



By Patricio P. Diaz | Friday| November 18, 2011

GENERAL SANTOS CITY – In Tuesday’s posting of Luwaran, the MILF official on-line publication, there was a story, “Japan-funded BLMI Center to rise soon”, complete with a picture of a two-story building under construction in Simuay, Sultan Kudarat, Maguindanao. According to the report:

1. The building is the Training Center for Human Resource Development of the Bangsamoro Leadership and Management Institute.
2. The project is being funded with P9,233,620 which the Embassy of Japan in Manila appropriated last March from its Grant Assistance for Grassroots Human Security Projects (GGP) for fiscal year 2010. The construction has been going on for months.

The Manila media should pick up this Luwaran report, send reporters to the construction site to investigate and get pictures; interview responsible sources at the Japan Embassy, as well as those of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front; then, publish a full story. That will help clear the BLMI controversy fostered by media reports from inaccurate sources.

When the Government and MILF peace panels met in Kuala Lumpur last August 22, the Philippine panel chair Marvic Leonen gave MILF panel chair Mohagher Iqbal a check for P5 million for the establishment of the Bangsamoro Leadership and Management Institute. This has been blown out to the proportion of a “scandal” that merited a threat to impeach President Benigno S. Aquino III.

Not only some members of the Senate and House of Representatives and opinion writers in national media assailed the Aquino government for the BLMI assistance; some Catholic bishops of the Philippines joined the fray. The controversy became most heated after the October 18 military-MILF encounter in Basilan that killed 19 Special Forces troopers in action. The MILF were suspected of using the P5 million to buy arms.

Malacañang and the Office of the Presidential Assistant for the Peace Process (OPAPP) have repeatedly explained the facts and relevant circumstances behind the creation of BLMI and the appropriation of the P5-million assistance. Silvestre Afable, former GRP peace panel chair, who negotiated the creation of BMLI in 2006, also explained. Not satisfied or not hearing, the critics have continued besieging the Palace and the OPAPP with demands to fully explain. The silence now does not mean closure of the issue.

From the official explanations, BLMI will do a lot in developing Moro human resources to eventually contribute to lasting peace and progress in Mindanao. From the point of view of the on-going peace negotiation between the Philippine Government and MILF, it is a vital piece in the implementation of the “Humanitarian Aspect” of the June 22, 2001 Tripoli Agreement of Peace the “Implementing Guidelines” of which, signed on May 7, 2002, created the Bangsamoro Development Authority (BDA).

Paragraph 2 of this “Aspect” states: “The MILF shall determine, lead and manage rehabilitation and development projects in conflict-affected areas, except when public funds are involved, in which case Government procedures and rules will be observed.” To properly do the task, the Moro human resources have to be developed.

BDA has been created and functioning with foreign funding support. It is manned by Moro professionals. As its activities expand, it will need more trained Moro personnel. Hence, as envisioned, BLMI is the answer to the need.

Critics and political leaders in Manila, especially those in Congress, should take note of these:

First, the Moro leaders spearheading development in conflict-affected areas through BDA are not card-bearing MILF; the development is not for MILF members but for the entire Moro people. So will BMLI be.

[As s significant footnote, only the chair of the MILF peace panel is card-bearing MILF; the others are Bangsamoro leaders truly committed to the Bangsamoro cause. More like them are involved in the MILF-led peace process. This answers the critics' question: Do the MILF represent the Bangsamoro people?]

Second, foreign governments and the United Nations have taken cognizance through their international development agencies of human and economic development of the Moros as a vital cog in the peace process in Mindanao. They have poured millions of dollars to help the Moros and the Philippine Government realize this end. Japan and the Asia Foundation have assisted in the take-off of BLMI.

Third, the pursuance of the "Rehabilitation Aspect" of the 2001 Tripoli Agreement of Peace through BDA is a challenge to MILF and other Moro leaders to prove that they are capable of developing themselves and the natural resources they are demanding under the political settlement they are seeking – the grant of state-sub-state autonomy. Foreign governments, including United Nations agencies, are helping them in their quest.

Fourth, officials of foreign embassies and aid agencies visit the MILF headquarters in Darapanan, Sultan Kudarat, Maguindanao to coordinate with MILF leaders in helping push forward the human and economic development aspect of the peace process – a most eloquent pitch against the continuance of armed rebellion.

Isn't it a shame that while foreign governments, the United Nations and their aid agencies have been helping the Philippine Government win peace in Mindanao through the human and economic development of the Moros, many critics and political leaders destroy the bridge of good will and confidence that Government and MILF have built painstakingly between them?

Isn't it a shame that while Japan has invested more than P9 million for the construction of the BLMI Human Resource Center – and together with other international agencies will surely invest more to equip the Center – many critics and political leaders see treason in the P5 million that the Aquino government has released to help set up BLMI?

What a shame, indeed!!!

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