

DATELINE PHILIPPINES

Last hurrah for Charter change

by DELEON PORCALLA & KATHERINE ADLANEDA
Philstar.com

MANILA—Charter change battle lines are being drawn in Congress, which resumes session this week to decide whether or not to amend the 1987 Constitution.

Speaker Prospero Nograles said he would ask the Commission on Elections (Comelec) for guidance on whether a plebiscite on Charter change (Cha-cha) is still possible before next year's general elections.

"If nothing happens by June 6, I may concede that it is too late," he said. "But between now and sine die on June 6, I would go through the process."

The final push for Charter change will be met by militant groups under the umbrella organization Bagong Alyansang Makabayan (Bayan) with a protest rally when Congress resumed session last April 13.

The House will begin debate on Charter change this week until session ends on June 6.

Bayan will march from the corner of Batasan Road and Commonwealth Avenue toward the gates of the House of Representatives at the Batasang Pambansa complex.

Nograles told radio station dzRH it is important for lawmakers to know if there is still time to amend the Constitution, especially since the filing of certificates of candidacy has been moved up from February 2010 to November 2009.

On the House agenda are Resolution 737 of Nograles calling for the lifting of the prohibition against foreign persons and entities owning local companies and public and private lands, and the proposed resolution of Camarines Sur Rep. Luis Villafuerte seeking to convene the House into a constituent assembly without the Senate.

The resolution of Nograles is up for second reading after the House committee on constitutional amendments

chaired by La Union Rep. Victor Ortega sent it to the plenary.

The proposed resolution of Villafuerte reportedly has the signature of 177 House members.

Villafuerte is convinced that with 197 signatures, they can do away with the Senate and provide a "justiciable" controversy where the Supreme Court would be forced to rule if both chambers should vote jointly or separately when it comes to amending the Constitution.

However, Nograles said convening Congress into a constituent assembly to introduce amendments to the Constitution might be pressed for time.

Meanwhile, Bayan Muna Rep. Teddy Casiño said the pro-administration Lakas-Christian Muslim Democrats, of which Nograles is president, and Villafuerte's faction of the Kabalikat ng Malayang Pilipino are just "slugging it out," even if their chances for Charter change are "nil."

"Both groups know there's no time for Cha-cha, but they are jockeying for GMA who wants

Cha-cha for her own agenda," he said.

What is at stake is not only the speakership but the use of government resources in 2010, Casiño said.

Other priority bills before Congress are the Reproductive Health Bill, the extension of the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Law, the Right of Reply Bill for media, biometrics for registered voters, compensation for human rights victims and strengthening of the Anti-Money Laundering Act.

Far-reaching repercussions
Bayan secretary-general Renato Reyes Jr. underscored the need to oppose the "persistent moves to amend the 1987 Constitution, saying this has far-reaching repercussions.

"Arroyo's allies in Congress are holding their own Easter egg hunt for that elusive Charter change formula. But this is not a harmless game. The persistent moves to change the Charter have far-reaching repercussions. There is again a sense of urgency to stop this latest move," Reyes said.

Arroyo rallies E. Asia on economy, security

MANILA—President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo stressed the need for coordinated action in the East Asian region against threats to economic stability and security as she left for Thailand for the second phase of the 14th Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) summit.

The meeting in the resort district of Pattaya gathered leaders of ASEAN member states—the Philippines, Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia, Brunei, Vietnam, Singapore, Laos, Cambodia, and Myanmar—as well as leaders from the regional bloc's dialogue partners—China, Japan, South Korea, India, Australia, and New Zealand.

"The world economy contin-

ues to challenge developed and developing nations alike. This and North Korea's missile launch underline the importance of our upcoming ASEAN Plus and East Asian Summits," Arroyo said in her departure statement.

"Within the context of a turbulent world, it is essential to keep our own region as calm and coordinated as possible. The ASEAN Plus and East Asian Summits should be an anchor for member states to keep control of our own backyard," she said.

"It will be important for East Asian leaders to agree on actions to further strengthen our regional economy and on steps to promote peace and stability," Arroyo said.

After the ASEAN summit and



Pres. Gloria Macapagal Arroyo AP Photo

related meetings end on Sunday, April 19, the President will proceed to Dubai to push for more jobs for Filipino workers there.

"I will be going there to champion our workers before the government and those firms that are hiring workers in Dubai," she said. (Inquirer.net)

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