

Telcos: Ban mobile phone use while driving

by LAWRENCE CASIRAYA
Inquirer.net

THE Philippine Chamber of Telecommunication Operators (PCTO) is supporting proposed measures to ban the use of mobile phones while driving.

PCTO members include the Philippine Long Distance Telecommunications Co., Globe Telecom, Smart Communications, Piltel, Innove, Digitel, Bayantel, Capwire, Eastern Telecoms, Extelcom, Philcom and PT&T.

Two bills filed with the House of Representatives seek to ban the use of mobile phones by motorists.

These are House Bill 1625 or the *Cell Phone Safety Act* filed by Pampanga representative Aurelio Gonzales Jr. and House Bill No 4917 or "An Act to Prohibit and Penalize Reading, Composing and Sending Electronic Messages while Driving, and for Other Purposes" filed by Buhay Party list representatives Irwin Tieng, Rene Velarde and Ma. Carissa Coscolluela.

Both measures aim to prevent vehicular accidents and help protect lives by forbidding motorists

from using their mobile phones while on board a moving vehicle, PCTO said in a statement.

Under the proposed legislation, placing or receiving calls and sending and receiving text messages is not allowed for both private and public vehicle drivers.

But motorists using hands-free devices and speaker phone function to make and receive calls are exempted, according to PCTO.

The Land Transportation Office would be tapped to implement this act with the assistance of the National Telecommunications Commission and other concerned agencies.

These measures are proposing to impose penalties of up to six months of imprisonment and fines ranging from P200 up to P100, 000.

Among those exempted from these proposed measures are law enforcers while performing official functions, authorized drivers of ambulances and rescue vehicles while on duty, persons responding to emergency cases or rendering public service and TV and radio news reporters. ■

RP enacts law claiming disputed islands

PRESIDENT Arroyo has signed a law defining Philippine territory, sparking protests from China and Vietnam over the control of strategic South China Sea islands, an official said.

The legislation, signed last March 10, reaffirms Philippine sovereignty over the more than 7,100 islands in its archipelago, Executive Secretary Eduardo Ermita said. It also claims outlying islands in the Spratly chain and Scarborough Shoal—two regions in the South China Sea.

China also claims sovereignty over Scarborough Shoal, while both China and Vietnam have long-running claims in the Spratly Islands.

"We are sending the message to the whole world that we are affirming our national sovereignty, our national interest," Ermita told a news conference.

After Congress passed the legislation last month, Chinese

Deputy Foreign Minister Wang Guangya summoned a Philippine Embassy official in Beijing and said Manila's claims over the two regions "were illegal and invalid," China's official Xinhua News Agency said.

It cited Wang as saying the Philippines should take into consideration bilateral relations as well as peace and stability in the South China Sea.

Vietnam also has urged the Philippines to refrain from taking action that might complicate the dispute.

Foreign Affairs official Henry Bensurto said the Philippines passed the law not to reiterate its claims over the Spratlys and Scarborough Shoal but to define

the baseline used to determine its extended continental shelf.

The UN has asked the Philippines and other countries that signed the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea to submit the dimensions of their continental shelf by May 13. The convention, which came into force in 1994, defines the maritime limits of its signatories.

The Spratlys, believed to be rich in oil, gas and fish, consist of about 100 barren islets, reefs and atolls dotting the world's busiest shipping lanes in the South China Sea.

Vietnam, China, Taiwan, the Philippines, Malaysia and Brunei each claim all or part of the low-lying islands. ■



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