

May 11 for Puerto Princesa, nearly 600 km southwest of the capital.

It returned Tuesday to Manila after observing special municipal elections held Sunday in Pag-Asa, the largest of seven Spratly islands held by the Philippines.

After two nights aboard a private cruise ship, the journalists reached Jackson Atoll, about 50 km northwest of Mischief Reef, where they transferred to the World War II vintage Benguet.

The first two sorties with 16 journalists on board Vietnam war-era Uhh choppers with "press" markings took off at about 11:15 AM when the landing ship was about 30 km off Mischief Reef.

Also on board was Tanega, the first Philippine officer to fly over the area since the Chinese built at least 14 structures on four platforms around the reef.

Manila has strongly condemned the Chinese occupation of the reef, which Filipino officials stress is well within the country's 200-km exclusive economic zone.

Beijing maintains that the reef is part of its territory and claims the structures are "shelters for fishermen."

Tanega pointed out the two Chinese ships raced back to the reef's lagoon after apparently seeing the choppers, journalists said.

But in the second wave of sorties, journalists saw the ships heading toward the Philippine naval ships which were about 24 km off the reef.

From the ship's foredeck, journalists saw the Chinese vessels, a small fast boat and a larger ship, assume blocking positions midway between the reef and the Philippine vessels.

At that point, about 16 km from the reef, the Benguet stopped to launch the fourth and fifth sorties.

"We stopped because . . . We knew this is the place where we could accomplish the mission in the best, expeditious and safest way," said Tanega at a press conference the next day.

As the Benguet was "lying to," a naval term to mean that a ship has stopped without dropping anchor, its patrol escort, Miguel Malvar, maneuvered from starboard to a position to port.

Tanega said this was done to prevent the bigger Chinese ship from coming closer to the Benguet.

The smaller Chinese vessel moved to a position as close as 50 meters from the Benguet from where some of its crew took photos and filmed the operations of the naval ship.

"The reaction was definitely expected because they did not know what we were doing," said Tanega.

"They did not know where the helicopters were taking off . . . They could not surmise how a land-based helicopter could fly 208 km from the nearest land field," he pointed out.

Tanega said that while the Chinese vessel, whose Chinese markings identified it as belonging to Beijing's Bureau of Fisheries, was "too close for comfort," he was not bothered by its presence.

As the choppers were secured on the deck of the Benguet, a Philippine Air Force reconnaissance plane radioed Tanega about the approach of "two savage fishes."

The plane was referring to Chinese frigates, which journalists learned were 24 km away and racing toward them.

Shortly after, at about 2:45 PM, Tanega ordered the Benguet and its escort ship to maneuver out of the area and proceed to Pag-Asa, some 18 hours away.

The two Chinese vessels made no attempt to stop the ships and stayed behind while the frigates, whose outlines could be seen on the horizon, appeared to stop.

"What is important here is we did what we had to do because this is our territory. We

were eyeball to eyeball. We did not blink," said Tanega.

#### PRC STANCE ON MEDIA'S SPRATLYS TOUR ANALYZED

(Editorial: "Manila Scores Versus Beijing")

Whatever substance to Beijing's claim that the Chinese structures on Mischief Reef are mere stations of Chinese fishermen has been shown spurious by the celebrated stand-off that took place last Saturday at the Kalayaan Islands. There, two Chinese warships suddenly appeared 15 nautical miles away in apparent support of Chinese vessels blocking a Philippine Navy ship carrying local and foreign journalists.

The inspection trip by our Navy would have been enough to impress upon independent journalists that the structures on Mischief Reef could not have been mere fishing stations by ubiquitous Chinese fishermen: the structures are made of metal with parabolic discs all around, giving credence to Manila's claim they could eventually become naval support facilities.

But the Chinese, not exactly known for subtlety, betrayed their own intentions; they themselves confirmed Manila's claim. Within minutes after Philippine Navy helicopters started their sorties of Mischief Reef last Saturday, two frigates from the Chinese navy raced to the sight in apparent aid of the Chinese "fishermen".

The trip has therefore accomplished Manila's objective of proving to the international community that the Chinese are undermining the status quo in the Kalayaan and unnecessarily causing tension there. By arranging for the coverage by foreign journalists, Manila has not only scored a public relations point against Beijing, it has also buttressed its territorial claim to the Kalayaan. As Acting Foreign Secretary Domingo Siazon put it when he turned down Beijing's request that the tour be canceled, the foreign journalists who were coming along for the inspection should be an indication of how they perceived the "sovereignty issue".

By drawing international opinion to the issue, Manila has hit back at Beijing in the most capable way it could, making full use of the resources of democracy and unmasking in the process China's unneighborly designs in the region. It has billed the trip as a concession to freedom of the press and made it just an item in the larger itinerary of visiting the Filipino settlements in the Kalayaan in order to conduct the elections there. In one fell swoop, the Philippines has been able to demonstrate its democratic character contrast to the authoritarian regime in China as well as the fact that the Kalayaan is hers by virtue of the Filipino living there.

The rub is that the confrontation shows China's aggressiveness in pursuing its weak claim on Kalayaan. And with the Philippine military by all accounts standing eyeball to eyeball with the Chinese display of mi last Saturday—the Italian-made jets of the Philippine Air Force screamed overhead during the stand-off to warn the Chinese—, what has been drummed to the international community is the seriousness of the Kalayaan dispute. In such a t, hostilities in the islands could break out any time.

But the tension could be managed by forceful diplomacy and imaginative show of force against Beijing. Manila has been able to compel Washington to issue a statement which voiced United States' interest that "freedom of maritime investigation" shall be preserved in the South China Sea, a clear potshot at Beijing over its mischievous incursions. Manila now has to navigate through the contentious domestic dispute

over some sort of a military logistical arrangement of the US in the aftermath of the pullout of the Americans from Subic and Clark. Asian capitals and some sectors in thilippine are loath to admit it but the key to controlling China and maintaining Asian security in the future is to America militarily engaged in the region.

[From the Manila Philippine Daily, May 18, 1995]

#### "CREATIVE" POLICY ON SPRATLYS LEADS TO SUCCESS

The decision to take on China on the Spratlys is the boldest foreign policy initiative ever taken by the Ramos administration. It is even more remarkable if we consider that he took a stand despite the military and economic weakness of the Philippines. That the Philippines forcefully challenged Chinese creeping expansion in the Spratlys was a shock to China, as well as a surprise to our ASEAN allies. They never expected the "sick man of Asia" to take on the Chinese giant on the question of territorial integrity. The diplomatic gamble paid off. It brought to the surface historic fears in Asia about the Chinese threat, which is more magnified by the modernization of its armed forces and its rapidly expanding economy.

President Ramos' gamble touched a raw nerve among Asians, and now many of our neighbors have dropped their reluctance to warn against the Chinese threat. The fear and anxieties over the Chinese move on the Spratlys are based on stronger grounds than sovereignty or who should exploit maritime resources supposed to lie underneath the atolls. The larger issue, as pointed out by Goh Chok Tong to Chinese Foreign Minister Li Peng, involves the freedom of navigation in the South China Sea, over which China claims sovereignty based on antiquarian maps.

It was the Philippines' actions that proved to be the catalyst of the new-found solidarity among ASEAN and the Asia-Pacific nations, notably Japan and the United States, to forge a common stand in persuading China that it is in her interest to bring the dispute within the framework of multilateral negotiations. The Philippine action proves that tough diplomatic decisions can give us a position of strength if we get international support behind us. This is what we call creative diplomacy.

Mr. THOMAS. Let me say in closing, Mr. President, that I am pleased the State Department has finally issued a definitive U.S. position on the Spratlys, with which I heartily agree. I believe that the Foreign Relations Committee will take up Senate Resolution 97—a sense-of-the-Senate resolution on the islands which I sponsored—in the near future and move it to the floor soon thereafter.

#### MESSAGES FROM THE PRESIDENT

Messages from the President of the United States were communicated to the Senate by Mr. Thomas, one of his secretaries.

#### EXECUTIVE MESSAGES REFERRED

As in executive session the Presiding Officer laid before the Senate messages from the President of the United States submitting sundry nominations which were referred to the appropriate committees.