

Appendix A: Online News Articles Selected

Label	Title
A1	Gov't intel eyes 3 groups abetting Sulu sultan's claim

1:29 am | Friday, March 1st, 2013

Whether the heirs of the sultanate of Sulu acted on their own to reclaim Sabah or were instigated by an external force to do so, one thing is certain, according to government intelligence sources: It was a business that proved too big for the heirs to handle on their own.

The sources said that the Philippine government's policy on Sabah is to keep it in the back burner.

But apparently "some people" want to push it forward now. And why now, at this time, is one of the questions government intelligence is looking into.

The sources consistently mentioned three groups that appear to have taken advantage of the decision of the Kirams to pursue their Sabah claim.

"These are groups that wanted to ride on the Kirams' pursuit with their own interests in mind," one of the sources said.

Another source added: "There are a lot who can gain from this, not just in the Philippines but in Malaysia as well."

These "external factors," as an Inquirer source described the groups, are one small faction that is in it for the money, an anti-Aquino administration group, and the Malaysian political opposition.

"The Kirams planned to pursue their claim as early as last year. But they went to Lahad Datu also on the instigation of these groups," the intelligence officer said.

The small group supposedly goaded the Kirams to ask Malaysia for a higher rent on Sabah. If Malaysia gives in, this small group would allegedly have a share of the increase.

The anti-administration group simply wants to discredit President Aquino and is using the peace process as a cause of disenchantment for the Kirams.

“All those who do not like P-Noy (the President’s nickname) have joined forces. This is one way to really test how this administration will react (to such an issue). Whatever happens in Malaysia, there will be a backlash on us,” one source said.

“In a way, whoever wants to disrupt the peace process or the gains of President Aquino has already won,” the source added.

The third group is allegedly the Malaysian political opposition, which is gearing up for general elections that may be called before June.

The intelligence officer said that one member of the Malaysian political opposition allied with Anwar Ibrahim was running for a post in Sabah.

“Apparently, this politician was one of those who spoke with the Kirams. He supposedly gave the opposition’s support to the Kirams’ claim to Sabah,” the source said.

November meeting

The source also believed that in their meeting in November last year, the Kirams decided to “reclaim Sabah or at least ask for a compensation for Sabah that is commensurate to the land’s value today, and for the royal family to be given due recognition by Malaysia.”

But it is being Tausug that is keeping Sultan Jamalul Kiram III, his family, and their subjects stubbornly pressing their renewed claim to Sabah, even to the extent of defying President Aquino, one of the Inquirer sources said.

“This is the last stand of Sultan Jamalul. Being Tausug, they already gave their word they would pursue their claim. This is now do or die for them just to keep their word of honor,” the source, a senior military officer, told the Inquirer.

But for another security administrator analyzing the events of the past three weeks, the Kirams appear to be quite edgy of late.

“They are confused. The government is hopeful that we can buy more time, find a diplomatic way out,” the source said, referring to the government’s efforts to help settle the standoff between Malaysian security forces and an armed group led by Jamalul’s brother, Agbimuddin Kiram, in Tandua village in Lahad Datu town now in its third week.

Kiram unity

The Inquirer’s sources are from the diplomatic and defense establishments. They asked not to be named as they were not authorized to speak to journalists about their analysis of developments in the so-called journey home to Sabah of the Kirams.

The source said the Kirams decided to unite because they felt left out of the peace negotiations between the Aquino administration and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front, which signed a preliminary peace deal last October.

Calling gov't attention

“The Kirams wanted to get the attention of the Philippine government,” the source said.

“For so many years, the family felt they have been exploited in politics. Sultan Jamalul was goaded to run for senator in 2010 but he lost. Then their letter to President Aquino (in 2010 before he assumed office) got lost,” the source said.

The source said the Kirams and their followers “conceived the details of the plan to go to Lahad Datu” in late January this year.

“In February, a small group of the Kirams’ followers left for Lahad Datu, followed by Raja Muda Agbimuddin,” the source said.

The estimated 70 firearms now in the hands of the group holed up in Tanduaao are owned by residents in Lahad Datu, Tausug and Badjao holding Malaysian identification cards, the source said.

Malaysian security forces have encircled Agbimuddin’s group but are holding action, with the grace period for the group to leave having been extended three times and a fourth being requested by the Philippine government.

Malaysians careful

The Inquirer’s military source said the impasse continues because the Malaysians are extra careful in dealing with Agbimmudin’s group.

“They are all Muslims and they know that if there is violence, it would go on forever. There are 800,000 Filipinos in Sabah. It would be a huge problem in Sabah if violence erupts. The Malaysian security forces may end up dealing with guerrillas or a rido,” the source said, using a Muslim term for clan war.

Label	Title
A2	Sulu gunmen call for ceasefire

9:20 pm | Friday, March 1st, 2013

PETALING JAYA, Malaysia—The Sultanate of Sulu is seeking a ceasefire with Malaysian armed forces in Lahad Datu, Sabah, saying that the group of Filipino gunmen need time to bury their dead.

“Malaysia is a Muslim nation so they should understand that we need to bury our dead,” said Abraham Idjirani, secretary-general of the Sulu Sultanate and spokesman for Sulu Sultan Jamalul Kiram III.

“I hope Malaysia will reconsider its position,” he said in a telephone interview from Manila on Friday.

Idjirani said that of the 235 people composing the group, 10 were shot dead by Malaysian armed forces.

Of the 10 dead, one was a woman, he said, adding that four were wounded.

The group, holed up in the seaside village of Tanduo, is led by Jamalul’s brother, Raja Muda Azzimudie Kiram.

Idjirani said Azzimudie intended to hold on to his position as their purpose for storming Tanduo — to live in peace and have the Malaysian government recognize their ownership of the state —remained the same.

He also claimed that the Malaysian forces had attempted to dig their way in to the area at around 6 a.m. Thursday but soon withdrew.

The shooting began at 10.30 a.m.

Label	Title
A3	Sulu gunmen open fire on Malaysia forces—officials

3:32 pm | Friday, March 1st, 2013

MANILA, Philippines—Malaysia said Friday that Filipino gunmen had opened fire at the scene of a tense stand-off over a territorial dispute, but denied they had returned fire as rebels claimed 10 of their group were killed.

Malaysia’s Home Minister Hishammuddin Hussein wrote on Twitter that shots had been fired in the Sabah village of Lahad Datu, but that security forces had not retaliated and that the group continued to be surrounded.

“I confirm that our security forces have not taken a single shot but were shot at 10 a.m. this morning!” he tweeted.

He later told The Star newspaper that there had been “no deaths”.

President Benigno Aquino’s spokeswoman Abigail Valte told reporters that security forces had fired “warning shots” but played down reports of a firefight.

“Warning shots were fired. There was no gunfight. There were no casualties,” she said.

Malaysia’s ambassador to the Philippines told Foreign Secretary Albert del Rosario that the gunfire had stopped and there were no reports of casualties, foreign affairs spokesman Raul Hernandez said on local television.

However, a spokesman for the self-proclaimed Filipino Muslim sultan who sent the men to Sabah to stake their territorial claim, alleged the Malaysian authorities had shot dead 10 members of the group.

Scores of followers of Jamalul Kiram III, the self-proclaimed heir to the Filipino Muslim sultanate of Sulu have been facing off with Malaysian forces in the village for more than two weeks.

The group, which includes about 30 gunmen according to Filipino authorities, sailed from their remote southern Philippine island homes to Lahad Datu on February 12.

Abraham Idjirani, Kiram’s spokesman, claimed snipers from the Malaysian forces had killed 10 of the sultan’s men and wounded four other members of the party.

“I talked to (the group’s leader) by telephone just now and asked him how many of his men were martyred. He told me 10. I enquired about the wounded and he said four,” Idjirani told a news conference at Kiram’s Manila home.

“They are not leaving,” he said of Kiram’s men. “The fighting will continue.”
Malacañang spokesman Ricky Carandang said the Malaysian authorities had briefed Manila about how the Malaysian forces had fired warning shots.
He stressed they did not receive any reports of casualties.

“This was not a firefight, that’s what we were told. What we know is that there were some members of the party who tried to break out of the area where they are being contained and they were arrested by the Malaysian authorities.”

Carandang added: “The foreign department and other concerned Cabinet members are talking to Malaysian counterparts for this to remain peaceful.”

Kiram says he is the head of the Islamic Sultanate of Sulu, which once controlled parts of Borneo including the site of the stand-off, as well as southern Philippine islands.

The sultanate leased northern Borneo to Europeans in the 1870s.

While the sultanate’s authority gradually faded as Western colonial powers exerted their influence over the region, it continued to receive lease payments for Sabah.

The former British colony became part of the federation of Malaysia when it was formed in 1963.

Kiram and the other heirs of the sultan still receive nominal annual compensation from Malaysia in the equivalent of about \$1,700.

Idjirani suggested last week that the men would stand down if the compensation were substantially raised.

Label	Title
A4	14 dead in Sabah assault ‘A massacre,’ Sulu sultan cries, ‘fight not yet over’

12:21 am | Saturday, March 2nd, 2013

A standoff in Sabah erupted in violence on Friday morning, with 12 followers of the sultan of Sulu and two police officers killed as Malaysian Prime Minister Najib Razak declared his patience had run out.

Sabah Police Commissioner Hamza Taib told reporters that 12 members of the group, which was led by a brother of Sulu Sultan Jamalul Kiram III, were killed in the clash that began at about 10 a.m. and lasted for 30 minutes.

A spokesperson for the sultan of Sulu, Abraham Idjirani, denounced the raid on Agbimuddin’s group as a “massacre.”



BLOODY FRIDAY A truck at the village of Tandua in Lahad Datu carries the bodies of two members of Malaysia’s police commando. The two were among the casualties in Friday’s clash between Malaysian forces and armed members of the sultanate of Sulu, who had camped out at Lahad Datu since Feb. 9 to press their claim to Sabah. MALAYSIA’S THE STAR/ASIA NEWS NETWORK

Idjirani said the standoff was not over and that Agbimuddin’s group was still there and fearing more attacks by the Malaysian forces.

“No, the standoff is not over, unless there’s a concrete understanding or agreement that can be reached by the three parties,” Idjirani said, referring to the sultanate of Sulu and the Philippine and Malaysian governments.

No one surrendered

Speaking to reporters, Hamza said no one had surrendered. He said Agbimuddin's group remained holed up in the village and that the security operation was going on.

"We will assess the situation again. We want them to surrender peacefully. If they still insist, we have no choice, but there is no time frame," he said.

Idjirani was speaking at the time when reports from Malaysia were saying 10 members of Agbimuddin's group, including a woman, had been killed.

"The first shot was fired by the Malaysian commando forces. The fallen heroes . . . are 10," Idjirani said.

He said the sultan had ordered that the casualties not be identified "so the situation will not escalate."

The dead will be buried in Lahad Datu, he said.

Stay put in Sabah

"Our stand is the same. Rajah Mudah (Crown Prince) Agbimuddin Kiram will stay put in the area to discipline [our followers]. But if the Malaysians will attack, they will do the same," Idjirani said.

He said that before the clash in Sabah, representatives of the sultan led by one of his brothers, Abdelnasser Kiram, were on their way to the Malaysian embassy for an "informal dialogue" with the Malaysian ambassador.

But reports of the clash in Tanduao came while the group was on the road, he said.

The sultan recalled the representatives "because the [shooting had] started," Idjirani said.

"The sultan is still open (to talks) because our advocacy is still peace," Idjirani said.

The Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) could not immediately confirm deaths on the side of the group led by Agbimuddin, a brother of the Sulu sultan, but said it had reports that 10 either surrendered or were arrested.

The Star newspaper of Malaysia reported that two police commandos were killed by mortar fire and four other policemen were injured in the raid on Tanduao village in Lahad Datu town where Agbimuddin's group had been holed up since Feb. 9.

Prime Minister Najib confirmed that two policemen were killed but said only three were injured in the clash.

The Star quoted Najib as saying he had given security forces authority to take whatever action they thought necessary to end the standoff.

Najib said Agbimuddin's group had ventured 1.5 kilometers from their holed up area and opened fire at the Malaysian security forces.

No more grace period

"I am very sad over the incident because what we had wanted to prevent, which is bloodshed, had actually happened," he said.

"Now there is no grace period for the group to leave," he added.

Earlier, Najib warned Agbimuddin's group to leave before the authorities took action.

"Do not test our patience, our patience has reached the limit," he said.

Agbimuddin's group, variously reported as numbering 250, 235 and 180, with about 30 armed and styled as the "Royal Security Forces of the Sultanate of Sulu and North Borneo," had rebuffed efforts by the governments of both Malaysia and the Philippines to leave the village and return home to Sulu.

The sultan's followers had insisted that Sabah belonged to the Sulu sultanate and they were only returning to their "homeland."

The clash

Three extensions of a Feb. 22 deadline for them to leave had expired and the Philippine government had requested a fourth extension, but Agbimuddin had refused to lead his group out, saying he took orders only from his brother the sultan.

Hamza said the shootout was sparked when the sultan's followers fired at security forces as they were tightening their cordon around Tanduaao.

"The intruders fired at us, then we returned fire," he said.

"As a result of the fire two of my men died, three were injured and . . . 12 intruders died," he said.

"The operation is still going on," he said, adding that police continued to surround the area.

Agbimuddin told radio station dzBB in Manila that Malaysian police surrounding Tanduaao opened fire at midmorning and that his group fought back.

"They suddenly came in. We had to defend ourselves," Agbimuddin said.

Gunfire was heard in the background while Agbimuddin was being interviewed by phone.

In a second interview with the radio station, Agbimuddin said he had received reports that some of his men were wounded but he was not ordering a retreat or sue for a truce.

He said he himself was trading shots with the Malaysian policemen and he would continue fighting.

A source who was located near the area of the fire fight told the INQUIRER that Agbimuddin's group was caught off guard, but was able to return fire with rifles and mortars.

"They came crawling and they fired the first shots," the source said.

The attack, the source said, was carried out not by ordinary police forces of Malaysia but by military commandos acting on information from a civilian agent of the Special Branch.

Special Branch officers were among the first negotiators to talk with Agbimuddin after the group's arrival in Lahad Datu, the source said.

The source said Jamalul talked with Agbimuddin by phone in the afternoon and told him to hold his ground, but with the information that direct negotiations with Malaysia were under way.

At sunset, the source said, Agbimuddin buried his slain followers.

DFA spokesperson Raul Hernandez said the department had received reports that the sultan's followers had fled toward the sea.

No prisoners

Idjirani denied that any of the sultan's followers surrendered to the Malaysians or were captured during the clash in Tanduaao.

"There's no truth to the report made by the Department of Foreign Affairs that Rajah Mudah Agbimuddin Kiram has been hurt. There's no truth that 10 members of the Royal Security Forces of the Sultanate of Sulu and North Borneo have surrendered or have been captured," Idjirani said.

He denied the information from the DFA that the sultan's followers fled to the sea.

"How can they escape by sea in broad daylight? It's like telling [the police], 'Go ahead, shoot us,'" he said.

Label	Title
A5	Malaysian ceasefire monitors in Mindanao advised to lie low

3:23 pm | Saturday, March 2nd, 2013

COTABATO CITY, Philippines—A former Moro rebel official now working as government peace consultant said Saturday members of the Malaysian contingent on the International Monitoring Team have been advised to limit their movements following Friday’s clash between Malaysian security forces and a group of followers of the sultan of Sulu who had been holed up in a village in Lahad Datu to assert their claim to Sabah.

At least 10 members of the “homecoming” party of the Sultanate of Sulu and two Malaysian commandoes were reportedly killed when Malaysian police forces stormed their encampment in Felda Sahabat 17 in Lahad Datu.

Eid Kabalu, former spokesperson of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front, told the Inquirer by phone there were fears the Malaysian contingent would be targeted if sympathizers or followers of Sulu Sultan Jamalul Kiram III decide to avenge the Tausug deaths.

Malaysian IMT members are deployed in various Moro areas, including Sulu, Basilan, Tawi-Tawi, Maguindanao and Lanao del Sur. The IMT members do not only monitor the implementation of the ceasefire agreement between the government and the MILF but they are also involved in the implementation of socio-economic and humanitarian programs.

“Authorities are now beefing up their security as part of precautionary measures,” Kabalu said.

But he clarified that so far, there has been no indication that followers of Kiram were targeting any Malaysian IMT members.

“But while there is no prior information, the Malaysian contingent was asked to limit movements,” he said.

Meanwhile, despite claims by Malaysian authorities they have ended the stand-off, tension remains high in Lahad Datu.

Jecel Kiram, Jamalul’s daughter, said that her uncle, Agbimuddin Kiram, who led the expedition to Sabah, had managed to elude the Malaysian police and was now in an undisclosed area of Sabah with most of his followers.

The younger Kiram said that despite the setback it suffered on Friday, the “royal army” will not leave Sabah, which, she said, belongs to the sultanate.

“Some of them had died or had been captured but they are staying there,” Jecel told a radio station here on Saturday.

Makabayan senatorial candidate Teddy Casiño and Bayan Muna Representative Neri Colmenares said in separate statements furnished the Inquirer that Malaysia’s action was “an utter breach of diplomacy and an affront to the Filipino people and the civilized world.”

“Malaysia is practically in control of Sabah. They did not need to resort to military operations. In fact, there is still time and opportunity to exhaust all options to peacefully solve the problem,” Casiño said, adding that Kuala Lumpur should be held liable for the deaths of the sultan’s followers.

Casiño, who had earlier suggested the revival of the Sabah claim, said that aside from Malaysia, the Aquino government was also liable “for mishandling the Sabah problem.”

“His hardline policy of no-talk unless they pull out, in addition to prosecution, practically pushed Kiram’s group against the wall. Paano sila uuwi eh kakasuhan din sila?” he asked.

Casiño added that the Aquino government’s position might have also emboldened Malaysian security forces to take on Kiram’s group “because their own President appears hostile (to) the Filipino Muslims’ attempt to stake their claim to Sabah.”

“What kind of President orders a group with a strong historical and legal claim to just leave Sabah without any promise of dialogue? We find it perplexing that Aquino is refusing to dialogue with our Muslim countrymen about the Sabah claim,” Casiño added.

Colmenares described the aftermath of the attack as an incident that “required accountability.”

“The Philippines must lodge a strong protest,” he said.

Casiño said it was also high time Philippines revived the Sabah claim by elevating it to the United Nations, “and pursue diplomatic talks with Malaysia for a just, comprehensive and peaceful solution.”

“The government cannot just dismiss the Sabah claim and order all Filipino Muslims in Sabah to ‘come home.’ Many historical accounts reveal that the Sultanate of Sulu predates all existing governments. The Philippine government must follow through on its official claim to the territory not only for the heirs of the Sultanate of Sulu, but for Filipino people and nation,” he said.

Colmenares said the government should “defend our territory.”

“Aquino should face this territorial dispute with patriotism,” he said, adding that the “standoff might have been avoided if Aquino recognized the legitimacy of Kiram’s claim to Sabah and helped them negotiate with the Malaysian government.”

“The Philippines and the sultanate, more than any entity, have solid historical and legal basis for claiming Sabah. Sabah is within the Philippine territory and Aquino should have had asserted, along with our Muslim brothers and sisters, our sovereignty,” Colmenares said.

He said while Aquino was obviously trying to appease Malaysia by not pursuing the Sabah claim, he has adopted a selective patriotism by pursuing the claim to the Panatag Shoal.

Colmenares said he suspected that the claim to the Panatag Shoal was being pursued because it would please the United States, which has been raring to deploy troops and weapons against China.

Meanwhile, Esmail Kiram II, another younger brother of Jamalul, said the Malaysian and the Philippine governments cannot just tell the Tausugs to leave Sabah.

He said that in reality, many ethnic Tausugs live in Sabah and they are known there as Orang Suluk (people from Sulu).

“Many Suluks from Sulu and Filipino Muslims and Christians fled Mindanao due to the conflict and the government of Malaysia opened up the door of Sabah to allow them to seek shelter and protection there,” he said.

Label	Title
A6	Palace still hopeful Kirams will soften

8:15 pm | Saturday, March 2nd, 2013

MANILA, Philippines—All is quiet in Sabah, but tensions linger.

Malacañang, after learning Saturday that all the 224 remaining followers of the sultan of Sulu in Lahad Datu were gearing up for a bloody confrontation with Malaysian forces, remained hopeful that Sultan Jamalul Kiram III would still soften his position.

At press time, the Philippine Navy’s BRP Tagbanua was still in waters off Tawi-Tawi, waiting for clearance from Malaysian authorities to dock in Lahad Datu and ferry the sultan’s followers back to Sulu.

“We have to respect that they are in control of the situation there,” said Cabinet Secretary Almendras of the Malaysian government, when asked at a press conference about the failure of the Aquino administration to convince Prime Minister Najib Razak to allow the entry of what Malacañang described as a ship carrying “humanitarian” help—social workers and medical personnel—to aid the sultan’s followers.

The administration’s pointman in Malaysia—Ambassador Eduardo Malaya—is also ensconced in the capital, Kuala Lumpur, a three-hour plane travel from Sabah.

Asked about the situation in Lahad Datu, Almendras said: “I’m sorry, I do not know exactly what the situation in Lahad Datu is.”

But he confirmed that Rajah Mudah Agbimuddin Kiram was still in the Tandua village on the outskirts of Lahad Datu.

“Right now, the most important thing is we’d want to avoid any more bloodshed. There was an incident yesterday. The President has been very active all throughout. The President was on this all the way till midnight, even beyond midnight,” he said.

“The previous days, it was the same thing. So there will be a time when all of these details can be discussed. We don’t mean to engage in an argument of who said this, who said that,” Almendras said.

“The important thing right now is you want to save lives. You want to prevent further bloodshed. And I believe, I firmly believe that we have, as a government, done everything we possibly can, and continue to do so to prevent the additional bloodshed,” he added.

The Palace inadvertently confirmed that Malaysia may not have been forthright in disclosing the real situation, initially providing the government with wrong information about the exchange of fire.

It was the Kiram family that was the first to announce that 10 of its followers were dead, but the Department of Foreign Affairs said that it had reports that the 10 either surrendered or were arrested.

The Palace, too, had denied any casualty, explaining it had been told that only warning shots were fired when two of sultan's armed followers tried to break off from the cordoned area. The Palace had denied any gunfight between the sultan's men and Malaysian forces.

When things got clearer Friday night, the Palace had to announce that "ten to twelve Filipinos and two Malaysians died as the Kiram family and their followers clashed with Malaysian authorities in Lahad Datu, Sabah."

Asked about the source of the confusion, Almendras said: "The Malaysian ambassador was called by Secretary del Rosario in the afternoon. Our requests were given to the Malaysian ambassador, and the Malaysian ambassador stated those things to us."

Asked if it was Malaysia that initially fed the Palace wrong information, he said: "At the time that Secretary del Rosario was meeting with the ambassador, he said, 'we do not have any reports of any death at that time.' So that was the basis for that statement."

Agbimudding Kiram had rejected the "small window of opportunity" seen by Malacañang as the last remaining avenue of a "peaceful conclusion" to the standoff.

To which Almendras said: "We are saddened—I am personally saddened by that statement. There are reports contrary to that. I will not claim authenticity to those, either. The President's statement is very clear."

"If you had a house, and then somebody comes into your house, armed, how would you react? It might be misinterpreted that we're defending the other country," he added.

The circumstances surrounding the gunfight remained shrouded in secrecy, obfuscated by the dearth of information coming from Sabah.

For instance, Almendras did not say whether the Palace was advised by the Malaysian government about their decision to assault the sultan's followers ahead of the actual operation.

He instead relied on the "official statement of Malaysians"—released by the Malaysian embassy—that "they did not provoke it."

"There was an incident, there was a reaction, there was a counter-reaction on a series. I beg your indulgence; it's hard to say anything because things need to be verified. But there are several—there are two versions of the incident yesterday. There is the Kiram version; there is the Malaysian version," said Almendras.

Label	Title
A7	PH humanitarian team banned from Lahad Datu

2:11 am | Sunday, March 3rd, 2013

MANILA, Philippines—Malaysian authorities have barred the humanitarian team sent by the Philippine government from entering Lahad Datu, stopping the group at Kota Kinabalu, a member of the team told the INQUIRER on Saturday.

“Upon reaching Sabah, the Malaysian authorities didn’t allow us to proceed to Lahad Datu. We were only allowed to stay in [Kota Kinabalu], so we left the place two days ago,” Mayor Nazif Ahmad Abdurahman of Simunul, Tawi-Tawi, told the INQUIRER by phone.

Abdurahman was among local officials from the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) who were sent by Acting Gov. Mujiv Hataman to meet and talk with Agbimuddin Kiram in Lahad Datu.

Navy ship stopped

“Our mission didn’t materialize because of the restrictions imposed by the Malaysian authorities,” Abdurahman said.

He said even the Philippine Navy ship sent to Malaysia to secure all illegally staying Filipinos wanting to come home had been denied entry by the Malaysian border patrol.

“The ship just anchored off Sibutu and has been there for five days already,” Abdurahman said.

Lt. Gen. Rey Ardo, chief of the military in Western Mindanao, confirmed that the Navy ship was still in Philippine waters as of Saturday.

“The Navy boat was not able to get through the Malaysian border,” Ardo, who also has jurisdiction over the Navy in Western Mindanao, said.

Ardo said the military wanted to help Filipinos in Sabah, including those from the group led by Agbimuddin, to come home, but it could not do anything because the ship sent to bring them home could not get through border security.

How to cross border

He said the military learned that some of Agbimuddin's followers and those illegally staying in Sabah wanted to return home.

"The problem they are facing now is how to cross the border," Ardo said.

The Malaysian border patrol has restricted movements into and out of Sabah, he said.

A government source, who declined to be named due to the sensitivity of the Sabah issue, said he was told the Malaysian authorities would allow Philippine representatives to see Agbimuddin and his followers only after the so-called Sulu royal army had surrendered and laid down arms.

"The problem with the Kirams is that they refuse to surrender," the source said.

Agbimuddin calls

The source said Agbimuddin had called up relatives in Sulu and asked them to help bring home some members of his group.

"Among the requests is to provide them security and bring them to Simunul Island," the source added.

Label	Title
A8	289 Filipinos deported from Sabah arrive in Zamboanga

6:39 pm | Sunday, March 3rd, 2013

ZAMBOANGA CITY, Philippines—At least 289 Filipinos arrived here from Sabah early Sunday after they were deported by Malaysian authorities.

The deportation occurred amid the “homecoming” of the followers of the Sultan of Sulu to Sabah.

Jamila Arasid, head of the Social Welfare Department Western Mindanao’s Processing Center for Displaced Persons here, said among those who arrived at around 1 a.m. Sunday were women and children on a commercial vessel from Sandakan, on the east coast of Sabah.

But Arasid clarified the deportation had nothing to do with the tension in Lahad Datu.

“They are Filipino workers or Filipinos without proper working papers previously arrested in Malaysia, jailed and their papers are completely processed for deportation to our country,” Arasid said.

But she could not explain why Malaysian authorities only decided to send them home in the aftermath of the “homecoming.”

Pepe Manaloza, 49, a baker in Lahad Datu, said a business rival (“competition”) had him arrested for not having a passport.

Manaloza, a native of Sindangan in Zamboanga del Norte, had lived in Lahad Datu for 10 years before his arrest. His wife was also arrested and is now jailed somewhere in Sabah. He is worried that his 16-year-old daughter was left behind in Lahad Datu.

He said he would immediately process his passport so he can return to Sabah.

Adzlina Sibung, 26, surrendered to the Malaysian police to escape from her abusive husband. To her dismay, she and her five children were also arrested and jailed for two months. Now she wants to return to her home to Tawi-tawi.

“I really wanted to go home. My children do not deserve to grow up in jail,” Sibung said.

The last time Malaysian authorities deported illegal aliens from Sabah was in January.

Putrajaya has been deporting Filipinos accused of illegally coming to Sabah for years now although in some cases, authorities in the Malaysian state would reportedly turn a blind eye on illegal aliens.

Arasid said that for 2012, a total of 7,532 Filipinos had been sent home, 5,622 of whom were males, who worked in oil palm plantations there. But in the last quarter of 2012, some 158 children of illegal workers in Sabah had also been sent home.

Label	Title
A9	12 confirmed dead in Saturday ambush-clash in Sabah

12:40 am | Monday, March 4th, 2013



In this picture taken on Saturday, March 2, 2013, a group of Malaysian police commandos stand guard near the area where the stand-off with Filipino gunmen took place in Tanduo village, Lahad Datu, Sabah, Malaysia. Gunmen ambushed and killed six Malaysian policemen. AP PHOTO/BERNAMA NEWS AGENCY

DIGOS CITY, Philippines—A total of 12 combatants—six Malaysian policemen and six members of the Sulu “royal army”—were confirmed killed following Saturday evening’s ambush-cum-clash in Semporna, Malaysian police Inspector General Ismail Omar confirmed.

In a news conference aired over a Sabah-based shortwave radio station, Ismail said all 12 cadavers had been recovered as of 6:30 p.m. Sunday following mopping-up operations in Simunul.

“During the operation, we also found six other bodies, believed to be the gunmen,” he reported.

Nineteen other policemen, who were trapped in an area during the ambush-cum-clash, had also been successfully rescued, he said.

Ismail did not identify the slain policemen but confirmed that some of them held junior and senior ranks.

Since violence broke out in Sabah following Putrajaya's decision to take on the group of Agbimuddin Kiram, which Malaysian Prime Minister Najib Razak calls "intruders," 24 combatants had already been killed—eight of them Malaysian policemen.

The death toll in the Sabah violence could still increase as more Malaysian security forces arrive in at least three areas—Lahad Datu, Semporna and Kunak—and hunt down the "intruders," according to Malaysia's deputy prime minister.

"More fatalities may be expected, and as a nation we must come together to rally behind our forces," Liew Vui Keong was quoted by state media Bernama as saying.

Malaysia Armed Forces chief General Zulkefli Mohammad Zin had admitted the Sabah situation was "delicate," according to a report carried by the Borneo Insider.

Zulkefli said this was the reason why the military decided on deploying two army battalions.

Amid the heavy deployment of Malaysian security against the Sulu "royal army" number just over 200, Foreign Minister Anifah Aman said Putrajaya would try its best "to avoid (more) bloodshed."

"It's already happening (deaths from both sides) but what is certain is the police and the military try to avoid more casualties," he said during a visit to Membakut, which is also an area in Sabah.

Anifah, commenting on Sultan Jamalul Kiram III's call for negotiations, said what Putrajaya wants now is for the "intruders" to lay down their firearms before fresh talks could take place.

He, however, clarified that Wisma Putra, the other name the foreign affairs ministry is known, was not the correct agency to negotiate with the Kirams.

"My ministry is not directly involved. It is the Ministry of Home Affairs," he said.

Meanwhile, the Islamist political party Parti Islam Se-Malaysia (PAS) asked the Najib government to provide Malaysians with "a real explanation of the incident in Lahad Datu."

Mustafa Ali, PAS secretary general, said the problem has now become serious with people getting killed.

"It should not be regarded as a thing that is not serious but the government is not even telling us the truth," he told Malaysian newspaper Haraka Daily.

Mustafa also said because the Sabah situation has become so serious, police elements should already be withdrawn and that the military should now take over.

Label	Title
A10	Sabah shootout: Timeline to slaughter

12:08 am | Monday, March 4th, 2013

In just 10 days, the standoff in Sabah has spiraled from a firefight between Malaysian security forces and followers of the sultan of Sulu who landed in the village of Tandua, Lahad Datu town, on Feb. 9, into a war of extermination mounted by both the Philippine and Malaysian governments, conspiring with each other, to evict the sultan’s men under siege in their enclave.

In their first encounter in the morning of Friday, 12 of the 235 men led by the brother of Sultan of Sulu Jamalul Kiram III were killed when superior Malaysian forces attacked them.

The Filipinos sailed to Sabah from Tawi-Tawi island, in the Sulu Archipelago, to press the sultanate’s bid to reclaim its ancestral land in the former British North Borneo.

This is a curious conflict where the Philippine government has gone to war against its own citizens from the Muslim southern region, assisting Malaysia in its mailed-fist action to expel the sultan’s followers after they refused to heed pressure/ultimatum from Manila and Kuala Lumpur authorities to leave and return to the Sulu Archipelago or face dire consequences.

This Malaysian-Philippine collaboration—in which the Philippine government has played second fiddle and subservient to Kuala Lumpur—in the gang-up on the recalcitrant sultanate’s followers was clearly evident on Day One of the hostilities.

The first wire services and press reports on the shootout in Sabah on March 1 said that Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) spokesperson Raul Hernandez told reporters in a press briefing that Malaysian Ambassador Mohammad Zamri Mohammad Kassim met with Foreign Secretary Albert del Rosario at 2 p.m. of that day to inform him that “the standoff has ended.”

The DFA apparently took this report on its face value. There were no attempts from the DFA to inquire whether the attack on the sultan’s men was carried out with maximum restraint.

Although details were to follow shortly, the DFA appeared overly anxious to see the end of the standoff. It was echoing the position of Malaysia, or acting as an extension of the Malaysian Embassy in Manila.

The Malaysians told the DFA they had resolved the standoff their own way—at the cost of 12 Filipino lives. The standoff turned into violence after Malaysian Prime Minister Najib

Razak declared that his patience had “run out” after the sultan’s men refused to obey demands for them to leave Sabah.

Preserving ties

It was only later that President Aquino ordered an investigation to determine what really happened in Sabah in the face of conflicting reports from Malaysian authorities and the sultanate’s followers.

Apparently disturbed by the violent turn of events and its implications on Philippine-Malaysian relations and the administration’s initiative to set up a Bangsamoro region in Mindanao to end decades of Moro insurgency, the President held emergency meetings with senior Cabinet members to take steps to prevent the clashes in Sabah from further spreading.

Malaysia has acted as an intermediary to facilitate the sealing of the Compromise Framework Agreement between the Philippine government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF).

A spokesperson for the sultan of Sulu, Abraham Idjirani, denounced the raid on the group led by Rajah Mudah Agbimuddin Kiram, brother of Sultan Kiram, as a “massacre.” The “first shot was fired by the Malaysian commando forces,” according to Idjirani.

Before the clash, representatives of the sultan were on their way to the Malaysian Embassy for an “informal dialogue” with the Malaysian ambassador.” But reports of the clash in Tanduao came while the group was on the road. The sultan recalled the representatives “because the shooting had started.”

The Star newspaper of Malaysia reported that Prime Minister Najib had given security forces authority to take whatever action they thought necessary to end the standoff. Najib claimed that Agbimuddin’s group had ventured 1.5 kilometers from the area they had occupied.

Earlier, Najib warned Agbimuddin’s group to leave before the authorities took action. “Do not test our patience, our patience has reached the limit,” he said.

Sabah Police Commissioner Hamza Taib said the shootout began when the sultan’s followers fired at security forces as they were tightening their cordon around Tanduao.

“The intruders fired at us, then we returned fire,” he said. “As a result of the fire, two of my men died, three were injured and ... 12 intruders died.”

Statement of capitulation

Agbimuddin told radio station dzBB in Manila that Malaysian police surrounding Tanduao opened fire at midmorning and his group fought back.

“They suddenly came in,” he said. “We fought back to defend ourselves.”

The threat of further bloodshed in Tanduao village—even the extermination of the sultan’s men still holed up there—loomed larger as Malaysia issued an ultimatum on Saturday that it would take “drastic action” against the sultan’s men.

President Aquino, as in the first shootout, poured oil on the fire, took the side of Malaysia and sent a message to the besieged group: “Surrender now, without conditions.”

The statement had two effects: It not only emboldened Malaysia to carry out its threat; it also made the sultan more defiant. Referring to the President’s statement, Sultan Jamalul said: “The only thing they know is surrender. Why should we surrender in our own home? They did nothing in their own home.”

Agbimuddin, the leader of the cornered men, sent a text message to the sultan, saying his remaining men (224) were “prepared to die.” The spokesperson for the sultanate said that Agbimuddin’s group went to Sabah to compel a peaceful resolution of the sultanate’s claim to Sabah.

The Malaysian prime minister told reporters that after talking with Mr. Aquino on Friday night, he decided to give Agbimmudin’s group two choices: “Surrender or face the action of our security forces.”

Succumbing to the Malaysian threat, the President, rather than trying to restrain the hands of the Malaysians from further mayhem, gave them clearance. He issued the statement of capitulation:

“To our citizens in Lahad Datu, from the very start, our objective has been to avoid the loss of lives and the shedding of blood. However, you did not join us in this objective. Because of the path you have taken, what we have been trying to avoid has come to pass. If you have grievances, the path you chose was wrong. The just, and indeed, the only correct thing for you to do is to surrender.”

With that the President has driven the last nail on the coffin of the Philippine claim to Sabah. What he didn’t say to the sultan’s men was: If you get slaughtered by the Malaysians, that’s your fault. Condolences.

Label	Title
A11	Only an intervention can end Sabah conflict, says Kiram wife

7:47 pm | Monday, March 4th, 2013

MANILA, Philippines—Only the intervention of the United Nations or another country could end the conflict in Sabah, the wife of Sulu Sultan Jamalul Kiram III said Monday.

At least 26 people have been reported killed in skirmishes in Sabah since Friday between the so-called “royal army” of the Sulu sultanate and Malaysian security forces.

“The only thing that could end the conflict is an intervention of the United Nations or a third country... This is honor above life. They (Malacañang officials) are saying life is more important. But for us Tausugs, honor is more important than life,” said Princess Fatima Kiram, the sultan’s wife.

The conflict began more than three weeks ago after the sultan’s followers, led by his brother Raja Muda Agmibuddin Kiram, arrived in Lahad Datu, purportedly to renew their family’s claim over Sabah.

Kiram and his followers said they base their claim on “historical truth,” amplified by the fact that the Malaysian government continues to pay their family rental fee as a result of a lease agreement between their forebear and a British company in the 1800s.

On Monday, Abraham Idjirani, secretary general and spokesperson of the Sulu sultanate said Malaysia only had an “administering authority and not a sovereign authority” over Sabah.

Idjirani also said that their followers in Sabah “are advancing.”

“This is do or die for us,” Fatima told the Philippine Daily Inquirer.

She said the relatives of the Sultan’s followers, who are now engaged in fighting in Lahad Datu, now want to sail to Sabah and reinforce the “royal army.”

Fatima said the sultan could no longer appease their followers. “They are going (to Sabah) on their own,” she said.

She said that according to reports reaching them from Semporna town, 300 kilometers from Tanduao village in Lahad Datu, the Malaysian police have allegedly been rounding up and “shooting men without documents.”

“This has been going on since yesterday (Sunday),” she said, adding that the mass deportation of Filipinos from Sabah was also a cause for concern.

She said the supposed human rights violations by the Malaysians should be brought to the attention of the international community and the United Nations Commission on Human Rights.

Idjirani said he had spoken to Agmibuddin at noon Monday.

“We are well and alive,” Idjirani quoted Agmibuddin as telling him. Idrijani also said that according to Agmibuddin, he and their men have finally eaten a breakfast of hot soup.

Idjirani added that Agmibuddin also told him that they finally have taken a bath.

Fatima reiterated that since Agmibuddin and their followers arrived in Lahad Datu, their family had always been open to negotiate with Malaysia.

“But the problem is ... Malaysia [is] not on our side. We want to negotiate and talk with them but they are firm in their decision (not to negotiate),” she said.

Unfortunately, she said, Philippine leaders appear to be echoing what Malaysia wants.

She noted that the Philippine government wants the sultan’s followers to return to the Philippines first before talks could commence. “But where would our leverage be if we do that? Will they still listen to us if we go back? Where is the assurance that no one will be jailed, or that if we sit down the Malaysians will listen to us,” she said.

“They [think] we are stupid to return if they (ask) us to. They said we are foolhardy but we are doing this for the people. We are foolhardy to pursue a benevolent aspiration,” Fatima said.

“Maybe they don’t have honor, just pride,” she said, apparently referring to the leaders whose clan she felt had refused to listen to them.

Label	Title
A12	Sabah ‘intrusion’ triggers political fight in Malaysia

2:56 am | Tuesday, March 5th, 2013



Prime Minister Najib Razak (left) and opposition leader Anwar Ibrahim: Political barbs

DIGOS CITY—When Tawi-Tawi Rep. Nur Jaafar was interviewed by the Sabah-based Daily Express on Sunday, he warned that the Sabah “intrusion” by armed followers of Sulu Sultan Jamalul Kiram III was developing into a major political issue in Malaysia, which is gearing for general elections not later than June 27.

Media reports from Kuala Lumpur indicate that this has become a reality, with the ruling coalition Barisan Nasional (BN) and the opposition accusing each other of orchestrating the Sabah situation for political gains after Philippine intelligence sources said a Malaysian opposition stalwart allied with Anwar Ibrahim had met with Kiram days before the Sabah entry.

Progovernment TV3 and Utusan Malaysia even ran a commentary by an unidentified author, which listed “10 indications that Anwar Ibrahim had architected [sic] the land grab by the sultan of Sulu.” The article accused Anwar of being a “manipulator par excellence and so skilled that he convinced several hundred fighters from Philippines to hide out in Lahad Datu and die for his cause.”

In the early years of his political career, Anwar, then an official of the the United Malays National Organization (Umno), was being groomed by then Prime Minister Mahathir Mohammad as his successor. Their relationship, however, eventually soured and Anwar was jailed on charges of sodomy.

Since then, Anwar has been on the forefront of the opposition, earning the ire of his former colleagues at Umno and their supporters.

Kiram meeting

The Bahasa daily Utusan Malaysia went even further when it printed a blog that claimed a “member of the Malaysian political opposition allied with Anwar Ibrahim” had met with Jamalul and promised the opposition’s support for his claim on Sabah.

TV3 used 30 minutes of its “Buletin Utama” program to discuss Anwar’s supposed links to the Lahad Datu “intrusion.” It also dedicated a similar period to demolish Tian Chua, vice president of the Parti Keadilan Rakyat (PKR), for claiming the intrusion was a political play by leaders of Umno, the dominant party in the BN.

Anwar, PKR head and representative of Permatang Pauh to the Malaysian Parliament, was quoted by The New Straits Times (NST) as saying he had asked his lawyers to study the possibility of suing the two media outfits.

“These are highly irresponsible statements. They are purely cheap political gimmicks to create uncertainties and to apportion the blame [on us], to deflect from the utter weakness and failure of the leadership in this country,” he said in the NST interview.

Anwar, in the succeeding days of the standoff, had repeatedly denied the claims and said Utusan was allowing itself to be used by Umno for its political gains. He said he never met with any member of the Kiram family or their emissaries.

“[And] even if I have met [them], what is the issue? Who in the government has not met Moro Islamic Liberation Front leader Al Haj Murad Ebrahim or (Moro National Liberation Front leader) Nur Misuari?” he asked in another interview printed by the Malaysia Today.

“What is important is: Was there any discussion or encouragement or tacit approval [from me] for the insurgency or the encroachment into our borders?” Anwar said.

Umno

In retaliation for dragging Anwar into the Sabah bloodbath, Tian was reported by the Borneo Post as having said that on the contrary, Umno orchestrated the gun battle “with armed intruders” in Lahad Datu.

Tian said it was a “planned conspiracy of the UMNO government to divert attention and intimidate the people,” especially in Sabah, which is fast becoming opposition territory.

The PKR is being helped in Sabah by another opposition leader, Jeffrey Kitingan, a brother of Prime Minister Najib Razak-ally Joseph Pairin Kitingan.

Azmin Ali, another party stalwart, was also quoted by Borneo Insider as saying “the allegations were made in an attempt to weaken the growing support of Sabahans for the opposition.”

He challenged Anwar's accusers to "produce proof."

"All these are baseless accusations and attempts to divert attention from the real issue, which is the people's safety," he said. "Malaysians wanted to know the prime minister's and home minister's explanation on their handling of the standoff."

"We ask: Don't shift the people's attention, how the safety of our seas and territory can be breached," Azmin said.

Political game

Najib, in a report carried by state media Bernama, trashed the allegations about Umno's role in the Sabah crisis as "a despicable political game by the opposition to garner the people's support in view of the approaching general election."

"They (the opposition) are accusing the government of staging a drama. We (the government) did not do any such thing. We never politicize our security because it involves human lives," Najib also told a news conference during a ceremony honoring as heroes the two Malaysian commandos killed in Lahad Datu on Friday.

Najib accused PKR politicians of being "merciless and had no regard for humanitarian values" as they were "prepared to commit despicable acts and tell lies, and they could not be accepted as leaders."

"We must say that all the security forces would be defended because they are risking their lives. The nation's fighters should be acclaimed, not humiliated and debunked. So, do not play politics on the question of security," the prime minister said.

He disclosed that a joint investigation by the Malaysian intelligence agency and its Philippine counterpart had started on claims that the Sabah incident was instigated by some politicians.

Najib said he, too, was puzzled at the timing of the "intrusion" because it took place as Malaysia's political atmosphere was heating up due to the general elections.

"We want to know more on the claim. President Aquino is also interested to know," he said.

Label	Title
A13	Malaysia attacks Filipinos to end Sabah siege

10:25 am | Tuesday, March 5th, 2013



Malaysian troops moving in to flush out members of the Sulu Sultanate’s ‘royal army’ from a remote village in Lahad Datu, Sabah. The Star/Bernama-Asia News Network

KUALA LUMPUR, Malaysia—Malaysian security forces using fighter jets attacked nearly 200 Filipinos in Sabah on Tuesday to end the armed group’s three-week occupation of a Borneo village that has left 27 people dead.

Prime Minister Najib Razak confirmed the assault was launched Tuesday morning after clashes in Lahad Datu in Sabah this past week killed eight policemen. He had earlier declared that security forces were authorized to take any action deemed necessary.

“At 7 a.m. this morning, security forces launched an attack on Tanduo village,” Najib said, adding that negotiations with the “royal army” of the Sultanate of Sulu, believed to number 100 to 300 and holed up in a farming village, had failed.

The main group of Filipinos comprises members of the clan of Sultan Jamalul Kiram III of Sulu, some bearing rifles and grenade launchers, who slipped past naval patrols last month, landed at a remote coastal village in Sabah's Lahad Datu district and insisted the territory was theirs.

Nineteen Filipino gunmen have also been slain in Lahad Datu and another Sabah coastal district involving a smaller group of Filipinos since Friday. The skirmishes shocked Malaysians unaccustomed to such violence in their country, which borders insurgency-plagued southern provinces in the Philippines and Thailand.

"The government has to take the appropriate action to protect national pride and sovereignty as our people have demanded," Najib said in a statement issued through the national news agency, Bernama.

Authorities made every effort to resolve the siege peacefully since the presence of the group in Lahad Datu district became known on February 12, including holding talks to encourage the group to leave without facing any serious legal repercussions, Najib said.

"The longer this intrusion persisted, it became clear to the authorities that the intruders had no intention to leave Sabah," Najib said. "As a peace-loving Islamic country that upholds efforts to settle conflicts through negotiations, our struggle to avoid bloodshed in Lahad Datu did not work."

Violence first erupted on Friday when a shootout between security forces and the Sulu gunmen left 12 Filipinos and two police officers dead.

Another gunbattle Saturday in the town of Semporna, hours away from Tandu by road, left six police and six gunmen dead, raising fears of a wider infiltration.

Another gunman was beaten to death there Saturday by villagers, police have said.



In this picture taken on Saturday, March 2, 2013, a group of Malaysian police commandos stand guard near the area where the stand-off with Filipino gunmen took place in Tandu village, Lahad Datu, Sabab, Malaysia. Gunmen ambushed and killed six Malaysian policemen. AP PHOTO/BERNAMA NEWS AGENCY

Local media reported fighter jets screaming over the stand-off site and explosions were heard. Military trucks were also seen moving into the area, which is surrounded by palm oil estates.

Najib had ordered a doubling of security forces in the area after the weekend violence.

Sabah police chief Hamza Taib confirmed the attack involved ground and air operations conducted by both the police and military, which included bombing the area. He declined to elaborate, saying the operation remained ongoing two hours after it was launched shortly after dawn.

Abraham Idjirani, spokesman for the Sulu sultanate, told reporters in Manila that the Filipino group in Sabah would not surrender and that their leader was safe. The group is led by a brother of Kiram.

Lahad Datu district is a short boat ride from the Philippine province, and the clan members had rebuffed calls to leave, claiming Sabah belonged to their royal sultanate and that Malaysia has been paying a paltry amount to lease the vast territory with many palm plantations.

The Philippine government had asked Malaysia to exercise maximum tolerance to avoid further bloodshed.

In Manila, presidential spokesman Ricky Carandang said Tuesday that Foreign Secretary Albert del Rosario was in Kuala Lumpur meeting with his Malaysian counterpart.

“We’ve done everything we could to prevent this, but in the end Kiram’s people chose this path,” Carandang said.

An undetermined number of other armed Filipinos are suspected to have encroached on other districts within 300 kilometers (200 miles) of Lahad Datu.

Some in Muslim-majority Malaysia advocated patience in handling the Lahad Datu intruders. But the deaths of the Malaysian police officers, including six who were ambushed while inspecting a waterfront village in a separate Sabah district on Saturday, have triggered widespread alarm over the possibility of more such intrusions.

For the second time in two days, President Benigno Aquino III had gone on national TV to urge the Filipino group in Lahad Datu to lay down their arms, warning that the situation could worsen and endanger about 800,000 Filipinos settlers there.

The crisis could have wide-ranging political ramifications in both countries. Some fear it might undermine peace talks brokered by Malaysia between Manila and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front, the main Muslim rebel group in Mindanao.

It also could affect public confidence in Malaysia’s long-ruling National Front coalition, which is gearing up for general elections that must be held by the end of June. The coalition requires strong support from voters in Sabah to fend off an opposition alliance that hopes to end more than five decades of federal rule by the National Front.

The US Embassy in Kuala Lumpur has advised Americans to avoid traveling to much of Sabah's east coast, which includes towns that are embarkation points for nearby diving resort islands, because of the potential for more violence.

Supporters of the Filipino group took their campaign to cyberspace on Monday, manipulating Google listings to post a message backing the incursion.

A number of Philippine sites also were reportedly defaced by pro-Malaysia hackers.

Label	Title
A14	'Royal Army' to fight on, will make last stand – Sultanate spokesman

12:27 pm | Tuesday, March 5th, 2013



HOMECOMING Members of the Royal Security Force of the Sultanate of Sulu and North Borneo who have traveled with Crown Prince Rajah Mudah Agbimuddin Kiram in what the descendants of the Sultan of Sulu describe as not an act of aggression against Sabah but a journey back to their homeland. Malaysian police and special forces surround the “royal army,” asking them to return home. **CONTRIBUTED PHOTO**

MANILA, Philippines – The “Royal Army” of the Sultanate of Sulu has no plans to surrender despite being bombed by Malaysian security forces in Lahad Datu, Sabah Tuesday morning.

Sulu Sultanate spokesman Abraham Idjirani was quoted as saying in a radio report that the group in Lahad Datu, which is under heavy fire from Malaysian forces, will continue to fight and will make their last stand.

The estimated 200 supporters of the Sultanate of Sulu in Lahad Datu, led by Rajah Mudah Agbimuddin Kiram, were fighting back against the Malaysian forces Tuesday, Idjirani said.

Bombs dropped by Malaysian jets struck the area but did not hit the Sulu gunmen, Idjirani said quoting Agbimuddin.

Malaysian Prime Minister Najib Razak has authorized its armed forces to flush out the remaining armed group in Lahad Datu Tuesday morning, according to reports from Malaysian media.

Fighter jets, artillery fire, and military truck were seen and heard in Lahad Datu, Malaysia's The Star reported.

As of 11 a.m. no casualties have been reported on the side of the Malaysian forces, The Star reported.

Label	Title
A15	<p>Filipinos survive attack</p> <p>Malaysia launches air, ground strikes</p>

12:07 am | Wednesday, March 6th, 2013

KUALA LUMPUR—“They are alive and kicking,” so claimed the spokesman of the Sultan of Sulu Jamalul Kiram III after Malaysia launched air strikes and mortar attacks on Tuesday against nearly 200 Filipinos occupying a Borneo coastal village.

Jets pounded the area in eastern Sabah state for more than 30 minutes before hundreds of ground troops moved in to search for the Filipino armed men believed to be hiding near a coastal palm oil plantation in Lahad Datu, according to Malaysian officials.

Abraham Idjirani, a spokesman for the Filipinos, said he spoke by phone with Kiram’s brother, Agbimuddin Kiram, who saw jets dropping two bombs on a nearby village that the group had abandoned.

“They could hear the sounds of bombs and the exchange of fire,” Idjirani said. “The truth is they are nervous. Who will not be nervous when you are against all odds?”

He said the sultan’s followers would “find a way to sneak to safety.”

“If this is the last stand that we can take to let the world know about our cause, then let it be,” Idjirani said, describing the assault as “overkill.”

Idjirani said that Agbimuddin and his men were “alive and kicking” in Lahad Datu. “The bombs dropped fell on Malaysian forces,” Idjirani said.

Earlier Malaysia’s national police chief Ismail Omar had also raised doubts about the success of the air and ground attack, saying “mopping up” operations had yet to find any bodies and suggesting at least some of the militants might have slipped away. The three-week-old standoff has killed eight Malaysian police officers and 19 Filipino armed men.

Omar said Malaysian ground forces encountered resistance from armed men firing at them, according to the Associated Press.

Relatives in Manila said that the Filipinos in Sabah told them by phone that they survived the bombardment.

Prime Minister Najib Razak said the government had no choice but to quell Malaysia’s worst security crisis in years, sparked when Filipino militants invaded to claim the Malaysian state of Sabah for the Philippine sultan.

“The longer this invasion lasts, it is clear to the authorities that the invaders do not intend to leave Sabah,” Najib said, adding that negotiations had gone nowhere. “The government must take action to safeguard the dignity and sovereignty of the country as required by the people.”

The Filipinos have been holed up in the village of Tanduaao since they landed by boat on Feb. 9 from Sulu in a bizarre incursion that has exposed Malaysian security lapses.

At least two fighter jets roared over the standoff site from early morning, launching an air bombardment, a Malaysian reporter positioned about 20 kilometers away told Agence France-Presse (AFP) by phone.

“There was a series of explosions in Tanduaao. Intense bombing lasted for about half an hour,” followed by a series of sporadic blasts, he said, asking not to be named.

An AFP reporter at a police roadblock about 30 km from the assault saw heavy military helicopters flying toward Tanduaao. Six ambulances also were seen speeding toward the site.

Three military trucks filled with dozens of soldiers also moved in the direction of Tanduaao, located amid vast oil palm plantations.

More than seven hours after fighter jets were deployed, Malaysian Home Minister Hishammuddin Hussein said no injuries occurred among Malaysian police and military personnel who went in to raid houses near palm oil plantations there.

“On the enemy’s side, we have to wait because the operation is ongoing. We have to be careful,” the minister said, refusing to elaborate on whether there were Filipino casualties or captives.

Philippine Foreign Secretary Albert del Rosario was in Kuala Lumpur meeting with his counterpart to discuss a peaceful resolution of the standoff when news of the early morning raid broke out.

On his return Tuesday at 5:30 p.m. from talks with Malaysian defense and home ministers, Del Rosario told reporters: “We did everything, we walked the last mile. We intend to fully continue this effort.”

Palace plea: ‘Go home’

Briefing reporters on the Kuala Lumpur mission, Department of Foreign Affairs spokesman Raul Hernandez said in Manila that Del Rosario had requested that Malaysia establish a “safe corridor for women and children and other civilians not involved in the conflict” and allow a Philippine Navy vessel in the area to conduct a humanitarian mission.

Del Rosario was to proceed to Malacañang to report to President Aquino on his two-day trip.

Presidential spokesman Edwin Lacierda said Aquino was aware of the Malaysian assault on the Filipino's position in Lahad Datu. He said Aquino's message to the Filipinos in Sabah has not changed from Day 1: "Go home."

"I think everyone knows that we have done everything possible, and we continue to do everything possible to peacefully end this standoff. Unfortunately, the position taken by the Kiram family is a position that leads down to violence," Lacierda said.

"For three weeks, our government has been saying, 'let's talk after you go back.' They refused," Lacierda said.

So the President deemed it wise to talk with Najib on Saturday morning, appealing for the safety of the 800,000 Filipinos in Sabah, he said.

Lacierda said the Philippine government was not only worried about the security implications of armed hostilities in Lahad Datu, but the effects on some 800,000 Filipinos suddenly returning to the Sulu archipelago.

"If they suddenly go back to the Philippines, it will be a peace and order problem. You can't create jobs for 800,000 in the course of one day," Lacierda said.

In a statement read by his daughter on Tuesday in Manila, Kiram said his followers who landed in Sabah to assert his claim over the Malaysian state on Bornia island "will fight to the last man protecting their ideals and aspirations."

Kiram said the Aquino administration had so far showed an "insensitive attitude toward the sultanate of Sulu and the Muslim sentiments as if we are not Filipinos."

"Please do not disrespect the integrity of their intentions. Mr. President, you cannot wash your hands and turn your back on your own people," he said in the message read by Princess Jacel Kiram at their home in Taguig City.

The clansmen, armed with rifles and grenade launchers, had refused to leave the area, staking a long-dormant claim to Malaysia's entire state of Sabah, which they insisted was their ancestral birthright.

Idjirani told reporters in Manila that the group would not surrender and that their leader was safe.

In Zamboanga City, Habib Hashim Mudjahab, an official of the Moro National Liberation Front, told reporters that Tausugs from Basilan, Sulu and Tawi-Tawi had sailed to Sabah to reinforce the besieged Filipinos there.

"We can no longer prevent our people. We are hurt and many of our people, even the noncombatants, are going to Sabah to help the sultanate," Mudjahab said.

But Lt. Gen. Rey Ardo, chief of the military's Western Mindanao Command, said his troops had not monitored movements to Sabah. "But we cannot avoid that some residents who have relatives in Malaysia would react to the situation," he said.

Acting Gov. Mujib Hataman of the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao said at least 70 Filipinos arrived in Sibutu, Tawi-Tawi, on Tuesday to escape being caught in the crossfire in Sabah. "They boarded a commercial vessel and they arrived this morning," Hataman said.

Label	Title
A16	Filipino killed in fresh Malaysian assault – report

1:00 pm | Wednesday, March 6th, 2013



Villagers in Kampung Simunul in Semporna look at the body of a man believed to be from Sulu who was killed during a shootout with Malaysian forces. MALAYSIA’S THE STAR/ASIA NEWS NETWORK FILE PHOTO

MANILA, Philippines – One of the Filipino gunmen in Sabah was reportedly killed in an encounter Wednesday morning as Malaysian security forces continued their operations against the group.

“At 6:45 a.m., there were shots fired at our security forces and we returned fire and one of the enemies was shot,” Inspector General of Police Tan Sri Ismail Omar was quoted as saying in a briefing with Malaysian media in Tanduao village, Lahad Datu, Sabah.

“We believed he is killed,” Omar said, according to Malaysia’s The Star. The report however does not state if any body was found after the encounter.

Omar also said that the supporters of the Sultanate of Sulu, which have been encamped in the village for at least three weeks, had been continuously on the move to avoid detection.

Police have been conducting mopping-up operations to find the members of the group after Malaysian security forces bombed the village using fighter jets and artillery Tuesday morning to end the occupation.

The “Royal army” of the Sultanate of Sulu in Lahad Datu, led by Rajah Mudah Agbimuddin Kiram, are in Sabah to reclaim what they say is their rightful territory.

At least 14 from the side of the “Royal army” and eight Malaysian policemen have been killed already from skirmishes that broke out after several weeks of the tense standoff and failed negotiations. *The Star-Asia News Network*

Label	Title
A17	Consequences

10:18 pm | Wednesday, March 6th, 2013

Karma, our neighbors in Malaysia must have realized by now, bites when one least expects it. The situation a full day after the massive military offensive that Malaysian security forces launched early yesterday against a few hundred followers of Sultan Jamalul Kiram III encamped in Lahad Datu in Sabah remains murky. But the official word from Kuala Lumpur is that the followers had disappeared into the surrounding areas.

There's one important reason why that may be so, and a statement from a leader of the Moro National Liberation Front gives us a clue. If we can see past the understandable bravado of Muhajab Hashim, we can glimpse the underlying truth.

"Many [ex-MNLF fighters] have slipped through the security forces," he told Agence France-Presse. "They know the area like the back of their hands because they trained there in the past."

He is referring to the claim, still unproven at press time, that former fighters of the MNLF, the rebel movement that entered into a peace agreement with the Philippine government in 1996, had sailed into Sabah to join Kiram's followers. If they did manage to evade both the Philippine and Malaysian navies and to slip into northern Borneo, it must be because Sabah is not only the so-called southern back door but also the exit point encouraged at worst and tolerated at best by the Malaysian government.

In other words, because Kuala Lumpur did allow MNLF rebels to train in Sabah all those many years ago (or determinedly looked the other way), it is now grappling with a ghost: the prospect of armed men hiding in the Sabah countryside that they call both ancient homeland and old training ground.

To be sure, Kuala Lumpur had closed the back door, or at least oiled the rusted hinges, by the time MNLF founder Nur Misuari staged a second rebellion after a failed stint as governor of the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao. Misuari fled to his usual haunts, only to be pursued and arrested by the Malaysian police and deported to the Philippines. By then, Malaysia had decided that it was in its best interests to support the peace negotiations between the Philippine government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front. To be completely fair, we recognize that after Kuala Lumpur switched gears, it backed the peace process to the hilt. Karma, however, seems to follow its own schedule.

We do not make light of the situation in Lahad Datu and surroundings; the consequences of the misadventure, of the maladroit handling by the Aquino administration of a crisis-in-slow-motion, above all of the massive military operation launched by Kuala Lumpur, will

be felt for a long time to come. But consequences, inevitable or otherwise, may be simply another name for history.

The massive air-ground offensive itself was probably a consequence of political calculations regarding the coming election in Malaysia; both the government and the opposition (led by Anwar Ibrahim, so-called friend of Filipinos and self-proclaimed admirer of Jose Rizal) have tried to outdo each other in striking nationalist postures and calling for the most aggressive action possible. The result: military aircraft dropping bombs on a band of men (and women) armed only with handguns and rifles. In other words, the politics of a close vote may have forced Kuala Lumpur's hand. The display of military power may have been made, then, to shock and awe not the Sultan's "intruders," but Malaysians soon to head to the voting booths.

Label	Title
A18	Kin say Agbimuddin Kiram is safe but hungry in Sabah

7:11 pm | Friday, March 8th, 2013

MANILA, Philippines—Rajah Mudah Agbimuddin Kiram remains safe in Lahad Datu although he and his men are now suffering from hunger because of constantly running around on foot to evade the relentless assault of Malaysian security forces, his relatives said Friday.

Abraham Idjirani, spokesperson of Sultan Jamalul Kiram III, said that according to Agbimuddin, members of the Kirams' Royal Security Forces have "regrouped" after the initial attack on them last March 1.

"They are constantly moving, not by boat, not by any means of transportation but by themselves.... They are on foot.... They are suffering from hunger," Idjirani said at a press conference.

Idjirani said he was able to talk to Agbimuddin at around 2:30 p.m. Friday.

Earlier, Jacel Kiram, daughter of the Jamalul Kiram, told the media that her uncle was safe in Lahad Datu but decried what she described as "maximum violence" unleashed by the Malaysian police and military.

"I was able to speak to one woman (in Tawi-Tawi) who kept on crying because she said children and women were being shot. While there was a call for maximum tolerance, there is indiscriminate firing (by the Malaysians). Maximum violence is what is happening," Princess Jacel said in Filipino.

She also said that the unilateral ceasefire announced by her father still holds despite Malaysia's rejection of it.

"The instruction for them is to be always on the defensive, just be ready for any assault or attack. Just defense, no attack," she said.

"Unfortunately, Malaysia is emboldened and decided to finish off the Filipinos in Sabah. It is clear that the government of PNoy is very much in support of the Malaysian government," Jacel said, adding, "We pray and hope the President's being Filipino would prevail so that he would address the situation in Sabah."

The past two days also saw the sultan reiterating his message that he was willing to talk to President Aquino to resolve the conflict in Sabah.

“From the very beginning, we have been saying that our lines are open to talk directly to the President. There should be no emissaries because it has been proven that there is no effective emissary,” Jacel said.

She added that the fighting in Lahad Datu could not have happened had the emissaries of Malacanang been “efficient and effective.”

“What we need is to talk because if they really want to resolve this peacefully, our government should prove that. We want to talk if Malaysia wants to end this peacefully. We want to talk, but why don’t they want to talk to us?” she said.

This appeared to be also the message of Agbimuddin.

According to Idjirani, Agbimuddin told his elder brother to ask the media’s help in “influencing Malaysia to follow the call of the United Nations to take heed of sobriety and dialogue with the Sultanate of Sulu.”

Idjirani said that despite the call of UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon for an end to the violence in Sabah, there has been continuous assault by the Malaysian security forces.

Label	Title
A19	KL asked: Give PH team access to Filipino gunmen held in Sabah

4:50 pm | Friday, March 8th, 2013



Department of Foreign Affairs spokesman Raul Hernandez. INQUIRER.NET FILE PHOTO

MANILA, Philippines – The Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) has sent another note verbale to the Malaysian Embassy Friday morning “strongly requesting” for the Filipino diplomatic team in Sabah to be given full access to the apprehended members of the Sulu “royal army.”

“This morning we sent a note verbale to the Malaysian embassy to strongly request that the Philippine embassy team in Lahad Datu be given full access to the 10 members of the Raja Muda Kiram group apprehended by the Malaysian authorities,” DFA spokesman Raul Hernandez told reporters Friday.

The note verbale also called on the Malaysian government to “give humane treatment to the Filipinos under their custody,” he said.

Raja Muda is the brother of Sulu Sultan Jamalul Kiram III who ordered his men to sail to Sabah on February 9 and reclaim what they insist is their rightful territory.

The 10 supporters of the Sultanate of Sulu were reportedly arrested after the air and ground assault by Malaysian authorities in Tanduao Village, Lahad Datu Tuesday that sought to end the three week standoff.

Several casualties were reported by Malaysian media from the Sulu “royal army” while the remaining members of the group managed to elude capture and are still being hunted by Malaysian authorities.

Sultan Kiram had declared a unilateral ceasefire Thursday heeding a call by the United Nations to end the violence. Malaysian Prime Minister Najib Razak however had rejected the ceasefire and called for the unconditional surrender of the group.

The DFA likewise reiterated their call for the group to lay down their arms and withdraw from Sabah “in order to prevent further loss of lives and bloodshed.”

Label	Title
A20	<p>KL reports 32 more dead</p> <p>UN calls for peace; Malaysia shuns sultan ceasefire offer</p>

12:11 am | Friday, March 8th, 2013



NO CEASEFIRE Malaysian Prime Minister Najib Razak thumbs down Sultan Kiram's unilateral ceasefire offer. AFP

Kuala Lumpur on Thursday rejected a ceasefire offer by the sultan of Sulu despite a call from the United Nations for an end to the violence in Sabah that has already cost 60 lives and talks among the parties involved to peacefully settle the dispute over the ownership of the eastern Malaysian state.

Malaysian national police chief Ismail Omar said 32 more followers of Sultan of Sulu Jamalul Kiram III were killed in two confrontations on Wednesday, bringing the number of sultanate followers killed to 52.

Eight Malaysian policemen were killed in skirmishes last weekend, for a total of 60.

But the number of casualties could not be confirmed independently as there appears to be a news blackout regarding the incursions into Sabah in Malaysia's state-controlled media.

As foreign correspondents are barred from Lahad Datu, there is no way to independently verify the police information.

On Wednesday, Ahmad and Home Minister Hishamuddin Hussein showed reporters pictures of the bloated bodies recovered from freshly dug graves, but they did not say whether those followers of the sultanate were killed in Tuesday's military assault or in the fighting on March 1.

Eight Malaysian policemen were killed in clashes with the followers of the sultan since security forces launched an assault on the Sulu group that Friday.

Jamalul called for a ceasefire following the rout of his armed followers in an air and ground assault by Malaysian security forces on Tuesday.

But Malaysian Prime Minister Najib Razak rejected Jamalul's ceasefire offer, demanding instead that his armed followers who intruded into Sabah and caused the crisis surrender unconditionally.

'Cessation of hostilities'

Learning that Malaysia had rejected his offer, Jamalul suggested calling his offer "cessation of hostilities" and proposed an exchange of prisoners.

Jamalul turned down Malaysia's demand that his followers surrender unconditionally.

"Comprehensive peace is not established with a surrender," said the sultan's spokesman, Abraham Idjirani.

Offensive continues

The UN call for an end to the violence and Jamalul's ceasefire offer came as Malaysian Air Force F-18 Hornets took to the skies again on Thursday and were seen flying toward Tanduao and Tanjung Bato village where Agbimuddin Kiram's group had been driven by Tuesday's heavy air strikes and artillery attacks.

But no explosions were heard at ground zero.

Police and military troops were also chasing fleeing followers of Jamalul in Labian district and the villages of Sungai Bilis and Lok Buani.

End to violence

News of the UN statement on the Sabah conflict reached Manila Thursday. In a statement issued from its headquarters in New York on Wednesday, the United Nations called on the parties involved in the Sabah conflict to end violence and uphold international human rights standards.

"[Secretary General Ban Ki-moon] is closely following the situation in Sabah. He urges an end to the violence and encourages dialogue among all the parties for a peaceful resolution of the situation," the United Nations said.

"The secretary general expresses concern about the impact of this situation on the civilian population, including migrants in the region," it said. "He urges all parties to facilitate the delivery of humanitarian assistance and act in full respect of international human rights norms and standards."

It was the first statement from the United Nations since the standoff between Malaysian security forces and Jamalul's followers began in Tanduao village in Lahad Datu town in Sabah on Feb. 12.

Unilateral ceasefire

After hearing about the UN statement, Jamalul declared a "unilateral ceasefire" that would take effect at 12:30 p.m. and urged Malaysia to reciprocate.

"They will not take any action. They will remain in the place where they are now. They will not expand operations," Idjirani said, referring to the sultan's followers who were reported Thursday as being chased by Malaysian security forces through five villages where they had been scattered by heavy air strikes and artillery attacks on Tuesday.

"We hope Malaysia reciprocates the same call for a ceasefire," Idjirani said, adding that the sultanate was showing to the world that it adhered to Islamic tolerance.

To wait for UN guidelines

Idjirani said the sultan's ceasefire call was "in compliance with the UN secretary general's appeal" and intended to prove that the sultanate's call for talks for a peaceful resolution of the Sabah conflict was true.

He said Jamalul's brother, Agbimuddin, leader of the fleeing "Royal Security Forces of the Sultanate of Sulu and North Borneo," would wait for the United Nations to lay down measures for the withdrawal of the sultan's followers from Sabah.

"The coming home shall be discussed properly and comprehensively with the sultanate of Sulu and Malaysia under the guidance of the United Nations," Idjirani said.

Hunt still on

The Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) said Jamalul's ceasefire offer could prevent further bloodshed.

"Our aim has not changed. We will explore all possibilities to save lives and avoid bloodshed," said Raul Hernandez, DFA spokesman.

"The suggestion of a unilateral ceasefire could be one of these options," Hernandez said.

But Malaysia would not stop chasing Jamalul's routed forces, as halting the police and military operations would give Agbimuddin and his men a chance to melt in the jungles of Sabah or disappear among the Tausug population of the state.

Najib visited Lahad Datu on Thursday to inspect government troops fighting Agbimuddin's group and to announce the rejection of Jamalul's ceasefire offer.

Najib told a news conference that Jamalul's followers must lay down their arms and surrender unconditionally.

If they don't surrender, the operations against them "will go on as long as it takes," Najib said.

He also announced the setting up of a special security area to secure the borders of the east coast of Sabah and reassure the people of the state about their safety.

Najib said five battalions of Army and police would be stationed at the special area.

Ownership question

Najib also said the question of whether Sabah was part of Malaysia should not arise, as that has been determined legally as far back as 1878 and subsequently by the referendum conducted by the Cobbold Commission ahead of the formation of Malaysia.

"Do not underestimate Malaysia's determination to maintain Sabah as part of Malaysia," he said.

The Philippines and Indonesia, allies against Malaya at the time, never accepted the results of the referendum, which was allegedly rigged in favor of Malaya, later renamed as Malaysia.

The question of the 1878 contract between the sultanate of Sulu and the British North Borneo Co. was settled by the British government itself by clarifying its position in a dispute with Germany and the Dutch government that "sovereignty remains with the sultan of Sulu" and that the British North Borneo Co. was merely an administering authority.

Destroy them all

Earlier Thursday, Malaysian Defense Minister Ahmad Zahid Hamidi rejected Jamalul's ceasefire declaration, saying Malaysia would accept his offer only if his followers would surrender unconditionally.

"Do not trust the ceasefire offer by Jamalul Kiram," Ahmad said.

"In the interest of the people of Sabah and Malaysia, destroy all the militants," he added, referring to Agbimuddin and his armed group.

Prisoner swap

After learning that Malaysia had rejected Jamalul's ceasefire offer, Idjirani said the sultanate was declaring a "cessation of hostilities" as a positive response to the rejection.

By cessation of hostilities, he said he meant a stop to the Malaysian operation against Agbimuddin's group.

He added that the sultanate was “willing to swap prisoners of war” if Malaysia would agree to a cessation of hostilities.

Supporters of the sultan in Sabah are reportedly holding four Malaysian police officials captured during an attack on a police station at Simunul village in Semporna town on Saturday night.

The Malaysians are holding 10 fighters from Agbimuddin’s group, captured during the fighting in Tanduao on March 1.

Idjirani suggested that the terms of the exchange of prisoners be agreed upon by the United Nations, Malaysia and the sultanate of Sulu with the “intercession” of the Philippine government.

There was no immediate comment from the Malaysian government on Thursday.

Ancestral claim

Jamalul sent his followers from their homes in Sulu and Tawi-Tawi across the Sulu Sea to assert an ancestral claim to Sabah.

The force headed by Agbimuddin landed in Tanduao on Feb. 9, expelled the residents and occupied the village, reports of which led to their discovery by the authorities on Feb. 12.

Malaysian security forces surrounded the village and threw a naval blockade off Lahad Datu, cornering Agbimuddin’s group, which rejected calls from both the Malaysian and Philippine governments for them to leave peacefully.

The standoff erupted in violence on March 1, after three extensions of a deadline for departure expired.

Twelve members of Agbimuddin’s group and two Malaysian policemen were killed in a gun battle that Friday.

The violence spread to other parts of Sabah on Saturday, resulting in more deaths on both sides and prompting a combination of air and ground attacks from the Malaysian military on Tuesday.

No. of casualties unclear

Idjirani said the actual number of slain followers of the sultanate remained unclear and that the only count he could confirm was 10 killed and four wounded in the March 1 “massacre.”

“The bombing is unstoppable, that’s why we don’t know if [they] have casualties from that,” Idjirani said.

Silent on dispute

The United Nations was silent on the dispute between the sultanate of Sulu and Malaysia over the ownership of Sabah, which the Kirams said they intended to bring to the world body and the International Court of Justice.

The administration of President Aquino says it continues to send emissaries to the Kirams to persuade them to call their followers home.

But the administration also threatens to bring charges against them and their accomplices for causing the international security crisis.—*With reports from AP, AFP, The Star/Asia News Network*

Label	Title
A21	KL rounds up 79 suspects Tausugs arrested outside battle zone

12:31 am | Saturday, March 9th, 2013



END GAME Malaysian soldiers atop an armored vehicle move in toward Lahad Datu on Thursday. MALAYSIA'S THE STAR/ASIA NEWS NETWORK

Malaysian police on Friday rounded up 79 people in Sabah for suspected links to the sultan of Sulu's attempt to retake the territory as crack troops and fighter jets pressed an assault to end a confrontation with the sultan's armed followers trapped in two villages in the eastern Malaysian state.

Federal police chief Ismail Omar said the arrests had all occurred in areas outside the battle zone where Malaysian security forces were chasing the followers of Sultan of Sulu Jamalul Kiram III.

“Outside the operation area, police already arrested certain suspects who we believe have links to the invaders,” Ismail said, referring to the armed force led by Jamalul’s brother Agbimuddin Kiram.

Ismail said those arrested were men and women, but declined to give any further details on the identities of those arrested and whether they were foreigners or Malaysians.

But a radio broadcast monitored by the Inquirer from Digos City indicated that those arrested were Tausug and Orang Suluk (people originally from Sulu) and they were arrested under the Security Offenses (Special Measures) Act of 2012 that human rights activists in Malaysia had criticized as unconstitutional and Amnesty International had described as an “oppressive law.”

The crackdown on suspected supporters of Jamalul’s supporters is part of the Malaysian government’s aggressive response to the intrusion into Sabah by Agbimuddin’s group.

Sixty people—52 of Agbimuddin’s fighters and eight Malaysian policemen—have been killed in fighting that began on March 1.

The Sarawak radio station reported that explosions from howitzer attacks were heard starting at 6:45 last night, hours after Malaysian F-18 Hornet fighter jets dropped bombs on an area in Tandua village in Lahad Datu town where the Sulu sultan’s followers had been on the run since Tuesday.

No signs of surrender

Malaysian armed forces chief Zulkifeli Zin said at a news conference earlier in the day that there were no signs that Agbimuddin and his men were surrendering soon.

The United Nations on Wednesday called for an end to the violence in Sabah and for talks among the governments of Malaysia and the Philippines and Jamalul’s family to resolve the conflict.

Jamalul on Thursday declared a “unilateral ceasefire” and offered an exchange of prisoners after air strikes and heavy artillery attacks by Malaysian forces scattered his followers on Tuesday.

No other option

But Malaysia rejected the ceasefire offer and demanded that Agbimuddin and his men give up unconditionally or be killed.

With Malaysia’s rejection of a ceasefire, the armed followers of Jamalul have no other option but to “lay down their arms” to prevent further bloodshed in Sabah, the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) said Friday.

Malacañang said it would not ask Malaysia to reconsider its rejection of Jamalul's offer of a ceasefire, leaving the sultan without a choice but to call his followers led by his brother Agbimuddin home and save their lives.

If he does not give that order, Agbimuddin and his men, on the run in two villages in Lahad Datu town in Sabah, will be wiped out.

Malaysian Prime Minister Najib Razak gave them an ultimatum on Thursday: "Lay down your arms or be eliminated."

Najib told reporters in Lahad Datu that he had spoken to President Aquino, who asked him what Malaysians thought about Jamalul's ceasefire offer on Thursday.

"I told him that they will have to lay down their weapons unconditionally," Najib said.

Malacañang spokesperson Edwin Lacierda told reporters yesterday that Najib's statement was clear, indicating that the Palace would do nothing to make Najib change his mind.

Rent increase

On claims that the government has abandoned the Sabah claim, Lacierda said "a member of the Kiram family" had warned the government against meddling.

The warning was given through acting Gov. Mujiv Hataman of the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao, a government emissary to the Kirams, Lacierda said.

He said "what the sultanate of Sulu wants is an increase in the rent being paid for Sabah by Malaysia."

The Sabah crisis enters a fourth week today, with 52 of Agbimuddin's "royal security forces" killed in fighting with Malaysian police and military troops since the standoff between them erupted into violence on March 1.

Eight Malaysian policemen were killed in skirmishes with Agbimuddin's group in Tandua and in Simunul village in Semporna town.

Dead or alive?

The fate of Agbimuddin remained unknown as Malaysian elite military and police teams went into the final stage of search and mopping-up operations on Thursday at Tandua and Tanjung Batu villages where the last of Jamalul's followers had been cornered.

According to reports coming from Malaysia, Agbimuddin has failed to contact his family in Manila for the past two days and security forces expect to know what happened to him in a day or two.

Agbimuddin's men have not eaten since they started running from air strikes and artillery bombardment on Tuesday, the reports said.

A "brigadier general" from the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF), identified only as Musa, was among the 32 killed in a fire fight with Malaysian troops in Tanjung Batu on Wednesday.

Agbimuddin's family in Manila said yesterday that he was "safe," although he and his men were hungry.

According to the family's spokesperson, Abraham Idjirani, Agbimuddin's group had "regrouped" after being scattered by the Malaysian attack on March 1.

"They are constantly moving, not by boat, not by any means of transportation, but by themselves. They are on foot," Idjirani said. "They are suffering from hunger."

Propaganda

Commenting on the killing of the MNLF's Musa in Sabah, Idjirani said Musa was "alive and well" in Lahad Datu.

Idjirani called the Malaysian casualty reports "propaganda."

As far as the sultanate of Sulu is concerned, he said, the assault on March 1 was the only encounter between Agbimuddin's group and the Malaysian authorities.

Idjirani said the Sulu group's casualties stood at 10 killed, four injured, and 10 captured.

Princess Jacel Kiram, daughter of Jamalul, said the "unilateral ceasefire" declared by her father on Thursday stood despite being rejected by Malaysia.

Raul Hernandez, DFA spokesperson, said Malaysia's rejection of the ceasefire despite the UN call for an end to violence left Agbimuddin's group no other option but "to lay down their arms to save lives."

"[T]hat is what we've been trying to ask them (to do) from the beginning ... so that further bloodshed would be avoided," Hernandez told reporters.

No reconsideration

Like Malacañang, the DFA, Hernandez indicated, is not asking Malaysia to reconsider its rejection of the ceasefire.

The Kirams, he said, can try asking the United Nations to issue another statement asking Malaysia to reconsider its decision to reject the ceasefire offer.

"It is within the rights of the Kirams to appeal to the UN," Hernandez said.

The Philippines, according to Hernandez, asked Malaysia yesterday to allow Philippine consular officials access to the 10 followers of Jamalul detained in Lahad Datu.

Hernandez said the Philippines had also asked Malaysia to treat Filipinos under its custody humanely.

Refugees

The Philippine Navy said yesterday it had intercepted two motorboats carrying 80 people from Sabah.

But Capt. Rene Yongque of the Navy's Task Force 62 in Tawi-Tawi said none of the people in the boats was armed.

"They are not armed [and they are not] followers of Kiram," Yongque said. "They are just ordinary people [who] may have fled (the violence) in Sabah," he said.

A Navy patrol ship escorted the two boats to Bongao, Tawi-Tawi, Yongque said.

Report of the stoppage came as Omar refuted rumors that 700 armed men from Sulu had entered Sabah.

"I received information that there are SMS and social media postings which falsely claim that these men have entered Kota Kinabalu and Tawau to create chaos," Omar said at a news conference yesterday morning.

"It is not true. Do not believe in reports which are not confirmed by the police and military," Omar said.

There were reports in the Philippines that 10,000 followers of Jamalul had crossed to Sabah to reinforce Agbimuddin's group.

Impossible

But the Philippine Navy said it was impossible for thousands of followers of the sultan to cross the Sulu Sea undetected.

"A report that thousands of Kiram's followers have been able to slip through Sabah borders is extremely doubtful," the Navy said in a statement.

"There are indeed a number of supporters of (the) Sabah claim, but the movement of hundreds, more so thousands, can't be done unnoticed," the Navy said. *With reports Michael Lim Ubac in Manila; Julie Alipala, Inquirer Mindanao; AFP and The Star/Asia News Network*

Label	Title
A22	<p data-bbox="391 222 1458 289">‘We’re treated like animals’</p> <p data-bbox="391 289 1458 409">Filipinos flee police brutality in Sabah</p>

A22

12:53 am | Sunday, March 10th, 2013



SLOW BOAT TO FREEDOM AND SAFETY A police sweep of the Filipino community in Sandakan drove its residents into “extreme fear” forcing them to escape into the night boarding whatever available boat that would take them. An initial wave of 400 evacuees from Sabah arrived in Sulu on Friday. A thousand more are expected in the next few days.
KARLOS MANLUPIG/INQUIRER MINDANAO

ZAMBOANGA CITY—“They dragged all the men outside the houses, kicked and hit them,” 32-year-old Amira Taradji said on Friday as she recounted her family’s ordeal in Sandakan, which started when Malaysian security forces launched a crackdown on suspected supporters of Sulu Sultan Jamalul Kiram III in Sabah.

Taradji said Malaysian policemen ordered Filipino men to run as fast as they could and shot them.

Among those killed on Monday night during the police sweep of a Filipino community in Sandakan was her brother, Jumadil, she said.

Taradji, who was originally from Calinan in Davao City, was among some 400 Filipinos who fled Lahad Datu, Semporna, Tawau and Kunak in Sabah for Sulu as the violence sparked by the intrusion of the followers of Jamalul into the eastern Malaysian state spread at the start of the week.

In other Philippine areas near Sabah, hundreds more have arrived since the police crackdown started and many more Filipinos are expected to return home anytime soon, according to government officials.

Speaking to the INQUIRER by phone through the help of a Sulu local official shortly after arriving in Patikul town by a commercial vessel from Sabah late Friday, Taradji said the police sweeps had become dreadful for both Filipinos and Sabahans known as Orang Suluk (people who originated from Sulu).

Taradji reported the arrest of Filipino men in Tawau and Kunak.

Some of the arrested men, who showed immigration papers, were shot dead, she said, recounting reports by other Filipinos who fled Sabah with her.

“Some of those arrested did not see jail because they were shot and killed,” Taradji said.

She said those who had been locked up were also unlucky, as the Malaysian authorities were not feeding them.

Extreme fear

Taradji had lived in Sandakan since she was 6 years old and she was a holder of MyKad, the identification card issued to Malaysian citizens and permanent residents.

She said that despite her and her family’s being holders of MyKad, they hastily abandoned their home when the police sweeps started Monday night.

She said that from a distance, she saw how those caught during the raid suffered in the hands of Malaysian policemen.

“We sailed from Sandakan to nearby islands. From one island to another, until we reached a small island where we took [an outrigger] for the Philippines. We begged hard so they would allow us into one of the [their boats],” she said.

Carla Manlaw, 47, said the extreme fear of Malaysian policemen, with stories of abuses and killings, prompted her and other Filipinos to leave for Bongao in Tawi-Tawi.

Manlaw and 99 others, including children and elderly people, reached Philippine waters in two motorboats after sailing for about two hours from Sandakan. They were intercepted and escorted by a Philippine Navy ship to Bongao late Friday.

“My employer had no problem with having a Filipino worker. But what bothered me was the police,” she said.

Manlaw said the other Filipinos in her boat fled because of fear. “What will they do to us?” she said, quoting her fellow refugees.

She said that when she heard that a vessel was leaving for Bongao from Sandakan, she immediately grabbed her things and went for it.

Investigate now

Mayor Hussin Amin of Jolo, Sulu, said the accounts of Filipinos fleeing police abuse in Sabah were “alarming and disturbing” and the Philippine government should look into it.

He said he had spoken with many refugees and their stories were the same: Malaysian soldiers and policemen do not distinguish between illegal immigrants and MyKad holders.

“Soldiers and policemen stormed their houses and even those with legitimate working papers like passports and IC papers were not spared. These documents were allegedly torn before their eyes. Men were told to run and were shot if they did. Those who refused were beaten black and blue. Filipinos in jail were executed,” Amin said by phone late Friday.

What’s really happening?

“We are asking our government to investigate now. Refugees from Sandakan and Sabah had spoken to us about their ordeals. If indeed what they have been telling us is true, then Malaysian authorities are not just targeting the Kirams in Lahad Datu,” Amin said.

The New York-based Human Rights Watch also wants to know what is really happening in Sabah.

Phil Robertson, deputy Asia director of Human Rights Watch, issued a statement on Friday saying that while the “situation on the ground in the conflict zone in Sabah is still quite murky,” Malaysia “should provide clear and accurate information on what had occurred.”

Robertson said the Malaysian authorities should “ensure the protection of all civilians in the area, and allow humanitarian access for the provision of emergency assistance to those affected by the violence.”

Detained without charges

“We’re concerned about the Malaysian government’s use of the Security Offenses Special Measures Act to detain reportedly more than 50 individuals, and call on the government to either charge them with a recognizable criminal offense or release them. All parties to the conflict should heed the call of UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon to ‘act in full respect of international human rights norms and standards,’” Robertson said.

Amin said that for now, he tended to believe the stories told by the refugees that Filipino men, especially Tausug, were being killed in the streets and in detention centers in Malaysia.

“Our people are treated like animals there and this has to stop because they are no longer hitting the Kirams,” Amin said.

He said one reason why he believed the stories was his observation that children and women were so “deeply traumatized” that they tried to flee when they saw Filipino policemen as they arrived in Jolo.

“Some (of them) even attempted to jump to the sea, thinking they were still in Malaysia,” he said, referring to scenes at the Jolo port this week.

“I spoke to them and gave them assurance that they were all home and no one would harm them now and the policemen securing the port were not Malaysians but Filipinos protecting them,” Amin said.

Humanitarian crisis

Social welfare officials, who spoke to the Inquirer on condition of anonymity, said they anticipated that more than a thousand Filipinos from Sabah would arrive in the next few days.

One official said the crush of evacuees would “pose a problem” greater than the difficulties caused by the massive deportation of Filipinos from Malaysia in 2002.

Some 64,000 undocumented Filipinos were forced out of Sabah in that year and feeding or relocating them became a nightmare for officials.

Amirah Lidasan of the militant group Suara Bangsamoro said she pitied women and children who braved danger at sea to escape the Sabah violence.

The waters between Sabah and the Philippine areas of Tawi-Tawi and Sulu are known for huge waves that could swamp and capsize small vessels.

Survival problems

Taradji said another problem facing many Filipinos fleeing Sabah was how to live in the Philippines after living for decades in Malaysia.

She said she managed to bring some money to sustain her family for a few days.

But after that, she and her husband do not know how to feed the family, she said.

“We do not even know which way is Calinan now,” Taradji said, adding that the Philippines is now a foreign land to her and her family after living for the past 26 years in Sabah.

Manlaw had the same thing to say.

“We have no future here, unlike in Sabah where we had jobs,” she said.

Like Taradji, Manlaw and the other refugees who arrived in Bongao were being assisted by government agencies. ***With reports from Cynthia D. Balana in Manila; and Allan Nawal, Inquirer Mindanao***

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Label	Title
A23	PH mission, media barred from Sabah evacuation center

4:41 am | Saturday, March 16th, 2013



LAHAD DATU—Malaysian guards on Friday rebuffed an attempt by a Philippine humanitarian mission to talk with Filipinos detained in the wake of the Sabah dispute, saying the group needed a written permission from Kuala Lumpur.

Elsewhere, Sabah police arrested eight Filipinos who sailed into the disputed territory carrying 300 water gallons and cash amounting to P369,000.

At the Cenderawasih gym here, the Malaysian security personnel demanded that the five-man humanitarian and consular assistance team (HCAT) dispatched by the Philippine government first show a permit before they can get in. The Filipino team was comprised of diplomats.

Cenderawasih is located at Felda Sahabat, a vast palm oil plantation where most of the fighting between the so-called “royal army” of the sultanate of Sulu and the Malaysian security forces has erupted.

Two of the diplomats spoke with the official in charge of the evacuation center, asking if the team could go inside.

“I told him that we just want to send food and water to the Filipino evacuees. He said we should first submit a written permission from their government,” one of the HCAT members told Filipino reporters covering the Sabah crisis.

Turned away again

The Sulu sultanate has a long-standing territorial claim to Sabah, the former British North Borneo, which was federated into Malaysia in 1963.

The Inquirer and news teams from GMA 7 and ABS-CBN networks were with the humanitarian mission outside the gate, hoping to get access to the detained Filipinos.

Turned away, the group drove to Embara Budi, 10 minutes away, to also try to get into the evacuation center there. But they were also stopped by a police checkpoint on a street leading to the evacuation center. No explanation was given.

ABS-CBN's Henry Omega-Diaz reported that the Filipino diplomats in Tawau also could not openly provide consular assistance to the Filipinos there because they had no permission from the Malaysian government.

Last Tuesday, the INQUIRER and GMA 7 teams were allowed inside the Embara Budi evacuation center only to take footages but not to interview the evacuees.

Investigation going on

Last Monday, the HCAT "found a way to enter" Cenderawasih but was asked to leave after a few minutes, one diplomat said.

The team was able to take photographs and talk to some Filipinos who told them they were given adequate food and medical supplies. They were mostly residents of villages where fighting had taken place.

The Malaysia Daily newspaper earlier reported Malaysian Foreign Minister Anifah Amab as saying that Malaysia could not grant Philippine officials "legal access" to the Filipinos arrested because "the investigation on suspicions that they provided help or security information to the terrorists is continuing."

Elsewhere, eight male Filipinos carrying water gallons and cash were arrested shortly after midnight on Friday in Sungai Bilis village in Felda Sahabat. Sabah Police Commissioner Hamza Taib said the authorities were investigating why the men came to Sabah's east coast.

More bodies

The eight Filipinos, aged from 17 to 29, were arrested at around 12:15 a.m. after they arrived on a speedboat, Hamza said at a press conference.

Malaysia's Security Operations Act, widely criticized by the international community, allows the government to detain suspects for 28 days without trial.

The Philippine government has not been granted access to the nearly 100 Filipinos arrested on suspicion they were abetting the group of Rajah Mudah Agbimuddin Kiram, the leader of a group that recently went to Sabah claiming the territory belonged to the Sulu sultanate.

Hamza said the death toll in Kiram's group was now 61, with the discovery of 15 bodies in three graves in the village of Tandua. He said about 10 more bodies could be retrieved in the village of Tanjung Batu.

Hamza said that following a postmortem on the bodies, Malaysia would call the Philippine authorities and ask if they would want to collect the bodies. If there was no response within three days from the Philippines, the Malaysian government would bury the dead.

‘No conspiracy’

In Manila, Abraham Idjirani, a spokesperson for Sultan Jamalul Kiram III, told reporters after meeting with officials of the National Bureau of Investigation that he was asked to narrate the events surrounding the Sabah incursion.

He said the NBI questioned him about the possible collusion of some personalities in the episode.

“I maintained no conspiracy and no financier,” Idjirani said.

3rd party inquiry

Sen. Miriam Defensor-Santiago proposed that the Philippines and Malaysia agree on a third party to conduct an inquiry on the spate of violence in Sabah to avoid further bloodshed.

Santiago also commended President Benigno Aquino III for his “sober and prudent” strategy on the issue.

“I commend him (Aquino) for his caution... You cannot just run to war on an emotional burst of energy. You have to consider all aspects, particularly the world public opinion,” she told reporters on the sidelines of the convention of the Association of Nursing Service Administrators of the Philippines.

Santiago said that if necessary, she would file a resolution in the Senate proposing that the Philippines invite Malaysia to agree on the entry of a third party to conduct an inquiry “on the alleged violent acts” that had occurred in Sabah.

She said Malaysia’s move to expel Filipinos from Sabah before any talks on settling the dispute “appears to be unacceptable under international law.”

Limited force

In her speech, Santiago said the Philippines may use “limited force” against Malaysia if the lives of Filipinos caught in the middle were in danger.

While the use of force is prohibited under international law, there are certain conditions that allow a state to use limited force to protect its nationals, she said.

In Malacañang, presidential spokesperson Edwin Lacierda said measures were in place to protect Filipinos in Sabah and render humanitarian assistance to those who have returned to Sulu.

“Our main concern is the 800,000 Filipinos in Sabah,” Lacierda said. “For those under the custody of the Malaysian authorities, we continue to ask for consular access. It is the reason why the Philippine Embassy has people on the ground in Lahad Datu.”

Social Welfare Secretary Dinky Soliman confirmed that Manila had sent a “rapid response team” to Sabah composed of Foreign Undersecretary Jesus Yabes and Social Welfare Undersecretary Paris Taradji. *With reports from Michael Lim Ubac and Nancy C. Carvajal*