

'New termites' behind Cervantes' slay?

By MARICHU VILLANUEVA

President Arroyo voiced suspicions yesterday that coup plotters, whom she identified only as "new termites," were behind the New Year's Eve killing of discharged Army Lt. Baron Alexander Cervantes.

At the same time, the Chief Executive sternly warned the supposed coup plotters that their plan will not succeed because the police and military establishments were solidly behind her.

"I condemn, in the stron-

gest possible terms, the murder of Baron Cervantes, the self-styled spokesperson and claimant co-founder of the Young Officers Union," she said.

Mrs. Arroyo noted that the killing was timed at the end of the year to deliberately derail the economic recovery which, she said, began last year.

"It is very clear to me that these evil-doers don't want us to get out of poverty. They would rather see our

country suffer than to see the lives of Filipinos improve," she said.

"To those who want to destroy our nation, to the termites of society: stop now because nothing will come out of your trouble-making in our country," the President said even as she exhorted the people to be calm and keep on trusting the government.

"Do not be swayed by these intimidation or propaganda by these new ter-

mites. Please continue your trust in and support for the government," she added.

The President assured the public she would crush any attempt to destabilize her administration.

"I wish to tell plotters that their plans will not succeed. The AFP (Armed Forces) and (police) have the muscle and wherewithal to stop and destroy them if they raise arms against the government," she said.

"The sovereign people

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will not countenance any attempt to bring down the government, undermine its authority and stop the momentum of economic advancement which we have begun and are determined to pursue," she said.

She did not specify who was behind Cervantes' murder but police officials have earlier said they suspect a rift within the YOU and the Rebolusyonyong Alyansang Makabansa (RAM) may be behind the killing.

Cervantes, a consultant to National Security Adviser Roilo Golez, had told Manila radio stations that some YOU members and other military officials had allegedly hatched a coup plot against Mrs. Arroyo during a clandestine meeting last month.

However, YOU leaders have denied his claims about a plot and disowned him, saying he was not the group's spokesman and that he was not a captain as he claimed but merely a former lieutenant who was dropped from the rolls.

The YOU was involved in some of the rightist military coup attempts against then President

Corazon Aquino in the late-1980s. However its members were later granted amnesty under a peace accord with Aquino's successor, Fidel Ramos.

Mrs. Arroyo said the police and justice department were investigating the killing of Cervantes and would submit a report to her as soon as possible. YOU members have denied they are plotting against Mrs. Arroyo.

Meanwhile, senators urged Mrs. Arroyo to explain why she said that politics could have something to do with the incident.

"Maybe the President knows something... She should explain because she cannot make conclusions left and right without any basis," Sen. Rodolfo Biazon said.

Biazon said the Arroyo administration should work to "bring to light the silhouettes or shadows moving in the dark" who supposedly want to destabilize the government.

He said the "shadows" were identifiably the members of the organizations involved in the popular uprising that swept her into the presidency in January last year.

Biazon theorized that Cer-

vantes' killing and the recent discovery that Navy Lt. (Senior Grade) Donn Anthony Miraflor allegedly tried to sneak high-powered explosives out of the Sangley Point naval base in Cavite could be related.

Sen. Ramon Magsaysay, for his part, said military intelligence chief Col. Victor Corpuz should also clarify issues because Cervantes released documents on a purported coup plot before he was killed.

Magsaysay and Sen. Gregorio Honasan also called on RAM leaders to help solve the murder to prove they are not involved in Cervantes' murder.

Honasan, one of the RAM founders, said his former comrades should extend whatever help and cooperation may be required by the authorities in solving the crime.

"I strongly denounce the heartless killing of Cervantes. The news of his untimely death came as a shock to us and whoever did this murderous act should be put behind bars," Honasan said. - **With reports from Aurea Calica, AFP**