Senate passes Climate Change Act on final reading

by Aurea Calica
Philstar.com

THE proposed Climate Change Act of 2009 was passed by the Senate on third and final reading, along with 11 other bills as Congress holds its last session day today, June 3.

Congress resumes session on July 27 in time for President Arroyo's last State of the Nation Address.

Senate Bill No. 2583, An Act Mainstreaming Climate Change into Government Policy Formulations and Creating the Climate Change Commission, highlights the synergistic action needed in dealing with the climate crisis and in reducing the risk of disasters associated with global climate change.

Sen. Loren Legarda, the bill's author and sponsor, welcomed the passage as a "step in the right direction" in mainstreaming into government's policy formulation and development planning the various measures needed to help address the problem of climate change.

The bill seeks to create a Climate Change Commission to oversee the implementation of government policies to mitigate and adapt to the threats posed by climate change.

Climate change is blamed on global warming which, in turn, is partly due to the continuing increase in global greenhouse gas emissions by man.

Climate change takes varied forms, including very strong typhoons, out-of-season rains and droughts.

SB 2583 incorporates the amendments of Legarda's committee, as well as the individual amendments of Senators Miriam Defensor-Santiago and Pia Cayetano.

Mrs. Arroyo will head the proposed Climate Change Commission, with the secretaries of various government agencies, the presidents of the leagues of cities, municipalities and barangays and representatives from the academe, business, non-government-organizations and civil society serving as ex-officio members.

The commission shall have the following tasks:

• Ensure the mainstreaming of climate change and disaster risk reduction into development plans and programs at all levels;

• Coordinate and synchronize climate change programs of national government agencies;

• Formulate a Framework Strategy and Program on Climate Change and exercise policy oversight to ensure that the goals set are attained; and

• Strengthen local government units to effectively address climate change issues.

The commission may also recommend legislation, policies, strategies, programs on and appropriations for climate change adaptation; review and recommend the approval of major development investments in climate-sensitive sectors; create an enabling environment for the design of relevant and appropriate risk-sharing and risk-transfer instruments; create an enabling environment for the promotion of linkages between and encourage broader multi-stakeholder participation in climate change mitigation and adaptation; and formulate strategies on greenhouse gas mitigation.

To aid the commission in the discharge of its duties, a climate change office shall serve as its secretariat which will be headed by an executive director.

The Framework Strategy and Program on Climate Change shall serve as the basis for planning, research and development, extension and monitoring of climate change activities.

Palace downplays Moody's forecast of RP recession

by Marvin Sy
Philstar.com

MALACAÑANG downplayed June 2 the forecast of an economist from Moody's Investors Service about the strong possibility of the country going into a recession this year.

The two deputy presidential spokespersons on economic affairs Gary Olivar and Rolando Tungpalan gave different opinions about the statements made by the economist but shared the same optimism about the state of the Philippine economy.

Tungpalan said that the country is not counting on miracles as a way out of a possible recession, just like what was stated by Nikhilesh Bhattacharyya, associate economist at Moody's Economy.com, the research arm of Moody's Investors Service.

"We expect our infrastructure and social protection programs under our economic resiliency plan to boost public spending starting the second quarter and savings transforming to consumption in the next quarters," said Tungpalan, who is deputy director general of the National Economic and Development Authority.

"Many sectors are more optimistic now than we were during the first quarter," he added.

According to the economist from Moody's, it would take a miracle for the Philippines to avoid going into a recession this year. The economist argued that slow growth in private consumption and the low level of investments would make it close to impossible for the Philippine economy to expand this year.

Olivar, for his part, would rather ignore the gloomy forecast of the economist. "I've learned to be much more sanguine about the rating agencies' projections ever since the collapse of the subprime mortgage instruments, many of which were rated triple A by the likes of Moody's," Olivar said.

Secretary to the Cabinet Silvestre Bello III said that Moody's is entitled to its own opinion but based on the analysis made by the President's economic managers, a rebound should even be expected during the second half of the year.

"They are saying that the economic meltdown has been in what we call a rebound mode. What this means is that we were expecting a longer recession period, but what happened is that we are now expecting a rebound within a shorter period," Bello said.

"Of course we are concerned about this statement but then we have to rely on the analysis of our own economic advisers because in the end, we are the ones who would get hit if our analysis is wrong," he added.

Business group opposes higher 'sin' taxes

by Ma. Elisa P. Osorio
Philstar.com

THE government must not raise taxes on tobacco and alcoholic products in times of crisis because it will only pull down the demand, for these products, local businessmen said last June 2.

"Higher taxes mean higher prices and less demand. In the end, the government's intention to raise more revenues out of these products will also be negated by the drop in demand," Jesus L. Arranza, Federation of Philippine Industries (FPI) president, said in a statement.

The group stressed that the levying of higher taxes is very untimely due to the economic crisis and the worsening case of smuggling of tobacco and liquor that are causing the market of domestic manufacturers to shrink.

Government data showed a 35.6 percent drop in taxes collected from the tobacco industry in the first quarter of 2009.

In the case of alcoholic drinks, Arranza said it has been established that when the price of copra is down, people in coconut producing area shift to the lower-priced gin products because their income is low. So with the recession, imposing taxes would just lead to a further drop in sales.

"It is not true that tobacco and alcohol are not price-sensitive," he said.

In addition to higher process, Arranza said tobacco and alcoholic products that are entering the country illegally are also eating up into the domestic market considerably.

In fact, in the last two weeks, the Presidential Anti-Smuggling Group (PASG) intercepted different brands of smuggled cigarettes and liquors in Currimao, Ilocos Norte and in San Fernando, La Union.

He said it would be a big injustice if the government would just keep on raising taxes on the domestic manufacturers of cigarettes and liquors and then not give them ample protection against the smugglers that are raiding their market.

Arranza lamented that if only the Department of Finance would just focus more on the campaign against smuggling, the agency would be able to raise an estimated P120 billion in additional revenues annually and it does not need to put more tax burdens on vital players in the Philippine economy.

During this difficult economic period, Arranza said the government should be more concerned in preserving the livelihood of the millions of Filipinos that are dependent on these industries.

Also, Arranza said the government and the lawmakers should stop branding tobacco and alcohol as "sin products" since these industries are feeding millions of Filipino families and are remitting billions of pesos in revenues to the state coffer.

"It's unfair to say that the farmers and the manufacturers are producing 'sin products' and to brand the companies that are employing Filipinos and are remitting taxes to the government as 'manufacturers of sin products.' They are contributing heavily to the economy," he said.

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