

# DATELINE PHILIPPINES

## '2.6 million new voters for 2010'

by SHEILA CRISOSTOMO  
Philstar.com

MANILA—With two months left before the Oct. 31 deadline for voter's registration, the Commission on Elections (Comelec) has already recorded more than 2.6 million new voters.

Comelec spokesman James Jimenez said last Aug. 26 that a total of 2,653,594 new voters have registered for the 2010 local and national polls.

"We expect the number to even increase," he added.

Jimenez attributed the huge turnout to the "active participation of media organizations and citizen's groups in encouraging the youth to register, coupled with the Comelec's intensified campaign to promote voter registration."

The poll body estimates that the number of new registrants will reach four million, strengthening its voters' pool of around 40 million in the 2007 mid-term election.

Meanwhile, Filipino overseas workers have until Aug. 31 to register for the May 2010 elections as overseas absentee voters.

The Department of Foreign Affairs-Overseas Absentee Voting Secretariat (DFA-OAVS) disclosed that the number of new

overseas absentee voter (OAV) registrants reached 200,637 as of Aug. 26.

SSS, Comelec plan single ID card

Meanwhile, the Social Security System (SSS) is in talks with the Comelec for wider coverage of the proposed single identification card which the government wants to put in place by the end of the year.

SSS president and chief executive officer Romulo Neri said the state pension fund for private workers wants to include the 48.3-million registered voters in the country in the coverage of the government's so-called Unified Multipurpose Identification System (UMID).

Aside from the Comelec, SSS is also in talks with the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) for the use of the national ID card, Neri said.

SSS has already signed agreements with the Government Service Insurance System (GSIS), Home Development Mutual Fund (Pag-IBIG) and the Philippine Health Insurance Corp. (PhilHealth) on the proposed national ID card.

SSS has over 27 million members while GSIS has 1.5 million. PhilHealth covers SSS and GSIS

members while the Comelec has 48.3 million registered voters.

The unified identification system project aims to enhance the integrity of state-issued ID cards, facilitate government transactions, cut costs and minimize redundant databases.

Neri said SSS is still studying the "lowest calculated bid of P1.689 billion" submitted by the winning consortium led by information technology firm Stradcom Corp. for the production of 12 million cards. Losing bidders alleged that the Stradcom-led group should have been disqualified because they did not meet all the requirements.

The Stradcom group, Neri said, must produce at least 1,000 cards to satisfy the project's technical specifications.

"We plan to conduct the testing at an independent facility in California in early September," Neri said.

If the consortium fails in the post-qualification test, Neri said the joint venture headed by Banner Plasticards Inc. which submitted the second lowest bid of P2.189 billion would also undergo the same process.

SSS is the head agency in implementing the national ID system. ■

## Estrada: 'Presidency is destiny'

by MAIA AGER  
Inquirer.net

MANILA—For deposed president Joseph Estrada, his Cabinet is cleaner than Arroyo's.

Estrada said that during his time, all members of his Cabinet were not "tainted or never got involved in any scam or scandal."

"They are people of competence and integrity and never part of any shenanigans," he said during a regular forum in the Senate Thursday, Aug. 27.

Estrada, who was ousted in 2001 amid corruption allegations and later found guilty of plunder, admitted that one of his mistakes when he was president was his being "too trusting" with the people around him.

And he is considering a political comeback despite the legal questions being raised against his fresh presidential bid, even as he said he would let the people decide on the issue.

"This decision of (seeking the presidency) should be given to the people because I believe in destiny and presidency is destiny. As the saying goes: *Vox populi, vox dei*. The voice of the people is the voice of God," he said.

"You know, when I'm decided, I'll fight it to the last especially if it concerns the welfare of our people in our country," he said.

Estrada said he might announce next month his final decision if he would join the presidential race next year, as he warned: "Nobody can stop me until they say I'm disqualified."

And if gets elected again by the people, the former leader vowed to initiate measures to bring down the



'THE AQUINO AFTERGLOW' Ex-President Joseph Estrada raises the hand of Sen. Noyon Aquino as if to accede to the crowd's greeting "Noyon for president" at the launch of the Serbisyo, Edukasyon, Pangkabuhayan Movement.

Inquirer photo by Rodel Rotoni

level of corruption in the country.

"First, you have to select the people around you, people of unquestionable integrity," he said.

He said the next administration must have a "certainty of punishment" unlike the present administration where certain personalities accused of wrongdoings had been acquitted because of their perceived closeness to President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo.

Estrada cited the cases of former Justice Secretary Hernando Perez, who has been accused of accepting \$2 million bribery from former congressman Mark Jimenez, and resigned Agriculture undersecretary Jocelyn "Joc-Joc" Bolante, who has allegedly diverted the P728 million fertilizer fund to buy the support of administration allies during the 2004 elections. ■

## Palace stands by its choice of national artists

by MARVIN SY  
Philstar.com

MANILA—Malacañang will stand by its choice of national artists for this year unless the Supreme Court rules against the validity of the awardees.

Executive Secretary Eduardo Ermita reiterated the position of the Palace that the President has the authority and prerogative to choose who she wants to receive the National Artist award and that she followed the established process in making her decision.

Ermita pointed out that there are several laws and presidential issuances in place that describe the process by which the selection of the National Artists is made.

"Now we feel that the Office of

the President is backed up by the issuances, especially Republic Act 7356, the law creating the NCCA (National Commission for Culture and the Arts). Also this was followed by presidential issuances, executive orders 435 in 2005 and 236 in 2003," Ermita said.

"Now we believe that on the primacy of the President's authority as the one mandated by law to be the one to make the final choice, that could very well be considered by the Supreme Court. But of course we are not dictating upon the Supreme Court," he added.

Palace legal experts believe that the role of the NCCA and the Cultural Center of the Philippines (CCP) as far as the process of choosing National Artists is concerned is merely to advise

the President.

EOs 236 and 435 provide the guidelines for selecting National Artists and other awards conferred by the state, including the establishment of an honors committee that would also advise the President on her choice.

**Ermita: GMA has final say**

In the current controversy regarding the 2009 National Artists, the honors committee played a significant role as it recommended four individuals who were not among those recommended by the NCCA and CCP.

"What the law said was that they are acting on their advisory capacity to the President and therefore the President has the final say on those that should be awarded," Ermita said. ■

## Is RP politics ready for a John Adams?

by EMMIE G. VELARDE  
Inquirer.net

MANILA—Need we go back to the 19th century to find an upright politician?

A preview of the mini-series *John Adams*, about the second president of the United States, hosted by the US Embassy and HBO Asia last Aug. 25, ended in a discussion of the forthcoming Philippine presidential race.

John Adams was famous for speaking his mind which, according to history books, often went against popular opinion.

"He was a simple lawyer with a prickly personality," noted Martha Buckley, cultural affairs attaché, "more remarkable as a political philosopher than as a politician."

"Can we put in the context of

today's situation ... a political figure like John Adams?" US Ambassador Kristie Kenney asked at the start of the open forum that followed the screening.

Kenney had formally welcomed the audience to the Chancery building of the embassy and introduced the film. Instead of leaving after that, as initially planned, she finished the film showing, seated alone in the row next to the last.

Her question sparked a lively exchange between the hosts and their guests, less than a hundred and mostly student leaders and young filmmakers.

Adams was short, bald and irritable, hardly poster-boy material. The multi-awarded, seven-part series (premiering in Asia on Sept. 7) portrays him through the actor Paul Giamatti as a fiery, almost

frightening, orator. He was "very much unlike George Washington," Buckley said, who was "6'3" and "charismatic."

**An Adams type in RP?**

The guests, some of them first-time voters, raised some concerns, foremost of which was: Does Philippine politics have room for an Adams type, in a sea of candidates polished to perfection through packaging and marketing?

And what if one such type turns up for next year's presidential race but no one listens because he's a grouch? What if Ninoy Aquino was it, and we don't get another crack?

Then this one, almost a plea: Who can help us comb through everything good that is written about all the candidates, to get at the truth? ■



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