

'GMA may recall ERC chief's appointment'

By PAOLO ROMERO

President Arroyo may recall the appointment of Energy Regulatory Commission (ERC) Chairman Zenaida Ducut if serious allegations against her are found to be true, officials said yesterday.

Offhand, however, Executive Secretary Eduardo Ermita and Press Secretary Jesus Dureza dismissed criticisms of Ducut's appointment and defended Mrs. Arroyo's prerogative to pick officials of her choice.

Ermita said Ducut, a former two-term lawmaker and lawyer from Pampanga, was qualified for the post and detractors are expected to pounce on the issue of her appointment to the ERC.

"The President is very discerning in her appointments and she chooses very well," Ermita said in a telephone interview.

"She also is receptive to suggestions and criticisms so if these allegations are proven, she may reconsider her move," Ermita said. "But these criticisms are expected (and) they must (be) proven also."

STAR columnist Federico Pascual, in his article yesterday, asked whether Ducut was related to Leslie Ducut and Ressie Ducut, both from Pampanga, who were among the incorporators of a firm that was awarded by the National Power Corp. (Napocor) a P956-million contract

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to supply coal for some of its plants.

The deal, he said, raised eyebrows because the firm, Transpacific Consolidated Resources Inc., reportedly only had P62,500 in paid-up capital but was "gifted" by Napocor with a coal supply contract worth nearly P1 billion.

"We always find some redeeming value to criticisms however, sweeping and unfair they may be," Dureza said on negative comments against Ducut and recent appointments of Mrs. Arroyo.

He said the President, by rea-

son of her office, "does not need anyone or an additional office for that matter for the purpose of protecting herself or promoting personal interests as some critical sectors merrily claim."

He said the residual powers of the presidency are so vast in reach and depth that no additional office or person can further enhance it.

"Moreover, it should not surprise anyone that persons who are close or perceived to be close to the President are appointed," Dureza said. "The President merely ensures that the team she has to work with

are those whom she thinks she can perform and can approximate her rigorous demands of performance and diligence."

"After all, the President, as appointing authority, takes responsibility and either benefits or suffers from the appointees' performance or lack of it," he said.

He said the bottom line is the President's trust and confidence in officials she appoints.

He said the views of critics are valuable as they are "cautionary in nature and constant reminders that public office, whomsoever it is bestowed is endowed with public interest, closeness to the appointing authority notwithstanding."