

# Palace: Snap elections at this time unconstitutional

President Arroyo will not call a snap presidential election to stop coup rumors and other destabilization campaigns against her administration because doing so would violate the Constitution.

Presidential Spokesman Rigoberto Tiglao told reporters Mrs. Arroyo could be impeached and removed from office if she ever calls for snap elections.

"By the mere calling for a snap presidential election, (Mrs. Arroyo) stands to be impeached already," he said. "It is not allowed by our Constitution. There can be no snap elections. We don't have to violate the Constitution."

He added that it was only during the dictatorship when a snap presidential election was called to give a fresh mandate to President Ferdinand Marcos.

Representatives Didagen Dilagalen of Maguindanao and Gilbert

By **MARICHU VILLANUEVA**  
and **AUREA CALICA**

Remulla of Cavite said the other day Mrs. Arroyo must allow a snap election to pre-empt the military from ousting her in a coup.

However, opposition Sen. Edgardo Angara said anti-administration forces should allow the President to complete her term "in peace" so she could submit herself to a "genuine electoral test" in 2004.

"The various forces opposed to her should compete in the electoral arena, not in an extra-constitutional form of struggle," he said. "This is for the sake of the country and the country's weak democratic institutions."

Agreeing with Angara, Senate Minority Leader Aquilino Pimentel Jr. and Senators Francis Pangilinan and John Osmeña said a snap election is "not feasible" to cut short the term of Mrs. Arroyo

as it would be unconstitutional.

The Supreme Court had already declared the Arroyo administration as legitimate, the three senators added.

Angara said the Arroyo administration must help in stabilizing the country by taking constructive criticism from the political opposition as inputs for good governance.

"The tendency to regard even the most constructive critics as

destabilizers does not help," he said. "And to dismiss those responsible critics as part of a destabilization scenario is way out of line."

Angara said political battles should be fought with ideas, platforms, and advocacies as the country's weak democratic institutions would no longer survive any more disruptions.

"Another aborted presidency would plunge the country into the unknown," he said. "The call for adventurism is primarily fueled by the weakness of the country's democratic institutions."

Angara said every citizen, regardless of partisan color, has the duty to prop up the country's institutions which have been weakened by anti-democratic forces.

"The anti-democratic forces only operate on the premise that the democratic institutions are weak and the center does not hold," he said.

Angara said he had called for the allocation of a P26-billion supplemental budget to give flexibility to the Arroyo administration to try to start up the economy.

"The state should invest wisely in job-generation and productivity-enhancement programs to make a dent on poverty and put in place a genuine pro-growth agenda," he said.

This year's P781-billion budget is a "sub-maintenance budget that is both anti-poor and anti-development," he added.

Pimentel said coup attempts are a "sure prescription" to scare away investors and ruin the econ-



**PEOPLE'S DEFENDER:** President Arroyo picks up a spear and makes like a warrior after she was adopted as a daughter of the town of Aginaldo in Iligao yesterday and dubbed 'Abfayran,' meaning a woman of exceptional courage and bravery and defender of the people. Also in photo are Tourism Secretary Richard Gordon (second from right) and Aginaldo Mayor Deslin Bulfian (right).

omy, and the political opposition will have nothing to do with it.

"We in the opposition believe that there is only one acceptable way to change governments and that is through the elections that are mandated by the Constitution," he said. "We will not countenance any conspiracy to unseat a government through the use of force."

Pimentel warned that the Philippines could be reduced to a banana republic like some countries in Latin America if coup plotters succeed in overthrowing the government.

"Although the Armed Forces of the Philippines played a decisive role in installing the Arroyo gov-

ernment, they must not meddle in the political decisions of the government," he said.

Pimentel said the military became highly politicized when a group of renegade soldiers overthrew the Marcos dictatorship in February 1986.

"The military should be depoliticized if the country is to spare itself from recurrent coup threats and to achieve political stability," he said. "A politicized military is a stumbling block to the professionalism and maintaining of discipline of soldiers."

For his part, Senate President Pro-Tempore Manny Villar ap-

pealed to people allegedly out to destabilize the government to refrain from making moves that may be "detrimental to the nation's interests."

"I urge everyone, especially those who are inclined toward fostering any kind of discord to please refrain from such actions," Villar said. "Let us all start the new year right and help the country move forward."

"How can we expect economic conditions to improve and uplift the lives of Filipinos with persistent talks of a coup? Let us put a stop once and for all to all these," he added.