

Rallies peaceful – PNP

By CECILLE SUERTI FELIPE and RICHIE PADUA

It was "very peaceful" nationwide during President Arroyo's eighth State of the Nation Address (SONA) before Congress yesterday, the police reported.

Chief Superintendent Mirasol Samolona, Philippine National Police (PNP) spokesman, said not a single untoward incident related to

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the SONA was recorded in any part of the country.

After the SONA, rallyists started to voluntarily disperse from the rally zone along Commonwealth Avenue in Quezon City, he added.

Bartolome said before and during the SONA, the PNP crisis management committee met at PNP headquarters in Camp Crame, Quezon City to monitor the situation.

The management committee meeting was presided over by Deputy Director General Jesus Verzosa, PNP deputy chief for administration as Director General Arolino Razon Jr. was attending the SONA at the Betasing Paribansa, he added.

Metro Manila police commander Deputy Director General Gary Barias said some 7,000 rallyists joined the mass action along Commonwealth Avenue.

"The conduct of the rallies for SONA was generally peaceful, no rallies occurred in designated freedom parks like Merdola, Livragas Bonifacio, Edsa Shrine and Ayala (Avenida)," he said.

Shortly after the SONA, the estimated 7,000 rallyists started to leave Commonwealth Avenue, he added.

Barias said some 6,200 police, military and traffic enforcers from the Metro Manila Development Authority (MMDA) were deployed in areas around the Betasing Paribansa during the SONA.

Of the 6,200 anti-riot policemen, some 1,700 were deployed on China River (Merdola) Bridge across Malabon and eight other areas in Manila, he added.

Barias said some 500 policemen were fielded at Edsa Shrine in Quezon City and 3,000 at St. Peter's Church along Commonwealth Avenue near the Betasing Paribansa.

Anti-riot policemen were also deployed at the Senate and the Philippine International Convention Center in Pasay City, he added.

Quezon City police director Senior Superintendent Magtanggol Gokhale said the number of protesters along Commonwealth Avenue peaked at 3,500 to 4,000 during the SONA.

The stretch of Commonwealth Avenue towards the Betasing was guarded by 1,000 anti-riot police, troops, firemen aboard fire trucks and traffic enforcers from the MMDA, he added.

Senior Superintendent Federico Lactio Jr., Quezon City police deputy director for operations, said their first line of defense was near Ever Gateco mall.

The lane board for Fairview in front of St. Peter's Church was blocked by four container vans, barbed wire and concrete barriers, he added.

Military trucks guarded the EBP Road leading to the Betasing complex, he added.

Just before noon, protesters belonging to the Dagong Alyansang Makabayan tried to go beyond Ever Gateco mall.

After a brief negotiation, the protesters were allowed to march a few meters away up to the New Capitol Estates subdivision.

At around 3 p.m., rallyists from Akbayan and allied groups crossed the lane leading to the Quezon Memorial Circle and attempted to march to St. Peter's.

Anti-riot policemen blocked

them before they could reach the church.

The rallyists then decided to hold a small program and dispersed at around 4:30 p.m.

As night fell, the number of protesters dwindled.

Minutes before the SONA, at around 3:45 p.m., protesters from Dagong Alyansang Makabayan burned a 25-foot tall effigy of Mrs. Arroyo in what appeared to be a sinking ship, which they named M/V Pilipinas.

Militants rally in Davao City

In Davao City, hundreds of members of the different militant groups, led by Bayan Muna marched to the city's main thoroughfare yesterday to protest against Mrs. Arroyo's SONA.

"It's a lie," said former Bayan Muna congressman Joel Vinzonsok, who was among the organizers of the protest rally.

Vinzonsok also condemned the efforts of police here to stop at least nine hundreds of protesters at the vicinity of Barangay Islangan in Davao City.

"We condemn this delaying tactic by the police. In the first place, we have not committed any violation," he said.

"We were able to get the necessary permits from the city government for our rally but I think they do not respect the permit,"

Vinzonsok said police put up many checkpoints in the route leading to the city center.

"The more that they keep us stranded here, the more that we will be delayed in joining the rally," he said.

The policemen have been getting the plate numbers of our vehicles."

Lumads rally

Hundreds of Lumads converged in Davao City yesterday for a three-day conference on the real state of the Lumads.

The conference shall delve on the government's failure fully implement the Indigenous Peoples' Rights Act (IPRA) 10 years after it was passed into a law.

The indigenous peoples shall discuss the government's stringency on the promise to release 100 certificates of ancestral domain titles (CADT) each year as Mrs. Arroyo had promised when she delivered her first SONA in 2001.

Organized by the Mindanao-based Legal Rights and Natural Resources Center, the indigenous peoples will question the government's release of only 27 CADTs seven years after Mrs. Arroyo vowed to look into the plight of the Lumads.

FP's daughter at rally

The daughter of Fernando Poe Jr., Mary Grace Poe-Llamanzares took part in an anti-SONA rally in Quezon City yesterday.

"I remember that some of the Arroyo administration's officials were belittling my father's platform when he ran for the presidency years ago," she said.

"They said that my father's platform was too simple. Yet, many years passed, but the administration still failed to address that simple issue to provide food for the people."

"Today, the situation is getting worse since more people are getting poor and going hungry."

Llamanzares criticized the administration for continuing to impose the 12 percent value-added tax (VAT).

"It is an added burden to the already impoverished Filipino people," she said.

Llamanzares called on the administration to provide an-