

GMA vows to shun politics, focus on economy

By MARVIN SY

President Arroyo has again vowed to shun politics and focus on building the economy and preparing the nation to face the global financial crisis.

Speaking to reporters in Baguio City last Wednesday, Mrs. Arroyo said she does not want to talk about 2010 when her six-year term expires.

"Politics is not foremost in my mind," she said.

"If I were always thinking about politics, I would not have been able to build all these roads in the Cordillera and all these (other projects). So let's talk economics, not politics."

The House of Representatives is determined to push for amendments to the Constitution that they claim are meant to change the economic provisions of the Charter.

But whenever there are discussions about Charter

change, suspicions about term extensions being included in the amendments inevitably comes to the fore.

Mrs. Arroyo's critics believe that this year would be focused on effecting Charter change to extend her term beyond 2010.

Presidential adviser on political affairs Gabriel Claudio said Mrs. Arroyo and her administration would remain focused on more important tasks facing the nation.

"Whatever the administration does, the President's critics will always see ghosts, shadows and goblins of term extension," he said.

"The government will simply train its full attention and energy on effective governance, particularly in shielding our economy and people from the harsh impact of the global financial crisis."

Claudio said one of the priority measures for the administration this year is the automation of the 2010 elections.

Preparations for automated elections would be in full swing this year in order to ensure clean, honest, orderly and credible elections, he added.

Press Secretary Jesus Dureza said he saw no reason to comment on "those critics whose hearts and minds are still consumed by political fears."

"We hope the spirit of the New Year brings fresh and positive thoughts and for all to be united behind President Arroyo's focused efforts to prepare the nation to weather the challenges we face in 2009," he said.

Mrs. Arroyo left for Manila early yesterday after spending close to five days in Baguio and nearby provinces and towns with her family.

She was supposed to attend the inauguration of a vegetable processing center in Benguet on her way to Manila, but this was cancelled before she left for Baguio last week.

The inauguration would instead be held during the President's return to Baguio during the Lenten break.

On Wednesday night, Mrs. Arroyo heard mass with her family and friends at the Mansion House to welcome the New Year.

Mrs. Arroyo said the government must remain vigilant this year to respond to whatever eventualities might come, just like what was done last year on the rice situation.

"As I said, we cannot predict what will happen in the future but we can plan," she said.

"We were lucky this year but we worked hard to have that luck. We planned for it."