

MINDANAO

Expressions of support for RP policy

The restraint exercised by the Philippines in coping with the problem of foreign intervention in Mindanao has drawn praises and expressions of support from newspapers and Muslim countries and leaders here and abroad.

In Hongkong and Jakarta, for instance, several newspapers have come out with editorials calling on other countries, specifically Libya, to keep their hands off the internal affairs of the Philippines.

Indonesia and Malaysia, two of the most respected Muslim countries in Asia, and Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and other countries in the Middle East, supported the Philippine cause in the 5th world Islamic conference last March in Benghazi, Libya. When Libya sponsored a resolution to condemn the Philippines for its alleged war on the Muslims, these countries turned down the proposal and came up with a watered-down version of it and decided to send a commission to the Philippines to confer with the President on the Mindanao situation. The commission, the Philippines was informed this week, will be composed of the foreign ministers of Saudi Arabia, Libya, Senegal and Somali.

Within the country itself, more than 30 Muslim religious and political leaders in Mindanao presented a resolution to President Marcos early this year, expressing their support for the martial law administration and endorsing the programs launched by the government to solve the problem in the south.

One of the most difficult, if not dreaded, examinations in the Philippine civil service is the Foreign Service Officer (FSO) test. But passing it can also be a ticket to some of the most rewarding and most prestigious middle-rank positions in the government.

Indeed, the FSOs are today regarded as the elite corps of the Philippine foreign service. A successful FSO examinee is automatically vested with the title of vice consul. From there he can work his way up the ladder to consul general, minister, and chief of mission through sheer merit.

Before he can go up that ladder, however, he has to go through a maze of written, oral, physical and mental examinations, which make up the screening process. So gruelling is the pace that many simply have given up in sheer physical and mental exhaustion. The annual casualty figures in the multi-staged exams can attest to this. For instance, of the 150 or so who had applied this year, only 127 qualified to take the test. When the final results were announced recently, only 12 or less than 10 percent of the examinees had made the grade.

The written test, which composes the first stage of the examination, is tough in itself, but the subsequent oral, mental, and physical tests are just as tough, if not tougher.

"It is like a student taking his

The restraint exercised by the Philippines was further underlined a few weeks ago by President Marcos. Speaking at the nationwide radio-TV program "Pulong-Pulong sa Kaunlaran" (Forum for Progress), the President said the Philippines had not sought the aid of the United Nations, specifically the Security Council, to stop foreign intervention in the south because there was no need for this move.

"Since the Arab nations have taken cognizance of this and they are sending a commission over here, it would be preferable if we dealt with them directly," the President said. "Since they are coming to confer with me, it is, I think, proper that we await the arrival of this commission."

The President also noted that the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) had indirectly taken cognizance of the problem. He reiterated the view that the conflict in Mindanao was an internal matter involving "our own brother, the Muslim, who is also Filipino."

In the same radio-TV forum, the President declined to go into the extent of foreign involvement, saying "I would merely sit back and listen to what everybody is admitting and confessing to have done. We don't really need to make any assessments because they themselves say so."

A few days after the radio-TV program, Pakistani President Zulfikar Ali Bhutto was reported to have expressed concern over the Mindanao situation in an interview with newsmen. Mr. Bhutto's statement drew a reply from Secretary of Foreign Affairs Carlos P. Romulo, who asked Pakistan "to sympathize" with Philippine efforts to solve its internal problem. Mr. Romulo emphasized the fact that the present conflict was not between Muslims and Christians, but between law-abiding Muslims and Christians, on one hand, and lawless Muslims and Christians on the other. He also said: "The attempt by external agents to exploit the just and legiti-

mate grievances of the Muslim population is strongly to be deplored. The use of extra-legal means, not for the purpose of correcting grievances, but for the purpose of fragmenting the nation cannot be condoned in any manner. The government and people of Pakistan which have just undergone the trauma of internecine conflict (that resulted in the breakaway of Bangladesh) will surely sympathize with the position of the Philippines which is only defending its sovereignty and integrity."

The foreign secretary reiterated what President Marcos and other government leaders had been saying: first, that the conflict was not a religious one; and second, that the government was doing everything possible to make up for the past neglect of the region by implementing a crash program of development with the objective of making the "Muslim brothers in the south as citizens of the Philippines, full and equal partners in the development of the country."

Time and again the Philippines had sought to tell the world the circumstances behind the Mindanao problem and what it was doing about it. When Libya's strongman, Col. Kaddafi, first openly admitted participation in the Mindanao conflict in a speech in Tripoli, Libya, on June 11, 1972, the Philippines, instead of acting belligerently, invited Libya and other Arab countries to send observers to the Philippines to see for themselves the situation in Mindanao.

Shortly afterwards, Egypt and other countries (with the exception of Libya) sent a delegation to the Philippines. The delegation came away convinced that the problem was indeed not a religious war, but one caused mainly by economic factors. Other missions from Asian countries also visited the area to observe the situation at close range.

The Philippines, in the meantime, proceeded with its program to develop the region through large-scale infusion of national funds. Emphasis was given

to infrastructure, dispersal of industries and social action.

Implementation of these projects shifted to high gear after the government had regained control of the situation. The President gave credit to both the military and the more than 20,000 Muslim and Christian civilians who helped work toward restoration of peace in the area.

The humaneness of the government's approach to the Mindanao problem is reflected in the policies, programs and other measures adopted for the south. For instance, to win away misguided elements from the communist ideologues among the insurgents, the President had offered selective amnesty to those who would lay down their arms and join the mainstream of national life. More than 1,000 Muslims and Christians so far had availed themselves of the amnesty. Recently, the government again offered in exchange for the surrender of at least five foreign-made weapons, a loan of P2,000 from government financial institutions without collateral. The amount will enable the surrenderer to engage in barter trade, a privilege granted to Muslims in Sulu and Zamboanga.

To bridge the communications gap, the government last week launched project SALAM (Special Action for Literacy Advancement of Muslims), a crash education program designed to inform the Muslims through their own language (Arabic) about the efforts being exerted to improve their lot. A civic organization called SABAKA (Samahan ng Bagong Kabataan, or literally, Organization of the New Youth) has started a campaign to solicit cash, foodstuffs, and used clothing for Muslim and Christian evacuees in the region.

These are among the bases for the Philippine assurance to both Mindanao residents and foreign observers that everything is being done to restore peace and bring about a better life in Mindanao.

FOREIGN SERVICE TEST

Passing through a needle's eye

exams for a doctorate degree with one exception: the FSO examinee is supposed to know every subject under the sun and must be able to answer them with the poise and circumspection worthy of diplomats," says a veteran Foreign Office official of the oral test. Well-known names are selected to compose the panel of interrogators. This year, the panel included Undersecretary of Foreign Affairs Manuel Collantes, former Senator Lorenzo Sumulong, Supreme Court Justice Enrique Fernando, Ambassador Monico Vicente, and Mario Yango of the Civil Service Commission. After observing one session of the panel, a cum laude foreign service graduate of a Manila university remarked: "I would rather remain a casual than take the exams."

After the orals, the applicant must also pass the physical and mental examinations conducted by a selected

group of physicians and psychiatrists.

The minimum age requirement for examinees is 23, but actually the average age of those who have taken the test is 30 or over. Consul Delfin Gamboa, for instance, had spent a major part of his working life in the foreign service before he took the test and passed it a few years ago. Francisco Santos, one of the successful examinees in the current batch, had been with the Foreign Office for the last 10 years. An official explains that maturity and experience are important assets for success in the examination. About 80 percent of the new vice consuls have already been with the Foreign Office for sometime and a number of them had taken the FSO test two or more times before.

Unlike those who pass most other government examinations and often have to look for openings by them-

selves, successful FSO examinees are immediately certified by the Foreign Office to the President for appointment as foreign service officers, class IV, with the rank of vice consul. Low in salary (a little over P10,000 a year) but high in prestige, the position can assure one of promotion purely on merit, a situation that had been strengthened under martial law with the elimination of the "padrino" system, in which one had to look for a political patron or some other wielder of influence to back up one's promotion.

The Foreign Office today has a complement of over 3,000 officials and employees, about 20 percent of which are FSOs. The rest are Foreign Service Staff Officers (FSSO) and Foreign Service Staff Employees (FSSE), all of whom also had to pass other examinations given by the Foreign Office in cooperation with the Civil Service Commission.

The staffing patterns are scheduled to be reorganized soon to make the foreign service a more effective arm in implementing the external policy of the government. With the rigid screening that they have to undergo (to make sure only the best are selected), the FSOs may well be on the forefront of the country's new goal—making foreign policy an instrument of economic development.