

GMA's SONA to tackle fiscal health

By PAOLO ROMERO

President Arroyo's last State of the Nation Address (SONA) on July 27 will not tackle politics but the economy, including efforts to strengthen the country's fiscal health, officials said yesterday.

Press Secretary Cerge Remonde, who accompanied Mrs. Arroyo on her four-nation swing, said preparations for crafting her final SONA began over a month ago with the Presidential Management Staff (PMS) collecting raw data for her report.

Mrs. Arroyo arrived in Hong Kong after coming from official visits to Japan and Brazil, and a private visit to Colombia.

She is expected to arrive in Manila tonight.

"The President will not speak only on raising revenues and improving collections but also how to stimulate the economy," Remonde said. "These are among the many things she will mention in her SONA."

PMS chief Secretary Hermogenes Esperon Jr. earlier told reporters that the President "will talk mainly about economic progress as well as the status of infrastructure projects earlier committed by her administration."

"There will be some sort of a report card of her accomplishments," Esperon said.

The delivery of the SONA is upon invitation of Congress as prescribed by the Constitution.

Remonde said those who will boycott the SONA is committing dereliction of duty because it is the duty of the President to deliver the SONA and it is the duty of the legislators to be there. On talks that the SONA might be postponed due to the A(H1N1) virus infection at the Batasan Pambansa complex where the address would be held, Remonde said the matter is for the leadership of the House of Representatives to handle.

Presidential Adviser for Political Affairs Gabriel Claudio earlier warned that talks

of the SONA being postponed due to the threat of the virus "would send the wrong signal to the international community."

"This is the call of Congress, with due consultation with our health authorities. It would be better for us to push through with the SONA where the President will map out her plans for next year and list her accomplishments in the past year," Claudio said.

"I don't think the threat of the influenza A(H1N1) is at such level as the postponement is inevitable and compelling," he said.

He said the SONA is "very symbolic of the state of the government itself. Postponing or canceling this might send dangerous negative signals not only to our people but to other countries."

"They might think that A(H1N1) is very serious and out of control here. Various interpretations can be drawn from such an action that will adversely affect perception of other countries about the health of our country and our economy itself. Let us please not speculate about this issue anymore - whether to postpone SONA or not," he said.