

# Gonzales slammed over 'transition president'

by JOEL GUINTO  
Inquirer.net

TWO Cabinet secretaries reprimanded National Security Adviser Norberto Gonzales for proposing a "transition president" to oversee constitutional reforms, saying his statement opened President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo to criticism. Presidential Political Adviser Gabriel Claudio said Gonzales' pronouncement gave rise to speculation that the

administration's presidential bet "is going to be a puppet of the President and is going to be used as a tool for Charter change." "Nothing can be more unfair and further from the truth," Claudio said. Cabinet Secretary Silvestre Bello III reminded Gonzales of a memorandum for Cabinet secretaries to speak only on issues related to their department.

"We have issued a memorandum to the effect that Cabinet members must comply with the dictum of 'to each his own.' When you are the Agriculture secretary, you do not do the job of the Health secretary," Bello said. Gonzales had proposed that the transition president serve only a portion of his or her six-year term to institute political reforms. He said former

president Joseph Estrada or El Shaddai leader Mariano "Mike" Velarde could take on the post. "With due respect to Secretary Bert, I think there is need to clarify and to emphasize that his opinion, his pronouncements and his concepts about the presidency or a transition presidency is entirely his," Claudio said. "I don't know if this pronouncement

is meant to sabotage the chances of any particular candidate in the election, but we have to make that distinction," he said. Last week, Defense Secretary Gilberto Teodoro Jr., who was shortlisted by the administration coalition as its possible standard bearer, said he would advocate constitutional reform if he runs for president. ■

## Gov't sees P53B in biofuel investments

by AMY R. REMO  
Inquirer.net

DESPITE the economic slowdown, the government expects as much as P53 billion in new investments going to the bio-fuel sector over the next few years, Energy Secretary Angelo Reyes said.

These investments were expected to come from over a dozen companies that have registered their projects with the Board of Investments or are seeking endorsements from the Department of Energy, Reyes told the Asia Biofuel Investment Summit 2009.

"There is a great growth potential for the local biofuels industry," Reyes said. Reyes said the Philippines' biodiesel requirement would increase to 160 million liters in 2014 from 133 million this year.

For bioethanol, the requirement will rise to 536 million liters in 2014 from 208 million liters this year, he said. ■

## ADB sees economy growing 2.5% this year

THE Asian Development Bank said the Philippines would feel the pinch of the global crisis and growth would decelerate this year, but noted that the country would be in a much better position than most of its neighbors to cushion the impact of the turmoil.

In its Asian Development Outlook report, released Tuesday, March 31, the ADB said the Philippine economy would grow 2.5 percent this year, compared with 4.6 percent in 2008 and 7.2 per-

cent in 2007. "The Philippines is not decoupled from the external economy, and we expect it to slow down this year," Thomas Crouch, ADB director general for Southeast Asia, said, he stressed that the growth outlook for the Philippines this year was higher than the average growth forecast of 0.7 percent for the Southeast Asian region.

The ADB said the declining consumption in advanced economies would drag down export income of countries in

the region, while the financial meltdown in the United States and Europe is likely to result in uncertainty that would force businessmen to pull out investments even from emerging economies.

In the case of the Philippines, the ADB said foreign direct and portfolio investments were expected to be weak. Consumption would also slow down this year as remittances from overseas Filipino workers finally end the growth trend.

The ADB also projected that the Philippines' export sector would suffer from the dwindling of global demand, projecting export income to drop 15 percent this year.

But what would make the Philippines suffer less than its neighbors this year, the ADB said, is the accommodative fiscal and monetary policies of the government, relative strength of the banking sector and continued growth—albeit at a slower pace—in consumption. (Inquirer.net)

## PAGASA chief wants more Filipino Galileos

by ALCUIN PAPA  
Inquirer.net

MANILA—The Philippines does not give importance to scientific discoveries, more so in the field of astronomy," said Frederick Gabriela, an instructor at the Rizal Technological University's Department of Astronomy. He also noted a "low awareness" of science and technology among Filipinos.

To illustrate his point, he cited the discovery of a second red spot on Jupiter in February 2006 by Christopher Go of the University of San Carlos in Cebu.

He said the discovery merited front-page treatment in the New York Times and was big news in the scientific community in other countries, but was not even reported in the Philippines.

To get Filipinos, particularly the youth, interested in science and technology, we should first

get them interested in astronomy, according to the chief of the Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astrological Services Administration (PAGASA).

At the launch of the Philippines' participation in the worldwide celebration of "100 Hours of Astronomy" on April 2-5, PAGASA chief Prisco Nilo observed a waning interest in the pursuit of science and technology as a specialized field in the country.

"Most of the graduates we have today are in nursing. In fields like engineering and agriculture, we are noting a sharp decline," Nilo said.

**Oldest science**  
"Astronomy is the parent of other sciences like physics, and is the basis for space discovery. It is the oldest science. So we need to increase awareness in science and technology and make Fili-

pinos more scientifically aware. And we can do that through astronomy," Gabriela said.

Astronomy has wide appeal, he said, adding: "You put up a telescope anywhere and people from all walks of life will come and take a look. It's our natural inclination to be curious. A telescope can catch attention and lead to interest in other sciences."

**Scientific revolution**  
According to Gabriela, the global observance of "100 Hours of Astronomy" is aimed at spurring deeper interest in the sciences.

The exercise coincides with the first time Galileo Galilei peeked into his telescope 400 years ago.

"That act of Galileo started the scientific revolution. Many scientific breakthroughs are credited to Galileo's act," Gabriela said. ■

## RP team bags awards in int'l robot tilt

WITH few resources, guts and vision, the Philippine Science High School team sent to the regional FIRST Robotics Competition (FRC) in Hawaii bagged two awards, besting over two dozen teams.

The Filipino team also earned a slot in the world finals in Atlanta, Georgia, USA where they would be facing teams from different countries.

Team Lagablab (Filipino for "fiery") and their robot entry, "Larry Labuyo," first won the Highest Rookie Seed Award, then the Rookie All-Star Award.

The first award is given to first-time participating teams that get the highest seeds at the end of the qualifying rounds. (Inquirer.net)

## PDEA SAYS

# Anti-drug agents proven clean on drug use

by TARRA QUISMUNDO  
Inquirer.net

THE Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency (PDEA) said Tuesday, March 31 that all its 400 officials and personnel tested negative for drug use following a surprise test on Monday, March 30.

"All key officials and personnel of the PDEA national headquarters passed the surprise drug test," said the anti-drug agency in a statement.

Conducted at the PDEA headquarters in Quezon City, the test required agents and office personnel to submit urine samples to be checked for use of shabu (methamphetamine hydrochloride), marijuana and party drug Ecstasy.

"This exemplifies the dedication and commitment of PDEA officials and personnel to uphold the integrity and moral ascendancy of the agency as the country's premier drug law enforcement organization," said the agency.

Drug testing is an annual activity at the PDEA to ensure its officials are clean and fit to perform their duties. ■

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