

GMA returns home with prospects for new jobs for Filipino workers, big investments

MANILA—President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo returned home last April 15 from her two-day successful trip to Dubai, bringing with her a package of employment opportunities for Filipino workers, and commitments by two Middle East business giants to invest up to \$1 billion in the Philippines.

The President held meetings with Dubai government officials, employers and businessmen as part of her continuing efforts to champion the interest and welfare of Filipino expatriate workers and attract more investment in the Philippines.

At the first Employment and Business Opportunities: the Middle East Forum, which she attended, the Chief Executive received a commitment from employers, manpower providers, officials of the Philippine and Gulf countries to open more than 200,000 new jobs for overseas Filipino workers (OFWs) this year.

Philippine government officials said the new job openings in the Gulf Region are a strong manifestation that the market for Filipino workers remains open and resilient despite the global economic uncertainties. Emerging from her meeting with officials of the two Middle East-based

investors, the President said that she was very happy that the two firms made specific investment proposals in the country.

In her meeting with the Filipino community at the Fairmont Dubai Hotel here, the President disclosed the government's initiatives and programs aimed at helping the Filipino workers, particularly those who have been affected by the global economic meltdown.

These government initiatives to help distressed OFWs include the payback program that is being carried out to assist OFWs in their host countries that are now being buffeted by economic crisis.

The President also urged representatives of the Filipino community abroad to report to the Philippine Overseas Labor Office (POLO) expatriate workers who are in danger of losing their jobs, those who have been retrenched and those who have already returned to the Philippine so that they could avail themselves of the government's payback program.

For OFWs who want to cross over to other countries or companies that are in need of their skill and talent, the Philippine Overseas Employment Administration (POEA) is implementing a marketing blitz to expand the market for expatriate workers. ■

Palace won't stop Estrada from running

Ermita: But ex-leader should check his eligibility

by THEA ALBERTO
Inquirer.net

MALACANANG said last April 15 it would not prevent former president Joseph Estrada from running for office but advised him to first check his eligibility to do so.

There are persistent reports the former president, who was ousted in a popular uprising in 2001, might seek to retake the post he lost. Estrada has also said he might run for president if the opposition cannot agree on a single standard bearer.

"In a democratic system of the government, everyone is given the opportunity to seek his destiny through democratic processes," Executive Secretary Eduardo Ermita told reporters at his weekly news briefing.

"It's not for anyone to tell him to stop because he has the right to follow his own aspirations in life. I will say again, in a democratic

system, everyone is given the opportunity to seek his fortune in the political field," he added.

But he said Estrada should first check his eligibility to run for office.

After his ouster, Estrada was tried and convicted for plunder. But just roughly a month after being found guilty, he was pardoned by President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo. Among the conditions of his pardon were that he would not seek public office again.

"We cannot fault him [Estrada] for doing what he's doing because he thinks he still has the support of people...I'm not very sure yet [about] whether legally the former president may be allowed by the Constitution to run," Ermita said.

Estrada recently released the opposition's possible senatorial slate in 2010. ■

April 15 is hottest day since Jan. 1 says PAGASA

by ALCUIN PAPA
Inquirer.net

THE hottest day so far this year was recorded last April 15, the Philippine Atmospheric Geophysical Astro-

nomical Services Administration (PAGASA) said.

April 15's maximum temperature was at 35.3 degrees centigrade recorded at around 2 p.m. at the state weather bureau's Sci-

ence Garden in Diliman, Quezon City, PAGASA weather branch chief Nathaniel Cruz said.

"Today's reading is the highest so far for this year since January 1, or more accurately, since sum-

mer started," he said.

But the country might have a respite from the heat in the next couple of days because of the tail-end of a cold front, he said. ■

Noli still top choice of Lakas

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tackle proposals to coalesce or ally with other parties, he said.

Claudio also dismissed the claim of former President Joseph Estrada that some Cabinet officials have approached him to join the opposition's list of candidates for 2010.

"I doubt very much if that is true. The good former president is entitled to his own propaganda," he said.

Toss-up between De Castro, Teodoro

Meanwhile, the continued silence of De Castro with regard to his party affiliation may ultimately benefit Teodoro, who may emerge as the Lakas standard-bearer in the May 2010 presidential elections.

De Castro has been playing coy on whether he intends to join the party of President Arroyo, under whose banner he ran and won in the May 2004 polls.

Isabela Rep. Rodolfo "Rodito" Albano III, stalwart of the

country's second largest party Kampi, said the chances of Teodoro are good, especially if De Castro keeps mum.

"He has all the chances of becoming the administration's presidential bet. He could be the one especially if the allies of the President help him. Teodoro is good, young and intelligent," Albano said in Filipino.

Lakas officials earlier confirmed that the party is choosing between Teodoro and De Castro as its standard-bearer.

Teodoro, a former congressman from Tarlac, holds the distinction of being the youngest secretary to occupy the defense portfolio. He is a lawyer by profession, having topped the Bar examination in 1989.

Teodoro's humility in openly seeking Mrs. Arroyo's endorsement and his incontrovertible qualities as a leader and as a person are being given much weight by

party stalwarts.

"His showing in recent poll surveys may not be that good but the moment Teodoro is drafted by the ruling party, his ratings are certain to increase given the administration's political clout and its well-oiled machinery," said Albano.

In an earlier interview, Teodoro said he will only join the presidential race if endorsed by the President and drafted by the ruling party as its official bet. He said he would be willing to go through the selection process.

In a related development, Nograles said critics of the President cannot stop her from seeking another elective post next year for the simple reason that there is no constitutional prohibition.

The House leader clarified that Mrs. Arroyo is only barred from re-election. "She can still run in any elective post except for the presidency," said Nograles. (Philstar.com)

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