

# Highlights and Sidelights of GMA's trip to the US

*RP sustains economic growth despite global recession, says GMA*

by MOMAR G. VISAYA  
AJPress

NEW YORK—It was all about the economy, and during the numerous opportunities that President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo had to talk about it, she did.

From the White House to the Capitol, from Filipino community gatherings in Washington, DC to New Jersey, from interviews with Filipino media to CNBC's Maria Bartiromo, President Arroyo took pride in saying that the Philippines weathered a succession of global crises in fuel, food, finance and economy.

Two major events, however, overshadowed President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo's trip to the United States: the "beer summit" hosted by President Barack Obama for Harvard Professor Henry Louis Gates and the death of former President Corazon Aquino on August 1.

These events, however, did not dampen the spirits of the president, specially after the much-touted historic meeting with US President Barack Obama inside the Oval Office.

"As you can see from this trip, President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo has command of the facts and commands the respect of other world leaders—from Speaker Nancy Pelosi to President Obama. They have been outspoken in their praise for her commitment, ability and leadership," Press Secretary Cerge Remonde said in a media briefing at the Beacon Hotel in Washington, DC on Friday, the day after the White House meeting.

The President and her team followed a hectic and strict schedule, allowing the media to join in some of her meetings while the others were closed-door sessions with key government officials and CEOs of major business corporations.

Remonde described the Chief Executive as a leader, who can hold her own with any leader anywhere in the world adding that this ability gives her the clout, credibility and strength to protect and advance the interest of the Philippines.

According to the Press Secretary, President Macapagal-Arroyo's trip is about upholding the deepest obligation of a President—namely, to ensure the peace, order and security of our nation and

meeting with President Obama and American leaders helps keep the Philippines strong.

"There is no price that can put on the safety and security of our nation and the value of establishing personal rapport through personal diplomacy as President Arroyo gained in her meetings with President Obama is priceless," he declared.

### Expanded investments

In New York, the president and her team met with business leaders, among them officials from the world beverage giant Coca Cola, which has joined the billion dollar club of investors in the Philippines in an expansion plan expected to boost further the investment climate in the country amidst the global economic downturn.

Speaking before the Filipino-American community of New York and New Jersey during a dinner meeting at the Sheraton Hotel in Newark, Arroyo relayed the good news.

Again, the president reiterated what she highlighted in her State of the Nation Address on July 27, 2009.

"A few days ago, Moody's upgraded our credit rating, citing the resilience of our economy. The state of our nation is a strong economy," she remarked.

During a separate press briefing, Remonde said the Philippines continues to enjoy a conducive investment climate due to the President's timely reforms and masterful steering of the economy.

Remonde said a number of hedge fund managers based here in New York, the world's top financial market, also discussed with the President various investment prospects in the Philippines.

The President, according to him, had a lunch meeting with hedge fund managers in the US "who are looking for a safe and attractive investments abroad to ensure the growth of the capital entrusted to them."

"And because of the upgrade Moody's gave us, very rarely during the time of the global crisis, the Philippines is now emerging as an attractive investment destination," Remonde said.

### Attractive haven

In an interview with top business news anchor Maria Bartiromo over CNBC's Closing Bell

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# Fil-Ams pay tribute to Tita Cory at a concelebrated mass at St. Basil's Cathedral

by RENE VILLAROMAN  
AJPress

LOS ANGELES – During a concelebrated mass held at the St. Basil's Cathedral on Tuesday evening, the Filipino-American community paid its respects for former President Corazon C. Aquino, a symbol of the Filipinos' crusade for freedom and democracy.

"Allow me to greet you with the most memorable way that former President Corazon Aquino had greeted her countrymen," declared Bishop Oscar Solis, who celebrated a mass in Mrs. Aquino's memory with about thirty Catholic priests that included "healing priest" Fr. Fernando Suarez. Flashing the trademark Laban "L" sign, Bishop Solis said, "The L stands for 'Laban' (fight), struggle for democracy and freedom. The L stands for love, love for her country and love for the Filipino people. L stands for loss of democracy, and L stands for light eternal."

Bishop Solis lauded Mrs. Aquino as an icon of Philippine democracy and freedom. He said that the memorial mass was a "beautiful way of expressing our solidarity" with the ideals of the former Philippine president.

Mrs. Corazon Aquino symbolizes the Filipino nation's struggles to regain its democratic traditions that were lost during the twenty-year reign of strongman Ferdinand Marcos, who declared Martial Law in September 1972. After Sen. Benigno Aquino was assassinated on his return to the Philippines in August 1983 after years of exile in the United States, Mrs. Corazon emerged as the Philippines' ral-

lying figure. She provided moral leadership to the bloodless February 1986 EDSA "People's Power" revolution that stopped the troops and the tanks that were arrayed against the peaceful rebels by the faltering government of President Marcos. A grateful nation catapulted Mrs. Aquino to the presidency and the successful revolution focused the world's attention to the Philippine republic. For weeks the country was the cynosure of world praise and admiration.

"She was not a politician," recalls Andrea Aquino, a niece of Sen. Benigno Aquino who lives in Los Angeles and was one of the hundreds of Fil-Ams that filled St. Basil's. "She didn't like to be president, but I think she did a wonderful job and was a good role model for the Filipinos and the whole world," Aquino told Asian Journal. "It was a beautiful ceremony," Aquino said about the memorial mass. "I was touched by all the prayers. It was beautiful to see Filipinos remembering what she had done, continuing the fight that Ninoy Aquino had begun."

The memorial mass was a surprise success. "This is better than what we expected," said a beaming Dan Espiritu, Deputy Consul General, who sat at the front pew with Consul General Mary Jo Bernardo Aragon and other consular officers. "We only planned for a simple ceremony," Espiritu said to Asian Journal. "By the grace of God, *siguro, maraming nagtulong-tulong*," Espiritu said. (By the grace of God, maybe, many people helped).

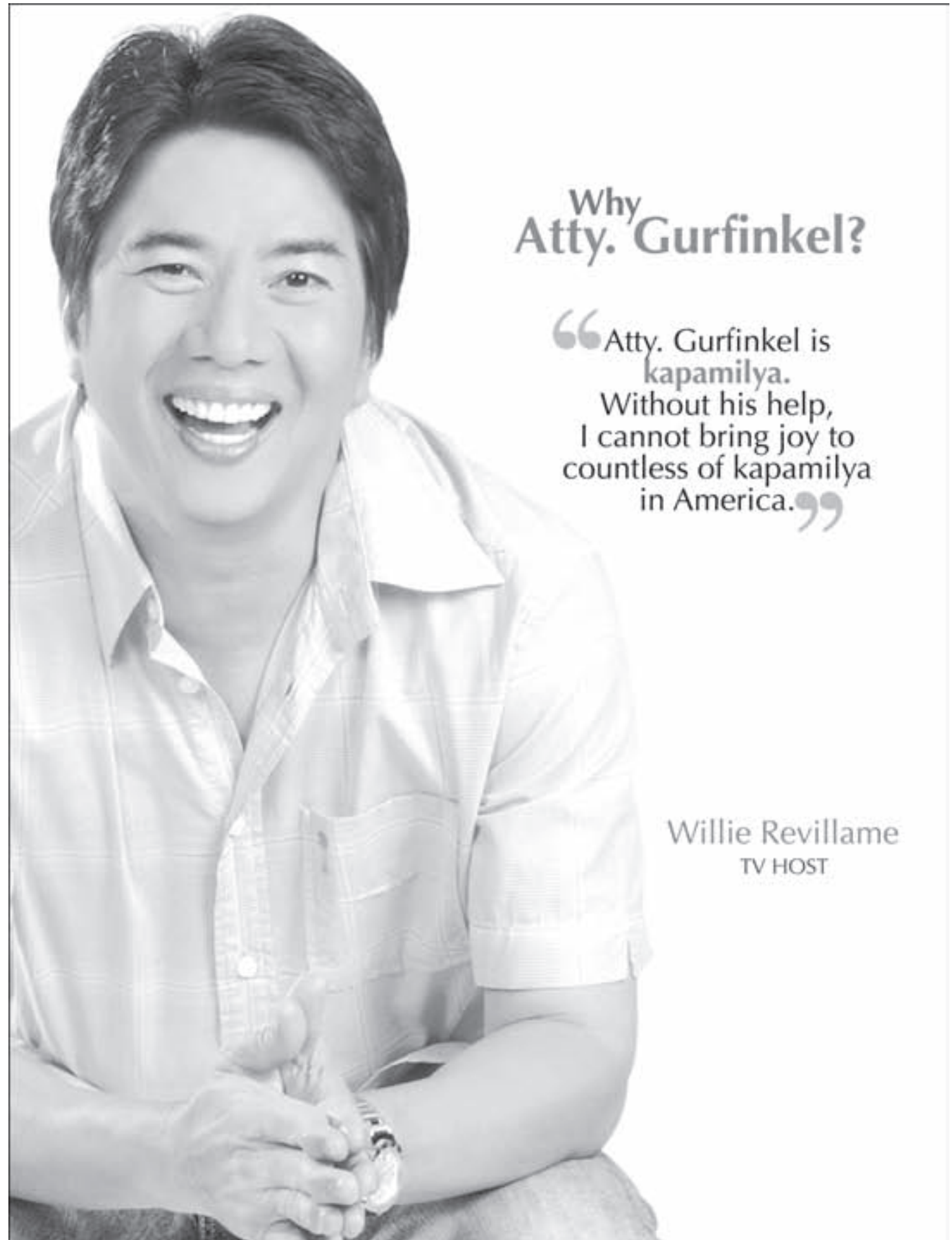
"*Ngayon, eto ang kinalabasan*, a very beautiful, very successful (memorial service)," Espiritu added. (Now, this is the

result). Espiritu revealed that the Consulate did not anticipate the large attendance. "We would be happy if we could have the church half-filled," Espiritu said. A group of volunteers, including Asian Journal's Charina Carrera, produced a tribute video presentation in a short period, but due to lack of time, only about half of that video was shown.

"It's a fitting tribute," offers Atty. Roman Mosqueda, President of the Ninoy Aquino Movement in Los Angeles. He was sitting between Felix Lapuz and Danny Lamila, fellow officers of NAM. "She will be missed. It is so fitting that we could commemorate and celebrate not only Corazon Aquino's life but also her legacy. This may be a time of grief and sorrow, but her legacy is already spread around the world."

A somber Danny Lamila, a close Aquino family friend, described Mrs. Aquino "as one gutsy woman, and that is Filipino courage for everybody and for the world to know." He said that Mrs. Aquino stood up against a brutal dictatorship. Lamila was able to visit with Mrs. Aquino three times before she died. "She's a darling, just like her husband, Ninoy," Lamila said. "Both of them were too charismatic, very close to God that I felt like a saint after talking to them."

The closing song, "Bayan Ko" the Aquino's signature hymn that became the rallying song of the entire nation, brought tears to Benito Miranda, President of the Historic Filipinotown Rotary Club. "Absolutely fantastic," is how he described the memorial mass. "She will be long remembered," Miranda said. ■



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