

DATELINE PHILIPPINES

De Castro, Teodoro lead admin bets

by TJ BURGONIO & MICHAEL LIM UBAC
Inquirer.net

MANILA—Vice President Noli de Castro and Defense Secretary Gilbert Teodoro have been confirmed as the leading contenders in the ruling Lakas-CMD's selection process for the administration coalition's standard-bearer in the 2010 presidential election.



Defense Secretary Gilbert Teodoro

However, rumors are rife that there is a slot for a third name in the short list of "presidentiables" being considered by the Lakas-Christian Muslim Democrats party and that this would be a toss-up between oppositionists Senators Francis Escudero and Manuel Villar—and possibly Sen. Loren Legarda.

Senate Majority Leader Juan Miguel Zubiri, the Lakas secretary general, confirmed that De Castro and Teodoro were in the short list, and that the "possible dark horse" could either be Legarda, Villar or Sen. Richard Gordon.

He said Metropolitan Manila Development Authority Chair

Bayani Fernando was definitely out of the list because of his poor showing in the surveys.

According to Zubiri, although Legarda was the running mate of the late Fernando Poe Jr., the opposition candidate in the 2004 presidential race, she has enough following in the administration coalition.

He said there was a clamor from the local officials allied with Lakas to include Legarda in the selection process.

Teodoro, Legarda and Escudero belong to the Nationalist People's Coalition (NPC), the party of business tycoon Eduardo "Danding" Cojuangco. The majority of NPC members are allied with the ruling party, with only a handful with the minority.

Escudero, who is with the minority faction of the NPC, has categorically rejected being included in the Lakas selection process.

"Thanks, but no thanks. I'm a member of the opposition. I'm part of the opposition, and I have no plans and I will never leave the opposition," said Escudero in a phone interview.

If he is chosen as the NPC candidate, Escudero said he would not "allow" an NPC merger



Vice President Noli de Castro

with any administration party.

Back-door

According to the rumors, Escudero could become the administration candidate through the back door, that is, through the alliance between Lakas-CMD-NPC-Kabalikat ng Malayang Pilipino (Kampi), thus precluding the necessity of his formally jumping to an administration party.

Zubiri said the ruling party was in a rush to name its standard-bearer for 2010 because of the early deadline set for the filing of candidacies, which has been moved to Nov. 30, 2009 from February 2010. The ruling coalition will have its convention in June.

As regards Fernando, he said that "we love chairman Bayani very much, but he is not rating well."

"We must be practical. Many party-mates will desert the party if the candidate is not winnable because he or she can't convince local party leaders to support him or her," he said.

5,000 public nurses sought; 11,000 apply

by TJ BURGONIO & EUGENE NUÑEZ
Inquirer.net

AS jobs become scarce, more than 11,000 nurses have scrambled to gain a slot in the government's emergency employment program for 5,000 nurses in the countryside, officials said.

"More than 11,000 applied," Labor Undersecretary Lily Pineda said. "But we expected more because there were close to 40,000 new board passers."

After a two-day orientation beginning Wednesday, April 1, the 5,000 nurses will be deployed on Friday, April 3 to treat patients in hospitals and attend to the sick in far-flung barangays (villages) in 1,000 municipalities with high incidence of poverty.

The deployment is part of the Nurses Assigned to Rural Service (NARS), an emergency employment-cum-training program for nurses. The program will cost P500 million.

The program seeks to address the growing number of registered nurses in the country who have been unemployed since passing the nursing board examination and lack the experience to work abroad.

Second batch

The 6,000 applicants who failed to get a slot, however, should not sulk. They will be given priority in the next installment of the NARS program later this year, said Pineda, head of the NARS program.

After six months, the govern-

ment will be hiring a new batch of 5,000 nurses for another six-month employment-cum-training program. The program will be implemented only for a year.

Perhaps the job's biggest come-on is the P8,000 monthly stipend for the province-based nurses, an amount that is higher than the minimum wage in the regions, which ranges from P5,000 to more than P6,000, Pineda said.

Nowadays, nurses pay for their training in hospitals.

"While undergoing free training, they will get P8,000," the labor official said.

Under the program, the nurses will spend the first three months working in a government hospital, and the next three in a rural health unit, or vice versa.

Wellness warriors

At the program's launch in February, President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo referred to NARS participants as "wellness warriors."

To save on transportation and accommodation expenses, the

government will hire licensed nurses from any of the 1,000 municipalities or nearby municipalities. Five nurses will be deployed in each town.

The Department of Labor and Employment (DoLE) said the nurses would have a job cut out for them:

- Initiate primary health, school nutrition and maternal health programs, and first line diagnosis.
- Inform the people about community water sanitation practices and conduct health surveillance.
- Immunize children and mothers.

Roving nurses

They will also serve as roving nurses for rural schools.

In the hospital, they will do the rounds and attend to patients under the supervision of the chief nurse, according to Pineda.

"In the *barangays*, these so-called wellness warriors will diagnose the health condition of the people, provide vaccines say for TB (tuberculosis) and vitamins

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ADB sees economy growing 2.5% this year

by MICHELLE REMO
Inquirer.net

MANILA—The Asian Development Bank said the Philippines would feel the pinch of the global crisis and growth would decelerate this year, but noted that the country would be in a much better position than most of its neighbors to cushion the impact of the turmoil.

In its Asian Development Outlook report, released Tuesday, March 31 the ADB said the Philippine economy would grow 2.5 percent this year, compared with 4.6 percent in 2008 and 7.2 percent in 2007.

"The Philippines is not decoupled from the external economy, and we expect it to slow down this year," Thomas Crouch, ADB director general for Southeast Asia, said, but he stressed that the growth outlook for the Philippines this year was higher than the average growth forecast of 0.7 percent for the Southeast Asian region.

The economies of Thailand, Singapore, Malaysia and Cambodia are projected to contract this year, the ADB said, with that of Singapore seen to post the biggest decline of 5 percent.

The ADB said the declining consumption in advanced economies would drag down export income of countries in the region, while the financial meltdown in the

United States and Europe is likely to result in uncertainty that would force businessmen to pull out investments even from emerging economies.

In the case of the Philippines, the ADB said foreign direct and portfolio investments were expected to be weak. Consumption would also slow down this year as remittances from overseas Filipino workers finally end the growth trend.

"Consumer spending, though benefiting from the downtrend in inflation, is projected to grow just 3 percent. That is because remittance inflows will likely flatten in US dollar terms as labor markets weaken worldwide," Crouch said. Remittances grew 13.7 percent last year to \$16.4 billion.

The ADB also projected that the Philippines' export sector would suffer from the dwindling of global demand, projecting export income to drop 15 percent this year, faster

than last year's 2.6-percent decline to \$49 billion.

But what would make the Philippines suffer less than its neighbors this year, the ADB said, is the accommodative fiscal and monetary policies of the government, relative strength of the banking sector and continued growth—albeit at a slower pace—in consumption.

"The Philippines did the right things over the past years," Crouch said, referring to fiscal measures that reduced the national government's budget deficit to P68.4 billion in 2008 from more than P200 billion at the start of this decade.

Crouch also noted the drop in the Philippine government's debt-to-GDP (gross domestic product) to only 56 percent last year from 78 percent in 2004.

The improved fiscal situation would allow the government to increase spending on social services and infrastructure projects

this year without worrying about going back to an unmanageable deficit and debt levels, he said.

Crouch also said the central bank's moves to cut its key policy rates—by a total 125 basis points since December—and to implement other monetary policy easing measures would also support decent growth this year.

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