

DATELINE PHILIPPINES

Pardon an injustice, vendetta, says Noynoy

by AUREA CALICA
Philstar.com

MANILA—Sen. Benigno “Noynoy” Aquino III assailed the injustice done to his family by President Arroyo for granting executive clemency to the 10 former soldiers convicted of killing his father, former Sen. Benigno “Ninoy” Aquino Jr. and his alleged assassin Rolando Galman on Aug. 21, 1983.

The young Aquino, however, said his family had been expecting the release of the 10 convicts after the others were freed earlier. The senator lamented they could not do anything but accept that Mrs. Arroyo was no longer sympathetic to their cause after her falling-out with his mother, former President Corazon Aquino.

More than political vendetta, the senator said Mrs. Arroyo’s action could be a ground for impeachment for “betrayal of public trust and abuse of discretion.” But he admitted that any impeachment might not be possible at this time.

Aquino said his mother had told him not to comment on the release. He also expressed concern that people would think they did not know how to forgive.

But he insisted that the soldiers

were part of a grand conspiracy to neutralize his father upon his return from exile in the United States.

Aquino also pointed out that Mrs. Arroyo was sending the wrong message because the soldiers had not confessed to their crime and had not sought forgiveness.

He cited the testimony of former Senior Police Officer 4 Ruben Cantimbuhan, which he said indicated that the soldiers were part of the conspiracy.

Cantimbuhan, who was the driver of the van that carried the late senator’s body, said former Air Force Captain Felipe Valerio Jr. was the key to the case because he served as leader of the 10-man Aviation Security Command (Avsecom) unit assigned to secure his father upon his return. Cantimbuhan said the orders of Valerio puzzled him because he was asked to drive to the Philippine Army hospital that was quite far instead of bringing the late senator’s body to a nearer medical facility so he could be saved.

Senate Minority Leader Aquilino Pimentel Jr. expressed belief that Mrs. Arroyo granted the



Photo provided by People Asia shows soldiers of the Aviation Security Command on the tarmac of the Manila International Airport moments after Aquino and Galman were killed. The convicts continue to insist that Galman was the assassin.

pardon as a way of getting back at Mrs. Aquino, who had become the President’s critic after withdrawing support from her.

Pimentel said Mrs. Arroyo must be fair and start reviewing the records of all those qualified to be freed.

Senate President Juan Ponce Enrile, who served under the Marcos administration, said the release was just right because the soldiers had paid their debts being the least guilty among those who

planned and executed the killings of the late senator and Galman.

Enrile and Sen. Joker Arroyo said the Aquino family must go after the masterminds of the killings and not focus on the small players.

“I sympathize with Ninoy’s death but they have suffered enough. They have been in jail for too long. It’s about time they are released with their families. They are old, some have died and others are sick,” Enrile said. ■

Arroyo meets Cabinet in Boracay resort

by JOEL GUINTO
Inquirer.net



WHITE SAND STROLL. President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo leads members of her Cabinet in a walk on the white sands of Boracay. With the President are Science Secretary Estrella Alabastro (far left), Press Secretary Cerge Remonde (front, left), TESDA Director General Augusto Syjuco (left, behind the president), Agriculture Secretary Arthur Yap (third from right), Presidential Management Staff Chief Hermogenes Esperon Jr. (second from right), and Public Works Secretary Hermogenes Ebdane Jr. (far right).

BORACAY ISLAND—President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo made a pitch for the country’s tourist spots as she visited a newly-opened upscale resort and convened her Cabinet here on Tuesday, March 3.

“Welcome to the Philippines. *Biyaha na. Bakasyon na* [Let’s travel. It’s vacation time],” the President said.

Arroyo said the government would continue to improve infrastructure here, including the upgrade of the Kalibo and Caticlan airports and the construction of more sewerage and garbage disposal facilities.

In a speech at the Shangri-La Boracay Resort and Spa, Arroyo said tourism continued to be the “flag-bearer in economic progress and development” despite the global crisis.

“We will not stop. We will not be covered by the global crisis. The government, this administration, will continue to be a strong partner of the tourism industry as we promote our nation and its natural beauty,” she said.

The President said that over four years from 2004, tourism has grown at an average of 10.6 percent annually, the highest growth in 20 years.

She said construction has started for 7,000 new hotel and resort rooms worth P550 billion across the country, 2,000 of which, will open this year, giving jobs to 3,000 Filipinos.

Boracay, tourist arrivals reached 51,000 in January, up five percent from 48 percent in the same period last year. A five-percent increase in tourist arrivals was also recorded in Cebu during the same period. ■

GMA accepts unpopularity, avoids media

by PAOLO ROMERO
Philstar.com



President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo

MANILA — President Arroyo has accepted that she remains unpopular, but this has not weakened her resolve to push for her initiatives amid the global economic crisis, Press Secretary Cerge Remonde said.

The latest Pulse Asia survey showed that dissatisfaction with Mrs. Arroyo has remained unchanged in the past three months, but her public trust rating during the same period has improved.

The President’s ratings were lower in Luzon and Metro Manila and highest in the Visayas and Mindanao.

“The President has already accepted (low popularity) as part of the burden of her leadership,” Remonde told a radio interview.

“Her principle is that governance is not a matter of popularity now that we are in an economic crisis. For her, it is a matter of doing what needs to be done or doing what is right because in a time of crisis, we have to make difficult, maybe unpopular decisions and I think this is a true test of leadership,” he said.

But in Iloilo City, Mrs. Arroyo avoided reporters who tried to ambush her for an interview. She instead played the role of reporter, interviewing call center agents at the newly inaugurated Teletech Iloilo Delivery Center at SM City recently.

The President has been complaining she is unpopular because she refuses to be interviewed by media, and even shuns ambush interviews.

Remonde added that when it comes to surveys, Mrs. Arroyo tries to “stay above it” and focus on her work. He also noted the general trend of improvement in her ratings over the last few years.

“We are in an economic crisis so we can expect people to be a bit dissatisfied, but we in the Palace see that as a reason to really work harder,” he said.

He lamented the work of the Arroyo administration has not been widely reported and this contributed to the low satisfaction ratings.

He said as press secretary, he would do his best to improve public awareness of the achievements of the administration.

During the short ceremony inside the Teletech’s main production area, President Arroyo asked three call center agents why they applied for the job and what difference it has made on their lives, in a bid to highlight the importance of the Business Processing Industry (BPO) to the country in the midst of the global economic downturn.

Their answers confirmed Mrs. Arroyo’s message that with BPOs in the country, Filipinos need not go abroad and be away from their families just to have jobs.

The President said that the BPO industry in Iloilo City has made it possible for the graduates of universities and colleges in Iloilo to stay and be with their families, rather than relocating to Metro Manila or abroad just to find work.

Mrs. Arroyo stayed for less than an hour, then headed to Boracay for the Cabinet meeting.

Meanwhile, the President’s House allies advised her that the country’s resilience to the impact of the global financial crisis is more important than “unstable and unpredictable popularity ratings.” ■

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