

FROM THE FRONT PAGE

Lacson drops out of presidential...

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He said there were times that he entertained the thought of accepting the P200 million yearly pork barrel which he could use in his campaign, but he kept his integrity because he was elected to serve the people.

He cited France's Charles de Gaulle, who after putting order back in a land wracked by anarchy, said that "in order to become the master, the politician poses as the servant."

"I bow to that reality, which is why I have chosen not to participate any more in this laudable forum of those who seek the presidency of the land. And I beg your favor that you read this message that springs from my heart," he

added, explaining his absence from the ANC forum.

"Up until I made this decision last Sunday to retire from a race that would matter most in the lives of our beloved countrymen, I had every intention to share with our people my vision of what the Philippines ought to be in a Lacson presidency," he said.

He maintained that poverty and the lack of health services, education and security for the people would not be solved by dole-outs from politicians during elections season.

Lacson said these kinds of assistance from politicians were easy to give out because they were stolen from government coffers.

"One cannot discipline if one is unable to discipline oneself. One cannot preach clean government if one is himself on the take, or his relatives and cronies are themselves the thieves. If a president cannot lead by the power of good example, then governance will always be bad," he said.

"Rest assured that in time, we will all join together to support a leader who could best deliver our people from the bondage they now suffer. That leader must have both the competence and character that are the preconditions to purposive leadership so imperative in these crossroads of the nation's life," Lacson said. (With Christina Mendez, Paolo Romero)

The signs of the...

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thon session by Tuesday midnight, with the minority objections quelled successfully through a viva voce and an alleged "no cha-cha, no pork barrel" tall order from Malacañang circulating. All these unfolded with the president nowhere in sight, as she went on state visits.

The outrage of people conquered social networking sites like Facebook.com and Plurk.com. In the popular Twitter platform, journalists and watchdogs created timelines that comprehensively looked into the events, even summarizing important questions raised in the plenary by minority representative whom until the end fought against the resolution.

Observers believe the resolution paves the way for the extension of the term of President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo. One Congressman, Nueva Ecija Rep. Eduardo Nonato Josen, described it as "gang raping" the constitution. The Jesuit law expert Fr. Joaquin Bernas, echoed the solon's view in interview, as he admonished the Filipino people to "be enraged" with what some describes as another legal travesty back in the country.

The "ConAss" is just one of the three constitutional options considered in so far as the history of charter change campaigns in the Philippines is concerned. At least in the post-Marcos and Aquino eras, charter change became part of the more controversial agenda of various presidencies.

There was one in the time of President Fidel Ramos, and later on after him, during the short-lived term of deposed President Joseph Estrada. Arroyo, now almost done serving her term after being elected as a sitting President in 2004, has had the charter change train running all throughout her term. In her terms alone, the main pipeline had been the House of Representatives, where she enjoys partisanship of the majority.

The adoption of HR 1109 follows the narrative of conspicuous events. A few days ago, before she flew to her state visits, Arroyo convened her party Kabalikat ng Malayang Pilipino (Kampi), in its auspicious merger with Partido Lakas ng Tao (Lakas) and Christian-Muslim Democrats (CMD). This had been in the light of the upcoming presidential elections in 2004.

Many of the figures appearing in both the Pulse Asia and Social Weather Stations survey have come out to voice their candidacy and advocacies. The automation too of the national elections had been fast tracked, and curiously, only one bidder, the consortium led by automation trailblazer Smartmatic and Total Information Management System.

At the height of the sex video scandals and the various issues that had been lined up for resolution like the extension of the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program, observers noted the expediency of the congressmen, in what is described in Philippine media today as "railroading".

It is not surprising. While we all keep our eyes shut, it is known fact that two of the president's sons are sitting solons - Rep. Mickey Arroyo of Pampanga and Rep. Diosdado "Dato" Arroyo of Camarines Sur, have been actively soliciting signatures for charter change. Camarines Sur Rep. Luis Villafuerte, a stalwart of Kampi, meanwhile initially supported the resolution, only to back out while congress was in session.

The Internet is slowly becoming a very potent

platform for discussing issues, and in the much recent brouhaha on the additional duties on imported books, manifestos and articles on the web helped bolster the government's decision to withdraw the tax duties imposed by the Bureau of Customs.

This time, cybercitizen Filipinos will surely wield their pens on Congress and we must expect the barrage of writings that would come out of the World Wide Web. In the night the House passed HR 1109, netizens gave blow by blow accounts in real time, beating TV coverage that usually sign off at 12. And what's more, they have been "covering" the whole thing for a very long time.

"Paano na ang Pilipinas makaahon kung mismo ang mga mambabatas ay magugulo, at wala nang inatupag kundi ang sarili nila?" asks "limr22" at the ABS-CBN online news portal which featured an article on how the Senate would block the moves done by the lower house. "Ang daming dapat bigyan pansin pero ano ang ginawa nila wala?"

And despite the pledge of four assurances by the proponents of the resolution - which includes among others the exclusion of the discussion of term extensions for all elected officials, including the president and the vice president - some of the readers following this event share the fears of minority Cong. Roilo Golez of Paranaque.

Blogs have also been written as the news ran its course. Explainer and Inquirer columnist Manuel L. Quezon III in his blog www.quezon.ph, hit the newest development and also did a roll call of all the notable reportage done on the charter change. "But I'm operating from a particular point of view, which is that it seems more likely to me that the President and her people are more interested in consolidating their ranks going into 2010, and solving the problem of what happens after 2010, by making whoever is elected president irrelevant," he writes.

Makati Cong. Teddy Boy Locsin meanwhile made a hilarious press statement that had become an important read the day after the passage of HR 1109. "This is a resolution calling for the convening of the Lower House of Congress as a constituent assembly the day before it adjourns. This is like sending out an invitation to a party on no date, for no stated occasion, while announcing that the host is leaving for a long vacation abroad," he wrote in his statement titled "Throwing a Party for No Reason and Inviting Only the Host." Locsin added: "This resolution mocks the House and holds it up to ridicule. If anything, it is a fit subject not of a vote but an ethics investigation of the proponents of this measure for inviting the contempt of the nation upon our House. This is a venture which can be described by only one word that politeness forbids me to say."

Some netizens have gone as far as renaming the House of Representatives into *Bastusang Pambansa*, signing up shout outs on their social networking site profiles and publishing hate messages against their respective congressmen. The signs of the times are at work today, especially at the World Wide Web, where Filipinos are very much engaged and opinionated. To say the least, their legions are the feistiest we have seen in recent times. A lot of bloggers are writing about major national issues, and not just the ConAss. Discussions are still unfolding and a "silent majority", at least in the net is making its presence felt. Overseas voters too are watching, and are most probably awaiting the resolution to this resolution. ■

'No politics in Dacer...

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out," Bello said.

Bello reiterated that all the parties concerned should wait for Mancao to confirm the contents of his affidavit before making any reaction.

"It becomes relevant only if (Mancao) will go before the court and affirm that sworn statement. Until that happens, anything about that sworn statement will be speculative," he said.

Mancao arrived Thursday from the US amid public expectations that he would identify the principal suspects in the murders.

The National Bureau of Investigation (NBI) took the former police official into custody shortly after he was turned over by US marshals in Los Angeles International Airport for the flight home.

Hours after Mancao was taken to the NBI head office in Manila, Justice Secretary Raul Gonzalez visited the former police official.

According to Gonzalez, Mancao promised to identify "71" and "Bigote" whom he mentioned in his affidavit.

While in detention in the US awaiting extradition, Mancao executed an affidavit on Feb. 14 linking Lacson, his former police boss, to the murders.

Mancao had served under Lacson, who then headed the defunct Presidential Anti-Organized Crime Task Force (PAOCTF).

Lacson, who was allegedly

identified as "71" by Mancao in his affidavit, has repeatedly denied any involvement.

Lacson is a graduate of Philippine Military Academy (PMA) Class of 1971 and became chief of the Philippine National Police (PNP) and the PAOCTF, the elite police unit said to be responsible for the killing of Dacer.

Dacer's clients included ousted President Joseph Estrada, who has also denied any hand in the publicist's murder.

Mancao's affidavit supposedly mentioned "Bigote," describing someone with a mustache who was the alleged mastermind of the murders.

During the meeting with Gonzalez, Mancao had requested that the preliminary investigation be confined to the Dacer-Corbito case and other issues that may link the principal suspects to other high-profile cases be avoided.

"He (Mancao) mentioned that he is hoping that we will just confine this (probe) to the Dacer-Corbito case. I agreed with him," Gonzalez said.

Gonzalez said Mancao revealed a few details of other cases he became involved in.

"They could be helpful but he (Mancao) doesn't want to put them anymore on paper," Gonzalez said.

He cited Mancao's recollection of the events surrounding the rebut case involving PAOCTF

and suspected members of Kuratong Baleleng robbery gang in 1995.

Lacson and a number of police officials involved in the incident were subsequently charged but the Quezon City court dismissed the case.

The case is currently pending before the Supreme Court on the petition filed by families of the victims and human rights lawyers seeking to revive the murder case.

"It would be good if we could lump all these things together, but the Kuratong Baleleng case is in the SC and it's not advisable for us to touch something that is in the SC already," Gonzalez pointed out.

Gonzalez said the preliminary investigation would start pending the arrival of former police senior superintendent Glenn Dumlaog next week.

Aside from Mancao, Dumlaog and 20 others were among those charged in the double murder.

He was arrested last year near New York where he was working as a handyman, and like Mancao was not contesting his extradition to the Philippines.

Dumlaog reportedly also wanted to return home to become state witness.

Gonzalez said he wants Mancao and Dumlaog to "detonate the bomb together" to reveal the details of the murders. ■



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