

Miriam wants VFA abrogated; US says no need

by AUREA CALICA
Philstar.com

MANILA – Sen. Miriam Defensor-Santiago is seeking the abrogation and renegotiation of the Visiting Forces Agreement (VFA) between the Philippines and the United States, citing a report that US troops were engaged in combat operations with Filipino soldiers, which violates the accord.

But US Ambassador Kristie Kenney denied that their troops were engaged in combat operations. She also said she saw no need to renegotiate the VFA.

Santiago, chair of the Legislative Oversight Committee on the VFA (LOVFA), on August 27 said US Col. David Maxwell, former commander of the Joint Special Operations Task Force – Philippines (JSOTF-P), had made an admission that American sol-

diers could engage in combat operations here.

Santiago cited, during the LOVFA hearing at the Senate on August 27, the publication "Focus on the Global South" that quoted Maxwell as saying: "The Philippine Constitution does not prohibit combat operations and provides an exception to this, if there is a treaty in force."

► PAGE A2



Arroyo, Abalos and Neri



Arroyos cleared in ZTE deal

by DELON PORCALLA AND MICHAEL PUNONGBAYAN
Philstar.com

MANILA – The Office of the Ombudsman has cleared President Arroyo and First Gentleman Jose Miguel Arroyo of graft in connection with the botched \$329-million national broadband network (NBN) deal with ZTE Corp. of China, but indicted former elections chief Benjamin Abalos and Social Security System president Romulo Neri.

The ruling came two years after businessman Jose de Venecia III, son and namesake of the former House speaker, exposed the alleged anomalies in the deal and implicated the First Gentleman and Abalos.

Details of alleged wheeling and dealing, multimillion-dollar bribes, and even a murder attempt surfaced during several tension-filled Senate hearings.

Ombudsman Merceditas Gutierrez, a law school classmate of Mr. Arroyo, inhibited from the case. She is facing impeachment raps for allegedly dragging her feet on the case and on other high-level corruption cases involving ranking administration officials.

The 144-page resolution was signed by Emilio Gonzales III, deputy ombudsman for the military and other law enforcement offices;

Robert Kallos, deputy special prosecutor; Rodolfo Elman, assistant ombudsman; Cesar Asuncion, director; and Jesus Micael, special prosecutor.

The joint resolution was dated April 21, 2009 but was approved only on Aug. 27 by overall deputy ombudsman Orlando Casimiro.

A separate case for "corruption of public officials," or a violation of Article 212 of the Revised Penal Code, was likewise recommended against Abalos, which will be lodged before the Metropolitan Trial Court of Mandaluyong City.

► PAGE A2



Ambassador Gaa extends condolences to Kennedys

IN a letter sent to Mrs. Victoria Kennedy, the wife of US Senator Edward Kennedy, who passed away on August 25, Philippine Ambassador to the United States Willy C. Gaa expressed his deepest condolences to the Kennedys on behalf of the Philippine Embassy and the Filipino American community in the United States.

Referring to Senator Kennedy as a distinguished person and statesman, Ambassador Gaa noted in his letter that the late Senator's accomplishments and contributions go beyond the borders of the United States. Ambassador Gaa's letter mentions that Senator Kennedy had been a strong supporter of America's alliance and historic friendship with the Philippines and advocated support for the freedom, restoration of democracy, and advancement of human rights in the Philippines. ■

'I'm out by June 30, 2010'-GMA to Obama

MANILA – President Arroyo continues to be coy about her political plans for 2010, but she has categorically told US President Barack Obama that she is stepping down as scheduled on June 30, 2010.

"Yes, we have elections in 2010. I will leave office on June 30. But I will be working until the last minute on issues that matter," President Arroyo told Obama at their White House meeting last month, according to a highly reliable government source.

This developed as Malacañang submitted to Congress on August 26 what was described as President Arroyo's "final" budget proposal, amounting to P1.5 trillion for 2010.

The source said the White House meeting, which lasted 45 minutes, started with welcome remarks by Obama, in which he dwelled at length on the "important elections coming up in 2010 in the Philippines."

"You are Asia's oldest democracy. It's important that your election process proceeds in a

► PAGE A3

Immigrants fight to bring adult children to US

Families sue feds to reunite families without lengthy waits for entry

SANTA ANA – Evelyn Santos began her quest for a green card nearly two decades ago, hoping someday she and her family could leave the Philippines and start a better life in the United States.

The opportunity came in 2007, but with a painful caveat: Her two elder sons were now too old to qualify as dependents, so they would have to stay behind.

The mother moved to Northern California with her husband and two younger children, and filed a new round of paperwork hoping to get at least one of her older sons into the country without another decade of waiting.

"I have a joke with my son – am I still alive when you come here?" said Santos, 55, a supermarket clerk who lives in Livermore. "I am

► PAGE A3



Teresita Costello is one of several immigrants across the country suing the federal government to try to get their adult children into the country without another lengthy wait. Here, she shows an image of her daughters and grandchild. But, her two elder sons are overseas and waiting for the outcome of the lawsuit.

AP photo by Reed Saxon

Henry Sy, still RP's richest

MANILA – Many of the country's tycoons have gotten richer.

In the *Forbes* magazine edition released Aug. 26, retail magnate Henry Sy, once again the country's richest person, was the biggest gainer.

Sy, owner of SM shopping malls, now has a net worth of \$3.8 billion, which increased from \$700 million last year after shares of his holding company, SM Investments, appreciated by 28 percent.

The magazine reported that this year, 25 tycoons became richer, including nine of the top 10 richest persons in the country.

This was the first time since *Forbes Asia's* November 2007 India Rich List that everyone in the top 10 among an Asian country's 40 rich-

est had increased their fortunes or maintained them.

Aside from Sy, the other moguls in the top 10 richest Filipinos include Lucio Tan (\$1.7 billion), Jaime Zobel de Ayala (\$1.2 billion), Andrew Tan (\$850 million), John Gokongwei (\$720 million), Tony Tan Caktiong (\$710 million), Eduardo Cojuangco Jr. (\$660 million), Enrique Razon (\$620 million), Manuel Villar (\$530 million), and George Ty (\$515 million).

Forbes also reported that among the 40 richest in the Philippines, another big gainer was David Consunji, whose net worth increased from \$105 million to \$300 million after the stock price of his construction firm, DMCI, more than doubled. (Philstar.com)

Final days to register for absentee voting

600,000 Filipinos abroad expected to vote in 2010

MANILA – The Department of Foreign Affairs and the Commission on Elections appeal to overseas Filipinos to register for the 2010 Presidential Elections as deadline draws near.

In a media briefing held by the DFA-Overseas Absentee Voting Secretariat, DFA Undersecretary for Special and

► PAGE A7



HOT SPOT. A plane drops fire retardant, left, as a helicopter drops water on a hot spot, Wednesday, Aug. 26, in the Angeles National Forest, Calif. The fire erupted a few miles north of the foothills community of La Canada Flintridge. The US Forest Service says it has spread over about 10 acres.

AP Photo by Mark J. Terrill

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