

PGMA's foreign trips are necessary in the midst of global economic crisis

MANILA — President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo's foreign trips are necessary especially now that the world is experiencing economic crisis. Press Secretary Cerge Remonde on Monday asked even the Filipinos, especially the government critics, to understand that it is vital for the Philippines to strengthen ties with other countries in the midst of global

financial slowdown. Remonde underscored the need for the Philippines to aggressively coordinate with other countries in order to shore up the economy in times of economic uncertainties. The President's trips abroad are aimed at creating opportunities and labor markets for overseas Filipino workers," he said. The Press Secretary likewise

said that it is not only President Arroyo who is making foreign trips but also other leaders of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) in an effort to forge closer economic ties with other countries. "There is, indeed, a need to have international response with the present challenges confronting our country," he said. After all, Remonde said all trips of President Arroyo and her delegation are subject to audit by the Commission on Audit (COA) in response to critics, questioning the Chief Executive's expenses on trips. He said Malacanang is more than willing to show how much benefits and accomplishments that the government gains in every foreign visit of President Arroyo. In Japan, he said, the President witnessed the signing of three agreements worth about 500 million US dollars. He also said that the President made a follow-up on the Japan-Philippine Economic Partnership Agreement (JPEPA). With the full implementation of JPEPA, Philippine ex-



BROKE. Former first lady of the Philippines Imelda Marcos shows certifications of her family's wealth in a room filled with neatly filed court documents related to court cases filed against her family during an interview with reporters at her residence, Saturday, June 20, in Makati City. Marcos is nothing if not a survivor. As the Philippines' most notorious first lady approaches 80, she is still courting publicity and claiming that despite the billions reportedly stashed away during her late husband Ferdinand's rule, and the 22-carat diamond ring on her finger, she is nearly broke. AP Photo by Pat Roque

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'Charter change may be an impossible dream'

by JESS DIAZ
Philstar.com

MANILA - After showing determination to lead in efforts to change the Charter through a Senate-less constituent assembly (con-ass), Speaker Prospero Nograles now admits that Cha-cha may be an impossible dream. "Cha-cha may or may never happen at all," he told reporters over the weekend before leaving for Australia for a short official visit. He said he was not optimistic about getting the required number of votes to railroad Cha-cha through a con-ass without the participation of the Senate. "We may never get the three-fourths vote. This is three-fourths vote not only of all members of the House of Representatives but of the House and the Senate," he said. Nograles was referring to a constitutional provision requir-

ing a three-fourths majority vote from all members of the legislature on proposals by Congress to amend the Charter. By the Speaker's calculation, they need 220 House members to approve any Cha-cha proposal. That number represents three-fourths of the combined membership of the House (268) and the Senate (24). "We may never get 220 to propose any amendment," he said. That is assuming that a House-only con-ass is a constitutional way of proposing amendments. Congressmen-lawyers as well as constitutional experts, including former Ateneo law dean Fr. Joaquin Bernas, maintained that the vote needed for any Cha-cha proposal is three-fourths of all members of the House and three-fourths of all members of the Senate. The two chambers should vote separately and not jointly, Congress being a bicameral body, they argue.

port products such as bananas, pineapples, crabs, shrimp, tuna and even chicken will find a new market in Japan which, in turn, can supply the Philippine manufacturing sector with critical inputs such as specialty

steel products and auto, electrical and electronic parts. Textiles and apparel will also enjoy mutual elimination of tariffs. The Japanese Diet also passed an Act that will further protect Filipino seafarers, particularly

those being deployed in vessels passing through the Gulf of Aden. "In Japan alone, the President's visit is very much fruitful and rewarding," he added. (PNA)

Even if a miracle happens and Nograles is able to muster 220 votes, the next hurdle would be the Supreme Court, where senators and other concerned citizens have vowed to question the constitutionality of a Senate-less con-ass. Agusan del Sur Rep. Rodolfo Plaza, who belongs to the Nationalist People's Coalition (NPC), is also convinced that Cha-cha proponents may never get 220 votes. He said the merged Lakas-Kampi has only 160 to 165 members. "Other than this number, they can only get a sprinkling of sympathizers from party-list representatives and members of smaller political groups," he said. He added that NPC members have agreed to boycott a Senate-less con-ass if it pushes through. Members of the Nacionalista

Party and the Liberal Party, the two oldest political groups in the country, have made a similar commitment to stay away from a House-only con-ass. NPC, NP and LP have about 60 members. Plaza said congressmen should now forget about Cha-cha and con-ass and focus on the fast-approaching May 2010 elections for President Arroyo's successor and other officials. Arroyo admitted in Tokyo on Tuesday that she wanted Cha-cha for political and economic reforms, but that "we are not out to scrap the (May 2010) elections." She did not specify what those reforms would be, but they are believed to include a shift to the parliamentary system and the abolition of restrictions on foreign ownership of land and certain businesses - changes that her House allies led by Nograles are advocating. ■



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