

Only 3 presidential bets take up fishers' issues—says group

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A boy presented a relief stub during Pamalakaya and Anakpawis' relief operations in Talim Island, Rizal

Leftwing activists belonging to the fisherfolk alliance Pambansang Lakas ng Kilusang Mamamalakaya ng Pilipinas (Pamalakaya) on Thursday said of the 9 presidential candidates, only three—Nacionalista Party (NP) standard bearer Sen. Manny Villar, independent candidate Sen. Jamby Madrigal and Lakas-Kampi merger party bet Gilberto Teodoro have taken up the issues raised by small fisherfolk.

Pamalakaya national chair Fernando Hicap said Villar was more interested in providing production subsidies and relief to small fisherfolk hit by rising prices of petroleum products and seasonal disaster, Madrigal focused on the particular fight against the privatization and conversion of Manila Bay and offshore mining in the high seas, while Teodoro offered his help to fast track the cleanup of Manila Bay in accordance with the Supreme Court ruling and the pursuance of Philippine claim to the controversial Spratly Island.

The rest of presidential wannabes have yet to issue any official policy statement how they would solve the multifaceted problems in Philippine fisheries, while the 3 presidential candidates need to concretize and be more comprehensive in addressing the sorry state of Filipino fisherfolk and the fisheries environment," the Pamalakaya leader noted.

Hicap said his group wants to hear from Villar, Madrigal and Teodoro, while at the same time strongly encourages the rest of the presidential candidates—Liberal Party presidential bet Sen. Benigno Simeon "Noynoy" Aquino III, Partido ng Masang Pilipino standard bearer former President Joseph Estrada, independent bets Richard Gordon, Nicanor Perlas, Bro. Eddie Villanueva of Bangon Pilipinas Movement and JC de los Reyes of the Kapatiran party.

Salvador France, Pamalakaya national vice-chair for his part, his group will stage the 2nd staging of Pamalakaya Fisherfolk Academy (PFA) next month, a presidential forum which aims to gather all presidential and vice presidential candidates in the May 2010 polls.

The forum which was first organized in the May 2007 elections for senatorial candidates, will ask all presidential candidates their respective stand and views on the fisherfolk electoral agenda which will be presented in the half-day forum.

The Pamalakaya official said among the doable demands their group will present to presidential candidates is the immediate and unconditional halt on all reclamation and conversion projects in Laguna Lake and Manila Bay, an indefinite freeze to demolition plans of fishing and urban poor communities along Manila Bay, Laguna Lake and other foreshore land areas across-the-country, the immediate recall

of all offshore mining projects in Central and Western Visayas, Mindanao and Palawan seas, Northern Luzon and Bicol regions.

France said, Pamalakaya will also ask the presidential and vice-presidential candidates their position on proposals to abrogate the Japan-Philippine Economic Partnership Agreement (Jpepa) and the repeal of the Fisheries Code of 1998 and the approval of production subsidy law for fisheries that provide financial and material support to small fisherfolk to improve production and their standard of living.

Pamalakaya will also ask the commitment of presidential and vice presidential candidates that if they win, they will investigate highly questionable contracts and projects implemented by the Department of Agriculture (DA) including but not limited to the overpriced P 455 million ice making machine and the

P 7.14 billion agriculture funds which were missing according to the findings of the Commission on Audit dated December 2008.

Quoting the COA 2008 report, the Pamalakaya leader said a total of P 5.19 billion intended for farm-to-market road project were either missing or incomplete. France said the DA only spent P 1.3 billion or 38.99 percent of the total project allotment for 2008. Another big item, the P 1.3 billion fertilizer fund project under the GMA Rice Program was also bungled because local government units refused to participate in the implementation.

“The projects were reportedly incomplete. So the next question is where are the unspent funds? Are they really missing? Were they diverted or juggled to other highly questionable projects? What happen to the farm-to-market road project? Did it become farm to pocket (of GMA allies) road project?” asked

France.

Pamalakaya also took note COA’s other findings like printing of P 2.2 million fertilizer discount coupons which were rendered useless, the construction of mini-dams in Regions VIII, IX and XI built at a cost of

P 7.35 million but were rendered useless due to inferior construction, the construction of 11 Barangay Food Terminals worth P 1.55 million but only one was functional, and the remaining 10 were condemned due to operational deficiencies.

The same COA report described DA as notorious in purchasing equipment which are overpriced, not really needed or cannot be utilized or run by intended beneficiaries, adding that many of the equipment bought are unutilized, undelivered and now rusting in storage.

Pamalakaya said the earth shaking COA report should stop the national government and the agriculture department from buying 300 new ice-making machines to the amount of P 1.5 billion on top of the 98 ice-making machines which DA purchased in 2009 at an overpriced rate of P 4.6 million, 100 percent more of the prevailing industry price. #