

House begins Charter change debates

by JESS DIAZ
Philstar.com

THE House of Representatives will begin last April 21 its deliberations on Speaker Prospero Nograles' Resolution 737, signaling the start of floor debates on Charter change (Cha-cha).

The resolution seeks to amend Article 12, Sections 2 and 3 of the Constitution "to allow the acquisition by foreign corporations and associations, and the transfer or conveyance thereto, of alienable public lands and private lands."

In a news conference last March 26 upon returning from a short vacation in the United States, and amid rumors that Camarines Sur Rep. Luis Villafuerte and his followers were trying to oust him, Nograles said the House would give Cha-cha its best shot.

He said that the House is tackling Resolution 737, he would file the resolution of Villafuerte, who is president of Mrs. Arroyo's Kabalikat ng Malayang Pilipino (Kampi) party, for a constituent assembly (con-ass).

Nograles announced that 175 House members have signed the resolution, 22 short of Villafuerte's target of 197 signatures to bypass the Senate on Cha-cha.

Responding to questions, Nograles said at some point in the floor debates on Cha-cha, Resolution 737 and the Villafuerte con-ass

measure would be taken up together.

He said it is possible that his proposed amendment might be approved by a vote of 197 or 198, the figure Kampi leaders have been trying to attain to bypass the Senate.

But Pangasinan Rep. Jose de Venecia Jr. warned that President Arroyo's congressmen-allies will try to scrap the May 2010 presidential polls to give way to the election of a parliament and a prime minister.

De Venecia said the principal objective of Cha-cha is to shift the nation to the parliamentary system "so the President can run for membership in parliament and aspire for and be elected to the position of prime minister."

He said administration allies would try to finish Cha-cha within this year or early next year so that the May 2010 elections would not be for Mrs. Arroyo's successor but for members of parliament, including the President, who would run in her Pampanga district.

While the House would begin debates on Resolution 737 today, the former speaker said the chamber would subsequently replace the Nograles measure with the Cha-cha via constituent assembly (con-ass) resolution of Villafuerte.

The holding of parliamentary elections next year is also the sense that Manila Rep. Bien-

venido Abante Jr. is getting from his House colleagues.

Asked what happens if the House musters that vote for his resolution, the Speaker, quoting Majority Leader Arthur Defensor, said the measure would then be sent to the Senate for its own approval.

Asked whether other Cha-cha proposals such as term extension and the shift to the parliamentary system could piggyback on Resolution 737, Nograles said, "I, as author, will not allow it because it will be illegal. A bill or a resolution should have only one subject matter."

Last April 13, Nograles and Villafuerte jointly held a news conference to assure the nation that the 2010 presidential elections would push through even while the House is considering Cha-cha.

As a matter of fact, they said Lakas and Kampi are feverishly preparing for the elections and would work on their merger to ensure the victory of administration candidates.

Nograles told reporters that the electoral preparations the two biggest political parties are making should assure the public that next year's balloting would be held as scheduled despite Cha-cha. ■

GMA set to sign tourism bill

PRESIDENT Arroyo will sign this week a bill that will boost the tourism industry in the country.

Press Secretary Cerge Remonde last April 19 said the measure has finally reached Mrs. Arroyo's desk and she is expected to sign it soon.

He said he was informed by Presidential Legislative Liaison Office chief and Senior Deputy Executive Secretary Joaquin Lagonera that the measure was transmitted to the Palace only last Friday, April 17.

"I can assure the industry and all its stakeholders that the bill will be signed very soon," Remonde told government-owned radio dzRB.

"This is good news for all stakeholders in the tourism industry."

The Philippines, famed for its world-class beaches, heritage sites, diving sites, eco-parks and friendly people, has been voted as the number one Asian tourism destination recently during a festival on tourism in Shanghai, China.



Press Sec. Cerge Remonde

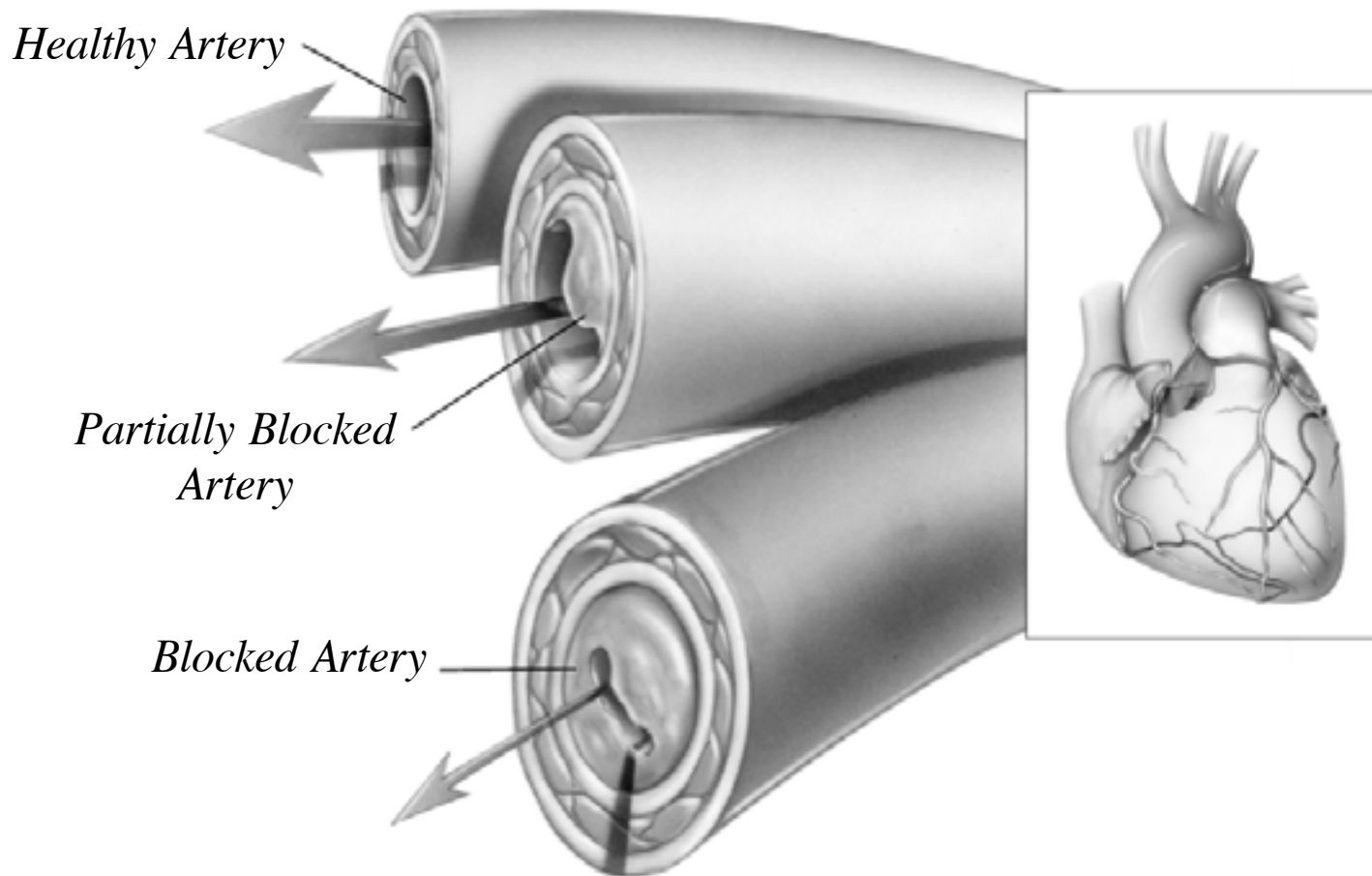
Remonde thanked the various stakeholders in the tourism sector, particularly taxi drivers, hotel chambermaids, tourist guides and others for their role in making the Philippines among the preferred tourist destinations in Asia.

He described them as the "heart and soul" of the country's tourism industry.

He likewise hailed the efforts of Mrs. Arroyo and Tourism Secretary Joseph Ace Durano in marketing the Philippines as a haven for both local and foreign tourists. (Philstar.com)

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