

# DATELINE PHILIPPINES

## RP economy to grow despite storms' onslaught - officials

PHILIPPINE economic managers said they are confident that the economic growth for this year will hit the targeted 0.8 to 1.8 percent despite massive damages wrought by two strong storms in the past two weeks, as overseas Filipino workers are expected to wire back more money in time of crisis.

In a press briefing held today, Finance Secretary Margarito Teves said the steady inflow of remittances from OFWs will offset the damages brought by

back-to-back storms, estimated to be worth P16 billion (about \$344 million). This figure includes roads, bridges, irrigation facilities and farmlands.

Since Sept. 26, tropical storms "Ondoy" and "Pepeng" struck the northern Philippines one after another, causing widespread flooding that submerged low-lying towns and villages up to now. More than 650 people were killed and around 6 million people were affected.

National Economic and De-

velopment Authority (NEDA) policy planning director Dennis Arroyo, for his part, said that in light of the recent calamities, OFWs might send more money back home to help their families who lost their homes and properties.

Teves said remittances for this year may grow by 4 percent, revising their earlier forecast of a flat growth, compared to the 0.3 to 0.4 percentage points reduction in GDP growth due to storm damages. (Philstar.com)

## MVP tapped to head RP reconstruction commission

by PAOLO ROMERO  
Philstar.com

DAGUPAN CITY—President Arroyo has formed a special reconstruction commission to be headed by Philippine Long Distance Telephone Co. (PLDT) chairman Manuel Pangilinan to raise funds from international donors and undertake a massive and long-term rebuilding program in the disaster-prone country.

During the Cabinet meeting here Mrs. Arroyo announced that she signed on Monday night an executive order creating the Special National Public-Private Reconstruction Commission that would undertake a study of the causes, costs and actions to be taken in the wake of tropical storm "Ondoy" and typhoon "Pepeng," as well as typhoon "Frank" that hit the country in 2008.

Defense Secretary Gilbert Teodoro, who is also National Disaster Coordinating Council (NDCC) chairman, said the combined damage caused by Ondoy and Pepeng to infrastructure and agriculture is estimated at nearly P30 billion and could go higher.

Typhoon Frank hit the Visayas in 2008 but the region has not yet fully recovered from the destruction left by it.

Socio-economic Planning Secretary Augusto Santos told the Cabinet that Ondoy could shave off 0.22 percent of the country's Gross Domestic Product for the year and Pepeng would affect 0.11 percent of GDP.

Albay Gov. Joey Salceda, one of the economic advisers of Mrs. Arroyo, made the recommenda-

tion to the President to set up a special body that would raise at least \$1 billion from foreign donors to rebuild the country because the government is cash-strapped and the economy is fragile.

Cebu Archbishop Ricardo Cardinal Vidal and Finance Secretary Margarito Teves will co-chair the commission.

Department heads of various government agencies, business groups and representatives of Philippine and international non-government organizations would be appointed as members.

The National Economic and Development Authority and the Office of Civil Defense will form the secretariat of the commission.

Mrs. Arroyo directed the commission to request the United Nations and the World Bank to coordinate an international pledging session.

Teves and Teodoro said the effort of the commission would not include the UN's "flash appeal" for relief aid to the country.

They said funds to be raised in the flash appeal are for immediate relief while the work of the commission is for long-term reconstruction programs.

Among the other tasks of the commission is to undertake the rehabilitation plan for destroyed infrastructure and other priorities, she said.

The body would also prioritize programs and oversee their implementation, she said.

The commission would also serve as a clearinghouse for international assistance implemented by donors themselves using the

cluster approach, Mrs. Arroyo said.

Teves said the special pledging session could be held late next month or early December, as most international financial and donor agencies would still have to conduct a "needs assessment" and determine the extent of aid the country needs for the reconstruction.

Salceda earlier said given the impact of the global crisis on our fiscal capacity versus the magnitude of the calamity impact, the Philippines should seek fresh aid of at least \$1 billion for a grand effort for reconstruction.

The two alternatives to finance a grand reconstruction effort, he said, are to raise taxes or slash other priorities, "which are neither feasible nor desir-

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## UN EXEC TO RP: BUILD, PLAN FOR DISASTERS

### Standing water in Pasig worries UN official

by VERONICA UY  
Inquirer.net

MANILA—Countries vulnerable to the harsh effects of climate change like the Philippines need to build and plan for disasters as the weather events become "more extreme" and "more intense," United Nations Undersecretary General John Holmes said Tuesday.

But in Pasig City, which he visited Monday, Holmes said he was most struck by the standing water that was expected to remain there in the next two months or more. He expressed concern for the people who have stayed on in their houses trying to go on with their lives, wading in these waters and being exposed to various diseases.

The government, he said, "should look for ways to get rid of the standing water."

At a press conference Tuesday, Holmes said "chronic vulnerability (in many parts of the world) has not gone away," and the consequences of climate change in the coming years were expected to worsen that vulnerability. And with the global economic meltdown, international humanitarian aid may not be as generous in the coming years.

That's why, he said, countries vulnerable to climate change effects needed to adopt measures, allocate funding, and initiate technology transfers to reduce the risks of disasters that were the sure effects of climate change.

"We cannot stop disasters, but we can reduce the impact if we take measures in advance like not build on flood-prone areas, implement the right kind of water management, build houses and schools that can withstand floods and earthquakes," he said.

"Governments can make good investments. These do not cost much compared to responses

after disasters that are more expensive," he added.

Holmes said that \$12 billion were spent globally every year in response to disasters, and he expected the amount to increase because of global warming.

The UN official, who is in the country to see for himself the effects of the storm "Ondoy" (international name: Ketsana) and typhoon "Pepeng" (international name: Parma), said the UN was likely to revise its flash appeal to the international community for the Philippines in the next two to three weeks after finishing the assessment of the destruction in northern Luzon caused by Pepeng.

At the same time, Holmes also said he was impressed by the Philippine government's response to the twin disasters, particularly its "speed" and "effectiveness."

He said the UN system adopted precautions against possible corruption in the distribution of relief goods and aid, including working with UN agencies and other non-government organizations in the country.

"The help goes straight to the people. They either survive or not. The effects are very visible. The risk of diversion or corruption is lower in relief operations than in other kinds of aid. It's not usually a major problem. The concern is always there but the effects of the relief are immediately seen," he said.

Of the \$74 million targeted for Ondoy operations, the UN has received \$19 million worth of commitments from the international community. Outside the UN flash appeal, \$25 million more were given directly either to the government or non-government organizations. ■

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