

Bicutan Siege: UNTOLD TALE OF ABUSES



Survivors of the siege are ready to tell their story and of those who did not make it through.

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The abuse ... is when it disjoins remorse from power. W. Shakespeare's Julius Caesar, II,i

THE Office of Legal Aid of the University of the Philippines, the Institute for Human Rights, and the NCR investigators of the Commission on Human Rights corroborated the earlier news that the Department of Justice state counsels, who pursued the cases against the suspected Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG), Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), and the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) detainees had prior knowledge of the planned jailbreak two months before the Bicutan siege. This information was relayed to the concerned officials of the Bureau of Jail Management and Prisons (BJMP).

The Day Before the Siege

Kosovo (Alhamser Manatad Limbong) and two other detainees were playing basketball on the first floor of the Special Intensive Care Area (SICA) Building at about 6 o'clock in the morning on March 14, when two guards working on a double shift entered and stopped their game.

Kosovo and two other detainees wrestled with the guards. One stabbed the guard with ice pick. Subsequently, they grabbed the gun of one jail guard and shot the other guard. Upon seeing what happened to the two guards on duty, the guard at the tower immediately went down to help, but he was also shot at. After which, Kosovo and the two detainees ran outside to escape but they heard shots coming from outside. They were forced to retreat to their cells. Despite protests of fellow inmates fearing they would get embroiled in the situation, they insisted on coming in. Then, two suspected ASG members, Borham Hadji and Ulli Atti, ran towards the jail guards' office but the guards shot at them.

Kosovo, together with Ka Lando, tried to convince other detainees at the first floor to join them, but the majority refused. Reports have it that even Commanders Global (Nadzmi Sabdulla) and Robot (Galib Andang) tried to dissuade Kosovo about his plan. Remaining adamant, Kosovo told those who refused to join them to go to the right side of the 1st floor fronting the Annex Building known as Metro Manila District Jail. Those who joined them were ordered to go to the left side. Kosovo and the two were joined by less than 10 others including

Almundi Tarbanga, an MILF detainee suspected of being a terrorist.

Other detainees who did not join Kosovo's group and could not be accommodated in the place he designated for them, went up to the second floor for refuge. After which, detainees on 1st, 2nd, and 3rd floors, who chose not to join, tied their cell doors shut from the inside for protection and to prevent other detainees from entering.

Kosovo's group asked for Congressman Mujib Hataman and Robin Padilla with Atty. Calleja to act as negotiators. But Robin Padilla was not available so the PNP instead offered ARMM Governor Parouk Hussein in Padilla's place. Three other negotiators, said to be British-trained, aided these two government officials. However, the detainees only negotiated with Hataman and Hussein to whom they presented their five demands. These were the following: speedy trial, respect of their human rights, security, food and other needs, and media projection.

At around 11 a.m., external negotiations took place with the government's Crisis Management Team (CMT) composed of Department of Interior and Local Government (DILG) Secretary Angelo Reyes, Philippine National Police (PNP) Chief Arturo Lumibao, three PNP negotiators, Taguig Mayor Fred Tinga and Congressman Cayetano with Ka Lando as spokesperson for Kosovo's group. Secretary Reyes demanded that Kosovo's group surrender first before the latter can have the live media interview. Kosovo said that they needed to eat first and to pray before they decided on that matter. After some time, the group declared they wouldn't surrender unless they had the media interview first. Secretary Reyes acceded. Since it was already 6:00 p.m., Ka Lando again requested if they could eat and pray first.

The negotiations bogged down.

At that time, Congressman Hataman had been talking with Commander Global on the cell



Cops help a survivor who cannot walk on his own because of wounds and exhaustion.
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phone. Commander Global said that he could not convince Kosovo anymore to discontinue with their plan despite the fact that many of the detainees who were not part of the attempted escape will be affected. Ka Lando said that they were all ready to die.

The Siege

At around 7:30 a.m., Secretary Angelo Reyes gave a one-hour deadline for Kosovo's group to surrender. At 8:30 a.m., the deadline lapsed but was extended for 15 minutes. At 9 a.m., the attack was launched at the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd floors.

Teargas canisters were thrown inside each cell. Concentrated firing was made without warning in every cell (estimated at one round of magazine per cell) of the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd floors.

When the smoke cleared, detainees on 2nd and 3rd floors were ordered to strip down to their briefs and come out of their cells. Once out of their cells, the detainees were kicked and punched and ordered to put their hands behind their heads and to crawl up to the rooftop.

Some wounded detainees who were crawling out and asking for help from the Special Action Force (SAF) were ordered by the latter to return to their cells. As they did so, they were shot. A detainee on the 2nd floor said that he saw a certain Maulo, a wounded suspected ASG, while they were all crawling out from their cells. According to them, Maulo was told by SAF to return to his cell and then they heard shots. Later they saw on TV that Maulo was one of the dead suspected ASG detainees.

Meanwhile, information was passed that a suspected ASG detainee on the first floor was ordered by SAF to carry Commander Robot to the 2nd floor. After putting Commander Robot down, he was ordered to crawl away. When the said detainee heard shots and tried to look back, one of the SAF stepped on his head.

Clearing up

Detainees, stripped down to their briefs, were made to sit on the rooftop under the sun for hours, with hands on their napes or backs. They suffered sunburn as evidenced by the

redness on the nape, back, and arms. SAF were then calling out the names of Commanders Global and Yusop. The latter however did not present himself but Global did. Nadzmi Sabdulla (Cmdr. Global) was then kicked and punched after that. Sabdulla was ordered to run but when he did, he was shot. One of the detainees recounted this. He saw Commander Global running and he heard shots afterwards. SAF threatened the detainees not to look up or look around, otherwise their heads would be blown off. They were thus not able to identify the perpetrators because they did not dare raise their heads because of fear.

At around 11 a.m., Sec. Reyes announced that the crisis was over and proclaimed the operation a success. Immediately after, there was a grenade blast. A round of firing on each of the first and second floors by siege forces was heard. Some PNP personnel admitted that they earlier threw two grenades on the 1st floor that did not explode.

The total death count from March 14 to 15 was 29 people. The official police statement released to media said that the raiders recovered from the scene eight handguns and two unexploded grenades. Others disputed this accounting as to the actual number and kind of weapons used by Kosovo and company.

Burial

The bodies of all dead detainees, including those of Galib Andang (Cmdr. Robot), Nadzmi Sabdulla (Cmdr. Global) and Alhamser Manalad Limbong (Cmdr. Kosovo), were brought by two ambulances to Maharlika Village to prepare them for Islamic burial rites at the Imam Kusim Memorial Park. The ambulances had to shuttle several times beginning 1 a.m. to bring all the bodies. Sometime past 9 AM, the burial ceremonies were held. ■

Prepared by the Philippine Alliance of Human Rights Advocates (PAHRA)