

AFP: NPA to unleash hit squads for SONA

By JAIME LAUDE

The Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) will deploy two Army battalions from northern and southern Luzon to Metro Manila to stop what it said was a plan of the communist New People's Army (NPA) to revive its notorious assassination squads and conduct operations in the metropolis coinciding with the State of the Nation Address (SONA) of President Arroyo on Monday.

Maj. Gen. Arsenio Arugay, chief of the AFP's National Capital Region Command

(NCRCOM), said the military had placed troops in Metro Manila on red alert starting Friday.

"We really have no specific information that NPA assassination squads or Sparrow Units will conduct operations from now or maybe after the SONA. The thing is they are going to conduct Sparrow operations," Arugay said.

The Sparrow Units were responsible for the assassination of soldiers and policemen in the 1980s.

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He cited reports that some members of these NPA death squads have already been deployed in the metropolis for this planned liquidation operation.

"We don't know when they came in but we have reports that some are already here in Metro Manila," he said.

Arugay admitted that the NCRCOM is not aware yet who are the key targets of the planned Sparrow operations.

Prominent victims of the Sparrow Units include American Col. James Rowe, Police Gen. Tomas Karingal, police officials Maj. Jose Pring, Maj. Temotheo Zarcal, former Col. Rolando Abadilla and former colonel and Cagayan Rep. Rodolfo Aguinaldo.

CHR conducts seminar for anti-riot police

Commission on Human Rights Chair Leila de Lima told anti-riot policemen yesterday that the law enforcers may look

"menacing" but it should not mean that the police would use violence against demonstrators during the SONA.

"I hope your menacing looks will not be translated to harsh conduct on the field. *Dapat hanggang looks lang.*" De Lima said during her lecture at the human rights seminar for anti-riot policemen yesterday at the Quezon City Police headquarters in Camp Karingal.

De Lima conducted the seminar, which was attended by hundreds of law enforcers wearing helmets and carrying shields from various police units in Metro Manila, Ilocos, Central Luzon and Southern Tagalog.

She said the protest rallies and the police response during the SONAs in the past years were generally peaceful. She said the seminar was just a refresher course for the police.

De Lima said the use of reasonable force "should only be the last resort."

"Give them (demonstrators) enough leeway for their grievances against the government and the President. Unless the situation arises for the use of force, that's the only time that reasonable force should be applied," she added.

More than 6,000 policemen deployed for SONA

Senior Superintendent Magtanggol Gatdula, director of the Quezon City Police District, said 2,500 policemen would be deployed along Commonwealth Avenue and the Batasang Pambansa complex in Quezon City, where the President will give her 8th SONA.

National Capital Region Police Office chief Director Geary Barias said at least 6,000 policemen would be deployed in other parts of Metro Manila during the SONA.

Barias said the human rights seminar for the anti-riot police is a "new template in our SONA preparations."

"This year the watchful eyes of the CHR will be focused on every movement we make," Barias said.

After a demonstration by one of the platoons of anti-riot police, De Lima noted that their formation was "impressive."

De Lima noted the possibility that infiltrators would mix with protesters on Monday and make the job of the policemen even more difficult.

Gatdula said the Kilusang Makabansang Ekonomiya and Bayan Muna have applied for permits from the Quezon City government to hold their rally.

A meeting is scheduled today between the police and rally organizers to lay the ground rules for Monday's protest.

Quezon City Hall had issued yesterday permits for Bayan to hold their rally along Commonwealth Avenue.

Manuel Sabalza, chief of the Department Public Order and Safety (DPOS), said Mayor Feliciano Belmonte assured rallyists that they would get their permit to conduct rallies in designated areas in the city.

"Bayan will be allowed to stay at the Ever Gotesco Mall area where they can hold their programs during the SONA," Sabalza said. He said city hall also granted rally permits to two more groups.

- With Reinir Padua, Perseus Echeminada, Jess Diaz, Jaime Laude