. presence and Washington's withdrawal from the Subic Bay naval facilities, Mr. Estrada's latest action is no less controversial even in his own country. However, his portrayal of Beijing as the bogeyman sailing across the South China Sea within Manila's geopolitical zone is not without acceptance in the Philippines.

Mr. Estrada's recent proposal for the formation of an East Asia Security Forum is seen by the West as an aspect of his penchant for promoting the strategic interests of the Filipinos. The composition of the proposed forum has not been properly spelt out, although top Filipino officials indicate the possibility of including Washington. In essence, the forum, visualised as a reality in the 21st century, does not exclude China, the

diplomatic compulsion being the ASEAN policy of seeking engagement with Beijing, in addition to a containment of China through the U.S. military presence in the Far East.

At a different echelon, even a country such as Thailand, which has close political ties with the U.S., is in a strategic dialogue with China. Another new trend is that of enlarging the scope of Washington's bilateral military exercises in the region, the example being that of Thailand co-opting Singapore. Should the U.S.-Filipino military exercises, a sequel to last year's Visiting Forces Agreement, be similarly extended to other countries (as observers or otherwise), a new confidence-building measure will take shape.

With the U.S. no longer seeing the Great Wall as China's symbolic barrier against the West, the increasing complexity of the new matrix of strategic possibilities in South-East Asia requires to be tempered by a Western sensitivity to Japan's moods and methods.

THE HINDU
20 FEB 2000

118-12 9/11

Estrada puts constitutional reforms on hold

By P. S. Suryanarayana

SINGAPORE, JAN. 8. The Philippines President, Mr. Joseph Estrada, today went back on his much-publicised pursuit of constitutional reforms. Addressing his nation of nearly 80 million people, Mr. Estrada said in Manila today he would instead constitute a new economic coordinating council to tone up the economy.

S. E. Asi - Philippines
The stated objective of his now-shelved 'CONCORD' (Constitutional Correction for Development) plan was to catalyse the flow of foreign investments into the Philippines which, with a recently estimated 'GDP per head' of about \$ 900 was far behind some other key South East Asian countries such as Singapore with an index of \$ 27,181 and Malaysia with \$ 2,772.

However, Mr. Estrada's critics had vehemently opposed his 'CONCORD' idea. The primary suspicion was that the plan, with an outward economic focus, was a smokescreen to further his hold on the presidency. The limitation of a one six-year term for the President might be annulled to facilitate a return to the old system of a concentration of powers as under the dictatorial Marcos, it was widely alleged.

While one reason for the move was the recent dip in his popularity ratings, Mr. Estrada sought to sustain his pro-poor image by announcing the forma-

tion of what immediately came to be dubbed a super economic Cabinet. He removed from key positions some of his advisers who had come in for public criticism on grounds of alleged "cronyism."

Some important Cabinet changes were also made public. Mr. Jose Pardo, Trade Secretary until recently, was made the new Finance Secretary in the place vacated by Mr. Edgardo Espiritu a few days ago to give the President a free hand. Mr. Espiritu had, however, presided over some recent economic recovery. If that factor had to be suitably contended with, Mr. Estrada, whose political agenda included a people-friendly law-and-order approach, sought to project himself in good light by appointing Mr. Alfredo Lim to the key post of Interior Secretary. Mr. Lim is said to have the necessary credentials for the job among those the President could count on.

Despite the many domestic controversies, Mr. Estrada has already pushed the Philippines closer to the U.S. since his assumption of office over a year and a half ago. The latest comments by the U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs, Mr. Stanley Roth, on the Spratlys issue were in line with Mr. Estrada's broad agenda. The identification of security issues and economic reforms as matters of concern to Washington in the East Asian region would suit Mr. Estrada.