

DATELINE PHILIPPINES

No time left to change Charter—Villafuerte

by GIL C. CABACUNGA, JR.
Inquirer.net

MANILA—The lead proponent of the constituent assembly (Con-ass) Wednesday admitted that there was not enough time to amend the Constitution before 2010. Camarines Sur Rep. Luis Villafuerte last April 1 said that the primary goal of their initiative was to get a definitive Supreme Court ruling that the constituent assembly could be convened by a three-fourths vote of all members of Congress with the House of Representatives and the Senate voting as one and not as separate chambers. Villafuerte said the convening of the constituent assembly was just the first step in changing the Constitution and with only 13 months left before the May 2010 election, there was not enough time

to make any amendments before the elections. “We have to explain to the public that convening Con-ass was different from changing the Constitution. I only want to implement the exact language of the Constitution through an SC ruling before 2010. We can do Cha-cha (Charter change) after 2010,” said Villafuerte in a radio interview. Villafuerte chastised Speaker Prospero Nograles for muddling the Con-ass and Cha-cha issues by proposing to hold a plebiscite before the 2010 elections to get the public’s pulse on the amendments. “Speaker Nograles is putting the cart before the horse. We only need to pass the Con-ass now. Let’s not talk about a plebiscite because we do not need that now, it’s already too late,” said Villafuerte. ■

Lakas-CMD bets out after Holy Week

by LIRA DALANGIN-FERNANDEZ
Inquirer.net

MANILA—The ruling administration party, Lakas-Christian Muslim Democrat (CMD) will firm up its shortlist of its presidential candidates for the May 2010 election after Holy Week, House Speaker Prospero Nograles said last April 2. “The timetable that we agreed is that we should be able to firm up the selection process, at least the names of those acceptable to Lakas, by Easter Monday,” Nograles, who is also Lakas-CMD president, told reporters in a forum in Quezon City. He said “high level talks” are now ongoing with coalition partners, including the President’s party, Kabalikat ng Malayang Pilipino (KAMP) and the National People’s Coalition (NPC), to

come up with its list of potential candidates. Nograles also announced that the party has appointed presidential political adviser Gabriel Claudio, Local Water Utilities Administration head and former congressman Prospero Pichay and Senator Juan Miguel Zubiri as spokespersons. Once the shortlist is done, Nograles said the party would consult with members to help choose the standard bearer. “It is our policy that selection process will not be dictatorial, it will be a bottom-up kind of selection,” the lawmaker added.



House Speaker Prospero Nograles

Nograles said Defense Secretary Gilbert Teodoro and Vice President Noli de Castro were among those being considered by the party, but stressed it was not its closing doors to other presidential wannabes from coalition partners like the NPC. The NPC has Senators Francis Escudero and Loren Legarda as possible bets for next year’s election. When asked why Lakas did not choose de Castro, Nograles replied, “It’s not just a question of leading the surveys, it’s also a question of, does he want to run.” “He has not told me he wants to run,” he added. ■

HK writer: ‘So sorry, I crossed the line’

by CYNTHIA BALANA
Inquirer.net

MANILA—A Hong Kong magazine columnist last April 1 admitted that he had indeed crossed the line when he branded the Philippines a “nation of servants” and apologized to the government and its people. “I realized that I had crossed the line. I now offer my public apology,” columnist Chip Tsao said in interview aired at about 7:30 p.m. on March 31 over Hong Kong’s ATV.



Chip Tsao

The Philippine consulate in Hong Kong relayed the apology to the Department of Foreign Affairs. Last March 30, the publishers of *HK Magazine*, Asia City Publishing Group, also issued an apology for “any offense” caused by Tsao’s article. A group of Filipino migrant workers in HK have planned a protest rally against Tsao on Sunday. Dolores Balladares, chair of United Filipinos in HK, said she expected thousands of marchers. **Racist, demeaning** “We are united in our position that the article was racist, discriminatory and demeaning to Filipino domestic workers in HK.” Tsao was quoted in an April 1 report by Agence France Presse as saying the article was a satire and “was never intended to be insulting to the Filipino domestic workers.” He then added that “English, being a global language, is open to different interpretations by those who come from various cultural backgrounds.” Tsao’s column entitled *War at Home*, published in *HK magazine* on March 27, made fun of the Philippine claim on Spratly Islands and satirized the re-

tirety of the Spratly Islands belongs to China.” “Grimly, I told her that if war breaks out between the Philippines and China, I would have to end her employment and send her straight home, because I would not risk the crime of treason for sponsoring an enemy of the state by paying her to wash my toilet and clean my windows 16 hours a day. With that money, she would pay taxes to her government, and they would fund a navy to invade our motherland and deeply hurt my feelings. “Oh yes. The government of the Philippines would certainly be wrong if they think we Chinese are prepared to swallow their insult and sit back and lose a Falkland Islands War in the Far East. They may have Barack Obama and the hawkish American military behind them, but we have a hostage in each of our homes in the Mid-Levels or higher. Some of my friends told me they have already declared a state of emergency at home. Their maids have been made to shout “China, Madam/Sir” loudly whenever they hear the word “Spratly.” They say the indoctrination is working as wonderfully as when we used to shout, “Long live Chairman Mao!” at the sight of a portrait of our Great Leader during the Cultural Revolution. I’m not sure if that’s going a bit too far, at least for the time being. The Bureau of Immigration in Manila did not think the piece was funny. It has since barred Tsao from coming to the Philippines. Running priest Fr. Robert Reyes, however, had said that if anyone should apologize, it should be President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo for making the country a nation of servants. ■

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Enhancing chances for growth despite crisis

MANILA—Having put in place safety nets for the vulnerable sectors of the economy, President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo is simultaneously enhancing the chances of the Philippines to grow despite the current global financial crisis. This, by promoting investments in agriculture, tourism and information & communication technology sectors, which have been identified as the growth drivers in the Philippines through the years, said Press Secretary Cerge M. Remonde. Her thrust for agriculture is aimed at meeting the 98 percent self sufficiency goal by 2010, making it easier for the country to meet 100 percent sufficiency by 2013 through her FIELDS program (fertilizer, irrigation and other infrastructure facilities, extension and education, loans for inputs and drivers and other post harvest facilities and seeds), Remonde said. The Department of Agriculture extended 3.2 million fertilizer discount coupons to farmers under the Fertilizer Subsidy Program. It also provided: a) 13,635.52 MT of organic fertilizer and soil ameliorants; b) 2.615 million bio-agents; c) location-specific interventions like Bio-N, Vital-N, Zinc Sulfate and Bio-con and d) soil and plant testing kits to

minimize wastage of fertilizer and soil ameliorants. A total of 74,259 hectares of irrigated farmlands were rehabilitated while irrigation service was restored in another 45,252 hectares. A total of 217,669 farmer-households benefited from 3,220 kilometers of farm-to-market roads that were constructed or rehabilitated which in turn generated 35,351 jobs. Also built were 16 agricultural tramlines which now facilitate the transport of commodities from highlands to markets (seven in Benguet, three in Mountain Province, two in Nueva Vizcaya, two in Luzon, one in Pampanga and one in Negros Occidental) and 15 mariculture parks were established. On extension and education, a total of 5,783 training activities were held aside from 212 research and development undertakings to generate production-enhancing and cost reducing technologies, Remonde said. The government also released P3.18 billion to 108,760 farmers/fisherfolk under various lending programs of the Agro Industry Modernization Credit and Financing Program apart from the P6.32 billion released by Land Bank to 221,110 palay farmer-beneficiaries. To reduce post harvest (PH) losses and maintain

grain quality, 596 flatbed driers were distributed and installed; four corn post harvest processing and trading centers were established each serving 2,000 hectares of corn land to produce quality corn and improve farmers’ incomes through reduced PH losses, Remonde added. As of December 2008, the government distributed 55,189.12 MT of certified seeds and 2,850.72 MT of hybrid seeds to farmers. Another 8.2 million pieces of planting materials (sugarcane, mango, coconut, cashew, citrus, lanzones, durian, cassava, mushroom and forage cuttings) 28,279 heads of various animals and 122.3 million pieces of fingerlings and broodstock were distributed. On tourism, 23 tourism projects, including new hotels, tourist facilities, enterprise zones and modernization of accommodations worth P15.9 billion were endorsed by the Department of Tourism. Despite the global slowdown, tourist arrivals as of October 2008 reached 2.6 million, 4 percent more than the 1.87 million recorded in 2007. With the government’s keen support for ICT, particularly the business process outsourcing, the industry was able to generate 410,000 jobs and revenues of \$6.2 billion since end-2008, Remonde said. ■

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