

Politics not yet on my mind—Pacquiao

by ARTEMIO DUMLAO
Philstar.com

BAGUIO CITY—Filipino boxing sensation Manny Pacquiao is not yet thinking of politics and has remained focused on winning over Puerto Rican Miguel Cotto in their World Boxing Organization (WBO) welterweight bout in November.

Pacquiao started his five-week training in the chilly highlands Monday morning with his coach Freddie Roach at the Cooyesan Hotel gym and the Sta. Lucia Estates golf course nearby.

Roach arrived before noon last Sept. 22 and went straight to the

gym to supervise the conditioning of his ward.

After finishing his flat road run at the Burnham Park Lake oval, Pacquiao surveyed the golf course where he will do his road runs in the coming days.

"This is more beautiful than Hollywood. This is nicer because you can see greens and trees which relax your mind," he said, adding that the ruggedness of the terrain at the golf course is a boost to his training.

"I love it. It is beautiful. It is clean and the ring is nice," Roach said, who had earlier expressed preference for Mexico.

Pacquiao will train here before moving to Las Vegas on the last two

weeks of his training to conquer jet lag and to get acclimatized.

"There is altitude to play with. Training in LA is at sea level like Las Vegas, but here it is 5,000 feet above sea level," Roach said.

Repeatedly asked on his political ambition, Pacquiao, who has been reportedly eyeing the congressional seat of Saranggani province in the 2010 polls, maintained that local politics is still far from his mind.

"I have to focus. No politics yet so I won't be distracted," he said.

The 30-year-old pound-for-pound king admitted that he carries a huge responsibility of uplifting the spirits of more than 90 million Filipinos.

"It's a big responsibility to give honor to the country," he said.

How he can be both a boxer and a politician at the same time is still a quandary for Pacquiao, who is reportedly going to face off with Floyd Mayweather Jr. in March next year.

"I'm going to finish this fight first (with Cotto)," he said, admitting that there have already been talks between boxing promoters on the Pacquiao-Mayweather fight next year. ■

House panel okays P2-billion allocation for holding constitutional convention in 2010

by DELON PORCALLA
Philstar.com

A COMMITTEE of the House of Representatives has approved a P2-billion allocation for the holding of a constitutional convention (con-con) at the same time with the holding of barangay elections in October 2010.

The House committee on constitutional amendments led by La Union Rep. Victor Ortega voted 5-2 in favor of the proposal of Isabela Rep. Giorgidi Aggabao to allocate P2 billion to finance the holding of a con-con that will be composed of 219 congressional delegates.

Ortega said the con-con proposal would be submitted to the House appropriations committee led by Quirino Rep. Junie Cua for approval.

He said the P2-billion budgetary requirement is part of the implementing guidelines of the consolidated measure that provides for the election of con-con delegates simultaneously with the barangay elections on Oct. 25, 2010.

Out of the P2-billion allocation, P884.1 million would be earmarked for personnel services for delegates and their staff members; P174.6 million for secretariat officials' and employees' salaries and benefits.

Around P617.5 million will be utilized for maintenance and other operating expenses (MOOE), a separate P108.6 million for capital outlay, and P300 million for contingency fund.

Ortega said the proposal provides that each delegate will re-

ceive P2,000 per diem allowance per attendance in the five-day weekly plenary sessions and will be given five staff members each, with a chief of staff, legal counsel, researcher, private secretary, legislative staff assistant, and a utilityman or messenger.

The elected con-con delegates can start deliberations on the third Monday of November 2010 that would be presided over by the Chief Justice, Ortega said.

Ortega said the committee has estimated the rentals of the con-con would run to at least P25 million a year, based on the P96,000 daily rental rate of the Philippine International Convention Center (PICC) as proposed.

He said the amount could still vary depending on the venue that would be selected for the holding

of the con-con.

Ortega said the House plenary could be used on Thursdays and Fridays since there are no congressional sessions during those days.

Ortega noted administration and opposition lawmakers have agreed on con-con as the only mode to introduce amendments in the Constitution.

Since there are already three pending con-con measures in the Senate, Ortega believes that con-con, as the mode for charter change, "will be the most acceptable in the Senate."

The Commission on Elections (Comelec) earlier opposed proposals to electing con-con delegates during the general elections next year, saying it would only confuse the voters. ■

House panel recalls text tax

by JESS DIAZ
Philstar.com

THE House ways and means committee recalled yesterday its approval of the proposed five-centavo tax on text messages after telecommunications companies (telcos) and consumer groups raised howls of protest.

Opposition Rep. Rufus Rodriguez moved for the recall of the measure "for the purpose of more public hearings so we can hear even representatives of our overseas workers who will be burdened by this proposed text tax."

"Let us hear consumer groups with members both here and abroad.

Let us hear the telcos, which are complaining of alleged lack of due process," he said.

The committee, chaired by Antique Rep. Exequiel Javier, then proceeded to listen to representatives of telcos, consumer groups and concerned government agencies.

Speaker Prospero Nograles' objection to the committee-approved pass-on provision might have also prompted the committee to agree to the bill's recall.

Globe Telecom legal counsel Rodolfo Salalima told the panel that he and other telco representatives were surprised to read in the committee's "substitute bill" that their companies would be prohibited from passing on the proposed tax to their subscribers.

He said Javier has told journalists that the tax would be a business cost that mobile phone companies would be allowed to include in their subscribers' monthly bills.

He said telcos would surely pass the levy on to the public if Congress imposes it.

"Let us not deceive the public on this no-pass through provision. Why are we testing the nerves and sensitivity of our people?" a visibly angry Salalima asked, stunning some members of the panel when he raised his voice.

Rodriguez supported Salalima's account of how the Javier committee made a complete turnaround on the no-pass on provision.

"I was the only one who voted against this bill in our Sept. 8 meeting because of your decision to let subscribers absorb the proposed five-centavo tax," Rodriguez said, addressing Javier.

He said he had also raised concerns about possible violation of privacy laws, as well as about unequal taxation.

He said under the metering proposal, the Bureau of Internal Revenue and the National Telecommunications Commission would have data on text messages and voice calls.

Javier clarified that the two agencies would only monitor the number of calls and messages for taxation purposes, and not their contents.

"Besides, under the Anti-Wiretapping Law, these agencies and even telcos are prohibited from releasing information about private communications like text messages and voice calls," he said.

Anthony Cruz, who heads a group of mobile phone users called Textpower, told the committee that messages and calls are now levied two kinds of taxes.

"These are the value added tax, which you increased from 10 percent to 12 percent, and the 10-percent overseas communications tax. The proposed five-percent import would be a third levy," he said.

He said his group believes more the telcos' statement that they

would pass on the tax to their subscribers than the lawmakers' no-pass on assurance.

Cruz also urged House members to use their pork barrel funds for education-related projects that they want financed out of the proposed text levy.

But Bacolod City Rep. Monico Puentevella objected to Cruz's proposal, saying lawmakers need such funds now that next year's elections are fast approaching.

"We need that so we can gain votes. Every school building we fund, we gain votes," he said.

Rep. Teodoro Casiño of the party-list group Bayan Muna said text messaging should be a free service of telcos.

Responding to Casiño's questions, officials of the Department of Finance said they could not assure that revenue agencies would be able to enforce a no-pass on provision. ■

RP architect leads in US art shelter contest

by CYNTHIA BALANA
Inquirer.net

FILIPINO Architect Gonzalo "Jun" Raymundo Jr. is one of the top 10 finalists in the prestigious Guggenheim Art Shelter Competition. At press time, he is leading the online voting poll for the award, the Philippine Embassy in Washington reported on Tuesday, Sept. 22.

In his report to the home office, Philippine Ambassador to Washington Willy Gaa said Raymundo exhibited exceptional skill in his design.

"Truly, his work best reflects ingenuity, workmanship and culture that the Filipino people can be proud of. I encourage members of the Filipino community to extend their support to Mr. Raymundo by casting their votes for his meritorious piece of art," Gaa said.

Raymundo, 55, who is based in Quezon City, said his design entry was inspired by the story of Salim and Jamal, the two kids in "Slumdog Millionaire," a movie shot on location in India.

"I was deeply touched by the scenes in the garbage dump so I came up with a 3-D shelter design entry using a bamboo wall representing the Filipino spirit of bayanihan (community cooperation) of strength and hope," Raymundo told the Philippine Daily Inquirer in an interview Tuesday.

According to the guggenheim.org website, Raymundo's work, "A Bamboo Shelter in a Garbage Dump City," is a shelter made of indigenous material built on a concrete base in a garbage dump in the Philippines.

The bamboo wall represents a strong sense of camaraderie or

bayanihan to signify that "where there is unity, there is strength." His work collectively symbolizes "sustainability and hope."

Competition sponsors Guggenheim and Google SketchUp invited amateur and professional designers to submit a 3-D shelter for any location in the world using Google SketchUp and Google Earth.

Nearly 600 contestants from 68 different countries submitted designs that met the competition requirements.

On Oct. 21, the People's Prize winner will be announced along with a special Juried Prize chosen by a panel of experts who include Timothy Bade, principal of Bade Stageberg Cox; Victor Sidy, dean of the Frank Lloyd Wright School of Architecture; and Aidan Chopra, product evangelist of Google SketchUp. ■



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