

Miriam: Senate to probe Poro dispute early Sept.

Sen. Miriam Defensor Santiago urged the Senate committee on environment and natural resources to set not later than the first week of September the probe on the alleged illegal misuse of Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) and government forces in the shutting down of the seaport and surrounding areas at Poro Point, San Fernando, La Union.

"This scandal should be halted in its tracks, because there are foreign investors in the area, and the use of brute force is bad news in the international community," she said.

President Arroyo, in a Malacañang meeting last January, reportedly expressed exasperation that the public officials in the Poro Point controversy all tried to profess innocence of the alleged military-style takeover of the port management from a private firm already operating the port under a 25-year contract with the government.

Last Aug. 5, heavily-armed men along with government personnel reportedly sent by the Philippine Ports Authority (PPA) Philippine Navy, Philippine Coast Guard and the Bases Conversion Development Authority (BCDA) allegedly forced their entry inside the Poro Point facility.

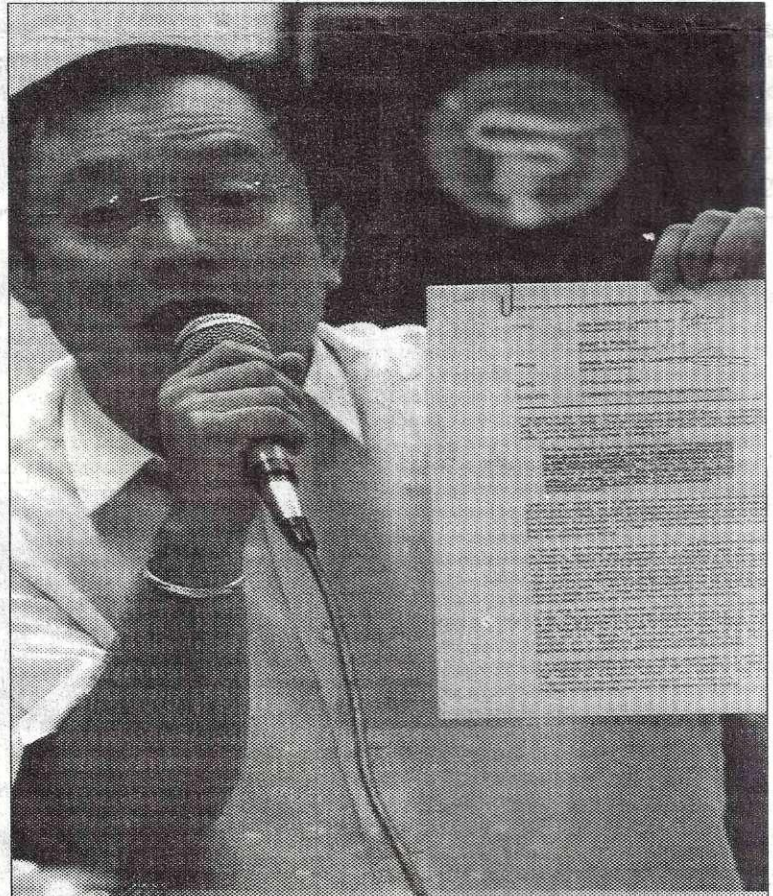
President Arroyo was reportedly peeved at news reports that the private firm was able to take photos and video footage of the military-style takeover, to counter the alleged claims of Environment and Natural Resources Secretary Angelo Reyes and BCDA president Narciso Abaya that no force was used.

Also at the Malacañang meeting, Abaya insisted that no politician exerted pressure on him to authorize the BCDA takeover, which was reportedly carried out through the use of violence by armed Philippine National Police and Coast Guard members.

But in her resolution referred to the Senate environment committee, Santiago pointed out that the takeover was an arbitrary act on the part of the DENR Environmental Management Bureau, which suddenly demanded from the port operator an Environmental Clearance Certificate (ECC).

"DENR already issued an ECC to the port operator all of seven years ago. This trumped-up reason for the takeover is barred by the legal principle of laches. When government sleeps on its rights for seven years, it loses those rights," Santiago, a former RTC judge, said.

Ayen Infante



Battle for Poro Point Lawyer Brigido Dulay, legal counsel of Poro Point Industrial Corp. (PPIC), shows a copy of the memorandum of Bases Conversion Development Authority (BCDA) general counsel Arnel Casanova to BCDA president Narciso Abaya which stated there is no legal basis for the termination of its contract with the private investor in the Poro Point seaport. In the memo, Casanova alleged political pressure was exerted on him to reverse his legal position.