

Brief Notes on the Current Philippine Situation

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Introduction

By the month of March 2015, the Bangsamoro Basic Law (BBL) will be passed by both houses of the Philippine Congress and signed into law by the President of Republic. The BBL will be the legal basis for the establishment of the new Bangsamoro Political Entity and it will also effectively repeal Republic Act 9054 which legally created the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM). The current Aquino administration and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) have considered ARMM as failed political experiment.

Ninety (90) days after the President signs the BBL into law, there will be plebiscite for the qualified voters whether they agree or disagree with the BBL in the identified Bangsamoro territory. Both the Aquino administration and the MILF with their Peace Negotiating Panels have been hopeful that the peoples in those areas will vote for the approval of the BBL. They (Aquino government and the MILF) do not even consider an alternative formula for peace just in case the BBL will not be approved by the peoples.

It seems that everybody is enthusiastic to set up the transition mechanism for the Political Entity - Bangsamoro Transition Authority (BTA). The BTA will be the MILF's way of preparing themselves for establishing the regular Bangsamoro government in June 2016. The MILF has already set up its electoral machinery called United Bangsamoro Justice Party (UBJP) to participate in the May 2016 National and Local elections.

The voices of those who have been opposing the version of BBL as submitted in Congress, especially the Indigenous People (IPs) within the core territories of the Bangsamoro, have been stifled and even forcible silenced by assassinations of IP leaders. As of this writing there were nine (9) leaders and members who have been murdered. Seventy two (72) more are known to be on the hit list.

The overwhelming support of the Aquino Administration and its allies in Congress has drowned other voices who dared to raise their opposition to a non-inclusive peace of the Aquino government and the MILF.

But the January 25, 2015 bloody encounter between the Special Action Force of the Philippine National Police (SAF-PNP) and the MILF's Bangsamoro Islamic Armed Forces (BIAF) and the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF) has changed substantially the views of politicians in Congress (including the Aquino supporters) and the attitude of peoples towards trusting the MILF in the peace negotiations with the government.

The SAF-PNP had tried to serve the warrant of arrest for the international terrorist Zulkifli Bin Hir or famously known as Marwan and his assistant Basit Usman in the middle of a territory claimed by the MILF and where the BIFF (MILF breakaway) as their camp. The international terrorist - Marwan was killed during the operation but forty four (44) SAF-PNP, eighteen (18) of the MILF-BIAF and five (5) civilians were also killed in the said operation.

Two vital issues have surfaced and became subject for big debates on the continuing police function of the PNP and the peace talks with its agreement on the mechanism of the proper conduct of ceasefire between the government of the Republic of the Philippines (GPH) and the MILF.

The January 25, 2015 violent encounter in Mamasapano, Maguindanao have caused indefinite postponement of the Congress' deliberations on the BBL. It has stalled the peace talks between GPH and MILF. It has also exposed the direct and indirect role of the US in the counter-insurgency campaigns of the Aquino government. It has opened up dynamics between the PNP and the AFP in terms of their different functions vis-à-vis the peace talks. It has created unfavorable space for peace and the immediate threat of a break-up of war between the GPH and MILF and lastly but not the least is that the incident in Mamasapano has rekindled the biases and mistrust between and among the three peoples in Mindanao.

Meanwhile, the popularity of the President has been further affected and so with the peace talks which has been closely connected with his term and his popularity. President Aquino has only more than one year left in his term as President but no one from his party or allies has been identified to replace him.

All geared towards May 2016 Elections

Before the Mamasapano, Maguindanao bloody police operation, Philippine media have been pre-occupied with issues on graft and corruption hitting politicians and personalities who have made themselves available for the 2016 elections. The object of the anti-graft and corruption campaigns is the incumbent Vice President of the country who consistently topped the surveys after declaring himself available to run for the Presidency. Currently, three (3) sitting Senators are detained because of accusations of pocketing their Countryside Development Fund (CDF) known also as pork barrel fund. It is not an accident that all the three Senators belong to the opposition. Two of them are identified with the Vice President and the other has expressed his intention to run as President under the political party of the former President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo who herself is currently detained in a hospital because of corruption issues during her term.

The biggest problem of the Aquino administration is that they do not have a credible and winnable candidate who will continue the programs of the President. The chosen one at least by the Liberal Party - the ruling Party - Secretary Mar Roxas - the current Secretary of the Department of Interior and Local Government - has consistently logged behind in all the surveys. This is in spite, making all the available resources of his department and the government machineries in general at his disposals and presidential projection.

The period of first quarter is already critical for the Presidential race because in the last quarter,

there will be filing of candidacies for the national elective positions. During this period, it is expected that political and electoral positions and machineries have been set up. Political movements and re-alignment should be seen on the ground for strengthening of the rank and file of those running for elected positions. There should be rallying activities around a Party/Coalition with prominent figure as their candidate in order for the local candidates to prepare themselves for the coming elections.

Meanwhile, Vice President Binay, leads and continue to strengthen the United Nationalist Alliance (UNA) a coalition which will be the electoral Party for his Presidential bid. But for several months now, he (Binay) has been the subject of non stop Senate investigations (with full media coverage) on his alleged corruption activities since when he was a Mayor of Makati City (Commercial Center of the country) more than 20 years ago. His popularity rating has consistently gone down because of these daily attacks but he has remained on the top of all these surveys. This means that all those who have been subject for surveys (including the Administration's chosen one) have not improved their ratings either.

There is another candidate, who is busy going around setting-up his machinery nationwide using his advocacy for federalism to perform these activities. Mayor Rodrigo Duterte is a well known Mayor of Davao City (Mindanao) because of his no nonsense treatment of the criminals in his city. He has been known of using extrajudicial method in dealing with criminalities in his City. He has been posturing not too be interested in the Presidency but the reason is obvious – he will be the object of criticisms, especially his known records for human rights violations. But his actions speak louder than his words. He does not declare himself as a candidate but the people identified with him have been going around and setting up machineries for his presidential candidacy.

There is a neophyte Senator (got the number one slot in the Senatorial elections 2013) who showed high popularity rating (second only to Binay) in surveys in spite of her non-declaration of her interest to the highest elected position. She is the daughter of the late and famous actor who was the opposition's bet against President Arroyo in 2010 Presidential elections. Everybody knew that Fernando Poe, Jr., the father of Senator Grace Poe, could have won the elections but was cheated by Gloria Macapagal Arroyo. Unfortunately he (Fernando Poe Jr.) had died after elections.

At this point, when it is only more than a year left for the term of President Aquino but his popularity rating has consistently gone down. His not being directly involved in graft and corruption practices in the government helps a bit but people have began to have questions in his capacity to govern and manage the affairs of the country. The Mamasapano fiasco has magnified such Presidential weaknesses.

The Aquino Resign Movement

There is a group which called themselves National Transformation Council (NTC). This is composed of religious leaders and personalities. Their advocacy is to transform the government starting with the resignation of President Noy Aquino, the Vice President and all the Cabinet members of the current Administration.

The NTC will act as caretaker government until a regular election will take place. The acknowledged head of the Council is former Defense Secretary and National Security Adviser of the former Arroyo government Norberto Gonzales who is also currently the head of Partido Demokratiko-Sosyalista ng Pilipinas (PDSP). The NTC with the active participation for several Catholic Archbishops is calling for the President and his cabinet to resign even before the Mamasapano incident. The call has intensified after the failure of the police operation in Maguindanao.

The role of the Church (eighty percent (80%) of the country's population are Catholic) has been heightened during the visit of Pope Francis in the first weeks of the year. The Pope's concerns on the glaring social inequality in the country has put on the line the program of the President on the poor and his "matuwid na daan" (straight path) banner program. The Pope has struck down the pro-poor program when he linked corruption issues to the deteriorating situation of more than half of the country's population. His famous saying..." that corruption has deprived the poor of the resources needed for them to live with decency and dignity..." has been as if directed to the Aquino administration.

The Pope did mention the value of families and the urgent need to safeguard them against social disintegration because of the high social cost paid for by families who are forced to work outside the country because of the need to earn a decent living. The Pope has pointed out the need to have dignified and humane employment which should be made available by the government.

The Pope has also pointed out that a peace in the South (Mindanao) can only be successful and sustainable if it is inclusive. The Pope had emphasized that the issues and concerns of the Indigenous People should be given due consideration in building peace in Mindanao.

The visit of the Pope is considered a big success that in effect it has given the Church a renewed energy for its evangelization work with the so-called poorest of the poor. Even after the Pope has long gone back to Vatican his much appreciated visit has been the talks and topics in town. Serious concerns have been raised on how the Aquino administration thru its Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) tried to gather all the street children and their families and hide them inside expensive resorts. This was done so that the Pope would not see them along the roads he had to pass. This kind of news had seemed to eclipse even the record breaking of the six (6) millions who gathered for the Pope's public mass. And it has put the current administration into defensive is normal because of its attempt of hiding the concrete realities from its important visitors such as the Pope, while pretending that everything is normal. This is reminding people of typical of the Marcos dictatorial period when beautiful fences were built to cover up and hide the houses and shanties of the thousands of urban poor along the road where dignitaries and visitors would be passing.

Peace Talks with the MILF and the Mamasapano Encounter

President Aquino plans to end his term in June 2016 with the MILF Peace talks consummated. This means that the Bangsamoro government will be already installed and becomes functional.

The January 25, 2015 Mamasapano bloody encounter has definitely delayed if not all together frustrated the Presidential plan.

The mission of the PNP/SAF to serve the warrant of arrest to an international terrorist Zulkifli Bin Hir alias Marwan and his assistant Basit Usman in the middle of the claimed MILF territory could not simply be done without affecting the ceasefire and current peace agreements between the two parties (GPH and MILF).

The MILF has plenty of explanations to do why it allows those two famous terrorists to stay in their claimed territories. Given the nature and the dynamics of the MILF and its communities the reason of it not knowing the presence of Marwan and Usman would not simply hold water.

The Aquino government has plenty of explanations to do as well when it plans and implements its mission to make the arrests in a complex situation in Mamasapano. It (government) knows fully well that aside from the MILF there are other groups like the BIFF and private armed groups (Ampatuan)

in the area. The PNP/SAF could not simply enter and serve its mission and get out without getting serious reactions from those armed groups. It would be understandable that it (SAF) would not coordinate with the MILF in accomplishing its mission.

The Aquino government would like “to have its cake and eat it too...” as the saying goes.

When the armed confrontation heightened and intensified, the PNP/SAF were practically left on their own and die serving their mission. The very slow or even lack and late reinforcement during the decisive period when they (SAF) were still alive was a clear and deliberate sign that the Aquino government would prefer to save the peace talks with the MILF rather than save the lives of PNP/SAF. The timely intervention of the Armed Forces of the Philippines 6th Division and the more than three hundred (300) SAF members just very near the clash site would have save the lives of the forty four (44) SAF men but because there was no clear order to make the reinforcement those 44 SAF were simply butchered by the combined forces of the MILF, BIFF and private armed groups. And in fact, there was an order (direct from President Aquino) which they (government officials) not to escalate the military clash by introducing reinforcements so as not make MILF think that we are attacking them - thus, endangering the peace talks.

The remaining SAF officers and men were simply saved because the US which have been active from Day One of OPLAN EXODUS (the oplan to get Marwan and Usman) had to intervene so as to get the cut off finger of Marwan for DNA testing. That was why after the remaining officers and men of SAF were off the encounter ground, the SAF had to directly deliver/hand over the Marwan specimen to the FBI agents waiting at the nearest airport.

The MILF would claim that the Mamasapano clash was a misencounter because the PNP/SAF did not coordinate their operation with them. But their (MILF) not able to explain the presence of Marwan and Usman in their territory and the manner in which the SAF were butchered (finished off at close range) while recording the killings and sending these videos to the families of the SAF and to social media could hardly stand up the mis-encounter justification of the bloody armed clash.

Blaming the BIFF for the carnage is not helping either with regards to the MILF's defense of the so called mis-encounter. In fact, the MILF has to give satisfying answer on why it is allowing the BIFF moving around freely in the MILF claimed territory. Does the organizational solution on the previous massacres done by the leaders of the BIFF who were once the leaders of the 105TH base command of the MILF? The 105th base command was once led by Umbra Kato who did the massacres on the civilians especially against the Christians and the Indigenous Peoples (IPs) as their reaction when the Supreme Court declared the Memorandum of Agreement on the Ancestral Domain (MOA-AD) in 2008 as unconstitutional. The MILF's leadership was strongly asked to investigate Umbra Kato and Bravo (Lanao provinces) about those criminal acts. Kato simply has founded the BIFF and the MILF lost jurisdiction over him. Kato's second in command took over the leadership of the 105th Base Command with the same membership. It should be important to factor in the dynamics of people in this part of Maguindanao. Many of them are related with each other by affinity or by marriage.

There has been no justice serve on the victims of the massacres of the 2008 MOA-AD and Umbra Kato since then operate freely in the MILF claimed territory until he was struck down by sickness.

The Aquino government and its peace panel should have pursued this case because it surely has big impact in the peace negotiation. But the President and his peace advisers and panel intentionally became blind to this situation justifying their act as looking at the bigger picture.

There are obvious signs that the Aquino government should have been alarmed by the MILF and BIFF relationship. The fact that the MILF leadership has been comfortable having their arms

manufacturing activities in the areas where the BIFF also operates is saying an important message and that is both have trusted each other. The government and its panel should have been seriously alarmed that the BIFF has openly declared thru its spokesperson – Abu Misry Mama – that the BIFF is affiliated with the Islamic States of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and willing to send fighters to places where ISIS has been fighting or willing to do their (ISIS) bid in the country. In the Mamasapano massacre the pictures of the ISIS' style execution of its victims (beheadings) can be related to the butchering done by the combined forces of the MILF and BIFF to the wounded SAF lying helpless on the ground.

Such acts should be part of correcting the historical injustice which has been the battle cry of the MILF. Giving justice to the victims of the recent past should be delivering a positive message to the present generation that there is no selective justice in pursuing peace in Mindanao.

The extreme and very emotional reactions of peoples, especially the relatives of the SAF victims to the inhuman acts inflicted on their loved ones should be understood in this context.

In fact, an important reality which has unfolded from this unfortunate event is that peoples throughout the country have suddenly become interested in the peace talks between the GPH and MILF. Before the Mamasapano massacre, only those directly involved and people from Mindanao were interested in the peace talks but now it seems that everybody has to participate to make sure that the government will not sell out to the MILF. This phenomena can be observed from the North (Luzon) and in Visayas (Central) but most especially from Mindanao, even those who are outside of the identified Bangsamoro territory.

On the other hand those personalities and non government organizations and institutions who have been acting like non partisans during the pre Mamasapano incident have been exposed of their interests to have the peace between the GPH and the MILF even if it is very obvious that it(peace) is non inclusive and not done based on justice. Their self serving interest has been uncovered and that they have been after the peace dividends and they are making sure to get from the funds coming in for the peace agreement.

The murdered 44 SAF have been considered heroes and were given heroes welcome and burial in their respective municipalities throughout the country.

Peoples have put the blame on the present Aquino government for the deaths of the SAF men. This is the main reason why even if the President himself appeared twice in national television to explain what had happened in January 25, 2015 and what was his role in it nobody would believe him especially the relatives of the 44 SAF officers and men.

Trust and confidence have been greatly affected in that single event. Peoples have lost their trust for the success of the peace talks with the MILF. The Bangsamoro Basic Law (BBL) which will lay down the legal foundation for the establishment of the Bangsamoro government has been put on hold (Philippine Congress had been deliberating on it for its promulgation) indefinitely. And since much has been put on the President's trust and popularity, it has gone down now. The peace talks have gone down together with the popularity and peoples' trust with the President.

People throughout the country, have now become active stakeholders of the peace process between the GPH and MILF. They are delivering strong messages that the peace which should be established will be the one based on justice, especially on the SAF murdered in Mamasapano and it should be inclusive not only the MILF but other Moro groups as well and the Indigenous Peoples and the Christians (Migrant Settlers).

The BBL and the Peace Process on Suspended Animation

Other groups like the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) have raised some questions on the correctness of creating a new law like the BBL for establishing the new Bangsamoro political entity. For these groups the Republic Act 9054 - a law which created the expanded Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) should only be enhanced. ARMM is the result of the 1996 peace agreement between the Philippine government and the MNLF.

The Aquino government and the MILF have considered the ARMM as a failed political experiment and this kind of status quo could not remain in establishing the Bangsamoro political entity.

In the agreed BBL version of the government and the MILF panels, lessons from the ARMM's failure were not included. The socio, economic and political set up of the region should be studied deeper. The role of the Indigenous Political Structures should be factored in vis-à-vis the role of the elected political leaders based on the local government code. Even the influence of State machineries and its functions in the barangay or even municipal levels should be analyzed.

In many areas in the ARMM, the elected political officials could not be seen except during election or when they received their Internal Revenue Allotment (IRA) which many of these officials considered as their personal budget. There are no banks or functional financial mechanism from the State machineries and therefore the main financial transaction are done through an informal economy and financing which are controlled by the local rich traders. Many of these informal businessmen are the government officials themselves or their puppets in the areas.

As stated above all of these government cum businessmen do not stay in their municipalities but have bought and built big houses in the cities and even in Manila.

These people/politicians stay and maintain their power because they also have arms and weapons and they have unwritten agreement with groups like the MILF to respect each other. Civil and Criminal cases are resolved through the Shariah courts. But it is the Council of Elders - respected peoples in the village of the municipality who would often times resolve the problem/conflict because the peoples trust and could freely go to them.

These facts could be seen from the ARMM experiences and they should serve as lessons to be learned and be put into BBL. The MILF is mainly political-military machinery and its structures do not have the civil society having a prominent role in its functioning.

The MILF has just formed the United Bangsamoro Justice Party (UBJP) as its main electoral and political mechanism towards direct governance of the Bangsamoro government. In the composition of its official, the leadership and the key MILF leaders have taken up positions starting with Al Haj Murad Ebrahim, the Chair of the MILF has also became the head of the UBJP. Most likely he will be elected as the Chief Minister of the Bangsamoro government. This multi-task of the MILF leadership and personnel will be replicated down to the basic level of governance. Already the traditional politicians have shown interests to the new electoral/political party. They will soon have strong if not have total control of the Bangsamoro.

At this stage, a menu is prepared for a sure failed political institution.

The Mamasapano situation is a case in point here. The mayor does not have control over his municipality. He could not even go to all his thirteen (13) barangays. Aside from the municipal building there are schools in big barangays but no other government instrumentalities in town. The Mayor can stay in power because he belongs to the Ampatuan clan (grandson of the former governor

of Maguindanao – Datu Andal Ampatuan) The mayor's brother – a suspect of the 2009 Maguindanao massacre – just like Datu Andal except that he avoided the arrest and now he led more than 200 fully armed group in Mamasapano both hiding from the arresting law enforcers and protecting the brother who is the Mayor. The MILF and the BIFF cannot touch the Mayor. In the same manner, the Mayor cannot go to the areas of the groups.

Important lessons from the MNLF- ARMM experience were never considered. Valid criticism were made to Professor Nur Misuari – the Chair of the MNLF when he got multi role after the 1996 Final Peace Agreement. He maintained his chairmanship with the MNLF. He accepted being the governor of the ARMM, he became the Chair of the Southern Philippine Center for Peace and Development (SPCPD) and held other various posts. He never shared important positions and tasks with other members of the MNLF leadership. He could not do all the tasks and roles at the same time as proven by concrete experience.

The indefinite postponement of the discussion of the BBL in Congress can give everyone the additional and needed time to deeply review its content in the light of what had happened in Mamasapano. The concepts of territory, citizenship, governance, resource sharing and generation, police and security, justice, etc will be analyzed by both houses of Congress without the pressures from the President and the executive just like in the pre-Mamasapano incident.

At this stage, it is definite that the BBL which will be passed by Congress will not be the version agreed upon by the GPH and MILF panels. The MILF Chair had already given a some sort of warning to the leadership of Congress that the MILF will not accept a watered down version of the BBL.

Representatives of the MILF had already delivered to the leadership of the IPs the message that they should trust MILF to consider their issues on Ancestral Domain and governance as long as the IPs would back down with their advocacy campaigns to have their autonomy within the Bangsamoro government.

After the Mamasapano bloody encounter, the MILF together with the Aquino government with its peace panel have become defensive. The families and relatives of the forty four (44) SAF/PNP strongly believe that their loved ones were sacrificed in the altar of peace of GPH and the MILF.

Peoples from the North to the South of the country do not believe the explanation of the President about his role and responsibility in the January 25, 2015 incident.

Definitely the popularity of the President and his government has become so low that the support of the peace talk with the MILF has been dragged with it.

Everyday, it has become crystal clear that the next President will be the one to handle the continuation of the peace process unless there will be extra constitutional move from within or outside the Aquino government to either continue his term or his government will be replaced by a transitory government.

In the coming days, people will celebrate anniversary of the People Power uprising. Definitely calls for the resignation of the President and his government will be highlighted. There will be merging of different political and social movements to rally around the issue of Resign All – the stepping down of the President, Vice President and all his cabinet members. The Peace talks with the MILF will definitely be set aside at least for the moment.

Reactions from the MILF will be expected to be in the form of the Military actions (just like the 2008 MOA-AD). Proportionate reactions or moves will be implemented by the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP). Movements on the ground towards this reaction can already be observed from the

two forces.

Meanwhile, the investors will have a “wait and see” attitude and if the situation of war will intensify they (investors) will simply pull out and wait for another opportunity.

The Role of the US

In the last few years, China has been making its presence more visible in the Asia-Pacific Region. Together with its becoming the second biggest economy in the world (second from the US and displacing Japan) it tries to impose its presence in the Spratly islands claimed by the Philippines, Vietnam and other Southeast Asia countries and it is establishing its military bases in those islands e.g. construction of airports.

With this development, since last year, the US has declared its Asian pivot – which simply means that it will make its presence more than visible while it maintains its seventh fleet in the region. It will try to maintain its presence in places like Okinawa in Japan amidst intensifying protests by the Japanese people. With the re-election of the conservative Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) and Abe as its Prime Minister, at least the US bases in the area will be secured for now.

In the case of the Philippines, the US has been able to continue its stay and is even able to enhance its presence in the country with stronger legal foundation. The already existing arrangement based on the mutually agreed document called the Visiting Forces Agreement (VFA) where it (US) does not have to build and maintain its military bases in the country but is able to go anywhere in the country for military purposes.

Now, the US is able to enhance its presence in the country through the Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement or EDCA, where the US forces can be involved in indirect war against terrorism and other external threats to the Philippines. Both countries are able to provide legal protection to the US forces' presence and be embedded in the camps of the AFP. This is also to advance the implementation of the already agreed Mutual Defense Treaty. Such agreement includes inter-operability, capacity building, strengthening of AFP external defense, maritime security, maritime domain awareness, humanitarian assistance and disaster response.

US Involvement in the Mamasapano Incident

The police operation to get a Malaysian terrorist who is believed to be the bomber of the Bali resorts in Indonesia and series of bombings in the Philippines and his Filipino assistant – is called OPLAN EXODUS. The US forces' hands are everywhere from offering the prizes of their heads – Marwan has \$6 Millions and Usman \$3 Millions. The US provided the direct training activities of the selected Special Action Force Seaborne Company in a resort in Zamboanga City.

In the actual operation it has been known that there were four members of the US forces who stayed with the Operational Command in the nearby municipality of Shariff Aguak, Maguindanao.

Unmanned drones had been used to monitor the areas days before the implementation of the OPLAN Exodus.

And when finally the remaining 84th Seaborne SAF Company was extracted– the US through the FBI agents make sure to directly get the specimen of Marwan for DNA testing.

It was very clear that the US is only after the proof that the one killed was the terrorist Marwan- and nothing to help save the lives of the SAF/PNP personnel.

During the hearings of different Investigative bodies, especially the Congress, the President thru his Cabinet and generals have been trying to cover up the decisive role of the US.

But since the US role in the failed police operation from the point of view of the high number of SAF/PNP casualties but success in the US interest - Marwan's death was confirmed - the peoples have become aware of how the Aquino government has defaulted his basic role to protect its citizens and sovereignty to the US. The consequence of this treason like action of the President can never be underestimated.

The Meaning of Some Indicators of the Philippine Economy

The Aquino Administration has been boasting that last year (2014) it got high Gross Domestic Product (GDP) with 6.1% which accordingly second only to China. It got 6.9% in the last quarter of last year and was able to pull up the annual average of its GNP. The prime movers of the GNP increase were government spending using the money from what it (Aquino government) termed as Development Acceleration Program (DAP). This is the pooling together of different savings from the approved General Appropriated budget and spends it base on the Presidential discretion. Last month part of this DAP has been declared unconstitutional by the Supreme Court. The government spending includes the various construction activities and the Conditional Cash Transfer (CCT) which is the dole out spending of government where money is literally distributed to the identified as poorest of the poor.

The second biggest source of the GDP is the remittances of the country's migrant workers which is becoming bigger everyday. These migrant workers who can be located in almost all countries of the world have an average monthly remittance of more than 2 Billion USD which is more than \$24 Billion in a year or comprising almost 50% of the country annual budget for 2015 (P2.6 Trillions).

More than 50% of its labor forces of 45 millions out of 100 million total number of its population is either unemployed or underemployed.

More than 30 millions of its people considered themselves living below the poverty level if it will be based on the UN Standard of poverty level - \$1.50 daily earning.

The below 5% inflation rate is more a result of the decreased of the prices of oil and other petroleum products rather than the results of higher purchasing power of its consumers.

The other factors which contributed in the increased of the country's GNP are the service sector, Business Process Outsourcing (BPO), Manufacturing and Agriculture.

These contributions will surely be affected by this year (2015) opening of market of members of South East Asian countries as part of their Regional Market Unification and Development.

Even the big amount as contribution of the migrant workers will surely be affected by the very unstable conditions of several host countries, especially in the Middle East.

In brief the economic indicators can hardly sustain for the basic reason that they are not founded on industrial base capacity of the country. Its industries are mainly semi-process and extractive.

But what is clear is that the more the Aquino government announces the improvement of the

economy the more number of the country's population are living below poverty level. In short, the more the Philippine economy has been said to improve the more people have suffered extreme poverty.

This is typical neoliberal capitalist in action in a country like the Philippines.

Conclusion

The unfortunate event in Mamasapano has provided a much needed wake up call for peoples not only Mindanao but the whole country as well.

Just as the peace agreement between the government of the Philippines and the MILF is about to be finalized by the approval of the BBL which will become part of the law of the land - the Mamasapano bloody incident happened.

The questions of trust and confidence on the MILF have been put in the open. Its (MILF) real role in the SAF/PNP massacre has triggered up debates in the sincerity and intentions of the MILF in achieving genuine and sustainable peace in Mindanao.

The coming in of investors even before the peace agreement is consummated is a concrete sign that what is at stake here is really the very rich natural resources in Mindanao which the national government needs to open up to foreign investors to further propel its neo-liberal project for development.

The peace agreement of the government and the MILF (if consummated) is getting the right to exploit what is left to the natural resources of the country in Mindanao. This is the main reason why the right of the Indigenous Peoples (IPs) over their ancestral domains and the very rich natural minerals in them has never been considered. Their (IPs) opposition to their exclusion to the peace that the MILF and the government is bulding, has been considered as works of peace spoilers.

It took the forty four (44) lives of the SAF/PNP to stop the peace momentum engineered by the Philippine government and the MILF.

Revolutionary and progressive organizations and groups should take this rare opportunity to organize and rally the three peoples in Mindanao in particular and the country in general in supporting the right to self determination of the Bangsamoro which will not hinder and diminish the right to self determination of the Indigenous People.

Programs and activities should be geared towards the elimination of the national oppression without neglecting the full realization of the rights of other minority nationalities. Solidarity among the poor and the toiling masses of the majority nationality and minority nationalities should be established and strengthened.

This is the only sure way to build durable and sustainable peace in this part of the world.

Raymund de Silva, February 2015
