

FROM THE FRONT PAGE

'My term ends in 2010'...

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 term. Many of those who accuse me of it tried to cling like nails to their posts," Pres. Arroyo said.
 "I am accused of misgovernance. Many of those who accuse me of it left me the problem of their misgovernance to solve. And we did it," she said.
 She said she was "falsely accused, without proof, of using my office for personal profit. Many of those who accuse me of it have lifestyles and spending habits that make them walking proofs of that crime."
 "We can read their frustrations. They had the chance to serve this good country and they blew it by serving themselves," she said.
 "Those who live in glass houses should cast no stones. Those who should be in jail should not threaten it, especially if they have been there," she said, apparently referring to Estrada's detention and conviction for plunder. Pres. Arroyo pardoned Estrada shortly after his conviction by the Sandiganbayan in October 2007.
 Apparently referring to her erstwhile ally De Venecia, she said the "noisiest critics of constitutional reform tirelessly and shamelessly attempted Cha-cha (Charter change) when they thought they could take advantage of a shift in the form of government."
 "Now that they feel they cannot benefit from it, they oppose it," the President said.
 She, however, remained silent on her latest position on moves in the House of Representatives to amend the Constitution.
 She said "as the seeds of fundamental political reform are planted, let us address the highest exercise of democracy, voting."
 She also hit Roxas, who has presidential ambitions, for using the Cheaper Medicine Law issue to lambast her. She said she exercised her powers under the law to increase the number of medicine whose prices are to be reduced.
Just do it
 "To those who want to be President, this advice: If you really want something done, just to do it. Do it hard. Do it well. Don't pussyfoot. Don't pander. And don't say bad words in public," she said, apparently referring to Roxas' swear words during an anti-Charter change rally in Makati City in December.
 Pres. Arroyo said being the President in the last eight years was not easy and was full of risks, but countered it by working "24/7 and being ready for any contingency, any crisis, anywhere, anytime."
 "There isn't a day I do not work at my job or a waking moment when I do not think through a work-related problem," she said.
 "Even my critics cannot begrudge the long hours I put in. Our people deserve a government that works just as hard as they do," she pointed out.
 "Everything right can be undone by even a single wrong. Every step forward must be

taken in the teeth of political pressures and economic constraints that could push you two steps back if you flinch and falter," she said.
 "I have not flinched, I have not faltered. Hindi ako umaatras sa hamon (I don't run away from challenges)," she said.
 Pres. Arroyo said she has never done any of the things that "have scared my worst critics so much."
 "They are frightened by their own shadows," she said.
 She justified her frequent foreign trips, which critics have lambasted as a profligate misuse of public funds.
 She also defended her strong moves to quell various destabilization and coup attempts since 2001, saying she was able to resolve the crises "with the ordinary powers of my office."
 "My critics call it dictatorship. I call it determination. We know it as strong government," the President said.
 "But I never declared martial law, though they are running scared as if I did. In truth, what they are really afraid of is their weakness in the face of this self-imagined threat," she pointed out.
 "I say to them: do not tell us what we all know, that democracy can be threatened. Tell us what you will do when it is attacked. I know what to do," she said.
 As she has shown in the past, she said, she will continue to firmly defend democracy and "try to sustain it by wise policies of economic progress, so that a democracy means not just an empty liberty but a full life for all."
Unprecedented growth
 Pres. Arroyo pointed out that in 2008 up to the first quarter of 2009, the Philippines stood among only a few economies in Asia-Pacific that did not shrink.
 "Compare this to 2001, when some of my current critics were driven out by people power. Asia was surging but our country was on the brink of bankruptcy," she said.
 "The state of our nation is a strong economy. Good news for our people, bad news for our critics."
 "I did not become President to be popular. To work, to lead, to protect and preserve our country, our people, that is why I became President. When my father left the presidency, we were second to Japan. I want our Republic to be ready for the first world in 20 years," she said.
 Since 2001, the economy posted uninterrupted growth for 33 quarters; more than doubled its size from \$76 billion to \$186 billion, she said. The average Gross Domestic Product growth from 2001 to the first quarter of 2009 is the highest in 43 years.
 The number of Filipinos who considered themselves poor went down from 59 percent to 47 percent even with the population growing, Pres. Arroyo said.
 The country's per capita GDP rose from

\$967 to \$2,000 while it created eight million jobs in the last eight years "much, much more than at any other time," she pointed out.
 "In sum: First, we have a strong economy and a strong fiscal position to withstand global shocks. Second, we built new modern infrastructure and completed unfinished ones. Third, the economy is more fair to the poor than ever before. Fourth, we are building a sound base for the next generation. Fifth, international authorities have taken notice that we are safer from environmental degradation and man-made disasters," she said.
 She said the global economic crisis hit both developed and developing countries worldwide but the Philippines was least affected and was cited for this by international rating agencies.
 "Had we listened to the critics of those policies, had we not braced ourselves for the crisis that came, had we taken the easy road much preferred by politicians eyeing elections, this country would be flat on its back. It would take twice the effort just to get it back again on its feet to where we are now because we took the responsibility and paid the political price of doing the right thing," Pres. Arroyo said.
 Under her watch, she said major highways and roads as well as ports and airports mushroomed all over the country, including the Subic-Clark-Tarlac Expressway.
 The business process outsourcing (BPO) industry remained resilient despite the global recession with earnings of \$6 billion and employment of 600,000, she said.
 In the last four years, tourism almost doubled and is now a \$5-billion industry, she said.
'Living proofs'
 Press Secretary Cerge Remonde said the personalities brought in by Pres. Arroyo and asked to be acknowledged during her SONA were "living proofs" of the gains of the nation during her administration.
 There was Gigi Gabiola, a former domestic worker in Dubai now working at the Department of Labor and Employment under the government's emergency employment program.
 Also presented during her SONA was Tarnati Dannawi, a Badjao trained in modern mariculture under the government's food program that helped him earn P180,000 since last year.
 "We will help more fisherfolk shift to fish farming with a budget of P1 billion," she said.
 Pres. Arroyo presented two beneficiaries of her administration's education initiatives.
 One of them, Mylene Amerol-Macumbal, finished Accounting at the Mindanao State University before pursuing law. She placed second in the last bar exams, making her

Discuss lower...

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 he added.
 Herrera made the statement as remittances from Filipino workers in the US plunged by \$385 million in the five months to May this year compared to a year ago.
 On account of the deep recession in America, the cash wired home by migrant Filipino workers in the US fell by almost 12 percent to \$2.896 billion in the five months to May this year compared to \$3.281 billion in the same five-month period in 2008.
 In 2008, some 48 percent or \$7.825 billion of all the cash sent home through banks by all OFWs around the world came from the US.
 Herrera, however, said almost 80 percent of all global remittances actually go through American banks.
 "Whether the OFW is based in the Middle East or in Asia, chances are he or she will be transacting directly or indirectly with an American multinational bank when making a money transfer," he said.
 Annual remittances from OFWs have steadily grown from just \$105 million in 1975 to a whopping \$16.426 billion in 2008, making the Philippines the world's fourth-biggest collector of money from migrant workers.
 Herrera expressed confidence that Obama would be "highly receptive" to any appeals for increased US government pressure to bring down the excessive remittances fees imposed by American banks.
 He noted that the Obama administration has been very aggressive in pursuing financial industry reforms that tend to benefit consumers, including the passage of new US legislation lowering credit card rates and charges, and strengthening protection for users.
 Herrera also pointed out that Western Hemisphere leaders themselves, at the Special Summit of the Americas in Monterrey, Mexico, in January 2004, had called for the cost of remittances to be cut in half.
 This call was echoed by the finance and central bank chiefs of the Group of Seven (the US, the United Kingdom, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, and Japan) who also declared in April 2004 that, "on remittances, we will continue to work on our initiatives to reduce barriers that raise the cost of sending them and integrate remittance services in the formal financial sector." (*Inquirer.net*)

Schwarzenegger signs \$85B...

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 to make those cuts," he said.
 Senate President Pro Tem Darrell Steinberg, a Democrat who negotiated the original budget compromise with Schwarzenegger, immediately questioned the legality of many of the governor's line-item vetoes.
 "We will fight to restore every dollar of additional cuts to health and human services," Steinberg said in a statement. "This is not the last word."
 Schwarzenegger called the budget package aimed at balancing the state's budget through June 30, 2010, the toughest since he took office in 2003. Still, the Republican governor said the package included reforms he has long sought and forces government to live within its means.
 He said additional cuts were needed to build a \$500 million reserve fund after the state Assembly rejected about \$1.1 billion in revenues from local transportation funding and by allowing new offshore oil drilling.
 With much of state spending tied up by federal and constitutional requirements, the Schwarzenegger administration wants to ensure the state has a cash cushion in case of emergencies such as earthquakes and wildfires.
 California's economy has been hit by the housing market slump and high unemployment, and the latest efforts to close a \$26 billion shortfall came just



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