



Perry Diaz

PerryScope

By Perry Diaz
Sacramento, California

Perry Diaz

Was Panlilio's Ouster a Hatchet Job?

SACRAMENTO, CALIF., Feb. 17 (PinoyGlobal) - The ouster of Gov. Fr. Ed Panlilio from the governorship of Pampanga once again reinforces the belief that the Commission on Elections (Comelec) is being used to "terminate" the political lives of the enemies of President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo. Panlilio was the third governor who got axed for not playing ball with Gloria.

The day before Panlilio's ouster, Comelec declared that Bulacan Gov. Joselito "Jonjon" Mendoza lost the recount to former Agrarian Reform Secretary Roberto Pagdanganan.

In December 2009, Comelec ousted Isabela Governor Grace Padaca and declared former Governor Benjamin Dy the winner in the 2007 elections.

In addition to the three ousted governors, several other LP candidates have been targeted.

Naga City Mayor Jesse Robredo, who has been mayor for 18 years, has a pending disqualification case on the issue of citizenship.

Another LP candidate who has a pending case in the Comelec is Batangas Vice Governor Jose Antonio "Marc" Leviste II who is seeking reelection.

Meanwhile, the Comelec's First Division disqualified LP member Abraham Kahlil Mitra from the Palawan gubernatorial race on the issue of residency. Comelec said that Mitra

failed to prove his residency which Mitra vehemently denied.

In my article, "Czarina and the Priest" (February 24, 2009), I wrote: "It all started when Panlilio and other governors were invited to a breakfast meeting at the Malacañang Palace in October 2007. During the meeting, a presidential aide handed brown envelopes to the guests without any explanation. The brown envelope that Panlilio received contained P500,000. After a few days -- not knowing what the money was for -- Panlilio went public and disclosed the money which he believed was a bribe."

Panlilio vs. Arroyo

Panlilio's exposé of the bribery was tantamount to a declaration of war against Arroyo. Pretty soon, Pampanga's vice governor, provincial board members, and all the municipal mayors ganged up on Panlilio and openly opposed him on everything he did or wanted to do.

Unfazed by the resistance, Panlilio persisted and held his political enemies at bay. Last year, people believed to be associated with Lilia Pineda -- one of two candidates that Panlilio defeated in the gubernatorial election in 2007 -- launched a recall petition against Panlilio. Some people questioned if Gloria's son, Rep. Juan Miguel "Mikey" Arroyo, had a hand in initiating the recall move.

The recall did not materialize and Panlilio's enemies looked

for other ways to remove him from office. The Panlilio-Arroyo war came out in the open when Panlilio accused Gloria and Mikey of “coddling” the jueteng protectors in Pampanga.

Recount

Things got worse for Panlilio when he launched his presidential bid. And when he vowed that he will prosecute Gloria should he win the presidency, his enemies went into high gear and decided to file a recount petition against him.

On February 11, 2010, the Comelec’s Second Division, in its ruling penned by Commissioner Nicodemo Ferrer, said that Pineda -- who lost by 1,147 votes to Panlilio in 2007 -- got 190,729 votes against Panlilio’s 188,718 votes, a margin of 2,011. However, Commissioner Lucenito Tagle, in his concurring opinion, differed with a lower margin of only 356 votes!

How could the huge discrepancy happen? What was the basis for the commissioners’ conflicting counts? Shouldn’t they have reconciled their numbers first and resolve any discrepancies before issuing a “final decision” ousting Panlilio? It only proves that the recount process was inaccurate and not credible. It looks farcical.

It is interesting to note that the Panlilio-Pineda recount was completed way back in October 2009 and the Comelec decision was supposed to have been announced last November. However, it was leaked out that Pineda won in the recount. But the commissioners said that their “final decision” might come as a surprise to everybody. It would seem that there were issues that had yet to be resolved.

The silence during the three-month hiatus that followed was deafening. Were the “players” trying to work out a face-saving and amicable “settlement” for Panlilio? But once again, Panlilio pulled a fast one on them. He surprised everybody when he changed his plan to retire from politics and go back to priesthood. Instead, he filed his Certificate of Candidacy for governor on the last day of filing. The news must have zapped Arroyo and Pineda with a double whammy. And that was probably the reason why the “final decision” to oust Panlilio was issued. In my opinion, if Panlilio did not file

for reelection and retired at the end of his term on June 30, 2010, the Comelec would have declared him the winner in the recount -- thus allowing him to finish his term -- and Pineda would run virtually unopposed for governor.

With Gloria running for a congressional seat representing Pampanga’s second district and her son, Mikey, a Galing Pinoy party-list nominee, the governor’s support is a key factor to ensure the Arroyos’ victory in the elections. And with Lilia Pineda as governor, the Arroyos would be able to utilize provincial resources -- which they would not be able to use if Panlilio remained in office -- for their campaigns.

In politics, nothing happens by accident. Every move politicians make have been hatched ahead of time and the execution is just a question of timing. And the “hatchet jobs” done on Panlilio, Padaca, and Mendoza couldn’t have been more timely.

Adonis vs. Gloriath

With the elections barely three months away, the electoral process enters a crucial period where incumbent governors could play a pivotal role in electing candidates for national and congressional seats. And whoever ends up controlling the House of Representatives would get the Speakership. A few days ago, Agusan del Norte Rep. Jose Aquino announced that the Lakas-Kampi-CMD will field Gloria Arroyo as its bet for Speaker in the next Congress. He bragged, “PGMA (Mrs. Arroyo) will win as Speaker hands down. She continues to wield power and influence. So if her detractors think they’ve seen the last of her, they are mistaken. She’ll be around longer than they think.” That’s arrogance!

It is now clear what the final moves of Gloria are going to be. Just a few more moves before she goes for the ultimate checkmate... unless she is checkmated first by Adonis Simpao who is challenging her in Pampanga’s second congressional district election. Simpao and his supporters promised that Gloria will have the fight for her political life. Indeed, it’s going to be like the biblical battle between David and Goliath. It’s going to be Adonis vs. Gloriath. Never in the history of the Philippines would one district election determine the future of the entire nation.