

GMA better than other presidents – Enrile

By MARICHU VILLANUEVA

Despite the scandals that rocked her administration since she took over the government in January 2001, President Arroyo has “done better” than her predecessors.

Senate President Juan Ponce Enrile gave this assessment of the administration of Mrs. Arroyo, who is set to deliver her final State of the Nation Address (SONA) before the joint opening of the third session of the 14th Congress

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this Monday at the Batasang Pambansa in Quezon City.

Sitting for the first time as Senate president since his installation after a leadership coup in the Upper Chamber in November last year, Enrile acknowledged the accomplishments of Mrs. Arroyo for the past eight years of her admin-

istration.

"Except for these talks about loose governance that led to wastes in government finances, not being candid to the people, etc., without these probably, she has done better than past presidents that we had," Enrile told **STAR** editors.

He did not go into details but he

obviously referred to a number of scandal-tainted government contracts that were investigated by the Senate, including the controversial fertilizer fund scam and the alleged overpriced national broadband network (NBN) deal with ZTE Corp. of China.

The 85-year-old Enrile gave his candid remarks even as president of the opposition's Partido ng Masang Pilipino (PMP) whose titular head is deposed President Joseph Estrada. Enrile, a re-electionist senator, is touted to head the 12-man senatorial slate of the opposition in the coming May 2010 elections.

Enrile especially credited the President for attaining sustained growth of the Philippine economy that has cushioned the country from the severe impact of the global financial crisis that has crippled the US, Europe and other big economies of the world.

"One thing though why we're not so much affected by the global financial turmoil compared to our neighboring countries today is our inflation rate is so low. So there is no pressure for salary hike," Enrile pointed out.

"But the impact is not so

much although our (government) revenues are affected because of the (economic) slowdown, the collection of our BIR (Bureau of Internal Revenue) is in danger of being eroded," he explained.

On top of the list of accomplishments of the administration, Enrile cited Mrs. Arroyo's being able to establish across the Philippines the so-called nautical highway through the Roll On, Roll Off (RORO) program of the government, or the inter-modal transport system that connects Luzon to Mindanao via ferry ships.

Making a mental random note of the accomplishments of the outgoing administration, Enrile credited the President also for the construction of new airports and upgrade of existing ones to international standards like those in Boilo, Silay, in Davao, Subic and Clark Freeports as well as NAL-3.

Enrile also mentioned the other flagship projects of the Arroyo administration that included development infrastructures from north in La Union to Rosario, Cavite to the next SC-TEX or the Subic-Clark Expressway "to the very dangerous" Halsema Highway in Mountain Province.

"She (President Arroyo) did a lot of things to modernize the agriculture, too," he added.

Enrile talked about wide-ranging national concerns in Congress and politics during a roundtable luncheon meeting he hosted with **STAR** editors last Tuesday.

During the same occasion, Enrile

expressed his belief there would be no attempt by their House colleagues to convene Congress into a constituent assembly (con-ass) under House Resolution 1109 that pro-administration congressmen approved before they went on recess last month.

Since his assumption as the chief of the Upper Chamber, Enrile is proud of the accomplishments of the Senate under his stewardship in having passed a number of bills that were either signed into law by the President or have lapsed into law.

Only last Tuesday, Enrile joined Mrs. Arroyo and Vice President Noli de Castro in the signing ceremonies of Republic Act 9679 that amended the charter of the Home Mutual Development Fund (HMDF) or Pag-IBIG Fund. The signing of RA 9679 came a week after the President also signed RA 9653 that extended the period of the Rent Control law.

When sessions resume next week, Enrile vowed to push for the passage of his pet bills before Congress winds down this year. Specifically, Enrile pushes for Senate Bills 3147 or the proposed imposition of 3 percent franchise tax in lieu of all other taxes collected by the government to reduce the cost of electricity and SB 3148 that seeks to remove the royalty taxes collected by the government on natural gas to also reduce the cost of electricity. The Senate has approved the twin bills but its counterpart bills are pending at the House.