

# DATELINE PHILIPPINES

## US defense secretary in RP on May 31

by PIA LEE-BRAGO  
Philstar.com

US Defense Secretary Robert Gates will visit the Philippines this week to strengthen military-to-military relationships between the two countries, diplomatic sources disclosed last May 26. Sources said Gates is scheduled to arrive in Manila on Sunday, May 31, and will leave the next day.

Defense Secretary Gilbert Teodoro confirmed that he will have a one-on-one meeting with Gates on Sunday, but details of the meeting are still being worked out.

US Embassy spokesperson Rebecca Thompson declined to give details on the US defense chief's visit to the Philippines, saying visits of US Cabinet officials are usually announced from Washington.

Gates had assured allies in the region that the US remains committed to Asia. He dismissed concerns that Iraq and Afghanistan have distracted the US from Asia, saying Washington has never been more engaged with Asian countries and continues to have strong and enduring interests in the region.

Gates will visit the Philippines after the brouhaha over the sudden departure of US Marine Lance Corporal Daniel Smith after his conviction for rape was overturned by the Court of Appeals. Much of the public uproar could have been avoided had the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA), which was informed by the US Embassy of his departure, been more transparent.

The incident has led to renewed calls for the review of the Visiting Forces Agreement (VFA) because of the unequal terms in the agreement over the treatment of US and Philippine troops. Despite this, the Philippines welcomed increased aid to the country in the proposed 2010 US government budget submitted by President Obama to the US Congress last May 7.

In the proposed budget, an estimated \$667 million is to be allocated to the Philippines. Foreign Affairs Secretary Alberto Romulo said the amount represents a substantial increase from previous years and can be taken as a reflection of the appreciation and value the Obama Administration gives to the strategic Philippines-US partnership.

Filipino World War II veterans have also been assured of US budget support in the amount of \$198 million for the Filipino Veterans Equity Compensation Fund. ■



US Defense Secretary Robert Gates

newed calls for the review of the Visiting Forces Agreement (VFA) because of the unequal terms in the agreement over the treatment of US and Philippine troops.

Despite this, the Philippines welcomed increased aid to the country in the proposed 2010 US government budget submitted by President Obama to the US Congress last May 7.

In the proposed budget, an estimated \$667 million is to be allocated to the Philippines.

Foreign Affairs Secretary Alberto Romulo said the amount represents a substantial increase from previous years and can be taken as a reflection of the appreciation and value the Obama Administration gives to the strategic Philippines-US partnership.

Filipino World War II veterans have also been assured of US budget support in the amount of \$198 million for the Filipino Veterans Equity Compensation Fund. ■

## VP to show up at Lakas-Kampi formal union

by CYNTHIA BALANA  
Inquirer.net



VICE President Noli De Castro accepted last May 26 the invitation of the newly formed administration coalition Lakas-Kabalikang ng Malayang Pilipino (Kampi) to attend the formal announcement of its union at the Manila Hotel on Thursday, May 28.

De Castro, who has been topping surveys on presidential aspirants but who is still without a party, said he was "honored and privileged" to be the special guest and witness to a significant event in Philippine politics.

Also attending as guest will be Defense Secretary Gilbert Teodoro, who has declared his intention to seek the presidency under the coalition party in the 2010 elections.

The Vice President lauded the efforts of those behind the merger of these two political parties.

"Many thought that this union will not materialize but through the self sacrifice and loyalty to the national interest of the respective members of the uniting parties, the merger was achieved," De Castro said.

"The merger of the country's largest political parties—Lakas CMD and Kampi—no less demonstrates the maturity of our democracy. The partnership of Lakas and Kampi forebodes well for our nation, wherein political leaders unite toward national growth and reconciliation," he said.

De Castro said his attendance in the meeting would be a manifestation of his "sincerest gratitude" to the leaders and members of both Lakas and Kampi who were supportive of his 2004 election as the second highest official of the land.

"I wish the synergy of the Lakas-Kampi merger will address the urgent needs of our people and lead to a resounding election victory next year," he added. ■

### SAYS SPOKESMAN

## Lakas-Kampi a 'challenge' to opposition

by THEA ALBERTO  
Inquirer.net

THE upcoming merger of two administration parties is a threat to the opposition and will serve as a "challenge" for it to consolidate its ranks, a spokesman for the United Opposition said.

"We have no illusions it will be easy but if the opposition can agree that if we do unite, then we can get the best scenario," lawyer Adel Tamano said during the weekly Ferdinandina Forum last Wednesday, May 27.

The Kabalikang ng Malayang Pilipino (Kampi), the party founded by President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, sealed its merger with the Lakas Christian Muslim Democrats on Thursday, May 28.

Many members of the opposition personalities have expressed interest in running for president in 2010, including Senators Panfilo Lacson, Manuel Roxas II, Francis Escudero, and Loren Legarda, and Makati Mayor Jejomar Binay, who is also UNO president.

Former president Joseph Estrada had said that he would seek the presidency again if the opposition failed to field a sole candidate. But this was questioned by his critics, citing provisions in the Constitution that a president could not seek "any reelection."

Tamano said Estrada running again for president remained as the opposition's best option because of the former leader's mass appeal.

Estrada, who was ousted by a military-backed popular revolt in January 2001, was convicted of plunder in September 2007, but was pardoned by Arroyo a month later.

Arroyo was Estrada's former vice president, who took over the presidency after the latter's fall from power. ■



FOUNDER'S DAY PROMO

ASIA  
**ATLAS**

SHIPPERS INTERNATIONAL, INC.

Door-to-Door Cargo to the Philippines

**Regular Box**

**\$45**

**DROP OFF ONLY**

METRO MANILA DELIVERIES  
(THIS OFFER IS FOR NORTHERN CALIFORNIA RESIDENTS ONLY  
(Restrictions apply))

**SEAFOOD CITY DROP OFF LOCATION**  
SUPERMARKET

**1-888-712-8527 / (510) 222-6471**

VALLEJO • SAN PABLO • SACRAMENTO • DALY CITY • SAN JOSE • UNION CITY