

Ninoy slay brains still in RP—DOJ chief

by MARVIN SY
Philstar.com

THE brains behind the murders of former senator Benigno Aquino Jr. and Rolando Galman is still in the country, Justice Secretary Raul Gonzalez said last March 10.

Gonzalez said he could have unmasked the mastermind of the crime were it not for his suspension by the Supreme Court when he was the *Tanodbayan*, or Ombudsman, working as the main prosecutor in the double murder case.

"I would say that I've had this conclusion since I was *Tanodbayan*, in 1986, '88. Maybe if I were not suspended by the Supreme Court, I would have named that person," he said.

Gonzalez was ordered suspended from the practice of law by the Supreme Court in 1988 for gross ignorance of the law while working as lead prosecutor of the case.

Gonzalez said his suspension came when he was poised to question Capt. Felipe Valerio and Col. Romeo Ochoco.

Both officers had led the task force of the defunct Aviation Security Command (Avsec) tapped to secure Aquino at the airplane upon his arrival from the US on that fateful day of Aug. 21, 1983.

The military at the time pointed to Galman, a supposed communist hit man, as the killer. Galman, disguised as an airport crew, was eventually gunned down by security forces at the tarmac.

Gonzalez said he was able to track the whereabouts of the witnesses, sisters Ana and Catherine Oliva and Rogelio Taruc, who were supposed to shed light on the background of Galman, but the leads turned up empty after their remains were exhumed in Capas, Tarlac and identified by the National Bureau of Investigation (NBI).

Gonzalez argued the discovery of the bodies would have provided circumstantial evidence showing the link to the alleged mastermind.

Gonzalez though refused to name or reveal the identity of the supposed mastermind.

The Aquino-Galman case was closed after the conviction of the 16 Avsec soldiers who escorted the former senator out of the airplane.

Some of the convicts have already died but the rest have served their reduced sentence in jail. All of them maintained they had nothing to do with the murders.

Gonzalez said the Aquino-Galman case could still be reopened if Valerio is brought back to the country to face trial.

Valerio was named among the principal accused by the Tanodbayan in 1986. He was tried in absentia along with former Armed Forces chief Fabian Ver and was ordered arrested by the Sandiganbayan in November 2005.

Valerio fled to the US following the ouster of the late strongman Ferdinand Marcos in 1986.

Gonzalez said the double murder case could be reopened but only to charge Valerio.

In the case of Valerio, Gonzalez

confirmed the report of Public Attorney's Office (PAO) chief Persida Rueda Acosta that the former Avsec officer is shuttling from Seattle, Washington in the US to Vancouver, Canada, as a pilot.

Valerio is reportedly using the aliases Edwin Salvador and Philip Valeo.

Duty bound

The military, for its part, said they are willing to help in the search for Valerio.

Armed Forces Civil Relations Service chief Brig. Gen. Gaudencio Pangilinan said they are duty-bound to cooperate and assist in the search of the former Air Force officer.

Pangilinan said the military would cooperate in any effort by other law enforcement agencies to track Valerio's whereabouts.

President Arroyo had earlier ordered the Department of Justice (DOJ) to lead the efforts in tracking down Valerio.

Mrs. Arroyo said the double murder case would be reopened

once Valerio is extradited to present new evidence.

Pangilinan said the search for Valerio would fall under the military's counter-intelligence operations.

Meanwhile, the Kilusang Bagong Lipunan (KBL), the political party founded by Marcos, expressed full support yesterday for the reopening of the double murder case in the effort to unmask the real brains of the crime.

KBL chairman Vicente Milliora said they are supporting calls for the reopening of the case that has left many questions unanswered, among them who had ordered the assassination of Aquino and the killing of Galman.

The assassination of Aquino was primarily blamed on Marcos, and triggered his historic ouster from Malacañang.

The military has claimed that Galman, a lone communist gunman, was the assassin.

Even after the soldiers who went to fetch Aquino from the air-



plane were convicted of the murders and eventually served their sentence, the PAO claimed they have new evidence which points to Galman as the assassin.

Milliora said the search for the truth in the killing should have been seriously done when Aquino's widow Corazon succeeded to the presidency.

Considering she had a personal stake in it, Milliora said Mrs. Aquino should have exerted thorough effort to uncover the real brains behind the assassination of her husband. ■



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