

# Job fairs but no pay hike on Labor Day

by TJ BURGONIO  
Inquirer.net

THERE was no wage increase for workers to mark Labor Day last May 1. There were, however, job fairs nationwide set up by the Department of Labor and Employment offering more than 200,000 jobs, Malacañang said.

"There will be a job fair in all the regions," Cabinet Secretary Silvestre Bello III said on the phone. "Labor Day is an occasion to look back on the welfare of Filipino workers, and a time to reflect on their needs in terms of pay and job opportunities."

But don't expect President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo at any of the job fairs or other Labor Day activities.

Asked if Ms Arroyo had any such activity scheduled, Bello said: "None that I know of."

Speaking at the 19th annual conference of the Inter-Pacific Bar Association last April 30, the President made no mention of Labor Day and focused on the "good news" about the global economic downturn.

She said the US Federal Reserve had observed that the sharp decline in the US economy was slowing, while Japanese Prime Minister Tarō Aso had talked of "a few glimmers of hope."

She added that the pickup in China's economy would strongly support growth in the rest of Asia by raising demand for commodities and products.

"It will probably have much more to go before these bits of good news we are hearing really becomes a positive trend, but just as bad news should not take us by surprise, recovery should also be prepared for," the President said in a speech at the Philippine International Convention Center in Pasay City.

"We should be ready to take full advantage of a rebound if it happens," she said.

### Labor Day marches

True to form, various workers' groups held Labor Day marches in Metro Manila and other urban

centers, focusing on job losses and job security amid the economic downturn caused by the global financial crisis.

The militant Kilusang Mayo Uno (KMU) began its May Day activities with a torch run at 5:30 a.m. from the Trabajo market in Sampaloc, Manila, to the Welcome Rotunda.

In the afternoon, members of KMU and its affiliates in the National Federation of Labor Union held simultaneous programs in Plaza Moriones, Tondo; the corner of Blumentritt and Dimasalang Streets and in front of the University of Santo Tomas campus, both in Sampaloc; Kalaw corner Taft Avenue in Ermita; and Quirino corner Taft Avenue in San Andres.

At 3pm, the gathered workers marched to Liwasang Bonifacio for a program scheduled at 4-6:30pm.

A march on the US Embassy on Roxas Boulevard was scheduled after the program.

The Bukluran ng Manggagawang Pilipino (BMP) said it would mobilize 10,000 workers in a separate march from UST to Liwasan beginning at 9:30am.

The BMP members were joined by their allies from Sanlakas, Kongreso ng Pagkakaisa ng mga Maralita sa Lungsod, Partido Lakas ng Masa, Pagkakaisa ng Manggagawa sa Transportasyon, Samahang Demokratiko ng Kabataan and others.

The Partido ng Manggagawa (PM) held a caravan-march (Lakbayan) to air what it sees as the answer to the crisis—a bailout for workers and a reversal of economic policies.

The march was composed of two contingents—one from displaced workers and urban poor from Cavite, Laguna and southern Metro Manila cities, and another from Rizal, Bulacan and northern Metro Manila.

The PM also had rallies and marches scheduled in the cities of Cebu, Davao, Bacolod, Iloilo, Gen-

► PAGE A18

# Senate seeks measures to help workers, employers

by AUREA CALICA  
Philstar.com

LAWMAKERS are seeking measures to provide workers, employers and those retrenched ample benefits and other forms of assistance in the face of the worsening global economic crisis.

As the world celebrated Labor Day, senators said employees would have to deal with the concerns of their employers too because of the financial difficulties experienced by many companies worldwide.

Senators Manuel Villar, Loren Legarda, Francis Escudero and Ramon Revilla Jr. said it was important to find balance between the needs of the workers and employers and at the same time, help those who lost their jobs.

Legarda said that workers would find this day an opportune time to press for their rights, just wages and benefits, as well as for humane and fair treatment from employers.

"But as we face a severe global economic downswing, there is an urgent need to strike a balance between providing workers additional benefits and remunerations that would do justice to their contributions to enterprises, businesses or government operations, vis-à-vis profitability," she stressed.

Legarda said the Labor Code

protecting the rights of workers must be fully implemented while government regulatory agencies must be on their toes to move against excesses committed against workers.

She said the common complaint of workers is that some employers are using the present economic downswing as an excuse.

Escudero, on the other hand, urged the Senate to convene as a Committee of the Whole to discuss a package of measures, ranging from tax breaks and incentives for workers and employers to help them ride out the current economic crisis.

"We need all hands on deck to face the economic turbulence buffeting the ship of state. The Senate must do its part by initiating measures that will help the nation not only to ride out this crisis but to ensure a quick and steady recovery," he said.

Escudero filed Resolution No. 1029 urging the Senate to look into the viability and effectiveness of adopting certain policy measures to "mitigate and address the various ill effects of the crisis on Philippine labor, particularly acute unemployment and poverty."

Escudero cited figures released by the Department of Labor and

Employment (DOLE) showing that "already 40,000 Filipino workers have lost their jobs since October last year, while a total of 120,000 have been affected by layoffs, rotation, reduced working hours and pay cuts."

Escudero proposed a tax refund for all wage and salaried earners, equivalent to two months of their salary; and the extension of Phil-Health Insurance coverage for displaced domestic and overseas workers.

He also proposed the condonation of penalties and interests for low-cost and socialized homeowners and tax deductions and other incentives for employers who increase salaries and benefits within a set period.

The plan also seeks the creation of programs to encourage entrepreneurship among workers and the grant of incentives aimed at strengthening local industries.

Escudero also filed Senate Bill 1437 which seeks to grant prosecutorial powers to the Commission on Human Rights (CHR) and establish its own witness protection program.

Escudero particularly wanted the CHR to protect labor groups and trade union activities.

"The sad fact is that in the

► PAGE A21

## RP economy remains stable under Arroyo administration - VP De Castro



Philippine Vice-President Noli De Castro (ovp.gov.ph)

PUERTO PRINCESA CITY, Palawan—The Philippine economy under President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo has remained stable and in fighting form amid the global economic crisis.

This was stated by Vice President Noli de Castro in a consultation-dialogue with the Palawan Provincial Development Council, provincial leaders led by Governor Joel Reyes and different sectors here, held at the Centennial Pavilion, Provincial Capitol Compound.

De Castro, also Cabinet Of-

ficer for Regional Development (CORD) for Mindoro, Marinduque, Romblon and Palawan (Mimaropa) or Region 4-B, said the Arroyo government has exerted efforts to mitigate the adverse effects of the global economic crisis.

De Castro has been spearheading an information campaign, which focuses on the government's overall efforts to combat the effects of the global financial crisis on the domestic economy.

Early this week, he was in the provinces of Oriental and Occi-

► PAGE A21

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