

# Maceda: GMA trips cost government P5.8 billion

by JESS DIAZ  
Philstar.com

MANILA – Former Senate president Ernesto Maceda disclosed that President Arroyo has spent over P5.8 billion for more than 50 foreign trips she made since 2001.

Maceda told the *Strictly Politics* program on ABS-CBN News Channel last Tuesday night that he has researched the annual budgets and actual fund releases from 2001 to 2009 and discovered that Arroyo has used more than P5.8 billion and not P3 billion as earlier reported.

He said appropriations in the annual budgets for the President's travel reached P3.5 billion.

"In addition to these, there are contingency funds that could be used for foreign travel. Arroyo has realigned a total of over P2.2 billion of these funds for her foreign trips," he said.

The contingency fund also covers the cost of local and foreign travels of the President.

He said he got his data from the Department of Budget and Management and the Senate finance committee, which he headed for five years.

Records showed that the travel expenses from 2001 up to 2009 of the Office of the President reached P3,054,976,000, while the travel expenses of her support staff from the Office of the Press Secretary (OPS) reached P521,249,000, for a total of P3,576,225,000.

The contingency fund used by the Office of the President and the OPS reached P2,285,766,710.

Total travel expenses from 2001 to 2009 of the Office of the President and OPS, including the contingency fund, totaled P5,861,991,710.

Reading from a full-page newspaper advertisement that tried to justify the President's frequent foreign travels, Maceda pointed out that some of the achievements Malacañang claims Arroyo made on

these trips were "just promises."

"Those memoranda of agreement and understanding that she has signed are nothing. They could have been signed by the secretary of foreign affairs. It would take a long time before they could be translated into actual benefits for our country, if they are pursued," he stressed.

He added that one accomplishment the administration claims Arroyo made on her trip to Moscow was "potential cooperation" on some future projects.

"How can potential cooperation on something to be undertaken in the future, which may not happen, be an actual benefit that Filipinos can get from this trip?" he asked.

Maceda, who served as the country's ambassador to the United States under President Joseph Estrada, also said Arroyo's foreign trips are costly.

"Let us take this latest Tokyo-Los Angeles-Colombia-Brazil-Hong Kong trip as an example. Flying time on a chartered Philippine Airlines jet is about 70 hours. The cost of one hour of flying time is about \$100,000 because fuel is expensive. That excludes landing and parking fees," he said.

"Then you have the expenses for hotel accommodation for the entire entourage, hiring of cars, tour and shopping guides, food, and similar expenses," he said.

He said if there are 30 congressmen and congresswomen traveling with the President, one limousine for each lawmaker has to be provided.

The Kilusang Magbubukid ng Pilipinas (KMP) slammed on July 1 the "excessive" foreign trips of President Arroyo using public funds that could have been spent for a better cause to help nine million peasant households nationwide.

KMP secretary-general Danilo Ramos said Arroyo's trips abroad could be considered malversation of public funds and a crime against the people. ■

# ADB: Asia set for mild economic recovery in 2010

MANILA – Asia is set for a mild economic recovery from the global financial crisis in 2010 after bottoming out this year, the Asian Development Bank's chief economist said Thursday.

"Clearly now we are in the transition from recession to recovery," Jong-Wha Lee said.

The crisis was "bottoming out in many Asian countries... but 2010 will see mild recovery," he told reporters at the bank's headquarters in Manila.

However, sustained economic growth will take longer to achieve because Western industrialized countries, the main markets for Asian exports, will continue to struggle with "the worst recession since World War II," he said.

"We all understand (that) in 2009, these industrial countries will suffer from unprecedented recession synchronized across the three major regions—the U.S., Japan and Europe."

Lee said the bank, founded in 1966 to fight poverty, is now

forecasting a contraction in Europe this year of 4 to 5 percent compared with its March forecast of a 2.6 percent contraction. The US economy was expected to contract by 3 percent.

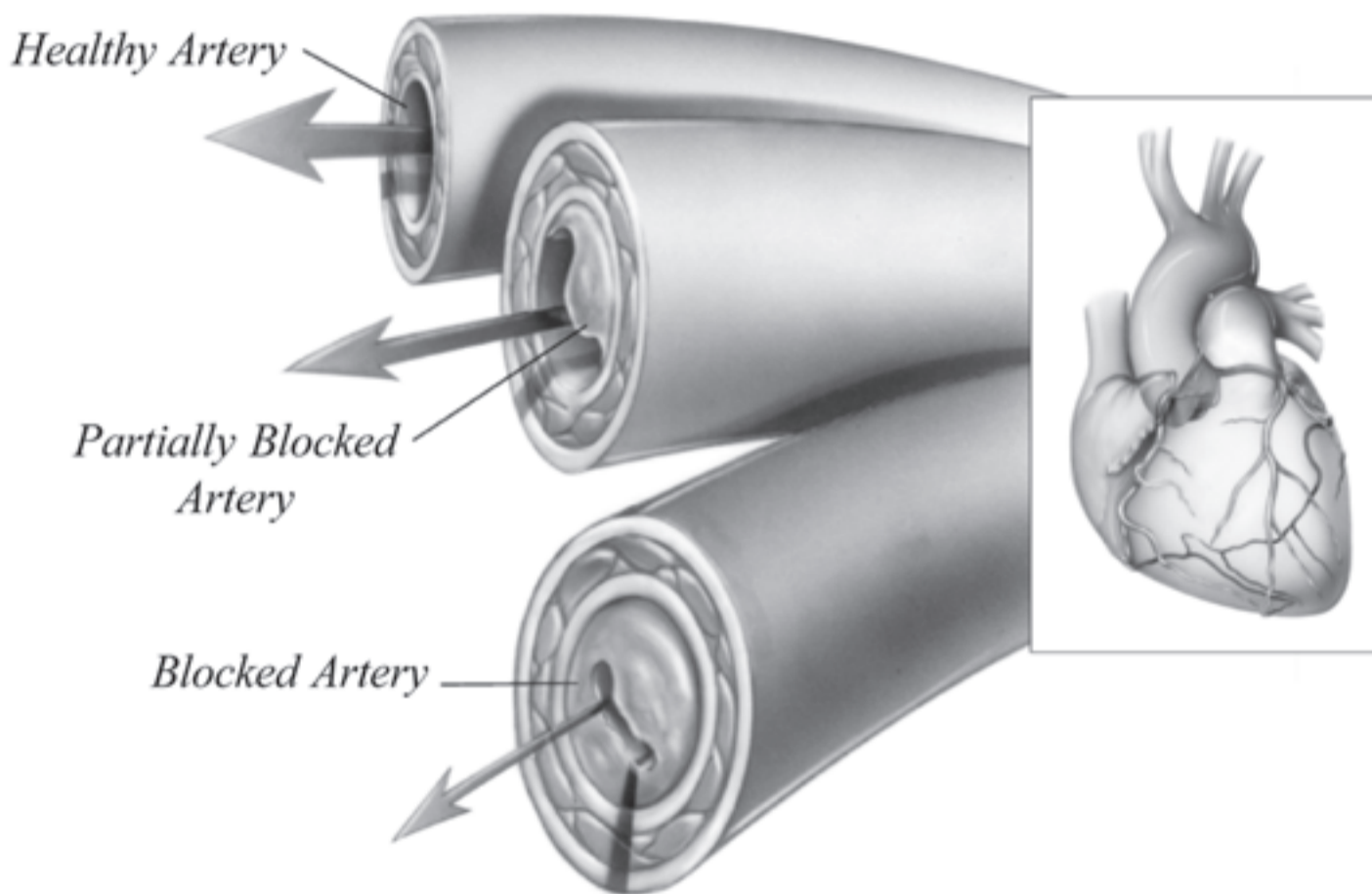
The ADB forecasts 3.4 percent growth for developing Asia in 2009, down from 6.3 percent in 2008. "This is relatively better than other regions in the world," Lee said.

He said the Manila-based lender is advising Asian governments to continue their economic stimulus packages while building social safety nets, developing the financial markets, supporting small and medium enterprises especially in the service sector and adapting flexible foreign exchange policies to help in the recovery.

"The most important thing is to revitalize the domestic industry serving the domestic market," he said. "How to strengthen the domestic and regional demand in Asia to provide another source of Asia's growth—this will be the big challenge." (AP)

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