

# Getting to the bottom of the Atimonan rubout

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As more information about the Atimonan, Quezon rubout of alleged jueteng lord Vic Siman and 12 others, including three policemen and three soldiers, is revealed to the public, the more questions arise.

First reported as a legitimate encounter, the Philippine National Police's (PNP) own investigation revealed the more likelihood of an ambush that was made to appear like a shootout. Police investigators had doubts about the positioning of the bodies and firearms. To the investigators, it looks as if the bodies and firearms were arranged to make it appear as a shootout.

If indeed it was a rubout, what was the reason behind it? What were the motives and objectives of the combined police and military team headed by no less than the deputy intelligence chief of the Calabarzon police?

Two former informants, who were part of the Siman group, were interviewed by TV 5 and Interaksyon.com in separate occasions, and their stories jibed with each other. They said the killings were the result of a turf war regarding jueteng operations in Laguna. Interaksyon.com reported that Supt. Hansel Marantan, the deputy intelligence chief of the Calabarzon police, who was in command of the checkpoint and the operation dubbed as case operation plan [Coplan] Armado, has a sister Selena "Tita" Marantan-Dinglasan, who controls jueteng operations in Calamba, Sta. Rosa, Binan, and San Pedro in Laguna. Apparently, the killings were done to eliminate Siman, the bitter rival of Marantan-Dinglasan over control of jueteng operations in the province.

This theory was bolstered when police investigators complained that Marantan refused to cooperate in the investigation. Worse, after the killings, another Siman aide Fernando Pandoy Morales was killed just outside his home by 20 policemen who were supposed to arrest him.

The fact that policemen and soldiers are involved in this deadly turf war against rival gambling lords is worrisome enough. But there seems to be something more to this. Even the National Bureau of Investigation is wondering how and why the Intelligence Service of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (ISAFP) was involved in a police operation such as Coplan Armado.

Also, according to a January 16 Interaksyon.com report, Chief Superintendent James Melad, Region 4-A (Calabarzon) police director, told reporters that Coplan Armado was submitted to the Presidential Anti-Organized Crime Commission for funding and approval. According to Melad, the requested funding was not given but the operation was approved by the Presidential Anti-Organized Crime Commission (PAOCC), which is being chaired by no less than Executive Secretary Paquito Ochoa Jr..

So if the ISAFP and the PAOCC were involved, who is behind the operations? At the minimum, if it was indeed a rubout resulting from a jueteng turf war involving Marantan and his sister against the Siman group, how was Marantan able to fool the ISAFP and PAOCC into getting involved in the operation?

Considering that the ISAFP and the PAOCC are no fools and that they are supposedly diligent in doing their homework before approving a bloody operation, what is the extent of their involvement and who ordered them to do so? Who is the brains behind all this and who is the ultimate beneficiary?

Jueteng, an illegal numbers game, is a poor man's lottery. But the people behind it are far from being poor. It involves billions of pesos. There is talk that transactions or bets in jueteng are mostly done in smaller denominations or in coins, but the collections produce numerous sacks of coins. The Small Town Lottery, which was created in 2005 purportedly to stamp out jueteng, reported that in Pampanga province alone, it was able to gross P2.5 billion (\$60.975 million) in the seven years of its existence, according to an Inquirer.net report in 2012.

Jueteng payoffs are big enough to prop up or cause the downfall of a president. Remember that the expose' that the Estrada family was receiving jueteng payoffs caused the downfall of the administration of Joseph Estrada. Early into the Aquino administration, Bp. Oscar Cruz, a known crusader against jueteng, revealed that after the Arroyo administration relinquished power to the Aquino government, the jueteng payoffs allegedly went to then Local Government Undersecretary Rico Puno and then police chief Jesus Verzosa. President Benigno Aquino III merely brushed off the accusations against Puno, his buddy and fellow gun enthusiast.

Jueteng is here to stay and turf wars like what happened in the January 6 Atimonan rubout would continue to happen because the government does not seem serious in stamping out this illegal numbers game. The question is who benefits from it at the national level and how high up the ladder of power do the tentacles of jueteng reach?

Ref.: <http://bulatlat.com/main/2013/01/18/getting-to-the-bottom-of-the-atimonan-rubout/>

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