

**LAWMAKER SAYS**

# Ensure PWD participation in automated polls

**M**ANILA—Senator Richard Gordon urged the Commission on Elections (Comelec) on Tuesday, April 7 to ensure the active participation of persons with disabilities (PWDs) in the 2010 automated polls. Gordon said the Comelec should prepare polling precincts that would accommodate the more than eight million disabled Filipinos. "As early as now, we must ensure that the more than eight million Filipinos with various disabilities can have full and active participation in our country's most vital democratic process," he said in a statement. "We must enable them to participate in elections so that they can themselves protect and further their

welfare and interests," he said. "As we move to automate the May 2010 elections, we should have persons with disabilities foremost in our mind," he added. For the blind, Gordon said, the direct recording electronic voting system should be able to read out the names of candidates. The machines should also allow deaf and people, who may have lost the use of their upper limbs, to vote, he added. DRE voting machines or popularly known as the "touch screen voting machines" display pictures and names of candidates. Users merely press the screen of the DRE voting machine to vote for their candidates. "We are working to ensure that the Automated Election System

Law is implemented in a way that will give our disabled brethren a greater voice in our elections because their voice truly matters," said Gordon. The lawmaker also urged the Comelec to ensure that there are adequate access ramps for people in wheel chairs, and personnel who can assist them. Barangays (villages), he suggested, might even organize a shuttle service to ferry the disabled from their homes to polling precincts. Government's conservative estimates showed that as of 2000, there were only about 942,098 registered PWDs nationwide, the bulk of which were from Southern Tagalog with 144,289 and 109,236 from the National Capital Region. (*Inquirer.net*)

**SAYS FORMER SOLON**

# No compensation law for Marcos victims

**M**ANILA—The Swiss government is still waiting for Congress to pass a law that will compensate the human rights victims of martial law, nearly 12 years after Switzerland transferred to the Philippines \$683 million in Marcos Swiss accounts, according to former Akbayan party-list Rep. Loretta Ann Rosales. Rosales said last April 6 that she talked to then Swiss Federal President Pascal Couchepin during his visit to the country last year and Swiss Ambassador Peter Sutter and they were both interested in the long-pending bill in Congress to compensate human rights victims. "The president of the Swiss Federal government came here last year and, very reassuringly, he said he told (President Macapagal-Arroyo) that they were quite concerned about the compensation bill being passed as soon as possible," said Rosales, who chairs Claimants 1081, a group of Marcos human rights victims. "This is sensitive since it in-

volves diplomacy but Switzerland wants it passed," she said. Rosales said that one of the two "informal" conditions for the transfer in 1998 of the \$683 million to the Philippines was the compensation of human rights victims and a judgment in the local courts that the money was ill-gotten. "That was in 1998 and now it's 2009 but still the bill has not been passed by Congress," Rosales said. "I had talked to Ambassador Sutter and he said that during the plenary deliberations on the bill in the last Congress, he would tune in on the radio to hear what was happening, even when he was visiting Mindanao," she said. Rosales said that the compensation bill, which allots P10 billion to human rights victims from the \$683 million Marcos Swiss account, was refiled in the present Congress. The Senate has finished its deliberations on it. The House version is up for plenary debate but up to now it

has not been presented on the floor, Rosales said. "The House leadership is saying that they still have 'no go-signal from the Palace.' That is preposterous. The House is an independent body mandated by the Constitution to pass laws," she said. Rosales said she had been lobbying for the bill's presentation in plenary but nothing has happened because of opposition from Malacañang. "We suspect that the Palace is not happy because we, together with Sen. Joker Arroyo, put in provisions to make sure that a very independent compensation board would be set up," Rosales said. The former lawmaker said the board would determine who among the claimants would receive compensation. "There were also rumors before that the military was against it but when I talked to (then AFP Chief of Staff Hermogenes) Esperon, he said 'What's in that bill?' He did not even know its contents," Rosales said. (*Inquirer.net*)

# 'Funny Eddie' at launch of his 12th book

by FE ZAMORA  
*Inquirer.net*

**M**ANILA— If Fidel V. Ramos was once "Steady Eddie," now you can call him "Funny Eddie." The octogenarian ex-President launched the 12th volume of his collection of essays and speeches on Thursday, April 9 and had everyone in stitches. He wore his "eyeglasses" — a pair without lenses—and bragged that he still had all his teeth. He also announced, with relish: "I used to have a gun and ammunition in my socks; now it's eyeglasses and a 'tabako' cigar!" And like a politician, he made a promise to give "free copies of the book to any independent politician who does not belong to any political party, provided he can present an identification card, preferably a senior citizen's ID." But in his latest book titled *Caring, Sharing, Daring*, Ramos discussed heavy stuff such as nation-building, national security, foreign affairs, World War II and the war veterans. **Eyes on the ball** Still, he included a chapter on anecdotes about him written by Cabinet members during his administration in 1992-98, pictures that he had taken, and his personal tips on playing golf. With two photos as illustration, the ex-President (senior golfer, age 76-80) offered these golf tips: "Lesson 1: Sit when you can, even with a long putter. The

sitting/lying positions are less stressful than standing (not only in golf). "Lesson 2: Always, eyes on the ball—not on the girl, no matter how curvaceous!" He also presented a formula for long life: "It's not that difficult to reach 100: the secret—be sure you reach 99 years old." **Power and policy** On the serious side, Ramos tackled the purported plan of President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo to stay longer in power, as well as her "flip-flopping" on the issue of population control. He wrote in his preface: "While Obama can look forward to as long as eight years of being at the helm, PGMA [Ms Arroyo] and her drumbeaters must not delude themselves into staying on beyond 30 June 2010. And if PGMA bites the bullet of reform and takes decisive actions now, she could still bow out with a passable legacy with her head still held high." He also wrote: "The Arroyo administration's population policy has generally been described as 'flip-flopping,' perhaps due to unwarranted subservience to the Catholic Church, in particular to its group of powerful bishops. The current government's family planning program reflects the gross inefficiency of the weak Philippine State. PGMA's ambiguousness has hurt the cause of proper family planning in this country. Under the guise of natural family planning, mothers' lives and health, together with those of their babies, are


now being put at risk for political expediency and religious traditionalism." **Reunion** The launch served as a reunion of sorts between Ramos and the officials at the time, such as Rafael Alunan (secretary of interior and local government), Daniel "Bitay" Lacson (presidential adviser) and Jose Pardo (secretary of trade and industry). Among those who queued for Ramos' autograph were officials of the incumbent administration such as Hermogenes Esperon Jr. (chief of the Presidential Management Staff) and Avelino Razon (Ms Arroyo's adviser on the peace process). Esperon and Razon served with Ramos at the now-defunct Philippine Constabulary and the Special Action Force (SAF), an elite unit that Ramos organized in the 1970s. (Ramos, who would become Armed Forces chief of staff and subsequently secretary of national defense, used to joke that SAF actually meant "Secret Army ni Fidel.") Esperon retired as chief of staff of the Armed Forces. Razon capped his career as director-general of the Philippine National Police. **Not done yet** Even if some people may consider publishing 12 volumes of collected speeches and essays as overkill, Ramos is not quite done. "Do not panic if I tell you that before the year ends, another book is coming out," the man said with his trademark wink. ■

**QC mayor urges new grads to go into business**

**M**ANILA—Quezon City Mayor Feliciano Belmonte Jr. has urged recent college graduates to try their hand at being entrepreneurs and open up their own businesses. In a statement addressed to the graduates of the Quezon City Polytechnic University, Belmonte called on the new members of the workforce to take advantage of new enter-

prises sprouting in the city. He added that such new businesses would give the graduates opportunities to set up their own or become gainfully employed. The city mayor pointed out that the courses in QCPU, such as Information and Communications Technology, Industrial Engineering, and Entrepreneurial Management, were carefully chosen to "best respond to real

and emerging demands both here and abroad." Belmonte noted students can also take advantage of other IT-related fields such as finance and business, software development, hardware maintenance and upgrading, website services, accounting, logistics, human resource management services, research, engineering, and architecture. (*Inquirer.net*)

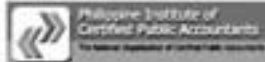


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