

FROM THE FRONT PAGE

Villar decries Senate 'kangaroo court'

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disrespected when Lacson tried to serve him the order at the session hall and even noted for the record that Villar refused to accept it.

Villar threw the copy of the order on his table.

Villar also hit Lacson's way of delivering his attacks against him since the C-5 controversy broke out,

saying Lacson had been doing it "in a very loud voice."

Villar said his reputation had been destroyed by the allegations and that he could not take the attacks anymore.

The 'order' that started it all

The order was exposed by Sen. Alan Peter Cayetano, a member of

the minority and the Nacionalista Party of which Villar is president.

He said it was shown to him by an "angel" of a senator, who turned out to be Senate President Pro Tempore Jinggoy Estrada.

Lacson assailed the "leak" of the order, which he said was a draft and should not have been circulated since it could still change, depending on the outcome of the preliminary hearings on Villar's case.

Estrada admitted on the floor that he was the one who showed Cayetano the copy of the order but maintained he did it without malice and bad intention.

But Lacson said it was unethical and a violation of the Senate rules.

In his privilege speech at the start of the session, Lacson said it was wrong for Villar, Cayetano and Senate Minority Leader Aquilino Pimentel Jr. to question the order because "a draft, whether signed or unsigned, remains a draft until promulgated."

"An order that would accord Senator Villar the right to file his reply within five days upon receipt, to determine if a preliminary inquiry will take place or not. In other words, the committee hearing held on April 15, 2009

was not a fait accompli. At along hindi moro moro (it was not a sham). Rather, it was undertaken either to ratify or reject that order," Lacson said.

He said nobody knew of the order until "an angel" leaked it and that it was unfortunate that he "takes pleasure at using every opportunity to twist the issue into a dirty political game."

Lacson said he became a victim of the ethics committee before but "I did not run to my minority leader for help in 2001. I did not ask any peer to heckle me. I did not mobilize marchers and protesters to muddle up the issue. I did not cry foul."

But Cayetano and Pimentel said the issue was no longer the order itself but Lacson's credibility and that of the other members of the ethics committee to conduct the investigation under these circumstances.

Senate President Juan Ponce Enrile joined the debates and said during the time of former president and senator Ferdinand Marcos, the late strongman answered all the charges against him point by point on the Senate floor.

Enrile also asked Pimentel if he wanted the chamber to decide on the issue, which would mean putting it into a vote. In this case, the majority would have the say on whether Lacson could stay in the ethics committee.

But Pimentel refused to answer and said Enrile should not join the debates without going down from his seat.

Both Cayetano and Pimentel said Lacson could not serve as "accuser, judge and executioner" of Villar. Cayetano noted that Lacson had mentioned before that out of propriety, he would not take part in the investigation of Villar.

But Lacson said he was not the one who accused Villar directly and that it was Madrigal who filed a complaint. He also said he was chosen by the majority to be the ethics committee chairman.

After almost three hours of showdown, the senators decided to adjourn and delay the caucus for today to decide on the issue. ■

Two men plead not guilty in killing of Filipina 'Black Widow'

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the media while the case is still pending.

The Los Angeles Sheriff's Department arrested Delacruz and Romero after a two-year investigation.

Rios-Risken was found shot to death inside her home in Lomita in April 2007.

Investigators believe that Rios-Risken knew her attackers because her home was secured with a steel front gate and a surveillance camera. No forced entry was found.

Delacruz is the great-nephew of Rios-Risken.

Friends and relatives of Delacruz and Rios-Risken were in the Torrance Municipal Courtroom visibly shaken, many with their eyes red.

"They picked the wrong guy. My brother is innocent," said Joenel Delacruz, Eric's younger brother and Rios-Risken's great nephew. "The cops can't find the real killer so they are trying to blame my brother."

Eric's aunt, Susanna Mata, just arrived from the Philippines. She said that the family is having a hard time dealing with this issue because Eric's father and mother both live in the Philippines and don't know what's going on.

"I really don't know what we can do," said Mata in Tagalog. "We don't have a lot of money. We have to hire an attorney. We need help."

"Sonia is a nice grandma," added Joenel. "Why would he [Eric] kill our grandma? It doesn't make sense. We all loved our grandma."

Lomita Black Widow

Authorities paint a different picture of Rios-Risken. Before being murdered, Rios-Risken was suspected of masterminding the shooting deaths of two husbands, 19 years apart, while both men were visiting her relatives in the Philippines, according to the Los Angeles District Attorney's office.

Nicknamed "the Lomita Black Widow" by reporters, Rios-Risken was suspected most recently in 2006 in the death of her second husband Larry Risken, a retired

US Navy seaman.

Risken, who was visiting his wife's family in the Philippines, was murdered after escorting his wife's niece to the hospital. His wife did not accompany him to the trip to the Philippines.

Police investigators believe it was a hit. However, no one was ever taken in custody.

Rios-Risken's first husband, retired US Marine Earl John Bourdeau, also was shot to death in the Philippines after traveling alone on a business trip. Police believed his 1987 murder was a staged robbery attempt at the home of Risken's family, according to authorities.

Philippine police arrested five men including two of Rios' brothers in connection with the death of Bourdeau. However, all the men were released and charges were later dropped.

The CBS *48 Hours Mystery* show featured Rios and investigated the mysterious deaths of her husbands. Both deaths are unsolved.

According to police, on the one-year anniversary of her second husband's death, a man went into Rios' salon in Lomita and took a shot at her. The man missed but vowed that he would come back.

Nine-days later, police found Rios-Risken inside her home in a pool of blood. Delacruz and Romero, a Navy friend, are suspected of fatally shooting the 60-year-old execution style in the back of the head, according to the DA's office.

Sheriff's Sgt. Michael Rodriguez, who investigated the case, declined to comment after the arraignment.

Le Truong, who also served with Delacruz in the US Navy reserves, said he couldn't believe it when he heard that Delacruz was charged with murder.

"No way. I've known Eric for more than a year," said Truong. "He's not that kind of person. You know we're Asians and we respect our elders."

Bail was set to \$2 million for Delacruz and Romero.

A preliminary hearing has been set for May 21. ■

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