

DATELINE PHILIPPINES

SOCIAL WEATHER STATIONS SURVEY

Satisfaction rating of gov't exes unchanged

MANILA—The satisfaction ratings of top government officials and institutions basically remained unchanged in the first quarter this year compared to the previous quarter, according to the latest survey of the Social Weather Stations (SWS).

The officials include Vice President Noli de Castro, Senate President Juan Ponce Enrile, House Speaker Prospero Nograles and Chief Justice Reynato Puno.

The SWS First Quarter 2009 survey was conducted from Feb. 20-23 this year. The results were released last April 6.

The survey found 60 percent satisfied and 24 percent dissatisfied with the performance of De Castro, giving him a "good" net satisfaction rating of +36 (percent satisfied minus percent dissatisfied). This was similar to his "good" +39 rating in December 2008.

"His net performance rating has been +30 and above since June 2006," the polling outfit said



Senate President Juan Ponce Enrile



House Speaker Prospero Nograles

in a media release. Enrile's net satisfaction rating remained "neutral" at +8 (41 percent satisfied, 34 percent dissatisfied) from +5 in the previous quarter.

Public satisfaction with Nograles basically remained unchanged, from 22 percent satisfied in December to 23 percent satisfied in February. However, those dissatisfied with his performance rose from 39 percent to 45

percent this quarter, resulting in his net "poor" rating worsening from -17 in December to -22.

Nograles' current rating is the worst rating to date for speakers of the House of Representatives since 1990.

Puno's rating remained "neutral" at +3 (38 percent satisfied, 35 percent dissatisfied) from -4 in December. SWS said Puno's rating had been consistently neutral in its nine consecutive surveys.

Among the government institutions, the Senate received a "moderate" net satisfaction rating of +23 (50 percent satisfied, 27 dissatisfied), similar to its "moderate" rating of +26 in December.

Some 35 percent were satisfied and 34 percent dissatisfied with the performance of the House of Representatives, a neutral net +2, correctly rounded, down seven points from its neutral +9 rating in the previous quarter.

The Supreme Court had a net satisfaction rating of a neutral +4 (39 percent satisfied, 35 dissatisfied), four points down from last quarter's neutral +8.

The survey found 31 percent satisfied and 39 percent dissatisfied with the Cabinet as a whole, a neutral -7, down by six points from its neutral -1 rating in the previous quarter.

The survey used face to face interviews of 1,200 adults in Metro Manila, the rest of Luzon, Visayas and Mindanao. It had a margin of error of plus or minus 2.5 percent. (*Inquirer.net*)

Nograles: Popularity not a job requirement

MANILA—A House Speaker need not be popular to do his job, according to Speaker Prospero Nograles, who shrugged off the latest survey results showing him with the lowest satisfaction rating among top government officials.

Based on the First Quarter 2009 survey of the Social Weather Stations (SWS), Nograles received a net satisfaction rating of -22. Of the total respondents, 45 percent were dissatisfied with his performance, while only 23 percent were satisfied.

"I am sorry but the position I hold as speaker is not based on my popularity or based on survey satisfaction," Nograles said in a text message. The SWS said Nograles received the worst rating to date for speakers of the House of Representatives since 1990.

According to Nograles, a speaker is not required to be well-loved. His job also entails making unpopular choices that he nevertheless thinks are good for the country.

"There are many instances that I need to take unpopular decisions and that's part of my job. I have to bite the bullet if I believe it's in the best interest of our people even if it's unpopular," he said.

Nograles, who represents Davao City and is also president of the ruling party Lakas-Christian Muslim Democrats, has been Speaker for a year.

He replaced Pangasinan Rep. Jose de Venecia who was ousted after he had a falling out with President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo over his son's allegations of corruption in the scuttled \$329-million National Broadband Network deal.

Nograles is currently spearheading moves to amend the Constitution in the House, particularly the Charter's economic provisions. His resolution is scheduled for plenary debate when session resumes next week. (*Inquirer.net*)

7 charged in kidnap of Red Cross workers

Palace taps new emissary to free 2 hostages

MANILA—Three police officers, two barangay chiefs and two alleged Abu Sayyaf members have been charged with kidnapping for ransom in connection with the Jan. 15 abduction of three workers of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC).

The Philippine National Police filed the charges last April 4 against the seven in the prosecutor's office in Zamboanga City, where they were being held by the Criminal Investigation and Detection Group, PNP spokesperson Supt. Jose Gucela said.

Also on April 6, Press Secretary Cerge Remonde announced that the government had tapped a new emissary to help secure the release of the hostages. He declined to reveal details "so there will be a chance for the negotiations to succeed."

PNP Director General Jesus Verzosa told reporters that military, police and civilian volunteer units had completed redeployment on Jolo island, to put pressure on the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) to release Swiss Andreas Notter and Italian Eugenio Vagni.

A third hostage, Mary Jean Lacaba, was freed last April 2 after 77 days in captivity.

Troops encircling the kidnapers had been withdrawn following an ASG threat to behead one hostage last March 31, but they moved back after the kidnapers demanded a total pullout.

However, local authorities were able to negotiate a stay of execution and the freedom of Lacaba.

Sen. Richard Gordon last April 6 said that Abu Sayyaf leader Al-bader Parad called him on April 5 to remind him anew of the terrorist group's earlier demand for troops to pull out from Parang and three barangays (villages) in Indanan, not a total pullout from the island.

Gordon, chair of the Philippine National Red Cross (PNRC), told the *Philippine Daily Inquirer* that he and Parad also talked about the condition of Notter and Vagni, but declined to give details.

Word war continues

In what appears to be a continuing word war with Gordon, Defense Secretary Gilbert Teodoro Jr. last April 6 ruled out a total withdrawal of troops from Jolo. He said that the military presence led to the release of Lacaba.

"A pullout is different from repositioning. A pullout means our troops would have to leave military camps, which we did not allow when Senator Gordon requested it earlier," he said in a phone interview from Honolulu with dzMM radio.

If Gordon wanted to maintain its communication with the kidnapers, it was fine with him, Teodoro said, as long as the senator would bring the demands to the committee and let it make the decisions.

Charged with kidnapping were Senior Police Officer 3 Muhilmi Ismula, SPO1 Sattal Jadjuli and PO2 Marcial Ahajan.



Andreas Notter Eugenio Vagni Mary Jean Lacaba

Accused as conspirators were barangay chiefs Alano Mohammad of Kanaway in Parang, Julhassan Awadi of Sawaki in Indanan and ASG members Hadjirul Bambra and Ibnogajir Hadjirul. Ismula is said to be a nephew of Parad.

"There are vital witnesses that pinpointed them. They provided logistical support and safe haven to the kidnapers," said Gucela.

ASG leader

Asked why Parad was not among those charged, Gucela said investigators were still in the process of "case buildup."

"There is no testimony yet that could directly link Parad," Gucela said.

Lt. Col. Edgard Arevalo, Jolo-based spokesperson for the hos-

tage crisis, said soldiers would not pull out from positions they are now holding.

"We cannot in conscience afford to provide the bandits a safe haven for future incidents of kidnapping and piracy like the Sipadan and Dos Palmas incidents. Neither should we allow the same to happen or spill in the nearby island provinces," he added.

New emissary

Remonde said the new emissary was known to Parad, "otherwise they will not negotiate with him."

Despite the naming of a new emissary, he emphasized that all actions seeking the release of the captives should be cleared with the local crisis management committee headed by Sulu Gov. Ab-

dusakur Tan.

"The governor and officials of Sulu definitely know the situation in Sulu better than any armchair expert based here in Manila," Remonde said.

"I still would like to believe that Senator Gordon is acting and speaking on the basis of the best of intentions and motivations," Remonde said.

"But as we say, oftentimes the road to perdition is filled with good intentions. So even if we have good intentions, let's be more circumspect [and determine] if we are helping or not." (*Inquirer.net*)

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