

DATELINE PHILIPPINES

Noli still top choice of Lakas

MANILA—Vice President Noli de Castro is still the top choice for standard-bearer of the ruling Lakas party in next year's presidential polls, according to Justice Secretary Raul Gonzalez.



Vice President Noli de Castro

Gonzalez revealed this as he welcomed the imminent merger of his party with Kabalikat ng Malayang Pilipino (Kampi)—both allies of President Arroyo—in preparation for the general elections next year.

He told reporters that officers of Lakas met two weeks ago and discussed plans for the 2010 polls.

During the meeting, four names surfaced as possible standard-bearer of their party: De Castro, Defense Secretary Gilbert Teodoro, Sen. Richard Gordon and Metropolitan Manila Development Authority Chair Bayani Fernando.

"Vice President Noli is in the forefront because of his standing in the surveys," he explained.

"But I'm not discounting Gilbert just because his name is not in the surveys yet, and that's because he announced his intention to run much later. Maybe in the next survey his name will be there already," he added.

As for the other two, he said Fernando is a "genuine Lakas member" but he was unsure of Gordon "because he was with the Nacionalista before."

A new political party, Bagong Bayan, was launched last April

candidates with greater unity and focus."

Presidential Adviser for Political Affairs Gabriel Claudio said the two parties could fully merge in the next 45 days as officials from both camps, as well as the merger committee formed by President Arroyo, are busy "ironing out details."

These include the new name of the consolidated party and its new national leaders, the arbitration process for the local candidates as well as the by-laws.

"The objective is to immediately effect the merger. Hopefully, this would happen in the next 45 days," Claudio said.

He said the arbitration process is necessary so "we can determine in orderly and harmonious fashion our candidates for the provincial, city, and municipal levels."

He said the committee is also rushing to craft the new by-laws for submission to the Commission on Elections (Comelec).

Claudio said that while a new party would emerge, its traits would be the same as Lakas and Kampi "so it's not altogether a new entity."

"It is our hope and expectation that we inherit the status of Lakas as the dominant majority party," he said.

He said it was too early to tell what the impact of the merger would have on other parties.

It would be only after the merger that the party would

14 in Quezon City to spearhead Gordon's presidential bid in 2010 if he decides to run, according to organizers.

Gonzalez stressed that the "winnability" of the candidate is a major criteria in their selection of standard-bearer.

He said the resignation of Speaker Prospero Nograles and Camarines Sur Rep. Luis Villafuerte as respective heads of Lakas and Kampi could be an indicator that the ruling parties would join forces.

"That (resignation) is not yet the perfect solution but that's a good start for the merger," he told reporters in an interview.

Nograles and Villafuerte earlier said they are giving Lakas and Kampi officials 45 days to merge the two parties.

They said a merged Lakas-Kampi "will allow, if not compel, administration allies to field single electoral tickets at the local level, thus enabling them to work for the victory of national

► PAGE 7

US to pay off all Pinoy World War II veterans within a year

by JOSE KATIGBAK
Philstar.com

WASHINGTON—The United States is in a rush to pay off by February 2010 all Filipino veterans who can rightfully claim they served Uncle Sam during World War II, a senior Veterans Administration official said.

Retired US Army Maj. Gen. Antonio Taguba last April 15 awarded the first lump-sum payment of \$15,000 to 98-year-old Alberto Bacani in recognition of his military service and said the amount, while modest, carried with it "our deepest gratitude for your faithful service to the nation."

Although called to serve in the military at a time when the Philippines was still a territory of the US, Filipinos who fought under the command of Gen. Douglas MacArthur were stripped of their recognition as US veterans for purposes of VA benefits under the 1946 Rescission Act.

Taguba, the son of a Filipino veteran himself, authored the investigative report about the abuse of Iraqi prisoners held by US forces at the Abu Ghraib prison in 2004.

In the presence of Ambassador Willy Gaa, he presented checks to Bacani and Adela Roldan Bugarin, a nurse who cared for US wounded dur-

ing the battle of Bataan, at an awards ceremony at the Philippine embassy in Washington.

Bugarin, 80, was unable to show up at the embassy and her check was collected by her son.

Taguba said as of the first week of April some 26,000 applications for payments had been received in Washington and Manila, considerably more than the 18,000 veterans thought to be still alive.

Applications are checked against a list of surviving Filipino veterans kept at the US Army Archives in St. Louis, Missouri.

Taguba said 16,143 applications were pending review, 776 claims had been completed and 195 checks have been delivered.

A \$198-million compensation fund for Filipino veterans signed into law on Feb. 17 provides for a one-time payment of \$15,000 to Filipino veterans living in the United States who have become naturalized US citizens, and \$9,000 (about P435,000) to those living in the Philippines.

It is estimated that about 12,000 veterans live in the Philippines and 6,000 are in the US. ■

Teodoro hedges on presidential bid

by ERIKA TAPALLA
Inquirer.net

MANILA—After announcing in March his plans to run for president in the 2010 elections, Defense Secretary Gilbert Teodoro Jr. is now avoiding giving categorical answers about his political ambitions.

"We'll cross that bridge when we get there," he said at a press conference when asked if he would be willing to run for senator instead if asked by President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, the Lakas-Christian Muslim Democrats or the Kabalikat ng Malayang Pilipino (Kampi, Partner of the Free Filipino).

Teodoro says he first needs to see the outcome of the efforts at a Lakas-Kampi merger.

"If there's a merger, then there will be one party naturally, or a surviving party, and naturally, those who want to contend to be the standard bearer of the administration must join that party," Teodoro, who is a member of the Nationalist People's Coalition, said.

He also said he has to wait for the selection process for administration standard bearer because, "sometimes the process makes the person also," and candidates who may not be mentioned at the moment could still emerge.

The defense secretary said he believes everyone has "a fair chance" of being chosen.

"Pag hindi ako kinuha at sumali ako sa selection process, incumbent sa akin na tanggapan yun [If I am not chosen and I submitted to the selection process, it is incumbent on me to accept that]," he said.

In the meantime, he said he would continue to focus on his work as defense secretary.

"Hindi ko sasakripisyuhin 'yung



Defense Sec. Gilbert Teodoro

mga kailangan kong gawin bilang secretary of national defense upang makamit ng anumang pogi [I will not sacrifice what I need to do as secretary of national defense just to score popularity] points or whatnot," Teodoro said. ■

Remittances rose 4.9% to \$1.32B in Feb.

Deployment of workers up, layoffs easing

by RONNEL DOMINGO
Inquirer.net

REMITTANCES coursed through banks grew 4.9 percent in February to \$1.32 billion as more workers were sent abroad while the rise in layoffs eased, the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas said last April 14.

This meant an improvement from the 0.1-percent growth of inflows posted in January when remittances reached \$1.27 billion.

For the first two months of 2009, inflows rose 2.5 percent to \$2.59 billion from \$2.52 billion a year ago.

The major sources of remittances in January and February were the United States, Saudi Arabia, Canada, Japan, the United Kingdom, Singapore, Italy and the United Arab Emirates.

"Remittances have been holding up as deployment of overseas Filipino workers has risen during the first two months of the year while the increase in the number of reported layoffs has slowed down," BSP Governor Amando M. Tetangco Jr. said in a statement.

Tetangco cited preliminary data from the Philippine Overseas Employment Administration showing that the total number of workers deployed overseas in January and February grew 27.3 percent year-on-year to 283,348 from 222,608.

He also cited a report from the Department of Labor and Employment saying the Philippines would renew the labor arrangement with South

Korea under the Employment Permit System.

Expected to be signed in May, the EPS would give priority in finding employment to displaced Filipinos working in South Korea.

The government has also intensified efforts to redeploy retrenched overseas Filipino workers to countries that have not been severely affected by the global financial turmoil.

This is in addition to hiring agreements forged with some host countries like Canada, Australia, Japan and Middle East countries that are expected to open job opportunities in the sectors of healthcare, education, power and energy, and real estate.

Specifically, Saudi Arabia and Libya continue to hire workers in the construction and healthcare industries.

The relocation in 2010 of the American naval forces from Japan to Guam is also expected to provide jobs to Filipinos.

"Commercial banks' continued expansion of their international and domestic market coverage to capture a larger share of the global remittance market has also helped to sustain the inflow of remittances," Tetangco said. ■

Enroll Now!

OPMI offers a variety of Programs & Courses that go well with your needs.

OUR PLANET MANAGEMENT INSTITUTE LTD

Document Preparation System

Spreadsheet Operation

Desktop Information Management

Presentation Graphics

Accounting Operations

Medical Assistant

Medical Office Assistant

Nursing Assistant

Home Health Aide

Phlebotomy Technician

EKG Technician

Day / Evening

Weekend Class

On Going Classes

Flexible Schedules

*"At OPMI,
You Get The Best Training
That You Deserve"*

Don't Delay, We have More To Offer!

NCLEX-RN Test Preparation

TOEFL Exam

CPR (BLS/ ACLS) Training, etc.

For more information,
Contact Admissions: (212) 269-4000
Ext. 125 (Ask for Mark)

116 John Street Suite 200 (2nd Floor) New York, NY 10038
Office: 212 269-4000 / Fax: 212 269-9070
E-mail: info@opmi.org / Website: www.opmi.org

OPMI is a NYSED Registered Business & Trade School and
Authorized by USCIS a component of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security
To accept and enroll Non-Immigrant Students.

Earn While Giving



Make a living by caring and being of service to people.

We offer jobs for:

- Companion
- Caregivers
- Specialty Care Providers
- Homemakers
- Concierge

FREE pre-deployment training to successful applicants.

Call now: 201.239.9333

homecare

DIVISION

when you need a helping hand.

putting people first.

j JUNO HEALTHCARE STAFFING

JUNO Healthcare New Jersey, Inc.

www.junohealthcare.com

NEW JERSEY OFFICE

35 Journal Square, Suite 825, Jersey City, NJ 07306

TEL 201.239.9333 | FAX 201.239.9093 | EMAIL juno@junohealthcare.com

NEW YORK | NEW JERSEY | LOS ANGELES | SAN DIEGO | ARIZONA