

News and Notes

EUGENE C. REYES*

International Developments

On Philippine-American Relations

Two senior U.S. officials reported to Capitol Hill their forecast for the Philippine economy and its president — their outlook: stormy weather for both. On the economy, disagreement with the IMF targets for economic performance delayed the much needed US\$113 million standby loans. According to Bernardo Villegas of the Center for Research and Communications, a Manila-based private research foundation, inflation was up by 25% this year, unemployment by 15%, underemployment at 40%, considered highest in the Asian region.

Marcos on the other hand continued to receive criticisms from the influential U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee. Assistant Secretary of Defense Richard Armitage was noted to have said that “the pace of economic, political and military reform was insufficient to arrest the growth of the (Communist) insurgents,” even as 45 New People’s Army (NPA) cadres surrendered and 3,000 alleged sympathizers swore allegiance to Marcos in a displayed mock ceremony at the Presidential palace. Meantime Marcos had a five-hour news conference with the TIME magazine-sponsored NEWSTOUR during which he selectively answered the questions raised.

The principal U.S. demands were military reforms, open elections and an efficient economy freed from the corrupt group of Marcos cronies. Marcos was predicted to fall in three years and America fears losing its Clark Air Base and Subic Naval Station, the two largest military installations outside the continental United States.

* Graduate Assistant, College of Public Administration, University of the Philippines.

As 2,000 women paraded near the presidential palace in protest of the "Marcos-Reagan Dictatorship," U.S. Ambassador Stephen Bosworth charged that 15 Americans have been killed in the Philippines during the past two years, four of them allegedly in the hands of security forces.

Senator Richard Lugar of Foreign Relations Committee stated: "Our patience is running out, but I don't think President Marcos has gotten the word." In a further step, Senator David Durenburger of Minnesota directly called Marcos to step down.

Local Developments

Snap Elections

In an unexpected move, President Ferdinand Marcos approved Cabinet Bill No. 7 calling for special presidential elections to be held on February 7, 1986. In what the political opposition calls a very cunning move, the snap elections includes the office of the vice-president long absent in the roll of elected public officials since the onset of martial law in September 21, 1972. Many however believe that the election is tied up with the World Bank/IMF requirements for the release of the stand-by credits badly needed by the financially-strapped Marcos government. The U.S. government is also pressuring Marcos to implement immediate reforms in his administration if they are to extend any foreign aid and suggested that Marcos needed a fresh mandate from the people.

Among the opposition bets are Mrs. Corazon C. Aquino, widow of slain opposition leader and staunch Marcos critic, ex-Senator Benigno S. Aquino and Salvador P. Laurel, a prominent politician who served as Senator in the old Congress and member of parliament in the Batasang Pambansa. The opposition is still at odds whether to field in a joint candidate or not despite the knowledge that a separate ticket will mean divided votes and a slimmer chance of defeating Marcos. Aquino herself was an unwilling participant and gave her consent only after a million and a half signatures were gathered endorsing her candidacy. Without Laurel's better organized party which is the United Democratic Opposition (UNIDO), Aquino's crusaders are at a disadvantage. They lack the experience in the political game aside from the fact that they are up against Marcos, a seasoned and veteran politician, who also has the government machinery dominated by his party, the Kilusang Bagong Lipunan (New Society Movement), under his control.

Meantime Marcos released P62 million as Christmas bonus for government employees and P14.9 for soldiers. At the same time he implemented

a military reorganization wherein sixty officers were rotated to different posts. Fraud was expected in the elections by the opposition. "We believe Marcos will do his worst," said Laurel even as Marcos stated that foreign officials will be permitted to monitor the balloting and the National Movement for Free Elections (NAMFREL), a non-partisan citizens organization will be accredited by the Commission on Elections (COMELEC) as independent poll-watchers.

Sandiganbayan Verdict on the Aquino-Galman Double Murder

One hundred fifty people crammed into a Manila courtroom to hear a clerk of court and two interpreters read for two hours a ninety-page decision by the Sandiganbayan on the trial of 26 men charged with conspiracy in the Aquino assassination on August 21, 1983. The verdict of "not guilty" in effect rejected the findings of the Agrava Commission, the civilian fact-finding board especially constituted to investigate the Aquino murder. The justice dismissed all evidence that supported the prosecution's arguments. It will be recalled that Rolando Galman, the alleged gunman, managed to penetrate a 1,199 man security cordon at the Manila International Airport to shoot ex-Senator Benigno Aquino. However, U.S. Undersecretary of State Michael Armacost commented that the verdict was impossible to reconcile with the Agrava Board's conclusion.

Upon the verdict's announcement, Armed Forces Chief of Staff General Fabian Ver, 65, one of those indicted in the conspiracy, immediately headed for the presidential palace and requested his reinstatement as Armed Forces Chief of Staff. President Marcos approved Ver's request and penned the marginal on the letter that (the request) "is hereby approved for such a period as may be decided upon by me."

The Reagan Administration openly opposed Ver's reinstatement. State Department Undersecretary Michael Armacost noted that it raises questions as to whether factional loyalties or professional accomplishments will determine advancement in the Philippine Armed Forces.

Marcos was quick to counter such criticism and said: "if my intention was to fix the case, then I could have dropped the charges against General Ver from the beginning because (Fact-finding Board Chairperson Corazon) Agrava insisted that Ver had nothing to do with the murder." It is to be noted however that Marcos cannot just order the dropping of the charges without raising any legal question since the prosecuting arm (the Sandiganbayan) is supposedly a duly independent judicial body.

College Developments

College Reorganization Update

Plans are underway for the reorganization of the College. Committees were formed to study the feasibility of integrating existing programs into a more efficient organization. The committees were the Committee on Academic Programs and Committee on Plans and Programs. The proposed reorganization would take into account the future direction of the College, its goals, management policies, priorities in programs and projects to be undertaken, and the organizational structure of the programs. Included in the proposal are the merging of the Research and Publications Program and the Administrative Development Center to form the Center for Policy and Administrative Development. The publication functions of the Research and Publications Program will be transferred to a newly created unit, the Publications Office. The integration of the Office of the College Secretary with that of the Academic Program is also being proposed with the head of the new office to be called "Secretary and Director of Studies". The reinstatement of the Bachelor of Arts in Public Administration is still being deliberated upon.