

PHILIPPINE OFFICIALS GET DEATH THREATS, SECURITY TIGHTENED.By **Chaitanya Kalbag**, Reuters

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MANILA, Aug 7, Reuter - Extra bodyguards were assigned to top Philippine officials today after a congressional leader and the country's election commission chief received death threats from Communist and Moslem guerrillas.

Amid rising public outrage, police admitted they were no nearer solving the murders of Local Government Secretary Jaime Ferrer, assassinated on Sunday, and of a retired naval officer considered close to Ferrer who was killed yesterday.

Military sources said police patrols had been intensified and more guards assigned to government officials after intelligence reports said a nine-member Moslem rebel hit squad planned to kill Ramon Mitra, Speaker of the House of Representatives.

Yesterday an angry Mitra called for the resignation of police officials for their failure to identify Ferrer's killers.

The military sources said Ramon Felipe, Chairman of the Commission on Elections, and two of his colleagues received separate death threats last night from the Communist New People's Army (NPA).

"We consider all officials as under threat," said Colonel Fernando Angara, police chief in the Manila suburb where Ferrer died in an ambush. "Even I am a potential target."

Angara said the Ferrer investigation was "still very much open".

Manila newspapers reported today that Angara's deputy, Major Jose Balbas had been removed from his post for failing in the murder investigation. But Angara said Balbas had been assigned to a task force set up to end the impasse.

Two men detained as prime suspects in the Ferrer killing, the latest in a long string of unsolved crimes, were freed after investigators failed to come up with evidence against them.

One of them, a former Moslem rebel leader, was captured in a highly-publicised raid led by Manila's Governor Jejomar Binay. The other, suspected of being one of the three gunmen who shot Ferrer, was not recognised by eyewitnesses in two police identity parades and showed no traces of having recently fired a gun when tested.

The controversy over the murder investigations drew a sharp retort from Brigadier-General Alexander Aguirre, Manila's military commander. He said the police were being used as a whipping boy by congressional leaders like Mitra.

"If we have this problem, is it the fault of the police? We should not be stabbed in the back while we are fighting," Aguirre told reporters.

Ferrer, 70, was an outspoken anti-communist but had also earned unpopularity by sacking many provincial officials appointed by former President Ferdinand Marcos.

His associate Rosendo Nuval, a retired navy commander, was shot dead by unidentified gunmen in Manila's tourist district yesterday.

On Tuesday Liberato Pacar, a World War Two veteran and Ferrer's friend, shot himself in what police described as a fit of depression over the assassination.

The outcry over Ferrer's killing was today joined by a veterans group calling itself the Hunters ROTC Guerrillas.

It charged in full-page newspaper advertisements that the murder "dramatises the inability of government to control the rising spread of terrorism and insurgency to the very heart of our urban centres".

A spokeswoman for the group told Reuters the Hunters were about 100 men, mostly in their 60s, who fought



alongside Ferrer against the Japanese in World War Two.

"We have mobilised our comrades-in-arms and existing network to determine the killers and those behind them," the advertisement said. The spokeswoman said she did not know what the group would do if it found the assassins.

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WASHINGTON, Aug. 7 (Reuters) - The growing call in the Philippines for a repudiation of some of the country's 23.4 billion dollar foreign debt was sharply attacked today by the finance minister and the leader of an influential business group.

Finance Secretary Jaime Ongena said the idea of repudiation or a freeze on repayments, proposals which are being considered by the new President in Congress, would cause the economy to collapse.

After President Corason Aquino said at the start of the country's 40th birthday in a speech in Congress on July 27, "repudiation is not an option," the President said repudiation is 10 per cent of export earnings and freezing an interest payment.

They have attacked some of the country's most responsible loans incurred by former president Ferdinand Marcos.

"I hope that the whole world has heard of it. There would be some consequences which none of us would be able to ignore," Ongena said.

He said the effect of a debt repudiation would make the country in the hands of "a few big companies and people in the government," a "totalitarian regime."

"Do we want to go back to the 1970s? Do we want to make repudiation mean the responsibility of having the economy collapse?" he asked. "I am not sure that is the strategy."

He said he had Aquino's backing "but the rest of the cabinet with respect to the debt is not clear. It is still a matter of debate."

A public hearing is expected to be held by the House of Representatives and industry, who in a statement said this "may result in the loss of jobs, the loss of credit and the ability to repay the debt."

"Repudiation is a very serious step. It is a step which the government must take if it is to avoid bankruptcy and financial collapse," said a statement from the business group.

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