

DATELINE PHILIPPINES



Former Speaker Jose de Venecia Jr. at the impeachment hearing of the justice committee at the House of Representatives. Inquirer.net photo

An eye for an eye?

From Arroyo to ZTE: JDV tells 'all'

by LEILA SALAVERRIA, GIL C. CABACUNGAN JR.
Inquirer.net

PANGASINAN Rep. Jose de Venecia Jr. Monday, November 24, accused President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo of spending as much as P100 million in bribes in October 2007 to buy herself "legal protection" from moves to impeach her for at least a year.

Nine months after he was boot-ed out as Speaker of the House of Representatives, De Venecia finally delivered on his promise to expose irregularities in the Arroyo administration, testifying at the start of discussions on the substance of the fourth impeachment complaint against her in three years.

He told the House committee on justice that Ms Arroyo had a hand in the bribery-tainted \$329 million National Broadband Network (NBN) deal with China's ZTE Corp., in unexplained delays in the NorthRail project and in the giving of cash gifts in connection with last year's impeachment case against her.

De Venecia's testimony marked the first time that the charges against the President have been elaborated on in Congress. Ms Arroyo's dominant allies killed the previous ouster moves in the House even before details could be discussed.

De Venecia told his peers that the impeachment complaint filed by his son Joey was an opportunity to use their consciences and cleanse the image of congressmen as "commodities for sale."

"Everybody is for sale in this country, even when we go to our districts, many of the citizenry are for sale. Their votes are for sale. Where will the country go? Now is the time to start cleansing ourselves and our nation," he said in his 40-minute testimony.

He spoke of an invitation made by the President to him and other congressmen and local government officials to a breakfast meeting in Malacañang where

the cash gifts were handed out on Oct. 11, 2007.

He said he met the President on that day at 11 am in the Malacañang music room where he was asked to transmit what he described as a "bogus and sham" three-page impeachment complaint by lawyer Roel Pulido that preempted the "more serious complaint" by San Juan Rep. Ronaldo Zamora and Iloilo Vice Gov. Rolox Suplico.

De Venecia's bag of P500,000 cash, which was delivered to his office that same day, would be forwarded to the committee as exhibit A.

In the NorthRail case, De Venecia was adamant that he did not get any cut from the deal while directly pointing to the President as the reason no single track of railroad has been built since the loan agreement from China Export-Import Bank was signed in 2004.

"How can anyone ask for commission from the Chinese government when we are the ones begging them to come here," said De Venecia who claimed to have persuaded Chinese leaders to undertake the project.

He said that he knew that his fate was "sealed and doomed" on the day his son went to the Senate to testify on the NBN-ZTE deal that cost him the speakership and the presidency of the Lakas political party.

He recalled how the President invited him and his wife to a golf game which turned out to be a meeting with ZTE officials and former Commission on Elections Chair Benjamin Abalos in Sheng-zhen, China.

"Pray tell me, what is the President of the Philippines doing there? What is the husband of the President doing in the ZTE headquarters, a company that is bidding for a massive project in the Philippines? Pray tell me why

the Comelec chair is there?" De Venecia said.

"Mike Arroyo said that I am lying. Let me say to you pictures do not lie. It was Mike Arroyo

who said that perhaps it is best that this project be done in a government to government basis," De Venecia said, referring to the

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Admin solons gang up on De Venecia, Nograles says predecessor 'sourgraping'

ADMINISTRATION congressmen ganged up on former Speaker Jose de Venecia Jr. after he accused President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo of bribing lawmakers and linking her to the national broadband network (NBN) scandal, with his successor saying he was "clearly sourgraping."

"My feel is that the show was clearly sour grapes...and Shakespeare should have written: 'Hell hath no fury than a Speaker scorned.' All of these events narrated by him happened during his watch as Speaker of the House. And the joke is the Philippine song 'Bakit Ngayon Ka Lang IWhy Did You Come Just Now!'" Speaker Prospero Nograles, who replaced De Venecia in February this year, said in a statement.

Agusan del Norte Representative Jose Aquino II accused De Venecia of using the impeachment hearing to "market" his newly-published book, in which he details his purported knowledge of how the NBN deal was awarded to China's the ZTE deal and the alleged bribery of House members to endorse a "sham" impeachment complaint against the President in 2007.

In *Global Filipino: The Authorized Biography of Jose De Venecia Jr., the Visionary Five-Time Speaker of the House of Representatives of the Philippines*, by US journalist Brett M. Decker, which is to be launched in Washington this week, De Venecia claimed Arroyo had a role in the "backroom negotiations" that favored ZTE.

Negros Occidental Representative Ignacio Arroyo, brother of the First Gentleman, said until now, De Venecia is still bitter over losing the top post in the House.

Other administration solons also disputed De Venecia's story that the President asked him to refer the "sham" complaint by lawyer Ruel Pulido to the House plenary in 2007.

Representative Matias Defensor, the justice committee chairman, said he did not remember Arroyo asking De Venecia to bring the complaint to the House members so that it could get moving.

But Defensor said he did not think the chief executive had to ask the then Speaker to do such a thing. (Inquirer.net)

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