

Duterte fetes SEA Games medalists; gives extra incentives

MANILA -- President Rodrigo Duterte on Thursday honored over 800 Filipino athletes who competed in the 30th Southeast Asian Games held from November 30 to

December 11. In his speech, Duterte personally congratulated the Filipino athletes for winning the overall championship in the biennial regional multi-sport event.

"I am deeply honored to be in the presence of our athletes who have emerged victorious in the recently concluded 30th Southeast Asian Games held in our country. Your triumph

showcases the athleticism and sporting prowess of our people to our neighbors in Southeast Asia," Duterte said. "I am really very happy to no end," he added, noting that he would brag about Filipino athletes to Southeast Asian neighbors.

A total of 149 gold, 117 silver, and 121 bronze medals were snagged by the Philippine team to win the overall championship since 2005 and its second top finish in the history of the SEA Games.

Duterte described the country's overall championship as a "windfall" or unexpected good fortune despite particular logistical issues prior to the SEA Games' formal opening. He also committed to give the athletes an additional PHP21 million on top of the incentives to medalists provided by the law.

Republic Act 10699 grants PHP300,000; PHP150,000; and PHP60,000 for SEA Games' gold, silver, and bronze medalists, respectively.

The President, meanwhile, floated the possibility of asking Congress to raise the monthly allowances of Filipino national athletes.

"I'll try to talk things over with Congress. Yung allowance ninyo, dapat yung pagkain libre na. Yung allowance ninyo, allowance na ninyo 'yan (You should keep the allowance to yourselves. Food should be free)," Duterte said.

"PHP250,000 a month, okay na siguro 'yan (does it sound okay to you)? We will try to raise the money," he added.

On top of the incentives, Duterte conferred the Order of Lapu-Lapu rank of Kamagi to all of the medalists.

The Order of Lapu-Lapu is given to those "deserving of merit and recognition and to fully express the President's appreciation of the Filipino people's contributions to the success of the campaigns and the programs of the government."

Also during the event, the Philippine Amusement and Gaming Corporation (Pagcor) turned over PHP117 million for the

incentives of medalists. Duterte later prod-ded Pagcor chair Andrea Domingo to providing an additional PHP100 million for the medalists.

Philippine Sports Commission (PSC) William "Butch" Ramirez presented the President with the Philippine team's trophy for its winning overall championship.

Duterte also obliged for a "groufie" with Filipino athletes while remaining on stage.

Stay out of drugs, terrorism

Warning athletes that illegal drugs and terrorism could destroy their lives, the President also urged athletes to instead "seek sanctuary" in the many human activities such as sports.

Duterte discouraged them from using illegal drugs, saying that it "is really a more dangerous thing to do."

He also expressed his desire to end communist insurgency anew, stressing the youth were made to believe that it was an easy way of getting out of poverty.

"Pag pumasok kayo diyan habang ako nag-

ing Presidente, delikado talaga 'yan (If you join rebel groups while I'm President, that's really dangerous). Stay out of it. It is the most dangerous activity that you can really mess up with. Mamatay ka diyan (You could die there)," Duterte said.

"Ngayon, sa sports nalang maghanap nalang ng pera, mag-training kayo (Look for money through sports. Continue training). I don't mind. Basta (Just) stay clean," he added.

The President defended anew his controversial war on drugs, saying he was "cruel in many ways" because he loved the country and the youth.

He also hit human rights groups anew for lacking common sense, noting that killing drug lords and other criminals was the best way to ensure a safer country.

Secret weapon vs. drugs

Philippine SEA Games Organizing Committee (Phisgoc) chairman and House Speaker Alan Peter Cayetano said promoting sports is one of the President's "secret weapons" in fighting illegal drugs.

"When the President took office in 2016, he had one directive for us, one clear vision: a safe and comfortable life for all. At simple lang po ang guidelines niya (And his guidelines are simple). If you remove crime especially drugs, corruption from the country, we can give every single Filipino a safe and comfortable life," Cayetano said.

"Many, especially those in the West, akala po nila unidimensional yung approach ni Presidente sapagkat very simple ang utos niya-- (thought the President's approach was unidimensional because his order is simple) to fight crime, corruption, drugs, safe and comfortable life not knowing that sports was one of the secret weapons of President Duterte in fighting drugs, in giving our young people a better future," he added.

PH to soft launch Advance Passenger Processing soon

MANILA -- The Bureau of Immigration (BI) will soon soft launch the implementation of the Advance Passenger Processing (APP), a more secure and faster way of processing arriving passengers at the international airports in the country.

This would allow immigration officers to have a copy of the manifesto in advance, knowing the passengers' profile even if they are still onboard their flight.

"We are waiting for an EO (executive order) from the President to compel airlines and other agencies to transmit advance passenger information to our system. We could soft launch the APP either this December or by January since we have a Department Order," BI Port Operations Division chief Grifon Medina told the Philippine News Agency (PNA) on Wednesday.

To implement the APP, the country needs to have an Advanced Passenger Information System (APIS) wherein data includes passenger details and basic flight information.

Currently, airlines provide BI a hard copy of the manifesto upon arrival.

The BI has been allocating a budget for an API since 2013, Medina said.

"This (APIS) would let us know in advance if there's an arriving passenger whose name would 'hit' our records. Our database is connected 24/7 with the Interpol (Interna-

tional Criminal Police Organization)," he said, adding that the APIS would enable them to get the data days or hours before the flights.

If someone has a criminal record in another country, or if he or she is a suspect terrorist, his or her name would automatically hit the immigration system.

"As such, our officers could watch out or wait for that passenger," he added.

Both local and foreign carriers are required to conform once the country implements the APP, Medina said.

The EO, he reiterated, would compel airlines and other concerned agencies such

as the Departments of Foreign Affairs and Transportation, airlines, to comply with the APP implementation.

"They (foreign carriers) are excited, because that would mean their passengers would be processed faster," he said.

"The immigration line would be cut short since we would no longer have to process (in the regular counter) someone who has records. Imagine if we have to ask that passenger with lots of questions, those behind him or her in the line would be affected," he said.

There are about 100 countries implementing the APP. (PNA)

DOJ welcomes moves to strengthen PCGG

MANILA -- Justice Secretary Menardo Guevarra on Wednesday said he welcomes any proposed law to strengthen the Presidential Commission on Good Government (PCGG) which handles the Marcos cases.

Guevarra, however, said that how the agency implemented its mandate may best be explained by officials of the previous administration, who were at the helm of the PCGG in the years shortly after the EDSA People Power Revolution that ousted the late President Ferdinand E. Marcos. "If there's any legislative intent to strengthen the PCGG, I welcome the Senate inquiry. For purposes, however, of know-

ing how the PCGG handled the Marcos cases, it should be the past PCGG leaderships who should be summoned to explain. The current officials of the PCGG had hardly any involvement in the cases except to await the rendition of judgment," Guevarra told reporters.

The Sandiganbayan on Monday dismissed the complaint filed by the Presidential Commission on Good Government (PCGG) against the family of the late strongman Ferdinand E. Marcos which involves alleged PHP200-billion ill-gotten wealth. It was the latest decades-old Marcos case lost by the PCGG.

In its 58-page decision, the anti-graft court's

Fourth Division by Associate Justice Alex Quiroz ruled to turn down the 33-year old case that seeks the reversion, reconveyance, restitution, and accounting of supposed ill-gotten wealth as well as damages.

"For failure of the plaintiff to prove its allegations by preponderance of evidence, the subject complaint filed against defendants Estate of Ferdinand E. Marcos, Imelda R. Marcos, Imelda R. Marcos Manotoc, Irene R. Marcos Araneta, Ferdinand E. Marcos jr. and Constantino Rubio is hereby dismissed," the court said.

Associate Justice Maria Theresa V. Mendoza-Arcega and Maryann E. Corpus-Manalac con-

curred. Among other things, the court said the majority of the documentary evidence presented by the PCGG was photocopied, which violated the best evidence rule.

The photocopies include the income tax returns of the late president from 1961 to 1965.

"The fact that these documents were collected by the PCGG in the course of its investigations does not make them per se public records," the court said, adding that much of the pieces of evidence were likewise missing.

The complaint was filed by the PCGG on July 16, 1987, a little more than a year after a popular uprising ousted Marcos. An amended complaint was also filed on September 22, 1987, impleading Rubio for allegedly being a dummy

of the Marcos family.

A second amended complaint, dated February 9, 1988, was filed and impleaded Nemesio G. Co, Yeung Chan Kam, Yeung Chan Hu, and Yeung Chan Fan as defendants. The third amended complaint impleaded Imelda Cojuangco, the estate of Ramon Cojuangco, represented by Imelda Cojuangco and Prime Holdings Inc.

The cases against Co, Manotoc, Araneta, Kam, Hu, Fan and the Cojuangcos had all been dismissed earlier by the court in separate resolutions.

The PCGG claims supposed "breach of public trust" and "unjust enrichment" estimated to amount to PHP200 billion, an amount it said is impressed with constructive trust "in favor of the plaintiff (government) and the Filipino people.