

Written by Nene Pimentel Press Office  
Friday, 18 March 2011 08:52 -

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Former Senate Minority Leader Aquilino "Nene" Q. Pimentel, Jr. today chided Malacañang for holding what he termed "sham consultations" on the proposed deferment of the election in the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao scheduled by law to be held in August this year.

"I'm afraid that the so-called consultations conducted recently in the cities of Cotabato, Marawi and Zamboanga ostensibly to determine the sentiments of the people on the controversial proposal to defer the August elections to 2013 and appoint officers-in-charge were all for show," Mr. Pimentel said.

"It appears that Malacañang has already made up its mind to postpone the elections and proceed with the insidious scheme to appoint its own people to key positions in ARMM," the former senator said.

Former Senator Pimentel said concerned citizens from as far away as Manila and Tawi-tawi had traveled all the way to the three dialogue venues to articulate their vehement opposition to the poll postponement plan and yet were not given enough time to share their views and were practically ignored by organizers.

Mr. Pimentel described the recent consultations as reminiscent of the “citizens assemblies” in the 1970s where people were herded by government functionaries to give a stamp of approval to the policies of the martial law government.

“Malacañang seems determined to pursue its poll postponement plan despite widespread opposition to it from the overwhelming majority of Muslim voters. This is out-and-out tyranny that should not be allowed by all freedom-loving Filipinos,” Nene Pimentel said.

The former senator, who hails from Cagayan de Oro City, said that while he supports President Aquino’s efforts to lead the nation to the righteous path, he cannot agree with any attempt “to take shortcuts in the democratic process and thwart the people’s will by postponing elections on flimsy arguments.”

## **Muslim Congressmen Want to Hold the ARMM Elections**

Meanwhile, Muslim congressmen led by Sulu Rep. Tupay Loong believe they have sufficient numbers to convince the national government to push through with the August election in ARMM.

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Representative Loong lamented that there seems to be an ongoing power play in the Lower House, with pro-postponement advocates now aggressively trying to win over opponents to their side.

"It is the Muslim voters who should be able to decide who should lead them, not lawmakers or any other public officials. Elections are supposed to give people the freedom to choose the people who should lead them," Mr. Loong said.

"Democracy would be seriously undermined if we deny people their right to elect their own leaders," the Muslim lawmaker added.

Meantime, the Commission on Elections has declared that the ARMM elections would be held as scheduled unless there is a bill passed by both chambers of Congress postponing the political exercise. The poll body has already scheduled voters' registration in ARMM from March 21 to 31. # # #

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