

PGMA's SONA Address to Center on Economy, Food and Fuel Woes - MabuhayRadio

Written by Philippine Consulate General of Los Angeles

Monday, 21 July 2008 15:36 - Last Updated Monday, 21 July 2008 15:40

President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo has told members, officers and governors of the Manila Overseas Press Club (MOPC), the oldest press club in Asia and RP's most prestigious press club that she is very confident the Philippines will overcome the current global food and fuel crisis.

The Chief Executive said this would be the theme of her July 28 state of the Nation Address (SONA).

President Arroyo, during the affair, inducted the officers and governors headed by Tony Lopez as MOPC chairman and Babes Romualdez of Philippine Star as the president.

With new Press Secretary Jess Dureza, she hosted a 15-minute cocktails before a 90-minute dinner.

"There is a challenge to the world," she said. "The Philippines has prepared itself for that challenge. We have a plan to address it. At the same time, we are not losing track of our transformation of our economy."

The resources we have husbanded can meet the challenges and allow us to stay on track. The Philippines offers the best value for investments.”

The President said the Philippines has lower inflation rate than Indonesia and Vietnam.

“There has been no negative when other developing economies were experiencing recessions. Every President (before me) experienced negative growth at the end of his or her term,” she pointed out.

Noting the huge contribution of OFWs, she said that “although our GDP is growing at 5.2 percent, our GNP is 7-percent” (because of the OFW remittances).

She said she won't remove the 12-percent value added tax. With the global challenge of unstoppable food and oil prices, her economic advisers have suggested that the country needs more than ever the revenues from the VAT on oil and petroleum products.

The President said she would rather give cash and subsidies for the poor, including P4-billion for the eight-million lifeline electricity consumers, those who consume less than 100-kwh a month. She has removed school fees (like for the Girl Scouts) in public elementary schools to boost attendance.

Karl Wilson of the French news agency asked her what books she has been reading lately. "I reread Tom Friedman [The World is Flat]," she disclosed.

"It's a more recent edition. He added more recent examples [of globalization]." Friedman has a new book, "Hot, Flat, and Crowded," which his website says "brings a fresh outlook to the crises of destabilizing climate change and rising competition for energy." "We [the Philippines] can live in a flat world," the President assured us.

"The goal I set in 2001," she recalled, "is to have the highest Internet penetration rate." I said only ten-percent of the population has Internet access. "Because you are including the provinces," she clarified. "If you talk about Metro Manila comparing it to city states like Hong Kong or Singapore, we are doing well. You are comparing a city state and a nation state."

The President said she will go to China on August 3 to 11 for the Olympics and make a visit to ChengduPhilippines can export something new. where the

When Tony Lopez asked her if she would become prime minister using the Putin model, she just smiled. When Lopez told her: "You are too young to retire," the President replied: "I only look young."

"How do you manage to look young?" Lopez asked.

"Energy management. You manage your time, you manage your diet, you manage your mental energy. My public schedule is from ten o'clock to three o'clock because I have to do paperwork before and after that. I do the final draft of my speeches."

"My dinners I try to make it not mentally challenging," she told us, as we broke into laughter, "that's why we tried to schedule this for lunch."

"I have seven hours of sleep," the President said. "I have a diet done by my nutritionist. But I don't live in a straightjacket." She has a daily exercise and hears Mass every morning. Some members of the Malacañang Press Corps used to join her for the exercises but dropped out

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“because of the high intensity.” She has seven hours of sleep.

“You need that to be creative and analytical. It’s all part of energy management,” she said.

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Keynote Address of President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo during the Joint Regional Merger of
Lakas CMD & KAMPI

Cap Trade & Cultural Center, Camp John Hay, Baguio City, July 18, 2008

Governance

“We can create big changes in the country when distinguished men and women come together for a noble cause.” Both the LAKAS-CMD and the Kampi are the strongest political parties in the land. United, the more we could extend our foremost roles in the politics and progress of the nation, and direct our country towards a progressive economy.”

“Wherever our discourse leads, let us assure our people of one thing: our administration will continue to harness all the resources at our command to help ordinary Filipino families pressured by cost and calamity, while still pursuing needed investments in people and infrastructure.” I assure you that the day will come when poverty will finally be wiped out from our nation, and all Filipinos could join the productive workforce of a peaceful and progressive country that we could be proud of.” Let us do our best in working for a stronger economy, let us strengthen educational reforms and environmental protection. Let us help each other to provide food and job for each and every Filipino.”

“In other words, we feel the sentiments and clamor of the ordinary Filipino, and we are responding accordingly by utilizing the funds of the government.” - (Sa madaling salita, dinig at dama natin ang hinaing at panawagan ng karaniwang Pilipino, at tumutugon tayo, gamit ang kaban ng bayan.)

“You and I made hard decisions - hard on our people, unpopular with big business, but good for the country, as events have shown. Our preparations shield our nation from the worst effects of the worldwide food and fuel crises.” We spent the last two years preparing for such world crises in two ways: first, by increasing food productivity, second, by increasing the ability to buy the food with bigger incomes and smaller income tax bites.”

“We have come too far, made too many sacrifices on the hard but wiser road taken, to reverse now and give up enduring strengths for popular but counterproductive short-term gains.”

“In deliberating on the best solutions to our people's travails, we won't agree on everything. It is easy to understand why many would want to see taxes on oil and electricity removed. But we have to carefully address some hard questions. If VAT on oil and power is lifted, how do we replace about P80 billion in revenues, mostly used for the poor? Won't scrapping the VAT on energy benefit mainly the well-to-do, who consume 84 percent of oil and 90 percent of power, while depriving the poor of billions in programs now funded by VAT? Wouldn't it strip the vast majority of our people of the means to ride out the world food and energy crises?”

“We can also spend billions more on health and education, and to train and retrain our workforce.”

Social Services

“For jeepney drivers and commuters squeezed by the quadrupling of the cost of diesel, we have fought kotong and colorum to boost the income of drivers, while keeping fare increases to P1, the cost of one text message.”

Economy

“Balancing the budget this year would be a laudable milestone in our fiscal turnaround, but not if it puts a milestone around our necks. Thus, even before we heard the call to review our policies, we already did so. Months ago we said that we may need to defer a balanced budget in the challenging global environment. We declared our willingness to allocate as much as P75 billion on social spending. And if things improve next year, we will return to our target.”

“Our bold fiscal reforms have also raised more billions for development without relying on outside loans, as in decades past. With our own resources, we are building more roads, bridges, ports and other infrastructure. They open wider areas and more opportunities for new wealth and new jobs, all towards a self-sufficient, self-reliant, strong republic.”

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Bilateral cooperation between RP and China leads to discovery and dismantling of shabu lab--PDEA

MANILA, July 20 (PNA) -- The Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency (PDEA) on Sunday attributed the success of the discovery and dismantling of huge shabu laboratories to the Philippine's bilateral cooperation with People's Republic of China (PROC).

PDEA Director-General retired military Gen. Dionisio Santiago, speaking before the Balitaan Tinapayan in Sampaloc, said the Philippine government and PROC have been sharing information that led to the successful drug operations in the past several months.

"We rely both on international and domestic information gathering in going after international drug syndicates operating in the country. Our counterpart in China helped us in the discovery of shabu laboratories," said Santiago, adding that cooperation among the Philippines and neighboring countries would help a lot in neutralizing drug syndicates.

However, Santiago clarified that the recent operation in Real, Quezon, was purely a work of the agency.

"This is one of the biggest so far and we are proud to say that this is a work purely by the PDEA. Imagine, they can manufacture hundreds of kilos of shabu in a few months," he said.

Santiago also said the PDEA is not focusing on street pushers and peddlers. "We are more focused on big-time drug syndicates. We go after the sources and we want it big not just small time pushers and peddlers. I told my men to raid shabu laboratories and make sure that the

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operators will be arrested. It seems useless if we fail to get the operators as these people will only change venue of operations," said Santiago.

"If we dismantle the laboratories without affecting arrest, it only means that our counterpart in China told us that the operators have already slipped out from the country," he said.

Santiago said he implemented changes in the strategies to go after drug syndicates and maintained his policy of the reward-punishment among his men.

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RP receives kudos from int'l experts over its handling of toxic materials in sunken vessel

The Philippine government received kudos from international experts over its handling of toxic materials in the sunken Princess of the Stars off Sibuyan Island.

Executive Secretary Eduardo R. Ermita said that a joint team of experts from the United Nations and the European Union noted that the efforts of the Philippine government to prevent and control a potential environment and human disaster have been successful, and that it is

“on track with what they are doing to assess the situation.”

The international experts arrived in the country through the efforts of the Department of Health (DOH) which has coordinated with the World Health Organization (WHO) on the possible health hazards arising from the sinking of the Princess of the Stars as part of the country's obligations to the International Health Regulations.

The DOH sub-task force on hazardous materials has instituted preventive measures that include a ban on fishing along a five-kilometer radius.

Ermita explained that this is in keeping with an earlier advisory from Health Secretary Francisco Duque III on the need for such a prudent precaution.

The DOH is now looking at the acute health-and-nutrition effects of the fishing ban and will work with the WHO and the local communities in Sibuyan to address the health concerns.

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On the other hand, health assessments on the diver to detect exposure to the harmful chemicals have also been made by the DOH and no acute signs of pesticide poisoning were found.

Together with the UN-EU team, the DOH has also coordinated with communities in Sibuyan to draw up contingency plans on preparedness, readiness, and response to hazards and risk before, during and following salvage operations which will start in August. # # #

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