

'It was a feel-good SONA'

By DELON PORCALLA

Allen heaped praise on President Arroyo yesterday for her "feel-good" State of the Nation Address (SONA), even as her staunchest ally in the ruling Lakas-CMD party hinted that she is on the right track pursuing what needs to be done.

"Mama nila, great speech!" a visibly elated Palawan Rep. Antonio Alvarez, chairman of the House trade and commerce committee, said.

"A feel good speech which did not gloss over the hard work and sacrifices we all have to make in these trying times. She laid out the road ahead, and if we'll follow it, it will lead us to the light at the end of the tunnel," he said.

Palawan Rep. Abraham Mitra, House agriculture committee chairman, said the President's speech "had the right mix of tactical and strategic solutions to the food crisis."

"If her agriculture officials can only follow her prescriptions, then a rich harvest awaits us," he said.

Like Alvarez, Paranaque Rep. Rella Colao, who is an assistant minority leader, described the SONA as a "feel-good" speech.

"She opened by how the economy was doing well for a while but stumbled due to the food and energy crisis. Then the President very courageously tackled head-on the ENAT issue and transformed a negative into a positive by focusing on the projects funded by the VOT revenues," he said.

"Now, we in Congress must cross party lines in rethinking the allocation of the additional tax revenue to projects that would have long-term benefits. We in Congress must strengthen our oversight of the line departments to make sure that the SONA targets are made good," he said.

For his part, former President Fidel Ramos said Mrs. Arroyo's performance should be judged on the basis of improvements, if any, in

the life expectancy of Filipinos, knowledge or education, and quality of life.

"In these three aspects of human development, we are below standards. In 2001, we committed to attain the United Nations' Millennium Development Goals by 2015. We are now at the halfway point, and we are far from complying with our commitments," he said.

He added that the government must pursue such goals, which aim to cut poverty by half, "consistently and coherently."

Laying down a legacy

Speaker Prospero Nograles said Mrs. Arroyo "hit the nail on its head" by focusing on the

"poor and vulnerable sectors" in her SONA. He expressed his "strong and unconditional support to the President's difficult task of staying the course and not reversing conjuring back on her reform programs."

"She is a true leader who will pursue what are needed to be done and not just what are popular and politically well-serving. She will do what is right," he said.

Nograles said Mrs. Arroyo, his ally in the ruling Lakas-CMD party, "has laid down in clear and simple terms a blueprint setting the nation's course of action to benefit even the future generation – a legacy beyond her term."

"The President has been faithful to her 10-point agenda – employment generation, education, agricultural productivity, and transparency in government, among others – which she

formulated on her first term as President," he said in a statement.

Likewise, the speaker said the program for rice self-sufficiency and energy self-reliance are key to sustainable progress which deserves the support of every Filipino. "This will strengthen the country to weather any global crisis."

House Majority Leader Arthur Defensor also lauded the President's address. "It was very candid. It was an admission of the realities on the ground. There's a global crisis on food, oil and energy."

"This crisis brought a lot of difficulties. In her admission, she is doing everything to cushion the impact of the crisis. We take consolation of the fact that she was able to point out the many things that have happened," the Iloilo congressman added.

"Listening to her gives us a sense of hope. While all is not well, there's reason to look forward. We believe we are still capable of moving forward," Defensor, who also heads the House committee on rules, said.

Albay Rep. Edcel Lagman made the same observation. "I think it was very factual, contrary to claims that it is fiction. There are concrete forces of action. We support her CARR extension, for mass housing, and the campaign against graft and corruption."

Valenzuela Rep. Ben Gutierrez, an administration lawmaker, lauded the President's "very concrete detailed plans to solve hunger and transparency in accounting for the proceeds of the value-added-tax."

Reps. Alvarez and Mitra shared a similar view.

"If the SONA was a dish, it was full of colored for agriculture. It had the right mix of tactical and strategic solutions to the food crisis. If her agriculture officials can only follow her prescriptions, then a rich harvest awaits us," said Mitra, chairman of the House committee on agriculture.

Alleviate the poor

Not to be outdone, Vice President Noli de Castro expressed support yesterday to government officials to provide direct assistance to people through social services programs transacted by President Arroyo.

"While the needed infrastructure must be built, along with the promotion of livelihood and skills training, education and job-generating initiatives, these efforts must be coupled with direct assistance to the people through social services programs," De Castro said.

— With Jess Diaz, Pia Lee-Svaga



President Arroyo is greeted by government officials and lawmakers after delivering her State of the Nation Address.