

# Palace hikes proposed 2010 budget by P115 billion

by PAOLO ROMERO  
Philstar.com

MALACAÑANG has increased the proposed 2010 national budget to P1.54 trillion, eight percent or P115 billion higher than this year's General Appropriations Act.

Budget Secretary Rolando Andaya Jr. added that next year's deficit was pegged at 2.8 percent of Gross Domestic Product (GDP), or at P233 billion.

The current budget is P1.4 trillion. When it was enacted, the government was still hoping that it would have only a small deficit and a balanced budget in 2010.

However, this year's fiscal gap is expected to widen at P250 billion.

"The budget's strength and focus will remain on infrastructure, agriculture, and social spending," Andaya said.

The final proposal is scheduled for submission on or before Aug. 27, or within the one-month deadline after President Arroyo delivers her State of the Nation Address.

The Department of Budget and Management last May issued a "budget call" for the 2010 national budget.

As expected, the increase in this year's proposed national expenditure program was small due to uncertainties in revenue flows caused by the global economic crisis.

Normally, the "budget ceiling" is announced shortly after the "budget call."

Amid the slight increase in the proposed national allocation for next year, Malacañang has set aside P1.2 billion to buy a brand new twin-engine presidential jet.

This was revealed in the Invitation to Apply for Eligibility and to Bid published in *The Star*, where the Office of the President's Bids and Awards Committee (BAC) has invited interested aircraft manufacturers and distributors to apply for eligibility and bid for one "Presidential Fixed-Wing Executive Jet."

The notice stipulated the aircraft must be factory new, with two pressurized turbo-fan engines and equip-ped with avionics and instruments compliant with the standards of the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) and International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO).

The notice said presidential aircraft must be "fitted with Auxiliary Power Unit and in VIP cabin configuration."

"The type of aircraft to be offered should have been used as a VIP/Executive aircraft by the country of origin and by at least two countries," the notice said.

# Ex-envoy to US confirms military rule plan

by ALBERT DEL ROSARIO  
Inquirer.net

AT the bishops-businessmen's conference a few weeks ago, the possibilities of a declaration of emergency rule or an imposition of martial law were among the topics discussed.

In that regard, I am prepared to sadly confirm that our incumbent national leadership would indeed be capable of placing our democracy at great risk in pursuit of its survival.

The past week, our nation found itself deeply mourning the immeasurable loss of our beloved former President Corazon Aquino, who was responsible not only for ousting a dictator but also for restoring our democratic institutions.

As we quietly paid tribute to our one and only charismatic leader at La Salle Green Hills, I was overwhelmingly reminded that each of us has a responsibility to contribute to the defense of our democracy.

Having served as the Philippine envoy to the United States in 2001-2006, I decided that I, too, should contemplate how I could make my own contribution under the present conditions. This humble contribution, intended to guard our democracy, has been fully earned by the Filipino people under President Cory Aquino's leadership.

I believe our people are fully entitled to know this with certainty if we expect to advance the concept of a proactive citizenship and to encourage vigilance at all times in

the protection of our democratic freedom.

The facts as related would also serve to provide a momentary view of that quaggy place to public officials who may in the future be asked to advance a Palace agenda that is contrary to the national interest.

It was in 2005 during the "Hello Garci" controversy that the then Speaker of the House, Jose de Venecia Jr., came to Washington. He indicated that the Palace had empowered him to ask if we could defend for them the suspension of the writ of habeas corpus.

[When the privilege of the writ is suspended, a person can be arrested and detained without charges.]

**Taken aback**

Taken aback, I could only ask why. The Speaker responded that it was to be used against certain members of the political opposition.

As I contemplated the circumstance, the question was repeated. I replied in essence that what our people needed was good governance, and not a weakening of our democracy. I added that given our being the first republic in Asia, the scheme could result in our becoming a failed state.

With apologies, I expressed as succinctly as I could that the plan was not defensible, and that we could not defend it.

Late that evening, I dutifully reported what had transpired to Foreign Secretary Alberto G. Romulo, who looked favorably on our having taken a clear and

firm position.

**Emergency rule**

Several days after the Speaker's return to Manila, I received a call from him. He said he was contacting me from the Palace to advise that there had been a change of plan and that the proposal to suspend the writ of habeas corpus was no longer an option.

It was obvious to us that while the specific proposal had come under consideration, there were officials in our government who strongly opposed it.

Some weeks later, the Speaker called me once more from the Palace. He wanted to know if I could source a safe phone. My response was that there was probably no such thing in Washington.

**Forceful stand vs media**

He then proceeded to ask if we could defend the declaration of emergency rule. To my reactive query on why we were intending to do this, he answered that the government was preparing to take a forceful stand against the intransigent media.

I replied, without hesitation, that such a position against the Fourth Estate would bring upon us the condemnation of the international community. That, I said, was also indefensible, and we could not defend it.

Subsequently, the Philippine press began to publish articles on hypothetical situations fostered by the Palace regarding threats to national security, at the same time providing emergency rule as a constitutional means to address the threats.

With this apparent propaganda, we knew with near certainty that emergency rule would be declared.

**US gov't alerted**

The US state department was also alerted by the press reports. When asked by them what we thought, I aired my opinion that there was an increasing probability of emergency rule being declared, that it was not good for the Filipinos and for the Philippines, and that we should discuss strategies on how the plan could be averted.

A review of the weeks prior to and during the declaration of emergency rule will show that the US government sent a procession of government officials to Manila, including Ambassador John Negroponte, who was then director of national intelligence.

The American visitors were to ostensibly share their views with our government about the lack of wisdom of such a declaration.

Emergency rule was nevertheless declared by the Palace on Feb. 24, 2006.

**To justify unjustifiable**

Since we could not justify what was unjustifiable, the Philippine Embassy in Washington limited itself to reporting factual occurrences in Manila, while expressing hope that the declaration would be lifted at the earliest possible time.

This, I thought, was the best course of action to at least preserve our reputation for credible representation in the United States.

# Erap tops survey; ex-Kampi chair backs Chiz

by FE ZAMORA & JUAN ESCANDOR JR.  
Inquirer.net

RESULTS of a survey showing former President Joseph Estrada ahead of the possible contenders in the 2010 presidential election may encourage him to run again, he said Wednesday, Aug. 12.

"That might convince me," Estrada told the Inquirer.

In a nationwide survey that Social Weather Stations (SWS) conducted in June, Estrada got 21 percent, followed by Sen. Manuel Villar, who received 19 percent.

The survey covered 1,500 respondents and had a margin of error of plus or minus 2.5 percentage points, according to a report Wednesday, Aug. 12 of *The Daily Tribune* on the survey results.

Estrada and Villar are in a statistical tie because of the margin of error.

Within striking distance is Sen. Francisco "Chiz" Escudero, who received 18 percent.

Vice President Noli de Castro, the erstwhile leading presidential hopeful in past surveys, slipped to No. 4, getting 15 percent.

Sen. Manuel "Mar" Roxas II was fifth, with 9 percent, and Sen. Loren Legarda sixth, with 7 percent.

SWS asked each respondent to name just one person as his or her presidential choice, according to *The Tribune*.

Estrada has been threatening to run if the opposition fails to field a common candidate in the May 2010 elections.

"What can I do if the opposition cannot unite behind a common candidate?" he said.

He said he would announce his decision whether he would run for president in mid-September or late next month.

Estrada, whose six-year term that started in

mid-1998 was cut short when he was ousted in 2001, has said he is qualified to run but critics doubt this. If ever, his qualification to run again would have to be settled by the Supreme Court.

Estrada spent six years in jail while standing trial for plunder. He was convicted in September 2007 by the Sandiganbayan and pardoned by President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo the following month.

**Villafuerte for Escudero**

In Naga City, a staunch supporter of Ms Arroyo and former head of her political party, said he would support Escudero should he run for president.

Camarines Sur Rep. Luis R. Villafuerte Wednesday said that he chose Escudero, also a Bicolano lawmaker, for his qualities as a young and intelligent leader with a vision.

"I am inclined to support Chiz Escudero (in his bid) for the presidency," Villafuerte said.

Villafuerte resigned from his post as president of the Kabalikat ng Malayang Pilipino (Kampi) a week before the merger of Kampi and Lakas-

CMD in May.

Escudero has not declared categorically that he will run for president in 2010, but said he would decide after he turned 40 this year.

While his Partido ng Masang Pilipino (PMP) is just one of the opposition groups under the United Opposition (UNO), Estrada is acknowledged as the leader of the opposition.

**Escudero-Legarda tandem**

Estrada said the political parties under UNO were free to choose their own candidates.

"I have nothing to do with that," he said, referring to reports that the Nationalist People's Coalition (NPC) would field an Escudero-Legarda tandem next year.

Estrada, who was ousted in January 2001 on allegations of graft, said UNO could not prevent the NPC if it wished to have an Escudero-Legarda tandem.

Villafuerte said that he had disaffiliated himself from any political party and that he would run as independent in the 2010 elections. He said he did not need a party to win.

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