

JDV wants GMA to declare 2010 elections to push through in SONA

By EVA VISPERSA

DAGUPAN CITY — Rep. Jose de Venecia Jr. said yesterday President Arroyo should declare in her State of the Nation Address (SONA) that there will be presidential elections in 2010 "to put an end to instability, non-stop speculations, anxiety and fear" among Filipinos.

"She must also declare, with her cronies and allies in Congress, that they will no longer pursue Charter change in the President's SONA or in the days or weeks following the SONA," De Venecia, a former speaker, told THE STAR.

"She must make these declarations in her speech during the SONA or during her meeting with US President Barack Obama in Washington" on July 30, De Venecia added.

"She must make clear that she will not take recourse to emergency rule or martial law and prohibit her agents from planting bombs in Metro Manila that scare the people," he said.

After leading in the killing of several impeachment cases against Mrs. Arroyo as House speaker, De Venecia had a falling out with the President after his son and namesake dragged the names of the first couple into the \$320-million botched national broadband network deal with Chinese firm ZTE Corp.

De Venecia said Mrs. Arroyo should follow the examples of her predecessors — Presidents Corason Aquino and Fidel Ramos — by giving up power after her term. He also said Mrs. Arroyo can still regain public trust if she cleanses her government.

He also took a jab at his successor, Speaker Prospero Nograles, for allegedly misleading the public on his stand on Charter change.

"Why did they (congressmen) approve House Resolution 1109 in the last hour of the night and why is he reviving his other resolution to lift the economic provisions when everybody in Metro Manila knows it's only a smokescreen and a decoy for Charter change to enable President Gloria Arroyo to stay in power beyond 2010?"

"Why did they approve it before Congress adjournment unless they have a clear intent to finalize its passage upon the resumption of Congress on July 27?"

Enough said

Malacañang conceded it couldn't do anything more to convince its critics that Charter change would not be brought up during next Monday's SONA.

"I think we have said enough about this. The President is concentrating on the economy and education (her State of the Nation Address)," deputy presidential spokesperson Lorelei Fajano said.

"If Speaker Nograles said that there is no con-ass, we just have to believe him," she added.

Unconvinced

Senators continue to doubt the sincerity of the Palace and Nograles in their assurances that there will be no Cha-cha moves during the SONA and in the coming weeks.

"Nograles and company are still day-dreaming. They seem to suffer from amnesia by forgetting the bicameral structure of Congress, which requires the two chambers to vote separately, and not jointly, on major or minor legislative measures. It defies logic and common sense that they want to do away with this basic rule when voting on amendments to the Constitution," Senate Minority Leader Aquilino Pimentel Jr. said.

"If the Palace isn't interested in Charter change then why is it debunking the SWS poll results on the matter? *Nabuhali ang isda sa bibig* (A fish is caught by its mouth). Malacañang's slip is showing as it questions the SWS poll results. We should all take this to mean that Cha-cha isn't dead and that we must guard against an illegal con-ass," Sen. Francis Pangilinan said. The SWS survey said the majority of Filipinos were opposed to Cha-cha.

"I hope that Speaker Nograles' assurances that there will be no con-ass at the SONA are true. As a fellow lawyer, I believe the Speaker will not allow this to happen," Sen. Francis Escudero said.

Escudero warned of "a tidal wave of protests" if the administration persists in its Cha-cha bid.

"To use the SONA in railroadng Cha-cha is patently illegal and blatantly immoral," Escudero said.

Pimentel said the administration's insisting on Cha-cha is "political suicide."

According to Pimentel, only a national leadership that enjoys high credibility and public trust has the moral right to espouse and pursue Cha-cha because it will shape the destiny of the nation.

With Mrs. Arroyo's public satisfaction rating plunging to a dismal negative 31 percent in the same SWS survey, Pimentel said the administration's refusal to abandon Cha-cha was the "height of insensitivity and delusion."

Ready to block Cha-cha

The United Opposition (UNO) vowed to block any surprise move by administration lawmakers to convene a con-ass during SONA.

"The assurances do not sound reassuring enough for us in the opposition to relax our vigilance. In fact, the administration has a track record of doing the oppo-

site of what it says," UNO president and Makati City Mayor Jejomar Binay said. "Remember that Mrs. Arroyo had said in 2003 that she would not run for president, and a few months back, House allies also claimed they would not push for con-ass," Binay said.

"They may have abandoned the plan, which was reportedly hatched in Malacañang, to call for a con-ass on July 27, but they did not say they will abandon con-ass," he said.

"On the contrary, the House leadership said con-ass is back on track, despite overwhelming public opposition," Binay said.

Intimidation

Binay also said the Philippine National Police's crowd dispersal management competition was aimed at intimidating protesters on July 27.

"The PNP should at least be credited for being more creative in sending its message to those who will join the anti-SONA rally," he said.

"The event may be described as a competition, but

the message is clearly intended to intimidate the opposition," he pointed out. — With Marvin Sy, Delon Porcalla, Katherine Adranada, Jose Rodol Capanan, Christina Mendez