

Finally, at least impeach complaint vs GMA filed at House

By JESS DIAZ

President Arroyo's critics filed a new impeachment complaint against her yesterday, which is reinforced with new allegations of torture and disappearance of activists, as well as cases of high-level corruption, including the botched national broadband network project.

The complainants, led by businessman Joey de Venecia III, Iloilo Vice Gov. Rolox Suplico and lawyer Harry Rosales, had planned to file their petition over the weekend but House offices were closed despite a promise of Speaker Prospero Nograles last Friday that they would be open.

The petitioners include Edita Burgos, Erlinda Cadapan, and Edna Cruz, all mothers of activists Jesus Burgos, Sheryln Cadapan and Karen Empeño, who have been missing for more than a year now.

House Deputy Secretary General Ricardo Nograles filed at 7:30 in the morning, beating by 40 minutes a separate case filed by lawyers Oliver Lozano and Ely Pamatong.

The two lawyers used as basis for their complaint the botched memorandum of agreement on an ancestral domain with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front.

The new impeachment complaint accuses Mrs. Arroyo of violating the Constitution by allowing extrajudicial killings, disappearances, torture, and illegal arrests.

The petitioners stressed that Mrs. Arroyo, as commander-in-chief of the armed forces, is ultimately responsible for the abuses of the military.

The authors of the latest impeachment case also accused the President of betraying public trust and committing graft in connection with the NBN and Northrail projects.

They also wanted the president to account for the P728-million fertilizer fund in 2004, the "Hello, Garci" scandal in 2005, and the distribution of P500,000 in cash gifts to House members in Malacang last year.

Jose III, son and namesake of former Speaker Jose de Venecia Jr. and the original whistleblower in the NBN-ZTE scandal, claimed that millions of dollars in commissions and kickbacks from the \$29-million deal went to corrupt officials and their patrons.

The Northrail contract, on the other hand, was allowed to proceed without the requisite Monetary Board approval.

The 64-kilometer railway project was also deemed "grossly overpriced" by \$15 million and a lot more expensive than the 2,000-kilometer Qinghai-Tibet system, which cost only \$1.8 million per kilometer, they said.

The petitioners also said the distribution of P500,000 to congressmen and local officials in Malacang last year was tantamount to bribery.

The "Hello, Garci" controversy erupted with the release of a recorded conversation between a female voice that sounded like Mrs. Arroyo's and a male voice believed to be that of then election commissioner Virgilio Garcillano.

The taped conversation allegedly detailed Mrs. Arroyo's plan to rig the results of the 2004 elections to ensure her victory against Fernando Poe Jr.

In June 2005, Mrs. Arroyo admitted making the call and 'apologized for her lapse in judgment.' She did not identify the ped official.

Under House rules, Speaker Prospero Nograles has 10 session days to refer an impeachment complaint to the committee on justice. Congress is on recess and will resume session on Nov. 10.

in many ways contributed to the rising levels of poverty in the country," she said.

"Impeachment cases are political cases. It's a question of numbers. They know that, if they want, they can campaign to get majority support of the other members (of the House of Representatives)," Sen. Juan Ponce Enrile said over *dBIS* radio.

Trade Secretary Peter Favila said the business community is not pleased with the latest impeachment complaint.

"Well I received some calls from the business leaders yesterday, on a Sunday, and they were saying 'why are we like this?' The whole world is faced with a huge challenge because of this financial turmoil and yet here in our country, we still have the time for politicking," Favila said.

Lukewarm response

The opposition appears lukewarm to the latest impeachment complaint.

"Up to this point, I'll be honest. I haven't seen

much reaction from the other congressmen aside from those in the minority," Minority Leader Ronaldo Zamora said in a radio interview.

"At this point, we may lack the numbers," he said.

"We hope the others will see the complaint and read the evidence," he added.

"The minority, as a group, has no position yet on the impeachment complaint. We will discuss it first chance we have during the recess," Deputy Minority Leader Rollo Colez said.

In a statement from Switzerland where he was in a conference with global lawmakers, Nograles gave a hint of what to expect of the latest impeachment complaint.

"The impeachment complaint will definitely go through the normal process as stipulated by our Constitution. But as we all know... impeachment is largely a partisan issue... at the end of the day, it's a numbers game," he said.

He said the impeachment petition is "ill timed."

"As leader of the majority in the House and president of Lakas, I am more concerned with

the national efforts to put in place all the needed safety nets to shield our people from any and all adverse effects that may impact on the economy resulting from the global financial crisis," he added.

Militant party-list Representatives Satur Ocampo and Teodoro Casiño of Bayan Muna and Liza Mazza of Gabriela endorsed the impeachment complaint.

Ocampo said two more of his militant colleagues - Rafael Mariano of Anakpawis and Luzviminda Ilagan also of Gabriela - would endorse the petition.

"I think it will prosper if administration congressmen believe that Charter change (Cha-cha) will not succeed and GMA (President Arroyo's initials) will be stepping down on June 30, 2010. Many of them might abandon her because she is already a lame duck. This is the scenario I see happening because Cha-cha has no chance to succeed," he said. - With Delon Porcella, Paolo Romero, Evelyn Macairan, Christina Mendez and Marvin Sy