

DATELINE PHILIPPINES

More Pinoys see life improving

by HELEN FLORES
Philstar.com

MANILA—More adult Filipinos are expecting their personal quality of life to improve in the next 12 months, the latest survey by the Social Weather Stations (SWS) showed.

The non-commissioned First Quarter 2009 Social Weather Survey taken from Feb. 20 to 23 showed 32 percent of adult Filipinos expecting their personal quality of life to improve—or “personal optimists”—in the next 12 months. Nineteen percent—“personal pessimists”—expect it to get worse, bringing the Net Personal Optimism to +14, which SWS termed “fair.”

However, nearly half of adult Filipinos said their lives have worsened in the last 12 months.

The 47 percent of 1,200 respondents, called “losers” in the survey, was an increase of four points from the fourth quarter of 2008, SWS said.

Those saying their lives had improved, or “gainers,” remained at 19 percent, according to the First Quarter 2009 Social Weather Survey.

SWS said compared to the Fourth Quarter of 2008, personal optimism rose by two points, but personal pessimism rose by four points. “Thus Net Personal Optimism was more or less unchanged,” it said.

“This brings the gainers-losers gap to a low -28, or worse by four points from the previous quarter,” the SWS said.

Optimism that the Philippine economy would get better (economic optimists) rose by one point to 19 percent in February, while pessimism stayed at 38 percent. The Net Economic Optimism score was a mediocre -19.

SWS said Net Economic Optimism has been at low to very low levels over the past six quarters, ranging from -19 to -39.

SWS said personal optimism rose in Luzon outside Metro Manila but dropped in the Visayas.

Compared to the previous quarter, Net Personal Optimism in balance Luzon rose by six points, to a high +23 in February.

It fell by 15 points in the Visayas, to a low -4; by six points in Mindanao, to a fair +11; and by one point in Metro Manila, to a fair +14.

Net Personal Optimism rose by two points in class D, to a fair +16 in February. It fell by 13 points in class E, down to a mediocre +5, and by four points in class ABC, to a fair +15.

SWS said the gainers-losers gap has narrowed in Mindanao but widened in the Visayas.

The number of Losers exceeding Gainers in Mindanao eased by six points from the previous quarter, slightly improving to a mediocre -16 in February, the survey firm said.

However, it worsened by 19 points in the Visayas, down to a very low -49; by five points in Metro Manila, to a very low -33; and by two points in balance Luzon, to a low -23.

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It worsened by 14 points in class E, falling to a very low -36, and by three points in class ABC, to a mediocre -17. It remained at a low -26 in class D or “masa.”

The SWS survey also showed that economic pessimism eased in Metro Manila but worsened in the Visayas.

Economic pessimism eased in Metro Manila, with its Net Economic Optimism score improving by 19 points from the previous quarter to a mediocre -18 in February.

Net Economic Optimism improved by seven points in balance Luzon, to -14.

It worsened by 18 points in the Visayas, down to a very low -33, and by five points in Mindanao, to a mediocre -18.

It rose by 6 points in class D, to -18, and by five points in class ABC, to -17. It worsened by 15 points in class E, to a low -23.

The survey used face-to-face interviews of 1,200 adults in Metro Manila, the balance of Luzon, Visayas and Mindanao.

It has sampling error margins of plus or minus three percent for national percentages and plus or minus six percent for area percentages. ■

Miriam: Visiting Forces Agreement up for review

by AUREA CALICA
Philstar.com

THE Legislative Oversight Committee on the Visiting Forces Agreement (VFA) will review the pact to set clearer guidelines on how US soldiers accused of crimes should be treated.

Speaking to reporters yesterday, Sen. Miriam Defensor-Santiago, Legislative Oversight Committee chair, said they must take a “good tough look” at the VFA.

“There are other pending VFAs, for the information of the Filipino public, with other countries,” she

said.

Santiago said the hearing would be held next month as Foreign Affairs Secretary Alberto Romulo had asked that he be given time to attend to the issue.

“Generally, my personal opinion, as chairperson of the committee on foreign relations, is we have to start examining these VFAs and see whether the loss to our self-esteem and our sense of sovereignty is compensated for by what normally are the regular bargaining chips of these countries,” she said.

Santiago said she personally did not like the VFA because the Philippines had been getting “junk” military aid from the US.

“Besides, it’s supposed to be a two-sided agreement, but we never go to the United States, our people do not go to the United States, we never practice our military exercises there, so it’s completely one-sided,” she said.

Santiago said the Philippines must be getting more from the VFA since it had been “acting as a lightning rod for the enemies of the US.”

“We are being used as a monitoring station by the US Armed Forces in its so-called ‘war on terror.’

“Every few years they need to upgrade their facilities and then they go around the world offering these junk to countries like the Philippines who can be badgered or pressured to grant these concessions which normally do not sit well with the university students or the leftists in our society.”

Santiago said the CA decision acquitting US Marine Lance Corporal Daniel Smith was “insensitive” to public opinion, especially in ordering the immediate release of the American from detention.

“I don’t know why this sentence had to be included in that decision, it’s a standard sentence in decisions of acquittal by lower courts, but in this case, since the accused is part of a very controversial agreement between the Philippines and the US, (the CA) could have been more prudent to include the sentence.”

► PAGE A6



Sen. Miriam Defensor-Santiago

Senators warn Palace on Lozada’s arrest

by CHRISTINE AVENDAÑO
Inquirer.net

MANILA—Sen. Francis Pangilinan warned last April 27 there could be public uproar should whistleblower Jun Lozada be arrested and jailed from a perjury charged filed by a close ally of President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo.

In a statement, Pangilinan said “public sympathy is clearly with Lozada,” who blew the whistle in 2008 on the rigging, kickbacks and overpricing in the aborted \$329-million National Broadband Network project awarded to China’s ZTE Corp.

Lozada testified during the Senate hearing on the controversy in February last year.

“The government should be careful of its next step,” Pangilinan said. He called as “ridiculous” the possible arrest of Lozada, who has been facing a perjury case filed by Ms Arroyo’s former chief of staff, Michael Defensor.

“It is a sad statement of the state of our system of justice and the rule of law when those who blow the whistle on wrongdoing are prosecuted and those accused and party to wrongdoing remain untouched, or worse, are promoted,” Pangilinan said.

Sen. Francis Escudero, meanwhile, urged the people, particularly his fellow Bicolanos, to protest the impending arrest of Lozada.

“I urge all those who seek the truth to unite behind Jun Lozada and support him in this difficult time by speaking out, and through prayers,” the opposition senator said in a statement.

“I also urge former Secretary Mike Defensor to withdraw his criminal complaint against Lozada. That is the best way, I think, he can vindicate himself and be magnanimous,” Escudero said.

Lozada, who is from Ligao, Albay, linked Defensor to an alleged attempt by the Arroyo administration to prevent him from testifying in the Senate on the alleged US\$329-million national broadband scam.

“This is the least we can do for Jun Lozada whose example should be emulated by all, especially those who intimately know about corruption at the highest levels of government,” Escudero said. ■

SAYS US AMBASSADOR

‘US didn’t violate protocol on Smith leaving’

by CYNTHIA BALANA
Inquirer.net

MANILA, Philippines—United States Ambassador Kristie Kenney last April 23 said the United States did not violate protocol when it whisked Marine Lance Corporal Daniel Smith out of the Philippines immediately after his rape conviction was overturned by the Court of Appeals last April 23.

In an interview with reporters at the US Embassy during a naturalization ceremony for four Balikatan 2009 soldiers, Kenney said the Department of Foreign Affairs was informed both orally and in writing of Smith’s departure.

Holding the Marine any longer would have been a violation of his human rights, she said.

“The Court of Appeals sent him a copy of their decision, which called for his immediate release. The word ‘immediate’ did not suggest 24 hours or 72 hours later,” Kenney said.

She did not say when Smith left the country but a DFA source said he flew out in the morning of April 25.

Smith is now in the US after being allowed by his superiors to spend time with his family, according to Kenney.

She said she was not aware if Smith faced a court-martial but that it was up to his mother unit to take the next step.

Kenney thanked the Department of Interior and Local Government for its “understanding” of Smith’s confinement conditions and for coming over to check up on him regularly.

She said the Smith case was a first for the US Embassy under the 10-year-old Visiting Forces Agreement.

“So I think for all of us, this was difficult, complicated. Everybody watched it very closely and for the families involved, I think, very emotional and this was never easy to deal with,” she said.

Asked if the US was ready to undertake a review of the VFA, Kenney said there were VFA-related cases pending in the Supreme Court and the US was awaiting their outcome.

“You know, throughout this process, we’ve been in constant dialogue on all issues. We’re friends and allies, and sovereign nations as well, and we’re always looking at how we can work together better,” she said. ■

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