

# US assumes RP 2010 polls to push through

by JAIME LAUDE  
Philstar.com

US Defense Secretary Robert Gates expressed confidence last June 1 that the May 2010 elections here would push through and Filipinos could democratically choose their next leaders.

Gates, during a 30-minute joint press briefing with Defense Secretary Gilbert Teodoro Jr. held at Camp Aguinaldo in Quezon City, said that he expected the elections to be successful.

"Well, that is a very hypothetical question on two counts, and I think the way I can answer that is we assume that the elections will go forward successfully. We assume that the people of the Republic of the Philippines will democratically choose a next leader and such choices will never face us," he said.

Gates was responding to a question posed by the Defense Press Corps on whether the administration of US President Barack Obama would allow extra-constitutional changes in the

Philippines if the elections do not push through or a failure of elections is declared.

The political opposition believe that President Arroyo's allies in Congress have not given up on their bid to amend the Constitution designed to prolong her stay in power, despite the assurance made by Mrs. Arroyo that the polls will push through next year.

Gates, director of the Central Intelligence Agency from 1991 to 1993, arrived yesterday upon Teodoro's invitation after the two defense chiefs attended the Shangri-La Dialogue Asia security conference in Singapore last week.

Gates is the first US defense secretary to visit the country in 10 years. The last time he was here was in 1989 when he was still CIA assistant director.

Teodoro described Gates' visit as a manifestation of strong ties in security and other field cooperation between the two long-time allies.



Visiting US Defense Secretary Robert Gates speaks while his Philippine counterpart Gilbert Teodoro looks on during a news conference at Camp Aguinaldo in Quezon City.

Philstar.com Photo by Boy Santos

"Dr. Gates' visit today signals another milestone and era of strong cooperation between our countries, particularly the defense and military field to combat traditional and non-traditional threats to national security, to include international terrorism and opportunities for working together," Teodoro said.

He stressed that the US gov-

ernment has been actively helping the country, from fighting terrorism to saving Filipinos with assistance during natural calamities.

Gates and Teodoro held a closed-door meeting at the Armed Forces of the Philippines Officers' Clubhouse before the US defense chief and his party headed back to Villamor Air Base in Pasay City for their flight back the US.

US military advisers are currently supporting and providing intelligence information to Filipino troops conducting counter-terrorist operations in the Zamboanga Peninsula, Sulu, Basilan,

► PAGE A11

# H1N1 cases soar to 21 - DOH

PAGE A7 ◀

level system that provides a mechanism for the suspension of classes in the school, division, or regional level," Lapus said in a press briefing on the DepEd's Oplan Balik Eskwela (OBE) program.

Duque also said level 2 is the one applicable in the country's situation now, having confirmed cases of A(H1N1) in the country but without any cases in schools yet and without community transmission.

Under this level, students and faculty with flu-like signs and symptoms are asked "not to report to school but to inform the school physician and municipal health officer for proper advice."

"School Response Level System for A(H1N1) outlines the criteria for suspending classes and actions expected at different response levels, particularly when cases of A(H1N1) are reported in school and when there is already sustained community transmission," Duque added.

As to who would authorize the suspension of classes, a school principal is given the authority to declare this if there is one confirmed positive case of Influenza A(H1N1) in the school.

If two or more schools in one

municipality have confirmed positive cases, the DepEd division superintendent in the concerned jurisdiction could declare the suspension of classes in the municipality.

If one or more schools per municipality have confirmed positive cases of Influenza A(H1N1), the division superintendent in the province could declare class suspension.

A DepEd or a Commission on Higher Education (CHED) or Technical and Skills Development Authority (TESDA) regional director is also given the authority to declare class suspension if two or more provinces have schools with confirmed positive cases.

Duque said that the mechanism had been put together in coordination with DepEd officials led by Education Undersecretary for Regional Operations Ramon Bacani over the weekend.

Lapus said that all public and private schools have also been ordered to disseminate the DOH's Influenza A(H1N1) virus advisory and implement health education campaigns pushing for daily hand-washing habits among school children.

Lapus said that school children who came from foreign trips and exhibit flu symptoms should practice self-quarantine.

Duque, for his part, pointed out that while the DepEd and DOH were on high alert for A(H1N1), he said they should also be on the lookout for dengue fever.

Duque said that school administrators all over the country should inspect their premises for dengue fever mosquito breeding grounds.

"Ang dengue walang gamot, ang H1N1 may gamot (There is no known medicine for dengue but there are drugs for treating H1N1)," Duque pointed out.

Meanwhile in Baguio City, health officer Florence Reyes reiterated his call to travelers who came from trips abroad with or without symptoms to observe a 10-day self-quarantine and social distancing of six feet or two meters upon arrival.

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