

**LOW PAY, POOR CONDITIONS FUEL UNREST IN PHILIPPINE MILITARY.**By **Chaitanya Kalbag**

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MANILA, Sept 4, Reuter - Low pay and poor working conditions have fuelled unrest in the Philippine military and laid the ground for further coup attempts, analysts said on Friday.

"Most soldiers barely manage to survive," a Western military attache told Reuters.

"Housing is almost non-existent, except for senior officers. Privates are forced to build shanties alongside major military camps to house their families."

He said the Philippine soldier was the lowest paid in South-east Asia, although the United States sees the country as the most strategically-important in the region and operates two of its largest overseas military bases here.

The military released figures last month showing that the Philippines' expenditure per soldier averaged a low 2,653 dollars in 1986 -- far lower than its ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) neighbours.

Tiny Brunei, in contrast, spent 75,240 dollars per soldier annually.

In the aftermath of the August 28 coup attempt, the fifth and bloodiest in President Corazon Aquino's 18-month-rule, a shaken government has moved to improve its soldiers' lot.

On Wednesday Armed Forces chief General Fidel Ramos said the cabinet had agreed to hurry action on a bill he had submitted two months ago proposing a 60-per-cent increase in soldiers' pay.

The House of Representatives took up urgent consideration on Thursday of proposals to double the pay of ordinary soldiers, many of whom can expect to see regular action against Moslem separatist and communist rebels.

Data obtained from military sources revealed a yawning gap between the 14,800-strong officer corps and the 143,970-strong other ranks in the deeply divided armed forces.

A private's basic monthly pay is only 23.50 dollars. Including fixed allowances for cost of living, housing and hazard pay, a private grosses about 83 dollars -- slightly below the government's own mandatory subsistence wage.

Although better paid, officers are not much better off, the data showed. A colonel grosses about 340 dollars a month, while Ramos gets only 625 dollars a month after 33 years of service.

A senior military official said Colonel Gregorio Honasan, who led about 1,500 soldiers in last week's uprising, felt strongly that the government was guilty of callousness towards the military.

The Honasan-led Reform the Armed Forces Movement has said it was fighting for better treatment and greater professionalism.

The military official said every soldier gets a daily food allowance of 60 cents -- not enough to buy a decent meal in Manila -- but his pay is doubled on combat duty.

That incentive may be related to a bizarre case of leniency.

A week before the latest coup attempt 68 soldiers detained since a January uprising were freed because they volunteered for combat duty.

Earlier this year the military made a strong pitch for more money, urging the government to raise its 1987 armed forces' budget of 453.6 million dollars by a hefty 43 per cent to modernise weapons and buy equipment in the face of the Communist insurgency.





Two weeks before the coup attempt, however, the government announced a 1988 budget in which the military got only a 5.4 per cent rise.

"U.S. military aid to the Philippines totalled 100 million dollars in 1987," the Western military attache said.

"That may look small, but it's nearly a quarter of Manila's own budget."

Aquino seems to recognise the need for urgent reforms.

"Our armed forces are asked to do more for less," she told Congress in July, noting that defence appropriations were down to 1.25 per cent of the Gross National Product from an average of two per cent before she took power.

A brother of Colonel Gregorio Honasan, leader of the August 28 coup attempt, was arrested after police raided his house and found unlicensed guns and ammunitions, a police spokesman said.

He said Don Honasan was brought to police headquarters for questioning about the weapons found in his home in suburban Manila.

In a nearby military camp, scene of a major battle between government and rebel troops, army explosive teams set off bombs and live projectiles abandoned by the mutineers.

Government television showed soldiers detonating bombs discovered among banana trees inside Camp Aguinaldo, which was held by rebel troops last Friday for several hours.

"The camp is not safe, that is why we have to go all over the area and clear it of any explosives," Colonel Sortili Rigor, head of the explosives team, said.

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