

# DPWH targets 'immoral' billboards

by EVELYN MACAIRAN  
Philstar.com

BILLBOARDS featuring men and women in sexy and skimpy outfits will be dismantled in the Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH)'s ongoing project Operation Baklas Billboard.

DPWH Undersecretary for Visayas Rafael Yabut, concurrent head of the agency's Operation Baklas Billboard Task Force, underscored the need to protect children from being exposed to sexually suggestive billboards, especially with the opening of classes.

Yabut said children would see these billboards whenever they travel from house to school.

"These lewd billboards pose multiple dangers — they distract drivers who can't help but ogle at the sexy photos, they pose danger to motorists and pedestrians when they fall down, they cause inconvenience to everyone when they collapse onto electric and telephone lines and they cause traffic jams whenever they fall," Yabut said.

Parents are concerned about children's exposure to sexually explicit pictures not only on television, Internet, and magazines but also on billboards. This has prompted the agency to conduct a crackdown on such billboards.

"The Hayden Kho-Katrina Halili sex video controversy seems to have brought out an explosion of in-

decency. We have decided to lessen this somehow by taking down those billboards which millions of students are likely to see when they report to school on Monday, June 1," Yabut said.

However, the DPWH does not intend to launch a moral crusade. Since they are engaged in the dismantling of illegal and unsafe billboards, they have decided to prioritize those that display lewd pictures or designs.

The DPWH resumed its operation against illegal billboards last May 27 and has so far taken down two billboards along the intersection of EDSA and North Avenue, and in Katipunan, Quezon City.

Earlier, an official of the DPWH's National Building Code Development Office (NBCDO) said that 90 percent of the 2,000 billboards along EDSA were found to have allegedly violated the provisions of the law, with many being constructed near electric and telephone lines.

President Arroyo ordered the dismantling of unsafe and illegal billboards nationwide in the aftermath of the destructive typhoon "Milenyo" in 2006, which saw the collapse of several billboards, resulting in the death and injury of motorists and pedestrians. ■

# Exports seen to pick up as global economy recovers

THE country's exports of goods and services are expected to pick up in the coming months—reversing a sharp contraction since last year—as the global economy starts recovering from a crippling recession, Trade Secretary Peter Favila said.

He said there have been encouraging signs of an export-led recovery, pointing as an example food and furniture exporters who have reportedly started recovering the lost orders they have incurred at the height of the worldwide economic slowdown.

More importantly, Favila noted that the electronics industry appears to be gaining ground again. "This is good news because this is our number one export," he said.

The National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA) earlier said merchandise exports are showing signs of recovery, posting a 15.9-percent growth in March this year from the previous month, as exports of all major commodity groups performed better than in February.

The economic planning agency also pointed out that while there was a 30.9-percent decline in exports shipments in March from a year ago, this was also an

improvement from a 39-percent reduction in February, "indicating signs of the easing recession in trading countries."

Exports earnings for March 2009 reached \$2.9 billion compared to \$2.5 billion in the previous month but lower than \$4.2 billion in March 2008. On a cumulative basis, export revenues for the first quarter of 2009 amounted to \$7.9 billion, 36.8 percent lower than the same period in 2008.

"The slight rebound in electronics in March compared to the previous month followed global trends wherein worldwide sales of semiconductors grew by 3.3 percent, as demand has somewhat stabilized, as reported by the Semiconductor Industry Association," the NEDA report said.

NEDA added that market research company iSupply Inc. has observed that "the global semiconductor manufacturing industry is expected to take a breather in the second quarter as utilization rises by 60 percent." The majority of the country's electronic exports for the month of March went to China, the Netherlands, United States, Hong Kong and Japan.

The United States remained the biggest overseas market for Philippine goods with a 17.3 percent share in total export revenues in March. Japan was the second major destination of outbound shipments in March with a 15.4 percent share.

Other major export markets were China (10.6 percent), Hong Kong (9.4 percent), and the Netherlands (9.2 percent). The aggregated shipments to China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan accounted for 23.3 percent of the total merchandise exports in March 2009. Semiconductor devices, electronic data processing (EDP) machines, and garments made up 65 percent of the total shipments to the five biggest export markets in March 2009.

Favila said aside from the exports industry, other forecast drivers for growth in the second quarter are the tourism and the business process outsourcing (BPO) sectors.

The global crisis has adversely affected the investing climate in the Philippines as investment approvals for the first quarter of the year decreased 52 percent, Trade Undersecretary Elmer C. Hernandez said. (Philstar.com)

# DOE expects more Korean investments

PAGE A9 ◀

everybody will be going towards that direction, and the Act provides the legal framework for achieving this now we have the policy and mechanism for it with the completion of the IRR. We have published that in the newspaper and that will become effective on June 12," he said.

Over the weekend, it was announced that Korea East West Power Co., Ltd. (EWP), a wholly owned subsidiary of Korea Elec-

tric Power Co. (Kepco), has committed in principle to invest \$50 million into Alternergy Philippine Holdings Corp., for investments in wind power projects in the Philippines.

This was announced by Undersecretary Elmer C. Hernandez, managing head of the Board of Investments, who signed the memorandum of understanding along with Lee Gil-Gu, CEO of EWP, Vincent Perez, president of Alternergy

and former Philippine Energy Secretary, and Kim Dong-Soo, chairman of the Export Import Bank of Korea (KEXIM) in a ceremony held at the Blue House on May 30, 2009 on the occasion of the official visit of President Arroyo to Korea. KEXIM for its part has committed to provide up to \$150 million in project loans to finance wind power projects that EWP and Alternergy will be undertaking in the Philippines. ■

# US assumes RP 2010 polls to push through

PAGE A8 ◀

and Tawi-Tawi.

The Philippines and the US also conduct the yearly RP-US Balikatan joint military exercises.

Gates was originally scheduled to arrive in Manila last May 31 but his military aircraft encountered mechanical problems, the US embassy in Manila reported last June 1.

**Gates vows US support to regional security**

At the Shangri-La Dialogue, Gates outlined a broad set of regional security issues and promised continued support from the US administration.

The annual conference is attended by defense, senior military and other officials from the Asia-Pacific region to discuss mutual security challenges.

Gates said during the security meeting that the US has paid a significant price in blood and treasure to fight aggression, deter potential adversaries, extend freedom, and maintain peace and prosperity in this part of the world, and their commitment to the region is just as strong today as it has ever been, if not stronger.

He said that the challenge now is to formulate a defense policy that adapts to the new realities of the region.

Gates cited the long-standing treaties with Japan and South Korea, both formed in the early years of the Cold War "when both nations were impoverished and virtually destroyed." The two countries are now economic powerhouses with modern, well-trained and well-equipped military forces.

He said the changes represent a shift in the defense strategy in the region, placing more emphasis on building the capacity of its allies and less on solely conventional military deterrence.

The shift will represent a more balanced mix of "soft" and "hard" power, he added, with military, diplomatic, economic and humanitarian elements integrated seamlessly, Gates said.

**US cool to VFA review**

The US is satisfied with the Visiting Forces Agreement (VFA) with the Philippines, in the face

of calls by critics for a review of the accord.

"I would just say that the US is quite comfortable with the VFA," Gates said.

"We are nations of laws. This agreement provides us with the legal basis for having our people here in partnership with the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP). We think it works and we are satisfied," he said.

Calls for the termination of the VFA mounted after US Marine Lance Corporal Daniel Smith was charged with rape after a November 2005 incident in Subic.

Smith was convicted and sentenced to life in prison by the Makati Regional Trial Court for raping "Nicole." The Court of Appeals, however, reversed the Makati court's ruling after the victim recanted her accusations, and ordered the release of Smith, who is now back in the US.

Sen. Francis Pangilinan had filed a resolution before the Senate's Foreign Relations Committee, chaired by Sen. Miriam Santiago, questioning the legality of the VFA.

**US still hands off Spratlys**

Gates said the US government is maintaining a hands-off policy over the disputed Spratly Islands in the South China Sea.

"There are a number of security challenges and obviously concerns on conflicting claims in the South China Sea. The US takes no position on those claims," he said.

He said that the US government is urging all the parties involved in the dispute to try and resolve these issues peacefully.

The claimants include the Philippines, China, Brunei Malaysia, Vietnam, and Taiwan.

Teodoro said Gates also expressed his gratitude to Filipino soldiers who are working hard to combat common security threats such as global terrorism.

Gate, who left at around 3:30pm for the US aboard a 747 E4-B jumbo jet, was able to meet some US soldiers assigned in Mindanao. ■

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