

Del Rosario has no business using diplomatic passport: Duterte

MANILA -- Former Foreign Affairs Secretary Albert del Rosario has “no business” using a diplomatic passport now that he no longer works for the government, President Rodrigo R. Duterte said on Wednesday night.

Duterte made this remark after del Rosario was denied entry at the Hong Kong International Airport and held and questioned for six hours last June 21.

“It was Albert representing ‘yung nahuli sa Hong Kong, idinetain. Naggamit-gamit ng passport na hindi naman dapat (when he was detained in Hong Kong. He was using a passport that he should not have used),” Duterte said in his speech during the 122nd founding anniversary of the Presidential Security Group (PSG) at Malacañang Park.

“When you are no longer an employee of government, you have no business using a government diplomatic passport,” he added.

Presidential Spokesperson Salvador Panelo earlier maintained that del Rosario “created his own problem” by using his courtesy diplomatic passport for his recent personal trip to Hong Kong.

“He (del Rosario) created his own problem so why blame the government for what happened to him,” Panelo said in a Palace briefing on Tuesday (June 25).

“In other words, when you file a case dapat alam mo ang magiging (you should know that) consequence (is) adverse,” Panelo said.

Del Rosario experienced the same ordeal as former Ombudsman Conchita Carpio-Morales when she traveled to Hong

Kong on May 21. However, the difference is that Carpio-Morales did not use a diplomatic passport.

On March 13 this year, del Rosario and Morales filed a complaint before the International Criminal Court (ICC) against Chinese President Xi Jinping for alleged crimes against humanity in the disputed South China Sea.

A day after del Rosario was denied entry at Hong Kong, the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) canceled the issuance of courtesy diplomatic passports to

all former Philippine ambassadors and DFA secretaries.

“The DFA Office of Consular Affairs (OCA) will be issuing an order shortly, canceling all courtesy diplomatic passports, and requiring their surrender for physical cancellation,” the DFA, through Assistant Secretary Emmanuel Fernandez, said in a statement.

“The practice of issuing courtesy diplomatic passports to former DFA Secretaries and ambassadors shall henceforth be discontinued,” it added. (PNA)

Bernal tapped anew to direct PRRD’s 4th SONA

MANILA -- Film and television director Joyce Bernal has been tapped anew to direct President Rodrigo Duterte's State of the Nation Address (SONA) on July 22.

This was confirmed Wednesday by officials of the Radio Television Malacañang (RTVM) during the second coordination meeting with members of the media for Duterte's fourth SONA.

Bernal, who is known for directing comedy, romance and drama films, also directed the President's third SONA last year.

She succeeded award-winning filmmaker Brillante Mendoza, who directed President Duterte's first two SONAs.

Presidential Communications Operations Office (PCOO) Secretary Martin Andanar earlier said it was

the President himself who approved Bernal as the director for his third SONA.

Andanar said it was actor Robin Padilla who recommended the award-winning film and television director for the job, which the Chief Executive approved.

He also revealed that Bernal offered her service for the third SONA free of charge. (PNA)

Expanded maternity leave law benefits 120K SSS members

MANILA -- Over 120,000 female members of the Social Security System (SSS) have benefited from the Expanded Maternity Leave Law in the first four months of its implementation, its top official said on Wednesday.

SSS president and CEO Aurora Ignacio said a total of 122,571 female SSS members have enjoyed a 105-day leave which took effect on March 11 this year.

“We are happy to report that we have assisted about 122,571 female members of SSS during

their pregnancy from January to April 2019,” Ignacio bared during a press briefing in Malacañang.

“Those who gave birth starting March 11, 2019 when the 105 day-expanded maternity leave law (Republic Act 11210) took effect have benefited from the longer period of recuperation, after giving birth and a longer time to take care of their newborns,” she added.

With the new maximum monthly salary credit of PHP20,000 which was implemented last April, Ignacio said the maximum ma-

ternity financial assistance of SSS will increase to PHP70,000 by January 2020.

“This is more than double the previous maternity benefit of PHP32,000,” Ignacio said.

According to Ignacio, the state-run pension fund has disbursed PHP2.67 billion in maternity benefits from January to April 2019, which is a 15.09 percent rise from the PHP2.32 billion disbursed in the same period last year.

She, meanwhile, clarified some con-

versial manifesto using his title as president of the PCFI.

“We would like to repudiate in clear terms, the representation of Romero saying that the party-list bloc wholly decided for Velasco. There was no such decision,” Defensor said

“Hindi napag-usapan ‘yan (That was not discussed), unfair, illegal and there is no basis for that. We were talking with some party-list lawmakers and they were very, very disappointed,” he added at the sidelines of the all-party caucus held at Seda Hotel Vertis North in Quezon City.

The caucus was led by Leyte Rep.-elect Martin Romualdez in a bid to unite all political parties and influential blocs in the incoming 18th Congress to advance the legislative agenda of President Rodrigo Duterte.

Meanwhile, Defensor said there would have been no problem if Romero signed the manifesto of support as his “individual preference.”

With what happened, he said the PCFI is now placed in a bind.

“Will we ratify what he did? Ito na ba and simula ng pagbagsak ng PCFI? Wala na ba kaming samahan? Na-

cerns on the law particularly for employers who have paid in advance the maternity benefit adjustment and for self-employed, voluntary members among others.

“Employers who have paid in advance the corresponding adjustment in maternity benefit to their qualified female employees in accordance with RA 11210, they have to submit to SSS a proof of advance payment with their letter request

sira (Is this the start of the collapse of the PCFI? Do we still have a coalition? It's broken),” he said.

“To be honest, if it comes to a vote, a different person would win amongst the PCFI members,” Defensor said, as he noted that more than 30 party-list lawmakers have expressed support for the Speakership bid of Romualdez.

Ako Bicol party-list Rep. Alfredo Garbin also said the PCFI has not yet decided on the candidate it would support for Speaker.

“As far as the coalition is concerned, wala pa kaming na-endorse (we have not endorsed anybody yet),” he said.

“Maybe he signed in his personal capacity but the same cannot be attributed to the collective decision of the members of the coalition,” Garbin said.

Fractures also seen in PDP-Laban

On the other hand, the ruling Partido Demokratiko Pilipino–Lakas ng Bayan (PDP-Laban) is also in danger of fracturing.

In a separate interview at the sidelines of the all-party caucus, Albay Rep. Joey Sarte Salceda bared that 40 PDP-Laban lawma-

ners have expressed their support for Romualdez as Speaker.

Salceda, a member of the ruling party, said they endorsed Romualdez because of his credibility and capability to carry out the reforms of President Duterte.

“Ang mas importante dito (What is more important here) is who can deliver the legislative agenda of the President,” he said.

“Kung bibilangin namin ‘yung mga nag-commit din kay Martin ay mga 40 (If we count how many have committed to Martin, it's about 40), so it cannot simply be overwritten by some pronouncement,” Salceda said.

The lawmaker also pointed out that party leaders cannot threaten them with sanctions since there was no consultation that happened.

“There was no consultation. I mean that's their choice, their choice but as individuals,” he said.

“The vote that counts is the vote on the floor, not now. I was never consulted about the party candidate for Speakership. There was no consultation, and there is no process for sanctions,” Salceda said. (PNA)

13,” she added.

The expanded maternity benefit is among the seven types of benefits under the new SSS law or RA 11199, also known as the Social Security Act of 2018. Others include sickness, disability, retirement, funeral, death or survivor pension and unemployment benefit.

Ignacio, meanwhile, vowed to continuously develop its benefit programs to provide better assistance to the SSS members. (PNA)