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Gloria's Swan Song

SACRAMENTO, CALIF., July 28 (PinoyGlobal) - Finally, the much awaited ninth -- and final -- State of the Nation Address (SONA) by President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo came to pass. With all the hoopla in the press about what she was going to say, one thing was very apparent, it's all about self-glorification. It was her farewell address -- her "swan song."

Interrupted 120 times by applause and laughter, Gloria boastfully trumpeted her achievements last year. The members of Congress unabashedly praised her to Heaven. It was the crowning moment of her political life, the pinnacle of her presidency. She was on cloud nine.

As she was addressing the members of Congress, including the cream of the elite seated at the gallery, it probably brought nostalgic moments in her life. Daughter of the "poor boy from Lubao" who became president. And, now, she, too, is president. Father and daughter. The first dynasty to reign over what was once called the "Pearl of the Orient Seas," and now, the "Sick Man of Asia." She'll change all that that if they'd only give her more time. Yes, her dream of an "Enchanted Kingdom" is still alive, she tells herself. But why won't the people allow me to make that dream a reality, she asks herself? Why don't they trust and love me, she laments. I have one shot to change that and now is the time to do it, she tells herself.

So, she started her address by lowering her audience's expectations: "Throughout the world tens of millions lost their jobs; billions across the globe have been hurt -- the poor

always harder than the rich. No one was spared." Silence. No applause. Great! That would put the audience's gloom at par with her popularity with the people, -31. That's minus 31.

And then she said, "But the story of the Philippines in 2008 is that the country weathered a succession of global crises in fuel, food, then in finance and finally the economy in a global recession..." Applause. "Good news for our people, bad news for our critics..." Applause. "I did not become President to be popular. To work, to protect and preserve our country, our people, that is why I became President..." Applause. "I want our Republic to be ready for the first world in 20 years..." No applause. Oops! That didn't sell. Nobody was ready for that, I guess.

Gloria then recited a litany of work she accomplished. She went on and on...

And then came the moment everybody was waiting for: "At the end of this speech I shall step down from this stage but not from the Presidency. My term does not end until next year. Until then, I will fight for the ordinary Filipino. The nation comes first. There is much to do as head of state -- to the very last day."

Like the pugilist Manny Pacquiao who was grinning from ear to ear in the VIP section in the gallery, she attacked her critics, heartlessly pummeling them left and right. "I have never done any of the things that scared my worst critics so

much. They are frightened by their own shadows.”

And then she finally said, “I have never expressed the desire to extend myself beyond my term.” Yes, in words she didn’t. But her actions seem to suggest otherwise, that she had -- or still has -- a strong desire to stay in power beyond 2010. But let’s defer to her on that issue for now. Certain things can still happen between now and June 2010. But for now, let’s presume that this is it -- she’s stepping down from the presidency at the end of her term on June 30, 2010.

As to her achievements, let the chips fall where they may. It is, however, interesting to note that while Gloria was delivering her SONA, the IBON Foundation released a report titled, “Arroyo’s Presidency’s Economic Legacy: A Distorted and Disintegrating Economy.” It says that “the main drivers of growth have been in activities essentially disconnected from the domestic economy and unable to contribute to any broad-based economic dynamism especially overseas work but also such as low value-added export manufacturing and business process outsourcing (BPO).” Further, it says, “With a population of 90 million, a labor force of over 38 million, and poverty of at the very least 28 million. The national economy needs to be directed to meeting the needs of all of these Filipinos which entails, without exaggeration, radical structural changes breaking the inertia of decades of backwardness.”

The IBON report concludes: “Certainly there is still much work to be done in building economic and political democracy in the country even as, slowly and painstakingly, there has been progress. The Arroyo presidency has set back that progress, even as the growing struggle of Filipinos build the

foundations of expanding what is politically possible in the period to come.”

Gloria’s SONA and the IBON report are like day and night in comparison. Gloria painted in broad strokes a vibrant economy and a bright future for the people framed in gilded opulence. IBON cut it to the chase and said it as it is -- no frills, no bells, no whistles. Just the facts. And facts don’t lie.

As Gloria stepped down from the dais after delivering her SONA, the final chapter of presidency begins: “Lame Duck.” This is the period in a president’s life that is unthinkable... and detestable. Just the thought of stepping down from power and all the perks and privileges that come with it is enough to drive into depression those who thrive on power.

Recently, President Manuel Zelaya of Honduras tried it... and failed. Zelaya maneuvered to add a referendum in the upcoming November 2009 general election to ask voters whether they want to convene a Constituent Assembly (Con-Ass) for the purpose of writing a new constitution. On June 28, 2009, soldiers seized Zelaya on orders of Honduras’ Supreme Court and sent into exile.

I hope that Gloria would realize that she’d be taking a big risk should her allies in Congress proceed with convening a Con-Ass. She survived several attempts to remove her from power only because cooler heads in the military prevailed in supporting a duly installed president. The question is: Will the military protect her if she decides to cling to power after her term ends in 2010? I don’t think so. What do you think?