

FILIPINO BALITA

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'No plan to take over Meralco': GSIS chief

(Source: ABS-CBN NEWS)

By CHARO LOGARTA

ABS-CBN News

The Government Service Insurance System (GSIS) on Wednesday said it has no plans of wresting control of Manila Electric Company (Meralco) from the Lopez family, legacy owners of the country's largest power distributor. But GSIS President Winston Garcia admitted tensions are brewing between him and some Meralco board members and management.

The government pension fund, together with other state firms Social Security System (SSS), Home Development Mutual Fund (HDMF or Pag-ibig), Land Bank of the Philippines and PhilHealth own a 33% stake in Meralco.

The Lopezes, through First Philippine Holdings Corporation (FPHC), own 33.4% of the total shares.

The rest is owned by public investors. Garcia said he's fighting for his right not only as a major stockholder, but also as a customer of Meralco questioning why power rates are high.

He said he has been repeatedly denied access to corporate information matters, which he insists he has got a right to know.

If the differences are not resolved, the government firms, led by GSIS, could seek the support of other stockholders via their proxies.

The proxies of Meralco's public investors, in favor of GSIS, will give it the power to out-vote First Philippine Holdings Corp.'s board directors.

"I'm just asking questions and they are not giving me answers. I am asking question why the paying public, the consuming public, is still made to pay for their inefficiencies," Garcia said.

No interference from Malacañang

Last February, the GSIS bought a 10% stake in Meralco from the national government.

That, combined with an existing 8% stake and purchases through the stock market, gave it a 23% stake in Meralco, making it the second largest shareholder next to First Philippine Holdings Corp..

The purchase occurred after President Arroyo said she wanted something done about Meralco's high rates.

But Garcia insisted Malacañang had no say in its decision to invest in Meralco.

"The President has never interfered directly or indirectly with the operations

of GSIS. This is not a takeover move of the GSIS. We have no intentions of taking over Meralco," Garcia said.

Oscar Lopez, chairman of First Philippine Holdings Corp., for his part, said government's attempts to rein in Meralco rates is nothing new.

"We cooperate with the government at all times. And we will cooperate to the extent that we can. But a lot of factors are beyond our control. When oil prices go up, everything goes up," said Lopez.

He added Garcia is probably just making noise so he can turn-around and sell GSIS's Meralco shares for a high profit.

"I don't know about the ultimate plan of Mr. Garcia, whether he's just doing this in order to get a better price for his shares, because I think that's his main business: to go into companies and to try to shake it and get a good price," Lopez said. (Full story: <http://uw.abs-cbnnews.com>)

10% pay hike for gov't workers

(Source: The Philippine Star)

CAGAYAN DE ORO – There will be no wage increase announcement for the private sector today, but President Arroyo is expected to sign an executive order that would grant a 10 percent pay increase to government workers.

Executive Secretary Eduardo Ermita said the draft EO, prepared by Budget Secretary Rolando Andaya, was on the President's desk and was expected to be signed last night upon her arrival from a three-day trip out of town before Labor Day.

Mrs. Arroyo told reporters on Monday night in Cebu City that she would likely announce a "package" for workers today. In the past several days, she had been visiting factories in Metro Manila and other provinces where workers are receiving good benefits from their employers.

Andaya earlier said the EO was meant to "flesh out" the appropriations authority given by Congress to increase by 10 percent the basic pay of national government employees effective July 1 this year.

He said the draft of the EO was similar to the one issued by the President in March last year which granted a 10 percent increase in the basic salary of civilian employees in the national government, and a P1,200 hike in the monthly subsistence and other allowances of policemen, soldiers and other uniformed personnel.

Andaya said a 10-percent increase in the basic pay of 898, 849 national government employees will cost P9.216 billion for six months.

The forthcoming pay hike will be the third in 30 months in the public sector, the first being the P1,000 across-the-board grant in "additional allowance" which took effect January 2006.

Meanwhile, militant workers' still vowed to gather around 5,000 people and march to Malacañang in their protest action today to seek wage increase. The Philippine National Police (PNP), on the other hand, has placed the entire Metro Manila under alert status and will deploy at total of 3,000 members of the Civil Disturbance Management (CDM) to maintain peace and order.

Bukluran ng Manggagawang Pilipino (BMP) president Leody de Guzman said the march started last Thursday in Calamba, Laguna then proceeded to Alabang going to the Bicutan area in Taguig yesterday. The last stop was in Barangay Pio del Pilar in Makati City. The workers will march today from Liwasang Bonifacio to Mendiola in Manila.

About 500 marchers from the three-day Lakbayan from Laguna entered Metro Manila via Alabang and about 1,000 South National Capital Region-based workers from BMP joined the marchers yesterday.

"The non-wage benefits to be announced today by GMA are just wage extenders that cannot replace an across-the-board wage hike which is a necessary economic relief for all workers nationwide. It is not a gift but an insult to the workers," Renato Magtubo, chairman of Partido ng Manggagawa, said.

Magtubo insisted on a substantial legislated salary increase instead of a wage order from the regional boards. "We also call on Congress to increase the planned tax exemptions for workers to P250,000 per individual so that all those earning below the cost of living — not just minimum wage earners — be spared the burden of withholding taxes," he said.

Heightened alert

Not one to be caught off guard, PNP chief Director General Avelino Razon Jr. said the police have placed the rest of the country under heightened alert effective 8 a.m. today.

"The operational readiness condition will ensure that 50 percent of police units, personnel and resources will be

available for peace and order, and public safety operations to ensure the orderly and uneventful celebration of the Labor Day holiday," said Razon. The PNP chief also instructed all regional directors and directors of National Support Units to conduct inspection on units, personnel and equipment, particularly those that will be deployed to provide security in projected mass actions.

PNP spokesman Chief Superintendent Nicanor Bartolome said police commanders may upgrade the alert status to full depending on the situation in their areas of responsibility.

"As workers in government, we too are entitled to commemorate the significance of Labor Day," Bartolome said. "However, as law enforcers, duty calls that we must report for work on that day to preclude any threat of violence and disorder on this otherwise peaceful and meaningful celebration of international Labor Day."

Metro Manila Police chief Director Geary Barias, for his part, has ordered the upgrading of alert status of the PNP-NCRPO in preparation for the overall security and public safety coverage.

"Starting 12 noon (April 30), the entire Metro Manila PNP will be on full alert status, which means that all leaves are suspended and that all commanders must see to it that their personnel are all accounted for and ready for deployment anytime," he said. (Full story: <http://www.philstar.com>)

Defense, DOJ chiefs to keep posts – GMA

(Source: The Philippine Star)

By Paolo Romero and Jess Diaz
Amid speculation over the forthcoming Cabinet revamp, President Arroyo said yesterday Defense Secretary Gilberto Teodoro and Justice Secretary Raul Gonzalez would be spared from the shake-up while Energy Secretary Angelo Reyes and Chairman Bayani Fernando of the Metropolitan Manila Development Authority were "safe for now."

There was no presidential reassurance for the rest of the Cabinet members.

The looming shake-up has triggered speculation that the President is set to accommodate some of the senatorial candidates who ran under the administration's slate but lost in last year's midterm elections.

The opposition joined the guessing game with House Minority Leader Ronaldo Zamora predicting that defeated senatorial candidate Mike Defensor would soon return to Malacañang.

Zamora told dzMM radio that he had it on good authority that Defensor would replace Press Secretary Ignacio Bunye as Mrs. Arroyo's chief spokesman. "I wish Mike (Defensor) good luck," Zamora said.

Defensor was Mrs. Arroyo's chief of

staff before he ran for the Senate in the May 2007 elections. He and eight other members of the administration's Team Unity ticket lost to their opposition rivals. Only three made it: Edgardo Angara, Joker Arroyo and Juan Miguel Zubiri.

Defensor is also former secretary of environment. He is now involved in two mining companies.

He is seen as prone to controversy, the latest of which was when Senate witness Rodolfo Noel Lozada Jr. revealed that Defensor asked him to tell lies on the scandal surrounding the national broadband network deal, assuring him that "we'll just manage it in the media."

The former Palace chief of staff denied Lozada's story.

On the other hand, Bunye's credibility started to suffer at the height of the "Hello, Garci" scandal in 2005 when he presented to the media two compact discs, one of which he said was original and the other tampered.

Zamora also said Defense Secretary Gilberto Teodoro Jr. would make a good justice secretary.

"He is a bright lawyer," he said. Both Zamora and Teodoro placed first in the Bar examinations.

The defense secretary is being rumored to replace Justice Secretary Raul Gonzalez, who is said to be sickly.

Another House member, Rep. Rozzano Rufino Biazon of Muntinlupa, said Teodoro is doing well at defense.

Biazon, who is defense committee chairman, said the incumbent defense chief and former defense secretary Avelino Cruz "have proven that what the defense establishment needs is not a military strategist and tactician but a leader with management skills... and political savvy."

"They have shown that a true-blue civilian with the appropriate qualities and qualifications is not only effective but also preferred," he said.

Besides Defensor, several other losers in last year's elections are expected to get government jobs.

They include former senators Ralph Recto, Vicente Sotto III and Teresa Aquino Oreta, former Surigao del Sur Rep. Prospero Pichay Jr., and Jamalul Kiram, who was part of the Team Unity ticket.

The one-year ban on their appointment to the government expires on May 14.

The United Opposition (UNO) also said the entry of losing administration bets triggered the looming revamp of the Cabinet.

Makati City Mayor Jejomar Binay, UNO president, said the imminent Cabinet revamp is "a filthy exercise in political accommodation and patronage."

"Judging by the names being mentioned as possible Cabinet replacements, it is apparent that the goal of the revamp is not better governance but rewarding blind loyalty," he added.

Prerogative

Administration lawmakers led by

Speaker Prospero Nograles, on the other hand, defended President Arroyo from criticisms arising from the looming Cabinet shake-up.

Nograles said the President's "decision to reorganize her official family is a timely move given the difficulties and challenges facing the country and the global community."

Nograles took exception to allegations that the Cabinet revamp will accommodate some of Mrs. Arroyo's political allies.

"The President's move is crucial. We support it and, if need be, we are ready to recommend for her consideration qualified personalities of proven integrity who share her visions for the country," Nograles stressed.

Nograles added the President is also moving to fill up some of the vacancies in the upper and middle-level positions in the bureaucracy, including government-owned and controlled corporations (GOCCs) to enhance further the efficiency in the delivery of services to the people.

"Vacant positions below the Cabinet level must be filled up for efficiency in governance or they must be abolished if found irrelevant and unnecessary," he said.

A ranking Malacañang official, however, disclosed Mrs. Arroyo is also considering who among the members of the Cabinet should be retained.

The Palace official added Mrs. Arroyo is also contemplating to fire the officials whose appointments have not been confirmed or repeatedly bypassed by the Commission on Appointments (CA). Those who have yet to be confirmed by the CA include Health Secretary Francisco Duque III, Finance Secretary Margarito Teves, and Justice Secretary Gonzalez.

Executive Secretary Eduardo Ermita said Mrs. Arroyo, "being the head of government, she alone knows the direction or accomplishment of projects."

"So she only knows who will be revamped or reshuffled. Let's give it to her to determine the timing and changes of people (in government)," Ermita said.

He said it does not mean that when an official is replaced, he or she has performed poorly.

Energy Secretary Angelo Reyes, who has held three Cabinet positions, said he would not be bothered if he would be moved to another post. "We work and we do our work well," he said.

Shortly after his appointment as energy chief from being environment secretary last year, Reyes could not hide his disappointment by saying he has to work double time in learning the technical details of his portfolio.—*With Delon Porcalla, Marvin Sy, Michael Punongbayan, Cecille Suerte Felipe, Jose Rodel Clapano, Rainier Allan Ronda* (Full story: <http://www.philstar.com>)

RP, others top 'Impunity Index' for slain journalists

By ROY MEDINA

(Source: ABS-CBN NEWS)
abs-cbnNEWS.com

The Philippines has been ranked among 13 countries with the "poorest records" of running after and prosecuting murderers of journalists, the Committee to Protect Journalists said in a list released Wednesday. "Most countries on the Impunity Index are democratic, are not at war, and have functioning law enforcement institutions, yet journalists are regularly targeted for murder and no one is held accountable," CPJ said as it released the index ahead of World Press Freedom Day on Saturday, May 3. The Philippines, at sixth spot, was described as a country with "a free and vibrant press."

The report, however, added that, "...journalists covering corruption, crime, and politics have repeatedly been targeted with violence."

"Broadcast commentators and reporters in provincial regions are especially vulnerable. Politicians and police have been implicated in a number of slayings, but corruption in the local court system has stymied efforts to prosecute. No convictions have been obtained in 24 cases," it said.

The Impunity Index rating for the Philippines, the CPJ said, means that there are "0.289 unsolved journalist murders per 1 million inhabitants." Citing Philippine records, CPJ said the country has 24 unsolved cases of journalists' murders.

The Philippines was ranked just below Sri Lanka, which was described as a country where "journalists are more like to be assassinated than to die in crossfire, with many of the victims ethnic Tamils."

'92, 56'

The Manila-based National Union of Journalists in the Philippines, meanwhile, has listed 92 media practitioners murdered since 1986 after dictator Ferdinand Marcos was ousted from power.

It, however, explained that, "The list contains only those who were killed -- or most likely killed -- because of their journalism work."

"In cases where it is not clear whether the death was work-related, or when the authorities could not ascertain the motives behind the killing, NUJP shall assume that the killing was work-related, unless future evidence points to the contrary."

Based on NUJP records, newspaper publisher Benefredo Acabal was the 92nd journalist to be murdered since 1986 and the 56th following the ascent of President Arroyo to power in 2001.

Acabal, who wrote a column under the name Freddie Yanco, was gunned down by a lone assailant in Pasig City

on April 7, 2008.

Five and up

According to the New York-based group, the Impunity Index calculated the number of unsolved journalist murders as a percentage of each country's population. CPJ said it examined every nation worldwide for the period from Jan. 1, 1998 to Dec. 31, 2007. Only nations with five or more unsolved cases are included on this index. Cases are considered unsolved when no convictions have been obtained, CPJ said.

CPJ said it defines murder as a deliberate attack against a specific journalist in relation to the victim's work. "Murders make up more 70 percent of work-related deaths among journalists, according to CPJ research. This index does not include cases of journalists killed in combat or while carrying out dangerous assignments such as coverage of street protests," it said. (Full story: <http://uw.abs-cbnnews.com>)

Trillanes extends support to workers on Labor Day

(Source: Philippine Daily Inquirer)

By Abigail Kwok
INQUIRER.net

MANILA, Philippines -- Detained Senator Antonio Trillanes IV extended his support to workers marking Labor Day on Thursday and enumerated the bills he has filed to improve their lot. In a statement, Trillanes said he authored Senate Bill 753 for a P125 across-the-board wage increase for private sector workers and Senate Bill 1792, which would double the current pay of government employees.

"I also filed a bill that would shorten the probation period for employees before they become regular workers, or Senate Bill 2186," he said.

Trillanes, a former Navy lieutenant being tried on coup d'etat charges for a short-lived military mutiny in 2003, ran for the Senate in the May 2007 elections.

In late November last year, he and a number of his co-accused, together with Army Brigadier General Danilo Lim, a defense witness, walked out of the Makati court room where they were being tried and marched to the Manila Peninsula Hotel, which they occupied as they called on President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo to resign. He and his companions are facing additional rebellion charges for this incident.

Protesting labor groups gathered at the Welcome Rotonda will march toward the Don Chino Roces Bridge, formerly Mendiola, to join other militant groups for a rally Thursday afternoon. (Full story: <http://www.inquirer.net>)

People

By BOB GARON (Source: THE MANILA TIMES)

A tale of a vicious note

The woman was terribly upset. Big tears rolled lazily down her cheeks ruining her make-up as they fell from her face. She was showing me an anonymous letter she had received a day earlier. The typed note accuses her husband of philandering. It was a nasty script. There was, of course, no signature. She asked what I thought she should do with the letter. "Tear it up," I said quickly, "it's not worth the paper it's written on."

The first thing I do when I open a letter is look for the signature of the writer. If there is none, I don't bother reading it. Experience has taught me that such letters are ordinarily poison pen letters written by people lacking in dignity and nobility. The individual who sends vicious notes to people without signing his name is not only a coward. He is a man who is totally lacking in self-confidence that he dare not stand by what he writes. He is so unsure of himself and what he has written that he fears to come out into the open and face the possible consequences of his words.

The anonymous letter writer is a shadowy figure. He prefers to hide behind the veil of anonymity because he is child of darkness and is afraid of the light. He thrives in the nooks and corners of our society. The acid letters he writes give him a false sense of strength and courage. They help him to fool himself into believing that he is not the miserable coward that he knows he is in reality.

The destructive anonymous poison pen writer is basically a very closed and dishonest person. He distrusts people and is suspicious of them. He feels very inadequate about himself. Usually, he finds difficulty in effectively communicating with others.

We can never stop these poor individuals from writing their sick letters. But what we can do is ignore them and refuse to allow them to upset us and trouble our hearts. We can fill our waste baskets with their unsigned pages. We can refuse their words entry into our minds.

The only way to fight the vicious anonymous letter is to ignore it so completely that you refuse to read even one line. I don't know of any other effective means, and I believe I've tried them all.

Sport

Spurs knock out Suns

(Source: THE MANILA TIMES)

SAN ANTONIO: Defending National Basketball Association champion San Antonio ousted Phoenix and New Orleans dumped Dallas Tuesday to book a second-round playoff showdown

against each other.

But the Utah Jazz could not join the Spurs and Hornets in advancing as the Houston Rockets kept their title hopes alive with a 95-69 triumph as the focus became clear in the Western Conference playoff chase.

Frenchman Tony Parker scored 31 points and Tim Duncan added 29 points and 17 rebounds to power San Antonio past Phoenix 92-87, giving the Spurs a 4-1 triumph in their best-of-7 first-round playoff series.

The Spurs scored seven of the last nine points to break a deadlock at 85 and book a date with the Hornets, who used a supreme performance by Chris Paul to defeat Dallas 99-94 to capture that series, 4-1.

"The whole series I was trying to be aggressive, get to the basket," Parker said. "Now it's New Orleans. They are very good. It's going to be a great challenge for me to play against Chris Paul."

The Hornets and Spurs split four regular-season meetings, but each managed to dominate an opponent that made a major mid-season trade, the Suns landing star center Shaquille O'Neal and the Mavericks obtaining guard Jason Kidd.

"We weren't overconfident but we have a different mentality," Paul said. "We expect to win. We expect a lot from ourselves. We're trying to set a new standard."

The Spurs closed the first half with an 18-6 run for 54-45 half-time lead, but Phoenix closed the third quarter on a 20-9 run to seize a 72-69 lead.

The Suns fell apart when it mattered most, however, hitting only 5-of-15 shots in the final period while making seven of their 14 turnovers in the last quarter. Phoenix missed 17 free throws, 13 of them in the first half.

"We were struggling. We had a bad

third quarter," Parker said. "In the fourth quarter, we played like it was a game 7."

France's Boris Diaw led Phoenix with 22 points while Amare Stoudemire added 15 points and 11 rebounds. Canadian Steve Nash hit a 3-pointer to equalize at 85, but Nash made three key late turnovers and Diaw gave away another. Parker took advantage for a key jumper for an 88-85 Spurs lead and the others set up three Ginobili free throws and two more by Duncan that sealed the triumph.

"We didn't play too well," Nash said.

"We should have slowed it down. I take responsibility for that. I made a couple key turnovers that cost us. (Full story: <http://www.manilatimes.net>)

RP soccer team upbeat despite tall Tajikistan's presence

(Source: ABS-CBN NEWS)

By REUBEN TERRADO

Business Mirror Correspondent National men's football coach Norman Fegidero is upbeat about his team's chances in the five-day Asian Football Confederation (AFC) Challenge Cup qualifiers that begin May 13 in Iloilo. This, despite the tough challenge a former Soviet republic is expected to pose on the hosts.

"The qualifiers are very winnable. We have a good chance winning against Brunei Darussalam and Bhutan. The only hurdle will be Tajikistan," Fegidero said in a recent phone interview from Iloilo.

The Filipino booters will open their campaign in the Group B qualifiers against Brunei Darussalam on May 13 and play Bhutan on May 17. Sandwiched in between the two relatively easy assignments is the

Tajikistan game scheduled on May 15. The Tajiks are the defending champions and, because they boast of tall players, are again heavy favorites to win.

That is why Fegidero, a former national team player who scored the goal in the Philippines' 1-0 upset win over Malaysia during the 1991 Manila Southeast Asian Games, strongly considered height in putting up his roster, which includes England-based goalkeeper Neil Ethridge, Phil and James Younghusband and six-foot homegrown Ali Borromeo.

"We have hired top tall players to try to counter their height disadvantage," said Fegidero.

Fegidero is also expecting the home crowd to be a factor as he is expecting throngs of football fans in Iloilo, a football hotbed, to troop the Iloilo Sports Complex and the Barotac Nuevo Football Field to cheer on the Filipinos. Also bannering the Nationals are England-based Chris Greatwich and James Hall, and local veterans Anton del Rosario, Emelio Caligdong, collegiate stalwarts Jason Cordova and Glester Sobremisana of Far Eastern U, Ricardo Becite and Meliton Pelayo of Santo Tomas U.

The team is currently in Iloilo and has played a series of friendly matches against local squads in Dumaguete, San Carlos City and Cebu.

The Nationals also hope to play friendly matches in Macau next week before the qualifiers.

The nation that tops the group will join seeded nations North Korea, Turkmenistan, India, Myanmar, Group A champion Sri Lanka, and two more group winners in the Asian Challenge Cup, a tournament for lower-ranked Asian nations, to be held from July 30 to August 10 in India. (Full story: <http://uw.abs-cbnnews.com>)

The Daily Bread

2008 May 1 Thu: Acts 18: 1-8/ Ps 98: 1. 2-3ab. 3cd-4/ Jn 16: 16-20. Proper Gospel for Joseph: Mt 13: 54-58

Today's Gospel

JESUS came to His native place and taught the people in their synagogue. They were astonished and said, "Where did this man get such wisdom and mighty deeds? Is He not the carpenter's son? Is not His mother named Mary and His brothers James, Joseph, Simon, and Judas? Are not His sisters all with us? Where did this man get all this?" And they took offense at Him. But Jesus said to them, "A prophet is not without honor except in His native place and in His own house." And He did not work many mighty deeds there because of their lack of faith.

The people's lack of faith so distressed Jesus that He couldn't work many miracles there – not that He chose not to, but because of their hardness He couldn't. He moved His mother to live at Capernaum and worked out of there. It took a great deal of courage for Him now to return to Nazareth, but He loved His hometown neighbors. They, however, thought Him not worthy of a hearing, for three reasons. First, He was merely a worker. He worked with His hands in wood, and stone, and metal. He fixed doors and windows, built houses, and made plows. Some people then, like some today, thought that those who work with their hands are incapable of any intellectual level which could command respect. (In the Talmud, however, carpenters are

praised for their knowledge of the Torah.) The second reason for their rejection of Jesus was that they were so close to Him as neighbors.

Thirdly, He was related to some of the townspeople. The Semitic words used here for brother and sister can be used of cousins or even more distant relatives. There are many instances of this in modern languages. In modern Italian, for example, nipote can mean both nephew and grandson. Two of the "brothers" listed here – James and Joses – are elsewhere described by Mark's gospel (15:40) as being sons of a different Mary.

The leaders at the Nazareth synagogue made the wrong decision. It was easier for them, as it is for us, to be negative rather than positive, to be destructive than creative – easier, in short, to confuse good with evil.

We ought to imitate Jesus' word and example – in speaking out God's truth and in honoring others who do. The Lord never based His actions upon the opinions of people. According to the Curé d'Arz (Sermon on Temptations): "Do you know what the Devil's first temptation is to the person who wants to serve God with dedication? It is human respect."