

LETTER FROM A REGION □

Progress comes to Tawi-Tawi

Bongao, Tawi-Tawi (PNA) — He is a full-fledged colonel and once slept in the quarters of a rebel leader. It was a risky thing to do, considering the bitterness and hostility that hung heavy in the air at that time in Tawi-Tawi. Nonetheless, Col. Teofisto L. Gaurano, deputy commander of the Sulu Sea Frontier Command (SUSEFCOM), went through with it, if only to demonstrate that the government is sincere in accepting the return of insurgents to the fold of the law.

Nothing happened that night. But something did happen afterwards. Gerry Matba, alias Commander Gerry of the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF), surrendered shortly after the "sleep-in" of Gaurano, along with his 250 fully-armed followers. With Matba commanding the biggest following in Tawi-

Tawi, his surrender was followed suit by almost 1,500 rebels.

The surrender of Matba, a former school teacher who joined the MNLF to dramatize the clamor for reforms and more government attention to the less developed Muslim areas, created a chain of positive reactions. Paramount of these was the clearing away of the doubts among Muslims over the sincerity of the government. "We came here not to add fire to the root causes of insurgency, but to build a viable and strong development foundation," said Gaurano.

Restoring peace and order, he added, was principally a goal of "peace negotiation tactical operation."

In addition to Matba, other prominent rebel commanders who had surrendered were Roxas Sali and Muham-

mad Sali Baliauddin. No less than President Marcos commissioned them recently as second lieutenants in the Philippine Army. Some 15 other rebel leaders are currently undergoing military training in Manila.

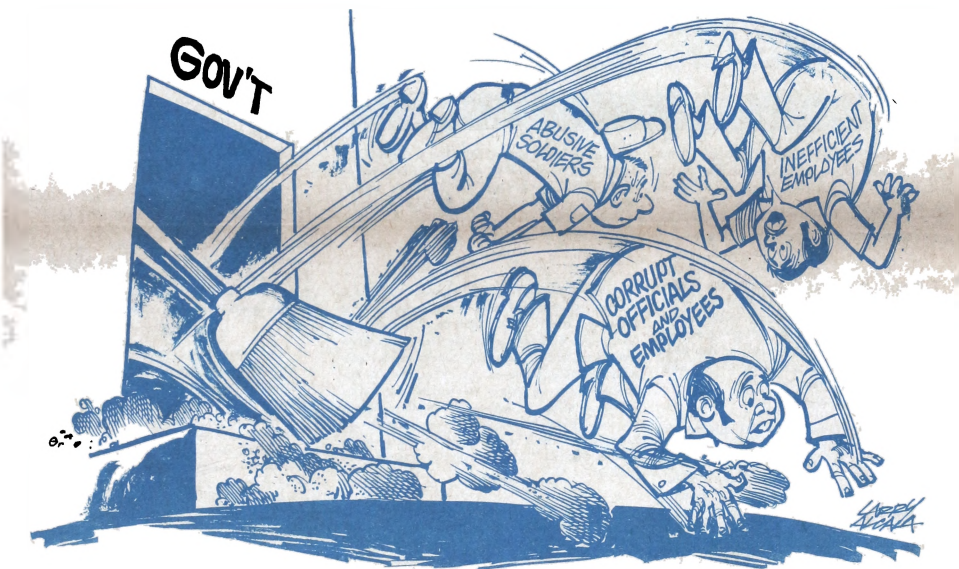
While SUSEFCOM placed priority on its pacification offensive it was not however remiss in its other mission.

To date, at least 64 development projects, most of them completed, are gradually changing the outlook of some 200,000 residents in the island who had rarely experienced government response to their problems before. A total of 2.7 million have been poured into a wide array of investments ranging from the construction of prefab school buildings to the cultivation of agar-agar. One such project is the opening of a 10-kilometer

road starting from the poblacion of Bongao going up to Bahut where a bridge is undergoing construction. Designed as farm-to-market road, it was finished with only picks and shovels.

The newly-created province of Tawi-Tawi has shown a tremendous capacity to surge toward the goal of social and economic development launched by SUSEFCOM. Tawi-Tawi used to be a part of the Sulu Province. By virtue of Presidential Decree No. 302 issued on September 11 this year, it became a province.

Among the reasons behind the promulgation of the decree was that the cluster of islands comprising the Tawi-Tawi group are distant from the seat of the provincial government of Sulu, and communications were so difficult.



(Cont'd. from page 1)

The second batch included one each from the Immigration Commission, Special Security Commission, Office of the President, National Economic and Development Authority, Citizens Legal Assistance Office, Department of Natural Resources, Bureau of Public Works, Bureau of Telecommunications, Department of Health, Department of Trade, Department of Local Government and Community Development, Home Financing Commission, State University; 14 from the Department of Justice; 18, Land Registration Commission; 5, Department of Agriculture; 3, Bureau of Fisheries; 6, Bureau of Forest Development; 5, Bureau of Posts; 31, Land Transportation Commission; 85, Department of Public Highways; and 81, Commission on Audit.

The resigned officials also included 12 judges of the Court of First Instance; three from the city fiscal's office, three

assistant city fiscals, six provincial fiscals; five municipal judges and 17 registrars of deeds.

The President also announced the retirement of Education and Culture Secretary Juan Manuel, Health Secretary Clemente Gatmaitan and Budget Commissioner Faustino Sy-Changco, and at the same time praised them for their "unblemished and dedicated services to the Republic long after they had reached the retirement age of 65 and had served with distinction the goals of reform and change of our New Society."

In a similar move, the President elevated to cabinet status Solicitor General Estelito Mendoza "in view of his exemplary service to the Philippine Republic not only in the conduct of legal defense of the Republic in our courts but also in legal conferences and forums outside the Philippines."

However, those who have gotten

the presidential ax comprise only a part of a massive overhaul in the government which will eventually see a total change in public service. The lower ranks of the civil service will not be spared; replacements for the corrupt and backsliders will be announced in due time.

In justifying his course of action, the President said: "I have warned, scolded, cajoled, reprimanded. "Now it is time to cut off the infected parts of the society from active public life before they endanger the entire body politic.

"This has been my painful duty as the head of the government and of the state. For the last three years, I have been watching the conduct of officers and employees in the national as well as the local governments. It is my duty as President of the Republic of the Philippines to reward what is proper, dedicated, devoted service by our public ser-

vants, and by the same token, to punish any violation of the sacred trust by a public official."

To those who have been found to have committed inequities or corruption in public office, the President said that not only were all their resignations approved but they would also face charges before the military court and would therefore be subsequently arrested and detained. Already, he has directed Defense Secretary Juan Ponce Enrile to probe the Office of the Undersecretary of Munitions which allegedly has misused the procurement of government materials.

As the big purge continues, other government departments, bureaus, agencies and offices would be affected, including the military organization. What has been started during the Rizal Park rite is only the beginning.

—JUANITA G. TRINIDAD