

Nene: Federalism won't extend GMA stay in power

By CHRISTINA MENDEZ

Senate Minority Leader Aquilino Pimentel Jr. slammed Speaker Prospero Nograles yesterday for comparing his advocacy for a shift to a federal system to the House's move for (con-ass) constituent assembly.

Pimentel said congressmen allied with the administration should stop cashing in on his advocacy for a federal system of government to justify their hidden agenda to allow President Arroyo to hold on to power after 2010.

The minority leader accused some administration congressmen of spearheading Charter change (Cha-cha) to shift to a parliamentary system and pave the way for Mrs. Arroyo's installation as prime minister.

"Speaker Prospero Nograles claims that their version of Charter change and my federalism proposal are the same. That is not correct. There is a vast difference between the two," he said.

In effect, he said their proposal is tantamount to extending Mrs. Arroyo's term, which should expire on June 30, 2010.

The minority leader was reacting to Nograles' statement that Joint Resolution 10 authored by Pimentel calling for a shift to a federalist form of government is no different from House Resolution 1109, calling for a con-ass.

He said he filed Joint Resolution 10 on the establishment of a federal system to put an end to the highly centralized setup that characterizes the existing presidential system, to

hasten the country's economic development, and provide a constitutional solution to the decades-old Muslim secessionist insurgency.

Although the federalism campaign was gaining momentum inside and outside Congress, Pimentel said he had to put the proposal in the freezer after seeing that Malacañang and its "legislative cohorts" were riding on it to support President Arroyo's design to perpetuate herself in power.

He recalled that he said "no" when some legislators identified with the administration tried to convince him to drop his objection to the idea of extending the term of elective officials, including the presidency and members of Congress, to build up support for his federalism proposal.

"If I would go along with their proposition, I would lose the moral authority to oppose the extension of Gloria's term," he said.

Meanwhile, Malacañang hit yesterday continued efforts by opposition groups to agitate Filipinos against the Arroyo administration using the martial law bogey and the Charter change issue.

Press Secretary Cerge Remonde issued the statement as Speaker Nograles lamented the House of Representatives is being criticized on its efforts to amend the Constitution just because administration allies dominate it when the Senate had earlier passed a similar Charter change resolution.

He also insisted there are no plans from the Palace to impose martial law. — With Paolo Romero