

If You See Something

The Salem Witch Trials of the 17th century taught us that false accusations could lead to death. In 21st century Philippines, the government made such accusations easier to make.



Michael Raqim Mira

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In New York City subways, you'll often see a Homeland Security advertisement that says, *If You See Something, Say Something*. These signs and similar ads are visual symptoms of post-9/11 America. While the tragic event happened almost two decades ago, terrorist

incidents since then have made the slogan a common part of the urban landscape and the American psyche. There is a good justification for the program, and this is exemplified by the Faisal Shahzad case, who attempted to detonate a bomb in busy Times Square, and was disrupted by an alert vendor who immediately called the police.

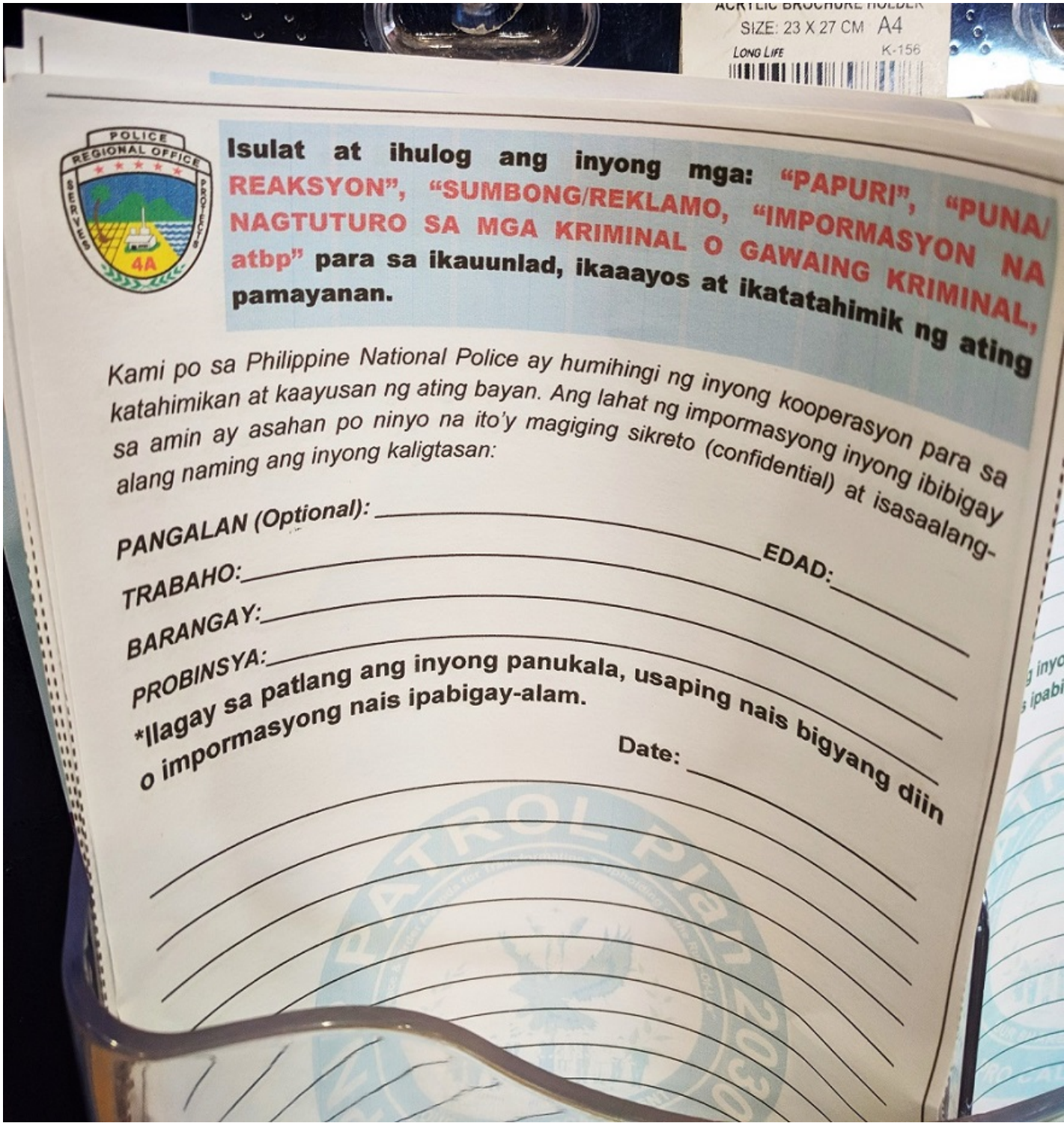
In the Philippines, the police and other law enforcement agencies are using the same method to collect intelligence pertaining to illegal drugs—both users and sellers—as well as other crimes. The initiative, called Project Blue Box, is meant to offset the lack of manpower and resources of the police. Geographically, the Philippines is a challenging nation to patrol. The country is an archipelago made up of over 7,000 islands. However, the country has more than 100 million people and counting, making civilian-assisted intelligence gathering a sensible strategy for the PNP.

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Kami po sa Philippine National Police ay humihingi ng inyong kooperasyon para sa katahimikan at kaayusan ng ating bayan. Ang lahat ng impormasyong inyong ibibigay sa amin ay asahan po ninyo na ito'y magiging sikreto (confidential) at isasaalang-alang naming ang inyong kaligtasan:

PANGALAN (Optional): _____
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Date: _____

On the other hand, critics of President Duterte’s “drug war” argue that such intelligence gathering programs would either be futile or could lead to negative unintended consequences. An example brought up by an individual I interviewed—who asked to remain anonymous—was that a person could fabricate information regarding individuals they have a personal vendetta against. The targeted individuals could be harmed or mistakenly arrested for a crime they did not commit.

This opinion is in line with a growing sentiment in the country. In a poll conducted by Social Weather Stations (SWS) last July, half of the 1,200 people they surveyed believed

that many of the victims in drug-related unsolved murders, as well as verified police killings, were falsely accused by “enemies.”

Project BLUE BOX

isang pamamaraan upang maiparating ang inyong panukala, usaping nais bigyang diin o impormasyong nais ipagbigay -alam.

Isulat at Ihulog:

“PAPURI”
“PUNA”
“REAKSYON”
“REKLAMO”
“SUMBONG”
“MUNGKAHI”
“IMPORMASYON NA NAGTUTURO SA MGA KRIMINAL O GAWAING KRIMINAL”
atbp..

Ang lahat ng impormasyong inyong ibibigay sa amin asahan po ninyo ito'y magiging sikreto (confidential) at isasaalang-alang ang inyong kaligtasan.

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A "blue box" in SM City Lucena positioned directly in front of the main entrance.

It could be argued that intelligence gathering programs such as these could create a culture of fear and paranoia. The false accusations and pranks by bored teenagers at the mall would also waste the police's time, resources, and manpower when they could be concentrated towards preventing and investigating actual crimes.

The civilian-sourcing program is still relatively new. In a few years, law enforcement agents and critics alike will see just how effective it is.