

The Signs of The Times

PAGE A1 ◀

looked into the events, even summarizing important questions raised in the plenary by minority representative whom until the end fought against the resolution.

Observers believe the resolution paves the way for the extension of the term of President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo. One Congressman, Nueva Ecija Rep. Eduardo Nonato Josen, described it as "gang raping" the constitution. The Jesuit law expert Fr. Joaquin Bernas, echoed the solon's view in interview, as he admonished the Filipino people to "be enraged" with what some describes as another legal travesty back in the country.

The "ConAss" is just one of the three constitutional options considered in so far as the history of charter change campaigns in the Philippines is concerned. At least in the post-Marcos and Aquino eras, charter change became part of the more controversial agenda of various presidencies.

There was one in the time of President Fidel Ramos, and later on after him, during the short-lived term of deposed President Joseph Estrada. Arroyo, now almost done serving her term after being elected as a sitting President in 2004, has had the charter change train running all throughout her term. In her terms alone, the main pipeline had been the House of Representatives, where she enjoys partisanship of the majority.

The adoption of HR 1109 follows the narrative of conspicuous events. A few days ago, before she flew to her state visits, Arroyo convened her party Kabalikat ng Malayang Pilipino (Kampi), in its auspicious merger with Partido Lakas ng Tao (Lakas) and Christian-Muslim Democrats (CMD). This had been in the light of the upcoming presidential elections in 2004.

Many of the figures appearing in both the Pulse Asia and Social Weather Stations survey have come out to voice their candidacy and advocacies. The automation too of the national elections had been fast tracked, and curiously, only one bidder, the consortium led by automation trailblazer Smartmatic and Total Information Management System.

At the height of the sex video scandals and the various issues that had been lined up for resolution like the extension of the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program, observers noted the expediency of the congressmen, in what is described in Philippine media today as "railroading".

It is not surprising. While we all keep our eyes shut, it is known fact that two of the president's sons are sitting solons—Rep. Mickey Arroyo of Pampanga and Rep. Diosdado "Dato" Arroyo of Camarines Sur, have been actively soliciting signatures for charter change. Camarines Sur Rep. Luis Villafuerte, a stalwart of Kampi, meanwhile initially supported the resolution, only to back out while congress was in session.

The Internet is slowly becoming a very potent platform for discussing issues, and in the much recent brouhaha on the additional duties on imported books, manifestos and articles on the web helped bolster the government's decision to withdraw the tax duties imposed by the Bureau of Customs.

This time, cybercitizen Filipinos will surely wield their pens on Congress and we must expect the barrage of writings that would

come out of the World Wide Web. In the night the House passed HR 1109, netizens gave blow by blow accounts in real time, beating TV coverage that usually sign off at 12. And what's more, they have been "covering" the whole thing for a very long time.

"Paano na ang Pilipinas makaahon kong mismo ang mga mambabatas ay magugulo, at wala nang inatupag kundi ang sarili nila?" asks "limr22" at the ABS-CBN online news portal which featured an article on how the Senate would block the moves done by the lower house. "Ang daming dapat bigyan pansin pero ano ang ginawa nila wala?"

And despite the pledge of four assurances by the proponents of the resolution—which includes among others the exclusion of the discussion of term extensions for all elected officials, including the president and the vice president—some of the readers following this event share the fears of minority Cong. Roilo Golez of Parañaque.

Blogs have also been written as the news ran its course. Explainer and Inquirer columnist Manuel L. Quezon III in his blog www.quezon.ph, hit the newest development and also did a roll call of all the notable reportage done on the charter change. "But I'm operating from a particular point of view, which is that it seems more likely to me that the President and her people are more interested in consolidating their ranks going into 2010, and solving the problem of what happens after 2010, by making whoever is elected president irrelevant," he writes.

Makati Cong. Teddy Boy Loc-

sin meanwhile made a hilarious press statement that had become an important read the day after the passage of HR 1109. "This is a resolution calling for the convening of the Lower House of Congress as a constituent assembly the day before it adjourns. This is like sending out an invitation to a party on no date, for no stated occasion, while announcing that the host is leaving for a long vacation abroad," he wrote in his statement titled "Throwing a Party for No Reason and Inviting Only the Host. Locsin added: "This resolution mocks the House and holds it up to ridicule. If anything, it is a fit subject not of a vote but an ethics investigation of the proponents of this measure for inviting the contempt of the nation upon our House. This is a venture which can be described by only one word that politeness forbids me to say."

Some netizens have gone as far as renaming the House of Representatives into "Bastusang Pambansa", signing up shout outs on their social networking site profiles and publishing hate messages against their respective congressmen. The signs of the times are at work today, especially at the World Wide Web, where Filipinos are very much engaged and opinionated. To say the least, their legions are the feistiest we have seen in recent times. A lot of bloggers are writing about major national issues, and not just the ConAss. Discussions are still unfolding and a "silent majority", at least in the net is making its presence felt. Overseas voters too are watching, and are most probably awaiting the resolution to this resolution. ■

Mancao extradited, arrives in RP

PAGE A1 ◀

Mancao arrived in the Philippines on Thursday, June 4 and was immediately surrounded by heavy security. Mancao has feared for his life after agreeing to testify on the Dacer-Corbito case. He has requested for NBI agents to place a bulletproof vest on him when arrives at the Ninoy Aquino International Airport.

"The security is already prepared," said de Castro Jr. to the Asian Journal. "All of our officers will be ready for his arrival." More than 200 NBI security personnel were deployed along the route from NAIA to ensure Mancao's safety.

The *Asian Journal* spoke to ABS-CBN North America Bureau Chief Ging Reyes, who boarded the same flight as Mancao on Tuesday night.

Reyes during a stopover in Guam said she spoke to Mancao

in the plane. She said that Mancao is prepared for the media circus that awaits him in the Philippines. Mancao declined to specifically talk about the case, according to Reyes. Reyes described Mancao as sad when he spoke about his family. According to Reyes, Mancao said, "I'm only worth one bullet in the Philippines."

She added that Mancao is confident that the NBI will protect him. Mancao will stay in one office inside the NBI compound. His quarter is fully furnished with air condition, bed, refrigerator, television set, comfort room, and receiving area. But the windows in his room will be closed for security reasons. (*Joseph Pimentel*)

NP swears in Tamano and Laurel...

PAGE A1 ◀

them choose. I believe in the process and respect the party which I am truly honored to join."

Villar said, "*Mahalagang ang ating mga kababayan sa Mindanao, pati ang mga kabataan, ay mabigyan ng representasyon. Kaya ang pagpasok ni Adel ay isang welcome development at nagmamalaki ang partido. Naniwala akong marami pang darating gaya ni Adel na makikita ang magandang adhikain ng partido.*"

Tamano, who hails from Lanao del Sur, was accompanied by his wife Atty. Rowena Kapunan and her parents former Supreme Court Justice Santiago Kapunan and wife

Angie, Tamano's sister Bai Jamila and younger brother lawyer Aquil Tamano.

The erstwhile UNO spokesman earned his A.B. economics and law degrees from the Ateneo de Manila University in 1992 and 1996 respectively, following which he took up Masters in Public Administration at the University of the Philippines. He was the first Filipino Muslim to have graduated from the Harvard Law School with a masters degree in law.

Meanwhile, businessman Arsenic Laurel of the illustrious Laurel clan will run for Congressman of the third district of Batangas.

Following the oath-taking was an emergency meeting of the political party about the constituent assembly in the wake of the passage of the House Resolution 1109 urging Congress to convene for the purpose of amending the constitution.

Villar said, "*Inaasahan nating magkakaroon pa rin ng eleksyon sa 2010 at ating hahadlangan ang anumang tangkang baguhin ang sistema ng ating gobyerno. Mahalaga sa ating mga kasamahan, hindi lamang sa mababang kapulungan kundi pati sa Malacañang, na tingnan ang nararamdaman ng tao.*" ■

Family of Pinoy on Air France flight...

PAGE A1 ◀

Miguela said she was a bit disappointed with what happened, but she and the rest of her family are still hoping.

"Seaman *siya, mahusay siyang lumangoy* (He's a seaman and a good swimmer)," she said, but also prayed that if her husband really died, they want his body recovered so the family could give him a decent burial in Bulacan.

Seaman planned a family reunion

Jugueta was on his way home because he had planned a family reunion in time for the birthday

celebrations of his mother, son, and a nephew on June 5.

He also planned to extend his regular vacation until after he celebrated his 42nd birthday on July 9, since he was able to celebrate his birthday with his family in the country only three times in the last 18 years.

But despite the accident, the family will push through with the reunion, but not as Arden had planned.

They called on their families and friends to pray for Arden.

Published wire reports on the

Internet the other day said that the missing Air France jet carrying 228 people from Rio de Janeiro to Paris ran into lightning and strong thunderstorms over the Atlantic Ocean.

Air France Flight 447, an Airbus A330, left Rio on Sunday, May 31 at 7pm local time (2200 GMT, 6pm EDT) with 216 passengers and 12 crew members on board, wire reports said.

About four hours later, the plane sent an automatic signal indicating electrical problems while going through strong turbulence. ■

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