

# **GMA evil? Neri can't remember**

P20-M 'patriotic fund' offered if he left gov't and testified

By RAINIER ALLAN RONDA

Commission on Higher Education Chairman Romulo Neri said yesterday he could not recall ever describing President Arroyo as "evil" but admitted making a presentation on the country's state of political economy that he maintained was controlled by oligarchs.

In a phone interview with **The STAR**, Neri said he already had a poor recollection

of the meeting and could not remember saying such a thing.

"I'm trying to recall whether I said that but I can't remember," he said.

When reminded that he was not making an outright denial, he said: "I cannot recall frankly but (the meeting) was about the nature of political economy, the oligarchic state structure."

Neri also said he could not

recall saying that Mrs. Arroyo was at the center of a web of corruption in government.

"I don't think so. What I said was that there are different players in the system and everyone has a role to play and we are all victims," he said.

When asked about the phone calls and text messages between him and the President that could indicate anomalies

**Turn to Page 10**

# GMA evil?

From Page 1

in the ZTE deal, he said: "I have told the Senate everything I know about the ZTE (deal) except those covered by executive privilege."

He said he was surprised that details of the meeting came out when there was an agreement to keep it under wraps. He said it was Rodolfo Lozada Jr. who organized the meeting with the help of the latter's brother.

He, however, said there was nothing unusual in the meeting, since he has been conducting similar briefings with lawmakers from various political inclinations since he was head of the Congressional Planning and Budget Office.

Executive Secretary Eduardo Ermita said the Palace did not take offense at the secret meeting, saying he attended a briefing made by Neri

when they were both still at the House of Representatives.

"The meeting had little to do (with) ZTE but it was about the whole political economy and I challenged them to get out of the oligarchic structure. We must all unite, not the Church alone, not the military or that would be a junta, but all sectors of society," Neri said.

He pointed out that the cost of power and telecommunications in the country is one of the highest in Asia because the industries are controlled by a few.

"There's hope that the President can do something about this with the help of everyone."

He also confirmed efforts to put up a so-called "patriotic fund" on his behalf but said it was offered to him so he would leave the government

and testify in the Senate.

He admitted that he was tempted by the P20-million offer made by Lozada on behalf of "some rich families" sometime in November.

"It (patriotic fund) was around P20 million or more but I did not take it seriously... you know, I had refused 200 (million pesos) before," Neri said, referring to the alleged bribe attempt made by former Commission on Elections chairman Benjamin Abalos for him to endorse the \$329-million national broadband contract with ZTE Corp. of China.

He said it was Lozada who discussed the "patriotic fund" with him but did not say who was the benefactor.

Sources however said it was Sen. Jamby Madrigal who offered to put up the money.

- With Paolo Romero