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PRIME NEWS

Aquino: There are signs of conspiracy

OUTSIDE SUPPORT: Sulu sultanate does not have financial means to plan and launch incursion, says Philippine president

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KUALA LUMPUR

PHILIPPINE President Benigno Aquino III has said that there are signs of a conspiracy that led to the bloody intrusion of Sulu terrorists in Lahad Datu, Sabah.

Aquino said he was not blind to signs that pointed to a conspiracy in the stand-off, which has left eight Malaysian policemen and at least 19 of the foreign gunmen dead.

"I have received intelligence reports and the authorities are monitoring persons of interest on the

Sabah issue," Aquino was reported by Philippine television network ABS-CBN as saying on Monday.

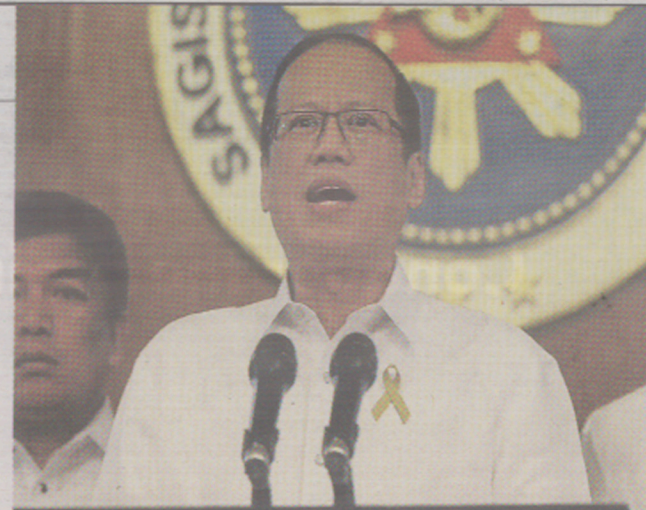
Aquino said the Sulu sultanate, under the leadership of self-styled Sultan Jamalul Kiram III, could not have launched the incursion alone as it lacked the financial means to do so.

"The Kiram family could not have financed the operation... the sultan is receiving financial support from the government for his regular dial-

ysis," he added. Jamalul, 76, is suffering from a kidney ailment and has been undergoing dialysis treatment for more than a year.

The *New Straits Times* yesterday reported that Aquino had warned those who had conspired with the Sulu sultan in pressing for his claim on Sabah that they would be punished.

"Some of these people have not yet been identified. But I assure you that these people will not suc-



President Benigno Aquino says Philippine authorities are monitoring people thought to be involved in instigating the Sulu gunmen. AP pic

ceed and that they will be brought to justice," he was reported as saying.

Two Filipino news organisations, *Inquirer News* and *The Manila Times*, recently published articles quoting unnamed Philippine intelligence sources claiming that the intrusion by the group, calling itself the Royal Sulu Sultanate Army, was instigated by a leader from the Malaysian opposition.

Three days ago, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak had said the government would work with its Filipino counterpart to investigate

the allegations.

However, a spokesman for the Sulu gunmen yesterday denied the claim, saying the Malaysian opposition did not channel funds to the militants.

"Abrahma Idjirani, spokesman for the sultanate of Sulu, reiterated on Tuesday that he is not receiving funds from the Malaysian opposition, stressing that if it were true, he wouldn't travel on a tricycle," the *Inquirer News* reported, citing the spokesman's interview with radio station Radyo Inquirer 990AM.