

DATELINE PHILIPPINES

SSS pensioners to get P500 anniversary bonus

by IRIS GONZALES
Philstar.com

THE Social Security System (SSS), the pension fund for private employees, announced Sept. 1 that all its pensioners would receive an anniversary bonus of P500 on top of their regular pension as part of the agency's 51st anniversary celebration.

SSS president and chief executive officer Romulo Neri said the SSS commission, the agency's highest policy-making body, has approved the release of P675.61 billion for the pensioners' bonus.

During anniversary celebration, Neri noted it was the contributions of current pensioners that helped put the agency to where it is now.

Data from SSS showed that it has already disbursed nearly P4 billion monthly for pensions

of about 1.4 million members. It grants lifetime pensions for retirement, death and disability to members with the required number of contributions.

Over 98 percent of monthly pensions are sent through bank accounts and the rest are checks sent by mail.

Net revenues of the SSS totaled P16.75 billion in the first half of the year, P2 billion or 14 percent more than the target for the period of P14.66 billion.

Neri also said that SSS has been able to collect P34.10 billion in contributions from its members. The amount is 14 percent more than last year.

Aside from higher contribution collection, revenues from investments and other sources also increased by 22 percent, reaching P19.07 billion this year from only P15.59 billion during the first half of the year, Neri said. ■



President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo acknowledges the standing ovation accorded to her by thousands of Laboans who came to meet her when she guested the 10th Busig-on Festival that coincided with the commemoration of the 208th Founding Anniversary of the municipality of Labo, Camarines Norte. OPS-NIB Photo by Exequiel Supera

Alvarez named adviser on global warming

MANILA – President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo has appointed former senator and senior Lakas-Christian Muslim Democrats (Lakas-CMD) official Heherson Alvarez as Presidential Adviser on Global Warming and Climate Change.

The President signed Alvarez's appointment papers on September 2, Malacañang said.

In a statement, Alvarez underscored the need to address the problem of global warming and climate change, which he said "are the most awesome, short-term and strategic challenges to

global security, stability and development."

"With the potentially disastrous combination of short-term climate changes and rising food and fuel prices, country coordination and global cooperation must be strategically systematized," he said.

Alvarez, Lakas executive vice president, was previously appointed by President Arroyo as chair of the Philippine Mining Development Corp. (PMDC). He now sits as board member of PMDC. (Inquirer.net)

Pacman: 3 more fights, and he'll join politics

MANILA – Three more fights and Manny Pacquiao is ready for the main event – politics. And he will be trained by no less than the political party of President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo.

Knocked out by reelectionist Rep. Darlene Antonino-Custodio in his political debut in May last year, the Pacman Monday said he would quit boxing next year in time for the 2010 elections.

He will either run as a congressman again or try for a local government seat in the Cotabato area or Sarangani, the World Boxing Council light-weight king said.

Pacquiao's immediate concern is to defeat another boxing legend, American Oscar De La Hoya, when they fight in Las Vegas on Dec. 6 at 147 lbs.

3 months' preparation

"Actually, my parents want this (De la Hoya fight) to be my last fight. But I told them I can still fight around two more fights after De la Hoya. So maybe around July or August next year, that's when I will retire," he said in Filipino.

Dubbed the world's best pound-for-pound fighter, Pacquiao is not exactly a spring chicken anymore. He will turn 30 on Dec. 17. De La Hoya is 35.

Pacquiao said he saw no problem in moving up to the welterweight class for the De La Hoya fight.

"It really depends on my preparations. I need three months to prepare, to get in the condition that I want to be for the fight," he said.

Inducted into Kampi

Pacquiao professed admiration for De La Hoya.

"He was my idol when I was starting out. Now I can't believe I am fighting him. So maybe to fight him is already a big honor. More so if I beat him."

He declined to reveal what his strategy would be for the fight but said he had started to train and would fly to the US on Sept. 14 to continue with his training.

"A win lover De La Hoyal would bring honor to the country and my countrymen. My political career will be a help to them too," he said.

Pacquiao was at the office of Interior Secretary Ronaldo Puno to take his oath as a full-fledged member of the Kabalikat ng Malayang Pilipino (Kampi), the political party of Presi-

dent Arroyo. Puno is the Kampi president.

The oath-taking was witnessed by Pampanga Rep. Juan Miguel "Mikey" Arroyo, Palawan Rep. Antonio Alvarez and other party officials.

'You can't eat honor'

Clad in *barong tagalog* and black pants, Pacquiao was mobbed by office workers.

"Every time I fight, what I give is honor. But you can't eat that. They (his provincemates) need help because their lives are so hard ... I want to help them in any way," the boxer stressed.

He said that he would never allow himself to be eaten up by the political system.

"If I were easily eaten up by systems, I would have been eaten up by now while I am champion," he said in Filipino.

"My ego would have been bloated since I've gone a long way in my career. But Manny Pacquiao is still the same. You will see that Manny Pacquiao won't be eaten up by any system."

Politics is service

Puno said Pacquiao could contribute to bringing back normalcy in Mindanao.

"I think Manny can help if he becomes a member of Kampi so he can help our work in bringing peace to the area," Puno said.

He said the party had yet to decide what position Pacquiao should seek in the 2010 elections.

"We know that if he runs for senator, hands down he will win. The problem is that he is only 30 years old and the minimum age requirement for senator is 35," Puno said.

This would be the second time that Pacquiao would run for an elective office.

In 2007, he lost to Darlene Antonino-Custodio in their congressional fight.

This time, Puno said he and the party would "train" Pacquiao in politics.

"The tactics will be easy. The root of public service is doing service and Manny has had that for a long time even when he was not a politician. He will just continue that. He can leave the tactics to us."

Pacquiao was earlier sworn in as a member of the Liberal Party under former Manila Mayor Lito Atienza, but Puno noted that Pacquiao had also formally run under Kampi and the two parties had a concurrent membership arrangement. (Inquirer.net)



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Cha-cha in high gear in House

by JESS DIAZ
Philstar.com

THE Charter change (Cha-cha) train shifted into high gear September 2, with Speaker Prospero Nograles directing his colleagues to feel the people's pulse.

"It is time we confront the issue of Charter change squarely. It is time the issue is discussed intensively, comprehensively and with intelligent sobriety not only in this chamber but throughout the nation," Nograles said in a letter to members of the House of Representatives.

He said Cha-cha proposals "invite us to decide the manner of changing the Constitution – through a constituent assembly or a constitutional convention; and the nature and scope of constitutional change – a total revision of the Constitution to change the form of our government or amendments only to specific provisions thereof."

He said he and his colleagues ask the people the following questions:

Do they really want to change the Constitution? If they do, when and how do they want to effect the change? What kind of change do they want? Do they support a shift in the form of

government?

Nograles urged House members to set aside their personal views, convictions and ambitions in holding the consultations so they could get a "truthful assessment of public sentiment on the issue."

"Only then, after these consultations, shall we proceed to discuss, with clear directions from the people themselves, the issue of Charter change in our committees and in plenary – confident that we speak with the people's voice, truthfully articulating their ideas and sentiments on the matter," he said.

House members revived their Cha-cha initiative after Malacañang officials said about a month ago that the agreement on ancestral domain with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front would require the constitutional amendment.

However, the same officials have said that the government would no longer sign the controversial agreement.

In the Senate, authors of a resolution seeking a Cha-cha for federalism have decided to shelve the measure in the wake of reports that President Arroyo's allies would seek an extension of her term beyond 2010.

At least one ally of Mrs. Arroyo in the House, Quezon Rep. Danilo Suarez, has said he would propose the equivalent of a term extension not for the President but for House members.

Suarez proposes to lengthen the term of office of House members from three years to five years.

On the other hand, Aurora Rep. Juan Edgardo Angara said he is for amending the Constitution after the 2010 elections.

"If we do it now, however well-intentioned we are, our motive will be suspect," he said. "People would think we want to extend the terms of office of incumbents."

Angara said since the Ramos administration, lawmakers have always talked of Cha-cha whenever the incumbent president was about to finish his or her term.

Earlier, former speaker Jose de Venecia Jr. warned that Mrs. Arroyo is out to extend her tenure beyond June 30, 2010 through Cha-cha.

He said this has been her plan since he and other administration allies in the House pushed for Cha-cha in 2006. ■