

# 'GMA's SONA to offer hope'

By PAOLO ROMERO

President Arroyo will offer hope to Filipinos and galvanize them into action against rising food and fuel prices when she delivers her eighth State of the Nation Address (SONA) before a joint session of Congress today, Malacañang said yesterday.

In separate inter-

views, Executive Secretary Eduardo Ermita and Press Secretary Jesus Dureza said Mrs. Arroyo would enumerate the accomplishments of her administration and assure the nation that neither her low ratings nor the economic downturn will distract her from

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pursuing reforms.

"The numerous accomplishments that the President will enumerate are not just based on reports given to her office but those that she personally verified and validated, those are accomplishments that she personally visited," Dureza said.

Ermita said Mrs. Arroyo would point out in her SONA that the current oil and food crises are worse than that 1997 Asian currency crisis.

She will show that the country fares better compared with its neighbors and its growth continues, he added.

Ermita said Mrs. Arroyo would also justify the need to continue the value-added tax (VAT).

She will cite the favorable ratings the country has been obtaining from credit rating agencies and other financial institutions since the VAT was implemented three years ago, he added.

Presidential Management Staff chief Cerge Remonde said Mrs. Arroyo will also present during her SONA Filipino heroes and other success stories to "put a face" to the successes of the administration's programs.

"They are living and actual examples of good news and hope," he said.

Mrs. Arroyo will present a public utility driver whose earnings increased because of the government's campaign against corrupt cops, as well as a farmer and a fisherman as examples of the administration's success on land reform and agriculture, Remonde said.

Deputy Presidential Spokesman Anthony Golez said Mrs. Arroyo would present 13-year-old Rodney Berdin, who saved his entire family from drowning at the height of typhoon "Frank" in Antique, and other individuals in her SONA today.

"The President wants to show that each of us Filipinos can become beacons of hope and heroism for our families, communities and the entire country," he said.

"Each Filipino is capable of heroic acts no matter our station in life."

Golez said the family's house was washed away when the Sibalang River overflowed at 7 a.m. on June 21.

His 40-year-old mother and two younger sisters aged seven and three accompanied Berdin to Malacañang.

Dureza said Mrs. Arroyo has been going around the country to check on the status of various infrastructure projects, while giving aid and livelihood to poor families hit by the rising prices of food and fuel.

Remonde said Mrs. Arroyo made a final rehearsal of her SONA Saturday night that lasted until past 1 a.m.

With her was close adviser Lupita Kashiwahara and Remonde.

During breaks, she would check on the progress of the Cabinet security cluster meeting on the latest impasse on the peace negotiations with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front.

Meanwhile, ousted President Joseph Estrada plans to deliver his own state of the nation address to contradict Mrs. Arroyo's speech before Congress.

However, Lito Anzures, United Opposition (UNO) political adviser, cannot say if Estrada would deliver his SONA today, Monday, or some other day.

"President Estrada will definitely deliver his own counter SONA," he said.