

DATELINE PHILIPPINES



New OFWs to Korea down by 40%

by VERONICA UY
Inquirer.net

MANILA – The number of newly hired overseas Filipino workers leaving for South Korea through the government-to-government Employment Permit System (EPS) has gone down 40 percent from 10,575 in 2006 to 6,452 in 2007, a recruitment specialist said.

Citing figures from the Philippine Overseas Employment Administration, which administers the system for the Philippine government, recruitment industry consultant Emmanuel Geslani said total deployment to South Korea last year, including re-hires, increased minimally from 13,984 in 2006 to 14,265 last year.

He said there should be no slowdown in the hiring of OFWs in South Korea because there are so many unfilled jobs there. Geslani attributed the over-all slower hiring pace to the inherent weaknesses of the EPS.

The recruitment industry's position is that the EPS encroaches in the private sector activity of recruitment. It seeks to recapture this market from the government.

As POEA is again set to sign this month a new memorandum of understanding with the South Korean government on a new batch of workers to be sent in 2008-2009, Geslani said recruitment agencies are asking, "Why does the government insist on taking over the function of private recruitment agencies in the deployment of OFWs abroad?"

Geslani repeated the basic weakness of the EPS: Government should not be in the business of recruitment while it is also regulating the industry.

He said the EPS operations do not allow for transparency in the hiring process, the deployment cost, and the actual working conditions in South Korea.

Geslani said that in EPS, the POEA violates its own policy that OFWs pay as little fee as possible; the POEA requires employers to shoulder airfare and prefers that they also shoulder fees involving mobilization, excluding personal costs like medical checkup and passport fees.

Unlike in Canada, he pointed out, the deployment cost of about P40,000 to P46,000 is shouldered mostly by OFWs. He broke down the cost to include: processing fee, P4,975; visa application, P2,500; pre-departure training, P1,994; Korean language tuition, P12,000 to P18,000; Korean language test, \$30; air fare, P15,000 up depending on the season and whether the flight is chartered; and pocket money, \$150.

These expenses are borne by the OFWs before they are registered under the EPS, he said. And this does not include grease money to some corrupt POEA employees to ensure their inclusion under the EPS, he added.

Geslani said another cause for the low OFW turnout for South Korea jobs is the increasing number of labor cases between employers in Korea and OFWs, who are usually not made to understand what they're getting into.

The POEA contract, he explained, usually indicates \$700 as the minimum pay for unskilled labor in Korea. However, Korean law requires Filipinos with work permits to pay tax, insurance for medical expenses, board and lodging, effectively reducing their take-home pay to \$300.

"As more OFWs run away and leave their job sites for other Korean employers, the POEA decided to slow down the processing of EPS workers in the middle of 2007 and refused to register the hundreds of thousands eager applicants for EPS workers to Korea," he said. ■

AFTER NEW IMPEACH RAPS FILED

Palace: Arroyo in 'high spirits'

by THEA ALBERTO
Inquirer.net

MANILA – President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo was in "high spirits" October 13, a day after critics filed a new impeachment complaint, the fourth so far, against her at the House of Representatives, her spokesman said.

Press Secretary Jesus Dureza said Arroyo managed the Cabinet meeting well last October 13.

"She's on top of the situation. She managed the Cabinet (even) with too many subject matters," Dureza told reporters.

But he stressed that, while there were "jokes" made about the new complaint filed by a group that includes businessman Jose de Venecia III, the original whistleblower on the scandal-tainted national broadband network (NBN) deal, it was not discussed during the Cabinet meeting.

Dureza refused to answer allegations of Arroyo's critics that the government plans to use money to convince lawmakers to vote against impeachment.

"Never mind those critics. They are always [about] their usual ways. What's new with that?" said Dureza, stressing that the matter is in the hands of the House of Representatives.

Administration allies who command an overwhelming majority in the House have said they expect to reject the impeachment complaint. ■

'Amid crisis, RP an island of calm'

by PAOLO ROMERO
Philstar.com

THE Philippines remains "an island of calm" amid the global financial storm because of its good macroeconomic fundamentals, an official of Standard & Poor's said.

Press Secretary Jesus Dureza and National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA) deputy director general Rolando Tungpalan made public the statement of Agost Bernard, S&P's associate director, during a news briefing in Malacañang last October 14.

The statement was also part of Tungpalan's presentation to President Arroyo during a NEDA Cabinet Group meeting at the Palace on the current global economic developments.

"The Philippines is 'lucky' because they have made the necessary adjustments and reforms when times were still good. So they are facing the global market problems and economic slowdown from a considerably improved position, compared to what they were in three to four years ago," Tungpalan said quoting Bernard.

"The Philippines is an 'island of calm' currently, while there is turmoil in the higher rated and previously stable countries," he said. The S&P official apparently was referring to Malaysia and Thailand but Tungpalan declined to confirm this.

The NEDA official did not read Bernard's entire statement but said it was part of an email of the S&P official to the Investor Relations Office of the Department of Finance the day.

In an earlier report, S&P's said the global financial crisis will not threaten the Philippines' credit ratings but the government must improve its fiscal position.

The President earlier called for a coordinated regional action to help cushion the effects of the global economic slowdown.

The country's economic contingency plan as well as the performances of the stock markets around the world was discussed during the Cabinet meeting. Press Secretary Jesus Dureza said Mrs. Arroyo is expected to issue a statement today on her call for a region-wide approach to addressing the financial crisis.

He said Mrs. Arroyo had dispatched Finance Secretary Margarito Teves, Socioeconomic Plan-

ning Secretary Ralph Recto and Budget Secretary Rolando Andaya to the US to discuss her proposal.

The economic managers were expected to return to the country October 14 and report to the President.

Tungpalan said the improvement in the stock markets around the world "gave us a boost of confidence in where we are right now."

He said there "seems to be better comfort" from the initiatives taken by developed countries to address their financial problems. But he said the Philippines will not let down its guard.

Mrs. Arroyo earlier told an economic forum that despite the looming recession in the US and in other major economies in Europe, the Philippines will not experience negative growth at least until next year.

She said the setbacks from "the past year and the past weeks are real and profound. It will take time and perseverance to put the pieces back together."

She said that while a recession in advanced economies is a cause for concern, "we are in best position to be able to weather such slowdown."

"It (reform) is paying off. Our economy is more resilient today than ever before," she said.

"We have created almost seven million jobs in seven years. Our international reserves cover six months of imports and the reforms have given us some running room to weather the wave of global price shocks that reverberated across the world this year," Mrs. Arroyo said.

"We have pulled together. We have been able to draw on additional revenues to provide targeted investments in food and fuel to keep our poor afloat until a better day," she pointed out.

She argued that while some economies in the region were experiencing recession in 2001, the Philippines was posting growth.

She said the administration is doing everything it can to keep the country's fundamentals stable.

The country, she said, has already diversified its export markets and that the US is no longer its No. 1 market but China.

"Our banks are well capitalized and the innate conservatism of our bankers is matched by the prudential foresight of our regulators," Mrs. Arroyo said. ■



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