

'GMA will not be toppled'

By PAOLO ROMERO

President Arroyo is in no danger of being toppled amid what Malacañang describes as new attempts to destabilize the government, Palace officials said yesterday.

Executive Secretary Eduardo Ermita said Mrs. Arroyo is being briefed on the alleged

destabilization plot, including developments on the police investigation of a bombing and the planting of explosive devices in Metro Manila.

Mrs. Arroyo is on self-quarantine at the Asian Hospital in Muntinlupa City following

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her recent visits abroad as a precaution against the A(H1N1) influenza virus.

Ermita said she personally briefed Mrs. Arroyo on the latest intelligence report over the destabilization effort.

Security and intelligence officials had revealed an opposition leader is behind the latest power grab by utilizing rightist military elements to overthrow the government.

Palace officials, however, maintained Mrs. Arroyo remained unperturbed by the turn of events, which, as Press Secretary Cerge Remonde has said, has become "seasonal" whenever the President is about to deliver her State of the Nation Address (SONA) three weeks from now.

"The government is stable, no question about it," Ermita told a news briefing at Malacañang.

"You know that this is not the first time this is happening... so we're used to this and the authorities have an SOP (standard operating procedure) for this," Ermita said.

"It's not that serious as people might think it is but it's worth looking into and we should not be lax about it and the people would think we are not reacting enough," he said.

Since the explosion that rocked the Office of the Ombudsman last Sunday and the failed bombing attempt at the Department of Agriculture (DA), Ermita said the National Capital Region Police Office (NCRPO) has been on alert and "has taken enough measures" like deploying policemen in vital government offic-

es. Ermita also noted the spate of bombings and anti-government rallies had increased as the President prepares for her SONA that the opposition wants to discredit.

"There are those people who are not exactly with the government—let's call them detractors—are trying to set up a situation so that there is a reason for them to cause some mischief as far as the administration is concerned," he said.

The worst that could happen, Ermita said, is "a destabilized environment."

"But the situation is not that bad and our intelligence agencies are closely following that up," he said.

Ermita also dismissed allegations that the administration is behind the spate of bombings to justify the imposition of martial law.

"Anybody can always concoct their own scenario," he said.

Defense Secretary Gilberto Teodoro also slammed reports involving "disgruntled military officers" in the latest destabi-

lization attempts against the government.

Teodoro expressed his disgust over the reports that once again implicated military men over the latest power grab.

"Recently we have seen once again some sinister attempts to create division and disharmony among our ranks, pitting brother officer against brother officer," he said.

"We appeal to those who are doing this for their selfish ends, choose another playground to play your games in. The Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) is solidly behind the Constitution," Teodoro said in his speech during the 62nd anniversary of the Philippine Air Force at Villamor Air Base in Pasay City.

Threat pattern

Ermita also said police investigators are still looking at the "signature" of the explosive devices retrieved from the DA office and fragments from the Office of the Ombudsman to possibly determine their maker.

Police also confirmed another bomb was planted at a condominium in Quezon City, a day after the explosion at the Office of the Ombudsman.

"It would appear based on in-

vestigation assessment, it's not the signature of the usual terrorists, meaning the Abu Snyyal," Ermita said.

Philippine National Police (PNP) chief Director General Jesus Verzosa said the AFP is helping out in analyzing the explosive devices.

"The PNP and the AFP are trying to analyze what are the component of the bombs. There is no reason to be alarmed," Verzosa said.

He said the police are analyzing the pattern of bomb threats whenever President Arroyo is about to deliver her SONA.

Investigators learned the bomb attack at the Ombudsman bore the similar style in the bombing of Philtrust Bank in Quezon City in 2005.

Police have

tightened security on all government offices following the incidents at the DA and the Ombudsman.

The police in the country's financial district of Makati City were also placed on high alert against possible bombing attacks.

Employees and officials at the Office of the Ombudsman were also sent home yesterday following a bomb scare.

Bomb experts of the Quezon City Police District (QCPD) inspected the entire premises of the Office of the Ombudsman

along Agham Road and declared the threat was just a hoax.

"I think it's (threat) from someone who wants to ride on the issue," Superintendent Franklin Moses Mabanag, chief of the QCPD's District Mobile Group, said.

Mabanag said the Office of the Ombudsman called up QCPD after receiving the threat in the text message. — With Reinir Padua, Michael Punongbayan, James Mananghaya, Rudy Santos, Jose Rodel Clapano, Dennis Carcamo