

28 killed, Philippine rebels hold 70 hostage

REUTERS

ZAMBOANGA, Nov. 27. — Muslim gunmen, followers of the detained Muslim leader — Nur Misuari, fought pitched battles with Philippine troops in the southern city of Zamboanga today and took scores of civilians hostage after at least 28 people were killed, sources said.

Local officials said they were working out a compromise formula under which the hostages, about 70 to 80, would be freed and the gunmen allowed to return to their camps.

(According to a late night report, 23 civilian hostages were later released.)

The gunmen took the civilians

captives after the fighters were pounded by helicopter gunships and bomber planes in pre-dawn raids. Twenty-five gunmen, two army men and a civilian died in the clashes in the mainly Christian port city of 750,000 people, according to official figures. By today evening, fighting for a guerrilla-occupied hill in one part of the city's suburbs had subsided but troops were locked in a tense stand-off in another area because of the hostages.

Residents had fled in terror when the fighting began and many were seized and paraded down a mud track by rifle-toting guerrillas shouting *Allahu Akbar*.

Hundreds of people, scribes

and TV cameramen followed the procession of gunmen and hostages as they walked through the outskirts of the city, 860 km south of Manila.

The hostages wept and pleaded with troops not to open fire as the guerrillas prodded them forward with rifle butts toward another district where they joined a larger group of rebels.

Many followed, hurling expletives at the gunmen, but some joined the rebels and shouted *Allahu Akbar*.

The drama, played out on national television, was the latest security embarrassment for President Mrs Gloria Macapagal Arroyo and her government. The Muslim secessionist problem in

the south has become a major headache for them. It appears to be contained in the south, but the outbreak of violence in Zamboanga, the headquarters of the southern military command and a major city, is a setback.

Today's fighting escalated after government troops, under orders not to let the gunmen leave, fired and then called in reinforcements and air support.

But by dawn, many of the guerrillas had broken out of the complex of buildings to take hostages from nearby residential areas and force the military to hold fire.

Some were left to battle troops in the Cabatangan complex of buildings, Misuari's Zamboanga headquarters.

REUTERS

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5 Philippine rebels killed

DEUTSCHE PRESS AGENTUR

ZAMBOANGA CITY, Oct. 27. — Five Muslim rebels were killed and two soldiers wounded when Philippine troops raided a lair of the Abu Sayyaf today in a remote village in southern Philippines.

Lt. Col. Alberto Gepilano, an army spokesman, said that soldiers operating under the military's Joint Task Force Comet, made a dawn raid at Abu Sayyaf hideout in the village of Tiis Kutong in Talipao, Sulu province, some 1,000 kilometres south of Manila, and clashed with 35 fully-armed rebels. "Troops stormed the Abu Sayyaf encampment at around 4 a.m., after villagers informed the military about the hideout," Lt. Col. Gepilano said.

"There was a firefight, and the fiercest lasted more than one hour. The rebels split into smaller groups, and sporadic

clashes continued till the morning in the town's hinterlands. Troops were pursuing the rebels with one mission, and that is to destroy them." He said soldiers seized weapons that included M16 automatic rifles, grenade launchers and canned goods left behind by fleeing rebels.

The Abu Sayyaf group is holding at least 11 hostages, including American missionary couple Martin and Gracia Burnham, on nearby Basilan island.

The Burnhams were among 20 people seized in May in Palawan.

Kidnap: The kidnapers of Italian priest Father Guiseppe Pierantoni have lowered their ransom demand for the priest's release but an official today rejected the payment of ransom. An army official said the abductors, members of the country's largest Muslim rebel group, have demanded a ransom of 10 million pesos.

THE STATESMAN

25 OCT 2001

26 Abu Sayyaf rebels killed in encounters

DEUTSCHE PRESSE-AGENTUR

ZAMBOANGA CITY, Oct. 21. — At least 26 Abu Sayyaf rebels were killed today when fighting erupted between the guerrillas and Philippine troops on two southern islands, the military said.

Lieutenant General Roy Cimatu, chief of the armed forces' Southern Command, said sporadic clashes were still ongoing in the hinterlands of Basilan and Jolo islands.

Lt Gen Cimatu said at least 18 rebels were killed in the skirmishes in the outskirts of Talipao town in Jolo, where one soldier was also killed and nine others wounded.

Eight other Abu Sayyaf guerrillas were killed in the fighting in Basilan, 900 km south of Manila, where the rebels were holding captive two Americans and eight Filipinos.

"The encounters were the result of continuing military operations against the terrorist group in Basilan and Jolo," said Lt Gen Cimatu, who flew to Basilan to supervise the operations there.

Two MG-520 attack helicopters conducted air strikes to support ground troops in the boundaries of Lantawan and Maluso towns and Isabela City

in Basilan, he said. *5-5 27/10 S B Asia Philippines*
"This is the main rebel force holding the 10 hostages," he added. "There have been sightings of these hostages and we believe they included the American missionary couple."

The American couple — Martin and Gracia Burnham — were among 20 people abducted from a Philippine luxury resort on 27 May. The group was brought to Basilan, where the rebels took more hostages.

Colonel Roland Detabali, assistant chief for operations at the Southern Command, said soldiers were on combat patrol when they encountered at least 100 rebels in Talipao.

The rebel group has been linked to Islamic militant Osama bin Laden, the prime suspect in the 11 September US terror attacks.

Last Friday, a 26-member team of US anti-terrorism experts arrived in the country to help train the military to deal with the Abu Sayyaf.

Lt Gen Cimatu said the team, headed by Colonel David Fridovich and Colonel John Christian of the elite US Special Forces, was expected to fly to Mindanao on Thursday. Officials stressed that the American experts are not armed and would not take part in the military offensive.

THE STATESMAN

22 OCT 2001

Rebel clash claims 44 in Philippines

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

MANILA, Oct. 1. — At least 44 people have been killed in fighting between the military and Muslim separatist guerrillas on the southern Philippine island of Mindanao, an army spokesman said today.

Lieutenant Colonel Jose Mabanta said eight soldiers and 36 members of the Muslim separatist Moro Islamic Liberation Front were killed in fighting in Maguindanao province from 27 to 28 September.

Helicopter gunships and attack planes were used to bombard the MILF positions. The

bodies of only four rebels were actually recovered, Mabanta said.

The other rebel deaths were confirmed by local officials on the ground, he added, although it is customary for Muslim guerrillas to recover their dead and bury them before sundown. He said the fighting was triggered when the army discovered the rebels had tried to ambush them.

MILF spokesman Eid Kabalu claimed more than 15 soldiers were killed in the two days of fighting. He refused to say how many casualties were suffered by the rebels.



Mr Joseph Estrada being escorted out of a courtroom after his trial in Quezon city on Monday. — AP/PTI

THE STATESMAN

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OCT 2001

Omani quizzed in Manila, named on hijacked plane manifest

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PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER
ASIA NEWS NETWORK

MANILA, Sept. 14. — An Omani, who was questioned in Manila three days before the US terror attacks for filming the US embassy, was apparently on one of the hijacked planes, President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo's office said today.

The suspect was among three Omanis who filmed the embassy on 8 September, three days before Tuesday's attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, Macapagal's spokesman, Mr Rigoberto Tiglao said in a statement.

Mr Tiglao said that after the attacks it was discovered that "the name of one of the three (Omanis) appeared in the flight manifest of one of the hijacked planes in the USA."

Target Manila: Militants may have planned to bomb the US embassy in Manila simultaneously with the terror attacks on US, Philippine officials said today, adds Reuters.

The three Omani nationals who were taken in for questioning in the city last week after they were found video-taping the US embassy, which occupies a large area fronting Man-



Philippine immigration officials escort the Saudi Airlines pilot, Omar Al-bhokhari, after he was held for questioning. At Manila's international airport on Friday.— AP/PTI

ila Bay was set free as there was no evidence to hold then further, police intelligence director, Mr Robert Delfin said.

The three left for Thailand on Sunday, Mr Delfin said. But a later routine search of their room at the Bay View Hotel, which is opposite the embassy, indicated residue of bomb-making material, Mr Delfin said.

By that time the three had left for Bangkok

National security adviser, Mr Roilo Golez said the operation at the Bay View was aimed only at securing the area and preventing any threat to the US embassy.

Asked if there was now any specific threat to the embassy in Manila, Mr Golez said there

was not, but added: "We presume there is a threat worldwide."

President Mrs Gloria Macapagal Arroyo told reporters in Tokyo earlier today that joint operations between the Philippine police and US authorities were being held at the Bay View Hotel.

Japanese media quoted President Arroyo as saying on Thursday that there might be a connection between those who planned and carried out the acts of terror against the USA and fundamentalist Abu Sayyaf guerrillas in the Philippines.

US officials said the hijackers were probably men of Middle east origin and that Saudi-born exile Osama bin Laden was a key suspect in the conspiracy.

Bin Laden, who is based in Afghanistan, has been on the Philippine watch-list for years, suspected of funding the Moro Islamic Liberation Front and the fundamentalist Abu Sayyaf guerrillas.

The Abu Sayyaf group has several times demanded the release of Islamic militants convicted in the 1993 plot to blow up the World Trade Center in exchange for freeing its hostages.

THE STATESMAN

15 SEP 2001

HD-12 19/8 Islands of unrest *S B Bin*
Phibruken

A NEW President must deal with old problems. Separatist violence in Aceh and Irian Jaya and communal trouble in the Malukkus and Central Kalimantan have presented a scary picture about Indonesia.

The ongoing problems in eastern, central and western Indonesia pose one of the most serious challenges to the newly-installed President, Ms. Megawati Sukarnoputri, as she gets down to the task of governance.

Some 30 palm plantation workers were massacred last week in Aceh, with the separatist Free Aceh Movement (GAM) and the military blaming each other for the killings.

A spokesman for GAM called for an international investigation into the incident, one of the most serious in recent months. "There should be an independent team consisting of people who champion human rights, not Indonesian interest nor those of GAM," he said. The spokesman also claimed that the massacre was revenge by the military for an earlier killing of 25 soldiers by separatist fighters.

According to available information, some 1,100 people have been killed in Aceh since January this year — a sure sign that the separatist GAM has not let up in its drive for a separate Islamic State. In the mineral-rich, western most province of Irian Jaya (also known as West Papua), the authorities arrested several top separatist leaders earlier this year. The separatists here consider their union with Indonesia illegal and have regularly clashed with the police for insisting on hoisting the "Morning Star" flag.

The Lasykar Jihad-led attacks on Christians in the Malukkus and the vicious massacres of Madurese settlers by Dayaks in Central Kalimantan in February this year have further underlined the instability of Indonesia.

Apart from separatist and communal violence and the state response to it, Ms. Megawati will have to deal with those responsible for the spate of bombings across the country outside churches on Christmas Eve and the attack on the Jakarta stock exchange last year.

Various theories have been circulating about the violence — including that remnants of the "New Order" could be behind it. The final word on the issue has not been heard even as a tainted police force has arrested

The separatist and communal violence presents the most serious challenge to Indonesia's new President, Ms. Megawati Sukarnoputri, says Amit Baruah.

some of those responsible for the violence.

More recently, the murder of a Supreme Court judge, who sentenced the fugitive Mr. Tommy Suharto, son of the former dictator, General Suharto, to an 18-month jail term on corruption charges, has posed a major challenge to the

Jaya. Earlier, she had asked the new Vice-President, Mr. Hamzah Haz, to handle the communal tension in the Malukkus and Central Kalimantan.

A spokesman for the President has announced that Ms. Megawati will travel to Aceh after she returns from a trip abroad on August 29 to hold a dialogue with the Acehnese. The spokesman, however, could not say whether the dialogue would include GAM representatives. A special autonomy law for the province has also been approved by the President.

In her independence day address on Thursday, the President apologised to the people of Aceh and Irian Jaya for past policies, but made it clear that a resolution of differences was possible only under an united Indonesia.

Addressing the people of Aceh

emphasis is on a personalised style of leadership. In a recent article, Mr. McIntyre also quotes Ms. Megawati writing in the *Yomiuri Shimbun* of July 22, 1999: "I always tell myself how lucky Japan is to have had in its history the Meiji Restoration, which allowed Japan to step into the modern era with its culture and traditions intact. This is what makes me jealous and forces me to question myself deep within my own heart — how to make Indonesia a modern and developed society without losing the spirit of its own very deep and unique cultural identity. To achieve this is my dream."

Seen in this background, if Ms. Megawati persists with her populist views, the pressure on her to deliver peace within a larger Indonesian framework can only mount. So far, the



Acehnese rebels out on patrol... escalating violence.

police and military. Hitmen, arrested after the judge's murder, told the police they were paid to do the job by Mr. Tommy Suharto. Still, the police and the military have not been able to lay their hands on Mr. Tommy Suharto, who is very much in Indonesia.

On the issue of separatism, the President, realises that this is a major problem for the country. At her very first Cabinet meeting, she announced that she would personally deal with the issues of Aceh and Irian

in July 1999, Ms. Megawati had taken a populist approach: "Especially to my brothers and sisters in Aceh, I say, be patient. Later when your Female Leader is running this country, she will not allow one drop of blood to spilled of the people whose achievements were so great in the struggle for Indonesian independence...."

Mr. Angus McIntyre, a scholar at an Australian University, believes that this populism tends to go together with an authoritarian approach since the

President seems to have made the right moves.

There has been no overt reliance on the military or on a pure law and order approach. In her Coordinating Minister for Security and Political Affairs, Mr. Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, the President has a professional who dealt with the same issues under Mr. Abdurrahman Wahid.

Given the complexity of the problems facing Indonesia, one can only wish the President well in her efforts to bring peace to the country.

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11/8

Arroyo orders probe into Abu Sayyaf-military links

By Amit Baruah

SG Bin Palencia

SINGAPORE, AUG. 10 The Philippine President, Ms. Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, has ordered an inquiry into claims that senior military officers helped in the escape of Abu Sayyaf rebels and hostages held by them from Basilan island on June 2.

Stung by the allegations, which come as a major embarrassment for the Government, Ms. Arroyo has asked the Defence Secretary, Gen. Angelo Reyes, to probe the allegations made by a Christian priest, Mr. Cirilo Nacorda.

According to Mr. Nacorda, who narrowly escaped from the Abu Sayyaf when they occupied his church and an adjoining hospital in the Basilan town of Lamitan, he had evidence against five military officers, including Army First Division Commander, Brigadier-General Romeo Dominguez, that they helped the Abu Sayyaf rebels flee. (Seventeen Filipinos and three American nationals were snatched by the Abu Sayyaf from an upmarket resort on May 27. The Abu Sayyaf claim to have executed one of the Americans, but there is no corroboration of this claim).

The Abu Sayyaf rebels, along with their hostages, found themselves surrounded by security personnel. However, according to the version presented by Mr. Nacorda, the military withdrew their cordon from the rear of the hospital, allowing the Abu Sayyaf fighters and select hostages to flee.

"We no longer suspect, we believe that there was connivance...we have strong and hard evidence. The people will talk and I am collecting strong sworn statements to prove this," Mr. Nacorda was quoted as saying.

Brig-Gen. Dominguez, for his part, has de-



Roman Catholic priest Cirilo Nacorda giving a final blessing to three victims of the Abu Sayyaf at a mass in Lamitan on Wednesday. — AFP

scribed the statements made by Mr. Nacorda as "incredible". According to the military officer, there was no truth in what the priest had said.

"...I don't know how he was able to say those things. I do not know what his motives are....this is my first time to be accused like this. I only live a simple life," he added.

Mr. Nacorda has also gone on record to state that the U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) was also working on a "conspiracy" angle between certain military officials and the Abu Sayyaf.

"FBI agents approached me several times, until I finally accepted their invitation. We met last on July 3 at the U.S. Embassy, and I was surprised to see the amount of information they had gathered on the possible military conspiracy," he said.

"They (FBI agents) revealed to me their information, I told them my story," Mr. Nacorda said, adding that when he finished his story, one of the operative said their own information had been confirmed.

At a time, when the Philippine President, has repeatedly stated that she will "crush" the Abu Sayyaf, the allegations of conspiracy are particularly embarrassing for Ms. Arroyo.

The President has done well to order an inquiry into the charges, but it remains to be seen whether this administrative probe will be sufficient to ferret out the truth.

Earlier, too, there had been allegations that officials had been taking a "share" of the ransom proceeds paid to the Abu Sayyaf, but the current allegations are the most specific till date.

Arroyo hails ceasefire deal with rebel group

By Amit Baruah

SINGAPORE, AUG 8. The Philippine President, Ms. Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, has hailed a ceasefire agreement reached with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), the principal rebel group in the country's southern island of Mindanao.

Ms. Arroyo, who is on her first-ever foreign visit since becoming President in January, was in Kuala Lumpur when the ceasefire agreement was signed on Tuesday between Government and MILF representatives. It appeared evident that Malaysia had facilitated the ceasefire talks, with the country's Foreign Minister, Syed Hamid Albar, in attendance when the accord was signed yesterday.

With this truce agreement, only the Abu Sayyaf, which specialises in kidnapping for ransom, remains outside the fold of dialogue. The ceasefire agreement with the MILF (the Moro National Liberation Front is already on board) will now set the tone for substantive talks with the Philippine Government on core demands raised by the Islam-based fighters. "This new Government is committed in settling the issue of security. It is committed to lasting peace in Mindanao and to bring Mindanao to the mainstream of development," Ms. Arroyo said at a business meeting in Kuala Lumpur today.

"Peace negotiations for a final settlement are ongoing," she maintained. Calling upon Malaysian businessmen to invest in Mindanao, the President said: "Mindanao is an island hungry for development, an island with an enormous desire to move forward. We will make Mindanao a gateway to Southeast Asia through the East Asian growth area."

"We hope that together we can tap the many opportunities in Mindanao, provide jobs and increase economic wealth there...I will provide stronger attention to Mindanao," Ms. Arroyo said, promising to visit this troubled island every week. Addressing a press conference in Kuala Lumpur, Ms. Arroyo was effusive in her praise for the Malaysian Prime



Minister, Mr. Mahathir Mohammad.

"We will always remember the Prime Minister, Mr. Mahathir as a broker of peace, as a brother who helped close many fissures between Christians and Muslims," Ms. Arroyo, who heads a predominantly Christian nation, said. The ceasefire accord between the Government and the MILF was preceded by several days of negotiation in Malaysia, which itself was based on a foundation reached through discussions held between the parties in Libya in June.

The present initiative taken by the Arroyo Government is the first real political move to tackle the problems in Mindanao and also isolate the Abu Sayyaf politically since the new administration came to power. It is clear that Ms. Arroyo, who has vowed to "crush" the Abu Sayyaf, cannot do so without addressing the political issues raised by groups like the

MILF and the MNLF, who have agreed to coordinate approaches in their dialogue with the Government. A military solution by itself is unlikely to work in Mindanao. The current initiative will definitely strengthen the hands of the Arroyo Government in tackling the issues politically.

It may be recalled that a similar ceasefire existed between 1997 and 2000, but was called off by the Joseph Estrada Government claiming that the MILF was busy strengthening itself. A new offensive was then launched against the MILF, when the Estrada Government itself was under pressure from the Abu Sayyaf. "As far as the security aspect is concerned, we are satisfied...we hope this agreement will work," Mr. Murad Ebrahim, the MILF leader who headed the delegation to Kuala Lumpur, was quoted as saying.

"It now depends on the sincerity of the Philippine Government whether they can fulfill this agreement...Past experience has shown that it has always been a problem for them to do so. This will be a test," he said. According to Mr. Ebrahim, a co-ordination committee to administer the ceasefire had been agreed upon by the two sides and would comprise representatives from Libya, Indonesia and Malaysia as members of the Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC). The chief Government negotiator, Mr. Jesus Dureza, was optimistic that the ceasefire would lead to progress in substantive negotiations. "We hope this can provide a conducive atmosphere to carry out the next stage of negotiations to help realise the Arroyo administration's goal of rehabilitating the economy and improving the lives of the people in Mindanao," Mr. Dureza stated.

There was, however, a word of warning from the Philippines military chief, Gen. Diomedio Villanueva, to the MILF — that they should not violate the truce arrangement. "We hope to see to it that our soldiers are safe and not disadvantaged in the fighting," the General was quoted as saying in Zamboanga, Philippines.

THE TIMES

9 AUG 2001

Rebels, Philippine govt sign peace agreement

PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER
ASIA NEWS NETWORK

PUTRAJAYA (Malaysia), Aug 7 — Philippine's largest Muslim separatist group, the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), signed a formal ceasefire pact here today with Manila.

The signing ceremony was witnessed by Malaysian foreign minister, Syed Hamid Albar, at the Putrajaya government administrative centre, where Philippines President, Ms Gloria Arroyo and Malaysian Prime Minister, Mr Mahathir Mohammad, were holding talks.

The MILF also signed a unity pact with a smaller Muslim separatist group, the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF), to forge peace in the impoverished southern Philippines.

Officials earlier said the pacts would be signed in the presence of President Arroyo, who arrived here today on her first foreign trip since taking charge in January.

But Manila chief negotiator, Mr Jesus Dureza, said there was little chance of her witnessing the signing. After the signing, Mr Dureza and MILF officials met briefly with the Malaysian Prime Minister and President Arroyo. Malaysia, which is a Muslim-dominated country, has been hosting talks between Manila and the MILF to help end a 23-year-old rebellion in the southern Philippines.

Rebel killed in encounter

Philippines troops clashed with Abu Sayyaf rebels, holding two Americans and 19 Filipinos as hos-

S. S. Asia - Philippine
tages, killing one of the kidnapers, a military spokesman said today, adds AFP. The clash came just days after an Abu Sayyaf raid on Lamitan town in Basilan last weekend, which led to the beheading of 10 villagers.

Soldiers searching for rebels, encountered a band of the gunmen in Tuburan town yesterday and killed one of them, said Major Alberto Gepilano, the spokesman for the armed forces in Basilan. However, he could not say if the band they clashed with was the same one that raided Lamitan.

Military spokesman, General Edilberto Adan, admitted in Manila that the Abu Sayyaf "slipped by us" during the Lamitan raid as troops were concentrating on guarding the town centre and not the villages on the outskirts.

THE PHILIPPINES / GRAFT CASE

Estrada formally charged

11/16

11/7

By Amit Baruah

SINGAPORE, JULY 10. The ousted Philippine President, Mr. Joseph Estrada, was formally charged in an anti-corruption court for economic plunder, a charge that carries the death penalty.

Both Mr. Estrada and his son, who was also charged, refused to enter a plea. The judges then entered a plea of "not guilty" on their behalf.

Reports from Manila said the arraignment was delayed by two hours as lawyers for Mr. Estrada called for the dropping of the economic plunder charge because it was vague.

The attorneys also contended that the arraignment should not proceed as the Supreme Court was still to consider the case.

The Supreme Court, however, did not hear Mr. Estrada's appeal today, saying that the judges were unable to consider the case immediately. There was tight security outside the court building — inaugurated by Mr. Estrada himself two years ago in his "battle" against corruption.

The police and security forces were taking no chance after the May 1 violence in which thousands of Estrada supporters took to the streets and made an abortive bid to storm the Presidential palace. Six persons were killed that day. Speaking in the court, Mr. Estrada angrily denied comparisons with a gangster he once played in a film.

"I was a former Mayor, a former Senator, a former Vice-President and President of the Republic of the Philippines. I am not Jose Velarde (a name Mr. Estrada allegedly used for one of his bank accounts). As for Asiong Salonga (the movie gangster), I made that



The ousted Philippine President, Mr. Joseph Estrada, brushes off questions from reporters as he boards his vehicle following his arraignment on plunder charges on Tuesday at the suburban Quezon city. — AP

movie 40 years ago," he was quoted as saying.

Mr. Estrada was arrested on April 25 on the charge of economic plunder — he stands accused of taking advantage of his official position and influence to amass more than \$ 80 millions in illegal wealth through a combination or series of overt criminal acts.

The former President is also accused of the illegal use of an alias (Jose Velarde) to hide his unexplained wealth and perjury for misrepresenting his assets in an official statement of assets and liabilities.

Speaking at the time of his arrest, Mr. Estrada complained that he had not been given due legal process. "I will face and answer all the charges filed against me by my foes... I believe that the truth and our Constitution will prevail," he said.

Estrada refuses to enter plea to graft charges

Manila, July 10 (Reuters): Deposed Philippine President Joseph Estrada refused to enter a plea today to a charge of plundering the economy — an offence punishable by death — after a last-ditch bid to stop the court hearings failed.

“Upon the advice of my lawyers, I am not entering a plea,” Estrada told the court.

He is the first former Philippine head of state to be criminally

prosecuted for allegedly enriching himself in office.

Estrada is charged with amassing more than \$75 million in ill-gained wealth during his 31 months in office, which ended with his overthrow in a military-backed “people power” revolt in January.

The anti-graft court, which is hearing the case and four other criminal charges against Estrada, automatically entered a “not

guilty” plea for him.

More than 2,000 troops, including commando teams armed with assault rifles, guarded the courthouse and bomb sniffing dogs prowled corridors as Estrada stood in front of a panel of three judges inside a jam-packed courtroom.

He was flanked by his son, former town mayor Jose “Jinggoy” Estrada, and former presidential aide Edward Serapio, who were among his seven co-accused in the plunder case.

The other defendants are at large, some now living in the US.

Just hours before his court appearance, Estrada’s lawyers had filed a motion with the Supreme Court to stop the hearing on the grounds the law of plunder was unconstitutional.

The attempt was futile. No restraining order came down from the country’s highest court and the hearings proceeded.

A Supreme Court spokesman said the court was studying Estrada’s petition.

Any court ruling in future declaring the plunder statute as unconstitutional would render the case against Estrada “moot and academic,” he said.

MONEY PER HEAD

The short run answer to the Abu Sayyaf

THE world remains extraordinarily vulnerable to indiscriminate terror. This is being demonstrated again by the Filipino bandits who go by the name of Abu Sayyaf and picked up 20 people, including three Americans, from a beach resort south of Manila on 27 May. The Filipino military launched an assault on the island of Basilan where the rebels had taken the hostages. The rebels threaten to kill two hostages, the government is relentless and demands that all of them be released unconditionally. After a pitched battle, two Filipinos, presumably hostages, are found dead with their heads cut off. The Abu Sayyaf uses a child as a shield and make their getaway. The process of "softening up" on the government side probably began around that time. The rebel group demanded that two Malaysian negotiators be appointed mediators.

The government says okay, "if that is what it takes to save the lives of innocent victims", but to save face, National Security Advisor Roilo Golez says, "no ransom, no concessions". The next day, the Abu Sayyaf behead Guillermo Sobero, American, because, it says, the government was fooling them. Ruse may or may not have been involved but as we know from our experience with the forest bandit operating in the jungles of Tamil Nadu and Karnataka, the assumption that such an adversary is amenable to any kind of civilised proceeding is wrong. Abu Sayyaf's motives are pretty clear. Several Filipino hostages have already been released — for money. But the prize catch are obviously the Americans. It is infuriating to have to submit before such repugnant pressures, but the battle against barbarism must not be lost.

Abu activists contact mediator

REUTERS

MANILA, June 5. - Fighting raged today between Philippine troops and Muslim rebels holding American and Filipino hostages, but the kidnapers made contact in what appeared to be an attempt to end the crisis, officials said.

The military said two soldiers had been killed and several wounded in the running gun-battle on Basilan, the rugged southern island where army commando units have been tracking the rebels in the mountainous interior since Friday.

There were no reports of casualties among the Abu Sayyaf rebels but all the hostages were alive, an army spokesman said.

Naval gunboats have set up a blockade around Basilan, 900 km south of Manila, to prevent the guerrillas from escaping to other islands, he said.

Senior officials said the Abu Sayyaf contacted a government-designated mediator on Tuesday to try to end the 10-day stand-off and initially demanded that soldiers back off.

"The talk, at least, was for the military to withdraw. That is normal," interior secretary Mr Jose Lina said on local radio. He did not say what the government response was.

THE STATESMAN

Abu Sayyaf frees two

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

ZAMBOANGA (Philippines), July 3. — Two Filipino hostages among 23 captives held by Abu Sayyaf Muslim gunmen walked free after allegedly paying thousands of dollars as ransom, reports said today.

The two, identified as Lalaine Chua and Luis Bautista, were recovered by the army in Lamitan town in southern Basilan island and were flown to the military base in this southern city, military officials said.

People close to the negotiations said the two were freed late yesterday but the army picked them up shortly before dawn.

They said six million pesos (\$113,210) had been paid to secure their freedom, but government said it had no knowledge of any money changing hands.

Philippine President Gloria Arroyo's spokesman Rigoberto Tiglao hailed the release, saying "we are happy that they have escaped from the Abu Sayyaf hell." He said the two were undergoing a military check-up here, adding that Arroyo had been informed of the development.

Yesterday, Abu Sayyaf



A relative covers the face of Lalaine Chua (15) as she arrives at Manila airport in suburban Paranaque on Tuesday after she was freed by the Abu Sayyaf group in southern Basilan province. — AP/PTI

spokesman Abu Sabaya said in a statement that his group was ready to free Chua and Bautista but could not do so because of heavy military presence.

Tiglao said despite the release of the two, the armed forces had not relaxed their offensive against the Abu Sayyaf, a small band of several self-styled Is-

lamic freedom fighters branded by Manila as plain bandits.

Chua and Bautista were among the 17 Filipinos seized along with Californian Guillermo Sobero and Christian missionary couple Martin and Gracia Burnham of Kansas from an upmarket resort off the western island of Palawan on 27 May.

Estrada arraigned on perjury charge

Manila, June 27

WITH THOUSANDS of riot police on alert today to head off possible unrest, Joseph Estrada became the first former Philippine president to be arraigned on criminal charges.

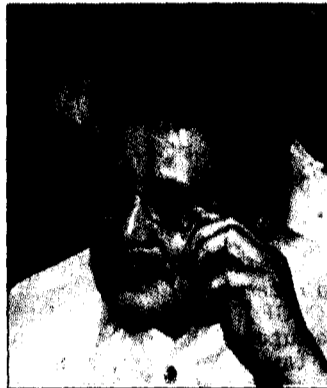
But he refused to enter a plea to the perjury charge, so the court entered a plea of innocence on his behalf.

After his lawyers failed earlier in the day to gain a delay, Estrada was taken by motorcade from a military hospital, where he has been confined while undergoing treatment, to the country's chief anti-corruption court, the Sandiganbayan.

Estrada, ousted from office in January by mass protests, is accused of misdeclaring his assets in 1999. He also is to be arraigned in two weeks for the capital offense of plunder for allegedly taking millions of dollars in kickbacks and payoffs during 31 months in office.

Television footage showed the 64-year-old Estrada, dressed in a traditional barong shirt, waving and smiling as he entered the courtroom. He was accompanied by his wife, senator-elect Loi Ejer Cito Estrada, and two of his sons.

When the former action film-star was seated in the second



floor courtroom, his expression turned more serious. His face was lit up repeatedly by the flashes of photographers frantically working to capture the historic moment.

Asked by a reporter how he felt, Estrada said: "I'm OK except for my eyes." He has said he needs surgery for a worsening eye condition.

Police secured key sites hours in advance of the latest episode in the political drama surrounding the downfall of the once-immensely popular leader.

The Government had warned that alleged coup plotters might try to take advantage of Estrada's appearance to foment violent protests.

AP

Abu Sayyaf bandit gunned down

PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER
ASIA NEWS NETWORK

ZAMBOANGA, June 21. — Military troops gunned down an Abu Sayyaf bandit after he wounded a soldier in an escape attempt, an army spokesman said on Thursday.

The rebel, identified as Nuramun Asamun, was arrested on Tuesday in the mountain village of Sinangcapan in Basilan island where he was buying medical supplies from a pharmacy, regional army spokesman Lieutenant Colonel Danilo Servando said.

Asamun resisted arrest, grabbing a soldier's service pistol and wounding him in the leg. He was shot dead while fleeing, Servando said.

Bottles of hydrogen peroxide and antibiotic tablets, believed to be collected for wounded Abu Sayyaf gunmen on the run from a military offensive, were recovered from him.

The military said three suspected Abu Sayyaf guerrillas were captured on Monday in Basilan and were undergoing interrogation.

Before this, in a letter sent on 14 June through the Ustadz (Muslim cleric) Latip Mohaymin Sali, the Abu Sayyaf chief Khaddafy Abubakar Janjalani said, the group had released Francis Ganson and Kimberly Uy "unconditionally" and as a "gift to the possible coming of the Malaysians as mediators in the hostage crisis."

The Abu Sayyaf letter indicated the bandits were feeling the might of the military pounding in Basilan island, Presidential spokesman Mr. Rigoberto Tiglao said.

The bandits are still holding at least 26 hostages including three Americans taken from a resort in Palawan last month.

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PHILIPPINES CRISIS

RF 11 19/6

Ultras set terms for releasing hostages

Zamboanga (Philippines),
June 18

FOR THE first time in a three-week-old hostage crisis, President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo visited a Muslim rebel stronghold on Monday and said the military would continue to attack the guerrillas amid strong indications they have killed one of their American captives.

Hours later, Abu Sabaya, a leader of the radical Abu Sayyaf, said he was willing to negotiate the release some of his two dozen hostages. But he set two conditions, including one that the Government was likely to reject: an immediate end to the military's pursuit.

Under tight military security, Arroyo traveled to Lamitan, a town on the southern Island of Basilan where a battle between soldiers and the radical Abu Sayyaf rebels heavily damaged a church and a hospital early in the crisis.

She hugged a weeping woman whose daughter was recently kidnapped by the Muslim guerrillas and told the husband of a missing midwife: "I'm sorry. We will do everything to get her back."

However, the President could

offer little else to a town fearful of a possible return by the rebels, who swooped down from the jungle-covered mountains two weeks ago and occupied the hospital for a day, dragging away four medical workers when they escaped. She also visited soldiers wounded in the pursuit and said the military will never stop until the Abu Sayyaf is wiped out.

At a news conference in Manila, Brig Gen Edilberto Adan said officials believe American hostage Guillermo Sobero, 40, of Corona, California, is dead but don't know if he was beheaded by the rebels or succumbed to infection after being wounded. No remains have been found.

Adan said the conclusion was based in part on information provided by Francis Ganzon, one of three hostages who were reunited with their families on Saturday.

Adan said Sobero appeared to have died the night of June 11 after he was hogtied and separated from the rest of the hostages. "Before this, he was suffering from a wound in his right foot. It appears he was diabetic because the wound did not heal."

"We do not know if he was exe-

cuted or died of infection," Adan said.

In California, Sobero's brothers, Alberto and Pablo, said on Sunday night they had spoken with the FBI and it could not confirm Guillermo's death. Pablo also said his brother was not diabetic. In a separate interview, a neighbor of Guillermo's, Cherrill Renwick, said he suffered from asthma.

The US Embassy in Manila said reports of Sobero's death were unconfirmed, adding in a statement: "We hold the Abu Sayyaf group responsible for the safety and welfare of the people it is holding."

In an interview with the Radio Mindanao Network on Monday, Sabaya asked for justice secretary Hernando Perez to serve as a negotiator and for the Government to call off the massive military search for his Muslim extremist guerrillas and their hostages in the jungles of Basilan island.

The proposal apparently was included in a letter hand-delivered to Arroyo on Saturday by Ganzon, but Presidential spokesman Rigoberto Tiglao said the letter included other names. He said the Government was studying the proposal. **AP**

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

Philippine poll results are not announced ^{Di-12} even after a month ^{19/6}

By Harvey Stockwin
The Times of India News Service

HONG KONG: When results of the British elections were officially announced within 24 hours of the polls closing, they threw a harsh light on the recent Philippine election. A month after the elections were held, the final results are yet to come in. Slow counting has always been an outrageous tendency in the Philippines, but this year it has been a national disgrace.

Around 22 days after the polling, the names of the 13 new members of the Philippine senate were announced. But senatorial counting is still on at Lanao in Mindanao, a key province.

The members whose names have been proclaimed are certain to win national vote, but results from Lanao del Sur and Lanao del Norte are important because they can alter the totals of the 11th, 12th and 13th winners. Whoever finally ends up as the 13th winner will serve only a three-year term instead of a full six-year term. Normally, only 12 senators are elected every three years, but since senator Teofisto Guingona was elevated to the post of vice-president, the 13th slot came up.

It is now 33 days since the polls closed, but the final result of the election to the House of

Representatives is yet to be nationally proclaimed by the national poll body, the Commission on Elections will be made known before the new 14th Congress of the Philippines formally comes into being on July 1.

Meanwhile, how many of the roughly 17,000 elections of provincial and local officials have actually been completed is anybody's guess. This appalling democratic failure has left many Filipinos feeling a sense of national shame over the outrageously protracted vote count. The failure on the part of the election authorities stands out starkly when compared to the brisk way in which elections around the world, notably in Italy, Peru and Britain, have been conducted, a point being forcefully made by the Philippine press.

The Philippine Daily Inquirer reported, "It has taken longer to count the votes now in 2001 than it did nearly a hundred years ago when we first held elections the results of which were transmitted by telegraph and even by carabao-driven sledge to the municipal and provincial tabulation centres. It is hard to explain why is it that as we increase our experience in democracy and as technology facilitates the speed of the election process, it takes longer to count the results and our elections continue to be marred by widespread charges of cheating."

THE TIMES OF INDIA

Philippines halts negotiations, declares war on kidnappers

Zamboanga, June 14

DECLARING WAR on Muslim extremists who hold more than two dozen hostages, the Philippines Government said on Thursday it has halted attempts to negotiate and will focus only on hunting them down.

"There's no point in talking anymore," National Security Adviser Roilo Golez said. "It's all-out war." The Abu Sayyaf guerrillas, who claimed on Tuesday they killed one of the three Americans they hold, already said they would no longer negotiate with the Government. Golez said the rebel beheading claim came despite the Government's offer to give in to a key guerrilla demand - to ask a former Malaysian senator to help work out a deal.

Felix Dalugdugan, vice mayor of Lantawan town on the southern island of Basilan, said 80 Abu Sayyaf rebels attacked the village of Atong Atong on Wednesday evening but were pushed back by 38 militiamen and eight soldiers. He did not mention casualties.

Joel Maturan, mayor of Tipo Tipo town, said on Thursday that residents saw Gracia and Martin



AP PHOTO

Philippine Defence Secretary Angelo Reyes flanked by Interior Secretary Joey Lina (right) and Basilian Governor Wahab Akbar for the national anthem before a meeting for peace in Isabela on Thursday.

Burnham, Christian missionary couple, last weekend, before the alleged beheading of Corona, California, resident Guillermo Sobero. Maturan said the Burnhams appeared in good health and in notably better spirits than their last sighting, a June 2 fight between the army and guerrillas. On Wednesday, Philippine President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo

warned that eliminating the Abu Sayyaf could mean a "long and bloody war."

Military Chief of Staff, Diomedio Villanueva, and Defence Secretary, Angelo Reyes, arrived in the southern city of Zamboanga on Thursday, where the rebels are based, to meet military officials. Commanders said 5,000 soldiers are scouring the island. **AP**

to Sabaya

Manila refutes Abu Sayyaf's claim *12/6*

By Amit Baruah *110-17*

SINGAPORE, JUNE 13. Two headless bodies have been recovered by the Philippine military as a spokesman dismissed as "bluff" a claim by the Abu Sayyaf kidnappers that they had executed an American hostage yesterday.

One of the headless bodies was reportedly identified as that of Mr. Mahayamin Latip, a local Muslim leader on the southern island of Basilan, who had gone to meet the Abu Sayyaf to plead with them on behalf of some of the hostages. Apparently enraged by the overture, the Abu Sayyaf then executed Mr. Latip. The second body was also that of a Filipino man, officials were quoted as saying. In a

related development, the Philippine President, Ms. Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, has said that there was no need for Malaysian negotiators to get involved in the hostage crisis. (The Abu Sayyaf had been demanding the involvement of two Malaysians).

"That's academic, because Abu Sabaya (the Abu Sayyaf spokesman) already said no more negotiations," the President said in Manila.

Separately, a military spokesman dismissed the Abu Sayyaf claim that they had executed an American hostage, Mr. Guillermo Sobero. "There is no truth to what Sabaya claimed...we consider it a bluff of Sabaya," Colonel Danilo Servando was quoted as saying.

THE HINDU

14 JUN 2001

Rebels 'behead' US hostage

Manila, June 12 (Reuters): Philippine Muslim rebels said today they had beheaded one of three Americans taken hostage in May at a southern island beach resort and a local broadcaster said two other captives had been killed.

President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo said she had no confirmation of the rebel Abu Sayyaf's claim but vowed to crush the group. "The reported beheading...only strengthened our resolve to decimate once and for all this cold-blooded bandit group," Arroyo said in an Independence Day address.

Soldiers were scouring jungle territory for the hostages and said the search would continue into the night. The Abu Sayyaf told

RMN radio station they had beheaded tourist Guillermo Sobero, 40, from Corona, California.

"We have executed Guillermo Sobero as a gift to the country on Independence Day," rebel spokesman Abu Sabaya said. He said Sobero's body is left for the troops to find. "The military better hurry up in the rescue because they may not recover anyone alive," he added.

Sobero's brother, speaking in the United States, told reporters the state department and FBI had called him and said they were unable to confirm the rebels' claim.

"I still have hope that my brother is still alive," he said. Sobero was one of three Americans and 17 Filipinos kidnapped

by the Abu Sayyaf on May 27 from the island of Palawan, 560 km south of Manila. Nine of the Filipino hostages have escaped or been rescued while two have been found dead, apparently executed by the rebels.

The Abu Sayyaf have since taken four hostages from a hospital and church complex in Basilan, an island 900 kmsouth of Manila, and at least 15 hostages from a village in Lantawan on the same island.

Local broadcaster ABS-CBN news channel reported that two hostages of the 15 abducted on Monday had also been executed. But military spokesman Lieutenant Colonel Danilo Servando said there had been no confirmation.

One source close to the family of one of the hostages, who declined to be identified, told

Reuters that the Abu Sayyaf had let some of their captives use the rebels' satellite phones to call home and ask for ransom.

Cowardly act

Arroyo denounced the Abu Sayyaf "who say they are fighting for an independent state in the south of the mainly Roman Catholic Philippines" as bandits interested only in money. "We condemn in the strongest possible terms this reported beheading of Mr Sobero," she said. "If the Abu Sayyaf's claim is accurate, it only emphasises the fact that it is a merciless and a ruthless group that has no qualms at all in murdering an innocent person for the sake of ransom money.

"The armed forces is doing everything it can to confirm the allegations of the rebels. I'm praying that this report is false," Arroyo said.

Abu rebels kill hostage

PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER
ASIA NEWS NETWORK

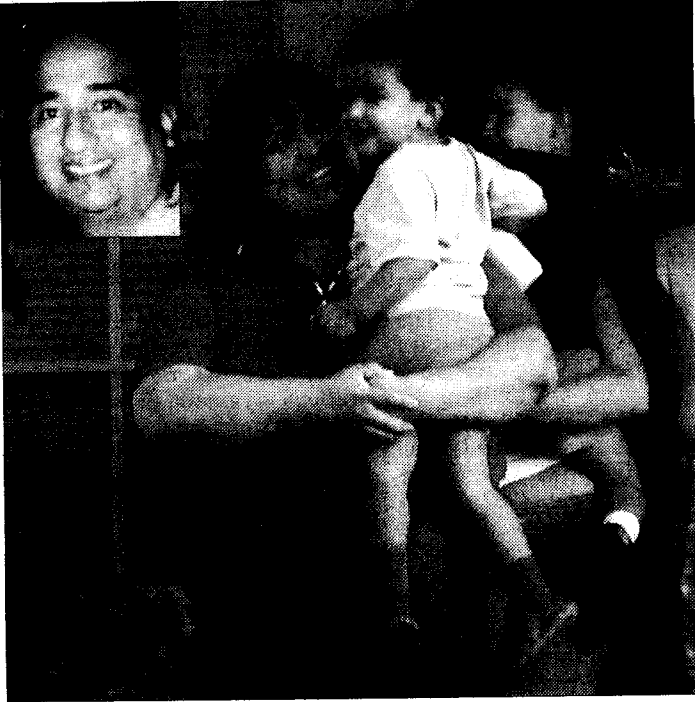
MANILA, June 12. - Abu Sayyaf rebels today claimed to have beheaded American hostage Guillermo Sobrero despite the government's yielding to their request for involving Malaysian mediators.

Rebel spokesman Abu Sabaya told RMN radio that they had executed Sobrero because the government was "fooling" them. "They thought they could deceive us. Let's see who will be embarrassed." But officials said Sabaya's claim hasn't yet been confirmed. "If accurate, it only emphasises the fact that this is a merciless, ruthless group with no qualms at all about murdering an innocent person for ransom," President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo said.

"We condemn the reported beheading of Sobrero," she said. When asked by the radio station for proof, Sabaya said: "You can find the body in Tuburan. But dogs might have eaten it by now."

Tuburan is a town on the southern island of Basilan and a known stronghold of the rebel group. He added the rebels had beheaded many times before, and that they had a "film" which they would release soon.

"These negotiators think we're stupid. That's why we beheaded the American," Sabaya said, boasting that it was an Inde-



A relative of US hostage Guillermo Sobrero, reportedly killed by the Abu Sayyaf, with two of his children in Corona, California, on Tuesday.
(Inset) Guillermo Sobrero. - AP/PTI

pendence Day "gift" to the government. Today is the 103rd anniversary of the Philippines' declaration of independence from Spain.

Peru-born Sobrero, in his late thirties, lived in Corona city, California. He was kidnapped with Mr Martin Burnham and his wife, Gracia, missionaries from Kansas, and 17 Filipinos from the Dos Palmas Resort on

27 May. Sabaya also threatened to behead the other hostages and said there would be no more negotiations with the government.

"There is no reason why we should not behead the others," he said. "The government is full of double talk. We have beheaded Sobrero. They better step up rescue efforts otherwise they won't find anyone alive."

TRADER FREED

SINGAPORE, June 12. - A Singapore businessman kidnapped in the Philippines has been freed after his wife paid the ransom, the couple confirmed in an interview aired today.

They would not reveal the amount, but the *Straits Times* estimated the ransom paid for Mr Roger Yeo at 300,000 Singapore dollars (166,000 USD).

Mr Yeo (45) was kidnapped by unknown gunmen from his Manila office on 1 June. He was the second Singaporean reportedly abducted in Manila since April, with the other kidnap victims having been freed although there has been no confirmation of whether any ransom was paid. - AFP

The national security adviser, said the news of Sobrero's execution was "subject to confirmation". The presidential spokesperson, Mr Rigoberto Tiglao, said the government maintains its no-ransom policy and that the military offensive against the rebels would continue.

"We have to intensify our military campaign, but we still have to open the lines of communication," he told CNN. "Apparently, the Abu Sayyaf does not honour its word," he said.

THE STATESMAN

Philippine rebels postpone hostages' execution

51-5
M6
REUTERS

MANILA, June 11. - Muslim rebels in the Philippines who had threatened to execute three US hostages said today they had postponed their plan as the government was willing to give in to their demand for a Malaysian negotiator.

The Abu Sayyaf rebels, based in Basilan, had threatened to kill the US hostages at noon if Mr Sairin Karno, a former Malaysian senator, was not allowed to negotiate with them. The government agreed to the demand shortly before the deadline.

"If what they are saying is true, that they will contact the Malaysian government and Sairin will come in and they will cease military operations here, then I can assure them that we will postpone the beheading," said Abu Sabaya, a spokesman for the Abu Sayyaf rebels, in a call to RMN radio shortly after noon.

Earlier, chief government spokesman Mr Rigoberto Tiglao told reporters: "If Karno Sairin can help, we have no objection... We want to solve this crisis in any manner."

The rebels abducted 15 people in the southern Philippines today, including two 12-year-olds, authorities said.

The mayor of Lantawan town on the southern island of Basilan had earlier said Abu Sayyaf rebels had kidnapped 50 school children.

"It's an all-male group, 15 of them," National Security Adviser Mr Roilo Golez told reporters, referring to the hostages. He said they included the two 12-year-olds and two teenagers and the rest were above 20.



Despite Monday's heavy showers, soldiers proceed to Lantawan town on Basilan island, southern Philippines where Abu Sayyaf guerrillas are holding hostages. - AP/PTI

The rebels also razed a chapel and one other building inside a rubber plantation.

Malaysian officials today said they were awaiting a formal request from the Philippine government for Malaysian mediators to intercede with the Abu Sayyaf kidnap gang, AFP reports from Kuala Lumpur say.

"We need to confirm the request with the Philippine government and our embassy in Manila," said Mr Mustapha Ahmad Marican, press secretary to foreign minister Mr Syed Hamid Albar.

"We have yet to receive any official request (to send two mediators) from Manila," he told AFP.

Philippine government spokesman, Mr Rigoberto Tiglao said Manila would contact Kuala Lumpur to allow politician Mr Sairin Karno and businessman Mr Yusuf Hamdan to mediate. Philippine President Ms Gloria Arroyo today asked Malaysia to send in the two mediators sought by kidnapers after they threatened to start killing their American hostages, the presidential spokesman said. "We will talk to the Malaysian government" he added.

Mr Tiglao said Manila was aware that Malaysia's deputy premier, Mr Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, had earlier "publicly

stated that he will not allow (the two Malaysians) to help in the negotiations."

Last year the two Malaysians helped mediate in the release of dozens of foreigners and locals including several Malaysians abducted by the rebels. Huge ransoms were reportedly paid.

Mr Sairin, a former member of Malaysia's Upper House of parliament, said last week he would only negotiate once given the green light by his government.

Mr Tiglao rejected suggestions that Manila was going soft in the face of blackmail, saying military operations against the rebels would continue.

Philippine rebels call off death threats, take new hostages

Isabela, Philippines

MUSLIM REBELS in southern Philippines called off threats to behead three US hostages on Monday but seized 15 new hostages, including children.

The Abu Sayyaf rebels announced they had postponed the threatened executions of a missionary couple from Kansas and a Californian tourist after the Government backed down and agreed to let a Malaysian negotiate with the guerrillas. But just before the announcement, gunmen from the same group swooped on a village on southern Basilan island and grabbed new hostages, National Security Adviser Roilo Golez said.

The military said the rebels initially took about 40 to 50 people from the village in Lantawan but left most of them behind, including children. "It's an all-male group, 15 of them," Golez said, referring to the hostages taken. He said two were 12, two were teenagers and the rest were over 20.

The rebels had threatened to kill the Americans at noon if Sairin Karno, a former Malaysian senator, was not allowed to negotiate with them.

Minutes before noon, the Government announced it was accepting the rebels' demand. "If what they are saying is true, that they will contact the Malaysian Government and Sairin will come in and they



Philippine President Gloria Arroyo Macapagal poses with Chinese-Filipino students in Manila on Monday, ahead of Independence Day celebrations.

will cease military operations here, then I can assure them that we will postpone the beheading," said rebel spokesman Abu Sabaya in a call to RMN radio shortly after noon. Earlier, chief government spokesman Rigoberto Tiglao

told reporters: "If Karno Sairin can help, we have no objection... We want to solve this crisis in any manner. We are agreeing if the Malaysian Government has no objection." Officials stressed the negotiations would only be for the unconditional release of the hostages and not involve ransom.

President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo had previously rejected the entry of any foreign negotiator in what she said was an internal Philippine problem. She has also ordered thousands of troops to hunt down the 100-member kidnap gang and rescue the original hostages — three Americans and 10 Filipinos — held in the jungles of Basilan. A military report said the hostages, or at least some of them, were last sighted on Sunday afternoon in civilian houses in the Lantawan forest near waterfalls. Manila stressed military operations against the kidnapers would continue.

Golez said that besides the more than 2,000 troops carrying out "a double pincer" movement on the rebels, the military was pouring in hundreds of marines into the fray.

Sairin helped in negotiations for the release last year of several Malaysians seized by the Abu Sayyaf when they snatched 21 mostly foreign hostages from a tourist resort in Malaysia and brought them to Jolo island in the southern Philippines.

Reuters

Two rebels killed in Philippines

Zamboanga, June 10

PHILIPPINE troops shot dead two Abu Sayyaf rebels today on the eve of a deadline set by the guerrillas for beheading three US hostages.

The two were among nine members of the militant group arrested by soldiers on southern Basilan island but were gunned down when they tried to fight back, area army commander Colonel Hermogenes Esperon said. Two other guerrillas were wounded.

"They were being brought to the army outpost when they fought back and tried to grab the firearms of our troops. Our soldiers had no choice but to shoot them," Col Esperon said.

An initial military report had said the two guerrillas were killed in an encounter on the outskirts of the provincial capital of Isabel on Basilan.

The rebels, believed to be holding their hostages in another town on Basilan, have warned they will behead a US missionary couple and an American tourist unless Manila yields to their demand for a Malaysian to negotiate with them.

An Abu Sayyaf spokesman set the 72-hour deadline in a call to local RMN radio on Thursday.

Local officials had said the ultimatum would expire today but presidential adviser on national security Roilo Golez said the deadline would not expire until tomorrow.

Reuters

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

A nation held to ransom

1076
IT IS like a repeat performance. As the Philippines grapples with the latest kidnapping by the Abu Sayyaf (bearer of the sword) group, the vision of a similar operation by the rebels last year, comes to mind. This May 27, 20 hostages, including three Americans, were snatched by the Abu Sayyaf from a tourist resort off the western island of Palawan, the first major kidnapping by the group since obtaining millions of dollars in ransom for Western tourists released by them last year.

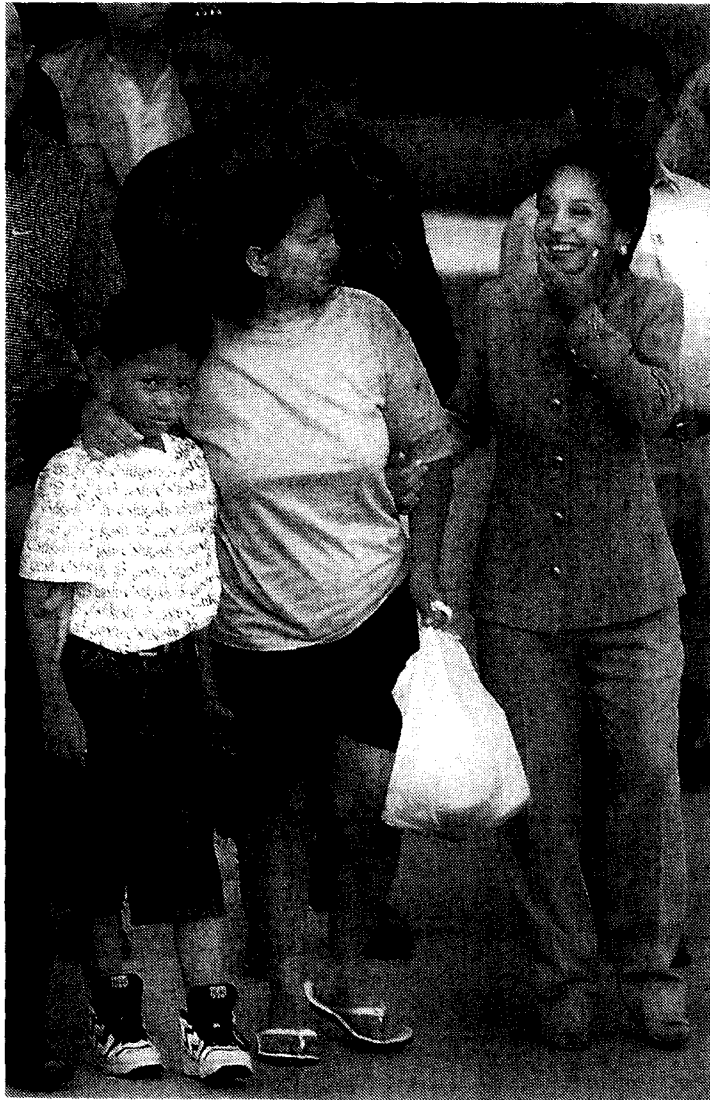
The Philippine President, Ms. Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, has been talking tough. She has asked the kidnapers to release their hostages or die in a "hail of bullets". One June 1, the Philippine armed forces, after remaining clueless for several days about the whereabouts of the hostages, encountered the Abu Sayyaf (officially called "bandits" in the Philippines) in Tuburan town of Basilan island, 480 km from Palawan.

It is evident that the Abu Sayyaf planned their operation well and managed to evade the security forces with ease while on their way to Basilan from Palawan. In Lamitan town, Basilan, after a day-long encounter, the Abu Sayyaf slipped away under the very nose of the security forces, with the Government coming under considerable criticism for allowing the escape.

During the battle between the Abu Sayyaf and the Government forces in Lamitan, nine of the original 20 hostages managed to escape and two were "executed" by the bandits. Four more hostages were taken in Lamitan, taking the total number in the custody of the Abu Sayyaf to 13, a military spokesman was quoted as saying.

A spokesman for the rebel group was quoted as saying that Mr. Martin Burnham, one of the American hostages, was injured during the clash with the security forces. There has been no independent confirmation of the report. When a "deadline" was set for "executing" one of the American hostages, the Government came out with a conciliatory response, a departure from its previous positions.

The military spokesman, Brigadier-General Edilberto Adan, called on Abu Sabaya, the Abu Sayyaf pointman speaking to local radio stations to put forward their demands, to



The Philippines President, Ms. Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, with some of the hostages who escaped from the Abu Sayyaf.

In the Philippines, the kidnapping game brings handsome dividends, as the Abu Sayyaf has learnt. Amit Baruah on the latest crisis.

immediately contact Mr. William Castillo, the Government's designated spokesman. "I know that you believe in Allah and you know that innocent victims are not to be hurt... It's a violation of your religion, of Islam. That's why we are asking you to continue treating them well," the military spokesman said in a live broadcast over local radio.

In the meantime, the Arroyo Government has rejected a demand from the Abu Sayyaf to appoint the former Malaysian Senator, Mr. Sairin Karno, as the designated negotiator. The President's spokesman, Mr. Rigoberto Tiglao, said in response to the rebel demand:

"We cannot authorise any other negotiator or intermediary to talk to the Abu Sayyaf, especially foreign citizens".

On Wednesday, Abu Sabaya said the military must stop chasing his men through the jungles if it wanted to discuss the negotiated release of the hostages. "If they (the Government) want to seriously talk to us, they should show it by removing the military... while the soldiers are here there will be no talking," he said on radio.

Last year, too, Mr. Joseph Estrada had done some tough talking, but when it came to the crunch, the then President authorised Libyan intermediaries to negotiate the release of Western hostages,

following which millions of dollars were paid out in ransom money.

Clearly, hostage-taking is a ticklish issue for any Government, especially when foreigners (and Americans to boot) are involved. However, in the Philippines, the kidnapping game brings handsome dividends, as the Abu Sayyaf has learnt. Last year, after the ransom payments were made, the Abu Sayyaf bought arms and speedboats for a new operation, which they launched some nine months after the last kidnapping ended.

It is evident that successive Governments in the Philippines have found it difficult to deal with Muslim separatism in the southern part of the island nation, of which the Abu Sayyaf is the most militant splinter. It has also been argued that the Abu Sayyaf has no political objectives any more.

Writing in *The Philippine Daily Inquirer*, Mr. Michael L. Tan, a columnist, said: "Will the Government be able to wipe out the Abu Sayyaf? Not in the near future. The likes of the Abu Sayyaf survive because they do have support from the people. That should not seem strange when you think about Philippine society. The Abu Sayyaf is a mirror to the Philippines, still a fragile and fragmented conglomeration of chiefdoms, ruled by numerous warlords who spend much of their time building alliances..."

"The Abu Sayyaf, unfortunately, represents the unreconstructed warrior, still clinging on to a tribal ethos of warfare, of endless rounds of offensives and counter-offensives," the writer added.

Groups like the Abu Sayyaf, formed in 1991 after splitting from the Moro National Liberation Front, have continued to thrive despite operations launched against them from time to time. Last year, in the wake of the kidnappings of Western tourists, they grabbed the attention of the world. Now, they will remain in focus until the fate of the three Americans is known.

The Philippines state appears unequipped to deal with challenges from groups like the Abu Sayyaf — well-trained, well-armed and very mobile. Till such time as the state gets its act together, such groups will continue to thrive.

Wahid must attend special session: Speaker

By Amit Baruah

410-15 9/16
SINGAPORE, JUNE 8. The Indonesian People's Consultative Assembly (MPR) Speaker, Mr. Amien Rais, said today that the President, Mr. Abdurrahman Wahid, could not escape a special session of the Upper House scheduled to take place on August 1.

The agenda for the special session appears pretty clear — the impeachment of the President himself on grounds of "incompetence". The President, who in the past has said he will not deliver any address to the MPR, today put certain conditions to attend the special session — the central condition being that the performance of his Government would not be questioned by the Upper House.

Clearly, the MPR is in no position to accept such an impossible condition given the fact that its principal objective is to call

Mr. Wahid to account for what they think is his inability to govern. In a separate development, the Vice-President, Ms. Megawati Sukarnoputri, has said that she expects the political crisis in the country to be over by mid-August (by the time the MPR completes its deliberations).

During a meeting with young Indonesian entrepreneurs, Ms. Megawati did not give details of how she saw coming events in the country, but said that the country's problems would be resolved by independence day on August 17. The Vice-President also said she was confident that the security situation in the country would hold till the MPR met. She brushed aside fears of politically-inspired clashes in the run-up to the MPR deliberations.

Mr. Megawati, who has begun to distance herself from the Wahid Government, did not attend a Cabinet meeting on Thursday. Similarly, she had boycotted

the swearing-in of new Ministers last week at the Presidential palace. Mr. Wahid dismissed Mr. Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono as Security Minister and Mr. Marzuki Darusman as Attorney-General after the former publicly differed with the President's proposal to declare a state of emergency in the country.

Mr. Bambang, meanwhile, has said that the MPR session should resolve the impasse in the country. "The upcoming special session must be able to produce a comprehensive solution for the sake of the nation and the State. We must first salvage the State above all other things. We will have a new and effective leader and Government," the former Minister stated. He admitted that the Wahid Government had failed to deliver on its promises. "Not only has it been wasteful, we've also failed to do anything significant for the people."

Filipino militants threaten to behead US hostages

Manila, June 7: Muslim rebels holding US and Filipino hostages on Thursday threatened to behead American captives "within 72 hours" if the Philippines rejected their demand for a Malaysian negotiator to end the crisis.

President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo's government swiftly rejected the demand and pleaded with the Abu Sayyaf rebels to spare the lives of the hostages but said it would not call off a military assault on rebel positions.

"We will be intensifying the operations against the Abu Sayyaf," defence secretary Angelo Reyes said. "We should not allow these terrorists to terrorise us. They cannot dictate the terms."

Abu Sayyaf commander Sabaya said earlier in a telephone call to local RMN radio: "Every hour counts with us. It would be a pity if you provoke us."

"We might go ahead with it (the execution) because our schedule is that within 72 hours, if the Malaysian is not allowed to come, we will behead the whites," he said. The three American captives include a Christian missionary couple. Sabaya named the proposed Malaysian broker as "Samo Sairin," described as a former senator who helped in negotiations for the release last year of several Malaysians seized by the Abu Sayyaf. Presidential spokesman Rigoberto Tiglao said the govern-

ment had already designated a local negotiator and added: "We cannot authorise any other negotiator to talk to the Abu Sayyaf, especially a foreign citizen. "We are appealing to them not to take the lives of any civilians, which is against the tenets of Islam."

Military spokesman brigadier-general Edilberto Adan asked the rebels to give the government negotiator more time to talk with them. "You know there are among your group who believe in Allah and you know that these innocent civilians or innocent victims should not be hurt because this would be a violation of your religion, a violation of the teachings of Islam." (Reuters)



RESCUED: US Navy Lt. Scott Alan Washburn (right) from Celina, Ohio, sits with an unidentified member of the Philippines military at the Clark Air Base at Pampanga, near Manila, on Wednesday. (AP)

Abu rebels kill 2 hostages

PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER
ASIA NEWS NETWORK

FIVE ESCAPE

MANILA, June 3. - Two dead bodies in decomposed state were found at the site where the Abu rebels battled with Indonesian troops hours before they seized a private hospital in Lamitan, Basilan, a radio report said today.

The Lamitan police chief, Mr Omar Dalawis, said one body had a severed head. He described the victim as fair-skinned.

Interviewed by Radio RMN, Mr Dalawis identified the victims as Armando Bayona and Sonny Dacquero, both employees at the Dos Palmas Island Resort in Puerto Princesa, Palawan.

The bodies were found at 3 p.m. yesterday afternoon in Bgy Bolanting, 3 km from the Torres Memorial Hospital in Lamitan, which the Abu Sayyaf seized yesterday. The rebels managed to escape with the hostages early today.

Five Filipino hostages escaped from their Abu Sayyaf captors early today while the rebels were defending themselves against the military gunfire, a report from Lamitan says.

"We untied ourselves from the

rest and managed to escape during the volley of gunfire," said Ms Janice Ting, a Filipino woman, who was among 20 hostages kidnapped from a resort off western Palawan island last Sunday.

Meanwhile, 12 soldiers including an army captain, were killed and 32 others wounded in the attack to free the hostages, an official said today. Armed forces spokesman, Brig-Gen Edilberto Adan, said the captain was killed yesterday when his

V-150 armoured troop carrier was hit by a rocket grenade during fighting in Lamitan town.

Fighting raged in the Basilan town of Tuburan on Friday after Abu Sayyaf rebels landed there from the western Palawan island along with the hostages.

Outside the Jose Torres Memorial Hospital, the military established a cordon to prevent the rebels from escaping and mounted fierce assaults. The rebels claimed they were holding another 200 people inside the hospital, including staff and patients.

THE STATESMAN

Civilians trapped in Philippine gunfire

LAMITAN (PHILIPPINES), JUNE 2. Scores of civilians were trapped as Philippine helicopter gunships fired rockets and troops rained gunfire on a hospital and a church taken over by Muslim rebels in the south today, officials said.

But at least four Filipinos kidnapped by the guerrillas from an island resort a week ago managed to escape in the confusion.

There was no confirmed news on the whereabouts of the other 16 people kidnapped at the time, who include three Americans, but they are also believed to be trapped in the hospital in the town of Lamitan on Basilan island.

Residents said more than a dozen people were killed, including many civilians caught in the crossfire, but the military said they could only confirm four soldiers and one rebel dead.

Some 50 Abu Sayyaf rebels, fleeing from troops along with their hostages, rampaged through Lamitan, 900 km south of Manila, before dawn and took over a church and the town's main hospital.

They claimed they had captured an additional 200 people, including doctors, patients and a priest. However, a man who escaped from the hospital said he estimated there were about 100 trapped there.

Troops directed mortars and steady gunfire at the rebel positions and then sent in helicopter gunships to blast guerilla snipers perched in the belfry of the St. Peters church and on the roof of the adjoining hospital. Machine-gun bursts from armoured troop carriers also peppered rebel positions.

But by evening, fighting tapered off and the military said there was no return fire from the rebels.

'The Abu Sayyaf is not responding to gunfire, but we cannot assume they are running out of ammunition,' said spokesman, Col. Horacio Lapinid. 'We have the upper hand. We are optimistic we will be able to rescue all the hostages safely.'

Three Filipino tourists, including an eight-year-old boy, and a hotel security guard kidnapped last Sunday managed to escape along with some of those captured in Lamitan earlier in the day.

'One kind Abu Sayyaf allowed me to run away,' said Joey Candido, who was taken captive in the hospital. 'I saw two Americans inside hugging each other in fright.' Col. Lapinid told reporters in nearby Zamboanga city, the headquarters of the southern command, that four soldiers were killed and 12 wounded in the fighting. Another spokesman said the body of an Abu Sayyaf gunman was also recovered. A spokesman for the Abu Sayyaf guerillas said in a telephone call to a local radio station that the group would execute hostages if the military did not pull back.

'We are part of an Abu Sayyaf suicide squad,' spokesman Abu Sulaiman told the radio. 'Now we have 200 more hostages. If you do not stop the military action, we will execute the hostages.' — Reuters

INDU

Philippine hostages escape, 200 still trapped

REUTERS

DE CASTOR LAMITAN (Philippines), June 2. — Up to 200 people were trapped as Philippine military helicopters fired rockets and troops kept up a barrage of gunfire on a hospital and a church taken over by Muslim rebels in the South today, officials said.

But at least four Filipinos kidnapped by guerrillas last Sunday from an island resort managed to escape in the confusion.

There was no confirmed news on the whereabouts of the other 16 people kidnapped at the time, who include three Americans, but they are also believed to be trapped in the hospital in the town of Lamitan on Basilan island.

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Three Filipino tourists, including an eight-year-old boy, and a hotel



Troops and police take cover while attacking a hospital taken over by Abu Sayyaf in Lamitan in Basilan province, Philippines, on Saturday. — AP/PTI

security guard kidnapped last week managed to escape along with some of those captured in Lamitan earlier in the day.

"One kind Abu Sayyaf allowed me to run away," said Joey Candido, who was taken captive in the hospital. "I saw two Americans inside hugging each other in fright."

Dozen bodies in hospital: Military spokesman Colonel Horacio Lapinid told reporters in nearby Zamboanga City, the headquarters of the Southern Command, that four soldiers were killed and 12 wounded

in the fighting. Another spokesman said the body of an Abu Sayyaf gunman was also recovered.

Rose Tamayo, a correspondent for the Filipino Star newspaper, said she counted 12 bodies at the lamitan municipal hospital, but couldn't tell if they were of civilians, rebels or soldiers.

Dozens of others with bullet injuries were being treated, she said. Late into the afternoon, gunfire continued to rip through the mainly Christian town of about 100,000 people, some 12 hours after the

guerrillas swarmed through. The fighting was centred on the compound where both the church and the hospital are located.

One school was burned down in the fighting and bullet-marks pocked the fronts of many houses. Thousands of Lamitan residents fled the town, taking ferries to safer parts of Basilan.

"This is affecting our lives too much. We're evacuating without money," Hadja Nhena said while carrying belongings and pulling her four children through the streets.

A spokesman for the Abu Sayyaf guerrillas said in a telephone call to a local radio station that the group controlled a church in Lamitan and its main hospital.

"We are part of an Abu Sayyaf suicide squad," the spokesman, Mr. Al Sulaiman, told the radio. "Now we have 200 more hostages. If you don't stop the military action, we will execute the hostages."

Bustling market town

Basilan is a mountainous, heavily forested island and its jungle-clad hills have long provided base camps for the Abu Sayyaf, which claims to be fighting for an independent muslim homeland but appears to concentrate on kidnap for ransom. Lamitan, a bustling market town, is on its northern coast, slightly inland but connected to the sea by an estuary.

Earlier, one of the hostages appealed on local radio for an end to the military assault, saying that the hostages' lives were in danger.

"please tell the government not to use the military to solve this problem," hostage teresa ganzon told the radio station.

While welcoming the news of hostage escapes, the government reiterated it would not stop military operations against the muslim rebels and would only negotiate for an unconditional release of the captives.

"We cannot stop the operations. This is what's needed. It is important to keep up the pressure by the military. We cannot let up on the military operations," presidential spokesman Mr Rigoberto Tigliao told Manila Radio station Ddzrm.

Abduction: Abu Sayyaf men claim responsibility

REUTERS, AP & AFP

ZAMBOANGA (Philippines), May 28. - Abu Sayyaf rebels today claimed responsibility for kidnapping 20 people, including three Americans, from a tourist resort in the southern Philippines. They forced a US missionary taken hostage to speak to a local radio station.

"We are admitting it, we are the ones who did it," Abu Sayyaf spokesman, Abu Sabaya, told the DXRV radio station in a phone call.

Mr Martin Burnham, one of three Americans among the hostages, told the radio station: "Hi, I'm Mr Martin Burnham, an American citizen. I'm a missionary. I am with my wife. We are in the custody of the Abu Sayyaf under Khadafi Janjalani. I'm safe."

There was no word on where the kidnapers and the victims were.

However, they were abducted from the Dos Palmas beach resort, about 600 km south of Manila yesterday and believed to be headed toward southern islands near the border with Malaysia.

Janjalani, who leads a Abu Sayyaf faction, has previously been based on the island of Basilan some 850 km south of Manila, but in recent months



A file photo of Abu Sabaya, a leader of Abu Sayyaf.

has shifted operations to the Jolo island about 150 km further south.

However, Abu Sabaya added that the hostages had been divided into two groups and taken to Basilan and Sulu islands in the southern Philippines.

The military launched an air and sea search that had yielded several suspected sightings, in-

cluding one that indicated the raiders had abandoned their escape boat and split up into three vessels.

The navy rushed 10 of its vessels to cut off sea lanes in the Sulu Sea and prevent any further southward advance by the suspected Abu Sayyaf gunmen, who officials said are racing for Jolo and nearby islands.

Military spokesmen said local officials in the island of Mapun, also known as Cagayan de Tawi-Tawi, reported the gunmen went ashore overnight after sailing all day across a 480-km expanse of sea from the resort.

"Mapun is sealed, but we are not concentrating only in Mapun," said southern Philippines military spokesman Lt Col Dani lo Servando. "It could just be a refuelling point," he said.

The American captives include Christian missionaries Mr Martin Burnham, Mrs Gracia Burnham as well as Mr Guillermo Sobero.

The Abu Sayyaf group seized 10 foreign tourists 13 months ago from a Malaysian resort. Most were released for large ransoms, reportedly paid by Libya.

Arroyo coalition takes lead

SF-5
1675

PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER
ASIA NEWS NETWORK

MANILA, May 15. - The administration's People Power Coalition took an early lead last night with nine of its senatorial candidates making it to the Magic 13 based on unofficial, partial returns.

Only three of the Opposition's Puwersa ng Masa (PnM) and one Independent candidate landed in the winning circle as of 2 a.m. today.

Results of the unofficial quick count conducted by the AMA Group and Smart Communications showed that the winning PPC senatorial candidates were Mr Juan Flavio (No. 2 with 742,616 votes), Mr Franklin Drilon (No. 3, with 681,482), Mr Sergio Osmeña III (No. 4, with 679,763), Mr Joker Arroyo (No. 5, with 679,269), Mr Ra-

mon Magsaysay Jr. (No. 6, with 653,688), Mr Francisco "Kiko" Pangilinan (No. 7, with 651,175), Mr Manuel Villar (No. 9, with 630,083), Mr Ralph Recto (No. 10, with 605,166) and Mr Wigberto Tañada (No. 13, with 599,185).

Mr Noli de Castro, an Independent adopted by the Opposition's PnM, was No. 1 with 789,900 votes.

The three PnM candidates who landed in the Magic 13 were Mr Edgardo Angara (No. 8, with 633,726), Ms Miriam Santiago (No. 11, with 599,648) and Mr Panfilo Lacson (No. 12, with 577,422).

Eight names firmed up from early results. Seven were from the PPC and one, Mr De Castro, an Independent.

But Mr Paul Aquino, PPC campaign director, said it was too early to see any trend as

poll officials hadn't even counted one per cent of the total votes cast.

Mr Aquino said a trend in the voting could only be seen after the Commission on Elections had counted 3 million votes. The Comelec will start the official count tomorrow.

Final results aren't expected for days or even longer in a country where vote counting is done by hand and often is hampered by protests and violence.

Hours after the voting, the Macapagal administration and the Opposition yesterday began predicting victory in an election that has underscored the country's polarisation.

Mr Aquino noted that unlike the past elections there was a "heightened interest" from the public to immediately find out what the outcome of the elections are.

ALMA

Abu Sayyaf group kidnaps U.S. tourists in Philippines

17-17
 28/5

By Amit Baruah

SINGAPORE, MAY 27 — Twenty persons, including three American tourists, were kidnapped from the Dos Palmas resort off Palawan island in the southern Philippines in the early hours of Sunday. The kidnappers are suspected to be linked to the Abu Sayyaf rebel group.

The kidnapping creates a fresh problem for the fledgling Government of the President, Ms. Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, who has been busy containing the damage caused by the dramatic arrest of the former President, Mr. Joseph Estrada. The masked gunmen responsible for Sunday's kidnapping entered cottages where the tourists were sleeping and seized them.

"It all happened very quickly. Everyone was stunned and no one could talk... it was all over in 15 to 20 minutes," one security officer was quoted as saying.

Other than the three Americans, 13 of the 20 persons abducted were domestic tourists while four others were resort guards and staff.

Last year, the Abu Sayyaf sparked off international concerns by kidnapping 40 foreign tourists from two resorts in Malaysia and from Jolo island in the southern Philippines.

In a statement, the President condemned the "dastardly, criminal act of ruthless bandits".

A spokesman for Ms. Arroyo said: "Early this morning, after reporting on the incident,



This aerial photo shows the cluster of exclusive beachfront cottages at the Dos Palmas resort on the tiny rock of Araceffi, 25 km from the capital city of the western island of Palawan, Puerto Princesa from where some western tourists were kidnapped by the Abu Sayyaf group on Sunday. — AFP

Armed Forces Chief of Staff Diomedio Villanueva was ordered by the President to personally supervise the pursuit operations against the bandits and to ensure the rescue of the 20 hostages...

"The military has deployed three Navy patrol boats, an S-211 aircraft, and two Huey helicopters to assist Philippine Marine companies and

Philippine National Police in pursuing the bandits..." the spokesman said.

"President Macapagal-Arroyo assures the family of the hostages that the Government will do everything within its powers to ensure the safe rescue of their loved ones," the spokesman added.

The President's National Security Adviser, Mr. Rolio

Golez, was quoted as saying that a motorboat carrying the hostages and their armed captors was spotted by military aircraft near the maritime boundary with Malaysia.

"We are conducting pursuit operations... we have deployed navy vessels in the area... they are travelling slowly apparently because of the many people on board," Mr. Golez stated.

Six killed on Philippine polling day



The former Philippine President, Mr. Joseph Estrada, fills in his ballot in Manila's suburb of Quezon City on Monday. — AP/PTI

AFP & REUTERS

MANILA, May 14. — The death toll in poll violence in the Philippines rose to 80 as voting began today in the country's bloodiest elections in recent years.

Six people were killed today alone in separate incidents in the central and southern Philippines, officials said.

Among them was a campaign worker of a mayoral candidate in Naga town, Cebu island, who was shot dead by plainclothes policemen in controversial circumstances.

Followers of the mayor of Pitogo town in the southern Amboanga-Del Sur province were ambushed, leaving one person dead, while a district official was gunned down in Bansalan town in the southern province of Davao Del Sur.

Elsewhere, a government militiaman was killed when

Muslim separatist guerrillas in the southern island of Basilan attacked an army detachment. A local military spokesman said the attack was an attempt to harass voters.

A few hours earlier, a village chief seeking re-election in the central city of Cebu was gunned down by suspected rivals before polling began, police said.

Unidentified armed men also ambushed two soldiers before dawn today in southern Cotabato City, killing one and wounding the other.

In Matanog town on the southern island of Mindanao, voting was disrupted when suspected followers of a local politician running for mayor lobbed two mortar shells behind the town hall, causing a stampede among employees, police said. No one was injured and voting resumed later.

Voting in Pantar town, also

on Mindanao, was postponed because of irregularities in the preparation of voters' lists, officials of the Commission on Elections (Comelec) said.

But the Comelec chairman told reporters an hour before voting ended at 3 p.m. that compared to past elections, today's polls were "generally okay." "However, it's too early to make an assessment," he added.

At stake in the polls are 13 seats in the 24-member Senate, all 262 seats in the House of Representatives and thousands of local posts.

The elections are billed as a test of legitimacy for the newly installed President, Mrs. Gloria Macapagal Arroyo. Results for some House seats could emerge later today but most local posts were expected to take much longer.



The Philippine President, Mrs. Gloria Macapagal Arroyo, waves at supporters after voting in her hometown of Lubao on Monday. — AP/PTI

THE STATESMAN

15 MAY 2001

TENSION IN PHILIPPINES

5/10 Estrada still powerful 9/5

THE largish crowds now gathering in Estrada's support at the Edsa shrine, the venue at which both he and Ferdinand Marcos, were toppled, shouldn't really come as a surprise. A poll conducted just before impeachment proceedings began in the Filipino Congress, said that while an equal number of people approved or disapproved of his performance, 47 per cent thought it was okay for him to continue in office, against 36 per cent who thought the opposite. This was the position after the governor of Iloco Sur, Luis Singson, made the damaging allegation that he had given Estrada 10 million pesos a month as part of his share from the native jueteng lottery. All that sympathy may have temporarily evaporated by very damaging revelations that followed: namely, that he had siphoned off tobacco taxes, that he had a bank account under a false name, that he had bought expensive homes for his various mistresses, and more in the same vein, all of which led to the January 20 demonstration that united Fidel Ramos, Corazon Aquino and Cardinal Sin, the last two regarded as the guardians of the Filipino conscience. Part of the reason why Estrada had to go was that he reminded many people, especially among the elite and the intelligentsia, of Marcos - the empty populism, the corruption, the expensive lifestyle, the womanising - and, thereby, came to represent a regression with regard to the civilised politics that Aquino and Ramos had practised. In fact, the Marcos Loyalist Foundation backed Estrada initially, but withdrew after Estrada said nasty things about the former president. But, one must remember that the Filipino Constitution is modelled on the US Constitution and support that members of the Congress are able to mobilise in the streets do not reflect public opinion in its entirety, as the crowds now demonstrating in favour of Estrada seem to suggest.

There are dark hints that there was some rebellious movement in the Army and the police in the context of what President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo described as an attempt to "grab power". Surprising in view of the solidarity expressed by the Army for the anti-Estrada movement on January 20; perhaps there are divisions within the Army which may have encouraged Estrada to exploit, given that constitutionally Estrada doesn't have much of a ground to stand upon after the Supreme Court ruled on April 3 that he had ceased to be President and could no longer invoke immunity from prosecution. But the groundswell of support for him, mainly among the urban poor, is significant enough to make Macapagal think in terms of martial law. She has already declared a "state of rebellion" in Manila and called in government forces to fend off thousands of Estrada supporters who surrounded the Malacanang palace. Filipinos have seen corrupt presidents being brought to justice before and that includes Mrs Arroyo's father. But this time, they have a popular mass leader in jail on charges that could eventually lead to his execution, in a situation where upholding the values and practices of a constitutional democracy is an imperative. Mrs Arroyo does not have the choice of exercising dictatorial authority, since the plank on which she implicitly assumed power requires her to uphold the Aquino legacy of 1986.

THE ECONOMIST

Arroyo rules out martial law for now

By Amit Baruah

SINGAPORE, MAY 2. As calm prevailed on the streets of Manila after a day of violence and clashes, the Philippine President, Ms. Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, hoped that she would not have to take more emergency measures.

Ms. Arroyo, stung by the ferocity of protests by supporters of the ousted President, Mr. Joseph Estrada, has already declared a "state of rebellion" and banned all rallies and assemblies by Mr. Estrada's supporters. At least three persons were killed and over 100 injured when pro-Estrada supporters reached the gates of the Presidential palace, breaking police barriers and clashing with security person-

nel in the early hours of Tuesday.

Checkpoints have been set up in different parts of the capital, especially around the Presidential palace, the scene of much of Tuesday's action. "I have no intention of declaring martial law. I hope they will not provoke me, those in the opposition into doing that," Ms. Arroyo was quoted as saying at a press conference in Manila today.

A tough-talking President said: "But if they break the law, as President I have no choice but to enforce the law and to defend the Republic. And I will use the weapon in the Constitution that is needed, suited, to a particular kind of provocation."

THE HINDU

MAY 2 2001

Philippines on high alert after failed coup

REUTERS
MANILA, MAY 1

THE Philippines declared a state of rebellion on Tuesday and began questioning opposition politicians on suspicion of inciting protests in which three people were killed.

Two policemen and a protester died during a night of violence in central Manila when thousands of supporters of deposed President Joseph Estrada tried to break down

the gates of the presidential palace.

President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo, emerging from a night of meetings in the besieged palace, accused unidentified political opponents of trying to oust her.

"The demonstrations...were funded by people with a political agenda. It is clear that their goal is to bring down the legitimate government," she said on national television.

As police and soldiers dispersed Estrada's supporters, officials said a

state of rebellion was being declared and there were plans to arrest at least four senior opposition figures.

"We are in a state of rebellion...these are deliberate moves to topple a government," government spokesman Rigoberto Tiglao told local radio.

Declaration of a state of rebellion allows authorities to arrest suspects without a warrant and is the first of three steps a president can take to maintain law and order.

Subsequent steps are the suspen-

sion of habeas corpus rights and martial law. Estrada ally and prominent politician Juan Ponce Enrile surrendered at his home and was taken to police headquarters for questioning, police said late on Tuesday afternoon.

Earlier, Chief state prosecutor Jovencito Zuno told reporters the government planned to arrest Enrile and other Estrada allies Miriam Defensor Santiago and Gregorio Honasan -- all senators seeking re-election on May 14 -- as well as Pan-

filo Laason, police chief under Estrada.

Interior Secretary Jose Lina said earlier the government was reviewing speeches made by opposition politicians to Estrada's supporters after his arrest on corruption charges last week.

Supporters of arrested ex President Joseph Estrada are dispersed with water cannon as they try to storm the gates of Malacanang Palace on Tuesday in Manila - Reuters

INDIAN EXPRESS

2 MAY 2001

HD-16
7/5

Arroyo lifts state of rebellion

MANILA (PHILIPPINES), MAY 6. The Philippines President, Ms Gloria Macapagal Arroyo, announced on Sunday the lifting of a "state of rebellion" in metropolitan Manila, effective midnight, five days after the military quelled an alleged coup attempt against her.

"The trouble has eased and while there is still a threat against our republic, we're now in control of the situation," Ms Arroyo said in a nationally televised address. The state of rebellion gave police power to arrest without warrant. Ms Arroyo defended her decision to declare a state of rebellion in the capital, saying it was a legal weapon she needed to use to defend the republic and democracy. She said there were no rights violations committed by Government troops who crushed the planned uprising.

The military chief, Gen. Diomedio Villanueva said Government troops began reducing their presence in the capital after the coup was quelled. "We're reducing our troops in metropolitan Manila to lessen the tension but they would just be within reach, within striking distance for any contingency," Gen. Villanueva said. He said the Philippines was stable following the failed coup and it would be hard to attempt another power grab soon. "There is nothing to be worried about. If people are on the run, they could not organise a coup," he said.

Government troops, however, are on alert for possible bombings and other similar attacks, he said. Gen. Villanueva said special military contingents would remain at the presidential palace. Many troops deployed outside the palace have been withdrawn, but many remained inside and access roads were still blockaded. More than 3,000 soldiers, backed by tanks and helicopters, were deployed to secure the Malacanang presidential palace, military camps and television stations after about 50,000 followers of the ousted President, Mr. Joseph Estrada, tried to storm the seat of power on May 1.

At least six people were killed and more than



The Philippine President, Ms. Macapagal Arroyo, announces the lifting of the "state of rebellion" during a nationally televised address on Sunday. — AP

100 were injured when Mr. Estrada's mostly poor followers, armed with rocks and wooden clubs, were dispersed by troops. "We could have been massacred inside Malacanang by the demonstrators. What would have followed was the collapse of the Government," Ms Arroyo said.

The Justice Secretary, Mr. Hernando Perez, said the assault was part of an Opposition plot to overthrow the Arroyo Government and set up a junta after killing her and Mr. Estrada, who is in jail on corruption allegations. Ms Arroyo declared the "state of rebellion" in the capital allowing her to use the military to halt protests and authorising the police to make

arrests without warrants.

At least 11 Opposition leaders linked to the protests have been ordered arrested. Four people, including the Opposition Senator Juan Ponce Enrile and the former ambassador to the United States, Mr. Ernesto Maceda, were taken into custody after the rioting was quelled.

On Thursday, Mr. Enrile was charged with rebellion, a non-bailable offence punishable by life imprisonment. Mr. Maceda was accused of "conspiracy to commit rebellion," a lesser offence and allowed bail. Both have denied wrongdoing and questioned the legitimacy of their arrests before the Supreme Court.

The court allowed Mr. Enrile to post bail. Two Opposition parties also asked the Supreme Court to nullify the "state of rebellion," saying the Government was only using it to gain advantage in the May 14 local and congressional elections. Mr. Enrile and another leader of the rebellion, the Opposition Senator, Mr. Gregorio Honasan, are running for re-election. Another alleged leader, the former national police chief, Mr. Panfilo Lacson, is running for senator in the Opposition ticket. Mr. Honasan and Mr. Lacson are being hunted by police.

Ms Arroyo, who swept to power after Mr. Estrada's Jan. 20 ouster, has tried to restore normalcy and reached out to the Opposition in recent days, visiting Mr. Estrada in jail and some of the arrested rioters. Ms Arroyo asked the people to support the Government and give her time to pursue development, ease widespread poverty and tame two rebellions that have pestered the country for decades.

"I have served as your President for only 100 days. Give me time," Ms Arroyo said. The Environment Secretary, Mr. Heherzon Alvarez, said last week's political unrest has wiped out the business confidence established by Ms Arroyo. "We're back to where we started. We have to work at it again." — AP

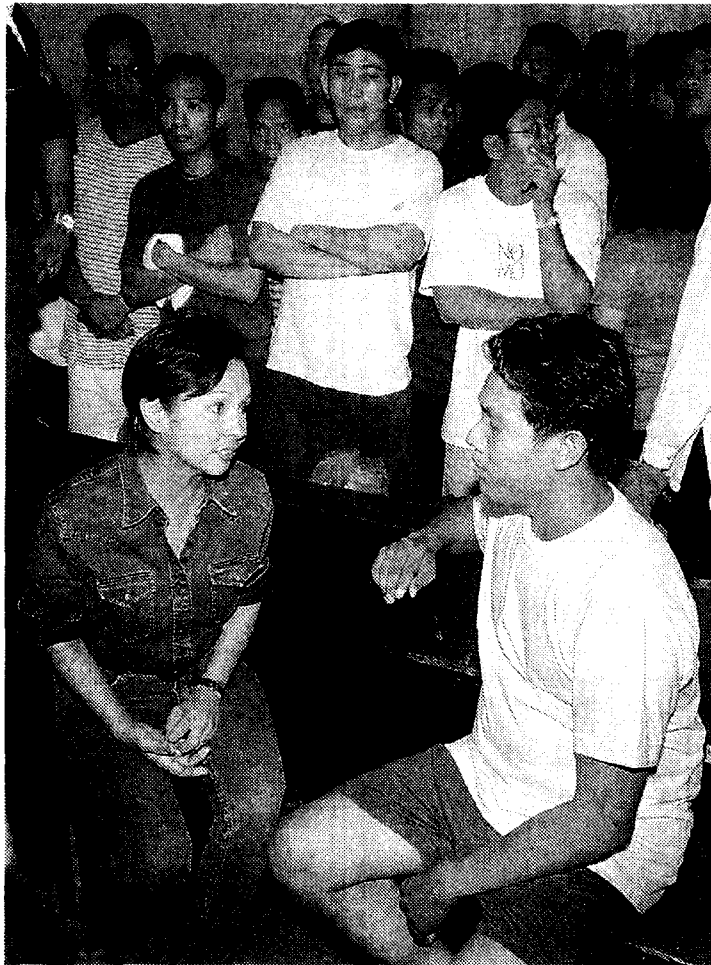
Arroyo vows to put down rebellion

MANILA, MAY 5. The Philippine President, Ms. Gloria Macapagal Arroyo said on Saturday she can deal with any threats to her Government after she lifts the "state of rebellion" declared after an assault on the Presidential palace earlier this week.

Calm has returned to the capital after at least six persons were killed and more than 100 injured when about 50,000 supporters of the ousted leader, Mr. Joseph Estrada tried to storm the Malacanang Presidential palace on May 1. "Right now, it is quiet around the country and we are just mopping up the leaders of the violent attack on May 1, and on Monday I will lift the 'state of rebellion,'" Ms. Arroyo said in an interview broadcast by Radio Mindanao Network. "There are still threats, but we will be able to address them in the regular manner."

The Justice Secretary, Mr. Hernando Perez said the assault was part of an opposition plot to overthrow the Arroyo Government and set up a junta after killing both Ms. Arroyo and the jailed former President. Mr. Perez has said that police have at least two witnesses to the alleged assassination plot, but he and Ms. Arroyo have declined to provide details.

On Friday, the Defence Secretary, Mr. Angelo Reyes said Ms. Arroyo was "firmly in the saddle" and had the full backing of the military. "We're over the hump," he said, adding that the military will reduce its contingent of 3,000 soldiers on Manila streets in coming days. Ms. Arroyo was sworn in as President after Mr. Estrada stepped down on January 20 amid massive protests against his alleged corruption. Mr. Estrada was arrested last week on plunder charges for allegedly amassing \$82 million from kickbacks and bribes during his 31 months in office. The arrest prompted Tues-



The Philippine President, Ms Gloria Arroyo, talks to Mr. Felipe Mondez, one of the 39 arrested supporters of the jailed former President, Mr. Joseph Estrada, at a detention centre at Camp Crame Philippine police headquarters in Manila on Saturday. — AFP

day's violence, which came at the end of a six-day rally at a key Manila intersection by masses of Estrada backers, mostly from the poorest classes. Mr. Estrada's supporters demanded that Ms. Arroyo resign and he be reinstalled. At least 11 opposition leaders linked to the protests have

been ordered arrested. Four persons, including the Opposition Senator, Mr. Juan Ponce Enrile and the former Ambassador to the United States, Mr. Ernesto Maceda, were taken into custody hours after the rioting was quelled on Tuesday.

On Thursday, Mr. Enrile was

charged with rebellion, a non-bailable offence punishable by life imprisonment. Mr. Maceda was accused of "conspiracy to commit rebellion," a lesser offence and allowed bail. Both have denied any wrongdoing. Mr. Enrile and Mr. Maceda questioned their warrantless arrest before the Supreme Court and demanded to be released. The Supreme Court later on Saturday dismissed Mr. Maceda's petition because he had already been allowed bail. However, it allowed Mr. Enrile to post an "interim bail" of \$2,000.

However, the tribunal left it to the trial court to determine the legality of Mr. Enrile's arrest and to determine whether the evidence against him was strong enough to withdraw bail, a Supreme Court spokesman said. Mr. Enrile's lawyers posted bail for him and the clerk of court issued an order to the police to release him. Mr. Enrile denied reports that he was to head the junta that would have taken over after Ms. Arroyo and Mr. Estrada are killed. "I'm not interested in the job. I know how difficult that is," he said.

Two Opposition parties also asked the Supreme Court to nullify the "state of rebellion," saying the Government is only using it to gain advantage in the May 14 local and congressional elections. Mr. Enrile and two other alleged leaders of the rebellion, Opposition Senators, Mr. Gregorio Honasan and Miriam Santiago, are running for re-election. Another alleged leader, the former national police chief, Mr. Panfilo Lacson, is running for Senator in the Opposition ticket.

Ms. Arroyo accused the Opposition leaders of exploiting the anger of the poor and inciting them to storm the palace. "They were used as baits by the power grabbers and then abandoned like Pontius Pilate," she said. — AP

THE HINDU

THE HINDU

6 MAY 2001

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Enforcing democracy?

IS RULE by Constitution sacred? Must the rule of law always be respected? Should duly-elected Presidents and Prime Ministers be voted out of office or removed constitutionally as opposed to being brought down? Given the events in the Philippines in January this year, and now in April-May, these questions have only one answer — a resounding yes.

The problem for the current President, Ms. Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, and her Government is quite simple. Having used "people's power" to secure the removal of Mr. Joseph Estrada from office, popular protests against her Government are difficult to denounce.

In January, a precedent was set. A President was literally driven out of office even while he could be faulted for manipulating the impeachment proceedings against him. So, many must have thought, what was possible in January could be repeated in April-May.

The thing about mass protests is that anyone can use them. Mr. Estrada may well be all the things that he is said to be; but it does not take away the fact that the former President has mass support — or else up to 300,000 people would not have gathered on the streets of Manila for six straight days and nights after his dramatic arrest.

Ferdinand Marcos, the hated dictator, was brought down by mass protests. The dramatic defection of his top military commanders — repeated again during People Power-II by the military chief and the Defence Secretary — underlined how a leader can be abandoned.

There are many differences between Marcos and Mr. Estrada. The latter was a dictator; Mr. Estrada was elected to office by the largest mandate in Philippine history. Though there can be no two views that the former President squandered his mandate rather quickly and was more interested in furthering the interests of his cronies than the people, he still has support in the country.

Analysts believe that there is a definite "class aspect" to the current politics in the Philippines. Ms. Arroyo and her team are seen as elitists and the



The Philippines President, Ms. Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, greets soldiers near her palace... a dangerous closeness to the military?

By setting a course for tough action, Ms. Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo has done nothing to calm things down in the Philippines, writes Amit Baruah.

one-time film hero (Mr. Estrada) as representing the interests of the poor.

While one might legitimately argue that the Left in the Philippines campaigned for the removal of Mr. Estrada, that has not stopped large sections of the poor, in their wisdom, from coming out in the streets in support for their former leader.

There is little doubt that Ms. Arroyo over-reacted to the protests of May 1; while the pro-Estrada demonstrators did reach the gates of Malacanang or the presidential palace, had the police and military been on the alert the problem could

have been sorted out.

By declaring a "state of rebellion" and arresting top aides close to Mr. Estrada and proclaiming a grand design to bring down her Government, the President is doing herself a disservice. Is her Government so fragile that a few thousand people who take to the streets can bring it down? By setting a course for tough action, Ms. Arroyo has done nothing to calm things down.

The Government also seemed to have been carried away in the method in which Mr. Estrada was arrested. Allowing the press to photograph him —

taking mugshots after arrest was hardly a politic step. Ditto with the finger-printing. Former Presidents can hardly be treated in this fashion.

An analysis published in *The Straits Times* on Thursday argued that Ms. Arroyo is "now a picture of a lame-duck President, just like Ms. Corazon Aquino, whose presidency was rocked by a series of failed bloody coup attempts, from 1986 to 1989, by renegade military elements".

In a belated move, Ms. Arroyo went and called on Mr. Estrada on Thursday in his jail cell. She also chatted up some of the protesters arrested for the May 1 rioting. "I'm proud of the fact that my grandmother is in fact a laundrywoman," she was quoted as saying. This move, however, could well be a case of too little, too late. Ms. Arroyo's first response was to call the protesters "drug-crazed" youth — a reaction that can only go to confirm her elitist background.

A nagging problem for Ms. Arroyo's fragile democracy is the military. A General switching sides publicly like the then Armed Forces of Philippines Chief of Staff, Gen. Angelo Reyes, did in January, coupled with mass protests, can bring down a duly-elected President. In a democracy, where the elected Executive draws its power from the Constitution, along with Parliament and the Judiciary, it is farcical to seek support from the military — men who are appointed by the civilian Government.

In the next few days, Ms. Arroyo will have an opportunity to gauge how much support she has in the electorate. The May 14 elections from the local level till the Senate will prove a sufficient barometer of public opinion. If the President and her party do badly at the upcoming polls, then there is reason for her to resign and seek re-election to the top job.

If she continues to cling on to power, which she can do till 2004, Ms. Arroyo will be reduced to seeking statements of support from her military commanders and watching those whose statements are not loud enough. Governance, clearly, cannot be a priority in such a climate.

THE HINDU
6 MAY 2001

Arroyo visits jailed Estrada

MANILA, MAY 3. The Philippine President, Ms Gloria Macapagal Arroyo, today visited the jailed former leader, Mr. Joseph Estrada, to check on his condition at a detention centre outside the capital, a spokesman said.

He said the visit had nothing to do with Tuesday's deadly rioting outside the Malacanang presidential palace by thousands of Estrada loyalists, which killed at least four people and injured more than 100 others. "She is there to see that all amenities and comfort due a former President is accorded to Estrada" the spokesman said. "There are absolutely no negotiations." He added that Ms Arroyo had a "brief face-to-face meeting" with Mr. Estrada, who has been in detention since April 25 to face trial for the capital charge of economic plunder. It was not immediately known what they talked about. The visit was made upon the invitation of Archbishop Ricardo Cardinal Vidal, a spiritual adviser of the former leader. The 64-year-old former movie star was moved to an 80-sqm detention facility at a police training school in Sta Rosa town in Laguna province, just south of Manila, when his supporters attacked Malacanang.

Mr. Estrada, who was ousted by a military-backed mass uprising on January 20, has blamed the Arroyo administration for the outbreak of violence when his supporters trooped to the palace. While he appealed to his supporters to remain calm and avoid further violence, Mr. Estrada urged them to remain vigilant, noting that "the struggle has just begun."

Mr. Estrada's lawyers have been pushing for their client to be placed under house arrest instead. The Sandiganbayan anti-graft court, which has scheduled the former President's arraign



The Philippine President, Ms Gloria Macapagal Arroyo, shakes hands with the jailed leader, Mr. Joseph Estrada, at a detention centre about 50 km south of Manila on Thursday. — Reuters

ment on June 27, has not yet decided on the motion. Meanwhile, the police on Thursday said they arrested another alleged leader of Tuesday's deadly riots.

Mr. Cesar Tanega, an official of an organisation of urban poor supporters of Mr. Estrada, was taken into custody, the national police intelligence chief, Mr. Reynaldo Berroya, said.

The police earlier arrested Senator Juan Ponce Enrile, two police officers and a former Filipino envoy to the U.S. to stand trial for plotting a rebellion to bring down the Arroyo Government.

Mr. Berroya said police were pursuing a manhunt for Senator Gregorio Honasan and the former national police chief, Mr. Panfilo Lacson. Both are "presumably armed" and eluded a police raid

on a suburban Manila hideout on Wednesday, he added. Mr. Lacson, the police chief during Mr. Estrada's rule, called up a Manila radio station on Thursday to denounce the manhunt, and indicated he would not surrender.

In another development on Thursday, suspected arsonists set fire to the house of a judge who is to preside over the corruption trial of Mr. Estrada, a court official said.

The judge, Mr. Anacleto Badoy, and his family survived the dawn blaze, which caused "minimal" damage to property, the official said. He said the judge had also received anonymous death threats since he was assigned last month to handle the plunder charge against Mr. Estrada. — DPA, AFP

Mitterrand 'knew of torture in Algeria'

PARIS, MAY 3. Details of the French army's campaign of torture and summary execution in Algeria were regularly passed on to the late Francois Mitterrand when he was Justice Minister, a retired general claimed on Wednesday.

Gen. Paul Aussaresses, 83, who confesses to running an execution squad during the Battle of Algiers in 1957, said in *Le Monde* that Mitterrand was kept abreast of the squad's methods, including the hanging of an Algerian leader which was covered up as a suicide. "The use of torture, was tolerated, if not recommended," he said.

"Francois Mitterrand in fact had an envoy called Jean Berard who covered us and knew exactly what we got up to. I had an extremely good relationship with him and had nothing to hide."

Gen. Aussaresses sparked controversy last year by revealing the bloody methods of the French against the Algerian guerillas during the war of independence.

The confessions led the communist members of the current Socialist coalition to call for a parliamentary inquiry into potential war crimes, a request rejected by the Prime Minister, Mr. Lionel Jospin.

But Gen. Aussaresses's latest revelations reveal in greater detail the gruesome tactics of his special unit and the implicit approval it was given by the French Government of the day, including Mitterrand.

According to the memoirs, Mitterrand was aware through his envoy, Mr. Jean Berard, of the arrest and execution of FLN commander Ben M'Hidi in 1957, who was officially declared to have committed suicide. — © Telegraph Group Limited, London, 2001.

Blood flows outside presidential palace

Philippines declares state of rebellion

FROM PAUL TAIT

Manila, May 1 (Reuters) - The Philippines declared a state of rebellion today and began questioning Opposition politicians on suspicion of inciting protests in which three people were killed.

Two policemen and a protester died during a night of violence in central Manila when thousands of supporters of deposed President Joseph Estrada tried to break down the gates of the presidential palace.

President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo, emerging from a night of meetings in the besieged palace, accused unidentified political opponents of trying to oust her. "The demonstrations... were funded by people with a political agenda. It is clear that their goal is to bring down the legitimate government," she said on national television.

As police and soldiers dispersed Estrada's supporters, officials said a state of rebellion was being declared and there were plans to arrest at least four senior Opposition figures. "We are in a state of rebellion... these are deliberate moves to topple a government," government spokesman Rigoberto Tiglao told local radio.

Declaration of a state of rebellion allows authorities to arrest suspects without a warrant and is the first of three steps a President can take to maintain law and order. Subsequent steps are the suspension of habeas corpus rights and martial law.

Estrada ally and prominent politician Juan Ponce Enrile sur-



Riot police disperse supporters of jailed ex-President Joseph Estrada during clashes in Manila. (AFP)

rendered at his home and was taken to police headquarters for questioning, police said late this afternoon.

Earlier, chief state prosecutor Jovencito Zuno said the government planned to arrest Enrile and other Estrada allies Miriam Defensor Santiago and Gregorio Honasan — all Senators seeking re-election on May 14 — as well as Panfilo Lacson, police chief under Estrada. Interior secretary Jose Lina said earlier the government was reviewing speeches made by Opposition politicians to Estrada's supporters after his arrest on corruption charges last

week. Customs commissioner Andrea Domingo said an order had been issued preventing at least nine Opposition figures, including the four identified by Zuno, from leaving the country.

A Manila radio station reported this afternoon that a small group of Estrada supporters were on the streets but many more Arroyo supporters were gathering for a show of support. Police said 103 protesters had been arrested and 36 policemen were hurt during the violence around the palace, which is defended by high walls on three sides, and a river on the fourth.

THE TIMES OF INDIA

2 MAY 2001

PHILIPPINES / ESTRADA SUPPORTERS STAGE MASSIVE PROTESTS

Coup attempt against Arroyo

By Amit Baruah

SINGAPORE, APRIL 30. There is an element of extreme irony in the pro-Joseph Estrada protests that have rocked the Philippine capital Manila since the arrest of the former President five days ago and the response of his political opponents who are now in power.

Thousands of Mr. Estrada's supporters have taken to the streets in support of their leader, whose arrest has generated a backlash and full-scale crisis for the new President, Ms. Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo.

At one point, over 250,000 supporters of Mr. Estrada had taken up position at EDSA, the "shrine" which has already seen massive protests twice leading to the protest of Mr. Estrada

and the late dictator, Ferdinand Marcos.

In January, it was Ms. Arroyo and the Catholic Church who were baying for the removal of Mr. Estrada. Today, the roles have been reversed — it is Mr. Estrada's supporters calling for Ms. Arroyo to go — using the same "shrine" as a springboard.

Yesterday, the Arroyo Government was in panic mode when it was suspected that the pro-Estrada forces, including elements in the military, were going to make an illegal bid for power. Addressing reporters in Manila today, the President confirmed that there was an effort to grab power yesterday, but not a "single" soldier joined the plotters. The plot, she claimed, had fizzled out.

There have been references in the Philippine press to senior serving officers as being involved in the "plot", but all the officers have denied playing such a role and, instead, pledged their loyalty to the President.

Talking tough today, the President said she was prepared to use military force if any attempt was made to grab power. "If one steps beyond the limits of conduct, Government will have no recourse but to take all measures necessary to safeguard the public. The Government has been given formidable defence measures that can be readily called upon," she said.

"Nevertheless, I ask people in the streets to police your own ranks. Our law enforcers are out there to protect everybody from harm, regardless of political beliefs or persuasions," she added.

Pointing to the seriousness with which the Government took the coup threat, the military Chief of Staff, Gen. Diomedio Villanueva, held a press conference at 2 a.m. to deny reports of high-level defections in the military to the Estrada camp.

"I'd like to assure the public that the Armed Forces of the Philippines stands united 100 per cent, steadfast behind Commander-in-Chief... Arroyo, and claims to the contrary are plain and simple falsehood and designed to create disorder and sow confusion," the general was quoted as saying.

In yet another twist, Cardinal Jaime Sin, head of the country's Roman Catholic Church, condemned efforts to grab power, quit forgetting his own role in the movement to bring down Mr. Estrada just three months ago.

"As Catholics, we must fully support, defend and stand behind the present Government and President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo," the Cardinal said in a radio and television broadcast. "Keep watch, stay alert. It is imperative to grab power."

Interestingly, Mr. Estrada and his son, a co-accused in the case of economic plunder filed against the former President, who were to appear at an anti-corruption court in a couple of days, have suddenly found their court appearance shifted to the end of June.

The fresh political chaos in the Philippines comes at a time when the country is to hold elections at several levels, including 13 seats in the Senate, in the next couple of weeks.

Any defeat for Ms. Arroyo will be a vindication of Mr. Estrada.



The Philippine President, Mrs. Gloria Macapagal Arroyo, displays a photo showing all of the generals of the armed forces of the Philippines in Malacanang presidential palace in Manila on Monday. The picture was taken during a meeting on Sunday in which the generals pledged their loyalty to her. Mrs. Arroyo averted a confrontation with tens of thousands of Mr. Estrada's followers when they called off a march to the presidential palace on Monday. — AP

THE HINDU

- 1 MAY 2001

Court rejects Estrada's plea for house arrest

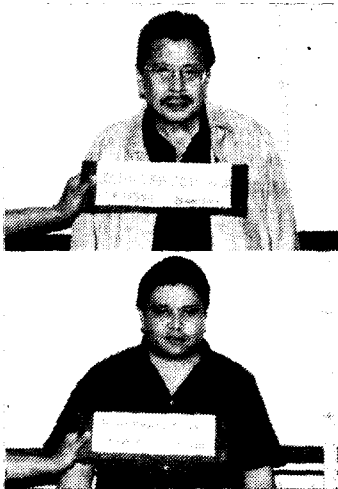
AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

MANILA, April 26. — A Philippines court today turned down former President, Joseph Estrada's plea to be allowed to go home after having spent a miserable night in prison.

The special court handling Estrada's case for economic plunder, a crime punishable by death, heard his formal petition to be placed under house arrest. It ordered him and government lawyers to submit written arguments by Wednesday, which means Estrada will have to remain in prison at least till 2 May.

The court set a hearing today on a separate petition to dismiss the charge that Estrada had illegally amassed \$80 million dollars, as well as a police plea to move him to another, more secure prison out of Manila.

Known for his hedonistic lifestyle, Estrada complained in a television interview about poor air circulation in his 19.3 square meter cell, as well as his



Estrada and his son Jose Ejercito (below) under going a photo session for police records. — AP/PTI

spartan food.

"It is very sad. I did not think that this would happen to me," said the 64-year-old former action movie star, held at the national police headquarters.

Estrada said the cell had an air-conditioning unit "but there

is no air coming out. There is no special treatment. Even the food is served in plastic".

Police said the cell had a cot, a toilet and a corner desk, but no television or telephone.

But the conditions of Estrada's detention are much better than those allowed for ordinary inmates. His lawyers urged the court to show "compassion" and allow Estrada to return to his suburban Manila mansion.

His son, Jose Ejercito, a co-accused who was also arrested and jailed was allowed to visit his father before he went to sleep late yesterday, officials said. Estrada's wife Luisa Ejercito said she was allowed to visit her husband and take food for him.

Supporters' protest: Thousands of Estrada supporters took to the streets to protest against his jailing and called for a civil disobedience campaign.

About 8,000 people began gathering at a historic shrine on EDSA, Manila's main thoroughfare late yesterday, just hours after Estrada's arrest.

THE PHILIPPINE STAR

27 APR 2001

Estrada complains about jail conditions

By Amit Baruah

SINGAPORE, APRIL 26. A former President spent a "terrible" night in jail. The one-time Philippine President, Mr. Joseph Estrada, arrested on charges of economic plunder yesterday and confined to an ordinary jail cell, said what had happened to him was "very sad".

A special anti-corruption court, hearing a plea from Mr. Estrada's lawyers, did not grant a request that the former President be placed under house arrest. Instead, it called on defence and prosecution lawyers to provide written submissions by Wednesday. If Mr. Estrada's comments are anything to go by, last night was probably one of the worst in

his life. The hard-drinking, womanising former Head of State, who was known to party into the wee hours, complained about the air-conditioning in his 209 square-foot jail cell. "It is very sad. I did not think this would happen to me," Mr. Estrada was quoted as telling a television channel from his jail cell. The jail cell has a cot, a toilet and desk but does not have a television or telephone. "There is no special treatment. Even the food is (served) in plastic." The former President complained that no air was coming out from the airconditioning unit.

With the authorities maintaining that Mr. Estrada was being provided superior treatment, it appears unlikely that he will be given further amenities unless a

court directive says otherwise. For their part, the former President's lawyers called upon the special court to show "compassion" and allow him to return home to be kept under "house arrest".

The arrest of the former President, which has been officially described as a "historic moment" for the country, has also seen pro-Estrada supporters taking to the streets, demanding freedom for their disgraced leader. It has also come just before the May 14 elections in which the leadership of the President, Ms. Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, will be tested for the first time. The polls are for city councillors right up to 13 seats in the Senate.

In an editorial today, the *Philippine Daily Inquirer* was circumspect. "For the first time in our short history, a former President of the Republic is now under arrest. Whatever happens now, in the courtroom and on the streets, it is clear that the nation has crossed a threshold. We hope that the crossover leads to greater political maturity."

"But let us not deceive ourselves. The potential for backsliding is great. As easy as slipping an agent provocateur into the middle of an angry crowd, yesterday's milestone can be turned into an occasion to indulge in politics of the worst kind," the paper warned. Stating that the arrest of a former President was without precedent, the *Inquirer* said: "That it has happened, following what Sandiganbayan presiding justice Francis Garchitorea earlier called the natural and automatic course of a judicial finding of probable cause, is cause for celebration."

"In the beginning, the Macapagal administration wanted to avoid the (prosecution) problem altogether, by letting Estrada decide whether to leave the country or stay. If he had taken the bait, the new administration would not have had to risk the violent displeasure of people who took Estrada's word as law," the newspaper added.



Policemen escorting the deposed Philippine President, Mr. Joseph Estrada, to his detention cell inside a police camp in suburban Quezon City near Manila on Wednesday. — Reuters

THE HINDU

27 APR 2001

Anger and tears as Philippine cops detain Estrada

Manila, April 25

PHILIPPINE POLICE detained former president Joseph Estrada today on a corruption charge punishable by death, after driving off supporters who tried to stop them taking their fallen idol into custody.

Top police generals, armed with an arrest warrant from the anti-graft court, picked up Estrada from his residence and drove away with him in a dark van as dozens of the former movie star's supporters broke down in tears.

Officials said Estrada, who faces death or life imprisonment on the plunder charge and whose power base is among the country's urban poor, had surrendered to police.

Photographers who joined a convoy carrying Estrada to his detention cell in a nearby police camp said the former president, wearing a white jacket over a polo shirt, looked glum and stared blankly into space.

Before the generals managed to enter the house, about 500 fist-waving, chanting supporters of Estrada, who denies any wrongdoing, formed human barricades outside his residence.

After several hours of stand-off, riot police charged and dispersed Estrada's followers who hurled rocks at the police.

Several people were injured, local television said.

After the protesters were driven away, national police chief

General Leandro Mendoza and other senior officers entered Estrada's house and took him into custody.

Following the rejection of his bail plea, Estrada's lawyers filed a separate motion asking the court to put him under house arrest rather than in a jail. The court would discuss it tomorrow, his lawyer said.

'Truth will prevail': In a pre-recorded statement broadcast on local radio, Estrada said "truth will triumph in the end." It was his first public statement since the arrest order.

"They continue to harass me, my family, my friends and the witnesses for me... I will face all these charges... I know that truth will triumph in the end, our Constitution will prevail," Estrada said.

The court's presiding justice, Francis Garchitorena, said Estrada would be automatically put in jail while waiting for his trial since the plunder charge was a non-bailable crime.

"We have shown that justice is working in the Philippines," presidential spokesman Rigoberto Tiglao told reporters. "We consider this a historic event. We showed that the former highest official of the land could be held answerable for his actions."

Estrada, the first Asian leader to be impeached, was ousted in January after people power protests triggered by corruption allegations.

Reuters

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

Filipinos deserve justice, says Arroyo

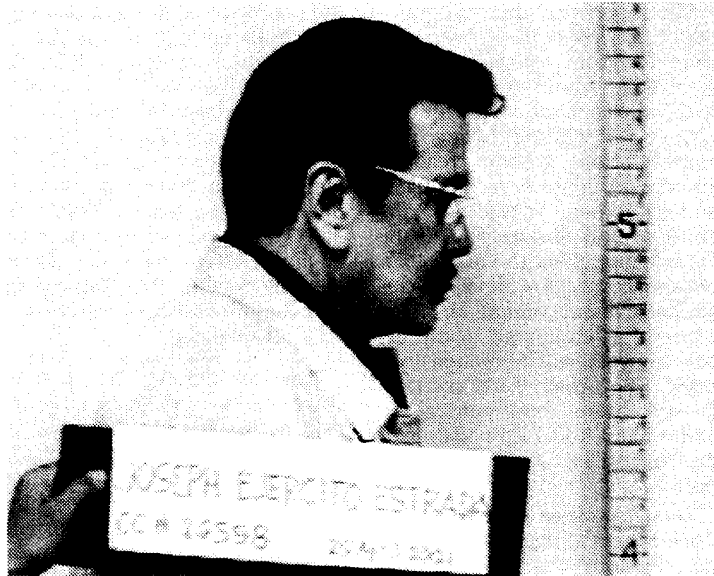
By Amit Baruah

SINGAPORE, APRIL 25. The former Philippines President, Mr. Joseph Estrada, was arrested under dramatic circumstances from his posh Manila home today on the charge of "economic plunder" which carries the death penalty.

Thousands of police and Special Forces personnel battled with protesters outside the Greenhills home of the former President, who was ejected from office following mass protests in January this year. After court-appointed officials served the arrest warrant on him, Mr. Estrada was taken away in a black-tinted luxury vehicle to a detention centre at Camp Crane.

The former President, who looked composed, was treated like a common criminal by an administration which is completely opposed to his brand of politics. Mr. Estrada, asked to remove his trademark jacket, had his mugshots taken and was fingerprinted by police personnel. He was accompanied to the Camp Crane detention centre by his wife, Ms. Luisa Ejercito, and son, Mr. Jinggoy Estrada, who are the co-accused in the economic plunder case.

Mr. Estrada, whose arrest was ordered by an anti-corruption court, is accused of taking advantage of his official position and influence to amass more than \$80 million in illegal wealth through a "combination or series of overt and criminal acts". He is also charged with illegally using an



The deposed Philippine President, Mr. Joseph Estrada, gets his mug shot taken in this video grab at the police headquarters in Manila shortly after his arrest on Wednesday. — Reuters

alias to hide his unexplained wealth and perjury for misrepresenting his assets in an official statement of assets and liabilities.

According to the government ombudsman, six other cases of economic plunder against the ousted President are also being studied. There is little doubt that the President, Ms. Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, has pursued cases against Mr. Estrada in a systematic fashion. Since being ousted, Mr. Estrada has been kept on tenterhooks. Earlier, the country's Supreme Court had dismissed petitions filed by Mr. Estrada that

he remained the country's President. The apex court had also stripped him of his immunity against prosecution. While the charges have been filed and the former President has been put behind bars, a close watch will have to be maintained on the judicial process itself. Whatever be the charges against him, Mr. Estrada, who was President only three months ago, deserves a fair trial.

In response to his arrest, the former President said he would fight the corruption charges levelled against him in court. "I will face and answer all these charges

filed against me by my foes...I believe that the truth and Constitution will prevail," Mr. Estrada said in a statement broadcast on radio and television. "I was not given a chance to defend myself," he said, pointing out that a few hundred thousand people had driven him out of office while he had been elected by some 10 million people. "I ask our people now to tell the powers-that-be to respect our Constitution and the rule of law," Mr. Estrada was quoted as saying.

For her part, the President, who served as deputy under Mr. Estrada, has hailed the jailing of her former boss. "The Filipino people were victimised when Government funds were used for private purposes. They deserve justice, and this is what the decision of the Sandiganbayan (anti-corruption court) is all about. It is all about justice," Ms. Arroyo said in a statement.

Rejecting Mr. Estrada's charge that she bullied the judiciary into acting against the former President, Ms. Arroyo added: "In the meantime, let the trial begin. The court is the proper venue, since the trial of Joseph Estrada is neither a political matter nor a class war." In a separate statement, Mr. Rigoberto Tiglao, spokesman for the President, told reporters that Mr. Estrada's arrest showed that justice was working in the Philippines. "We consider this a historic moment. We showed that even the former highest official of the land could (be) held answerable for his action," Mr. Tiglao stated.

Graft-hit Estrada surrenders

Manila, April 16

FORMER PHILIPPINE president Joseph Estrada, toppled in a "people power" revolt in January, surrendered himself to the anti-graft court Monday after it had ordered his arrest on corruption charges, witnesses said.

Estrada, accompanied by lawyers and other aides, arrived at the heavily guarded courthouse in the Manila suburb of Quezon City just before 5 pm, some two hours after the court issued an arrest warrant against him.

Earlier, lawyers of the disgraced former movie actor sent word to the court that he would personally go to the courthouse to post bail, which the court had fixed at a total of 40,000 pesos (\$800) on twin charges of graft and perjury.

The charges stemmed from allegations by State prosecutors that Estrada and at least four other associates had pocketed 130 million pesos (\$2.6 million) of excise taxes intended to benefit tobacco farmers.

Ousted President Joseph Estrada posted a bond and was fingerprinted on Monday after a special anti-graft court issued an arrest warrant for him on two charges linked to alleged corruption in office. It was believed to be the first time a warrant has been issued for a Philippine leader. A separate case was filed against Estrada for a questionable land deal was also filed.

Estrada avoided being jailed by posting bond, but he was fingerprinted and he submitted photos for mug shots. The warrant and new charges add to his considerable legal woes: He already faced six other charges, including plunder, a capital offense for which no bail is allowed.

"Nobody is above the law," said Narciso S. Nario, one of the



Philippine leader Joseph Estrada and his wife, Luisa Ejercito, at the special anti-graft court in Quezon City on Monday.

justices in the Sandiganbayan, the special graft court. "We have to bring to court anybody who violates the law, whether he is the most powerful man in the country or the lowliest laborer in the country."

The charges that were the basis of the warrant were perjury and graft. The graft charge involves allegations that Estrada skimmed \$2.6 million in

tobacco taxes. The perjury count alleges that he misstated his assets and liabilities in 1999, which he declared net worth of only \$700,000.

They carry total bail of \$800, but an Estrada lawyer said about \$3,000 was being posted to cover the rest of the bailable offenses.

Estrada's lawyers said they were confident they could keep

him out of prison and clear his name.

On April 4, Estrada was indicted on accusations that he pocketed \$82 million in kickbacks and payoffs during his 31 months in office. His indictment came after the Supreme Court unanimously rejected his appeals of a ruling that stripped away his presidential immunity.

On Monday, Estrada, who has professed his innocence and accused rivals of fabricating the charges, was greeted by about 30 impoverished supporters outside his posh Manila home and the same number at the court.

The poor formed the backbone of Estrada's support, and there are concerns that arresting him could spark protests.

Meanwhile, a lawyer filed a new case of plunder on Monday against Estrada and his associates, claiming they were involved in the sale of "outrageously overpriced" land to the government. Lawyer Ernesto Francisco Jr. said the sale of nine pieces of land for \$24 million defrauded the government of more than \$16 million in 1999.

In the case he filed before Aniano Desierto, the Government's chief graft fighter, Francisco alleged that Estrada intervened to ensure the sale of the plot along Manila Bay despite its grossly high price. Francisco also alleged that portions of the land, which the government used for a road project, had ownership problems at the time they were sold.

Estrada and Velarde were charged along with other officials, including then-Public Works Secretary Gregorio Vigilar.

Carlos Baviera, a vice-president of Amvel, said the company can answer the allegations and prove there was no overpricing or other irregularity in the deal.

Reuters/AP

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

17 APR 2001

Arroyo denies deal with Estrada

MANILA, April 7. — The Philippine President, Ms Gloria Arroyo, today rejected claims that she had offered a deal to Mr Joseph Estrada, allowing him to avoid criminal charges if he relinquished power.

Ms Arroyo said accounts by Estrada's allies that she had offered him such a deal shortly after he was toppled were "totally inaccurate because I never offered to drop any cases".

She urged Mr Estrada "to move on and defend himself" before an anti-graft court where eight corruption cases have been filed against him.

The ombudsman has filed eight corruption charges against Mr Estrada. — AFP

HO-13
MA
Estrada appeal
rejected
phelmu

MANILA, APRIL 10. The ousted Philippine leader, Mr. Joseph Estrada, facing a charge punishable by death, suffered a twin blow today when the Supreme Court rejected his claim to the presidency and an appeal to stop his trial.

It was the latest in a succession of legal setbacks in his attempt to avoid arrest and prosecution on an array of charges ranging from corruption to economic plunder, the last a capital offence.

Officials of the Sandiganbayan anti-graft court, which would try Mr. Estrada, said they were studying prosecution evidence to see if it justified ordering his arrest. "If there is a basis...We issue the arrest warrant on Monday," the Sandiganbayan Chief Judge, Mr. Francis Garchitorena, said in an interview.

But Mr. Estrada's lawyers said they were not giving up their fight and would file petitions with the court questioning the filing of the plunder case. — Reuters

THE HINDU

79 APR 10

Estrada to fight ^{Philippines} criminal charges

Manila, April 5 ^{HC-11}

OUSTED PRESIDENT Joseph Estrada vowed on Thursday to fight corruption charges and said he may attempt a second appeal of a Supreme Court decision that stripped him of immunity from prosecution.

Immigration authorities have been put on alert to ensure Estrada doesn't flee while the country's anti-graft court, the Sandiganbayan, mulls evidence to decide whether to issue an arrest warrant. Presiding judge Francis Garchitorena said his court will "double its effort."

No bail is permitted for the most serious of eight charges against Estrada, economic plunder. Estrada, interviewed by radio station Dzec, said he will stay and fight what he called "fabricated" charges. "I will never leave the country. There should be no fear that I would flee," he said.

Estrada, forced to step down in January 20, a mid mass protests sparked by corruption allegations, was indicted on Wednesday for allegedly pocketing 4.098 bil-

lion pesos (\$82 million) in kickbacks and payoffs during 21-2 years in office. The eight charges include plunder, defined as illegal accumulation of more than 50 million pesos (\$1 million) while in office. It is a capital crime but execution of the once-popular former action film star is considered highly unlikely.

The charges were filed by ombudsman Aniano Desierto, the Government's chief anti-graft prosecutor, a day after the Supreme Court unanimously rejected Estrada's first appeal. The court earlier stripped Estrada of immunity and confirmed the Presidency of Gloria Macapagal Arroyo, Estrada's Vice-President. Estrada said his lawyers agreed to ask the Supreme Court to reconsider again. "I feel that they will again ignore this, but I will exhaust all legal remedies," he said.

Supreme Court spokesman Ishmael Khan said court rules ban a second motion for reconsideration, which "will most probably be dismissed" once filed.

AP

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

Estrada indicted on graft charges

By Amit Baruah

SINGAPORE, APRIL 4. A string of corruption charges have been filed against the former Philippine President, Mr. Joseph Estrada, by an anti-corruption ombudsman a day after he was stripped of immunity from prosecution by the Supreme Court.

Mr. Estrada, indicted for plunder, is alleged to have amassed some \$82 million from payoffs during his two-and-a-half years in office.

A court official was quoted as saying that the immediate arrest of the former President on corruption charges was unlikely. "It is not our procedure to immediately arrest anyone, no matter who is charged".

Several associates of Mr. Estrada, including his wife and a son, have also been named as accused. The former President described the charges as fabricated.

"I'm already convicted here through publicity so how do you expect to get a fair trial under this administration," Mr. Estrada told reporters at his Manila home.

Under the Philippine law, a conviction on the charge of plunder carries death penalty, but it is considered highly improbable that Mr. Estrada will face such a sentence.

PTI adds: The movie star-turned-President has been charged with violation of anti-corruption law, illegal gambling and violation of the law on ethical standards. The ombudsman, Mr. Aniano Desierto, said the \$82 million dollar amassed by Mr. Estrada included \$60 million in a secret bank account under an alias, \$10.9 million in payoffs from illegal gambling, \$2.6 million in paybacks from a tobacco excise tax and \$3.7 million in commissions from a stock sale using state pension funds.

The popular movie star, who remained President for 31 months, was forced to leave



The ousted Philippines President, Mr. Joseph Estrada (centre), on Wednesday walks to his plane that would take him to the central region of the country to campaign for his senatorial candidates. — AP

the presidential office in January after tens of thousands of protesters, backed by military and police, demanded his resignation after the corruption allegations.

Though Mr. Estrada never formally signed a resignation letter, Tuesday's supreme court ruling put an end to any of his hopes of getting back into the presidential palace.

The corruption allegations were the focus of

a six-week Senate impeachment trial which collapsed in January when Senators voted against opening a sealed envelope that prosecutors alleged linked Mr. Estrada to a multi-million dollar bank account under the name of 'Jose Velarde'.

Later under the new government, the envelope was opened showing bank accounts under the name of Mr. Velarde.

Philippines ousted President faces corruption charge

Manila, April 4

ONE DAY after the Philippine Supreme Court stripped former President Joseph Estrada of his presidential immunity, a top prosecutor announced Wednesday that he will charge the ousted leader with corruption.

Aniano Desierto's announcement follows the Supreme Court voting unanimously Tuesday to reject Estrada's petition to retake the presidency, removing his immunity and clearing the way for criminal charges.

The case centers on allegations that Estrada amassed as much as \$300 million in bribes and kickbacks during his 31 months in office. He was forced to leave the presidential palace on January 20 as tens of thousands of protesters, backed by top police, military and church officials, demanded his resignation after months of snowballing corruption allegations.

Desierto said he will charge Estrada's son, Jinggoy, and Estrada's wife, Luisa Ejercito, in connection with the bribe and



JOSEPH ESTRADA

kickback allegations. Charges were also expected against several of Estrada's friends and business associates.

Desierto said he would officially charge Estrada later Wednesday on several counts, including plunder, a non-bailable offense that could result in his immediate arrest. That means systematic theft from the state of more than \$1 million. It is a capital crime but it is highly unlikely

Estrada would receive the death penalty.

Desierto said he will also charge Estrada with violation of the anti-graft law, misuse of public funds, perjury, illegal use of an alias, illegal gambling and violation of ethics law.

The Supreme Court's ruling dashed Estrada's final hope to retake the presidency through legal battles. He had never signed a resignation letter and asked the Supreme Court to declare President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo, who was his Vice-President, as only the "acting President." The court ruled he effectively resigned when he left the palace.

The allegations against Estrada were the subject of a six-week Senate impeachment trial that was aborted in January when his Senate allies voted against opening a sealed envelope that prosecutors alleged would tie him to a multimillion dollar bank account. The account was under the name "Jose Velarde." The vote set off the mass protests that drove Estrada from power.

USA Today

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

- 5 APR 2001

~~Estrada no
longer
President:
Supreme Court~~



PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER
ASIA NEWS NETWORK

MANILA, April 3. — Supreme Court justices ruled for a second and final time today that disgraced leader Mr Joseph Estrada had ceased being President and thus could no longer invoke immunity from arrest, court sources said.

The verdict threw out an Estrada plea for the court to overturn a similar ruling issued last month.

Mr Estrada was ousted in a military-backed popular revolt in January.

The court was to issue later today a written ruling to the effect that "no new arguments were raised which could warrant the reversal of the 2 March decision," said a court official who asked not to be named.

A separate radio report also said that the Supreme Court had already decided with finality to junk Mr Estrada's petition. The high court justices ruled 13-0 to affirm the legitimacy of the government of President Mrs Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, and set aside Mr Estrada's claim that he is only a President on leave.

The Supreme Court had again cited the diaries of former Estrada executive secretary Mr Edgardo Angara, in making its decision. The Angara diaries were published in *The Philippine Daily Inquirer*.

THE STATESMAN

APR 2001

HP-17 AA Court upholds Arroyo's presidency

MANILA, APRIL 3. The Philippine supreme court voted unanimously today to uphold the presidency of Ms. Gloria Macapagal Arroyo, and reject the former President, Mr. Joseph Estrada's appeal that he was still country's legitimate leader.

"The court voted 13-0 to deny the motion for reconsideration of Mr. Estrada," assistant court clerk, Ms. Maria Luisa Villarama, told Reuters over phone.

The decision cleared the way for the filing by the government ombudsman of corruption, bribery and economic plunder charges against Mr. Estrada. The plunder charge is punishable by death. Mr. Estrada has denied any wrongdoing.

The court last month declared Ms. Arroyo the legitimate President and rejected Mr. Estrada's contention that he was merely on leave from office.

Death penalty suspended

Ms. Arroyo has effectively suspended the death penalty for the duration of her three-year term, the Philippine President's chief aide said today. "There are no executions because the President automatically commutes the death sentences of all cases which are already going to be carried out or before they are carried out," executive secretary, Mr. Renato De Cilla said.

"She has not said exactly" that she is against the death penalty, "but her recommendations for those due for execution speak for themselves," Mr. De Villa said.

The President "has the power to commute death sentences into lower penalties such as life imprisonment. That is what is happening now". — Reuters, AFP

Arroyo declares war on rebels

S. Sabaya
1-3
28/4

Manila, April 2 (Reuters): Philippine President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo said today she had ordered the armed forces to launch an "all-out war" against Islamic rebels who have threatened to behead a US hostage.

"Today, I have ordered an all-out war against the Abu Sayyaf," Arroyo told a news conference.

"They will be annihilated," she said when asked what her government would do if the fundamentalist Abu Sayyaf group carried out its threat to behead American Jeffrey Schilling and present his head to Arroyo as their birthday present to her. Arroyo turns 54 on Thursday.

"I warn the Abu Sayyaf not to harm the hostage," she said.

Asked if her order was for soldiers to take no prisoners, Arroyo said: "Take no prisoners." She later clarified her remarks by saying "Take no prisoners, except those who willingly surrender."

She said she had talked to US embassy officials who told her Washington was supporting her move.

Earlier today, an Abu Sayyaf spokesman said on local radio the group would behead Schilling on Thursday and present his head to Arroyo as a birthday present if the government did not agree to the rebels' demand for Saudi Arabia's ambassador in Manila to negotiate with them. "If they want to save Jeffrey, they should bring the

ambassador of Saudi Arabia here. Otherwise we will cut off the head of Jeffrey Schilling," rebel spokesman Abu Sabaya said.

Schilling has been held on the remote southern island of Jolo, 960 km south of Manila, since August last year.

"It will not be good karma (fate) for a President (to receive) a decapitated head as a birthday gift, just like what we did to Erap," Sabaya said, referring to deposed President Joseph Estrada by his nickname.

"He failed to complete his term as President." Abu Sabaya was referring to the beheading by the guerrillas of two kidnapped Filipino teachers on Basilan island, near Jolo, on Estrada's birthday, which also falls in April, last year.

Estrada was ousted in a "people power" revolt in January which catapulted his Vice-President, Arroyo, to the presidency.

The Abu Sayyaf beheaded the two teachers after Estrada rejected a package of rebel demands.

The Abu Sayyaf gained international attention last year when they seized more than 40 foreigners and Filipinos from nearby Malaysian tourist resorts and from Jolo.

All of the kidnap victims have been freed — mostly in exchange for huge ransoms — except for Schilling and Filipino Roland Ullah, who are still being held on Jolo.

THE TELEGRAPH

- 3 APR 2001

Philippine rebels declare truce

MANILA, April 1. - The Philippines' biggest Muslim rebel group today ordered its forces to halt all attacks against government forces ahead of peace talks with Manila.

The rebel cease-fire will take effect from 1 a.m. on 3 April, vice-chairman for military affairs of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front, said in a directive to guerrilla units on the Mindanao island. The MILF declaration matches a similar move made by the President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo, who had ordered a unilateral military ceasefire in February to pave way for resumption of peace talks.

"This is part of our efforts to normalise the situation before resumption of the stalled peace talks between the Philippines government and the MILF," the MILF vice-chairman said.

- Reuters

THE STATESMAN

APR 2 2001

Gusmao not to run for President

Dili, March 29

AFTER QUITTING East Timor's interim legislature in a bitter row over the shape of a new constitution, Xanana Gusmao today said he will not contest the country's first presidential election.

"I will not run for President... I believe that if I could do something for this country and these people it was in a different stage of the process, the liberation struggle," said Gusmao, who had been widely expected to assume the position.

East Timor's temporary UN administrator, Sergio Vieira de Mello, said he accepted Gusmao's resignation from the National Council yesterday, but hoped the former guerrilla leader would change his mind. "I hope he will stand for election...I believe he is the key to stability in East Timor during the transitional phase," de Mello said.

In his resignation letter, Gusmao said the National Council no longer reflects the views of the East Timorese people. The committee is a consultative body working in association with the UN administration.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

30 MAR 2001

Gloria's time of grace

SG Arroyo, Philippines

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25

NOW THAT People Power-II is behind the Philippines, the focus is back on governance and the Government of the President, Ms. Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo.

Mr. Joseph Estrada, ejected from the presidency by the crowds that collected in Manila in January, and Ms. Arroyo are now preparing for elections to the lower House of Parliament and the Senate in May.

The Philippines Supreme Court has formally ended any claims Mr. Estrada had to the presidency though the former movie star continues to call Ms. Arroyo "acting President". But there is little he can do but score propaganda points against his one-time deputy. For the moment, the Supreme Court has, however, prevented the Ombudsman from filing criminal cases against Mr. Estrada.

The order staying Mr. Estrada's prosecution has been described by a Presidential spokesman as a "little" delay. "We are not bothered by this because we feel this is just normal for an important case like this, which has far-reaching legal and historical implications." Mr. Estrada, who is putting up candidates for the upcoming elections, is relaxing if newspaper reports are to be believed.

At a press conference, the former President was quite happy to comment on how Ms. Arroyo was looking. "GMA (Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo) looks very pretty now. Even her hairdo, she looks better now," Mr. Estrada was quoting as saying, adding, "she looks very pleasant now".

Of course, his appreciation of Ms. Arroyo stopped there. Criticising the Government for offering "juicy positions" to former Generals, Mr. Estrada said: "I think the Acting President has more military advisers than I did..." This, he said, had happened in a situation where the Government had announced peace talks with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), against whom Mr. Estrada's Government had waged a protracted offensive.

While the focus is obviously on matters of the moment, Ms. Arroyo's Government must deal with Mr. Estrada and his "cronies" against whom Ms. Arroyo and her rainbow coalition had shouted themselves hoarse.

The Arroyo administration must be aware that it is not only prosecuting Mr. Estrada that is the issue — the ousted President remains a political force in the

Ms. Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo has been in office for just two months. She could still be said to be enjoying a time of grace. That, however, is not going to last very long, writes AMIT BARUAH.

country. The elections in May are, in a sense, a battle between Mr. Estrada and Ms. Arroyo.

The stakes are high for both; perhaps they are higher for Ms. Arroyo politically. If Mr. Estrada and his supporters do well at the polls, then the question asked about People's Power II — whether it was a revolution of the Filipino people or of a few hundred thousand Filipinos prompted by a few hundred powerful individuals" — will get a definitive answer.

Interestingly, none other than the former President, Mr. Fidel Ramos, who played a key role in Mr. Estrada's forced exit, has come out against staging People

Power turnovers.

In a recent interview, Mr. Ramos was quoted as saying: "Belabouring the issue of the coup is a secondary matter now. We have done two People Power turnovers in 15 years. We have to strengthen our democratic institutions.... we have been lucky, but we must not constantly resort to this action to sort out our political problems..."

Indeed, the primary issue is that of how the new Government is doing in matters of providing good governance and dealing with corruption and cronyism.

There has been much adverse comment about Mr. Luis Singson, a provincial Governor who blew the lid off the gambling scandal in which Mr. Estrada was purportedly involved, being named by Ms. Arroyo as her "gambling consultant". Mr. Singson, who publicly admitted collecting gambling kickbacks, should be prosecuted along with Mr. Estrada. While he may have performed a service by naming Mr. Estrada publicly, in the eyes of the law he should be as "guilty" as the former President.

According to a report in the *Far Eastern Economic Review*, Mr. Lucio Tan, chairman of

Philippine Airlines and a major financier of Mr. Estrada's election campaign in 1998, led a delegation of powerful Filipino-Chinese businessmen to the presidential palace.

"Tan is battling charges of tax evasion.... Arroyo has claimed that having her pictures taken with these men doesn't mean they are going to escape criminal charges, but she has had a harder time explaining what they were doing in the palace in the first place..." the *Review* said.

"Dozens of other pro-Estrada politicians in Congress have also been greeted with open arms by the President. Senator Ramon Revilla, for example, has left Estrada's LAMP coalition and joined the administration Lakas party..." the report added.

Clearly, it is easier to rail against corruption and cronyism from outside the Government. It is difficult to act decisively against the corrupt when in Government. It is, of course, not just the anti-corruption plank. A majority of the 77 million people in the Philippines are looking to the Government to address their basic needs.

Ms. Arroyo has been in office for just two months. She could still be said to be enjoying a time of grace. That however, is not going to last very long.



Ms. Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo joins hands with two of her predecessors as Philippines President, Ms. Corazon Aquino and Gen. Fidel Ramos... the test lies ahead.

THE HINDU

25 MAR 2001

Arroyo seeks Army help to fight crime

AGENCE FRANCE PRESSE

MANILA, March 22. - The Philippine President, Ms Gloria Macapagal Arroyo, today said she ordered the military to help police battle common crime as fighting against insurgents wanes.

Ms Arroyo also asked the army to help her foster peace talks with Communist and Muslim rebels by following her order to suspend offensives against the insurgents.

"The enemy is no longer so much the rebel in the mountains but rather the kidnapper lurking in the street corner," Ms Arroyo told soldiers during the 104th founding anniversary ceremony of the Philippine army.

Ms Arroyo said she asked new military chief of staff Lt Gen Dimedio Villanueva to help police fight crime, particularly kidnaping and smuggling. A series of widely publicised killings of kidnaping and rape victims in Manila and nearby provinces sparked public concern and added to the daunting problems facing Ms Arroyo, who took power on 20 January.

In the latest such crime, the body of a missing Chinese college student, Mark Chua, was found on Sunday floating in the murky waters of Pasig River in downtown Manila. Police suspect that he was killed by kidnapers.

23 MAR 2001

23 MAR 2001

~~New charge~~
SF-11 against Estrada
M7 *pliki*

MANILA, March 16. — Lawyers filed a new criminal complaint today against former President, Mr Joseph Estrada, based on a rich bank account that prosecutors say he used under a false name.

Prosecution lawyers filed the complaint with Ombudsman Aniano Desierto, the chief government corruption prosecutor, alleging that Mr Estrada was the real owner of a bank account under the name "Jose Velarde" that held up to \$68.8 million.

Mr Estrada declared net assets of \$700,000 in 1999 and, as President, was prohibited from personal business dealings. He has denied he owns the account at equitable PCI bank.

Clarissa Ocampo, the bank's vice president, has said she saw Mr Estrada sign transactions as Velarde.

The complaint accuses Mr Estrada of "economic plunder." The crime is punishable by death. However, it is highly unlikely that Mr Estrada would receive lethal injection if convicted.

— AP

THE STATESMAN

11 MAR 2001

Philippines declares truce against rebels

REUTERS

MANILA, March. 8. The Philippines today declared a ceasefire against Communist rebels after a police officer, held captive for 16 months by the guerrillas, died from injuries sustained during a rescue attempt.

Police chief inspector Abelardo Martin was injured in a gunbattle when patrolling Army Scout Rangers rescued him from the Communist New People's Army in the mountains in Quezon province, officials said.

The patrol may have chanced upon the rebels, who had previously agreed to release Mr Martin and another prisoner within weeks, officials added.

After the gunfight, Martin could not be shifted to hospital because of bad weather. He died reportedly from loss of blood.

President Ms Gloria Macapagal Arroyo declared a "suspension of military offensives", - in effect a ceasefire - in Quezon and adjoining Cavite provinces. She hoped "the truce would enable third party emissaries to work with the rebels for the release of the remaining NPA captive.

Officials said it was possible Martin was being moved to meet him with Buan before their release.

Rebels captured Martin in November 1999 after raiding his police station in Dolores town on Luzon island. He was one of two "prisoners of war" the NPA had agreed to release before the resumption of talks between the government and the communist-led National Democratic Front this month.

THE STATESMAN

9 MAR 2001

Philippine seals Estrada's exit

REUTERS
MANILA, MARCH 4

THE Philippines said on Sunday it had ordered police, airports and ports to block any attempt by ousted President Joseph Estrada to leave the country and avoid potential prosecution for allegedly plundering the economy.

Justice Minister Hernando Perez issued the alert following a Supreme Court ruling on Friday dismissing Estrada's claim that he was still the country's legitimate leader and therefore immune from prosecution.

But Perez also said if he were Estrada's lawyer he would advise him to try to escape because the evi-

dence against him was "very strong".

Ombudsman Aniano Desierto said on Saturday it would be decided by Monday whether to file charges against Estrada over a range of alleged offences including bribery, corruption, perjury and economic plunder. Plunder is punishable by death.

The former movie actor, who has repeatedly proclaimed his innocence and said he has no intention of leaving the

Philippines, said he was surprised by Friday's court decision.

"I was a bit shocked because legal luminaries said I had a strong case," Estrada told reporters on southern Mindanao Island, adding it was his right "if I should feel depressed".

The former President, forced from office by a popular revolt in January during his impeachment trial where he faced corruption charges, is currently on southern Mindanao Island helping

his wife campaign for Senate seat in the May legislative elections.

Air Transportation Office chief Anacleto Venturina said his office, as well as all police agencies around the country, had received orders from the Department of Justice "to prevent the departure" of Estrada if he attempted to leave. Perez said in a radio interview all private ports around the country had also been ordered to keep watch for Estrada.

Companies operating chartered flights have also been alerted.

"We have told them that if they allow their aircraft to be used by the former President to escape, that their planes will be impounded upon their return," the Justice Secretary said.



No good-bye now for Estrada
corruption charges, is currently on southern Mindanao Island helping

INDIAN EXPRESS

5 MAR 2001

Court confirms Arroyo appointment

MANILA (PHILIPPINES), MARCH 3. The Philippines Supreme Court voted on Friday to confirm the legitimacy of the President, Ms Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, and to deny her predecessor immunity from criminal prosecution.

The Associate Justice, Mr. Josue Bellosillo, who presided over the deliberation, said the court voted 13-0 to confirm the presidency of Ms Arroyo who was hastily sworn in on Jan. 20 after mass protests forced out Mr. Joseph Estrada from office. The court voted 9-4 to deny Mr. Estrada, who is under investigation for corruption, immunity from prosecution.

The ruling, the subject of speculation and rumors that have kept the nation on edge for weeks, came in response to Mr. Estrada's request last month to declare Ms Arroyo as the acting President. Mr. Estrada said he never signed a resignation letter and claimed a right to the office. But the 68-page Supreme Court ruling said Mr. Estrada effectively quit when he sailed out of the presidential palace grounds on a barge while tens of thousands of protesters outside, angry after months of snowballing corruption allegations, clamoured for his resignation on Jan. 20.

Senior military and police officers had already publicly withdrawn support for him. "There was no turning back the tide," the ruling reads. "The tide had become a tsunami. January 20 turned to be the day of surrender." The ruling cites a Jan. 20 statement by Mr. Estrada that reads: "I leave the palace of our people with gratitude for the opportunities given to me for service to our people." The court said Mr. Estrada



Supporters of the ousted Philippine President, Mr. Joseph Estrada, hold posters of their leader and his wife, Ms Luisa Ejercito, during a picket outside the Supreme Court in Manila on Saturday to protest the court's confirmation of Ms Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo as President. — AP

da has 15 days to appeal the decision.

Prosecutors for the plaintiffs allege Mr. Estrada, with the help of friends and associates, amassed as much as \$300 millions in bribes and kickbacks during his 31 months in office. The Supreme Court ruling also appealed for fairness and calm from the "hooting throng" demanding a conviction of Mr. Estrada. "The call from the majority for instant justice will hit a higher decibel while the

gnashing of teeth of the minority will be more threatening," the ruling reads. "Rights in a democracy are not decided by the mob whose judgment is dictated by rage and not by reason."

In his reaction to the ruling, Mr. Estrada said the Supreme Court may have succumbed to politics and vowed to fight its ruling that stripped him of criminal immunity and affirmed the legitimacy of his successor. "I was stunned", Mr. Estrada said. "The decision

was rushed. I felt that there was strong pressure for the decision to be promulgated in haste."

Mr. Estrada said he will fight the ruling that he said violates the Constitution in favour of "plain and simple military coup or mob rule". "I am not power-hungry, but I want to make it a point that I am defending our Constitution. This will be a legal and historic matter for our country that we will not tolerate a coup or mob rule." — P

Gloria chooses Senator Guingona vice-president

By Harvey Stockwin
The Times of India News Service

HONGKONG: Philippine President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo ended the two-week suspense on Wednesday as she chose Senate minority leader Teofisto Guingona to be her vice-president, a post that has been vacant since her elevation to the presidency on January 20.



Gloria Macapagal

This is the first time that a vice-president has been selected in the Philippines, consequent upon an elected vice-president being unexpectedly elevated to the presidency. Three earlier presidents died in office.

As President Arroyo has all along stipulated, Senator Guingona will hold the post of secretary for foreign affairs concurrently with the vice-presidency. By choosing Guingona now, Ms Arroyo has made it possible for the House of Representatives and the Senate to formally endorse her choice before Congress adjourns in mid-February for the May Congressional election. Mr Guingona, 72, comes from the large southern island of Mindanao and so balances Ms Arroyo whose political base is in the main island of Luzon.

But Ms Arroyo spent much of her childhood in Mindanao and in announcing her choice of Mr Guingona, a son of Mindanao, she emphasised that Mindanao would now be given the importance it deserved. Mindanao has long been the home of a Muslim rebellion and of general lawlessness which has prevented it realising its economic potential.

THE TIMES OF INDIA

8 FEB 2001

ESTRADA FALLS

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E. B. ...
People power Mark II L.R. 6

PEOPLE power has asserted itself once again in the Philippines, with the ouster of President Joseph Estrada. It came just in time to resolve the messy political situation which arose when Estrada's impeachment trial, on charges of graft was abruptly aborted, as the Senate tribunal decided not to open documents crucial to the proceedings, and prosecutors resigned in protest. Prior to this, the trial was going very badly for Estrada, as damning evidence emerged of a secret \$10 million account, consisting allegedly of illegal gambling payoffs, which was operated by the President under a false name "Jose Velarde". At the same time Luis Singson, Governor of the province of Ilocos Sur, testified that he had passed on \$8 million of gambling money to the President over two years. Confronted with such evidence, the Senate voted along politically partisan lines not to examine further evidence, which ignited widespread street protests. People who had played a prominent part in the movement which toppled Marcos in 1986 played active roles once again in organising these protests. When the clergy, the armed forces, ministers and the national police chief added their imprimaturs to the protest, Estrada's fate was sealed.

Although per capita income in the Philippines is more than double India's, it is a poor democracy by Asian standards. The manner in which it handled the political crisis created by Estrada demonstrates both problems and prospects of such societies. What has emerged of Estrada's corruption so far does not appear particularly remarkable by Asian standards, but the Filipino system brought him to trial. When institutions were subverted in order to abort the trial process, people poured out into the streets following a forceful reaction from influential sectors of public life. All this is to the good, particularly because it comes so soon after the Marcos dictatorship, but what should put former Vice-President and now Estrada's successor Gloria Macapagal Arroyo on notice is that the Philippines' poor have by and large stood sullenly by or engaged in counter-demonstrations during the process of Estrada's ouster, with the charismatic movie star still retaining a measure of support among them. Arroyo is a trained economist who has promised to make the eradication of poverty her first priority; she is also opening channels of communication with the nation's Muslim and Communist els. A new opening, at any rate.

THE STATESMAN

29 JAN 2001

Arroyo's defence minister resigns

ASSOCIATED PRESS
MANILA, JAN 28

THE new Philippine president confronted coup rumors by telephoning a general on Thursday, but her defence minister announced his resignation, alleging the national security adviser was corrupt.

Orlando Mercado's defection was a clear blow to Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo's administration, especially since she has made clean government a top priority. Her predecessor, Joseph Estrada, was forced out last week amid allegations that he amassed a fortune in bribes and kickbacks.

Although Mercado had planned to resign by February 12 to run for the Senate in general elections scheduled for May, his decision to go early underscored the country's deep political divisions. He said he was resigning over Macapagal-Arroyo's appointment of Lisandro Abadia as national se-

curity adviser, alleging he was tainted by a military corruption scandal four years ago. In her first news conference since being sworn in Saturday, Macapagal-Arroyo was asked about persistent rumors of a coup, particularly involving Marine Lt. Gen. Edgardo Espinosa.

"Espinosa is an old friend of mine," Macapagal-Arroyo told reporters on live television. "I will call him up right now and ask him."

After an aide with a cellular phone got through to the general, she got on the line and asked: "Are you going to stage a coup against me?" She listened carefully to his response before telling the media that he said the reports were nothing more than imagination. She was upbeat in maintaining that the anti-Estrada street protests - dubbed "people power II" after the 1986 "people power" revolution that toppled Ferdinand Marcos - had strengthened the country's democracy.



AT A GLANCE

INDIAN EXPRESS

29 JAN 2001

People power prevails

JOSEPH ESTRADA is history. The actor has taken his final bow. On January 20, Mr. Estrada was swept out of office by a combination of mass political power and full-throated support to the people on the streets by the military. The Philippines President, elected to office in 1998 by the highest-ever vote, had to leave with four years to go — a shadow of his former self — tainted by grave allegations of corruption.

The Vice-President, Ms. Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, was sworn in amidst thunderous approval from a massive crowd at the Epifanio de los Santos Avenue (EDSA) "shrine" in Manila, the site of the "People Power" revolt in February 1986 against the hated dictator, Ferdinand Marcos. From January 17 onwards, when it became clear that the impeachment trial of Mr. Estrada had been reduced to a farce by Senators loyal to him, the crowds began gathering at the EDSA. While many have argued about the "class composition" of the crowds, there is little doubt that the military acted to desert Mr. Estrada because the people in the streets left them with little choice.

As Ms. Arroyo moves to consolidate her power and appoint new Ministers (she has retained the Defence Secretary, Mr. Orlando Mercado, and the military chief, Gen. Angelo Reyes, who defected with dramatic effect on January 19), the debate on the events leading to Mr. Estrada's ouster continues. Press reports in Manila have spoken of some kind of a "deal" being hammered out by Ms. Arroyo's supporters with the Estrada camp on January 19 that he could continue till Wednesday, January 24. However, the Arroyo camp moved the Supreme Court in the early hours of January 20, and the Court moved swiftly to declare the position of the President "vacant" leading the way to the Vice-President's elevation.

In a statement before leaving the President's palace, Mr. Estrada said he had "strong and serious doubts" about Ms. Arroyo's takeover. "I do not wish to be a factor that will prevent the restoration of unity and order in our civil society," he said, adding that he would "live and die" in the Philippines. It would appear that by "leaving" and not

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Philippines
The new President, Ms. Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, has the right 'academic' credentials but running a country like the Philippines will not be easy, writes AMIT BARUAH.

"resigning", Mr. Estrada hopes to have some bargaining chips vis-a-vis likely prosecution on corruption charges in the weeks and months ahead. Already, Mr. Estrada has been barred from going abroad and his bank accounts frozen. Even if the former President does mount a legal challenge against his ouster, the Courts are unlikely to provide him any relief given the clear ruling of the Supreme Court.

It is clear that the Supreme Court acted in a "hurry", becoming, after the military, a key ally in paving the "constitutional path" to secure

Mr. Estrada's quick departure from office. The Court did not hear Mr. Estrada or his lawyers when they declared the post of President "vacant".

But then, for the thousands of people demonstrating at the EDSA, the end result was what counted — they were able to force the President out. Many have objected to the theory that it was the "Generals" who forced Mr. Estrada out. A newspaper columnist, Ms. Rinci Jimenez-David, put it graphically: "Yes, I wish those danged generals had come out early enough, putting their careers and lives on the line, the

same way humble, ordinary men and women, a majority of them below age 30, risked their careers, studies, income and health to be counted."

"Where were the retired and active generals, now claiming credit for their constitutional coup that they say actually led to Erap's (Mr. Estrada's nickname) ouster... and if they were going to move regardless, why did these generals have to wait and let us spend three tiring days on our feet, shouting ourselves hoarse, subsisting on fish balls and pissing on sidewalks? I mean, what kind of coup it is when you start moving only when everything's over but the shouting?"

There is little doubt that many Filipinos were sick and tired of a President, whose personal life made more news than his Presidential actions. They are happy at having got Ms. Arroyo, but she is beholden to two former Presidents — Ms. Corazon Aquino and Mr. Fidel Ramos — who pitched in to get Mr. Estrada out.

The new President is also in debt to the Roman Catholic Church, which played a key role in getting people together. While few can disagree in principle with the contention that the way out for Mr. Estrada should have been the constitutional one, the events of "People Power-II" hold major lessons for his successors.

Ms. Arroyo is a member of the blue-blooded elite, Mr. Estrada was the quintessential populist politician, who promised to do things for the poor, but could not deliver much.

The President has the right "academic" credentials, but running a country like the Philippines will not be an easy task. The right sounds have been made, but the menace of cronyism and corruption will take a long time to remove.

The crucial issue is: will the new administration adopt the correct approach to these issues or will a new set of cronies replace the old ones? The Filipino people and the rest of South East Asia will be watching closely.

For many in the region, the turmoil in the streets of Manila points to larger turbulence in the region. It will be up to Ms. Arroyo and her team to convince others that change is good for the people and the economy, for democracy and good governance.



Ms. Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo... can she deliver?

Defence jolt for Arroyo

PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER/ANN
& ASSOCIATED PRESS

MANILA, Jan. 25. — Even before finishing filling her Cabinet, President Arroyo got her first defection today when the defence secretary, Mr Orlando Mercado, quit over the appointment of a national security adviser who he said was tainted. Mr Mercado will run for Senate.

"One of the reasons why I resigned is the appointment of Lisandro Abadia as national security adviser," Mr Mercado told AP.

He said Gen Abadia was military chief of staff when officials uncovered a case four years ago involving misuse of billions of pesos in military pension funds.

Mr Mercado's departure is a clear blow to Mrs Arroyo's administration, especially because he is linking it to a military corruption case, while she has made clean government her top priority.

Lt-Gen Edgardo Espinosa and Mr Mercado, who were retained after Mr Estrada's ouster, marched to the Edsa Shrine on 20 January to throw their support behind the people power movement. Their joining the popular movement sealed Mr Estrada's fate.

Meanwhile, a Congressional leader, Mr Pimentel today said Mr Estrada should be banished to remove a possible security threat and allow the nation to rebuild after months of turmoil, adds AFP.

COUP RUMOURS SCOTCHED AT PRESS MEET

MANILA, Jan. 25. — The new Philippine President, Mrs Gloria Macapagal Arroyo, put down rumours of a coup today by calling the General supposedly plotting it and asking him during a news conference: "Are you trying to stage a coup against me?"

Dismissing the question whether Lt-Gen Edgardo Espinosa, a senior officer in the Marine Corps, was unhappy with the new administration, she said: "He's an old friend of mine. Did he say he would stage a coup? I'll call him up right now."

A few minutes later, an aide handed Mrs Arroyo a mobile phone with the General apparently on the other end of the line. In full view of the cameras and scores of reporters, she asked Gen Espinosa if he was plotting against her.

After saying "Oh, oh" a few times, the President said: "He says it's beyond his imagination."

Mrs Arroyo was sworn in last Saturday and newspapers have talked of several supporters of her predecessor, Mr Joseph Estrada, aligning with disgruntled elements in the military to overthrow her government.

— Reuters

THE STATESMAN

25 JAN 2001

Estrada barred from leaving country

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PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER
ASIA NEWS NETWORK

MANILA, Jan. 23. — The Philippine government today barred Mr Joseph Estrada from leaving the country and ordered that his bank accounts be frozen.

Mr Estrada admitted today that he owned a dollar account with Citibank which he maintained with his wife, Mrs Luisa Ejercito. But he said that it was funded legally.

In a radio report, Mr Estrada was quoted as saying that he was allowing the bank to reveal information about the account to prove its legitimacy.

He said records would show that he opened the dollar account with Citibank in Greenhills in 1985 and that the funds came from his earnings as a movie actor and producer.

He said he converted his

income into dollars since the foreign exchange rate was more manageable at that time.

Members of the Sanlakas, a militant group, today picketed branches of Citibank and Equitable PCI Bank in San Juan to block attempts by Mr Estrada and his representatives to withdraw money from his accounts. They claim that these constitute a part of his hidden wealth.

Arriving in Mr Estrada's home district a little before noon, activists blocked the doors of the banks, singing "Erap is a thief" to the tune of a Filipino folk song, adds AFP. "Erap", the Filipino word for friends spelt backwards, is Mr Estrada's nickname.

Protesters held placards which read: "Erap, Return the People's Money." They handed over to the bank guards a mock court order for the deposits of "Jose Velarde," the alias,

prosecutors said, Mr Estrada used.

President Ms Gloria Arroyo's spokesman, Mr Renato Corona had told reporters that shortly before he left the Malacanang Palace on Saturday, Mr Estrada pleaded that he be allowed to keep his wealth. He also tried to broker a deal protecting him from criminal charges.

The demand was rejected with Ms Arroyo's camp stressing that he was in no position to ask for concessions, he said.

Prosecutors launched criminal proceedings on Monday against Mr Estrada and his cronies, and took steps to prevent him from fleeing the country while they studied several possible charges, including an offence of plunder which is punishable by death.

Sources close to Mr Estrada told reporters: "If there are any changes in the figures (his

earnings), that's because of the interest earned by the deposits. He was then an action (movie) star when he opened that account. It was a joint account of Erap and the First Lady". "He didn't touch that so it really went up because of the interest," they said.

A senior Citibank official testified at the trial earlier this month that Mrs Luisa Ejercito also had an account at the bank. She was investigated for possible money laundering when she deposited an eight-million-peso (\$ 160,000) check in 1999, he said.

Meanwhile Mr Estrada, who remained holed up in his San Juan mansion today, "is expecting healing and reconciliation," sources said.

A military-backed popular uprising forced Estrada from power last weekend as hundreds of thousands of people took to the streets.

THE STATESMAN

24 JAN 2001

11-10
25/1

Exit Estrada

56
Rising

The Philippines has staged a second revolution through people power: President Joseph Estrada has had to flee, faced with a large assembly of angry people outside his palace calling for his resignation. Others like Cardinal Jaime Sin, Mr Estrada's vice-president and many cabinet officials came out openly against the president. Earlier, Mr Estrada had lost the support of his generals as well as the police chief. All this left him with no alternative. The supreme court has since declared the presidency vacant and vice-president Gloria Macapagal Arroyo has been sworn in as the new president. After the 1986 takeover of presidency by Corazon Aquino this is the second time a woman has swept into office on the strength of popular uprising. In this respect, the Philippines has set a precedent in all of South East Asia. Though popular anger and street power forced President Suharto out of power, he managed to hand over office to a crony of his, vice-president Habibbi, and escaped punishment for his misdeeds. Mr Estrada is now being investigated for his corruption. Mr Estrada is a former action movie star who cashed in on his popularity to get elected much like Ronald Reagan, M G Ramachandran and Jayalalitha. He was immensely popular, especially among the poor and the slum-dwellers. However, two years into office, reports surfaced of his linkages with casinos and his making millions of dollars through bribes. His former drinking companion and partner in all these misdeeds came out with detailed revelations as did a mistress of his. Still he chose to deny the charges and attempted to brazen it out. The lower house of the legislature which examined the charges voted to impeach him and sent the case for trial to the 22-member senate.

Mr Estrada evidently thought that he could frustrate the impeachment by buying off the senators, a two-thirds majority of whom was required to find the president guilty to remove him from office. He managed to get 11 of the senators to vote against calling for the bank accounts he held under different names on the specious plea of inviolable privacy of bank records. This despite a bank employee's testimony that Mr Estrada had issued cheques under assumed names. Unfortunately for Mr Estrada, the senate vote of 11-10 against opening bank records led to the resignation of entire prosecution staff and exploded in huge street demonstrations. Mr Estrada's offer to hold fresh elections, cutting short his full term, was of no avail and once the army and the police came out against him, his fate was sealed. His successor, who deserted him a year ago protesting against his corruption, is the daughter of an earlier president. She will complete the remaining term of two and half years and is eligible to stand again for election. This is the second time the people of the Philippines have acted to oust a corrupt leader through a peaceful revolution. Revolutions happen when the instrumentalities of the state — army, police and bureaucracy — switch over from the ruler to his opposition. A salute is in order for the people of the Philippines, its political leaders and its army and police forces for carrying out this bloodless revolution.

THE TIMES OF INDIA

25 JAN 2001

People's power again

FEW TEARS will be shed over the ouster of Philippines President Joseph Estrada. He had tried desperately to cling to power despite the corruption trial. But it was finally yet another demonstration of 'People Power' which toppled him in a replay of what had happened to Ferdinand Marcos in 1986. Estrada, the movie actor-turned-politician, proved to be a poor student of history. He had refused to learn any lesson from the ignominious end of the Marcos era. True, Estrada retained some of his popularity till the end but that was only because of his celluloid fame. The people of the Philippines had reasons to be indignant about the way he sought to cover up his crime, riding roughshod over a pliant Parliament. However, the more he tried to shield his wrongdoing, the louder grew the demand for his ouster. A time came when his own ministers and the military openly defied him. And yet, Estrada refused to see the writing on the wall.

But when tens of thousands of people, including two former Presidents and senior religious leaders, held a huge demonstration against him, Estrada reluctantly handed over power to Vice-President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo. Southeast Asian countries have generally been known for their tolerance for institutionalised corruption. But even by such standards, the charges against Estrada were shocking. He was charged with corruption, bribery, betrayal of public trust and violation of the Constitution for accepting nearly \$ 12 million in kickbacks from illegal gambling operators and for other misdemeanours.

Estrada's tragedy may prove to be the Philippines' triumph. Democracy in the country may still be fragile, but the success of the anti-authoritarian and anti-corruption crusades has set an example to the rest of the region. It may be recalled that students' protests in South Korea had brought about the downfall of an authoritarian system there. Two former Presidents were brought to justice for abusing power. Similarly, the campus-based movement forced the ouster of the Suharto regime in Indonesia in 1998. Even in Myanmar, the pro-democracy movement nearly ousted the military junta a decade ago. After its long tryst with authoritarianism, the region is today enjoying a democratic renaissance. Old style leaders will ignore the underlying message from the developments in the Philippines at their peril.

THE HINDUSTAN

24 JAN 2001

RE-ENACTING 'PEOPLE POWER'

A JUDICIOUS INTERVENTION by the Supreme Court in the Philippines has rescued this South East Asian state from the portents of a violent overthrow or even a non-constitutional and chaotic dismissal of a one-time, democratically-elected leader who in recent months managed to squander the goodwill of his people. In the face of a tumultuous civilian revolt against him on the streets of Manila, Mr. Joseph Estrada accepted the judicial decision that his post as President was deemed vacant following the extraordinary action of most of his ministers as also the chiefs of the military and other security services to dissociate themselves from his crumbling administration. In the event, Mr. Estrada did not formally resign. In a false show of bravado, he chose to dispute the constitutionality of the circumstances in which Ms. Gloria Macapagal Arroyo, Vice-President under his regime, quickly assumed power as the chief executive. At least for the moment, the extenuating realities of his bizarre exit from power seem to have spared him the ultimate ignominy of being equated with Ferdinand Marcos, tyrant who was forced out of office in an amazing affirmation of 'people power' by the Filipinos in 1986.

Mr. Estrada, a matinee idol-turned-politician, has now been shown the rear door of the Malacanang presidential palace in the climactic scene of what has been hailed as the re-enactment of a real-life drama of the Filipino 'people power'. His disgrace is poignant by the standards of eviction of arrogant leaders. Marcos had, by the time of his fall, become a byword for a degenerate ruler, whereas the same cannot be said of Mr. Estrada in similar measure. At the time of the absolute dissolution of his presidential authority, Mr. Estrada arguably retained much of his popularity among the poor and gullible masses who had catapulted him to the highest office. Until the court pronounced its verdict on Saturday, Mr. Estrada resorted to ev-

ery trick in the political book to try and outwit the elite classes and the high clergy, who for the most part had raised the revolt against his perceived corrupt rule to a frenzied crescendo. The ordinary people too joined the chorus in a show of solidarity with the traditional political elite. Their sense of outrage was traceable almost entirely to Mr. Estrada's transparent attempt at a foolish cover-up aimed at preventing the Senate from viewing an accumulated mass of suspected evidence against him.

When Mr. Estrada vowed to clear his name before the Senate, sitting as the trial court following his impeachment by the House of Representatives over a scandal concerning alleged gambling-payoffs to him as also an 'embezzlement' of tobacco-tax revenues by him, it appeared fair that he should be given the chance. Yet, as the trial collapsed due to a blatant voting by his supporters in the Senate that blocked any scrutiny of the prime records in question, the angst against him assumed uncontrollable proportions. During his 30-odd months in office, Mr. Estrada had failed to improve a sagging economy and remained clueless about how to manage an Islamic insurgency in the largely Roman Catholic nation. Yet, he will be remembered for a single-minded foreign policy action which itself marked a reversal of his earlier position — the eventual ratification by the Filipino Senate of the Visiting Forces Agreement with the U.S. This signalled the possibility of the Philippines gravitating towards the U.S. in the context of an earlier 'estrangement' over the Subic Bay bases issue. It is not without significance that the U.S. has promptly welcomed Ms. Arroyo's constitutional assumption of office. On a different plane, it is too early to judge whether the Filipino denouement can serve as a wake-up call for the other struggling 'democracies' in the disparate South East Asian region.

THE HINDU

22 JAN 2001

GLORIA IS NEW PRESIDENT

REVOLT IN THE PHILIPPINES

Manila, Jan. 20: Ms Gloria Macapagal Arroyo fought back tears as she was sworn in as the Philippines' 14th President on Saturday and said she was taking office with a sense of awe at what people power had achieved.

Ms Arroyo, 53, was sworn in by chief justice Hilario Davide outside the EDSA shrine, a church where hundreds of thousands have gathered over the past two days demanding the ouster of disgraced Joseph Estrada.

The military, the national police and most of his Cabinet deserted Mr Estrada on Friday and he resigned on Saturday, paving the way for Ms Arroyo to ascend from the vice-presidency.

"I accept the privilege and responsibility to act as president of the republic... with both a sense of trepidation and awe. (It's) a time to heal and a time to build. The task is formidable," Ms Arroyo said.

Speaking without a podium as Senate President Aquilino Pimentel held a microphone in front of her, Ms Arroyo fought back tears several times.

"As we break from the past in our quest for a new Philippines, the unity, the Filipino's sense of history and his unshakeable faith in the almighty (and) EDSA 86 and EDSA 2001 will continue to guide us."

Ms Arroyo said that her first task would be to remove poverty, change the patronage style of politics exemplified by Mr Joseph Estrada and bring transparency and a level playing field in business.

President Gloria Arroyo later told reporters of the country that there was no agreement on what would happen to Mr Joseph Estrada but that the law of the country would take its course. (Reuters)



GLORIOUS BEGINNING: Ms Gloria Arroyo waves to the crowd after being sworn in as the new President of the Philippines at Manila on Saturday. (Reuters)



GOODBYE: Former Philippines President Joseph Estrada and his daughter Jackie before leaving the Manila Presidential Palace on Saturday. (AP)

Estradas leave palace on barge

Manila, Jan. 20: Meanwhile Former Philippines President Joseph Estrada and his family left the Malacanang Palace on a barge on river located behind the presidential office on Saturday. Forcing a smile, Mr Estrada said "Salamat!" or "Thank You" in Filipino. His wife was smiling while his son was teary eyed, witnesses said. Meanwhile, the US embassy on Saturday welcomed the appointment of the new President of the Philippines Gloria Macapagal Arroyo.

"We have had an exceptionally strong working relationship with new President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo in the past, and are looking forward to working with her to strengthen US-Philippine

relations even further," the US embassy said in a statement. "We are pleased to join the new President in our common efforts to enhance these ties."

The embassy also said the United States was pleased the presidential crisis in the country had been resolved without violence and in accordance with democratic and constitutional procedures.

Back in the Presidential palace there had been some fear of bloodshed.

But by the time Mr Estrada left the grounds for the last time on Saturday, the casualty list amounted to nothing more than a few cuts and bruises after some brief skirmishing between opposing camps. (Reuters)

Estrada out, Arroyo in

REUTERS

MANILA, Jan. 20. — The Vice-President, Ms Gloria Macapagal Arroyo, was today sworn in as the new Philippine President after a disgraced Mr Joseph Estrada accepted a Supreme Court order stripping him of his title.

Ms Arroyo choked back the tears as she took her oath of office before thousands of supporters at the Edsa Shrine in Manila, the stage of the 1986 "people power" revolt that toppled Mr Ferdinand Marcos.

"The Filipino has done it again on the hallowed ground of Edsa," she told the crowd, praising the "people power two" that helped sweep her into office.

"I accept the privilege and responsibility to act as the President of the republic," she said. "I do so with a sense of trepidation and awe."

Mr Estrada's position was severely weakened yesterday when the military and police withdrew their support and shifted allegiance to Ms Arroyo. Most of his Cabinet members also resigned and sided with the protesters.

Observers said it was people power in reverse. In 1986, rebel soldiers moved first against Mr Marcos, and then the civilians acted. Last week, civilians erupted in protest, and the soldiers followed.

Mr Estrada and his family left the presidential palace by the river barge two hours af-

ter Ms Arroyo was sworn in. Appearing worn down, Mr Estrada and Mrs Luisa Estrada had a last encounter with journalists. Reporters fought to catch a last glimpse of the Estradas. Estrada's son, Jinggoy, appeared to be holding back tears.

Forcing a smile, Mr Estrada said "*salamat*" (thank you) and gave a final salute to his

guards.

Earlier, he said he had "strong and serious doubts" about the constitutionality of Ms Arroyo's appointment, but said he would leave for the good of the country. "I don't wish to be a factor that will prevent the restoration of unity and order in our civil society," he said.

The news of Mr Estrada's

downfall came soon after thousands of protesters had surged towards the presidential palace, where Mr Estrada has been holed up, demanding his resignation.

The protests had been mostly peaceful, but in a final push through barricades and police, some protesters were bloodied. Presidential security forces had warned of bloodshed if the protesters were to storm the palace.

Ms Arroyo, the daughter of a former President, thanked many people for helping her to power, including the former President Mr Corazon Aquino — who led the 1986 uprising against Mr Marcos.

She also thanked the former President, Mr Fidel Ramos and Roman Catholic Archbishop of Manila, Cardinal Jaime Sin, who was a key organiser of the Edsa protests in 1986 and again now.

Sin played a major role in the campaign to oust Mr Estrada and is an adviser to Ms Arroyo.

US support: Ms Arroyo's swearing-in and Mr Estrada's departure brought to a head five days of protests following a controversial Senate vote on Tuesday to suppress supposed crucial evidence in Mr Estrada's impeachment trial.

The US embassy in Manila welcomed Ms Arroyo's appointment. "We have had an exceptionally strong working relationship with new Presi-

dent Gloria Macapagal Arroyo in the past, and are looking forward to working with her to strengthen US-Philippine relations even further," the embassy said in a statement.

Mr Estrada, true to his word, had not resigned from office but was stripped of power by a supreme court ruling.

But the deposed President declared to local television that he "will live and die in this country" rather than flee overseas as had been suggested.

Controversial president: In the impeachment hearings, Mr Estrada faced removal from office if convicted of any one of the charges against him — corruption, bribery, betrayal of public trust and culpable violation of the constitution. He pleaded not guilty to all charges.

Prone to controversy since he became the 13th President of the country in 1998, Mr Estrada was opposed by the Church which was mortified a man who has owned up to womanising, gambling, drinking binges and fathering several children out of wedlock should be elected President.

His movie star past and upfront personality helped win him massive support, especially among the nation's poor, but he was never accepted by the political elite.

A PETITE WOMAN WITH BIG IDEAS



Ms Gloria Arroyo

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

MANILA, Jan. 20. — Ms Gloria Arroyo, the new Philippine President, is a petite convent-bred economist with ambitious goals.

The 53-year-old daughter of a former President was sworn in today.

Ms Arroyo will have to race to achieve her key goals of eradicating poverty and

wiping out graft, a scourge which Mr Joseph Estrada was charged with and which led to his fall from grace today.

She will serve out the remaining three-and-a-half year of Mr Estrada's six-year term. After that, an election will decide the next President.

"I feel god put me in this point of our history and there is hard work ahead," the US-educated economist told a news conference after being sworn in by the Supreme Court chief justice, Mr Hilario Davide, at a Christian shrine where thousands of Filipinos had been staging rallies calling for Mr Estrada's ouster.

Ms Arroyo has vowed to wipe out corruption in the presidency but promised there would be no witch-hunt. She said she would push four "core" goals, with a priority on eradicating poverty within this decade.

THE STATESMAN

21 JAN 2001

Estrada's govt crumbles under people power

SE Asia Philippines (11) SFH 20/1

THE PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER
ASIA NEWS NETWORK

MANILA, Jan. 19. — Philippine President Mr Joseph Estrada's embattled government crumbled today after heads of the country's armed forces, top ministers, the national police chief and the clergy joined the 'people power' street protests demanding his resignation.

Mr Estrada — whose impeachment trial on corruption charges has brought the worst political turmoil to the country since the 1986 'people power' protests that toppled dictator Ferdinand Marcos — tried to dig in earlier today and made no offer to resign in a televised address. Instead, he called for snap polls with the promise that he wouldn't contest.

While the Opposition rejected the offer and set him a dawn deadline to quit, the Vice-President, Ms Gloria Arroyo, declared herself the "new commander-in-chief". She too rejected Mr Estrada's proposal, saying he "has not only lost the moral authority to govern, but now has no government."

The President and his family will be allowed to "exit with dignity", said armed forces chief, Gen Angelo Reyes. To cheers from some 250,000 people protesting in central Manila, he announced that the military had withdrawn support to Mr Estrada and was backing Ms Arroyo. Other top generals and ministers joined the rally at EDSA Shrine, focus of the 1986 anti-Marcos



An Estrada fan spikes the poster of Cardinal Jaime Sin, who called for the President's resignation. Scuffles broke out in Manila between pro- and anti-Estrada groups earlier on Friday before the stir gained strength. — AP/PTI

protests. Estrada loyalist and defence secretary, Mr Orlando Mercado, told the gathering: "Our presence here manifests the need for change."

Former President Mrs Corazon Aquino urged the crowd, which held a candle-lit rally at night, to "come back here tomorrow" and "keep coming here as long as Estrada doesn't step down".

Reports swirled that Mr Estrada might flee. Four armoured personnel carriers entered the presidential palace grounds in the evening, supposedly to provide him security, but left within minutes.

Jets are waiting at Villamor Air Base. Immigration officials have been told to prepare the process for the departure of 'some people', reports AP.

A filmstar-turned-politician, Mr Estrada faces charges of taking bribes from illegal gambling bosses, siphoning funds and protecting a friend involved in an insider trading scandal. But Senators trying him voted along party lines to suppress evidence, allegedly over a hidden bank account he used to stash \$66 million. The trial was adjourned when prosecutors resigned en masse in protest.

THE STATESMAN

20 JAN 2001

Armed forces revolt against Estrada

By Amit Baruah

SINGAPORE, JAN. 19. The Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) led by Gen. Angelo Reyes, today revolted against the President, Mr. Joseph Estrada, making the position of their "supreme commander" untenable.

In a day of surprising and fast-paced developments, Gen. Reyes and the Defence Minister, Mr. Orlando Mercado, joined hundreds of thousands of protesters at the EDSA shrine in Manila — the site of the "people power" revolt in 1986 against the then President, Ferdinand Marcos.

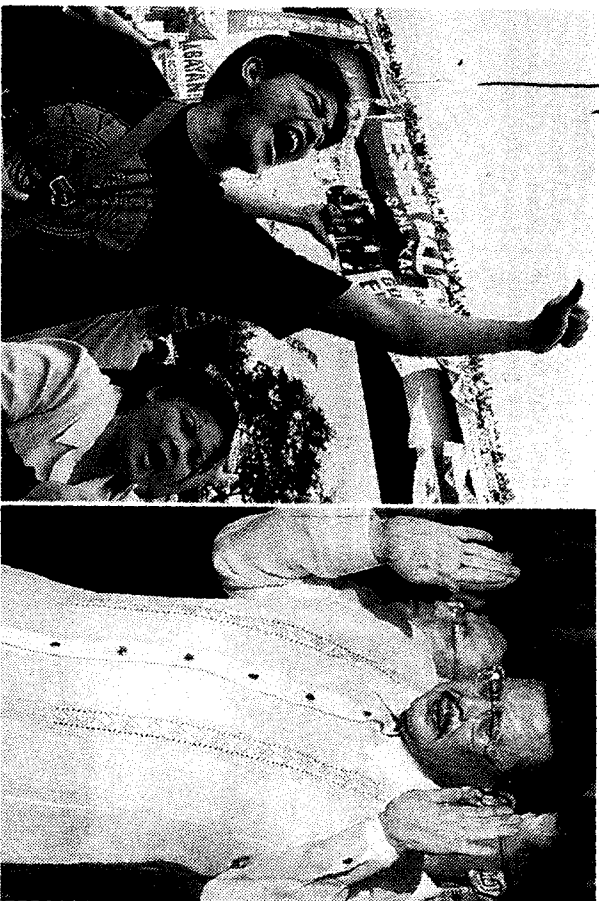
The parallel between the joint action of the then military chief, Mr. Fidel Ramos, and the Defence Minister, Mr. Juan Ponce Enrile, in February 1986, against Marcos for tampering with election results, is not to be missed.

By joining the demonstrators and telling the press later that the AFP had withdrawn support to the President, Gen. Reyes put Mr. Estrada in a position where his options were severely limited. He can play for time, but is certain to go.

"On behalf of your armed forces, the 130,000-strong members of the armed forces, we wish to announce that we are withdrawing our support to this Government," Gen. Reyes announced.

"We are allowing President Estrada and his family to exit with dignity. Let us not be vindictive," the General said, making it clear that an "exit policy" was being worked out for Mr. Estrada, whose impeachment trial came to a halt on Thursday after pro-Estrada Senators blocked the opening of key bank documents.

Under the Philippine Constitution, in case the President resigns or is unable to finish his term, the Vice-President (Mrs. Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo) will take over of



Flashing thumbs down signs, tens of thousands of anti-Estrada protesters shout "resign" during a massive rally in suburban Mandaluyong, east of Manila, on Friday. At right is the beleaguered President, Mr. Joseph Estrada. — AP

Mr. Estrada, who was in a celebratory mood after the Senators voted 11 to 10 on Tuesday to block access to bank papers, changed his mind and offered to provide the bank details to the Senate trial. It appeared to be a case of too little, too late.

By voting as they did, the pro-Estrada Senators have triggered the action by the armed forces. While the pros and cons of the military's actions will be the subject matter of debate, it is clear that in the long run the institutions of Filipino democracy have suffered once again.

By joining hands with the demonstrators

1986, Mr. Fidel Ramos, who became President in May 1992, had openly called for the military to act against Mr. Estrada a couple of days ago.

In a full-page newspaper advertisement which appeared today, 60 retired military officers — half of them Generals — called for the President's resignation.

"Even if President Estrada is acquitted, because he has the numbers (in the Senate trial)...we are still convinced of the need for the President to resign," the advertisement read.

That Gen. Reyes, as the head of the armed forces, was not alone in his action became clear when the Air Force and Navy commanders, also appeared before cheering crowds at the EDSA shrine.

The impeachment trial of Mr. Estrada, which related to allegations that he had accepted \$8.6 million in bribes from illegal gambling proceeds, got under way in December.

With the Chief Justice, Mr. Hilario Davide Jr., presiding over the trial in the 22-member Senate, sensational testimony came to light. A prosecution witness and senior bank official revealed that Mr. Estrada signed before her in a false name on an account which reportedly contained millions of dollars.

While the possibility of Mr. Estrada being acquitted (he needed eight votes to continue in office) was always real, matters came to a head when Senators loyal to him voted to block access to the bank account about which the bank official had given details.

Prior to Tuesday, the public protests had continued apace with the trial. But after the mass resignation of all 11 prosecutors in the impeachment trial, it was clear that the democratic process had run its course.

Estrada playing for time

By Amit Baruah

SINGAPORE, JAN. 19. The Philippines President, Mr. Joseph Estrada, is in grave danger of being ejected from office after being shown the door by the powerful military and almost his entire team of Ministers, as massive street protests continued.

Striking a defiant note, the President, however, announced fresh Presidential elections for May and said he would hand over power to an elected successor after the polls, where he would not be a candidate.

The President's announcement was immediately rejected by the Opposition, with a spokesman claiming that Mr. Estrada had been given until Saturday morning to quit or demonstrators would march to the Presidential palace. Mr. Estrada, who spoke on television, appeared to be playing for time.

The Opposition, after the day's dramatic developments, firmly believes that the President's resignation is only a matter of time. For his part, Mr. Estrada wants to ensure that power is not transferred to the Vice-President, Ms. Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo.

In her response, Ms. Arroyo said in Manila: "We reject in no uncertain terms the offer of President Estrada to hold a snap election for lack of constitutional basis." Ms. Arroyo, who will take over in case the President does resign, said Mr. Estrada "not only has lost moral authority to govern but now has no Government in the face of mass resignations of his cabinet and withdrawal of support from the military".

Prosecutors in Estrada trial resign

By Amit Baruah

SINGAPORE, JAN. 17. The impeachment trial of the Philippines President, Mr. Joseph Estrada, was adjourned today by the presiding judge as all 11 prosecutors resigned from their jobs and street protests against yesterday's Senate vote mounted.

The entire impeachment process, which had been proceeding smoothly since December 7, was disrupted yesterday when the Senate, whose members are sitting as judges in the trial of Mr. Estrada, voted by 11 votes to 10 to block access to a crucial bank account. The crucial bank account held in the name of Mr. Jose Velarde, a key prosecution witness testified earlier, actually belonged to the President. Consequently, prosecutors have argued that details of the account must be made known for trial purposes.

The 22-member Senate vote, several analysts have argued, shows that the Upper

House will vote to acquit Mr. Estrada. A two-thirds majority is required in the Senate to eject the President from office — it is now clear that Mr. Estrada has three more Senators than the required eight to ensure that he continues in office (one Senator is sick and did not vote). It would appear that the trial process is, in a sense, over for the Opposition, which will now prefer to put pressure on the President on the streets. It is still not clear whether these protests will involve ordinary people or will remain confined to the middle and upper classes, who have been leading the charge against the President.

As the trial process halted in its tracks today with the resignation of the prosecutors, the presiding judge, the country's Chief Justice, Mr. Hilario Davide, said: "The trial is adjourned until the court shall receive the action one way or the other by the House of Representatives on the mo-

tion of withdrawal of appearance by the public prosecutors." It was a day of furious activity as anti-Estrada forces took to the streets both in the capital Manila and other key cities against the Senate vote.

The leader of the Roman Catholic Church, Cardinal Jaime Sin, a crucial actor in the "people power" protests against the late dictator, Ferdinand Marcos, called for further protests against Mr. Estrada. "Under these circumstances, we see the continuance of the trial as an exercise in futility and a mockery of the truth," the Cardinal was quoted as saying in Manila. "We cannot be blamed any more if we take the pursuit of truth to other venues and use other ways of intensified non-violent forms of public protest, including even civil disobedience," the Catholic leader said.

The country's markets too have responded badly to the Senate vote and the consequent public protests, which by all

accounts, are likely to continue. For his part, the President has appealed for calm. "Just like in any important trial...you win some, you lose some."

"Let us be calm and pray for unity and guidance so that there will be no violence or other events that will not be good for the unity and peace of our nation," Mr. Estrada said in a statement. His opponent, the Vice-President, Ms. Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, alleged that a conspiracy had been hatched to take over the Government, but gave no indication of those behind such a "plot".

It may be recalled that the President had been accused of receiving about \$8.6 million in illegal gambling pay-offs by a provincial Governor and one-time friend, Mr. Luis Singson. The allegations led to the Senate trial after the Lower House of Representatives voted to impeach the President.

S. B. Asin
Philippines

THE HINDU

18 JAN 2001

Philippine Governor stands by charges

REUTERS

MANILA, Jan. 3. — Philippine's provincial Governor, Mr Luis Singson, stood firm by his allegations that he had funneled millions of dollars in gambling payoffs to the President under cross examination at Mr Estrada's impeachment trial today.

Mr Singson and the chief defence lawyer, Mr Estelito Mendoza, traded testy remarks during the cross-examination, but the governor was not shaken from his testimony that collections mostly in 1,000 Peso bills were either deposited in banks or handed over to the President over a two-year period.

"The net collection that went to Mr Estrada was 400 million Pesos (\$ 8 million)," Mr Singson said.

At one point, Mr Mendoza asked the Governor not to keep naming Mr Estrada when the question was unrelated to the President.

But Mr Singson replied: "He is the one starring here and so I have to mention President Estrada's name".

The Governor had triggered

ESTRADA CONFIDENT

MANILA, Jan. 3. — Philippine President Joseph Estrada said today that he would emerge victorious from the Senate impeachment trial because his supporters were praying for him.

He alleged that there was a conspiracy against him.

"It's obvious these people (in the opposition) are conspiring," Estrada told reporters.

"... But I know many people are praying for me... That's why I believe I will emerge victorious in this fight," he said. — Reuters

the impeachment trial and plunged the country into political turmoil, when he said in October that he had personally handed the President about 400 million Pesos in payoffs from gambling lords running underground lotteries called "jueteng".

The trial resumed on Tuesday after a holiday recess and a spate of bombings in Manila at the weekend, which killed 16 people and wounded more than 100.

Some opposition politicians have said the bombings were carried out by Mr Estrada's supporters in an attempt to halt the trial.

Mr Joseph Estrada and his aides have denied the charges.

Local financial markets were quiet today after sharp falls yesterday in reaction to the bombings.

The Peso had plunged to an all-time low of 52 to the dollar yesterday, while the stock market, virtually deserted by foreign players, lost more than three per cent.

Today, the stock market closed flat while the peso was holding at around 51 to the dollar in late trade.

He had also said he gave Mr Joseph Estrada 130 million Pesos representing excise taxes intended for tobacco farmers.

Mr Luis Singson's testimony and statements in court by senior officials of Equitable-PCI ban that Estrada was keeping a secret bank account under an alias have intensified calls from the Church and business groups for him to resign, and save the country from the trauma of a protracted trial.

THE STATESMAN

4 199 2001

Estrada trial resumes, key witness fears for her life

AGENCE FRANCE PRESSE
MANILA, JAN 2

PHILIPPINE President
Joseph Estrada's landmark corruption trial resumed today amid fresh tension following a series of deadly weekend bombings that rocked Manila and sent local markets reeling.

The hearing continued with prosecutors wrapping up questioning of a senior bank executive whose devastating evidence had gripped the trial before it halted for Christmas.

Equitable PCI Bank senior vice-president Clarissa Ocampo had told the Senate tribunal she saw Estrada repeatedly sign documents to a 500 million Peso (9.6 million dollar) trust account under a false name.

Estrada's lawyers however refused today to cross examine Campo, whose testimony they claimed was immaterial to corruption and other charges faced by the



president.

Prosecutors contend that the money in the trust account was used to hide illegally-acquired wealth, including millions from a protection racket against illegal gambling Estrada supposedly set up. They also submitted officially-certified copies of Estrada's statements of assets and liabilities which showed that president's declared wealth could not support funds of the amount deposited in the account.

However Supreme Court

Chief Justice Hilario Davide, the presiding officer of the court, today upheld his ruling that prosecutors had nonetheless to prove the money in the trust account was acquired illegally.

If convicted by the Senate, Estrada would automatically be removed from office.

Meanwhile, Ocampo said she decided to testify against the President because she was "afraid of my life and the security of my family."

Prosecution lawyers had earlier rushed to obtain her testimony in the belief this would afford her protection. However, asked at the Senate trial if she still feared for her life, she replies, "Yes, of course, I do."

When asked why she was afraid, she said, "because this is the government, this is Malacanang (the presidential palace)."

"Especially after bombings, I was really very concerned," she said.

INDIAN EXPRESS

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