

DATELINE PHILIPPINES

Constituent Assembly resolution filed

Opposition warned: Don't take case to SC

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Inquirer.net

MANILA—A controversial resolution was filed last April 22 in the House of Representatives calling for a Constituent Assembly (Con-ass) to amend the Constitution even without the Senate's participation.

Critics said the measure sponsored by Speaker Prospero Nograles was a ploy to draw the opposition into challenging its constitutionality in the Supreme Court, dominated by administration-appointed justices, and urged lawmakers not to take the bait.

The resolution seeks to gather 197 signatures, the magic number its principal author, Rep. Luis Villafuerte of Camarines Sur, contends is needed to pass Charter revisions by members of the Senate and the House of Representatives voting jointly.

Majority of the senators believe that Charter revisions in the Con-ass mode require approval by three fourths of members of the two chambers voting separately. They contend that the Villafuerte resolution is uncon-

stitutional and have announced they would challenge it in the Supreme Court.

"There is no road map to this but we have to be careful because maybe this is being done on purpose," said Quezon Rep. Lorenzo Tañada III of the Liberal Party.

"Those who are advocating this mode is hoping that those against it would (go to court) immediately. We are all wary of this, of playing into their hands," said Tañada.

Tañada said that most of the justices were appointed by the President, which could explain why her allies were challenging those opposing Charter change (Cha-cha) to go to court.

"I'm not saying the Supreme Court will decide in favor of them. I'm giving them the benefit of the doubt. But why are they challenging us? Maybe they know something we don't know, we have to read between the lines," said Tañada.

'Fourth mode'
Last April 20, Nograles introduced House Resolution No.

737—described as a "fourth mode" of Cha-cha calling for amendments to economic provisions in the Constitution by employing procedures in approving bills, but not by simple majority vote in each chamber but by three fourths.

The Constitution can only be changed through a people's initiative, a constitutional convention and a constituent assembly.

Bayan Muna party-list Rep. Teodoro Casiño said that Ms. Arroyo's allies have been moving to break every rule in the House to provoke the opposition into raising the issue in the high tribunal.

The Villafuerte resolution specifies that there would be elections in 2010 and the term of the president, vice president, senators, representatives and governors would not be extended.

With the filing, Villafuerte said Nograles should first set aside resolution 737 so that the House could debate first on the mode of changing the Charter.

Nograles' 737 resolution has

been scheduled for plenary debates. Villafuerte drafted the Con-ass resolution (No. 1109), but said its main author is Nograles.

Likely court challenge
Villafuerte said Nograles' 737 resolution was "seriously objectionable."

"Since Speaker Nograles himself is the author also of the resolution that I drafted, I think the proper procedure would be to suspend consideration of his 737 resolution on economic provision."

However, his proposal to defer discussions on resolution 737 was rejected last April 22.

Villafuerte said he expected

that resolution 1109 would trigger a "justiciable" controversy to trigger a Supreme Court case to decide if the two Houses should vote separately or jointly.

The Con-ass resolution was signed by 174 lawmakers. It states that the mode for Charter change should first be established before any specific proposal to amend it could be made.

'Foolish attempts'

Villafuerte also said in an interview that he only wants a Supreme Court case to be filed.

"Even if we get a favorable ruling, after the convening is considered constitutional, it is too late to remand or bring back the issue

to Congress for the acceptance of specific amendments. At that time, that's already the campaign period. Moreover, we still have to go through a plebiscite," he said.

Makati Mayor Jejomar Binay, president of the United Opposition, Wednesday said administration allies must concede defeat in their move to revise the Constitution after the Supreme Court ruled to increase the number of party-list seats in Congress.

"With one decision on a case filed a few years back, the Supreme Court has ended all these foolish attempts by Ms. Arroyo's allies to extend her term through Cha-cha," Binay said. ■

Diving poverty excites gov't to work harder; CLEEP generates 75,000 jobs

MANILA—Dropping poverty levels in the midst of global financial turmoil are motivating government to work harder to fight poverty.

"This is a confirmation that the anti-poverty programs of Her Excellency Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo are working and right on target," said Press Secretary Cerge Remonde.

Remonde was reacting on the Social Weather Stations February 2009 report that the "Self-Rated Poverty has been on a generally downward trend since mid-2008, declining from 59 percent in June 2008, 52 percent in September, 52 percent in December, to 47 percent in February 2009."

In Mindanao, SWS reported that the Self-Rated Poverty declined by 14 points from 59 percent in December 2008 to 45

percent in February 2009.

For Metro Manila, SWS said Self-Rated Poverty declined slightly from 53 percent to 49 percent, and from 44 percent to 42 percent in the remaining parts of Luzon.

In Visayas, however, it stayed at 60 percent over the past two quarters barely changing from 59 percent in September.

He commended the National Anti-Poverty Commission, the Department of Social Welfare and Development, the Department of Labor and Employment, the Department of Health and other agencies that took active parts in the implementation of anti-poverty programs.

For his part, Cabinet Secretary Silvestre Bello III said the Comprehensive Livelihood and Emergency Employment Program (CLEEP) has generated

75,000 jobs nationwide based on the report of NAPC Secretary Ding Panganiban.

"This is an addition to the mandate of DPWH Secretary Ebdane to create 500,000 jobs," said Bello.

As far for solving local unemployment, Bello said, quoting the DOLE report, the prospects are good.

"Ang sabi ni Secretary Roque, there was a displacement of about 30,000 plus, out of this nagkaroon ng re-hiring ng 12,000 plus," said Bello.

Bello said the cabinet will be monitoring the status of the programs on employment especially in Calabarzon, Mimaropa and Bicolandia. He added these are the areas where the number of laid off workers was high especially in Laguna and Cavite. (PIA-MMIO)

P2.3B more pork for new party-list reps

MANILA—The House of Representatives will need about P2.31 billion for the pork barrel alone of the additional 33 party-list lawmakers that should be proclaimed because of a Supreme Court ruling that is effective immediately. This, on top of the P200 million needed for their staff and day-to-day operations.

The amounts exclude the expenses for their new offices, electricity and other needs for the remaining eight months of the year, Speaker Prospero Nograles said in a statement.

Last April 21, the Supreme Court increased to 55 the number of seats in the House for party-list groups, or 20 percent of the chamber as prescribed by the Constitution, when it ordered the Commission on Elections (Comelec) to follow a new formula for allotting party-

list seats.

There are currently 22 seats in the 14th Congress occupied by party-list groups.

Each member of the House is entitled to P70 million a year in Priority Development Assistance Fund, more commonly known as the pork barrel, to finance their pet projects. Senators get P200 million a year.

The pork barrel is not given in cash, though. The lawmakers just identify the projects and beneficiaries for which funding should be allocated.

A total of P200 million is needed for the salaries of the lawmakers' staff, office supplies and other office needs.

A lawmaker is entitled to a minimum of six regular staff members in the House, plus consultants.

Lawmakers also get transportation allowances, which varies depending on where their

districts are located.

Supplemental budget

The House would need to pass a supplemental budget to fund the new lawmakers' needs, according to Camarines Sur Rep. Luis Villafuerte and Cebu Rep. Pablo Garcia.

Nograles also has another problem aside from where to get the funding.

Where to put them

He does not know where to put his 33 new colleagues since there are no office spaces currently available.

He said new offices would be available at the Batasan Complex in Quezon City after the completion of the four-story South Wing Annex Building. The P700-million building is expected to be finished next year.

But the Speaker said he had no choice but to accommodate the 33 party-list representatives. (Inquirer.net)

Palace says erratic weather is a wake-up call for Filipinos to preserve the environment

MANILA—The unpredictable weather currently being experienced in the country is a wake-up call for all Filipinos to unite to preserve the environment for future generations.

This is the message the President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo wishes to convey to the nation during the Earth Day celebration on April 19-25, Presidential Spokesperson and Executive Secretary Eduardo Ermita said.

At his regular weekly briefing in Malacanang, Ermita said climate change is already here as shown by the intense heat, humid, erratic and unseasonal changes in the weather.

"The weather has become unpredictable because of too much carbon dioxide in the environment. It's a wake-up call for us Filipinos to preserve the environment," Ermita said.

Last April 17, Ermita said the President, along with Presidential Adviser on Climate Change Secretary Heherson Alvarez, launched the "Carbon Cutting Coalition" during her weekly climate change briefing in Payatas, a former dumpsite in Quezon City.

The Coalition is a multi-sectoral initiative to find concrete solutions to mitigate the impact of global warming and climate change.

The President conducts a nationwide climate change briefing every Friday to drum up support from environmentalists, government agencies, local officials and other sectors of society and the general public as well, to engage in programs that help mitigate climate change.

These mitigation programs include recycling and waste segregation, reforestation and coastal clean-up.

Ermita said that this coming April 24, a "Panata ng Bayan" will be conducted in Quezon City as part of the week-long Earth Day celebration themed, "Earth Survival, Climate Change Solutions." (PND)

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