

# 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) last April 1 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 (KAMPI) 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.



Chip Tsao

“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.

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-

sponse of Hong Kong Chinese who have Filipino domestics in their employ.

The threats to Chinese sovereignty by Russia and Japan they could live with, wrote Tsao. These countries have been mentors to China or exert major cultural influences on them. “But hold on—even the Filipinos?”

Manila’s Congress, said Tsao, has recently “threatened to send gunboats to the South China Sea to defend the islands from China if necessary. This is beyond reproach. The reason: there are more than 130,000 Filipina maids working as \$3,580-a-month cheap labor in Hong Kong. As a nation of servants, you don’t flex your muscles at your master, from whom you earn most of your bread and butter.”

Quipped Tsao: “As a patriotic Chinese man, the news has made my blood boil. I summoned Louisa, my domestic assistant who holds a degree in international politics from the University of Manila, hung a map on the wall, and gave her a harsh lecture. I sternly warned her that if she wants her wages increased next year, she had better tell every one of her compatriots in Statue Square on Sunday that the en-

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. ■

## 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 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. ■

## 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.

**Married life**  
She cited how she was using ICTs in her work with the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) and that this was also very applicable in the country. “It makes more sense for us because we are an archipelago. It is the easi-

est way to communicate.”

It was her first public appearance 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.

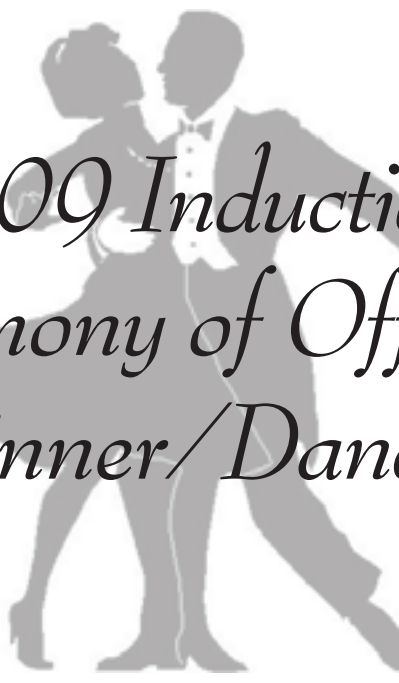
The eSkwela takes off from the ALS and uses digital modules loaded in computers. There are already 10 eSkwela centers in the country.

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. ■



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