



DELUGE. Filipinos react as water is splashed on them during a town fiesta in San Juan, Manila, on Wednesday June 24. Thousands of Filipinos in the Manila suburb honored their patron saint John the Baptist by drenching passers-by and motorists in a raucous annual water festival Wednesday. AP Photo by Aaron Favila

House won't insist on...

PAGE A10 ◀
the Constitution's economic provisions to allow 100-percent foreign ownership of land and certain businesses.

Nograles is the principal proponent of these changes.

Unlike Resolution 1109, which advocates Cha-cha via a Senate-less con-ass, the Nograles measure would be sent to the Senate after the House approves it.

The Speaker originally wanted the House to approve his Cha-cha proposals ahead of Resolution 1109 so these could already be sent to the Senate, but that changed last May 28.

That was the day when President Arroyo presided over the Lakas-Kampi merger at the Manila Hotel, where she later met with Nograles and other House allies and reportedly told them to adopt Resolution 1109.

Four days later, the House adopted the resolution through a voice vote.

In Tokyo last week, Mrs. Arroyo admitted that she wanted Cha-cha for unspecified political and economic reforms, but that she and her allies were not out to scrap next year's elections for her successor and other officials.

Ortega's statements at the Ateneo forum were consistent

with his answers to questions from his colleagues during his sponsorship of Resolution 1109 three weeks ago.

He told them that he did not believe that the House could achieve Cha-cha without the participation of the Senate as an institution.

He said some pro-administration senators may be willing to join con-ass, but that is not enough.

The Senate has to approve a resolution expressing its willingness to sit with the House in such an assembly, he said.

However, Ortega said he was only expressing his personal opinions.

Another resolution sponsor who expressed the same opinions as Ortega was Deputy Speaker Pablo Garcia of Cebu.

A third sponsor, Rep. Elpidio Barzaga Jr. of Cavite, said if a Senate-less con-ass were convened, any Cha-cha proposal is possible, including one extending Arroyo's term.

More protests
Militant groups are set to stage a protest march against Charter change on June 30.

"We just can't accept the assurances by the House majority that they will not convene the con-ass during the SONA (State

of the Nation Address). It's not true that they are not callous, as they would like us to believe. If they were indeed sensitive, then they wouldn't have forced House Resolution 1109 in the first place, because all the surveys showed that the people were against it," Renato Reyes Jr., secretary-general of the Bagong Alyansang Makabayan (Bayan), said.

"It is necessary that we sustain the protests to send a clear and unequivocal message that any con-ass during or after the SONA would be resolutely opposed by the people," he said. "This is a warning to these insensitive lawmakers who are obsessed with perpetuating themselves and Arroyo beyond 2010. Their plan to shift to a parliamentary form of government is not lost on the people."

"The protest action has also been billed as a countdown to the SONA of Arroyo on July 27, as opponents of the planned constituent assembly believe that it is possible for Arroyo's allies to convene the con-ass after the SONA," he said.

"The June 30 activity likewise marks exactly one year before President Arroyo's term of office expires in 2010," he said. ■

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