

GMA not covered by pay increase

By PAOLO ROMERO

The proposal to increase the pay of workers in the public sector that the budget department has sent to Congress clearly stipulates that the sitting President, Vice President, senators and congressmen should not benefit from such increases, Budget Secretary Ro-

lando Andaya Jr. reiterated yesterday.

This, as a Palace official also lamented that President Arroyo was unfairly hit for the planned salary hikes when at least three opposition senators have been pushing for such a raise in the last few years,

Turn to Page 6

with the proposed presidential pay higher than what was submitted to Congress last week.

The official also said the resolution submitted by the executive branch was patterned after a proposal of former Civil Service Commission (CSC) chair Karina David, now a critic of the administration.

Andaya said Section 14 of the proposed joint resolution states "that pursuant to Section 13, Article VI, and Section 6, Article VII of the Constitution, the salary adjustment prescribed herein for the President of the Philippines, Vice President of the Philippines, and members of Congress shall take effect only after the expiration of the terms."

"It is precisely because of the constitutional provisions that the President's salary had been raised to P57,750 despite the three salary increases for government workers since January 2006," Andaya said.

However, in the official government organizational chart, the increases in the pay of the Salary Grade-33 holder, the highest in the pay scale and occupied by the President, are "reflected for record purposes only but the amount the incumbent receives is far less," he said.

"While on paper the compensation of SG-33 is pegged at P69.875, the actual pay is P57,750 only, a level that is not even the highest in the public sector today because there are certain heads of government corporations and financial institutions who are getting more," he said.

Andaya said the "cumulative increases" in the pay of the President will be enjoyed by "whoever succeeds the incumbent."

He said "to give room for wage increases of positions below the President, the ceiling must be raised, as the government pay scale consists of 257 gradations which must have pay differentials in between."

Pending bill

After opposing the Department of Budget and Management's proposal for salary increase, Senate records showed that Sen. Panfilo Lacson filed a bill last year calling for the adoption of an omnibus job classification and pay increase for all government employees including the President, Vice President, Senate President and everyone down the line.

Under Senate Bill 42, the President's salary, which is under salary grade 22, will be P140,377 per month while the Vice President, Senate President and the House Speaker would get P125,247 monthly under salary grade 21.

Lacson's bill presents an omnibus system which provides 22 job grades as opposed to the current 33 salary grades, and is based on skills and knowledge, nature of work and accountability.

Senators Loren Legarda, Edgardo Amara and Antonio Trillanes have also filed the same bill.

Legarda said she filed her bill upon the recommendation of former CSC chairman David.

Lacson defended his bill yesterday after he questioned the DBM's move to insert the increase of salaries of the Office of the President as well as senators and congressmen in the 2009 budget.

"If Malacatang really wants to ease the plight of government workers, it should follow the constitutional process. It should pass the proper measure into law, and then fund it, instead of breaking in billions of pesos in taxpayers' money into next year's budget, which cannot be used anyway because the Constitution prohibits it," Lacson said.

Lacson also said there is a big difference between the Palace's insertion of the funds into the 2009 budget, and his Senate Bill 42.

"My bill aims to rationalize the pay scale of government officials and employees. Funding it will follow the constitutional provision," he said.

Meanwhile, the House appropriations committee starts public hearings this morning on President Arroyo's proposed P1.415-trillion national budget for 2009.

Albay Rep. Edcel Lagran, senior vice chairman of the committee, yesterday said the panel has invited the administration's economic managers to brief congressmen on how they have put the budget together and how they would fund it.

"We should be able to finish scrutinizing the budget at the committee level in two weeks and then start going into its details at the sub-committee level. We intend to approve it on second reading before the first recess next month," he said.

- With Jess Diaz and Christina Mendez