

Today we inaugurate a new format in presenting the commentaries and thoughts of Aquilino “Nene” Q. Pimentel, Jr., the minority-floor leader of the Philippine Senate. Senator Pimentel, an established writer and a prolific book author, is perhaps the number-one national leader insofar as communications is concerned. He is the only national leader who normally replies to all e-mails sent to him. And usually he or his staff member replies within 24 hours after receipt of e-mails or slow mails. The Office of Senator Pimentel is also the number-one sender of press releases in the entire Congress of the Philippines.

Some of Senator Pimentel’s political remarks are published in our sister site, the www.revotelution.com. Readers may also visit the official website of Senator Pimentel at <http://www.nenepimentel.org>. Here are, therefore, the commentaries and/or statements of Senator Pimentel this week:

Date: July 16, 2009

* On RP as Least-Competitive Asian Country, According to World Competitiveness Ranking

The country is the 'least competitive' among other Asian countries because of a variety of reasons, among which are: 1. corruption is massive 2. Law and order in shambles and 3. Active rebellion in Muslim Mindanao.

Fraudulent deals like the NBN-ZTE and the North Rail contracts, and awarding huge contracts like the Laiban dam project and the recent purchase of 1.5 million metric tons of rice from Vietnam without public, transparent and clean public bidding discourage investments from coming in and cause some of those already in to get out of the country.

* On Arroyo's Meeting with President Obama at the White House

While President Obama's invitation to GMA to visit him in the White House on July 30 is good for her publicity-wise, it won't change her self-serving style of governance. I think that not even St. Peter's invitation for her to visit the Pearly Gates would save her from the dissatisfaction and disgust that the people feel for her.

Let the 100 or so members of Congress go with her on this visit to the White House. Then they will realize that the country would be better off without them.

* On Amnesty for Abu Sayyaf

The Abu Sayyaf is a bunch of extremists who are shunned even by their co-religionists because of their patently unIslamic ways that bank on kidnapping, mayhem and violence to intimidate, harass and kill those who stand on their way.

If only we can rely on their word that they would 'turn over a new leaf', that would go a long way to establish law and order in the areas where they operate.

Unfortunately, even the governor of Sulu had said that only an 'all- out war' against the Abu Sayyaf would cause them to mend their ways.

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Date: July 14, 2009

* Military and Police Urged to Neutralize Abu Sayyaf Bandits

Senate Minority Leader Aquilino Q. Pimentel, Jr. (PDP-Laban) today expressed elation over the release of Red Cross volunteer Eugenio Vagni even as he urged military and police authorities to intensify the pursuit operations against the Abu Sayyaf bandits in Sulu and Basilan.

Mr. Pimentel warned that kidnap-for-ransom incidents will continue in Minda

nao

unless government forces mount sustained attacks against the Abu Sayyaf until they are completely neutralized.

“The government must now show that it is in control of the situation by arresting and punishing the terrorists and kidnappers and restoring law and order in the areas where they operate,” he said.

“Otherwise, it will be business as usual for the kidnappers after a few days of respite.”

* Statement of Senator Pimentel on Unioil Petroleum’s Cutback of Prices of gasoline by P4.75 per liter, diesel by P3.50 and kerosene by P1.50

The UNIOIL should be praised for setting a precedent for other oil companies when it cut down prices substantially for gasoline, diesel and kerosene.

If other oil companies follow suit, it will enable our consumers to buy essential commodities at much lower prices than they cost at present.

The government should respond not by raising the excise tax on oil but in fact by lowering tariff duties on oil and oil products wherever possible.

Date: July 10, 2009

* On former President Corazon Aquino

What I recall of Cory is she is a straight-talker as a politician. What she has said, that's it. She is a very honest person and completely reliable. I can say without her at the presidency, the Local Government Code, which I

sponsored, would never have come to pass because the Code diminishes the powers of the presidency to the extent that those powers are devolved to the local government officials.

She is also a person who is detached from power – she has no selfish attachments to the powers of the presidency. She has led the restoration of democracy in our country. With that, I believe the Filipino people owe her lot.

Date: July 9, 2009

* On Government-MILF Peace Talks

The ancestral domain thing for the Moros can be threshed out under a federal form of government. There is no other way of doing it. But this will need a constitutional amendment. Otherwise, you will dangle the same thing

which has been rejected by them. The danger is at some future time, another group will say, we are not MILF.

There has to be a Bangsa Moro Federal State under my proposal.

On plan of President Arroyo to seek OIC help in Mindanao peace talks during her trip to Egypt to attend the Non-Aligned Movement

Any effort to bring in the moral support of the Organization of Islamic Conference is a step in the right direction. Among the Muslim countries, I would suggest that we seek the help of Indonesia. Indonesia has always been a friend of the Philippines in that respect.

Even during the Marcos years, Indonesia has discouraged the smuggling of arms, for example, from their end to our part of the country. On the matter of

encouraging the rebels to take up arms,
Indonesia
has always put down any effort of that kind.

* On Government's Response to the Spate of Bombings

It is obvious that the response of government is very weak and utterly unconvincing. Of course, we do not expect solutions overnight, but what is important is the government must send the message that it is on top of the situation. It is running after the culprits and soon there will be people behind the bar because they are running after the bombers without any respite.

And to say that the bombings will come to Manila, that is an alarmist statement. That should not even come from responsible government authorities.

(Bombings connected to President's SONA) – Probably so, although I do not think that the SONA is that important. I think that just like the implant, we are making a mountain out of a molehill.

For government to say we are monitoring (the bombings), that is a very unconvincing and unresponsive kind of statement. It is important that they be a little more forthright – assuring rather than engaging in very vague terminology that only adds to the situation of instability that is now obtaining in the country.

(Necessity of convening the National Security Council) May be that could be a move. If the NSC is better run, that may be worth it. But I am not to sure that the meeting of the NSC will add to the enlightenment of the people and the security of the republic.

Apparently there is some kind of an effort... This is not a secret... (National Security Adviser) Bert Gonzales has come up with an idea of a transition government. It has been publicized. Bert Gonzales should know that a transition government cannot be done by a decree or the wishes of the President. It has to be constitutional amendment.

(If Malacanang is thinking of a state of emergency due to spate of bombings, should it be nationwide or limited to Mindanao?) A state of emergency can be declared to meet a specific threat in a specific location. It need not be nationwide.

(Should it include Metro Manila?) I would think that might not be constitutionally defensible. There has to be actual threat before an emergency on the part of government – not only actual but probably a consummated act of violence that shows a pattern that threatens the lives of people. That will probably be the only justification for a suspension, for example, of the civil liberties we are enjoying. # # #