

'No reason for GMA to declare martial law'

By MARVIN SY

Nothing but black propaganda coming from the political opposition.

This was how Malacañang characterized the claims of the opposition that President Arroyo would declare martial law as a prelude to extending her term in office beyond 2010.

Press Secretary Cerge Remonde said there is no reason for Mrs. Arroyo to declare martial law since this would be unacceptable to the people.

"This is just part of the propaganda of the opposition aimed at demonizing the government and to realize their scenario of having the people demonstrate, especially with the State of the Nation Address (SONA) coming up," Remonde said.

"We would like to say to our people that there is no basis to the claim of the opposition that the government is planning to declare martial law," he added.

The spate of bombings in Mindanao and the warning from authorities that Metro Manila could be the next target have bolstered the belief of the opposition that the President is gearing up to declare martial law.

Two administration congressmen also gave assurance that Mrs. Arroyo would not resort to declaring martial law despite the bombing attacks in Mindanao.

"She will not do it," Manila Rep. Bienvenido Abante Jr. told a news forum in Quezon City yesterday.

"There is no sufficient grounds to declare martial law and the people are against it," he said.

Abante, a Protestant bishop, said the religious organization he heads would oppose the declaration of martial law.

For his part, Cavite Rep. Elpidio Barzaga Jr. said there is no reason yet to impose martial rule.

"Under the Constitution, the President can impose martial law when there is rebellion, invasion, insurrection, or when public safety requires it," Barzaga pointed out.

"There is no rebellion, or if there is, it is confined to Mindanao; there is no invasion, there is no insurrection, and public safety does not require it," he said.

Barzaga, a lawyer, pointed out that the President is authorized to make a "partial imposition" of martial law like limiting it to Mindanao.

"But I think the situation there has not reached a point that would justify the imposition of martial law. If people are afraid of going out of their homes due to the bombings, if students do not want to go to schools due to bomb attacks, then that would justify it," he said.

Barzaga said the framers of the 1987 Constitution have written stringent safeguards to prevent abuses committed by the military and the authorities when the strongman Ferdinand Marcos declared martial law in 1972.

"They remedied those abuses by making it hard for whoever is president to repeat them. The president under the present Constitution cannot padlock Congress, the courts and media entities," he said.

Barzaga stressed that both Congress and the Supreme Court can review and lift a martial law declaration.

"The president is required to report to Congress within 48 hours his or her imposition of martial rule. If Congress is not in session, it is required to convene in 24 hours. It can immediately terminate martial law; otherwise, the imposition is good only for 60 days, unless Congress, with the two chambers voting jointly, extends it," he added.

Deputy presidential spokesman Anthony Golez allayed fears of the supposed plan to declare martial law.

- With Jess Diaz, Jose Rodel Clapano