

'GMA, First Gentleman have divested from interests'

PRESIDENT Arroyo and First Gentleman Jose Miguel Arroyo have long divested from their business holdings and their financial records are always open to scrutiny to the public, their lawyers said.

Lawyer Ruy Rondain said the Arroyo couple has already divested from all the corporations mentioned in the report made by the Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism (PCIJ) that detailed the First Couple as incorporators or having business interests.

Romulo Macalintal also explained the names of incorporators of a corporation are on the records of the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC).

"This does not mean that they remain connected to the firm, he said.

"I checked, they've (First Couple) divested," Rondain told a news briefing at Malacañang.

Rondain and Macalintal made the effort to defend the First Couple amid the increasing calls for the Arroyos to explain their wealth as reported by the PCIJ over the weekend.

Opposition lawmakers have threatened to initiate a congressional investigation over the PCIJ report.

The controversy was sparked by the PCIJ report that showed Mrs. Arroyo's wealth supposedly doubled since 2001, based on her statements of assets, liabilities and net worth (SALN) that she filed annually.

The PCIJ report also indicated possible discrepancies or omissions in the President's SALN.

Rondain said the PCIJ should have made the effort to verify if the First Couple are still involved in the corporations before coming out with the article.

He explained the information on a corporation indicating its incorporators would also include the General Information Sheet (GIS) that contains the latest data on the company, including its present owners.

"This information is all in one file so maybe this could be solved by just a little more research," Rondain said.

Macalintal said Pres. Arroyo reiterated her position that she stands by the truth and veracity of her SALNs.

He said Mrs. Arroyo authorized the Office of the Ombudsman to obtain and secure from all appropriate government agencies, including the Bureau of Internal Revenue, the documents that may show her assets, liabilities, net worth, and business interests in filing her SALN.

"In other words, her position as President does not exempt her from being investigated on any matter stated in her SALN," Macalintal pointed out.

"The law is very clear in that her obligation is to file her statement (SALN). It is now up for the concerned agency to look into any allegation of defect or irregularities in the preparation of this document or any issue that may be raised as to the contents thereof," he said.



Militant groups dramatize their protest by eating noodles and dried fish at Plaza Miranda, Quiapo, Manila, condemning the Arroyo administration for spending thousands of dollars in a classy restaurant in New York. Philstar photo by Edd Gumbaan

Macalintal also said Mrs. Arroyo gave assurances that there has been no conflict of interest involved in the investments made by the First Couple in the stock market.

He said the SALNs that were made under oath, "only proves that she can defend all that is stated therein."

The two lawyers said the Arroyo couple have agreed to cooperate in any investigation into their wealth that may come their way even though they questioned the possible motives and the basis for the probes.

"It's very clear it is the requirement of the law that anyone who submits his or her SALN certified that he or she authorizes the Ombudsman to undertake any investigation," (Philstar.com)

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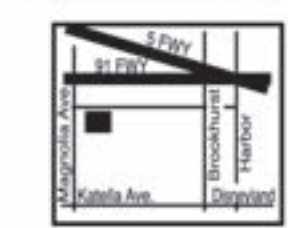


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Loren reconciles with Vice President Noli

by AUREA CALICA
Philstar.com

SEN. Loren Legarda has reconciled with Vice President Noli de Castro.

Speaking to reporters, Legarda said she had made peace with De Castro during a flight to Cebu where they both stood as godparents in a wedding that was also attended by President Arroyo and former President Joseph Estrada.

During the Mass for the late

President Corazon Aquino last week, she had thought about talking with De Castro, against whom she had filed an election protest after his election for vice president in 2004, she added.

Legarda said De Castro was seated in front of her while she was beside Senate Minority Leader Aquilino Pimentel Jr. and his wife Bing during the Mass.

"Nene (Pimentel) said, 'there Noli is in front of you,'" she said. "And I said, 'he is included.'"

Legarda said she took the

chance to speak with De Castro while they were together on the plane headed for Cebu last Saturday, Aug. 8.

"I told him, I've already forgiven all those who sinned against me, in 2004, before 2004, after 2004," she said.

"And he told me, I am not doing anything. I said, let's no longer exchange blame, what's important is I have forgiven."

Legarda said she and De Castro talked about family, their farms and trees, their respective

children and how they worked together at ABS-CBN Broadcasting Corp.

She was the one who approached De Castro and gave him ensaymada, she added.

Meanwhile, Legarda said she was holding talks with Sen. Francis Escudero for a possible tandem under the Nationalist People's Coalition in next year's presidential elections.

However, she said she was not in negotiations with former President Estrada. ■

Binay urges opposition to carry one presidential bet

by ROEL PAREÑO
Philstar.com

ZAMBOANGA CITY—United Opposition (UNO) leader and Makati Mayor Jejomar Binay called on his fellow opposition presidential aspirants to make the supreme sacrifice and give way for a common candidate in order to ensure the opposition's victory against the administration bet in next year's polls.

"Kailangan you have to

sacrifice, for us to have a common candidate," Binay said, hoping that opposition aspirants would attend the unity meeting and respect what would be decided.

Binay was in Zamboanga last weekend with fellow opposition leader, former President Joseph Estrada.

Binay also dismissed critics' tirades that the opposition party is fragmented because a number of opposition candidates have signified their intention to run for the presidency in 2010 polls.

"Wala naman kaming problema dyan sa opposition, 'yong mga nagtatanong lang ang nagsasabi na hindi kami united. (We don't have a problem in the opposition, those who are asking are the ones who say that we are not united.) We cannot be simplified, like if he is administration it follows you are administration, it's not like that," Binay said.

But Binay said they have

various shades of oppositions.

"Meron instant coffee opposition, meron oposisyon oposisyon lang, (pseudo opposition)."

However, he said the real opposition is a party that is determined to field a common candidate following two criteria.

"First, will an aspirant allow or tolerate the actions of the present administration?"

Second, will an aspirant make a similar call of unity, just like what the late former Pres. Corazon Aquino did, to heed the call to have one common candidate to win the race?" asked Binay.

Meanwhile, opposition Senator Rodolfo Biazon is not convinced that their ranks could come up with a unified and single presidential candidate against the administration for next year's elections.

"That is next to impossible," said Biazon, a Liberal Party (LP) stalwart.

Biazon was in Bayombong, Nueva Vizcaya for the World

Indigenous People's Day celebration.

Biazon expressed doubts on the opposition's capability to unite and rally behind a common presidential standard bearer, considering the Filipinos' propensity for political pride and ambitions.

"Evensmallgroups, (including) farmers' (association), and even Filipino communities (overseas) could not even come up with a unified leadership. They are divided when it comes to electing their leaders," he said.

Noli not bent on running

Meanwhile, San Jose City second district Rep. Gilbert Violago said Vice President Noli de Castro is not bent on seeking a presidential post next year.

Violago said that De Castro's prolonged reluctance to join the administration coalition as its presidential standard-bearer is a clear indication that he is not at all obsessed with the presidency. ■

Recto eyeing return to Senate—Ermita

by TJ BURGONIO
Inquirer.net

SOCIO-ECONOMIC Planning Secretary Ralph Recto resigned from the Cabinet to prepare for the 2010 senatorial elections, Executive Secretary Eduardo Ermita said on Tuesday, Aug. 10.

"He's running for senator, and he wants to prepare early enough," Ermita said in a phone interview, quoting presidential political adviser Secretary Gabriel Claudio.

Ermita said he had not seen Recto's resignation letter as of late Aug. 10, but said he believed that President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo would not stop him from leaving the Cabinet to pursue his political plans.

"I don't suppose the President will prevent him from doing so because that is his personal preference," he said by phone. "That's an individual choice. What can we do? That's his privilege," Ermita added.

It was Arroyo who announced at the start of the closed-door Cabinet meeting at the Department of Foreign Affairs that Recto was making his "valedictory" report on the Global Recession Impact News (GRIN), Claudio said.

Arroyo also said that Recto was resigning effective August 16, but has not named a replacement for him, he said.

Recto's announcement of his resignation was surprising, and his reason even more surprising. He has been quiet about his political plans unlike some Cabinet members who have been coming out with print or TV ads.



Recto lost in his reelection bid in the 2007 elections which some saw as an offshoot of the public backlash against his sponsorship of the value-added tax on goods.

"He's an excellent Cabinet member, and he's very good team player. He deserves an opportunity to prepare adequately for his political plans," Claudio said in a phone interview.

"Everyone has his own sense of timing," he said when asked if it wasn't too early for Recto to

leave the Cabinet and prepare for the elections.

Claudio, secretary-general of the administration coalition Lakas Kampi CMD, indicated that eight Cabinet members would quit in November to run for public office, but did not name them.

"He's a shoo-in for the administration slate, and for victory in 2010," he said by phone Tuesday night, confirming that Recto would run under the administration coalition.

Ermita doused speculations that Recto's resignation had been prompted by his public wrangling with Energy Secretary Angelo Reyes on their different computations of the oil price increases.

"They're on good terms," he said. ■

SWS: Government performance still bad...

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Gary Olivar said while the news was welcome, "this doesn't change the President's basic philosophy to govern for performance and posterity, not popularity."

Olivar added that "polls are fickle, but the President's achievements will stand the test of time and the judgment of history."

Meanwhile, the non-commissioned survey showed that the Arroyo administration received poor ratings on Fighting infla-

tion (-14), Ensuring that no family will ever be hungry and have nothing to eat (-21), and Eradicating graft and corruption in the government (-21).

Its rating on the issue of Eradicating graft and corruption switched from "bad to poor" or up by 11 points from -32 to -21.

It became less negative for Ensuring that no family will ever be hungry and have nothing to eat, by five points from poor -26 to poor -21, and Fighting inflation, by three points from poor -17 to poor -14.

SWS said dissatisfaction with the performance of the Arroyo administration eased in all areas, with the sharpest improvement noted in Mindanao.

The national administration's net satisfaction rating rose by 16 points in Mindanao, switching from a poor -18 in February 2009 to a neutral -2 in June.

The survey used face-to-face interviews of 1,500 adults divided into random samples of 300 each in Metro Manila, Visayas, and Mindanao, and 600 in the balance of Luzon. ■



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