

80,000 nursing graduates to take June licensure examination

by MAYEN JAYMALIN
Philstar.com

CLOSE to 80,000 nursing graduates are set to take the Nursing Licensure Examination (NLE) next month, the Professional Regulation Commission (PRC) reported last May 21. Marco Sto. Tomas, PRC's Board of Nursing (BON) member, said a total of 78,574 nurses would take the licensure examination on June 6 and 7.

Manila has the biggest number of examinees with 42,338, followed by Baguio, 11,336; Cebu, 6,948 and Davao, 4,069.

In remote Jolo, there are 635 nursing graduates who will take the exams, Sto. Tomas said.

He said there are fewer examinees in today's batch because some nursing graduates failed to meet the deadline for the filing of the application for exams.

He also noted a decline in the number of enrollees who want to take up nursing as another factor why fewer nurses are taking the

exams this June.

Although the demand for nurses has not dwindled, many of the new board passers are having a hard time finding employment here or abroad, Sto. Tomas said.

"The demand is there but the opportunities for employment for new graduates within the country are limited," he explained.

He said countries hiring nurses would require one to two years of actual employment experience but existing health facilities in the country cannot provide this.

"We noted that some hospitals even ask graduates to pay just to get these clinical experiences in the guise of training."

The BON is preparing a comprehensive "competency-based" career progression program to improve the Filipino nurses' chance of employment, Sto. Tomas said.

The board is set to go into quarantine from May 27 until June 8 to preserve the integrity of the coming licensure examination, he added. ■

Erap can't run for president - lawmaker

by JESS DIAZ
Philstar.com



Former President Joseph Estrada

FORMER President Joseph Estrada cannot run again for president, Isabela Rep. Giorgidi Aggabao said last May 21.

Aggabao told a Quezon City news forum that the issue involving the re-election ban the Constitution imposes on the president is controversial and "can be argued either way."

"But my interpretation is that the ban is lifetime," he said.

He said imposing a perpetual re-election ban on the president was the "intent" of members of the 1986 Constitutional Commission that wrote the Constitution.

Aggabao, a lawyer, said such prohibition applies not only to Estrada, but to President Arroyo and former Presidents Corazon Aquino and Fidel Ramos as well.

San Juan Rep. Ronaldo Zamora, Estrada's first executive secretary, has expressed a similar view on the application of the re-election ban on the incumbent president and former presidents.

Zamora's former Malacañang boss has expressed intention to seek the presidency again in the May 2010 elections.

Estrada said his lawyers, including former Senate president Ernesto Maceda and former Supreme Court justice Serafin Cuevas, are one in saying that he can run and that the re-election ban applies only to a sitting president.

According to Cuevas, the ban was designed to prevent an incumbent from using the power

and resources of the presidency if he or she were allowed to seek re-election.

He said in the case of Estrada, he could no longer use the power and resources of the presidency.

Cuevas said his client, if he runs in next year's elections, would not be seeking re-election because he is not the incumbent president.

Lawyers Adel Tamano, United Opposition spokesman, and bar toptotcher Aquilino Pimentel II said recent efforts by the Palace to stop Estrada from running again in 2010 betray the government's concern over its own lack of credibility with the Filipino people.

"It's obvious that the GMA administration is afraid of Erap running in 2010. Personally, I would much prefer a president who wins the support of the Filipino people despite what some claim as prohibitions to his candidacy than to have a president who is not prohibited from running but will cheat her way to the presidency," Tamano said. "The real issue that we Filipinos should be discussing is not who is prohibited from running but rather what type of president we need in 2010."

For his part, Pimentel said the president being referred to in the Constitution who cannot run for re-election is the incumbent.

Estrada, meantime, yesterday asked Justice Secretary Raul Gonzalez to shut up as he insisted that he can still run for president in 2010.

In a telephone interview with *The Star*, Estrada said the people who conducted a legal study which declared that he can still run for president in 2010 are more reliable than Gonzalez.

"He (Gonzalez) better shut up. I have two former Supreme Court chief justices, two deans of Colleges of Law and two bar toptotchers who say that I can still run based on the study that they have conducted on the possible legal issues that can be raised against me," Estrada said. ■

DFA, Palace deny Gaa recall

by MARVIN SY
Philstar.com

MALACAÑANG and the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) denied last May 21 that Philippine Ambassador to Washington Willy Gaa has been recalled.

Deputy presidential spokesperson Anthony Golez said that there is no recall order for Gaa and that he still enjoys the trust and confidence of the President.

President Arroyo was supposedly furious with Gaa for failing to take a photo of her shaking hands with President Obama when she visited Washington last February for the National Prayer Breakfast (NPB).

Gaa was reportedly tasked to take photos during the event, which would have been the first face-to-face encounter between the two world leaders.

The President was said to have been very angry that Gaa could not be found when Obama supposedly passed by her on three occasions and even greeted her.

Golez emphasized that Gaa is an ambassador and not a photographer, so he was not expected to take snapshots of the President during her visit to the US capital last February.

He said though that he was not aware of Gaa's status, whether his stint is about to end or not.

DFA spokesman J. Eduardo Malaya said there is no recall order for Gaa.

"He remains at post in Washington. Ambassador Gaa is a highly competent and very senior career officer. He has the trust and confidence of President Arroyo," Malaya said.

After the NPB, officials said members of

the Arroyo delegation saw the President very angry when she called Gaa and ordered him to ride with her in the presidential car.

Officials said although Gaa has completed his tour of duty and is already due home, he can remain as ambassador to the US while his successor is not yet named.

Gaa said there was never any opportunity to take a photograph of President Arroyo with President Obama at the NPB because they never crossed paths.

Arroyo made an unscheduled visit to Washington on her way home from the Middle East to attend the breakfast in hopes of seeing and meeting Obama. The NPB is an annual event attended by top US government officials and foreign leaders invited to the event.

A "Kodak moment" never presented itself, Gaa said, referring to that rare, one-time moment that would have made a great photo.

The envoy said Obama entered the stage for the prayer meeting from the rear and exited the same way.

"Obama did not go to the floor to meet guests. He did not greet anybody in the audience. He only shook hands with organizers of the prayer meeting who were seated on the stage," Gaa said.

Referring to the report, which quoted unnamed Foreign Affairs officials as saying Arroyo gave him a tongue-lashing in the presidential car after the NPB, Gaa said, "How would they know what we talked about, as we were the only two passengers in the car?"

Gaa said he has not been fired nor has he received a recall order, and implied that people envious of his position are setting him

up for a fall.

He said he is scheduled to visit Manila in July for at least one week for the annual Ambassadors/Consuls General and Tourism Directors of the Philippines meeting.

A career diplomat, Gaa was posted to Washington in July 2006. He previously served as ambassador to China (2003-2006), Australia (2002-2003) and Libya (1992-1997).

In a press statement issued by the embassy later on Wednesday, May 20 Gaa dismissed as "totally untrue and baseless" allegations made in a *Star* article.

"I serve at the pleasure of the President and I am prepared to be relieved at any time the President feels she no longer has any confidence in me and my ability to effectively carry out my duties and responsibility as Philippine ambassador to the United States.

"However, I am bothered with the article's malicious and false characterization of the President as someone who would fire her representative to a close ally of the Philippines over a missed photo opportunity. This is not fair to the President and I strongly feel that this must be made to clear to everyone," he said.

Gaa said President Arroyo did not come to Washington for the purpose of securing a photo with Obama.

"In fact, the President came in response to my recommendation for her to pass by Washington to attend the National Prayer Breakfast, and meet with key congressional leaders on the Filipino veterans issue, business leaders and officials of the Millennium Challenge Corporation," he added. ■

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