

# Bilateral talks on territorial bounda



Speaker Ignacio Anastacio

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A POLITICAL leader has stressed the need for concerned governments to sit down and discuss a very touchy issue of possible overlapping of territorial waters between or among neighboring countries, saying that for as long as there is the gray area, there will always be the problem of intrusion and illegal fishing.

House Speaker Ignacio Anastacio said it is about time this issue, which relates to the implementation of the United National Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), should be discussed bilaterally with neighboring countries such as the Philippines and Indonesia.

An exodus of fishermen from Southern Philippines, including Metro Manila lately, has found its way into and violated the exclusive economic zone (EEZ) of Palau, based on the judgment of the Palau marine patrol, which carries out with air support from the Australian government a regular surveillance over the territorial waters of Palau of illegal fishing and poaching activities in this richly-endowed marine area.

Filipino fishermen, however, have always argued that they carry fishing permits issued to their mother companies by the Indonesian government and therefore fish in the area close to the Tobi Is-

land.

"As long as we have the gray area, we will continue to encounter problems with outside fishermen," said Anastacio.

The Republic of Palau, being the 185th member of the United Nations, should look at this matter in cooperation with the governments of neighboring countries. "Palau is no longer an isolated island nation in the Pacific such that it must uphold international laws like the UNCLOS," he said.

The delineation of boundaries should once and for all be resolved, he added. All this will redound to tripartite talks between Palau and the Philippines and Indonesia.

Consul General Julius Torres of the Philippine Embassy in Koror echoed the same views, saying that there is really a need for concerned governments to have bilateral talks on the issue.

The recent encounter between the Palau marine patrol and fishermen coming from Navotas, Metro Manila somewhere near the Tobi Island, where possible gray area lies, spells out the sensitivity of the problem especially that "an engagement" occurred.

The Philippine government has expressed gratitude to President Nakamura for the presidential pardon he accorded to the nine fishermen who were placed under house arrest and faced criminal charges for escape and unlawful fishing.

The president even went to the extent of recommending the fishing company involved in the recent incident to apply for a fishing license with the Palau Foreign Investment Board.

The Philippine government, on the other hand, is mulling a proposal to form a fisheries

agreement with the Republic of Palau wherein fishing licensing would not only b

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