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## Villafuerte says JdV lobbying for Joey

BY MARICEL V. CRUZ Reporter

SPEAKER Jose de Venecia had been lobbying with government officials to get his son's contract for the national broadband network approved, one of the de Venecia's critics in the House of Representatives said Wednesday.

Rep. Luis Villafuerte of Camarines Sur, president of the Kabalikat ng Malayang Pilipino (Kampi), said in an interview on dzMM radio there is evidence that de Venecia was somehow involved in the NBN controversy.

"I think there is evidence that Speaker Jose de Venecia, the father himself, had also sought the assistance of other government officials to help his son in this project," Villafuerte said. "That is what is going around in the House now."

Jose "Joey" de Venecia 3rd is an executive of Amsterdam Holdings Inc., a company that competed for the multimillion contract. The deal went to the Chinese company, ZTE.

Like House Minority Leader Ronaldo Zamora, Villafuerte believes the Speaker and his son may have violated the antigraft law which prohibits family members or relatives of Speaker, the President, Vice-President and the Senate President, from applying for or participating in a government contract.

Asked how the young de Venecia's disclosure against the President's husband, Jose Miguel "Mike" Arroyo, would affect de Venecia's leadership in the House, Villafuerte said the answer would depend on how de Venecia will effectively address the reforms in the chamber.

Villafuerte, who supported the speakership of Kampi colleague Rep. Pablo Garcia of Cebu, said any move to oust de Venecia now

See JOEY A2

# Chinese press RP on broadband deal

BY DARWIN G. AMOJELAR Reporter

THE Chinese government appears to be determined to push through with the National Broadband Network deal, despite the raging political controversy.

On the same day Jose "Joey" de Venecia 3rd testified before the Senate, representatives from the Chinese Embassy in Manila met with officials of the Department of Transportation and Communications (DOTC). The Chinese reportedly said they want the \$330-million deal awarded to ZTE Corp. of China to push through.

The Chinese party that went to the DOTC included Liang Wentao, economic and commercial counselor of the Chinese Embassy in Manila; Li Sa, deputy director of the Department of Asian Affairs; and officials from China's Ministry of Commerce—Weng Shengwen, commercial counselor; and Wang Yingqi, deputy director of the Department of Foreign Economic Cooperation.

The Chinese party met Secretary Leandro Mendoza, reportedly about "how they can help resolve" the controversy.

On Wednesday, Mendoza issued a press statement saying ZTE officials visited him, and they were still keen on the broadband project.

"The representatives of the Ministry of Commerce of the People's Republic of China came to my office to ask about the status of the NBN project, and to reiterate their support for the project," according to Mendoza's statement.

In a disclosure to the Hong Kong Stock Exchange, ZTE Chairman Hou Weigui said his company is consulting with the DOTC about the temporary

See DEAL A2

## Woman talk



President Gloria Arroyo share a light moment with US Ambassador Kristie Kenney before the signing ceremonies for the memorandum of agreement for Ahon Pamilyang Pilipino Program and the Mindanao Peace and Development in Malacañang Wednesday. MALACAÑANG PHOTO/MELYN R. ACOSTA

## Estrada wants complete pardon

FORMER President Joseph Estrada said he would not consider a deal from President Gloria Arroyo, demanding an unconditional pardon from his archival after his corruption conviction.

In a telephone interview with Agence France-Presse on Wednesday, Estrada again insisted he was innocent and said he would soon file an appeal. Last week, Sandiganbayan sentenced the 70-year-old former president to life in prison on two counts of plunder.

"I will accept an absolute or unconditional pardon," Estrada said from his villa in Tanay, Rizal, where he is under house arrest.

"I will never admit I am guilty. I have been in detention for six years and went to the court. I could have left the country, but I did not."

Estrada, who was deposed in an army-backed popular revolt in 2001, was the first president in Philippine history to be convicted of plunder.

It was alleged that the former movie star had amassed more than \$80 million

See PARDON A2

## Wack Wack meeting a 'chance encounter'

THE spokesman of Jose Miguel "Mike" Arroyo on Wednesday admitted the President's husband met with Joey de Venecia in Wack Wack Golf and Country Club in March, but it was a "chance encounter."

In a press conference in Makati City, the spokesman, Jesus Santos, said Mr. Arroyo also denied he had intimidated de Venecia into backing out of the National Broadband Network (NBN) project.

"Why would the First Gentleman berate the Speaker's son when the incident being referred to by Joey was the first meeting between him and Mr. Arroyo, a purely chance en-

counter?" Santos said.

To prove he has nothing to hide, Mr. Arroyo is planning to cut short his vacation and face

the Senate investigation of the controversial project, he said.

De Venecia testified before the Senate blue-ribbon commit-

tee on Tuesday the meeting had been arranged by Transportation Secretary Leandro Mendoza, who had wanted de Venecia and Commission on Elections Chairman Benjamin Abalos Sr. to reconcile after clashing over the ZTE deal.

In his own recounting of what had transpired in Wack Wack, Santos said Mr. Arroyo had gone to the club to play golf. Mendoza introduced Mr. Arroyo to de Venecia, who was following up his project proposal with Mendoza.

De Venecia's Amsterdam Holdings Inc. had applied for the NBN deal, which was

See ENCOUNTER A2

## Palace execs allowed to attend Senate inquiry

PRESIDENT Gloria Arroyo has allowed Cabinet officials implicated in the \$329.4-million national broadband network project fiasco to attend the Senate inquiry on Thursday.

Executive Secretary Eduardo Ermita told reporters on Wednesday the President instructed the Cabinet members linked to the ZTE issue to attend the Senate hearing.

Ermita said the President would like to send the message "that there's really nothing wrong with all these issues and the admin-

See INQUIRY A2

## Instant floods

A monsoon-induced downpour brought floods to Malabon City and other low-lying areas in Metro Manila Wednesday morning. The floods prompted the suspension of classes in Malabon.

PHOTO BY RENE H. DILAN



## 2 Bulacan areas among world's dirtiest places

BY CHINO S. LEYCO Reporter

THE town of Marilao and Meycauayan City in Bulacan have been rated by an environmental group as among the dirtiest places on earth.

The New York-based Blacksmith Institute has included the two places on its "Dirty Thirty" list of the World's Worst Polluted Places for 2007. The study was based on the group's monitoring of pollution levels in different parts of the globe.

The list includes Chernobyl in Ukraine and Tianying and Lanfin towns in China.

Marilao and Meycauayan are the only

See PLACES A2

## TODAY

**PESO-DOLLAR RATE**  
US\$1 = PHP45.57  
Closing price Wednesday

## EDITORIAL

**Going after the loot**  
THE decision of the World Bank and the United Nations to go after dictators and corrupt leaders and recover ill-gotten wealth could not have come at a better time.

## LOTTO

For complete lotto results, text TIMES LOTTO and send to 2299

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