

News and Features

AQUINO IGNORES COUP WARNING TO VISIT REBEL ISLAND

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MANILA, Sunday: President Corazon Aquino flew to the violence-racked island of Mindanao today, apparently unruffled by a night of tension triggered by warnings that a fanatical military group was plotting a new attempt to topple her Government.

In Manila, soldiers, backed by water cannon and armoured cars sealed off the presidential palace after the military went on a full, "red alert" to head off the third possible coup attempt in Mrs Aquino's 11 months in power.

Word of the latest coup plot spread through Manila when the largest military fraternity, the Guardian Brotherhood, told its members that a die-hard splinter group loyal to the former Defence Minister, Mr Juan Ponce Enrile, and the deposed President, Mr Marcos, was gearing up for revolt.

After five days of violence spawned by Muslim rebels, Mrs Aquino's chief political adviser, Mr Aquilino Pimentel, paved the way for her trip to Mindanao by clinching a temporary truce with the rebels' leader yesterday.

In her riskiest constitutional campaign stop so far, Mrs Aquino held a 10-minute meeting with a guerilla leader, Mr Haji Murad, in Cotabato city and then told a rally of 4,000 Muslims and Christians: "My prayer is that fighting among us will finally end."

Mr Murad, the vice-chairman of the Muslim Islamic Liberation Front, said he gave Mrs Aquino a paper proposing talks on a "final solution" to the Muslim conflict.

Asked about the military alert in Manila, Mrs Aquino said: "(It was)nothing. I spoke to (armed forces chief General Fidel) Ramos this morning."

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