Ramos: Judge foreign trip by its results

by JEROME ANING
Inquirer.net

MANILA – Former President Fidel V. Ramos refused to join the growing debate over the expensive foreign trips of President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo.

"I don't like to make any comparison between my trips [when I was president] and hers," Ramos told reporters at the Ninoy Aquino International Airport presidential lounge on Monday, while he waited for his flight to Canada.

However, Ramos said that ultimately, a foreign trip's success "would be judged by its results," adding, "The benefits could be long-term and short-term" and these could be economic or diplomatic.

Among such benefits he said, would be attracting foreign investments to the country, improving the Philippines' image overseas, involving the country in world affairs, boosting bilateral ties with the host country and reaching out to Filipino communities abroad.

These, according to Ramos, are the aims of the Ramos Peace and Development Foundation (RPDEV), which he chairs. The organization promotes Philippine interests abroad, among others, at no expense to the government.

Ramos' presidency from 1992 to 1998 was also noted for his many foreign trips but he did not get as harsh a criticism as Arroyo due mainly to the stable conditions of the country's economy and politics during that time.

Meanwhile, Ramos ruled out running for an elective post in the 2010 elections, following reports the Arroyo has been planning to run for Congress.

"I've already been there. I don't need that," he said, adding that he was content to be a private citizen and statesman still serving the Filipinos in other ways.

He echoed 19th century American preacher and author James Freeman Clarke, who said, "A politician thinks about the next elections; the statesman thinks about the next generations." ■

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Lawmakers urged not to travel before SONA to prevent H1N1 spread

by DELON PORCALLA
Philstar.com

MANILA – An administrative official of the House of Representatives on June 29 requested lawmakers to refrain from traveling abroad for at least 10 days before President Arroyo delivers her state-of-the-nation-address on July 27.

House secretary-general Marilyn Yap said this was necessary to prevent the possible spread of the A(H1N1) virus at the lower chamber.

"I can always suggest that they don't (legislators) take foreign trips at least 10 days before the SONA," she said. "But that's always a matter of choice. At the end of the day, it is still their decision," Yap told reporters at a pre-SONA briefing.

Yap also urged lawmakers who came from abroad to undergo "self-quarantine" for 10 days before reporting to work or attending the SONA as a precautionary measure.

Last week, a House employee died from complications from the H1N1 virus, prompting Congress to shut down its operations.

Yap said that in case another employee gets infected or a congressman tests positive for the virus, they would just lock down the affected area.

All entrance points in the 16-hectare Batasan Complex are equipped with thermal scanners to check the temperature of everyone who enters the House, whether employee or visitor.

Persons who register a temperature of 38 degrees celsius will automatically be denied entry.

Speaker Prospero Nograles said the House is all set for the SONA even after nearly a week of work suspension.

"We are in full and close coordination with all departments, agencies and offices concerned, including the Senate and Malacañang," he said.

Nograles added that the weeklong work suspension did not in any way affect SONA preparations.

The House SONA preparations group is expected to conduct inter-agency meetings and consultations by next week to coordinate every aspect of the event with the other government agencies.

"I commend the officials for their prompt action on the matter, and also the employees of the House Secretariat for their full cooperation," the Speaker said, adding that the work suspension allowed the sanitation of the entire Batasan complex in coordination with the Department of Health.

Since the re-opening of the House, all employees, visitors and even members of Congress are required to pass through thermal scanners before entering the complex.

"Fever Free" tags are given to those who are allowed inside the complex, while those who are suspected to have fever are immediately referred to the House Medical Services for immediate and proper medical attention.

So far, no suspicious fever case has been reported at all entry points. ■

Former police senior superintendent Cezar Mancao is escorted by National Bureau of Investigation agents to a Manila court for his arraignment in the Dacer-Corbito murder case. Philstar.com Photo

Mancao pleads no guilty

by TETCH TORRES
Inquirer.net

MANILA — Former police official Cezar Mancao on Tuesday entered a plea of not guilty on the double murder of publicist Salvador "Bubby" Dacer and his driver Emmanuel Corbito.

Mancao, who has been officially admitted by the Department of Justice as a government witness to the crime, made the plea before Branch 18 of the Manila Regional Trial Court. ■

HEALTH EXEC SAYS

H1N1 can mutate into 'milder' strain

MANILA – The Influenza A(H1N1) virus can mutate, but not anytime soon and not necessarily into a more virulent strain, a health official said Monday.

Viruses need between six months to a year before it can mutate, and even if it mutates, it does not necessarily become deadlier, said Doctor Yolanda Oliveros, director of the National Center for Disease Prevention and Control.

"Based on worldwide data, a virus needs at least 6 months to a year before it can mutate. And this mutation not exactly means that the virus will be more virulent in form, it can also be milder," she said.

While vaccination for the seasonal flu will not provide protection against A(H1N1), it will prevent A(H1N1) from mutating when it strikes an individual with the seasonal flu, she said.

As of Friday last week, the Department of Health recorded a total of 861 A(H1N1) cases, of which, 734 or 74 percent have recovered.

Starting this week, the DoH will give updates on the country's A(H1N1) cases only on Wednesdays, instead of everyday, said Doctor Lyndon Lee Suy of the DoH's Institute for Emerging Infectious Diseases. *(Inquirer.net)*

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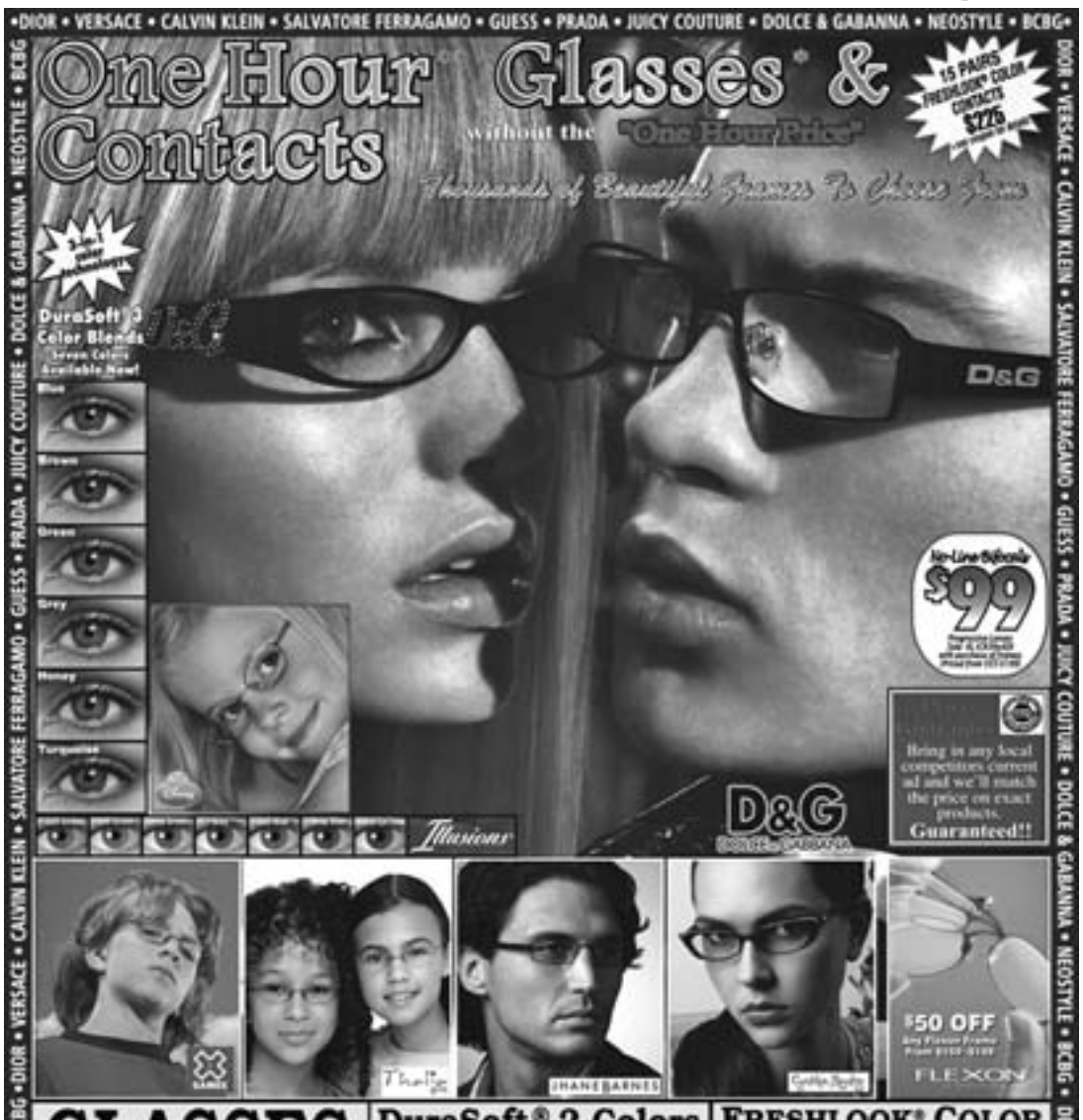
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