

FOREIGN MEDIA PAID FOR PHILIPPINE ATTACKS - EX-DEFENCE CHIEF.By **Chaitanya Kalbag**

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MANILA, May 17, Reuter - Former Defence Minister Juan Ponce Enrile said on Tuesday that the Philippine military had a file of evidence on ambushes by communist rebels "financed by foreign journalists in exchange for media coverage".

Enrile, defence chief for 17 years until 1986 and now the only opposition member in the Senate, was quoted by the Philippine Inquirer newspaper as saying that in 1986 an investigation he ordered found a foreign television crew had paid rebels 20,000 dollars to carry out an ambush in Quezon province in which 11 soldiers died. He did not name the crew.

Referring to a row over charges by a military commander on Monday that the British Broadcasting Corporation had been linked by a surrendered woman guerrilla to an ambush in February in which 12 soldiers were killed, Enrile said: "The BBC is doing many wrong things against us."

Military officials said they had no evidence linking the BBC to the attack in Albay province.

In London on Monday, BBC spokesman Richard Peel told Reuters: "We totally deny the allegations. We didn't have a crew there and it has nothing to do with us."

Foreign Secretary Raul Manglapus said the charges against the BBC sounded "bizarre".

"I doubt if a serious and respected media institution would go that far to create news," he added.

President Corazon Aquino's Press Secretary Teodoro Benigno said the military would investigate the charges.

Asked to comment on the charges against the BBC, Aquino told reporters: "We are waiting for the recommendation of the Department of National Defence. Then it will be forwarded to me and I will discuss it with the Secretary of Justice and with the Executive Secretary."

The large foreign media presence in Manila has been under increasing attack in recent weeks, blamed for the Philippines' poor international image and labelled by one commentator as "the enemy (President Corazon Aquino) can't beat".

Ernesto Herrera, an Aquino supporter in the Senate, called for swift action against the "mercenary activities" of foreign journalists whom he termed "bloodthirsty and barbaric".

Herrera accused foreign reporters of "distorted and grossly inaccurate reports about conditions in our country at the expense of the dignity and rights of the Filipino people", the state-owned Philippine News Agency said.

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