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TRUTH SHALL PREVAIL

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P1 million for info on Ballacillo slay

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President Arroyo has released P1 million as reward for anyone who provides information leading to the arrest of the killers of Assistant Solicitor General Nestor Ballacillo and his son Benedict, Solicitor General Antonio Eduardo Nachura announced yesterday.

Ballacillo's wife Lydia said the reward will be a big help, as this can encourage persons with knowledge of

the killing to come out.

At a press conference at the Office of the Solicitor General on Amorsolo Street in Makati City, Nachura also said the Ballacillo murders may have something to do with the expropriation case involving the mothballed Ninoy Aquino International Airport (NAIA) Terminal 3 and the Milk Code cases that the elder Ballacillo was

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handling prior to his death.

Ballacillo and his son were killed on Dec. 6 as they were walking towards a public transport terminal near their house in Barangay San Antonio, Parañaque City.

"President Arroyo ordered the release of a P1-million reward for anyone who could provide reliable information that could shed light on the killing of Ballacillo and his son," Nachura said. "Through the P1-million reward, the President gave a clear message that she will not condone such a dastardly act and that the government will not be cowed into submission by criminal acts like the one committed against the Ballacillos."

He also said the OSG will not be deterred from performing its mandate as government lawyer and as tribune of the people.

He said the P1-million reward is an addition to the P200,000 reward offered by the Southern Police District (SPD).

"I asked the Philippine National Police (PNP) and the National Bureau of Investigation (NBI) to leave no stone unturned in conducting its investigation. Justice must be served, if only to honor the memory of Ballacillo," Nachura said.

In linking the Milk Code case to the killing of the Ballacillos, Nachura said the elder Ballacillo was a breastfeeding advocate: "Nestor came out very strongly in these cases - if this is really work-related. Ballacillo is an advocate of breastfeeding."

He added that the elder Ballacillo's kindness, humility and deep religiosity earned him the

monicker of "Obispo (bishop)."

"He was a valedictorian in law school. He was my student at the Arellano Law Foundation and he was very intelligent," Nachura said, adding that the elder Ballacillo served the OSG with the utmost commitment and dedicated himself to defending the government's position in numerous cases.

He said through the elder Ballacillo's efforts have led to the recovery of hundreds of millions of dollars in Marcos ill-gotten wealth cases.

Besides this, Nachura said the elder Ballacillo also successfully litigated the case against the Manila Electric Co. (Meralco) where the Supreme Court (SC) ordered Meralco to refund its overcharge to consumers.

Nachura said Ballacillo was also handling the international arbitration cases involving the expropriation of the NAIA Terminal 3.

"Nestor is a good person. If he received threats, he probably laughed (them) off - that is why no information has reached us. This is a big shock for us," he said.

Nachura said the elder Ballacillo was "handling land cases, sensitive cases like the (Milk Code), he has cases in expropriation. The case is tremendous. We are also going through in this cases," Nachura said.

Superintendent Ronald Estilles, chief of the Parañaque Police, said they are not discounting the possibilities the Ballacillo murders may be related to the murder of Pasay City Judge Henrick Gingoyon.

Gingoyon was handling the

expropriation proceedings of the NAIA Terminal 3 when he was killed.

Hired guns

Estilles released sketches of the two gunmen, whom he described as standing between five feet and five feet and four inches tall and being in their early twenties.

"They (the suspects) may have used .45 caliber pistols. Their precise acts indicate that they are professional killers. This is not a simple case of a cellphone theft. They are guns for hire, hired by somebody and the murder of Ballacillo's son could have been incidental only," Estilles said.

"We requested the casing of shells found in the crime scene to the crime laboratory. If it will match to the shells recovered in Cavite when Gingoyon was murdered, it is a big possibility that this is related to the killing of Ballacillo," Estilles added.

Estilles said aside from the cellphone of Benedict, there were no other valuables taken by the suspects.

"The bag of Mrs. Ballacillo contained documents, while Benedict's bag contained his personal belongings. If the evidence gathered in Cavite and that the shells are the same and match the shells coming from the killing of Gingoyon, probably they are the same brains. His son is very young and is only 20 years old and he is a sacristan, so it would be hard to say he has enemies," Estilles said.

Estilles said they will be exchanging notes with the Criminal Investigation Detection Group (CIDG) and the NBI, which are handling the investigation of the murder of Gingoyon.

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Condemnation

In a statement released to the media during the press conference, Ballacillo's family condemned the brutal killing of Ballacillo and his son.

"We, the wife/mother and daughter/sister of the late Nestor Ballacillo and Benedict cannot tell you the depth of the grief and shock we feel at this profound twin loss of the head of our family and the only son in the family. We grieve their passing, especially because the brutality of their killings opposes everything they stood for in life," the statement read.

The Ballacillo family described Nestor as the epitome of kindness, gentleness and humility.

"Never did he think that being an Assistant Solicitor General, with the rank of a regional trial court judge, entitled him to power and privilege," the Ballacillo family said.

"He treated neighbor, lawyer, legal secretaries and drivers with the same spirit of cheerful concern that he never seemed to run out of. He raised his family on the Christian principles of humble service, never to think of themselves as better than anybody, and always bearing in mind the interest of others. Not once in his public service did he contemplate nor even entertain the thought of committing dishonesty. He raised Benedict to follow his example of honest, loving service."

The Ballacillo family said Nestor has no personal enemy and that their family is not involved in any personal or property dispute.

"In all candor, we cannot think of any case that (Nestor) involved in that could possibly



Solicitor General Eduardo Nachura and Parañaque police chief Ronald Estilles show sketches of the suspects in the killing of Assistant Solicitor General Nestor Ballacillo during a press conference at the Office of the Solicitor General in Makati City yesterday.

MANNY MARCELO

generate such a brutal response. Whatever it was that prompted the murders of our family members, we nevertheless beg the public to give us any lead that would help the investigators in their search for the killers. A fund to reward productive leads on the killers is being put up by the friends of Nestor," they said.

The Ballacillo family also demanded justice for the death of Nestor and Benedict: "He laid down his life, through all his long years of public service, with unselfishness. We demand that government pour all the resources in its power to investigate his death and prosecute his killers."

"It is only just and fair to honor the memory of this exemplary public servant and the only son whom he cherished and raised in the same spirit of servanthood," the Ballacillos said. "Our hearts break for the injustice we have suffered as a family. Half of us is gone. We appeal to

the public to help us in this hour of our need for justice."

They also thanked the government after the President ordered the release of a P1-million reward to anyone who could provide vital information that will help solve the murder case.

"Whatever it was that prompted the murders of our family members, we nevertheless beg the public to give us any lead that would help the investigators in the search for the killers," the Ballacillo family said.

SPD director Chief Superintendent Roberto Rosales expressed hope that the augmented reward will encourage witnesses to come forward and cooperate with the police in putting behind bars the killers of the Ballacillos.

Rosales said they are still gathering evidence, which they are sharing with agents of the NBI and the CIDG, the investigating arm of the PNP.