

No makeup, escorts, driver for simple Luli

by EDSON C. TANDOC, JR.
Inquirer.net

MANILA—Proud of what her mother had accomplished, Evangelina Lourdes “Luli” Arroyo-Bernas last April 1 said she was looking forward to returning to private life when President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo’s term ends next year.

She said her mother’s nine-year presidency had “its ups and downs,” but “I think overall my mother did quite well, so we are proud of that.”

Bernas added: “We know that when she (the President) leaves office, she is leaving the Philippines in a better state than when she first got it.”

Members of the political opposition, who are speculating that her mother would cling to her post even after her term ends next year, should “just concentrate on their platforms,” Luli said.

Bernas spoke at the 2nd eSkwela Conference in Lian town in Batangas province on Wednesday. She talked about the importance of integrating information and communication technologies in education.

ance since her private wedding on Nov. 5 last year. She laughed when asked about her married life.

“It’s normal,” Bernas said. “It’s just that now I need to ask for permission if I am going out.”

She said her mother had been asking her for a grandchild. “But they let us (decide) on our own. If it comes, then that will be great.”

Delegates to the conference, composed of volunteers, teachers and local government officials involved in existing, as well as proposed, alternative learning centers in the country, took turns in posing for photos with her.

Simplicity
Some of the delegates expressed amazement at her “simplicity.” She neither showed up with security escorts nor put on makeup.

“That’s how we were brought up,” she said. “I mean my brothers are the same. It’s just that they are men so people don’t notice it.”

She expressed disappointment, however, at how other people “twist it badly.” She noted that her brother, Pampanga Rep. Juan Miguel “Mikey” Arroyo, had at one time been described by some politicians as sounding “uneducated.”

“But, actually, it’s because we live our lives simply,” she said.

Sacrifice
Bernas admitted that being a daughter of the country’s president was not easy, but she said:

“We learned from her experience when she was the daughter of the President (Diosdado Macapagal).”

“Our grandmother (former First Lady Eva Macapagal) had told us before that once your mother entered politics, it would really be a sacrifice,” she said.

The eSkwela, a project spearheaded by the Commission on Information and Communications Technology, is a modified version of the Alternative Learning System (ALS) handled by the Department of Education (DepEd).

The ALS uses printed modules to teach students who could not go to regular grade or high schools and get formal education. The program, usually composed of once-a-week sessions, depends on the student’s own pace and needs.

The eSkwela takes off from the ALS and uses digital modules loaded in computers. There are already 10 eSkwela centers in the country.

After completing their modules, students usually take DepEd’s Accreditation and Equivalency Test, which gives them the equivalent of a high school diploma if they pass the exam. This allows them to get work or pursue college. ■

Farmers buck new twist in new CARP

by MICHAEL LIM UBAC
Inquirer.net

MANILA—Trouble is again brewing in Congress amid a plan by a congressional panel to exclude lands newly converted to sugar and coconut plantations from the coverage of the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program (CARP).

The proposed exemption is unacceptable to farmers, Senate Minority Leader Aquilino Q. Pimentel Jr. said last April 1, expressing fears that such controversial move would only fuel the restiveness and discontent in the countryside.

In a statement, the senator said this congressional plan would defeat the purpose of land reform since it would greatly reduce the land areas to be distributed to tenant-farmers.

Leaders of Task Force Mapalad composed of agrarian reform beneficiaries contacted Pimentel recently to voice their objection to the reported recommendation of a Senate-House panel tasked to draft the measure extending the program for another five years.

“They feel that the exemption of vast tracts of land being converted to sugar and coconut lands will render meaningless the provision on compulsory acquisition and distribution of lands which the Senate and House of



A farmer tends to his field

Representatives have agreed to restore,” he said.

In December, Congress approved Joint Resolution No. 19 temporarily extending the Carp for six months, or until June 30, 2009 while the legislature is still hammering out the new law extending the program for a longer period.

But the joint resolution disallowed new acquisition of lands. If extended for five more years, it will cost P147-billion in taxpayer’s money, Sen. Gregorio Honasan had said.

Honasan, chair of the Senate agriculture committee, had said that Catholic bishops were supportive of Senate Bill No. 2666.

Reforms include a very strong oversight mechanism, payment of all obligations and then consolidation of sorely outdated database,

according to Honasan.

The Department of Agrarian Reform (DAR) has said that the extension of CARP by five years would enable the government to acquire and distribute the remaining 1.3 million hectares of farmland targeted for coverage under the program.

A huge fraction of the targeted areas consists of land which their owners want to plant with sugar and coconut, said the senator.

Pimentel said exempting these lands would also be a retrogression from the old CARP law under which lands planted with these cash crops were included.

“If Congress is really serious about extending CARP and alleviating the plight of landless farmers, it should disregard the exemption plan,” he said. ■

Arroyo orders socially sensitive tuition plan

by JOEL GUINTO
Inquirer.net

MANILA—President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo has signed an executive order (EO) for the drafting of “flexible, socially sensitive” tuition fee payment plans in state colleges and universities.

In a speech before a national convention of the Sangguniang Kabataan (Youth Council) in Sta. Rosa town, Laguna province, Arroyo said the EO would also call for a reform of school policy preventing students who have not paid their tuition fees from taking periodic exams.

“I have issued an executive order for the Commission on Higher Education [to] instruct all state universities and colleges to devise a flexible, socially sensitive tuition fee payment plan and reform the no payment, no periodic examination policy that is currently being applied,” Arroyo said.

The President said she also instructed administrators of the Students’ Assistance Fund to expand its coverage



BIRTHDAY GIFT FROM BIRTHDAY GIRL President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo gets an advance birthday cake after signing a law that allows companies to employ poor but deserving students aged between 15 and 25 years old. To advance her administration’s educational agenda, Ms Arroyo has also instructed all state universities to devise a “socially sensitive tuition payment plan” and reform the no-tuition, no-examination policy. Photo from Inquirer.net

from tuition fees to monthly stipends and subsidies for transportation, laboratory and research expenses, and book allowance. ■

Stay put, Palace tells Duterte

by TJ BURGONIO
Inquirer.net

MANILA—Malacañang said Davao City Mayor Rodrigo Duterte should retain control of the city police force even as it balked at suggestions that the Palace order a separate investigation of Duterte over the killing of 800 civilians by alleged “death squads.”

Duterte cannot abdicate the mayor’s duties that are spelled out in the Local Government Code, said Executive Secretary Eduardo Ermita.

“That is an inherent duty of a local executive to maintain peace and order, and therefore he must have control and supervision over the police,” he said.

Duterte announced the other day that he was giving up his supervisory role over the Davao City police force and resigning from the National Police Commission (Napolcom) to give the Commission on Human Rights a free hand in its investigation into the killing of more than 800 civilians allegedly by a group of vigilantes called the Davao Death Squad (DDS).

Mere outburst
The New York-based Human Rights Watch alleged in a paper that the DDS had the backing of the Davao police.

Ermita said Duterte’s announcement may have been a mere “outburst.”

Brian Yamsuan, interior assistant secretary, said Duterte cannot resign from the Napolcom as he is neither an employee nor an official of the commission.

He explained that under the rules of the Napolcom, which has supervision of the Philippine National Police, all governors and mayors are automatically deputized as its representatives to supervise the police forces in their jurisdiction.

Ermita, who heads the Presidential Commission on Human Rights, said there was no basis for investigating Duterte at this time and Malacañang should not be dragged into the issue.

“The mayor is an elected official. We can’t act on something that is not based on actual facts on the ground,” he said.

Presidential commission
Besides, he said many agencies—the CHR, Task Force Usig of the Philippine National Police and the Task Force against Political Violence of the Department of Justice, also known as Task Force 211—were already dealing with the case. ■

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