

Senators vote to probe Villar

by CHRISTINA MENDEZ
Philstar.com

TWELVE senators last May 21 voted to adopt a resolution finding credence and substance in the ethics complaint filed by a fellow senator against Sen. Manuel Villar Jr. over the alleged realignment of funds for the C-5 Road extension project.

Bur Villar, who has accused the Senate committee of the whole of being biased against him, remained firm in his decision not to attend the proceedings and said he reserves his legal right to defend himself.

Sen. Jamby Madrigal, the leading proponent of the complaint, cast her yes vote along with Senators Rodolfo Biazon, Panfilo Lacson, Juan Miguel Zubiri, Edgardo Angara, Manuel Roxas II, Jinggoy Estrada, Richard Gordon, Loren Legarda, Benigno Aquino III, and Gregorio Honasan.

Senator Villar and the members of the minority bloc did not attend the proceedings after Minority Leader Aquilino Pimentel Jr. and Sen. Alan Cayetano expressed dismay over the handling of the rules for the ethics hearing.

Absent were Senators Bong Revilla, Francis Escudero, Miriam Defensor-Santiago, Lito Lapid, who are part of the majority, and minority senators Joker Arroyo, Pia Cayetano, and Kiko Pangilinan. Sen. Antonio Trillanes is still in detention.

Enrile said Villar is not compelled to appear in the preliminary conference on Tuesday, May 19 "if he does not want to."

Presidential aspirants Roxas, Legarda, Lacson and Gordon stressed that they want to give Villar due process and enough time to explain his side on the accusations.

The senators explained how their votes should be viewed in the face of insinuations earlier made by Villar that the composition of the committee is biased and that the presidential candidates plotted to eliminate him.

Enrile said the senators will vote on Villar's guilt after the examination of affidavits and evidence during the "trial."

If found guilty, Villar may face any among a range of penalties, from the lightest penalty of admonition up to expulsion, which is the strongest penalty that can be slapped on a senator embroiled in an ethics case.

Enrile explained that whatever punishment, if any, will have no effect on Villar's plan to run for president in next year's elections.

Finding probable cause

Angara explained that the Senate proceedings last May 21 were still in the preliminary stage, and compared it to the filing of charges at the prosecutor level in criminal proceedings.

"There is no finding of guilt or



Sen. Manuel Villar Jr. inspects a portion of the C-5 road extension project in Sucat, Parañaque City last May 21.
Philstar Photo by Manny Marcelo

innocence at this stage. We are just making a finding of probable cause to enable the calling of a hearing to receive the evidence formally that will be offered by the complainant and hopefully, the evidence offered by the respondent," said Enrile.

Angara said there is no definitive judgment or determination of guilt at this point until the senators have scrutinized all records and evidence.

The Madrigal complaint alleged that Villar caused the realignment of the C5 Road Extension project to benefit the properties registered in the names of the corporations owned and controlled by

him and his family.

It added that Villar allegedly committed conflict of interest when he failed to divest himself of his interests in corporations whose properties were acquired by the government for road right-of-way for the Las Piñas-Parañaque Link Road.

Madrigal also alleged that Villar inserted P200 million in the 2008 budget for the construction of the C5 Road extension project from the Southern Luzon Expressway to Sucat Road including the right-of-way when "such project is already covered by an appropriation for the same amount in the same law." ■

Arroyo party sets meet over Lakas merger

by LIRA DALANGIN-FERNANDEZ
Inquirer.net

PRESIDENT Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo's political party, the Kabalikat ng Malayang Pilipino (Kampi), will gather its members next week for a meeting to firm up its position on the merger with the ruling administration coalition, Lakas-Christian Muslim Democrats (Lakas-CMD), a leader of the party said last May 21.

Camarines Sur Representative Luis Villafuerte said there was a need to "inquire from individual members their sentiments and stand" on the merger, aimed to unite the country's two biggest political parties for the May 2010 election.

Villafuerte and Speaker Prospero Nograles last month resigned as respective presidents of KAMPI and Lakas-CMD to give the President a free hand on the merger.

A panel composed of Lakas and Kampi leaders was also formed to iron out problems that could stop the unification.

In a phone interview, Villafuerte stressed that the merger was "not merely a party decision, but individual concerns."

"It just can be decided by a majority vote, you have to consider the individual concerns of members from the national to the local level, from the provinces to the municipalities," he said.

When asked about some members leaving the party because they might not be in favor of the merger, Villafuerte said he was not discounting that. ■

Comelec: Poll surveys allowed by law

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fraud or falsification was committed," read the Comelec resolution.

"Besides, the complainants even failed to state their addresses as well as the addresses of the respondent. On its face, thus, the complaint is incomplete and inaccurate."

Lozano, along with Ruben Enciso, Eduardo Orpilla and Melchor Chavez, had asked the poll body to stop the SWS from conducting election surveys on ground that these are influencing the electorate.

Meanwhile, the League of Provinces has branded as "voodoo statistics" the recent SWS survey showing the country's unemployment rate at 34.2 percent.

Eastern Samar Gov. Ben Evardone, LP secretary-general, said the survey is "farical reporting" at its worst.

"First how can 1,200 respondents yield even a semi-accurate data on unemployment," he said.

Evardone said SWS and other polling outfits are "purveyors of baseless doom."

Evardone said no country can be politically stable with that unemployment rate.

"It was ironic that while multilateral institutions and rating agencies have been taking note of the country's economic strengths at this time of great crisis, our own polling firms have been acting as purveyors of baseless doom." ■



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Stephen H. Mattern is a cum laude graduate of Southwestern University School of Law, where he served as an editor of the prestigious Southwestern University Law Review.

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