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PRIME NEWS

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Manila plans to charge terrorists

PHILIPPINES' PLEDGE: Authorities studying charges to be filed against 36 gunmen

MANILA

THE Philippine government is preparing criminal charges against the 36 Sulu

terrorists who were picked from the waters off Tawi-Tawi on Wednesday, a clear indication that the Southeast Asian neighbour is committed in helping Malaysia resolve the conflict in Lahad Datu.

The 36 gunmen, some of whom were injured, were in two boats when they were stopped by the Philippine Navy off the coasts of Omapoy and Adulingan islands in Tawi-Tawi and detained.

Reports out of Manila quoted Justice Secretary Leila de Lima as saying that the National Bureau of Investigation (NBI) would continue looking into the alleged conspiracy that led to the stand-off.

In a briefing in Malacañang on Thursday, De Lima said the NBI and the police Criminal Investi-

gation and Detection Group (CIDG) were studying the charges to be filed against the 36 gunmen.

"I would want to avoid specifying the charges at this point. The only (case) I can confirm, which is quite obvious to everyone, is the illegal possession of firearms because they were caught with or they were found with assorted weapons," De Lima said.

"And that, definitely, is punishable under our laws. They can be charged immediately with illegal possession of firearms and other deadly weapons. That is clear."

In **Taiping**, Defence Minister Datuk Seri Dr Ahmad Zahid Hamidi said the Philippine government would also identify the mastermind behind the stand-off in Lahad Datu and its surrounding areas.

The Philippine government's commitment was conveyed to Zahid at a meeting with the Philippine Defence Secretary Voltaire T. Gazmin in Putrajaya on Thurs-

day.

Zahid said proof of the Philippines government's commitment was in the arrests of the 36 Sulu gunmen.

"Voltaire also informed me that they would use all the information network to identify the master-

"Voltaire also informed me that they would use all the information network to identify the mastermind behind the intrusion into Sabah."
Datuk Seri Dr Ahmad Zahid Hamidi
defence minister



Armed forces personnel preparing for an operation in Sungai Nyamuk near Kampung Tanduo on Thursday. Pic courtesy of Ministry of Defence

mind behind the intrusion.

"They will help us to ascertain if the mastermind was from the Philippines, Malaysia or a third party," he said after a get-together with armed forces personnel, here, yesterday.

At the meeting, Voltaire also extended Philippine President Benigno Aquino's regards to Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak as well as the government and people of Malaysia.

On the possible extradition, of

Jamalul Kiram III, the leader of the Sulu sultanate, Zahid said Malaysia had no extradition treaty with the Philippines but that the attorney-general was looking into the case.

He, however, stressed that Malaysia was confident with the investigations carried out by the Philippine government. Zahid also expressed hope that the issue would not be politicised by both Malaysians and Filipinos.

"This is about the country's se-

curity and defence. I hope it will not be politicised."

Page 1 pix: Soldiers and General Operations Force personnel continue with the mopping-up exercise in Kampung Tanduo, Sabah to ensure that the terrorists do not return to the area. (Inset) It's business as usual on Mabul Island, famed for its diving spots, as 60-year-old Hans Van Erp prepares for his diving lesson.