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Lacson, minority senators clash over rules

by CHRISTINA MENDEZ
Philstar.com

SEN. Panfilo Lacson and the minority group were still at each other's throats last May 7 during the resumption of meeting of the Senate Committee of the Whole that will tackle the alleged conflict of interest case against Sen. Manuel Villar Jr. involving the double budget insertion for a road extension project.

Senate President Juan Ponce Enrile presided over the meeting that was attended by Lacson, Senators Aquilino Pimentel Jr., Gregorio Honasan, Loren Legarda, Rodolfo Biazon, Miguel Zubiri, Joker Arroyo and Alan Peter Cayetano.

Pimentel and Cayetano took turns explaining the need for the Senate Committee of the Whole to amend its rules, particularly on the determination of form and substance of a complaint.

To address the concerns of the minority, Enrile has directed the secretariat to draw up a comparative table of what rules were changed by the Ethics committee led by Lacson and why these were revised.

Lacson delivered the opening salvo when he insisted that he would not allow any amendments to be made on the rules of the Ethics committee, which has been adopted by the Committee of the Whole.

"Without preempting the proceedings, I would like at the outset to register my strong objection to any move, subject to the collective wisdom of the body, to amend the rules as published in the official gazette last March 23."

Pimentel immediately shot down Lacson's move, saying it did not adhere to the dictum of democratic process.

"I regret that there seems to be a penchant on the part of Sen. Lacson to preempt the discussion. The other side has not said (its piece) and he has rebutted it. It seems to me that that might not be the best way to proceed," Pimentel said.

"We were saying that there are some procedures that are not up to level of impartiality that we wish to see in governing the ethics committee, Mr. President. And so, we certainly do not appreciate the kind of positioning that the senator has taken as if he has issued an edict written in stone," Pimentel said.

Lacson, for his part, accused Cayetano and Pimentel of using dilatory tactics, saying they were the ones who did not participate when the rules were being drafted at the committee level.

Enrile said he has studied the rules and found that the determination of form and substance of any sworn statement or verified complaint is "internal to the committee."

The five-day notice is simply to warn a respondent that there is indeed a charge against him, Enrile explained.

Enrile has hired another lawyer, Mike Ancheta, to assist the general counsel, Johnmuel Mendoza, "to disabuse the mind of the minority that the general

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