

Written by Philippine Consulate General of Los Angeles

Monday, 14 July 2008 09:15 - Last Updated Monday, 14 July 2008 11:24

President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo urged today the delegates to the 4th Annual Ambassadors, Consuls Generals and Tourism Directors Tour (ACGTDT) to become partners of her administrations in fueling the growth of the Philippine economy. The President issued the call, not only to the delegates of the 4th ACGTDT but also to the four-million Filipino-Americans residing in the United States and half-a-million Filipino-Canadians in her speech welcoming them this morning to Malacanang.

The President said Filipinos through their remittances, in the US and Canada are “truly a significant and positive force” for the Philippine development.

“You are an important partner of government in ensuring that the Philippines remains firmly on the path of progress. Your remittances, make up the bulk of the record-setting \$16-billion that we received in 2007, and therefore, you have helped fueled the growth of the Philippine economy,” the President said.

She noted that the country’s Gross Domestic product (GDP) is 5.2-percent and with the help of remittances from the Filipino-Americans and Filipino-Canadians the Gross National Product (GNP) remains at 7-percent.

The President told the delegates that their investment in small and medium enterprises (SME’s)

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have fanned the flames in entrepreneurship among your siblings, children, nieces and nephews while your investments in real estate have been instrumental in renewing the real-estate market and sustained its considerable growth during her leadership.

“And now might have noticed our Philippine Stock Exchange is counting your investments as well. You are a crucial part of Team Philippines. We encourage you to continue championing Philippine initiatives aimed at lasting peace,” she told the delegates.

Citing the importance of their RP tours, the President said “we will continue to build bridges and neighbors and more importantly strengthen the Philippine ties with its allies around the world, particularly America.”

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PGMA: No backpedaling on fiscal reforms

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President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo said today the government is determined to pursue the fiscal reforms that have placed the country in a better position to weather the blows of soaring food and oil prices worldwide, and raised funds for social services and priority infrastructure projects.

“We are sticking to and we are widening the fiscal reforms that have earned us the respect of international finance, bringing our interest rates down and making our peso strong,” the President said, in an apparent reference to the calls by certain sectors for the suspension or lifting of the 12 percent Valued Added Tax (EVAT) on oil.

The President made the statement before the visiting Filipino-Americans and Filipino-Canadians delegates to the 4th Annual Ambassadors/Consuls General and Tourism Directors Tour of the Philippines, who paid a courtesy call on her in Malacanang this morning.

Instead of backpedaling on her fiscal reform programs, President stressed that she intends to “plant them deeper in the structures of the government economy. All this is for the benefit, not only of our people tomorrow, but the next President as well.”

Those who have sought the lifting of the EVAT on oil include committed candidates for president in the 2010 elections.

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The Chief Executive pointed out that with the revenues generated by tough fiscal reforms, the government can now focus its attention on “day-to-day problems that have taken all countries by surprise including the US in the world food and fuel crises, while continuing to invest for a better tomorrow.”

She also pointed out that when it comes to food and fuel, the Philippines cannot take the “risk of no one selling us both (items) unless we pay impossible prices.”

“National food self-sufficiency and national fuel conservation are now entrenched as the first principle of statecraft,” she said.

“And that is why having prepared for this, we have adequate supplies of rice today, and we have a solid plan to reach self-sufficiency in the very near future,” she added.

She thanked the Filipino-Americans and Filipino-Canadians for their important role as partners of government in ensuring that the Philippines remains firmly positioned on the path of progress.

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She said that their remittances formed the bulk of the \$16 billion remitted to the Philippines in 2007 and which helped fuel the country's economy.

There are now four million Filipino-Americans in the US, and 500,000 Filipino-Canadians.

"Your investments in small and medium enterprises, have fanned the flames of entrepreneurship among your siblings, children, nieces and nephews. Your investments in real estate have been instrumental in renewing the real estate market during my administration and sustaining its considerable growth," she told her visitors.

The President said that the Philippines will continue to build bridges with its neighbors and strengthen relations with its allies around the world, especially the US.

"But at the same time, at this moment in world history, with the rapid rise in food and fuel prices, which you're also experiencing as the whole world is experiencing, the Philippine must take greater control of its own destiny. We must become more self-reliant and self-sufficient," she said.

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PGMA says RP is prepared to face global food/fuel crisis

President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo said today that with her administration's successful implementation of fiscal measures, the country has the best shield against the worst effects of the unstoppable worldwide food and fuel prices increases.

The President made the statement in a speech welcoming in to Malacanang's Rizal Hall this morning the delegates of the 4th Ambassadors, Consuls Generals and Tourism Directors Tour (ACGTDT).

The President said her government spends a lot of time and resources to train and retrain a growing work force for "specific task and for whatever challenges a wayward world economy may throw at us. And because we have been prepared for it we have been able to shield our nation from the worst effects of food and fuel crisis worldwide."

The President told the 320 Fil-Am and Fil-Canadian delegates that the current economic crisis sweeping the world did not catch the nation unprepared.

In fact, she said, her hard decisions to impose bold fiscal reform measures have resulted in more revenues, which the government is now spending for the rehabilitation and upgrading of infrastructures projects such as bridges, highways, ports, airports and other facilities that intended to create more new jobs.

“With more money we can spend now a lot on health and education,” she said, adding that the policy reforms that she has instituted will now benefit the majority of the Filipino people. Her successor, she added, will inherit ‘a more stable economy’ when she steps down in 2010.

“Had we acted differently or not acted at all, all would be lost today,” she said. “So we remain committed to the path we have taken, the best solution is the one that has worked,” she said.

The President maintained that her government remains on track and is firmly focus on getting

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the country ready for the next generation.

To be able to maintain the respect of the international finance, the government is now widening the fiscal reform by bringing interest rates down and making the Philippine peso stronger than its current status.

“All this is for the benefit not only of our people tomorrow but the next President as well,” she said.

She also informed the delegates that during the last three years that Trade and Industry Secretary Peter Favila has headed the nation’s competitiveness council, the international finance has convincingly agreed that the Philippines has made important progress for which the international credit rating agencies like Moody’s, Standard and Poor, and among others, gave its positive and stable outlook on the country.

“We are happy that the world competitiveness year book, the latest edition, shows a remarkable improvement of five notches in the rating of the Philippines,” she said.

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President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo's speech during the Courtesy Call of the Delegates to the 4th Annual Ambassadors/Consuls General and Tourism Directors Tour (ACGTDT) of the Philippines
Ceremonial Hall, Malacañang

July 14, 2008

OFWs

"Let me say once again, that Filipinos in the United States and Canada are truly a significant and positive force for development.

"Four million-strong in the U.S. now and half a million-strong in Canada, you are an important partner of Government in ensuring that the Philippines remains firmly on the path of progress."

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"Your remittances, make up the bulk of the record-setting 16 billion dollars that we received in remittances in 2007, and therefore you have helped fueled the growth of the Philippine economy."

"And now you might have noticed our Philippine Stock Exchange is courting your investments as well. You are a crucial part of Team Philippines. We encourage you to continue championing Philippine initiatives aimed at lasting peace and development."

Foreign Relations

"On our part, in the Philippines, we continue to build bridges and neighbors, and strengthen ties with allies around the world, especially America."

Governance

"The world crises did not catch us unprepared or without reserves."

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"We took hard decisions several years ago, hard on our people, unpopular with big business, but good for the country, as events have shown beyond any doubt."

"These hard decisions were intended to raise new revenues, large amounts of new revenues from bold fiscal reforms -- more money for more bridges, roads, ports and other infrastructure to create more opportunities for new wealth and new jobs, all towards a self-sufficient, self-reliant, strong republic."

"With more money, we spent a lot on health and education; we spent a lot to train and retrain a growing workforce. And not just for specific tasks but for whatever challenges a wayward world economy may throw up."

"We remain on track and firmly focused on getting the country well on the road by 2010 to first world, like what you are enjoying, in 20 years."

"But when it comes to food and fuel, definitely, we cannot run the risk of no one selling us both

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unless we pay impossible prices. National food self-sufficiency and national fuel conservation are now entrenched as the first principle of statecraft. And that is why having prepared for this, we have adequate supplies of rice today, and we have a solid plan to reach self-sufficiency in the very near future."

"But our best response in the longer term to the global commodity crisis is this: What is lost in rising costs of commodity imports like oil and rice must be offset by increasing volumes and hopefully increasing prices of commodity exports, whether hard commodities like primary products or soft ones like tourism."

Economy

"We are sticking to and we are widening the fiscal reforms that have earned us the respect of international finance bringing our interest rates down and making our peso stronger. We shall plant them deeper in the structures of government of the economy. All this is for the benefit, not only of our people tomorrow, but the next President as well."

"With the fiscal wherewithal bestowed by our reforms, we are now focusing on the day-to-day problem. We can focus on the day-to-day problems that have taken all countries by surprise including the U.S. in the world food and fuel crises, while continuing to invest for a better tomorrow."

Food Supply

"We spent the last two years preparing for such world crises in two ways: first, by increasing productivity, with the help of the International Rice Research Institute which you have visited. Second, by increasing demand with bigger incomes and smaller income tax bites. Today, minimum wage earners no longer have to pay income tax."

"We should have the world food crisis well in hand in the Philippines, with the programs we launched, combined with more vigilance over prices and greater severity against price manipulation."

Social Services

"We are clustering the programs of DSWD, Department of Health, GSIS, SSS, and other anti-poverty agencies into a National Social Welfare Program to shield the poorest from these ongoing global-wide developments."

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Full text of speech available at <http://www.op.gov.ph/speeches.asp>

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Developmental offensive a win-win solution vs insurgents

MANILA, July 13 (PNA) -- Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) chief Gen. Alexander Yano credited the military's non-traditional activities in the countryside as among the major factors why the 120,000-strong military is winning the war against the communist New People's Army (NPA).

"We have sought to redefine military solution," said Yano, referring to the military traditional solution of engaging the members of the NPA, the armed wing of the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP), in gun battles.

Citing figures culled by the military intelligence community, Yano said the NPA's strength only

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stands at 5,300 which he said is a historic low in the NPA's history. The rebel group's strength peaked to 25,000 in 1987.

He also said that the number of barangays where there are rebel presence is now down to 1,615 barangays or 3.8 percent of the 41,900 barangays nationwide.

He added that rebel guerilla fronts are now down to 69 from a high of 107 in 2005.

"Vital to our accomplishments is the recognition that we could not have achieved as much if we relied on traditional military solution, that is fighting arms with arms," said Yano, referring to the overall gains against the communists.

"When I say redefining the military solution, I am talking about adding to the equation the AFP's developmental offensives. You have heard of our National Development Support Command which is primarily task to undertake basic infrastructure works, livelihood activities and other development projects in conflict, underdeveloped and depressed areas," he said.

"You are aware of our 'kalayaan barangays program,' which aims to transform conflict affected barangays into model communities of development, " added Yano.

He said 357 high-impact projects, including school buildings, access roads and water systems, have been so far completed under the program.

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"We launch these offensives because we know that there is a symbiotic relationship between security and development. Bringing development into our communities encourages our people to reject armed groups. Our people know that they are stakeholders to peace and development and they shun groups that threaten their peaceful communities. People are turning against the communist insurgency, creating unfavorable environments for the rebels," he said.

"Another important factor to our success is that a military solution gives precedence to a peaceful solution. Local peace processes are given importance by our commanders on the ground in coordination with local chief executives," said Yano.

"This has resulted in an increase in the number of rebel surrenderors over the past months, the decline in their numbers is not only an effect of sustained military operations. It is also a manifestation of the number of rebels turning away from the local communist movement. In Davao just last month, 59 rebel returnees came back to mainstream society," he said.

Yano said that given the military accomplishments as a result of its traditional and non-traditional operations, "we are positive that we will meet our 2010 commitment not only to the President but to the Filipino people."

The military is referring to the directive of President Arroyo for the military and the police to end the insurgency problem on or before 2010 when her term ends. The insurgency problem started about four decades ago.

Yano assured that the AFP will not be complacent in view of its accomplishments.

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"Rest assured that your Armed Forces will not only seek to sustain our gains but will double our efforts to finally bring the local communist movement to its inevitable end," he said.

Yano, at the same time, clarified that the military is not fighting an ideology, adding that they "respect the inalienable right of every citizen and our democracy to believe in any ideology he chooses including communism."

"What we are putting an end to is the capacity of the communist insurgents to cause violence and disorder. We shall continue to press on the fight and sustain the gains towards the defeat of the communist insurgents," he said. (PNA)

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U.S. advisory just precautionary measure; Mindanao relatively peaceful – DurezaMindanao is relatively peaceful and the bigger part of Mindanao is, in fact, a haven for visitors and fun seekers.

Thus stressed Press Secretary Jesus Dureza today as he pointed out that the travel advisory issued by the US Embassy in Manila for American citizens to be cautious in their travels to Mindanao is just a precautionary measure.

The Mindanao leader and former head of the Office of the Presidential Adviser for the Peace Process (OPAPP) stressed thus of the July 10 US Embassy travel advisory:

"Travel advisories are internal issuances and are merely 'advices' to their own citizens. And, as such, they are more precautionary in character."

"Hence, we should not give those advisories more credence than they deserve," advised Dureza who pointed out that the US Ambassador to the Philippines herself has been a frequent visitor of Mindanao.

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“U.S. Ambassador Kristie Kenney goes to Mindanao more often than many Filipinos residing in Manila do. Mindanao is relatively peaceful and safe for both foreign and local tourists,” Dureza assured.

The former two-term congressman of Davao City in eastern Mindanao also explained that “except for some areas that are conflict-affected, the bigger part of Mindanao is a haven for visitors and fun seekers.”

Saying there is a “need for caution in Mindanao,” the advisory urged Americans living and working in Mindanao to “reassess their personal security, keep a low profile, and avoid public gathering places.”

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PGMA to receive 320 Fil-Ams and Fil-Canadians in Malacanang Monday

President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo is scheduled to receive Monday, July 14, some 320 Filipino-Americans and Filipino-Canadians from the United States and Canada who shall participate in the 4th Annual Ambassadors, Consuls General and Tourism Directors Tour

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(ACGTDT) of the Philippines.

The delegates, who arrived in Manila Saturday morning (July 12), will stay in the country until Tuesday (July 15).

Their four-day itinerary will be capped by a tour of Intramuros Walled City, and famous world-class tourist spots like Corregidor in Cavite City; Pagsanjan Falls in Pagsanjan, Laguna; Villa Escudero in Tiaong, Quezon; Aguinaldo Shrine in Kawit, Cavite; Tagaytay City and Taal Volcano in Batangas. The group will also have a round of golf at the exclusive Tagaytay Midland Golf Course.

Started in 2005, this joint project of the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA), Department of Tourism (DOT), and the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) has attracted hundreds of Filipinos living in the United States and Canada.

Renamed ACGTDT from Ambassadors, Consuls General Tour (ACGT) in 2007, this joint project of the DFA, DOT and DTI is aimed:

- To provide an opportunity for Filipino-Americans and Fil-Canadians and their friends to visit the Philippines and contribute to the national economy in terms of foreign exchange generation and job creation;
- To instill a stronger sense of nationalism and love of country among participants, especially the youth, to discover their roots and appreciate the beauty of the Philippines and the hospitality of its people; and
- To motivate Filipino-Americans and their friends to become Philippine champions in the areas of tourism, trade, investments and cultural development.

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The highlight of their four-day tour is the wreath-laying rite at the monument of national hero, Dr. Jose P. Rizal, and the much-awaited and once-in-a-lifetime courtesy call to the President of the Philippines, to be followed by a luncheon.

They will be accompanied to Malacanang by Philippine ambassadors to the US and Canada, and RP consuls general and tourism directors in the said countries.

Also another highlight of the ACGTDT's trip is for Filipino-Americans and Filipino-Canadians to explore investment opportunities as they attend the Business Opportunities Seminar and Fair organized by the DTI for July 12, and a chance to see the 3rd One Town, One Product (OTOP) Luzon Island Fair at the SM Megamall in Mandaluyong City.

OTOP is the administration's project showcasing the talents and skills of residents in all municipalities and provinces in creating their own brand or product.

This year's delegates will come from Washington DC (21 participants), Ottawa (24), Agana (14), Atlanta (10), Chicago (42), Edmonton (20), Honolulu (58), Los Angeles (34), New York (55), San Francisco (36), Toronto (7), Vancouver (10) and Winnipeg (13).

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PGMA SONA to focus on realignment of expenditures---NEDA

President Gloria Macapagal- Arroyo is expected to explain in her 8th State-of-the-Nation Address (SONA) on July 28, the realignment of expenditures to social programs for the country to cope with the "global economic slowdown."

Acting National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA) Director- General Augusto Santos, in an interview over government-run Radyo ng Bayan this morning, said the President wants expenditures focused on social programs, infrastructure and environment protection.

"Gusto gawin ng gobyerno, 'yung parang kailangan pagbutihin ang expenditures, ilagay sa tamang lugar, sa social programs, infrastructures, and programs to protect the environment (She wants the government to

improve its expenditures and pour in money in social programs, infrastructure and protection of the environment)," Santos said.

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Malacañang has also plans of a media campaign on the government's "achievements" in time for the SONA, the annual speech the President delivers before a joint session of Congress to spell out the accomplishments and thrusts of the administration.

Santos added that the Philippines has been caught in a "global economic crisis" that can be dealt with through strengthened partnership between the government and the private sector.

Santos also insisted the government's economic fundamentals remain in place.

He said NEDA projects that the economy will still grow this year but it will likely be lower than last year's 7.3 percent.

In the same program, Presidential Management Staff head Cerge Remonde said many of the government's infrastructure projects have been completed, most even ahead of schedule.

Remonde added the only delays will be in the construction of airports.

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PNP posts 89% crime solution efficiency

MANILA, June 04 (PNA) -- If the solid statistics compiled by the Philippine National Police (PNP) were to be a scientific basis for creating a public perception, there is no doubt that it is much safer to walk the streets now, than it was a year ago.

In fact, PNP director general Avelino I. Razon, Jr., may just be coy about it, but fact is: the cops achieved a high 89 percent in crime solution efficiency, solving 14,817 out of the 16,653 reported cases nationwide during the first quarter of 2008.

Based on the crime data culled by Chief Supt. Jefferson Soriano, chief of the PNP Directorate for Investigation and Detective Management (DIDM), the total crime volume dropped by 6.44 percent during the first three months of 2008 compared to the same period last year.

Index crime or crimes that are serious i.e., murder, homicide, rape, robbery and theft, make up 54.71 percent of the total crime volume, Razon said.

Rape cases dropped from 695 during the first quarter of 2007 to 618 during the same period in 2008, he said.

Razon also said that robbery and theft also decreased. During the first three months of 2008, there were 1,721 robbery cases as compared to 1,845 in 2007. Theft posted 2,064 cases during the first quarter of 2008 as against 2,371 cases during the same period in 2007.

The National Capital Region (NCR) which is composed of Metro Manila's 15 cities and one municipality, registered a 92.58 percent in crime solution rate, solving 4,206 out of the 4,543 reported cases during the first three months of this year, making it the fifth highest in solving crimes in the country's 16 regions.

Metro Manila, which has a population of about 12 million, posted the highest number of crimes, although it is a far second to Region 4 (Southern Tagalog) with regards to murder and homicide cases. During the same period, the southern tagalog region recorded some 175 murders and 113 homicide, compared to NCR's 131 and 85 cases, respectively.

During the first quarter of 2007, Metro Manila recorded 136 murder cases compared to Southern Tagalog's 116.

For the second time in a row, the Autonomous Region for Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) where a heavy concentration of rebels belonging to the Moro Islamic Liberation (MILF) is based, surprisingly registered the smallest crime volume at 168 during the first quarter of 2008, reducing further the 190 it registered during the same period last year.

Of the total crime volume, the ARMM police solved 131 out of the 168 cases reported, or an effective solution rate of 77.98 percent, the lowest among the 16 regions.

However, the ARMM also posted the lowest average monthly crime rate (AMCR) of 1.93 percent.

Western Visayas comprising Region 6, posted the highest number of crimes solved at 94.81 percent, followed by Region 4B comprising the provinces of Mindoro, Marinduque, Romblon

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and Palawan (Mimaropa) with 93.77 percent crime solution rate, Region 8 or Eastern Visayas (Samar and Leyte) 93.49 percent, and Region 5 (Bicol) 92.77 percent.

Razon said that all other regions in the country posted high rates of crimes solution: Region 1 (Northwestern Luzon) 91.39; Region 2(Northeastern Luzon) 87.43; Region 3 (Central Luzon) 87.37 percent; Region 7 (Central Visayas) 79.16 percent; Region 9 (Zamboanga Peninsula) 86.47 percent; Region 10 (Northern Mindanao) 88.64 percent; Region 11 (Davao Provinces) 89.31 percent; Region 12 (Central Mindanao) 92.40 percent; Region 13 (Northeastern Mindanao) 89.01 percent; and the Cordillera Autonomous Region (CAR) 79.77 percent.

The PNP chief vowed to exert more efforts at sustaining the momentum in combating crime syndicates.

Razon who has coined a new battle cry "Mamang Pulis" designed to rebuild the tarnished image of the PNP, has put to task the entire Police Regional Offices and national support units to intensify crime prevention and public safety operations. (PNA)

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Economy back on track next year, govt predicts

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THE Philippines expects economic growth to accelerate in 2009 as inflation and interest rates ease, an official said yesterday.

The expansion in the gross domestic product may accelerate to a range of 6.1 percent to 7 percent in 2009, Budget Undersecretary Laura Pascua told reporters after a meeting of economic managers.

That range would compare with this year`s revised target range of 5.7 percent to 6.6 percent, Pascua said.

She made the statement even as another official said the government was deciding if it could lower the tax on oil and petroleum products to help soften prices.

A possible lowering of that tax was in response to calls to suspend it, said Augusto Santos, director general of the National Economic and Development Authority.

``It will not really be suspending but more of lowering the VAT, but we have to clarify that this would require legislation, `` he said.

``We can lower the VAT to a level that is revenue-neutral. Given the increase in [oil tax collections] , we have windfall revenue, so we can lower the VAT rate to the extent that the government will no longer generate windfall.``

That windfall reached P4 billion in the first quarter, and the government spent P2 billion of the

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money to pay for the power bills in June of consumers using 100 kilowatt hours or less. It also earmarked P1 billion to provide scholarships to deserving students, and another P1 billion to modify diesel engines to run on cooking gas.

Finance Secretary Margarito Teves said the government would lose P73.1 billion in oil revenues if the oil tax was lifted.

“Lifting the VAT on oil will largely benefit the rich because they are the biggest consumers of oil, while most of the consumption of the poor families is VAT-exempt, such as food products,” Teves said.

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PGMA preoccupied with cushioning impact of soaring oil prices on the poor – Dureza

President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo is preoccupied with finding ways and means to cushion the impact of the meteoric rise of oil prices in the world market on the poor.

“This is the President’s main preoccupation now,” Press Secretary Jesus Dureza said in a statement.

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He said that the “important work we all have to do is to help cushion the adverse impact on all, especially on the poor and the less privileged.”

But Dureza pointed out that Malacanang is confident that, as in the past when the nation was confronted by a crisis, Filipinos will close ranks and rise above the present problems.

“Filipinos, at this time of difficulties, usually close ranks and help collectively especially when we all know that this is triggered by global event,” he said.

He pointed out that one of the “global events” currently rocking the country and the world is the “the meteoric rise of fuel prices that we cannot do much about except to mitigate until the economic storm blows over.”

“We are all buffeted by these, irrespective of diverse sectoral, political or ideological moorings,” Dureza said, adding that “we view those discordant voices as necessary strands of our vibrant democracy.”

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All social welfare programs consolidated into a single national social welfare strategy

Exuding confidence that there’s still ample time for her administration’s social reform targets to be achieved, President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo ordered today the clustering

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of all existing social welfare-related programs of the different government offices into a national social welfare strategy that will directly address the impact of the adverse global situation.

In Administrative Order (AO) No. 232, which she signed during the Cabinet meeting this morning, the President stressed that she “plans on working hard the next two years to fulfill” her administration’ s reform agenda.

“There is still time to generate social impact if efforts are targeted,” she declared.

To be headed jointly by Ateneo president Fr. Bienvenido Nebres and Chairman Romulo Neri of the Commission on Higher Education (CHED), the Presidential Task Force will “assess, plan and monitor the entire educational system.”

However, the consolidation itself of the social welfare programs of the various government agencies into a single, national social welfare strategy “shall be headed by the administrator of the SSS (Social Security System), who shall be granted a Cabinet rank.”

Under AO 232, the “existing programs of the Department of Social Welfare and Development, the Department of Health, the Government Service Insurance System, the Social Security System (SSS), and other agencies dealing with social welfare shall be clustered together into a national social welfare program that directly addresses the impact of the adverse global environment.”

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PGMA's SONA 2008 to center on subsidy, electricity, food production & infrastructure – Ermita

President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo's State of the Nation Address (SONA) this year will center on government's subsidies for the poor, electricity, food production and infrastructure.

This was revealed this afternoon by Executive Secretary Eduardo Ermita who also said that the President will "gauge whether enough has been achieved" in the above-mentioned areas.

Ermita -- who is also the Presidential Spokesman in concurrent capacity following the transfer of former Press Secretary and Presidential Spokesman Ignacio R. Bunye to the Monetary Board – said the President is now in possession of "accompanying documents" from agencies to help her craft her SONA 2008.

"She will go over it, grade it (the set of documents)..." said Ermita.

The hands-on President has been "going through this (SONA preparation) many times," said Ermita, adding that yesterday, President Arroyo discussed the content for the latest SONA for over two hours.

Ermita said the President will center on subsidies, electricity, food production and infrastructure, specifically "to what extent these have been achieved."

President Arroyo will also touch on the roll-on, roll-off (RORO) of the Strong Republic Nautical Highway (SR-NH), and balancing the budget.

There will be both "mid-range and long-range" items, said Ermita, adding that the President will also touch on highways, airports, seaports, plus the electrification of all barangays.

The President's Ten-Point Agenda are as follows:

1. The creation of six million jobs in six years via more opportunities given to entrepreneurs, tripling of the amount of loans for lending to small and medium enterprises, and the development of one to two million hectares of land for agricultural business;

2. The construction of new buildings, classrooms, provision of desks and chairs and books for students and scholarships to poor families;

3. The balancing of the budget;

4. The "decentralization" of progress around the nation through the use of transportation

networks like the roll-on, roll-off and the digital infrastructure;

5. The provision of electricity and water supply to barangays nationwide;

6. The decongestion of Metro Manila by forming new cores of government and housing centers in Luzon, Visayas and Mindanao;

7. The development of Clark and Subic as the best international service and logistic centers in the region;

8. The automation of the electoral process;

9. A just end to the peace process; and

10. A fair closure to the divisiveness among the Edsa 1, 2 and 3 forces. # # #

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