

Palace: GMA critics deserve SONA rebuke

By PAOLO ROMERO

President Arroyo's critics deserve the "stinging rebuke" they got in her last State of the Nation Address (SONA) on Monday, Malacañang said yesterday.

Some 12 governors also went to the Palace yesterday to reiterate their support for Mrs. Arroyo.

Speaking to reporters, Press Secretary Cerge Remonde dismissed claims of the opposition that the SONA was not

truthful and did not face the issues she needed to address.

"It was a stinging rebuke to the critics and oppositionists who have been hounding her of late, hoping to make political capital out of her refusal to take the low road which they themselves find so congenial for their own ambitions," he said.

"And yet to judge from their expressions of indignation at her remarks about

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them, or their incredulity at her achievements despite all the facts she mustered, one wonders if her critics were in fact watching the same speech as the rest of the country."

Remonde said opposition members were only listening to themselves.

The SONA was "memorable" that made her official family proud in serving our people with her, he added.

In going to Malacañang, Misamis Occidental Gov. Loreto Leo Ocampos, president of the League of Provinces of the Philippines, said they are "testifying to the truth of the data presented by the President."

"We are the ones on the ground, we know what is happening in the provinces, cities and municipalities and barangays," he said.

Ocampos said in 2001, his province was among the top 10 poorest provinces, but that it is no longer the case.

On the other hand, Dinagat Islands Gov. Geraldine Ecleo said her province was also among those elevated from the poorest provinces due to the assistance and economic opportunities under the Arroyo administration.

"It's about time that the President hit back at the opposition," she said in Filipino.

"We would not allow vicious attacks against her and what she said (in her SONA) were not enough. If I were in her place, they would have heard things from me that they have never heard in their entire life."

Basilan Gov. Jum Akbar said people in her province are very grateful for the security and development assistance that allow businesses to sprout in the area.

"We came here to express what our people feel for her," she said.

Military lowers alert in Metro

The military has lowered the alert level in Metro Manila following the generally peace-

ful opening of the 14th Congress and Mrs. Arroyo's last State of the Nation Address.

Half of the more than 3,000 troops in Metro Manila have returned to barracks, while the other half remain on standby, according to Maj. Carlo Ferrer, Armed Forces National Capital Region Command spokesman.

Two days before the SONA, NRCOM chief Maj. Gen. Leo Joggy Fojas placed troops in Metro Manila on red alert as part of security preparations.

Last Saturday morning, troops were mustering at Armed Forces headquarters in Camp Aguinaldo, where an array of armored personnel carriers were also placed on standby.

An Army Scout Rangers Regiment from Fort Magsaysay in Nueva Ecija was also called in to reinforce a composite combat force from the Army, Air Force and the Navy under the command of Fojas.

Military agents deployed in rallies

Lt. Col. Romeo Brawner, Armed Forces spokesman, denied yesterday that six people allegedly caught spying on anti-Arroyo rallyists last Monday were military agents.

"But even if in case they were soldiers, the rallyists do not have the right to maul the said persons," he said.

However, Brawner said the military fields plainclothes men in rallies to ensure that terrorists and other criminals would not infiltrate the protest actions.

"This happened in the Hacienda Luisita incident, where we saw rallyists with guns. But when we identified these people, we found that they were members of the New People's Army," he said.

"Because of that experience, we have to take precautionary measures, including fielding plainclothes policemen and military officials." - Paolo Romero, Jaime Laude, James Mananghaya