

Cayetano, Lacson want Lozada under Senate custody

by AUREA CALICA
Philstar.com

TWO senators want Senate star witness Rodolfo Lozada Jr. taken from the Manila police headquarters and brought under protective custody of the Senate.

With two nuns, Lozada spent Wednesday, April 29 in a small room inside Manila police headquarters on United Nations Avenue.

Police allowed Lozada to hear Mass celebrated by Manila Auxiliary bishop Broderick Pabillo at the lobby of the police headquarters last April 30.

Lozada's detention would be prolonged following the reported departure for the United States of Philippine National Railways chairman Michael Defensor, who had charged Lozada with perjury, according to lawyer Adel Tamano, United Opposition spokesman.

On the other hand, Lozada cannot be committed in the Manila City Jail because Judge Jorge Emmanuel Lorredo of Manila Metropolitan Trial Court Branch 26 had reportedly gone on leave after ordering Lozada's arrest, Manila police officials said.

It was also "highly irregular" for the judge to have rejected the request of Manila Mayor Alfredo Lim to have Lozada released to him on recognizance, Tamano said.

The court set Lozada's arraignment for perjury on May

7, according to his lawyer, Jose Manuel Diokno.

Senators Alan Peter Cayetano and Panfilo Lacson said Lozada should not be detained at the Manila City Jail, contrary to the stand of Senate President Juan Ponce Enrile.

However, everything has changed after Enrile had ordered the pull out of Lozada's guards from the Office of the Senate Sergeant-at-Arms, Cayetano added.

Enrile said he had ordered the Senate Sergeant-at-Arms to pull out Lozada's escorts because the Manila police have already placed him under arrest.

Lacson said the senators could talk about how they could help Lozada since he remains under Senate custody.

"Maybe we can ask the court by way of a motion if we can get or we can retain Lozada in our custody," he said.

"That is one help we can give him. At least we can guarantee the safety of Lozada."

Lacson said they could not pass judgment on what the court did and that the Senate could not interfere with the judiciary.

"So maybe we can still place him under our custody," he said.

Lozada was arrested when the committee report on the NBN deal would be out soon as announced by Sen. Richard Gordon, Senate Blue Ribbon committee chairman, Lacson said.



Rodolfo Lozada Jr., witness in the ZTE deal, peeks from the window of the comfort room of the Manila Police District headquarters last April 30. Lozada was arrested Wednesday, April 29 on charges of perjury. Philstar Photo by Jonjon Vicencio

Lozada refuses to post bail

A defiant Lozada refuses to post bail for his temporary liberty.

In a message read by Sister Estrella Castalone, Association of Major Religious Superiors executive secretary to reporters at Manila police headquarters, Lozada said:

"I reiterate my stand that my decision is not a surrender, but rather it is standing my ground to face my family's abusers. I value my liberty but I value truth more."

"I am now asking Mike Defensor and Malacañang to substantiate their accusations against me. And I will stand by my word that Mike Defensor is doing this

to cover up for Gloria Arroyo's criminal involvement in the NBI-ZTE deal. A speedy trial in a fair court is all I'm asking for."

The police have barred media from interviewing Lozada, according to Castalone.

However, Justice Secretary Raul Gonzalez said Lozada must have a "deeper reason" in refusing to post a P6,000 bail.

"You are given the right to post bail but you refuse," he said.

"There is malice there. Why would you not post bail when he can afford to do so and when your supporters were offering help?"

The police would release Lozada once he posts bail, Gonzalez said. ■

DoH reactivates emergency task force

by DONA PAZZIBUGAN
Inquirer.net

THE Department of Health has reactivated an emergency task force and ordered all its units and hospitals to prepare after the World Health Organization raised an "imminent pandemic" warning.

The Health Emergency Management Task Force was last activated in 2005, when the country faced an avian flu threat.

Health Secretary Francisco Duque III convened a command conference last April 30 with all regional directors, chiefs of DoH-run hospitals and all regional epidemiologists to put their readiness plans and systems in place in case of a pandemic.

"I am also calling for a meeting with the chiefs of all private hospitals to coordinate with the DoH on how they can prepare and respond to possible cases of the Mexican Swine Flu," Duque told reporters.

Code white alert

All DoH hospitals in Metro Manila and all DoH regional medical centers have gone on code white alert that indicates "intensified readiness" in case of mass emergency cases.

"They will mobilize up to the local government hospitals, the rural health units and barangay health centers for readiness and preparedness," said Health Undersecretary Mario Villaverde.

The DoH has set up a 24/7 operations center in its headquarters in Manila to receive field reports of any suspected swine flu cases or high number of influenza-like illness.

Anti-flu drugs expire this month

"We need to plan on a day to day basis because the situation is fluid," Villaverde said.

Duque also said they are also talking to the local pharmaceutical industry "to help us ensure the availability of (the anti-flu viral drug) Oseltamivir when the need arises."

The DoH stockpile has about 600,000 capsules of the anti-flu drug, good for 60,000 patients. Most of the capsules however are set to expire this month.

Duque said United Laboratories, which donated the drugs, assured them that the drugs remain efficacious "36 to 40 months" after the expiry date.

He said President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo has authorized the purchase of additional P10 million worth of the drug.

"As a matter of policy, we give them to the healthcare workers who are in the frontline. We will also give them to the sick person," said Duque.

Duque urged the public not to buy their own Oseltamivir for future use, since these should be administered upon a doctor's supervision. ■



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