

SAYS WORKERS GROUP

# .7M voters abroad to sway 2010 polls

MANILA – Urging more Filipinos abroad to register for the 2010 elections, the Trade Union Congress of the Philippines (TUCP) on Monday said it expects some 700,000 overseas absentee voters “to significantly influence” the outcome of next year’s presidential elections.

“We are counting on over a million overseas Filipinos to sign up as absentee voters, and at least 70 percent of them to actually cast their vote. This is

enough critical mass to considerably affect the selection of the next President,” said TUCP secretary-general and former Senator Ernesto Herrera.

Herrera said TUCP has feedback from labor posts abroad, indicating a surge in the number of overseas Filipinos, mostly migrant workers, who want to enlist as absentee voters for the first time.

“Obviously, overseas Filipinos are eagerly anticipating the elec-

tions and raring to vote,” said Herrera, former chairman of the Senate committee on labor, employment, and human resources development.

He said the low absentee voter turnout in the 2007 mid-term elections was not surprising because the country’s top two posts were not at stake then.

“Next year, however, we expect (absentee) voter turnout to easily surpass the 64 percent (turnout) in the 2004 presidential polls,” Herrera said in a statement e-mailed to media outfits.

Herrera urged overseas Filipinos “not to give up their right to choose the country’s next leaders that offer the greatest hope for real change.”

Qualified overseas Filipinos have until August 31 to register as absentee voters. The new listing began on February 1.

“We have high hopes that by the August 31 deadline, a little over a million overseas Filipinos will have already registered as absentee voters,” Herrera said.

As of June 3, a total of 92,175 overseas Filipinos had registered as absentee voters for the first time, bringing to 463,249 the total number of listed (absentee) voters.

The total would have been higher, as the Commission on Elections is mandated by law to remove 132,820 absentee voters for failing to participate in the 2004 and 2007 polls.

In the 2004 presidential elections, a total of 364,187 overseas Filipinos were listed as absentee voters, but only 64 percent or 233,092 actually voted.

In the 2007 mid-term elections, a total of 503,894 overseas absentee voters were listed, but only 16 percent or 81,732 turned out to vote. (*Inquirer.net*)



**INCONVENIENCED.** Flamboyant former Philippine first lady Imelda Marcos, right, shows her passport and travel documents to a clerk of court where she made a personal appearance at an anti-graft court which is required of her every time she travels abroad Thursday June 11 at Manila’s Quezon city. Marcos is facing dozens of lawsuits, mostly on corruption cases, in the course of her husband’s 20-year-rule. Second from right is her legal counsel Atty. Robert Sison. AP Photo by Bullit Marquez

## More OFW families turn to investments

MANILA – The threat of job cuts abroad has prompted families of overseas Filipino workers to invest more than they used to, according to a survey by the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas (BSP).

The Consumer Expectations Survey for the second quarter, which was conducted during the first two weeks of April, said 8.3 percent of OFW households invested part of the remittances they had received. This was higher than the 5.9 percent of households reported in the first quarter survey.

In the second quarter of last year, only 3 percent of households invested their remittances in various instruments.

The survey covered 575 OFW households nationwide.

“The percentage of [OFW] households that devoted part [of their remittances] to investments increased appreciably,” the BSP noted in its survey. “The pattern was broadly similar for households in the National Capital Region and in [other] areas.”

The increase in the number of OFW households that have invested actively is consistent with pub-

lic expectations that the level of unemployment in the country may worsen over the next 12 months.

The survey showed that the unemployment index stood at +73.6 percent.

The index is determined by subtracting the number of household-respondents that expect an increase in the unemployment rate from those that expect a decline.

According to data from the National Statistics Office, 7.7 percent of the country’s workers were unemployed as of January.

Officials said expectations that the unemployment problem could worsen in the months ahead were fueled by reports that the economy was slowing down, forcing some companies to cut spending and trim their workforce.

For this year, the government expects the Philippine economy, as measured in terms of gross domestic product, to grow by only 0.8 to 1.8 percent, a stark decline from last year’s 4.6 percent growth. (*Inquirer.net*)

## Gov’t remains upbeat over Q2 growth

MANILA – The Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas believes that the economy will grow faster in the second quarter, saying that the likely increase in consumption and remittances will prevent a repeat of the weak performance seen in the first quarter.

BSP Governor Amando Tetangco Jr. said historically, the economy tends to perform better in the second quarter than in the first because of increase in remittances from overseas workers. As enrollment season kicks in, OFWs send more money to their families.

“There are seasonal factors that may

come in to support consumption,” Tetangco told reporters, referring in part to the start of the school year, which could help accelerate growth in the second quarter.

This view is supported by investment bank Citi, which expects the economy to still grow, albeit at a minimal pace, given prospects of higher consumption.

According to its latest paper on the Philippines, Citi said the economy could grow by one percent this year. This was a revision of its earlier forecast of a 3-percent expansion, but within the government’s own projection of between 0.8 and 1.8 percent.

“We concur with the government’s downward revision and believe there is potential for marginal growth this year,” Citi said.

The BSP also said that the severe economic crisis had forced Filipino households to save more than spend. For this reason, the economy suffered an anemic growth in the first quarter. The country’s GDP grew by only 0.4 percent year-on-year in the first quarter, the slowest in 10 years.

But the BSP maintains that the country will not suffer from a recession this year. (*Inquirer.net*)

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