

# Palace won't prevent ZTE witness from testifying

By MARVIN SY

Malacañang said yesterday it will not prevent Philippine Forest Corp. chief executive officer Rodolfo Lozada Jr. from testifying at the Senate in its inquiry into the controversial \$329-million national broadband network deal with ZTE

Corp. of China.

Executive Secretary Eduardo Ermita said that Malacañang was neither hiding Lozada from the Senate nor involved in the alleged abduction of the Senate witness at

the Ninoy Aquino International Airport (NAIA) in Parañaque City the other day.

Ermita said that he does not know what the Senate wants from Lozada when all of the issues have already been an-

swered in the past by Commission on Higher Education chairman Romulo Neri.

Moreover, Ermita said that the President has already canceled the NBN-ZTE deal so the issue should already be fin-

ished.

Ermita said that there is no reason for them to prevent Lozada from attending the Senate hearings.

"We will not. It's his (Lozada's) call," Ermita said when

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asked if the Palace will prevent Lozada from testifying.

He said there is no reason for Palace officials to instruct Lozada to invoke Executive Order 464 if ever he does appear before the Senate.

At the moment, Ermita said that the Palace has not been informed by the Senate about what they would be asking Lozada during the hearing.

"We cannot presume to know and then we will say

you invoke 464 when we don't even know what questions will be asked of him," Ermita said.

Ermita reiterated that he believes the NBN-ZTE deal is no longer an issue since the President ordered its cancellation last year.

However, he admitted that there is nothing the executive branch can do to prevent the Senate from pursuing its investigation as a separate con-

stitutional body.

Regarding the incident at the NAIA-1 last Tuesday, Ermita said that the Palace had nothing to do with it and that the matter has been cleared up by the Philippine National Police.

Ermita said that he saw nothing irregular about the incident at the NAIA and that it was well within the rights of the PNP to keep silent about their involvement in securing Lozada.

PNP chief Director General Avelino Razon Jr. has informed

Ermita that Lozada asked for security from the police before returning to Manila from a trip to Hong Kong and London.

"In other words what the PNP did was a regular function of the PNP. As to why they did not come out in the paper, that's their call," Ermita said.

He said that Malacañang is already used to being blamed for everything but in this particular case, he reiterated that there is no reason for them to interfere.

"What's there to be worried about?" Ermita added.