

Gonzales slammed over 'transition president'

by JOEL GUINTO
Inquirer.net

TWO Cabinet secretaries reprimanded National Security Adviser Norberto Gonzales for proposing a "transition president" to oversee constitutional reforms, saying his statement opened President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo to criticism.

Presidential Political Adviser Gabriel Claudio said Gonzales' pronouncement gave rise to speculation that the administration's presidential bet "is going to be a puppet of the President and is going to be used as a tool for Charter change."

"Nothing can be more unfair and further

from the truth," Claudio said.

Cabinet Secretary Silvestre Bello III reminded Gonzales of a memorandum for Cabinet secretaries to speak only on issues related to their department.

"We have issued a memorandum to the effect that Cabinet members must comply with the dictum of 'to each his own.' When you are the Agriculture secretary, you do not do the job of the Health secretary," Bello said.

Gonzales had proposed that the transition president serve only a portion of his or her six-year term to institute political reforms. He said former president Joseph Estrada or El Shaddai leader Mariano "Mike" Velarde could

take on the post.

"With due respect to Secretary Bert, I think there is need to clarify and to emphasize that his opinion, his pronouncements and his concepts about the presidency or a transition presidency is entirely his," Claudio said.

"I don't know if this pronouncement is meant to sabotage the chances of any particular candidate in the election, but we have to make that distinction," he said.

Last week, Defense Secretary Gilberto Teodoro Jr., who was shortlisted by the administration coalition as its possible standard bearer, said he would advocate constitutional reform if he runs for president. ■

Gov't sees P53B in biofuel investments

by AMY R. REMO
Inquirer.net

DESPITE the economic slowdown, the government expects as much as P53 billion in new investments going to the biofuel sector over the next few years, Energy Secretary Angelo Reyes said.

These investments were expected to come from over a dozen companies that have registered their projects with the Board of Investments or are seeking endorsements from the Department of Energy, Reyes told the Asia Biofuel Investment Summit 2009.

"There is a great growth potential for the local biofuels industry," Reyes said.

Reyes said the Philippines' biodiesel requirement would increase to 160 million liters in 2014 from 133 million this year.

For bioethanol, the requirement will rise to 536 million liters in 2014 from 208 million liters this year, he said. ■

ADB sees economy growing 2.5% this year

THE Asian Development Bank said the Philippines would feel the pinch of the global crisis and growth would decelerate this year, but noted that the country would be in a much better position than most of its neighbors to cushion the impact of the turmoil.

In its Asian Development Outlook report, released Tuesday, the ADB said the Philippine economy would grow 2.5 percent this year, compared with 4.6 percent in 2008 and 7.2 percent in 2007.

"The Philippines is not decoupled from the external economy, and we expect it to slow down this year," Thomas Crouch, ADB director general for Southeast

Asia, said, but he stressed that the growth outlook for the Philippines this year was higher than the average growth forecast of 0.7 percent for the Southeast Asian region.

The ADB said the declining consumption in advanced economies would drag down export income of countries in the region, while the financial meltdown in the United States and Europe is likely to result in uncertainty that would force businessmen to pull out investments even from emerging economies.

In the case of the Philippines, the ADB said foreign direct and portfolio investments were expected to be weak. Consumption would

[TheWeekthatWas]

10M Filipinos participate in Earth Hour

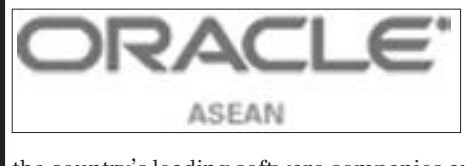
LAST Saturday, March 28, at precisely 8:30pm, various parts of the country switched off the lights for a full hour to keep with the worldwide "Earth Hour," a noble attempt to call for action on climate change.

RP's effort was led by the World Wildlife Fund (WWF), the Department of Energy, and the Green Switch Movement.

National Director of Earth Hour Philippines Yeb Saño said the Philippines ranked number one in having the most number of cities and municipalities which participated in Earth Hour, with a total of 647 cities and municipalities switching off the lights.



Leading software company to continue to be an investment haven in RP



PRESIDENT Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo recently visited the office of one of the country's leading software companies and expressed optimism of the country's position as an information and software industry investment haven in the region.

At the Oracle Global Development and Delivery Center at the Bonifacio Global City in Taguig, the president also held an executive session with the top officials of the company.

GMA also had high praises for the company for its continued belief in the capability of the country to host foreign investors despite the global economic crisis.

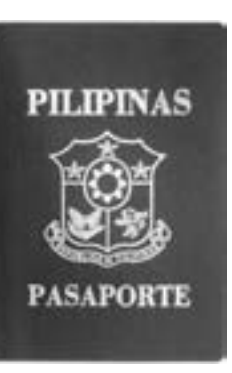
Oracle is currently the world's largest business software company serving more than 320,000 customers, including 100 of the Fortune 100 which represents a variety of industries in more than 145 countries around the world.

DFA determined to continue issuance of e-passports

IN an effort to make traveling convenient for millions of Filipino workers, the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) said there is a need to continue the e-passport project.

"The e-passport project is an important government infrastructure project in line with the DFA's mandate to provide secure and globally accepted passports essential to every Filipino, in particular the more than eight million OFWs," Foreign Affairs spokesman Ed Malaya said.

The DFA launched the machine-readable passport project ahead of the April 1, 2010 deadline imposed by the International Civil Aviation Office (ICAO) to upgrade the passport system among all its member-countries. ■



2 'Lacson men' seen in US—Gonzalez

by TETCH TORRES
Inquirer.net

TWO media personalities identified with Senator Panfilo Lacson are in the United States "maybe doing errands" for former police officers linked to the deaths of a publicist and his driver, Justice Secretary Raul Gonzalez said Tuesday, March 31.

Quoting Bureau of Corrections Director Oscar Calderon who arrived from the US, Gonzalez said a certain "De Belen" and "Burgos" were also there.

But Gonzalez did not confirm if he was referring to Gerry De Belen, a former newspaper reporter who is now staff of Senator Panfilo Lacson, and Raymond Burgos, a columnist of Abante who is also known to be close to the senator.

Reports said that some media personalities were in the US to deliver money to former police officers Glenn Dumlaog and Cesar Mancao to fight the extradition case against them.

The two, who have been implicated in the murders of Salvador

"Bubby" Dacer and Emmanuel Corbito in 2000, are scheduled to return to the Philippines.

Both were under Lacson, then chief of the Philippine National Police and who has also been linked to the killings.

But Gonzalez said Calderon failed to confirm if the reports were true.

Gonzalez believed that there were "unseen hands" trying to prevent Mancao and Dumlaog from returning to the country.

He said regardless of the manipulations, it was certain that the extradition would push through because the US courts have granted the Philippines' request. ■

PDEA SAYS Anti-drug agents proven clean on drug use

by TARRA QUISMUNDO
Inquirer.net

THE Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency (PDEA) said Tuesday, March 31 that all its 400 officials and personnel tested negative for drug use following a surprise test on Monday, March 30.

"All key officials and personnel of the PDEA national headquarters passed the surprise drug test," said the anti-drug agency in a statement.

Conducted at the PDEA headquarters in Quezon City, the test required agents and office personnel to submit urine samples to be checked for use of shabu (methamphetamine hydrochloride), marijuana and party drug Ecstasy.

"This exemplifies the dedication and commitment of PDEA officials and personnel to uphold the integrity and moral ascendancy of the agency as the country's premier drug law enforcement organization," said the agency.

Drug testing is an annual activity at the PDEA to ensure its officials are clean and fit to perform their duties. ■


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