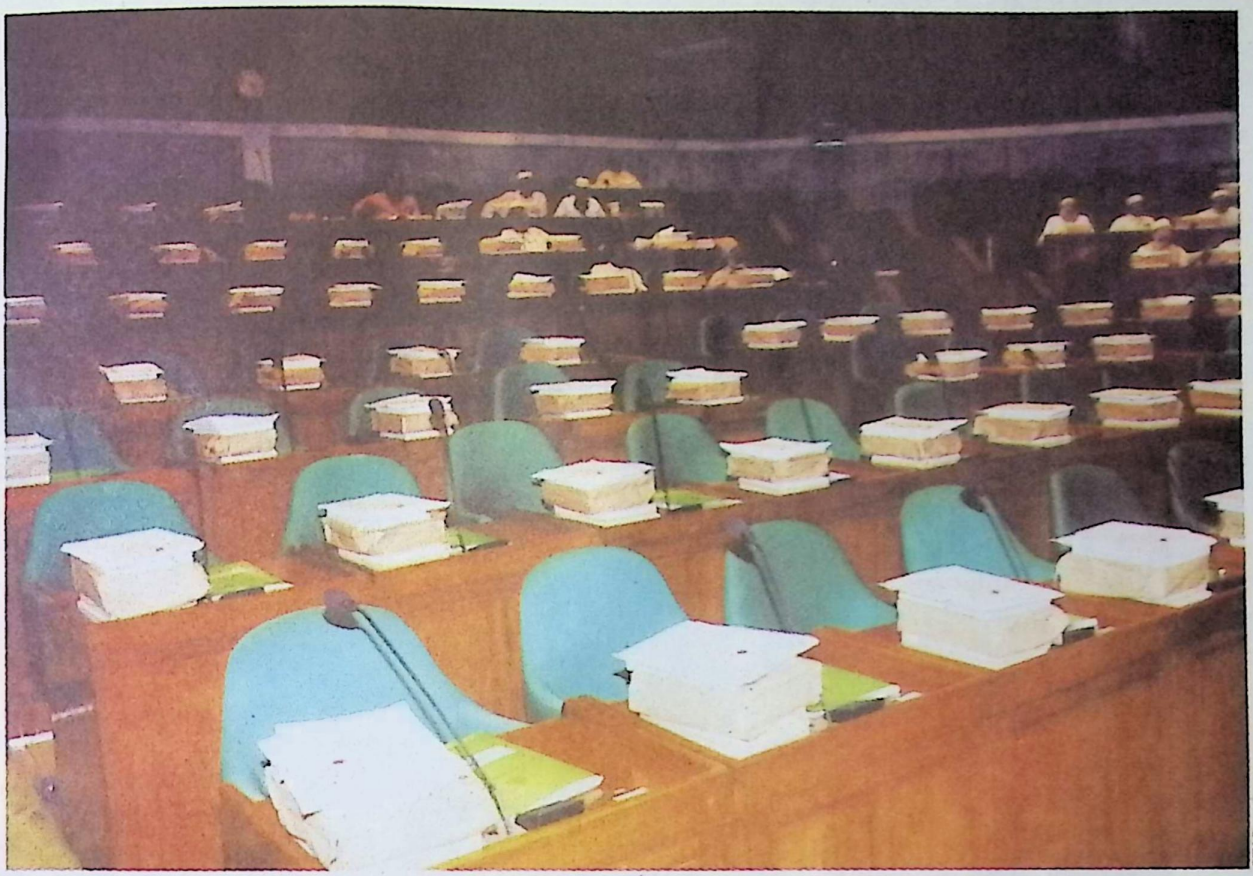


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To make party switching unattractive, a better alternative is to make at least three years of party membership mandatory to receive a party nomination -- and this can be done via electoral laws. The repeal of Article 70 will enable MPs to vote their conscience, which would increase local representation and go a long way toward reducing the unchecked power of the PM. Allowing vote across party lines would also make the parties more careful and serious about resolving both intra-party and national issues, as they would always be in fear of defection or "crossing the floor."

Do we need a whole new system?

All of these suggestions will introduce a good set of checks and balances to our system without having to restructure the entire system altogether. The basic structure of the system should be continued; it is familiar to all of us, and most of all, we know very well where the leaks are and where it is broken. Our challenge is to address specific deficiencies judiciously and to consolidate its existing strengths.

Introducing a whole new system, as some quarters would like to do, is not the answer, for it will introduce not only new levels of confusion and battles in an already exhausted polity, but also many unforeseen pitfalls simply because we cannot foresee how an alternative system would work out practically. If politics are to be brought closer to the people, it needs to be done first with what is already familiar to the public. We need a return to stability, not comprehensive experimentation.

Some of the suggestions mentioned above, such as repealing Article 70 and putting term limits for the prime minister, will require constitutional amendments, which will need to be brought by political parties through a deliberative and constitutional process after the elections. As the caretaker government begins formal conversations with political parties, it would do itself a great service if it can drive the parties toward recognising that some of these changes are necessary toward instituting greater checks and balances. And the key to enhancing checks and balances, which we sorely need, is to bring power closer to the people through strengthening processes of bipartisan decision-making in the parliament and local levels. Although, at the end of the day, it is our mindset that has to be democratic, formal checks and balances will help prevent the rise of a pre-1/11 kind of political crisis rooted in a gross abuse of power.

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