

Impeachment move declared void

By P. S. Suryanarayana

SINGAPORE, NOV. 10. The escalating crisis in the Philippines over the latest move by some Congressmen to impeach the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court took a new turn today.

While the Supreme Court itself held that the impeachment drive was 'unconstitutional', the President, Gloria Macapagal Arroyo, extended her "full and whole-hearted support" to the intervention by the country's apex judicial authority.

The Chief Justice, Hilario Davide Jr., is sought to be arraigned by the Congress on the basis of allegations that he had misused state funds to buy cars, houses and office furnishings for himself and other senior judges.

He has denied wrong-doing. In characterising the impeachment attempt as a step against the Constitution, in letter and spirit, the judges of the Supreme Court took the unanimous line that there was no

room for multiple complaints against the same officer of state in the same year.

On this score, the current move against the Chief Justice became untenable for the reason that it was the second of its kind concerning him within a year, it was held.

However, even as the crisis remained unresolved today, despite some late-night indications that the House of Representatives might after all consider dropping the impeachment move, the President maintained that she was not taking sides with the Chief Justice and the Supreme Court against the Congress.

She would have to abide by the Supreme Court's rulings under the Constitution, and she had earlier sent a draft 'covenant' to the House of Representatives, suggesting that the issue be sorted out on the basis of national interest. For the Filipinos, the impeachment move has only complicated an already complex situation.

Manila airport battle ends with two deaths

PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER/ ANN

MANILA, Nov. 8. — Police shot dead the Philippines' former top aviation regulator and another gunman some three hours after they seized the Manila airport control tower early today, claiming they wanted to expose government corruption.

Panfilo Villaruel, head of Philippine Air Transportation Office in the 1990's, was killed with one of his companions after aviation police stormed the tower at 3 a.m. and took control about 30 minutes later. The duo were strapped with explosives and armed with guns and grenades, security officials said after removing the bodies after a bloody gun battle.

The attack came amid fears of a possible military coup as President Mrs Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo faced a constitutional crisis following moves by Opposition legislators to impeach Supreme Court Chief Justice Mr Hilario Davide. But the President

DYING ON AIR...

MANILA, Nov. 8. — Filipino radio listeners heard a bizarre drama on air today as a radio station, carrying a live interview with Villaruel, continued broadcasting even as police stormed the airport control tower and shot him dead.

"We're being murdered here, my friend. I surrender! I surrender!" the former air transportation office chief screamed in a telephone call to DZBB radio here as a police assault squad broke down the door atop the tower. A short burst of gunfire was heard, followed by laboured breathing. Then, there was only silence. — PDI/ANN

appeared on national TV to allay fears, saying the incident was not an attempt to grab power and the Philippines was secure. She, however, said police and military would remain on "maximum alert".

THE STATESMAN

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MIXED MOTIVES

S. B. Arroyo
Philippines
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THE PEOPLE OF the Philippines were apparently not surprised when their President, Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, reversed an earlier decision and declared her candidacy for the May 2004 election. The rest of the world might have lauded the motives, cited by Ms. Arroyo in a speech last December, for her decision to retire from politics at the end of her term. She wanted to devote the rest of her term to the tasks of uniting and leading her people. The cynicism with which the Filipinos responded to this announcement has been validated. They knew better than people outside the country that there were several factors that would impel Ms. Arroyo to enter the electoral fray. A desire for personal fulfilment seems a leading factor. Ms. Arroyo was pitch-forked into the Presidency in the wake of a popular uprising against former President Joseph Estrada; the military's nod for Mr. Estrada's ouster had reduced his options before the Philippines Supreme Court finally ended the constitutional crisis by declaring the Presidency vacant. Ms. Arroyo's term in office has always been clouded by the public perception that she became President less on merit than through fortuitous circumstances. She has to make a bid to enter office with the backing of the people's mandate if she is to establish her political credentials.

It is not clear whether Ms. Arroyo set aside her intent to seek political sanyas on grounds of high political principle or out of self-interest. Allegations of corruption have been levelled against her husband and son. Ms. Arroyo promised to cooperate with the agencies investigating these charges. However, she has not been able to erase the impression that she wants to cling on to power to protect her relatives. The suspicion that the public has on this score is likely to affect Ms. Arroyo's capacity to deliver

the principled leadership she has promised. The cultivation of a principled democratic leadership is essential for the Philippines, which was ruled by a corrupt dictator till 1986 and has suffered several attempted military take-overs since then. By most accounts, Ms. Arroyo has not been able to ensure corruption-free governance. But she still represents an attractive alternative to some of the more unsavoury characters who are likely to challenge her at the polls; among the potential challengers is former soldier of fortune and current Senator Gregorio "Gringo" Honasan, who has been involved in nearly every coup attempt since 1986.

The manner in which Ms. Arroyo proclaimed her candidature has damaged the prospects of her efforts to unify the country. The Philippines media flayed her decision to throw her hat in the ring announced at a rally held in her home province. This attempt at arousing parochial sentiments was not expected of a person who claims that she wants to unify a populace that is divided along several lines. Ms. Arroyo might not be able to rally the people by appealing to their national pride either. Under her stewardship the Philippines has slid back towards its former position within the imperium of the United States. The Philippines does require external assistance to combat the several insurgencies currently raging in different parts of the archipelago. However, Ms. Arroyo's success in securing the status of a non-NATO ally of the U.S. for her country does not appear to have enhanced her appeal. Public opposition to the deployment of U.S. forces in any role other than as trainers shows that Filipinos are still wary of the former colonial power. It will be difficult for Ms. Arroyo, whose administration slavishly backed the U.S. invasion of Iraq, to make national pride a campaign issue.

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Philippine

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probe on hold

S. E. Asia

Manila, Aug. 3 (Reuters): The Philippine government today backed a call to suspend a Senate inquiry into a failed soldiers' mutiny, warning that the renegades might use the sessions to stir up further dissension in the armed forces.

It also said it was supporting local police efforts to enlist the help of the US Federal Bureau of Investigation in establishing the sources of high-tech weapons used by the mutineers in their abortive July 27 uprising.

Opposition senators accused security officials of keeping the public in the dark about the mutiny by refusing to present its five leaders at a Senate hearing on Friday. Another group of senators filed a resolution urging suspension of the inquiry to enable officials, who had been summoned to testify, to concentrate on tracking down soldiers still missing from their units.

"Definitely, we are in favour of that (suspension)," presidential spokesperson Ignacio Bunye said on local radio. "This would allow authorities to proceed with their work to eliminate any residual threat to our society."

Bunye said the government was not curtailing the rights of the army renegades to air their case "but they do not have any right to use a congressional inquiry as a platform to sow fur-

ther trouble". "Their desire to have a platform from which they can continue to spread their lies and agitate fellow soldiers is not a right guaranteed by our laws."

The department of justice has filed coup charges against 321 troops involved in the 19-hour takeover of a luxury hotel in Manila's main business district.

The military said the hotel siege was part of an abortive coup intended to establish a 15-member junta to govern the country. National Bureau of Investigation chief Reynaldo Wycoco said yesterday he was seeking FBI help to find out the sources of some of the weapons used by the mutineers.

He said some of the equipment, including sniper rifles and night vision goggles, could be part of US military aid but that other equipment could have been bought from abroad.

The *Philippine Daily Inquirer* newspaper supported calls for the suspension of the Senate probe, saying "it would grant the enemies of the state the chance to strike again".

Citing a military report that about 100 soldiers were still unaccounted for, the *Inquirer* said in an editorial: "It is imperative that the authorities redouble their efforts to uproot the very roots of rebellion."

Manila jitters.

Army needs to be insulated from politics

While the coup attempt in the Philippines ended peacefully, the fact that rebel soldiers could take over Manila's central financial district for a day implies that political stability is not yet firmly established following the dictatorship of the Marcos years and the unrest of the Corazon Aquino and Joseph Estrada eras. President Estrada was unseated by a "people power" movement in 2001 and is now in prison, facing corruption charges. The authorities have charged that Estrada is attempting to make a comeback through the coup, and police have claimed to recover assault rifles, ammunition and the red armbands used by the rebels from the house of Ramon Cardenas, a member of Estrada's cabinet still in close touch with him. At any rate the seizure of government buildings and residential quarters by the mutineers appeared to be more of a political demonstration targeting Arroyo rather than a military operation.

The charges leveled by the mutineers against Arroyo's government include corruption, collusion with Muslim rebels, and plans to stymie presidential elections scheduled for 2004 by declaring martial law. Arroyo had been Estrada's vice-president and her record hasn't been terribly distinguished and discontent with her rule isn't confined to the circle of mutineers. The Philippines is like India, in that annual growth in economic output has been hovering around four per cent. But mutinies of this type aren't much help either — nothing can dampen business and scare off foreign investors more than the spectacle of mutinying troops taking over a capital's financial district. Frequent coup attempts during Corazon Aquino's rule from 1986 to 1992 also saw the Philippines miss out on the record growth its Southeast Asian neighbours experienced during this period. Something needs to be done to discourage excitable young officers in the military from entertaining the illusion that the solution to their country's ills rests in their hands.

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THE STATESMAN

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Estrada aide held, panel to probe 'roots of mutiny'

RAJU GOPALAKRISHNAN
MANILA, JULY 28

PHILIPPINE police arrested an aide of former president Joseph Estrada on Monday over a weekend mutiny by disgruntled members of the armed forces and said red armbands worn by the mutineers had been found at his home. Police said they had also recovered weapons and ammunition in a raid on the home of Ramon Cardenas.

Meanwhile, President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo said on Monday that the Philippine government will set up an inde-

pendent commission to investigate the roots of the mutiny. "Such actions are deplorable and will be met with the full force of the law, including the political component," she said in a state of the nation address which was broadcast live on the national television.

Although the uprising ended without a shot being fired, local share prices and the peso currency plunged and analysts said there was deep unease about which way the nation was headed.

"The future beckons with what looks like the crosswinds of a raging storm," wrote

columnist Teodoro Benigno in *The Philippine Star*, adding that the mutiny was part of general disaffection with the government of President Arroyo.

Cardenas was a cabinet minister in the government of Estrada, who was toppled in 2001 in the Army-backed popular protests that brought Arroyo to power. On Sunday, Estrada was moved from the government hospital where he has been held for months to a military camp as the renegades held out in the Makati shopping mall. At the time, officials had refused to give a reason. —Reuters

29 JUL 2003

INDIAN EXPRESS

Political shadow on mutiny

Manila, July 28 (Reuters): A failed mutiny by 300 Philippine soldiers took on political overtones today as police arrested an aide to ousted President Joseph Estrada and the government ordered an investigation into the roots of the weekend uprising.

Delivering her annual state of the nation address just hours after police arrested Estrada's aide, President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo said the siege in central Manila was deplorable, and suggested there was political scheming behind the rebellion.

"Such actions are deplorable and will always be met with the full force of the law, including the political component," she said of the mutiny. "Yet they signal an underlying problem that we must address."

Nearly 300 mutineers ended a 19-hour siege yesterday after accusing the government and senior military officers of graft, collusion with Muslim rebels and planning to impose martial law to avoid presidential elections

scheduled for 2004. Arroyo, elevated from vice-president by a popular revolt that forced out Estrada in January 2001 with the blessings of the army and the church, made no mention in the nationally broadcast speech of her oft-repeated pledge not to run for office next May.

Despite Arroyo's assurances yesterday that the mutiny had not hurt national security or political stability, the main share index lost 2.11 per cent and the peso fell 1 per cent.

The head of an influential business group warned the administration against sweeping the grievances of the rogue troops under the carpet as some commentators said the uprising was part of general disaffection with Arroyo's government.

But Peter Wallace, an economic consultant who runs a think-tank in Manila, said the coup concerns were overdone.

"Foreign investors, if knowledgeable or sensible enough, won't be taking it seriously," he

said. "If you had been away over the weekend and came back today you would never have known it had happened."

Arroyo said an independent commission would investigate "the roots of the mutiny and the provocations that inspired it".

She also ordered an independent investigation of a bombing in the south of the overwhelmingly Roman Catholic country. The rogue soldiers had accused the government of staging the attack and blaming Muslim rebels to gain military aid from Washington.

"Pushing accountability for something like this will send a signal that the country means business and wants to correct things and come through with reforms," Guillermo Luz, president of the Makati Business Club, said on television.

"Anything less than that would probably raise the political risk profile for the country."

Arroyo announced peace talks with the Moro Islamic Lib-

eration Front, the country's largest Muslim rebel group, would restart in Malaysia next week to try to end three decades of violence.

But it was tough to put an entirely positive spin on the security situation after a notorious Muslim militant escaped from prison recently and rogue troops paralysed Manila's commercial heart under the apparent hand of her political opponents.

There were fears the mutiny could be the start of a throwback to the 1986-1992 rule of President Corazon Aquino, which was marked by a string of coup attempts that stymied the Philippines as its southeast Asian neighbours enjoyed rapid growth.

Police said they found weapons, ammunition and red armbands worn by the renegade soldiers in a raid on a house owned by Ramon Cardenas. Cardenas — who denied any involvement — was a cabinet minister under Estrada, who is now on trial for economic plunder.

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MUTINY IN MANILA

The 20-hour long flutter in the Philippine capital seems to have died down with a somewhat discomfiting ease. The 300 mutinous junior marine officers — who were, just a few days back, quite willing to risk death and blow up Manila's financial and diplomatic centre — have been quelled. They wanted the government of the president, Ms Gloria Macapagal Arroyo, to resign because it was corrupt, pandering to both Muslim insurgents and American interests. Nobody has resigned — and the ex-rebels are awaiting court martial. The president has also followed this up with a state-of-the-nation wrap-up in which inquiries have been pledged, terrorism declared the eternal enemy and promises made to look into the marines' allegations and grievances. So far so good. But coups (successful or otherwise), and talk of corruption in the state, are bound to make Filipinos quite giddy with *déjà vu*. Philippine governments have hardly ever succeeded one another in the natural course of things. Already, links with the ousted president, Mr Joseph Estrada, and with Ms Corazon Aquino are being investigated. With elections due in May 2004, this president's immediate political future is implicated in all this.

But what has worn the military out, to the point of mutiny, in the Philippines? Apart from poor pay and conditions, these are the men and women who have been fighting an intermittently violent, three-decades-long battle with insurgency in the southern Philippines. Islamic separatist groups — with conflicting agenda of autonomy, and variously treated by the predominantly Roman Catholic political establishment — have ravaged the south with killings, explosions and kidnappings. Blasts in shopping malls, churches and mosques are part of everyday life in the island of Mindanao, for instance. The presence of American troops, post-9/11, in the country has also put it rather uneasily on the map of the Bush-Blair "war on terrorism". A military which fought for its independence from the United States of America as recently as 1946 is bound to look at the return of American troops with unease — and perhaps more.

29 JUL 2003

THE TELEGRAPH

PHILIPPINES MUTINY / ESTRADA AIDE ARRESTED

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Arroyo vows to hunt down conspirators

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23/7

By P. S. Suryanarayana

SINGAPORE, JULY 28. Jubilant after quelling Sunday's mutiny by some heavily-armed soldiers, without firing a shot in the process, the President of the Philippines, Gloria Macapagal Arroyo, began a reality check on Monday.

In her annual State of the Nation Address to a joint session of Congress in Manila, she announced the constitution of an independent commission to investigate the root causes of "the short-lived and ill-conceived military mutiny".

With the Government emphasising that there would be "no holy cows" in the investigation of the mutiny, the police reported the arrest of an aide to the deposed President, Joseph Estrada. Red arm bands, similar to those sported by the rebels, and some arms were said to have been recovered in a raid on the aide's residence.

Ms. Arroyo promised a separate "independent commission" to inquire into the circumstances of some recent bombings. While this was being set up at the behest of the Defence Secretary, Angelo Reyes, a police reform commission, too, would be instituted, despite the



The Philippine President, Gloria Arroyo, about to address the Congress in Manila on Monday. — AFP

police-military coordination in overcoming the mutiny.

She emphasised that the recent "failures on the scale of Al-Ghozi escape (from prison)" called for police reforms. Al-Ghozi is an alleged top operative of the Jemaah Islamiyah, a suspected regional outfit of the Al-Qaeda.

It was in this context that the President asked Congress to pass an anti-terrorism law. As a nation "we remain at war", she said, "at war against terrorism, at war against corruption, at

war against disease (and) at war against drugs, the greatest menace facing our country today". There would be no let-up in the anti-drug war and no death penalty moratorium in respect of drug lords, she told Congress.

As Ms. Arroyo was holding forth on her drive and determination to rid the Philippines of its problems, several thousand people were reported to have assembled, calling for her resignation, a key demand that the mutineers first made, only to give it up later. According to diplomatic sources in Manila, the popular mood in the Philippines today was one of shock and a sense of subdued introspection over Sunday's events, the latest in a series of eight coup attempts since the overthrow of Ferdinand Marcos.

In a related development, the Indian Minister, Vinod Khanna, has postponed his visit to the Philippines in view of the current situation in Manila.

THE HINDU

29 JUL 2003

Manila mutiny drama ends without bloodshed

Rebel soldiers demanding President's resignation lift siege

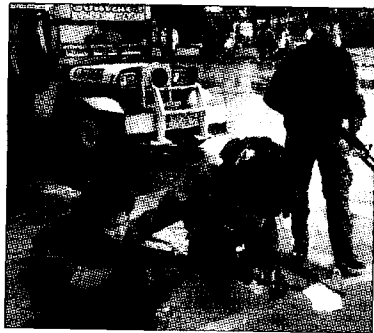
Manila: Renegade Philippine soldiers barricaded in a Manila shopping centre ended a nearly 19-hour stand-off with the government on Sunday without a shot being fired, a negotiator said. "It was agreed they would end the siege and march back to barracks," Colonel Danilo Lim, a member of the government panel that met the rogue troops, told reporters.

The mutineers had accused the government of corruption and colluding with rebel groups and demanded the resignation of President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo.

Earlier, tanks, armoured vehicles and hundreds of troops had encircled the shopping centre and set a deadline of 7 p.m. (4.30 p.m. IST) for the surrender of the mutineers.

The deadline came as about 20 of the renegades gave themselves up, but about 150 others—mostly junior officers below the rank of captain or enlisted men—remained inside the 26-storey Oakwood building in the upmarket Glorietta shopping centre.

The renegades had seized the com-



REBELS WITH A CAUSE: The renegade Philippine troops before their surrender on Sunday.

plex shortly after midnight and wired it with explosives, leaving Australia's ambassador and several other foreigners briefly trapped in adjoining residences. The envoy, Ruth Pearce, along with other foreigners and civilians, were later allowed to leave. No one was taken hostage.

The soldiers, who denied they were staging a coup, also accused Ms Arroyo of planning to declare mar-

tial law ahead of next year's scheduled elections. "We don't intend to grab power," the rebel officers had said in a statement. "We are asking the present regime to step down because it is no different from the previous regimes. For this, we are ready to lay down our lives."

Ms Arroyo had warned of strong action if the renegades did not surrender. "Your actions are already hovering at the fringes of outright terrorism. You will find no support for your actions among our people and the world," she said. "You have already stained the uniform. Do not drench it with dishonor."

Ms Arroyo, who has the support of the military command, had ordered a manhunt on Saturday for up to 70 junior officers and deserters after days of rumours of a coup plot by a small group of soldiers disgruntled about pay and the pace of internal reforms. Apparently in response to the arrest order, the group had entered and taken over parts of the Glorietta complex. Reuters

Sf Arroyo
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No threat to national security, says Gloria

HO-11
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By P. S. Suryanarayana

SINGAPORE, JULY 27. After the mutiny ended in Manila tonight, the Filipino President, Gloria Macapagal Arroyo, sought to assure the international community that "this event does not in any way injure (the Filipino) national security". She said there was no cause for concern about "political instability". According to her, the "issues involved are domestic, operational or administrative" in scope, without any ideological content or policy overtones. "Our decision to enter (into) dialogue (with the rebels) reaped positive results," she said.

In contrast, the rebels — a small band of "rogue junior officers and soldiers" of the Philippines' Armed Forces — claimed a "moral victory" for their purported cause of fighting corruption at all levels of governance.

Some of the rebels, who appeared on television and before the media, accused Ms. Arroyo of seeking to engineer violence so that she could use that as a smoke-screen to impose martial law and remain in office.

The only point of agreement

between the mutineers and Ms. Arroyo, as she declared that the entire country was in "a state of rebellion", was that it was not a classical coup attempt. There was no bid at a power-grab or even a power-shift, the rebels said.

The crisis began to boil over as the rebels seized a hotel and a few other buildings in the Makati shopping area and laid booby traps around it so

as to barricade themselves.

Those trapped in the area, including the Australian Ambassador, were allowed to leave without being taken hostage.

The U.S., Australia and several South East Asian states, including Singapore, threw their weight behind Ms. Arroyo, even as the rebels talked their way towards an exit strategy.

'Indian families safe'

KUALA LUMPUR, JULY 27. Six Indian families staying in the hotel apartment complex, taken over by rebel Philippines Army officers in a bid to overthrow the Government of President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo, are safe.

"All the six Indian families staying in the Oakwood Apartments which is in the area cordoned off by the army, have been escorted out of the hotel and are staying in other hotels away from the area," Navrekha Sharma, Indian Ambassador to Philippines told PTI over telephone from Manila.

Oakwood Apartments is in Manila's Makati district, a posh neighbourhood with many hotels and shopping malls.

There were roadblocks. Army and police vehicles surrounded the Makati area where the incident took place. But Manila appeared calm.

"The incident does not concern Indians here but we are in touch with our nationals. They always have an access to the embassy," Ms. Sharma said. "We are watching the situation here. We are in touch with Delhi," she said.

There are many Indian nationals holding executive positions with multinationals here. — PTI

THE HINDU

28 JUL 2003



An unidentified renegade junior military officer (above) airs his views against the Government of President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo during a press conference at the Oakwood Hotel and after the surrender the mutinous soldiers (below) cover their face to avoid the media, at Makati in Manila on Sunday — Reuters, AP



Manila stand-off ends, rebels to face charges

By P. S. Suryanarayana

SINGAPORE, JULY 27. The mutiny by a small band of "rogue junior officers and soldiers" of the Philippines' Armed Forces ended tonight, without bloodshed, in Manila's fashionable commercial district of Makati, where the armed rebels had barricaded themselves for nearly 21 hours.

No force was used during the standoff, and there were no casualties, as intermittent talks eventually brought the crisis to an end. Hailing the end of the standoff as "a triumph for democracy", the Filipino President, Gloria Macapagal

Arroyo, said the rebels, numbering 296 including 70 officers, would return to the barracks and also face charges under the "Articles of War".

They would be "investigated" and they had neither asked for nor promised any special treatment, she underlined in a statement from the presidential palace in Manila.

The Military Chief of Staff, Narciso Abaya, had been "directed to immediately restore normality in the military organisation", while "civilians shown to be involved in any conspiracy will (also) be prosecuted".

See also Page 11

Filipino govt inks pact with rebels

Philippine Daily Inquirer/
ANN & Agencies



Ms Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo

MANILA, July 18. — The Philippines government today announced that it has signed a ceasefire agreement with the country's largest Muslim separatist guerrilla group ahead of peace talks expected shortly in Malaysia.

President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo said: "Today the peace panels of our government and the MILF (Moro Islamic Liberation Front) agreed on a mutual cessation of hostilities." Manila is to issue safe conduct passes to the MILF negotiators, she added.

MILF spokesman Eid Kabalu welcomed the truce and said: "Peace can be had even in a few days if both sides are sincere."

Malaysia is expected to deploy ceasefire observers to the MILF hotbed of the southern island of Mindanao shortly, the President said, thanking Prime Minister Mahathir Mohammed "for his sincere and abiding support" to the peace process.

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FAILED MUTINY'S MESSAGE

SUNDAY'S SHORT-LIVED MUTINY in Manila may have some embarrassing home truths for the presidency of Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo and Filipinos. The primary question that arises is this: is Ms. Arroyo's U.S.-supported campaign against terrorism in southern Philippines in danger of degenerating into a self-perpetuating military exercise? In the immediate context, an aide of the former President, Joseph Estrada, has been arrested and broad hints have been given that he might have inspired the failed mutiny. Mr. Estrada, in custody and on trial for corruption, was toppled two years ago in an army-backed popular protest that brought Ms. Arroyo to power and therefore becomes a prime candidate for suspicion. But the demands made by the band of mutineers may indicate a deeper malaise. The young officers accused the Government and seniors in the Services of corruption, of selling weapons to the Muslim and communist rebels in the south, and of planning to impose martial law to avoid holding the presidential election due next year. Of the three, it is the gun-running charge against the leadership that must be a cause of serious concern for the entire region. Its perplexing connotation must be seen against the background of an embarrassing event that took place a fortnight ago: the escape of one of the South East Asian region's most notorious extremists from a top security prison in Manila.

Fathur Rohman al-Ghazi, an Indonesian accused of belonging to the Jemaah Islamiah, a terrorist group, was the most important suspect captured in the Philippines since it joined the American-led "war on terror." Arrested last year and imprisoned for illegal possession of explosives, he disappeared from his cell in the national police headquarters in Manila on July 14. Also missing from their cells were two prisoners accused of belonging to Abu Sayyaf, the Muslim rebel group that has been behind a series of kid-

nappings in the south and, like the Jemaah, is suspected to have links with the Al-Qaeda network. To dismiss their escape as a security lapse and to ignore the main complaint of the mutinying young men — that those in power were selling weapons to the Muslim and communist rebels and staging bombings to justify more aid from the U.S. — will save some embarrassment for the regime in Manila but can prove to be dangerously short-sighted.

It is unlikely that the commission promised by Ms. Arroyo will expose the larger truth — that in fragile democracies, the military establishment develops deep vested interests in fomenting and perpetuating violence and anarchy. Latin America learnt this unsavoury truth and has been coming to terms with it in the past decade and more. South East Asia's experience has been somewhat different as it experimented with variations of 'guided democracy.' In the Philippines, a land turned rock-hard by the years under Ferdinand Marcos, democracy has been finding it extraordinarily difficult to put down roots, notwithstanding some spectacular successes of popular will and people power. It is the kind of setting in which mutinies and military coups always seem round the corner. The forces behind the weekend's destabilisation attempt must be swiftly identified and the participants brought to book but the serious questions posed by the young officers must be addressed without a cover-up in the larger interest of the region. Sunday's mutiny capped a week of major events in the region and beyond. In Cambodia, a resourceful Prime Minister who used to belong to Pol Pot's Khmer Rouge is set to gain the stamp of democratic acceptance in internationally supervised elections. Further east, under intense pressure from the U.S., Japan seemed to break with half a century of pacifism when its Parliament approved the despatch of troops for 'non-combat' duties in support of the U.S. in occupied Iraq.

ONE HINDO

31 JUL 2003

Norwegian peace envoy meets Arroyo

8/6 HO-17
MANILA, JUNE 7. The Norwegian Deputy Foreign Minister, Vidar Helgesen, met on Saturday with Philippine President, Gloria Macapagal Arroyo, to discuss a possible resumption of stalled peace talks with communist rebels brokered by Norway, officials said.

"We will do our best and see what can be done," a presidential palace statement quoted Ms. Arroyo as telling Mr. Helgesen. "We need to work with both parties if this is to move forward," Mr. Helgesen said. "It will not be easy but we will work closely with the Filipino people."

On Friday, Mr. Helgesen met with Foreign Secretary, Blas Ople, who welcomed Norway's "commitment to the success of our peace process," a Department of Foreign Affairs statement said. Norway's top peace broker also held separate meet-

8/6 HO-17
ings with the Vice-President, Teofisto Guingona, the Defence Secretary, Angelo Reyes, members of the government peace panel and other officials.

He also held talks on Saturday with left-wing Congressman, Satur Ocampo, and representatives of human rights groups and other peace advocates. "He is trying as much as possible to elicit opinions, views, recommendations on how to push the peace process which the Norwegian government is committed to facilitate," said Mr. Ocampo.

The Government suspended peace talks which were held in Oslo in June 2001 after guerrillas killed a former congressman and an intelligence officer. The rebels defended the attack as punishment for his alleged human rights violations during the government of late dictator Ferdinand Marcos. — AP

SEVEN MUSLIM SEPARATISTS, ONE SOLDIER DEAD IN ARMY OFFENSIVE

Arroyo orders truce with rebels

Philippine Daily Inquirer/ANN

Feb. 11. — The President of Philippines, Mrs Gloria Macapagal Arroyo, today ordered the military to cease all offensives against the Muslim separatist group Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) in Mindanao in south Philippines, after violent clashes left at least seven Muslim rebels and one soldier dead and scores wounded.

President Arroyo said the clashes could endanger peace talks with the Muslim rebels.

The military's sixth infantry division launched an attack on the rebels today after receiving reports that members of the notorious Pentagon kidnap-for-ransom group had sought refuge in an MILF camp. MILF officials denied the charge.

She, however, directed Mr Jesus

Dureza, her advisor on Mindanao affairs, to convene two ceasefire committees within this week and asked the military chief Mr Dionisio Santiago to convey to the ground commanders to stop the attacks and return to the barracks.

The President's directive came hours after heavy fighting erupted in Pikit town in North Cotabato today. OV-10 bomber aircraft, MG-520 helicopters and 105 mm howitzers blasted positions of the insurgent Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) near the town of Pikit, officials said.

Fighting began at dawn when the 1,000-member MILF force attempted to break out of a ring of ground troops, army spokesman Major Justo Ando said.

The clashes had left at least seven Muslim rebels and one soldier dead and scores wounded. At least 17,000 villagers were forced to evacuate to safer grounds for fear of being caught in the crossfire.

Peace talks were suspended in October 2001 amid alleged violations by both sides of a ceasefire agreement that was first reached in 1997 and renewed in 2001.

A spokesperson for the rebel MILF Mr Eid Kabalu had said the latest attacks were part of a government strategy to pressure them to



Gloria M Arroyo

Peace deal

MANILA, Feb. 11. — The Cabinet oversight committee on internal security today approved the final draft of the comprehensive peace agreement with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF).

Only the President's green signal is needed before negotiators could present the document to the MILF panel, Presidential Adviser on Mindanao affairs Mr Jesus Dureza said today. Leaders of the Senate and the House of Representatives have also been sent copies for review, Mr Dureza was quoted as saying over GMA Network radio station dzBB. — ANN

accept a "political package" that negotiators would present when talks resume.