

'OVP abolition under Cha-cha beyond Palace control'

By ALEXIS ROMERO

Malacañang yesterday distanced itself from proposals to abolish the Office of the Vice President (OVP) under a new Constitution, saying Congress has the final say on the matter.

"There's talk about abolition of the Vice President under Charter change. That's beyond the control of the Palace," presidential spokesman Harry Roque said.

"It is Congress sitting as a constituent assembly that will propose amendments. I'm sure that because any proposed amendment to the Constitution will be subject to ratifica-

tion by the people, ultimately it is the people who will judge this matter," Roque added.

Meanwhile, former president and Manila Mayor Joseph Estrada said the abolition of the OVP as proposed in Congress is self-serving.

Estrada, who served as vice president from 1992 to 1998, said Congress should retain the OVP if it would succeed in changing the Constitution.

He said the succession provided by the 1987 Constitution should be retained. He opposed a proposal to postpone the May 2019 elections.

Last week, former congressman and Bayan Muna party-list chairman Neri Colmenares

warned that the Charter change proposal being pushed by the allies of President Duterte may abolish the OVP.

Colmenares said Robredo, the highest elected member of the opposition Liberal Party, may be booted out of office before her term ends in 2022.

"Under the PDP-Laban Constitution, the Office of the Vice President will be abolished by 2019 if they succeed in having the new Constitution ratified during the 2019 elections. Vice President Leni Robredo will be ousted from her office long before her term ends in 2022," Colmenares said.

He said he does not believe

the PDP-Laban statement that it would not apply the new ruling to Robredo.

Robredo resigned as chair of the Housing and Urban Development Coordinating Council in December 2016 after she was asked not to attend Cabinet meetings.

Officials claimed Duterte had asked Robredo to desist from attending Cabinet meetings because of "irreconcilable differences."

Duterte later revealed that he asked Robredo not to join the Cabinet meetings because the Vice President was present in rallies asking him to step down.

Robredo has denied calling

for Duterte's ouster.

'BBL first before federalism'

In the same briefing, Roque said Duterte wants the Bangsamoro Basic Law (BBL) to be enacted first before the form of government is changed to federal from unitary.

The BBL aims to fulfill the Bangsamoros' aspiration to establish a more independent homeland by establishing a political entity with enhanced autonomy.

"The President said it is hard to start Charter change to implement the BBL," Roque said.

He said Duterte also favors a unicameral form of legislature with 50 members, but it would be up to Congress to decide on the mode of amending the Constitution.

"The House has decided it would be through con-ass (constituent assembly). It's not for the President to decide on these things. But he agrees that it is the most economical way of doing it," he said.

Roque reiterated the President would not use Charter change to extend his term.

"He is willing to serve out his term until 2022, absolutely against extending his term. (He) may be willing to cut short his term," he added.

- With Jose Rodel Clapano

* CONSTITUTION
* OFFICE OF THE VICE PRESIDENT (OVP)