

14 mayors under watch for drugs—Sotto

by CARLA GOMEZ
Inquirer.net

BACOLOD CITY—Fourteen of the country's mayors were placed under close watch because of their alleged involvement in illegal drug activities, Dangerous Drugs Board Chair Vicente "Tito" Sotto III said on Saturday.

Sotto, who was in Bacolod with his family for the MassKara Festival during the weekend, said these mayors included two from the Visayas, two from Metro Manila and five from Mindanao while the rest were from Luzon.

Sotto noted though that there was no cause for alarm because this number comprised less than one percent of the total number of municipal and city mayors in the Philippines.

The Philippines has over 1,500 municipal and city mayors. However, Sotto did not disclose the names of these mayors.

Sotto also said they also have the names of barangay (village) captains, law enforcers and even show biz personalities on their watch list.

He added that they have already

submitted their watch list to President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo.

"We are closely monitoring them and if they are proven guilty of the allegations, we will put them behind bars," Sotto said.

He said the names of these personalities were included in their watch list based on information gathered by their action centers in Metro Manila to monitor those involved in illegal drug activities and to receive information from concerned citizens.

The DDB was also comparing their watch list with that of the Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency, the National Bureau of Investigation, the Intelligence Service of the Armed forces and the other intelligence units nationwide, he added.

Sotto also said that while they were not well funded, their campaign against illegal drugs has gained grounds.

He also disclosed that the Philippines ranked third in the world as far as the number of dismantled shabu (methamphetamine hydrochloride) laboratories was concerned.

The DDB dismantled 23 big and small shabu laboratories, mostly in Luzon, in coordination with other government agencies this year, he added.

Sotto said the DDB has eradicated marijuana plantations in Cebu, Benguet, Ilocos Sur and La Union provinces.

He said the board was now targeting the marijuana plantations in Bukidnon and Lanao provinces in Mindanao. ■

Disasters further set back RP's anti-poverty goal

by JERRY E. ESPLANADA
Inquirer.net

MANILA—Barely six years before the deadline for achieving its Millennium Development Goals (MDG), the Philippines continues to lag behind on its MDG targets.

Worse, the series of natural disasters that hit the country have further set back government's efforts to reduce, if not eradicate, extreme poverty by 2015.

With the Arroyo administration "on its last mile," it would be great if they could focus hard on the achievement of the country's MDG goals and meeting the needs of the poorest people of this country and leave a great legacy," said Salil Shetty, director of the United Nations Millennium Campaign.

Shetty was in the country to "remind your leaders of the promises they made" on the country's MDGs.

According to Shetty, the MDGs must be brought to the local level where their achievement will either be won or lost.

When interviewed, Shetty stressed the need for "disaster-proofing" the MDGs, or integrating disaster risk reduction into government's development planning and policies so it could contribute to the achievement of the country's MDGs.

The visiting UN official also called for "specialized emergency services for the poor, especially women and children, the most vulnerable sector every time calamities strike."

Shetty said he was confident the government could do all these, noting "the Philippines is better equipped in disaster management than many countries."

"You have a long history of having to deal with disasters ... Compared to other countries like Indonesia and India, where I come from, you're not too bad. But there's always room for improvement," he added.

UN Millennium Campaign deputy director Minar Pimple called disaster-proofing the "need of the hour."

"Efforts to avoid or at least mitigate further losses are a must by all concerned if achievement of the MDGs by 2015 is to be a realistic proposition," Pimple said.

In a report furnished by the *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, the United Nations representative office in Manila said that "while the Philippines is progressing well in its bid to achieve most of the MDG targets, faster pace of gains is urgently needed to reach some of the 2015 goals, especially because poverty has increased in the country."

"Specifically, current trending shows that targets for Goal 2 (achieving universal primary education) and Goal 5 (improving maternal health) are least likely to be achieved. And while the country is still within the target of less than one percent of the population for HIV/AIDS, the rising number of HIV cases has become a cause for alarm as well."

The spread of killer diseases is Goal 6. The other MDGs are: eradicating extreme poverty and hunger; promoting gender equality and empowering women; reducing child mortality; ensuring envi-

ronmental sustainability; and developing a global partnership for development.

According to the UN office, "there is a need to raise adequate resources to fund the achievement of the MDGs, reverse the trends in social budgeting, sustain high economic pro-poor growth to reduce income inequality, and address conflict issues which hinder development."

"The country's high population growth rate is diluting the gains of economic growth," it pointed out. "The larger the population a country has the greater will be the pressure on basic social services and on natural resources."

Here, "more than one million babies are born every year. They will be needing resources in the future, such as health care, schooling, food, clothing and later on, employment. Even today, these needs are not being met."

According to the UN office, "investing in population and reproductive health is cost effective. Couples who plan and limit their family size can spare more funds for their children's education, food and health."

"A study showed that as much as 70 percent of the cost of programs for basic social services can be sourced out from savings incurred due to low population growth. Investing in contraceptives would also save the government some P800 million a year in medical costs for unintended pregnancies."

The country also needs to "adopt a 'not business as usual' policy and this means strengthening good governance, demonstrating political will, mobilizing financial support, reorienting priorities and policies, capacity building and reaching out to civil society and the private sector and engaging national support," said the UN office.

The Philippines "has the fertile ground to achieve the MDGs and it must continue to explore this potential to its fullest and plant the seeds that will yield the best returns."

According to Shetty, "at any given goal, about 40-50 (out of 189 countries which signed the Millennium Declaration) are on track of meeting the MDGs ... The Philippines is almost there."

Based on the 2009 Global MDG Report, "progress is moving too slow to achieve the MDGs by 2015."

"While data is not available to assess the full impact of the economic crisis, progress on Goal 1 (eradicating extreme poverty) has slowed down due to the crisis. The most damage has been done to the number of people living in extreme poverty. The World Bank estimated this number to be around 55 million to 90 million higher than expected because of the crisis."

Said the same report: "72 million children are out of school. Half of them have never been inside a classroom ... Strong partnerships and strong national policies have resulted in protecting the ozone layer while the world is on track to meet the safe water target ... But the least progress of all has been made on maternal health."

According to the UN Millennium Campaign, "the MDGs are feasible, but action is needed. They can be achieved and they must be achieved because they are our future." ■

Only Estrada favors...

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dential aspirants responded:

• Perlas said he would not hesitate to do so if there was evidence against the President. He said there were "a lot of unfinished questions" under her administration.

• Escudero said that if a case is filed against Ms Arroyo and she is convicted, "the next president must simply do his or her job to implement the law."

• Estrada initially evaded answering the question but later said: "Let's not single out President Arroyo. All those crooks in government should be given due process and punishment."

• Gordon said "no one will be above the law" when he is president. He said this was what he had been doing since he served as mayor of Olongapo City.

• De los Reyes said the law should be allowed to "take its due course." ■

Nacionalista Party 'raids' administration bailiwick

by CHRISTINA MENDEZ
Philstar.com

PILI, Camarines Sur—With high hopes of getting over a million votes here in next year's elections, the camp of Nacionalista Party standard-bearer Sen. Manuel Villar Jr. "raided" what is perceived to be the bailiwick of the administration and of perceived presidential hopeful Sen. Francis Escudero.

This developed as Villar formally administered the oath of Gov. Luis Raymond "Lray" Villafuerte as NP member. The governor bolted from the administration Lakas party where he served as deputy spokesman.

Villafuerte joined the ranks of Davao del Sur Gov. Douglas Cagas and Surigao Gov. Robert "Ace" Barbers who recently joined Villar's NP. Villafuerte, Cagas and Barbers are former Lakas stalwarts.

In ceremonies at the Camarines Sur Watersports Complex (CWC), Villafuerte led the long list of new NP members that now includes Vice Gov. Salvio Fortuno, nine mayors, 13 vice mayors, 264 councilors, 720 municipal leaders and 112 incumbent provincial leaders.

About 30,000 supporters and committed grassroots leaders trooped to the CWC, clad in orange shirts, to show their support for Villar's presiden-

tial bid.

The CamSur governor, along with Lakas leaders of the province, took their oaths before Villar, who flew to the Bicol region through Legaspi City and motored towards this first class municipality.

Being the largest among the six provinces in Bicol both in terms of population and land area, CamSur has two cities: Naga and Iriga.

All in all, the NP hopes to get a majority of the 1.2-million votes in CamSur and a big slice of the Bicol region's total of 2.5 million voters.

Escudero, who is from the Nationalist People's Coalition (NPC), hails from Sorsogon while Liberal Party standard-bearer Sen. Noynoy Aquino enjoys the support of Naga Mayor Jesse Robredo, a longtime LP ally.

Presidential son Dato Arroyo is the congressman of CamSur's first district.

"We believe in the leadership of Senator Villar, whose track record sets him apart from the rest of our presidential hopefuls. As the only one with solid experience in the executive level, he will be able to govern the country from day one and achieve results. Having started from scratch and made his mark, his strength is what our

calamity-torn country needs," Villafuerte said.

Villafuerte expressed hope that Bicol will be in better condition with Villar at the helm of government.

In response, Villar said the political alliance with the governor and his supporters would bolster his desire to serve the Bicolanos.

"Having Gov. Lray and the people of CamSur as formidable partners in our pursuit to improve the lives of our citizens empower our efforts and delivery of results needed by the nation. I am deeply grateful for your overwhelming support," Villar said.

Delegations from Catanduanes, Sorsogon, Masbate, and Camarines Norte were also present during the mass oath-taking.

In swearing allegiance to NP, Villafuerte said the Nacionalista Party is the most organized and strongest political group in the province, fielding candidates from the provincial down to the precinct level in the forthcoming elections.

League of Municipalities president Nabua Mayor Ferdinand Simbulan, Vice Mayors League president Nathaniel Capucao, and Councilors League president Antonio Olaño were among those who took their oaths. ■



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