

# HAWAII FILIPINO CHRONICLE

HAWAII'S #1 FILIPINO NEWSPAPER

WEEKLY DECEMBER 6, 2008

## CELEBRATING A FILIPINO CHRISTMAS IN HAWAII!

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Tim Llean Photography

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## EDITORIAL

## Traditions Worth Holding On To

**M**ention "Christmas" to the average Filipino, especially those who were raised in the Philippines, and they will recall festive celebrations with family and friends. As the only predominantly Christian nation in Asia, Christmas is special to Filipinos, many of whom are deeply religious.

Long ago, different regions in the Philippines began celebrating Christmas with various colorful festivities, like the world famous giant lantern parade hosted by the town of San Fernando in Pampanga. Some towns held special re-enactments of the Christmas story, while others followed the Spanish tradition of attending early morning masses.

On a smaller scale, Filipino families began their own unique Christmas traditions that were passed on to successive generations—traditions such as making parols, decorating the Christmas tree, sharing a Christmas Eve meal together, singing carols and opening presents.

As Filipinos, we need to hold fast to these rich and uniquely Filipino Christmas traditions and to each other that they are not forgotten. If you are unfamiliar with a traditional Filipino Christmas, consider attending the upcoming Pasko sa FilCom. The event can also be a nostalgic walk down memory lane, particularly for ex-pats reminiscing of life back in the Philippines.

Kudos to the FilCom Center and other community groups for organizing Pasko sa FilCom and promoting our many rich and festive Filipino Christmas traditions. Such traditions connect us to our past, bind us closer to our families and leave an indelible reminder of who we are and where we came from.

## Tighten Your Belt For 2009 and Beyond

**W**herever one looks, there are dreary signs of a weak economy. The State Legislature, which convenes in January 2009, will have the unenviable task of balancing the State's budget and dealing with a projected \$1 billion shortfall.

The City isn't doing much better. Declining tax revenues have led to freezes in hiring and travel. Departments have been instructed to trim their budgets. In the private sector, Hawaiian Telcom Communications Inc.'s \$1.27 billion in liabilities forced the company to file for bankruptcy protection—a move that opened many people's eyes to how bad Hawaii's economic situation really is.

More than ever, our elected officials need to curb government spending and to account for every dollar during this turbulent economy. Tough decisions will have to be made. Decisions like whether to fund the Lanakila Multi-Purpose Senior Center in Liliha, a gathering place for 2,000 elderly. If state lawmakers don't fund its budget, the center will likely close. Similar scenarios may play out for other non-profit organizations that depend on government assistance.

Prioritizing which programs and departments to fund won't be easy for lawmakers, but then again, they were elected to make the tough decisions. They can start by rejecting their 36 percent payraise (\$48,708 per year) as well as an increase in their annual allowance (\$10,200) for items such as travel, food, office equipment, etc. The timing for

## FROM THE PUBLISHER

**Y**ou may not realize it, but the issue you are reading marks the Hawaii Filipino Chronicle's 16th Anniversary! Sixteen years is a long time to be doing anything, much less publish a regular community newspaper. The faces have changed over the years and we moved offices from Kalihi to Waipahu. Looking back, I can honestly say that it has been a pleasure serving our readers and providing the Filipino community with timely and useful news. Thanks to the faithful support of our readers and advertisers, the Chronicle has managed to not only survive, but thrive as a small business in Hawaii's unpredictable business climate.

The cover story for this special anniversary issue, which begins on page 4, is about a traditional Filipino Christmas and why the holiday is one of the most loved and anticipated times of the year. A big reason is that Christmas is celebrated together by the entire ohana, including immediate family members and distant relatives. Written by Caroline Julian, the story also focuses on "Pasko sa FilCom"—a free event organized by volunteers from various Filipino organizations. The entire family is sure to enjoy the numerous activities that will be held, including children's games, cooking demonstrations, a roving minstrel, Christmas caroling (daigon), a parol making demonstration, Christmas display, lantern parade and others. Please consider attending the event, which is scheduled for Sunday, December 14, 2008 at the FilCom Center.

Since rail transit has been a hot topic of late, we a special Open Forum section on page 3. Honolulu City councilmembers Charles Djou and Romy Cachola have written respective articles on the best alignment for Oahu's rail transit project. Djou supports the airport alignment, while Cachola says the airport route is best. Please read the pros and cons for each route and make up your mind as to which route is best for Honolulu.

While on the topic of transit, we encourage you to read the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) for the rail project and submit your written comments. Since this multi-billion dollar project will be paid for by taxpayers for years to come and forever change the way we travel, it is important for the community to get involved now and ask questions on issues relating to the project that may be of concern. Please read more on page 8 on how to submit comments on the DEIS.

There are many more interesting articles of interest and regular columns in this issue, particularly Family Corner, Legal Notes and Philippine Language. We hope you will enjoy reading them.

In closing, thank you again for your support these past 16 years. It has been a pleasure to serve all of our readers. From our family to yours...*Maligayang Pasko!*  
Aloha and Mabuhay!

*Chona A. Montesines-Sonido*

these increases is bad, particularly when schools, social service agencies and others are suffering.

We all could stand to do more with less until the economic situation improves. Let's hope the Legislature can step up to the plate and set the example.

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## OPEN FORUM

# Why Honolulu Must Connect the Airport and Pearl Harbor

By Charles K. Djoj  
Councilmember, District IV

**O** have long argued that a multi-billion dollar rail system for Oahu is far too expensive and beyond what our local families can afford. I continue to hold this position and, indeed, the ballot measure on rail showed that nearly half of Oahu's voters shared at least some of my concerns.

Nevertheless, while I disagree with the decision to move forward with rail, the voters have spoken in narrow support of this issue, and it is now my responsibility as a councilmember to ensure that the money spent on rail is extended as cost-effectively as possible so that we do not end up with rail system that we do not ride.

Even for staunch rail proponents, the City's handling of the rail project thus far leaves much to be desired and much that needs correction. The exclusion of the Honolulu International Airport, in favor of Salt Lake Boulevard, was a significant error on the part of the City, which was the result of a backroom deal by the mayor to secure the

votes needed on the City Council to go forward with rail. I was not a part of this, or any deal, related to any vote over the rail system.

The administration's decision to open the first leg of the rail from dirt fields in East Kapolei to Waipahu, rather than from the widely-used airport to downtown, is also nonsensical. Likewise, the Administration's decision to spend \$3 million in taxpayer resources for "public relations" to tout the rail system was clearly an inappropriate use of funds. This significant expenditure of public funds swamped the meager private spending by rail opponents and likely made the difference in the rail vote.

Finally, the massive political contributions by beneficiaries of rail construction to selected politicians also raise serious concerns. However, because of the vote earlier this month, the key question is no longer whether Honolulu should have a rail system, but how it should be done.

The close vote on rail reflects our community's clear divide over the wisdom of a rail system for Honolulu. If

(continued on page 6)

# Salt Lake Route Saves Taxpayers' Money

By Romy M. Cachola

**O**mmediately following the General Election, the Council proposed to change the route of the Honolulu Rail Transit Project from Salt Lake Boulevard to the airport.

The proposal surprised many voters who felt that the change was improper.

The media hinted at a political compromise in the selection of Salt Lake Boulevard for the 20-mile Minimum Operable Segment (MOS) of the rail project. The truth is, for the rail project, leaders in the Salt Lake community and I have not played political games. Instead, we have worked very hard to justify why Salt Lake Boulevard is the better route for the Honolulu Rail Transit Project.

Here are our findings:

## Airport

- The rail station is too far away from the passenger terminal, making it a hassle to lug around suitcases. There is also little incentive for visitors to use rail since there is no connection into Waikiki.
- There are over 7 million annual visitors to Hawaii. 71 percent of passenger seats go through Honolulu

International Airport, with the remaining 29 percent going to the neighbor islands.

- Asian visitors, the majority of whom are Japanese, total approximately 2 million. They arrive early in the morning and are taken via buses to briefings or tours before checking in at their hotels in the afternoon.
- Out of 21 major U.S. cities that launched rail systems since the 1970s, only 7 were connected to the airport. Most of the airport spurs were built after the rail systems were launched.

## Pearl Harbor/Hickam

- There are approximately 27,000 civilian employees combined at the airport, Pearl Harbor and Hickam with free parking on base.
- Most military personnel live on base or within a short driving distance.

## Transit Oriented Development (TOD) Housing

- The SLB alignment extends through Mapunapuna which encompasses 150 acres and is owned by a single landowner who is willing to donate

(continued on page 6)

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# Fil-Com Center Gears Up For a Philippine Christmas in Hawaii

By Caroline Julian

**G**hristmas is a special time for Filipinos. For many, it's one of the most anticipated holidays of the year as the Christmas season is not only a time to exchange gifts, but also a time to share good tidings and fellowship.

"It is when we gather with family and friends to renew friendships and strengthen emotional ties," says Rose Cruz Churma of the Filipino Association of University of Women (FAUW).

"I grew up on a farm in the Philippines, and there, Christmas was a time of family reunions, thanksgiving, and sharing, (which are) made more exciting by fireworks, colorful parols, caroling, *simbang gabi*, and Noche Buena," adds Serafin Colmenares, chair of Pasko sa FilCom 2008.

Colmenares and organizers of Pasko sa FilCom 2008 hope to recreate those traditional experiences of Christmas in the Philippines for all to enjoy, by showcasing how it is celebrated there—a time for family, for sharing, for giving, and a time for food, fun and friendship.

Filipino Christmas carols. Colorful Parols (Filipino lantern). Delicious delicacies such as *bibingka*, *puto bumbong* and *sorbetes*. They will all be part of an exciting one-day celebration that will be held at the

Filipino Community Center in Waipahu on December 14, 2008.

"It includes cooking demonstrations of Filipino delicacies such as *lubi-lubi*, *salabat*, *palitaw*, *kinalinking*; educational demonstrations such as *parol*-making, vinta, jeepney, and *alibata* cards; video shows on cultural events in the Philippines; and a Philippine tourism display," says Colmenares.

There will also be a holy mass reflective of the *Simbang Gabi* in the Philippines; and entertainment featuring Filipino folk dances, Christmas carols, and *rondalla* as well as *kulintang* presentations.

"The event will definitely evoke feelings of nostalgia for those who were born and raised in the Philippines. In addition, it is a way of sharing and educating the local born and non-Filipinos about the variety and uniqueness of Filipino culture. And it promotes the FilCom Center's goals of preserving Filipino traditions in Hawaii," says Colmenares.

"My first Christmas in Hawaii—the first away from family in the Philippines—was in 1978. I was so homesick for the sights and sounds of a Filipino Christmas. It so happened that during that year, the Honolulu Academy of Arts hosted a *Pasko*, organized by members of the Filipino community," remembers Churma, who is involved in the event.

"As I recall it was so nice to just sit there, and smell the food, listen to my own language and songs and be dazzled once more by the colors of our costumes. I promised myself then, that the celebration should continue," she adds.

"While we see bits and pieces of its celebratory aspects, what I miss mostly is the spirit of togetherness when we meet long-seen relatives, and the simple joys of giving and sharing with those who have less in life that we experience in the Philippines, says Colmenares.

## Cultural Experience

Filipinos in the Philippines are proud to proclaim their Christmas celebration to be the longest and merriest in the world. It begins formally on December 16 with attendance at the first of nine pre-dawn or early morning masses and continues non-stop until the first Sunday of January. And people attending *Pasko sa FilCom* will have a chance to learn about the how Christmas is celebrated in the Philippines through the various activities.

Organizers hope their nearly two months of hard-work and planning will showcase the true spirit of a Philippine Christmas. About 200 volunteers from many different Filipino organizations have joined together in hopes of making the event a success. Last year, about 500 people attended *Pasko*. This year, the FilCom Center anticipates much more.

People attending the event will be able to get a cultural les-



son through a video presentation featuring *Iligao*, which is a landlocked province of the Philippines in the Region in Luzon. It is well known for its hand carved rice terraces and has been dubbed as a "Living Cultural Heritage Site" by the World Heritage Foundation.

Iligao's artifacts, songs and dances will be highlighted in the film, says Churma.

Children will also have a chance to learn about their heritage on a lighter note.

They'll be able to enjoy "*Maki Makisig*," a movie about a young boy named Kit who is obsessed with the idea of becoming a superhero like his favorite comic book character Maki Makisig.

There will also be a children's play presented on DVD and a live story-telling performance by artists Grace Caligatan and Darlene Rodriguez.

The celebrations in the Philippines are also a time for a renewal of faith. Since a majority of Filipinos are Roman Catholic, Christmas, not surprisingly, is an extremely important and revered holiday. Perhaps the most spiritual part of *Pasko sa FilCom* is the reen-

actment of Mary and Joseph's unsuccessful search for an inn in Bethlehem.

"We have a mass at 6:00 p.m. after the dramatization of the Search For An Inn," says Toy Arre, president of the FilCom Center.

## Food

While there is fellowship, there is also food.

A number of Filipino community organizations are slated to participate in a variety of cooking demonstrations, which will take place in the center's parking lot.

Folks will be able to feast their eyes and their appetites on many types of deserts and finger foods.

"(There will be) food preparation and cooking demonstration of finger foods normally found in the streets when you go to the midnight mass — *puto bumbong*, *bibingka*, *palitaw*, *sorbetes*, etc.," says Arre.

"We will also demonstrate *linubian*, which is the pounding of different mixed cooked ingredients such as cooking banana, casava or yam, freshly grated coconut, *ube* (taro),

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## COVER STORY



langka, and pinipig," he adds.

Two restaurants are expected to be featured, Souvaly and Loulen. Both are expected to serve tasty Filipino favorites.

### Games

Christmas is not only for the young, but also for the young at heart. It brings out the child in all of us. And what better to bring that out than games and activities?

The FAUW will be having a game similar to a "lucky number" drawing, called *bunutan*. "In *sari-sari* stores in the Philippines, for a few centavos, kids can try their luck at choosing the right number to match prizes displayed," explains Churma.

But to qualify to play, each child or adult needs to sit through the FAUW's video and movie presentations.

"This is a great incentive for kids and adults to participate," says Churma.

In the meantime, the University of the Philippines Alumni Association (UPAA) in Hawaii is also organizing five unique and traditional games that Filipinos play.

"We hope to impart to the kids and adults alike, who will try these games at the event, how Filipinos use native materials and come up on inventing games without the need for expensive and fancy toys," says Alma Phocas, president of the UPAA.

The planned games are:

1). *Sipa* or kicking of a coin-like (washed) object, with colorful threads attached to it, into the air as many times a player can without falling on the ground.

2). *Tumbang Preso*: It is played by using an empty can placed in the center of the "home base" with the "it" defending the can from being knocked down by other players. The "it" will chase anyone and tags him/her while the can is in upright position. The tagged player becomes the new "it".

3). *Sungka*: A traditional game using a hand-carved wooden board with 14 holes in 2 rows and a large hole at each

end. Ninety-eight shells are employed and evenly distributed in 14 cavities (7 shells in each). Two players take turn by taking shells from anyone of the holes and drop shell in each hole passing to the left and into the large hole at the end (depository) but not into the opponent's end.

4). *Dama*: A familiar pastime game (usually played by boys), which uses a small

wooden board with 10 squares and 14 end points. It is played using bottle caps (12 pieces per layer) or called *pitas*. They are placed by each player on the end point and move alternately from point to point. Like chess game, the opponent's *pitas* are captured.

5). *Pabitin*: It is played with hanging bags on wooden frames. Children would jump to reach a

bag. But, the *pabitin* is pulled up and down to tease the kids trying to grab the hanging bags filled with goodies (candies, knick-knacks, etc.).

### Entertainment

In the Philippines, Christmas caroling—going from house to house—is part of the celebration. And Christmas is not complete without caroling.

Therefore, it is only fitting Christmas carolers are part of the entertainment line-up. Folk dancers are expected to perform.

People attending the event will be able to enjoy an entertaining program, which includes: the Royal Hawaiian Band, the Lawrence Patriotic Group, Silangan Singers and the Rey Rausa group.

## SOCIAL SECURITY COLUMN

# Social Security Has Good Tidings to Share this Holiday Season

By Jane Yamamoto-Burigsay

As the holidays approach, Social Security has good tidings to share with Social Security and Supplemental Security Income (SSI) beneficiaries: they will receive a 5.8 percent increase in benefit payments beginning with the January payments!

The 5.8 percent Cost-of-Living Adjustment (COLA) will begin with benefits that over 50 million Social Security beneficiaries receive in January 2009. Increased payments to more than 7 million SSI beneficiaries will begin on December 31.

Social Security and Supplemental Security Income benefits increase automatically each year based on the rise in the Bureau of Labor Statistics' Consumer Price Index for Urban Wage Earners and Clerical Workers (CPI-W), from the third quarter of the prior year to the corresponding period of the current year.

This 5.8 percent increase is the largest since 1982.

Along with the annual COLA comes other changes, including an increase in the amount of wages subject to Social Security tax. In 2008, the maximum taxable amount was \$102,000. Beginning in 2009, the maximum taxable amount will be \$106,800. This change

will affect about 11 million of the 164 million workers who pay Social Security tax. The tax rate remains the same: 6.2 for employers and employees, and 12.4 for the self-employed.

In 2009 it will take \$1,090 in taxable earnings to earn a credit of coverage for Social Security, up from \$1,050 in 2008. All workers can earn up to four credits in a year.

The average retired worker will receive \$1,153 per month in Social Security benefits in 2009, up from \$1,090 in 2008.

People who have Medicare coverage will want to visit Medicare's website at [www.medicare.gov](http://www.medicare.gov) for changes coming in 2009.

To learn more about Social Security changes coming in 2009, visit our online fact sheet at [www.socialsecurity.gov/pressoffice/factsheets/colafacts2009.htm](http://www.socialsecurity.gov/pressoffice/factsheets/colafacts2009.htm).

As always, you can find a wealth of information about Social Security at our website, [www.socialsecurity.gov](http://www.socialsecurity.gov).

### MEDICARE PRESCRIPTION DRUG PLAN OPEN SEASON BEGINS NOVEMBER 15

The next open season for enrollment in the Medicare Part D prescription drug program is rapidly approaching. Newly eligible Medicare beneficiaries, and current beneficiaries who are considering changes to their

Medicare Part D plan, should mark their calendars for November 15. The "open season" will run from November 15 to December 31.

The Medicare Part D prescription drug program is available to all Medicare beneficiaries to help with the costs of medications. Joining a Medicare prescription drug plan is voluntary, and participants pay an additional monthly premium for the coverage.

While all Medicare beneficiaries can participate in the prescription drug program, some people with limited income and resources also are eligible for extra help to pay for monthly premiums, annual deductibles and prescription co-payments. In 2008, the extra help is worth an average of \$3,600; in 2009, it's worth an average of \$3,900.

To figure out whether you are eligible for the extra help, Social Security needs to know your income and the value of any savings, investments and real estate (other than the home you live in). To qualify you must be receiving Medicare and also have:

- Income limited to \$15,600 for an individual or \$21,000 for a married couple living together. Even if your annual income is higher, you still may be able to get some help with monthly premiums, annual de-

ductibles and prescription co-payments. Some examples where your income may be higher include if you or your spouse:

- Support other family members who live with you;
- Have earnings from work; or
- Live in Alaska or Hawaii.
- Resources limited to \$11,990 for an individual or \$23,970 for a married couple living together. Resources include such things as bank accounts, stocks and bonds. We do not count your house or car as resources.

You can complete an easy-to-use online application for yourself or someone you care about at [www.socialsecurity.gov](http://www.socialsecurity.gov). Click on Medicare on the top right side of the page. Then click on "Apply for help with prescription drug costs." To apply for the extra help by phone or have an application mailed to you, call Social Security at 1-800-772-1213 (TTY 1-800-325-0778) and ask for the Application for Help with Medicare Prescription Drug Plan Costs (SSA-1020). Or go to your nearest Social Security office.

And if you would like more information about the Medicare Part D Prescription Drug Program itself, visit [www.medicare.gov](http://www.medicare.gov) or call 1-800-MEDICARE (1-800-633-4227; TTY 1-877-486-2048).

(to be continued next issue)

## OPEN FORUM (CONT.)

from page 3. Why Honolulu...)

we want to bridge this divide, we must make sure that the City implements the rail project in the best way possible. One of the first steps to making sure that things are done right is to connect the airport and Pearl Harbor to the rail system.

Every major American city that proceeded with a rail system has connected its airport to the rail line. In Honolulu, tourism is the largest sector of our economy. Except for a handful of cruise ship passengers, every tourist who comes to Hawaii comes to us via the airport. Every rail study conducted in every major city, including Honolulu's, concluded that connecting the municipal airport makes sense. It makes it all much more important to connect Honolulu International Airport to the rail system.

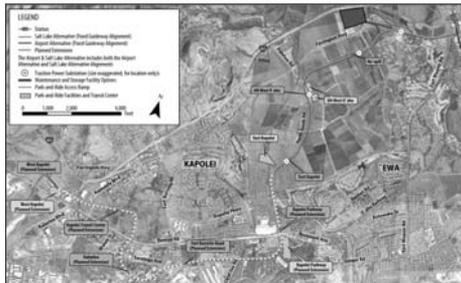
Furthermore, the second largest sector of our local economy is defense. The Pearl Harbor and Hickam Air Force Base area is one of the largest job centers in our State—not just for military service members, but for local civilian employees as well. If we are going to go forward with a rail system, it makes sense to connect this major employment center to the rail system.

Along with Councilmember Todd Apo, I introduced legislation that would make connecting the airport and Pearl

Harbor a priority in the building of a Honolulu rail system. This is an important measure that makes doing rail a little more sensible.

My proposal to connect the airport and Pearl Harbor, however, does not mean that Salt Lake Boulevard will never be connected to the rail system. Rather, it changes the construction priority. Salt Lake Boulevard still remains a part of the master planned rail system for construction. The airport and Pearl Harbor area, however, will just be connected first in rail's initial operating segment.

I was not one of the 51 percent of the voters who went to the polls and voted for a rail system, but I respect our democratic process and will focus on addressing the weaknesses in the rail project so that we end up with a rail system that actually serves our community's needs. One of the major mistakes the City has made in designing the proposed rail system is to opt for a route that goes down Salt Lake Boulevard instead of connecting the airport and Pearl Harbor. We need to correct this mistake now before we start preliminary engineering at the beginning of next year. We need to correct this, and other mistakes made with the City's rail planning, to bring those, like me, who opposed rail, to at least respect the decision to do rail even if we don't like it.



from page 3. Salt Lake...)

land and help build a station. Adding a station in Manunapuna would increase ridership for the SLB alignment and provide greater opportunities for affordable housing and TOD, particularly at:

1. Stadium Mall
2. K-Mart across Stadium Mall
3. Former Costco site
4. Salt Lake Shopping Center
5. Manunapuna

#### Operation/Maintenance (O&M) & Construction Costs

- The SLB route is shorter and costs less than the airport route.
- When completed, the initial segment from East Kapolei to Waipahu, will have less ridership and won't relieve traffic gridlock. O&M costs and taxpayer subsidies will be more and will increase until the 20-mile MOS is completed. This will further burden taxpayers' pocketbooks.

Furthermore, we should look at the transit experiences of other cities and hopefully learn from their mistakes.

1. San Francisco's BART was extended to the airport in 2003 with a projected ridership of 17,800. Currently, they are hard pressed to meet projections, despite having 34,000

airport workers and higher visitor arrivals than Honolulu.

2. New York's Metropolitan Transportation Authority has proposed a 23 percent fare hike for the Long Island Rail Road and a 43 percent hike for Long Island Bus fares—a proposal which has angered passengers.

3. Denver's FasTracks transit extension, estimated in 2002 to cost \$4.7 billion, now costs \$7.9 billion. Officials may raise their sales tax to fund this increase.

Based on the above, we should be skeptical of the projected 95,310 riders for the airport route and the estimated \$220 million that will be added to the cost of construction. If the numbers provided in the Draft Environmental Impact Statement don't match, taxpayers will be faced with the following additional funding proposals:

- Extend the half percent GET collection beyond the Year 2022.
- Increase the GET to one percent.
- Borrow money by floating bonds.
- Increase property taxes.
- Raise fares.

We should think first and foremost of the welfare of our taxpayers and select the route that is less costly and that will attract locals who will ride the rail despite a bad economy.

Leaders and residents of Salt Lake, although upset with the proposed route change immediately after the election and the deletion of \$30 million for SLB widening, have done an outstanding job in defending Salt Lake Boulevard as the better route.

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## City Encourages Public's Comments on Draft EIS For Rail Transit Project

City officials announced the beginning of the official public comment period on November 24, 2008 for the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (Draft EIS) for Honolulu's proposed rail transit project.

The public has 45 days to submit written comments to the Department of Transportation Services (DTS) or provide oral comments during public hearings.

The Draft EIS presents the potential environmental and economic effects of three Build Alternatives for a rail transit system between East Kapolei and Ala Moana Center, as well as a No Build Alternative.

"I want to encourage all of Honolulu's citizens to review

the DEIS and comment on issues or matters that concern you," says Mayor Mufi Hannemann. "This is one of the most important public works projects in our city's history. We will only be able to build a rail system that meets our needs today and tomorrow with the full and informed involvement of the community."

### Public Comments

Comments on the Draft EIS will be formally accepted from government agencies and the public until 4:30 pm. on January 7, 2009. Comments will be accepted via the following three ways:

- In writing to the Department of Transportation Services, 650 South King

Street, 3rd Floor, Honolulu, Hawaii 96813. Comments must be received or postmarked by January 7, 2009.

- Online at [www.honolulu-transit.org](http://www.honolulu-transit.org).
- At a public hearing in December. Those wishing to speak at the hearings should sign up at the hearing site. Speakers will be limited to a three-minute presentation. Dates are listed below.

The public comment period is mandated by federal and state laws. All comments received will be considered as the Final EIS is being prepared by the FTA and the City. All substantive comments will be

responded to in writing.

### Draft EIS Availability

Copies of the Draft EIS are available for review at State Libraries, the City Library, the Department of Transportation Services office and the DTS - Rapid Transit Division office at 1099 Alakea Street, Suite 1700. The Draft EIS is also online at: [www.honolulu-transit.org](http://www.honolulu-transit.org).

The project website has additional content: a video guide to the Draft EIS and a computer-simulated fly through of the two alternative alignments covered in the Draft EIS—the Salt Lake alignment and the Airport alignment. City officials will add renderings of rail transit station characteristics in the coming weeks.

Residents can request a free DVD with the Draft EIS, the video guide, computer simulations of both alignments and renderings of rail transit station characteristics by calling 566-

2299 or visiting [www.honolulu-transit.org](http://www.honolulu-transit.org).

Printed copies of the Draft EIS can be ordered for the reproduction cost of \$59 by calling 566-2299 or visiting the project website.

### Public Hearing Dates

- Saturday, December 6 from 9 am - 11 a.m. at Kapolei Hale, 1000 Uluohia Street.
- Monday, December 8 from 6 pm - 8 pm at the Neal S. Blaisdell Exhibition Hall, Hawaii Suites, 777 Ward Avenue.
- Tuesday, December 9 from 6 pm - 8 pm at Salt Lake District Park, 1159 Ala Lilioko Place.
- Wednesday, December 10 from 6 pm - 8 pm at the Filipo Community Center, 94-428 Mokuula Street.
- Thursday, December 11 from 6 pm - 8 pm at Bishop Museum, 1525 Bernice Street.

## Fil-Am Girl Among Finalists in National BabyGap/GapKids Contest

Audrey Sussmann, 2, from Jersey City has been selected as a finalist in Gap's nationwide search for the next faces of babyGap and GapKids.

Gap held casting calls in 38 cities and reviewed over 900,000 online entries in its search for adorable kids to feature in its next ad campaign.

A panel of judges narrowed the entries to five baby girls and five baby boys (ages 4 and under) and 5 kid girls and 5 kid boys (ages 5-10). Audrey is 1 of

5 finalists in the baby girl category.

Audrey loves dancing to "The Wigglers" and funk music. She also enjoys reciting some of her favorite books from memory (like Eric Carle's *The Very Hungry Caterpillar*); imitating animals (some of her more unusual ones are gorilla, penguin, peacock and porcupine) and singing nursery rhymes.

Her parents couldn't be any prouder.

"Audrey has a ton of energy and is just so curious about the

world," says Jennifer Sussmann, Audrey's mother. "We're excited that so many people will have a chance to see how fun she is."

Ross is a radiology resident at NYU Medical Center while Jennifer was a business writer for *The New York Times* and *SmartMoney* before becoming an at-home mom to Audrey.

Both of them grew up in Jersey City, which they still call home to this day. Typical of Filipino families, doting grandparents volunteer to baby-sit the precocious Audrey.

Ross's mom, Helen Caballero-Sussmann, hails from Bulacan while Jennifer's parents come from Manila and Iloilo.

Audrey's parents accompanied her on a five-day trip to San Francisco for Gap's photo shoot. Her photos will appear in the contest's online viewing gallery (<http://www.gap.com/castingcall>)

from December 8-21, 2008 so that voters can choose a winner in each category.

The four winners, who will be announced in January 2009, will appear in Gap store windows nationwide and receive prize packages from Gap and Snapfish. ([www.asianjournal.com](http://www.asianjournal.com))

## Emme's Island Moments to Air Christmas Special

Hawaiian Electric Company and Stanford Carr Development present



In celebration of the upcoming Holiday Season, a special "Emme's Christmas Island Moments at Honolulu Hale" will be broadcasted on the following days on KHON-2:

- December 18, 2008 at 9 pm
- December 20, 2008 at 4 pm
- December 25, 2008 at 3 pm

The hour-long television special will be filmed on location at the beautiful Honolulu City Lights

Celebration at Honolulu Hale. Viewers can expect to see a colorful extravaganza of Hawaiian-style holiday displays accompanied by holiday musical favorites, as well as a nostalgic look back at Christmas musical performances of yesteryear.

Special guest appearances include Mayor Mufi Hannemann Christmas greetings from Hawaii National Guard military personnel and a special tribute to President-elect Barack Obama.

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## HAWAII-FILIPINO NEWS

## Hirono Announces \$398,470 in Fed Funds For Homeowners Facing Foreclosure

U.S. Rep. Mazie K. Hirono announced the awarding of \$398,470 to the Hawaii Housing Finance and Development Corporation (HHFDC) to assist families and individuals facing the

threat of foreclosure during these uncertain economic times.

Of the amount, \$298,470 will be used to provide free assistance to Hawaii families at risk of losing their homes, to

help clients to understand the complex foreclosure process and to identify possible courses of action so they can make informed decisions and then take appropriate action. The remaining \$100,000 will provide legal assistance to homeowners facing foreclo-

sure. Funding is being awarded by the NeighborWorks America National Foreclosure Mitigation Counseling Program.

"The latest reports show that foreclosures in Hawaii have tripled over the past year," Hirono says. "Federal assistance is now available struggling homeowners who are trying to avoid foreclosure."

NeighborWorks America

was established under Title VI of the Housing and Community Development Amendments of 1978. As a congressionally-chartered non-profit organization dedicated to improving distressed communities, NeighborWorks America and the NeighborWorks network have an interest in federal policies that affect the housing and community development field.

## Amber Aduja Named Hawaii's Miss Grand Queen 2009

Aduja garnered the most overall points of all age divisions and in all categories, which included Runway, Swimsuit, Mother-Daughter, Talent, Evening Gown and Interview.



She will now participate in the Universal Miss Pageant in June 2009. Although the location is not yet determined, previous pageants have been held in Las Vegas, Nevada and Anaheim, California.

Amber Aduja, the daughter of former State Sen. Melodie Aduja, was recently crowned Hawaii's Miss Grand Queen 2009 during the 5th Annual Hawaii's Miss Pageant held at the Aloha Tower Marketplace on November 15, 2008.

She also won the titles of Miss Photogenic, Miss Aloha Spirit and Miss Hospitality.

## Society of Seven LV to Perform in Concert with Sacred Hearts Academy Marching Band

The Society of Seven Las Vegas, Waikiki's best entertainment show, will hold special benefit concerts showcasing the Sacred Hearts Academy (SHA) Marching Band December 17 and 18, 2008 at the Outrigger Main Showroom.

Both concerts begin at 8:30 pm. Proceeds will go towards the purchase of new uniforms for SHA's 129-member marching band which will participate in London's 23rd Annual New

Year's Day Parade.

"We invite everyone to this special show and ask their support for this marching band from Sacred Hearts Academy," said Fran Kirk, vice president of Outrigger Entertainment. "Let's send them to London with warm top coats as they'll make Hawaii proud by representing us well in this prestigious New Year parade."

The SHA Marching Band, led by Band Director Matthew Marvin, will perform several

numbers with The Society of Seven LV, led by Richard Natto. Show tickets are available at \$35 per person. Four-hour validated parking is available for \$3 at the Ohana East Hotel. For reservations, call 923-7408 or 922-6408.

The SHA Marching Band will be the only band from Hawaii and 1 of about 24 bands from the U.S. that will participate in the parade, where more than 500,000 spectators are expected to attend. The event will be televised to an audience of more than 220 million people.

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SUNDAY CLOSED



**Gusto naming malaman ang inyong mga puna tungkol sa 'Draft Environmental Impact Statement for Honolulu Rail Transit' (Pahayag tungkol sa tamang kapaligiran ng Honolulu Rail Transit)!**

Ang Honolulu Rail Transit ay isang mataas na linya ng riles na magdudugtong mula

- Kanlurang O'ahu hanggang downtown Honolulu at Ala Moana Center. Ito ay: magpapabuti ng transportasyong pampubliko
- magbabawas sa malaonang pagbubuhol-buhol ng trapiko
- magpapabilis ng biyaha
- masusuportahan ang dumadaming populasyon ng O'ahu

**Mag-ukol ng puna tungkol sa Draft EIS**

Sa Nobyembre 21, 2008 ang City and County Honolulu at ang Federal Transit Administration ay magtisingulang tumanggap ng mga puna tungkol sa Draft Environmental Impact Statement (Draft EIS) para sa Honolulu Rail Transit. Sinuring mabuti ng Draft EIS ang magiging pangkalahatang puna, mga benepisyo at kung magkano ang magagastos sa tatlong pinapanlong ruta o daan ng riles. Tatanggap ng mga puna mula sa publiko sa loob ng 45 araw hanggang Enero 7, 2009.

**Saan puwedeng kumuha ng kopya nitong Draft EIS sa salitang Ingles?**

Makukuha mo ito sa lahat ng state libraries; City library; lahat ng mga unibersidad; at sa Department of Transportation Services (650 South King Street, 3<sup>rd</sup> floor); at online sa [www.honolulutransit.org](http://www.honolulutransit.org).

**Draft EIS Public Hearing Schedule**

Date	Time	Community	Location
Saturday, Dec 6	9-11 am	Kapolei	Kapolei Hale 1000 Ulu'ohia St
Monday, Dec 8	6-8 pm	Ala Moana/ McCully	Blaisdell-Hawaii Suite 777 Ward Ave
Tuesday, Dec 9	6-8 pm	Salt Lake	Salt Lake District Park 1159 Ala Liliko'i Pl
Wednesday, Dec 10	6-8 pm	Waipahu	The Filipino Community Ctr 94-428 Mokuola St
Thursday, Dec 11	6-8 pm	Kalihi	Bishop Museum 1525 Bernice St

Puwede kang umorder ng DVD o kopya sa halagang \$59. Ito ay sa salitang Ingles. Tumawag sa 566-2299 o pumunta sa [www.honolulutransit.org](http://www.honolulutransit.org) para umorder. Ibigay ang buong pangalan, address, numero ng telepono at iyong sariling wika.

**Paano ibibigay ang aking mga puna?**

Mga pagpipiliin:

1. Sumulat ka sa Draft EIS Public Hearing o ipadala kay Mr. Wayne Yoshioka, DTS, 650 S. King Street, 3<sup>rd</sup> flr, Honolulu, Hawaii 96813
2. Pumunta ka sa gagawing miting bukas sa publiko (Public Hearing). Ang pamahalaan ay magtatatka ng mga miting tungkol sa Draft EIS sa lalong madaling panahon. Ilalathala ang mga petsa nito sa Honolulu Advertiser, Honolulu Star-Bulletin, at online sa [www.honolulutransit.org](http://www.honolulutransit.org)
3. Online sa [www.honolulutransit.org](http://www.honolulutransit.org)

**Puwede ba akong humingi ng isang tagapagsalin/interpreter para sa Public Hearing?**

Oo. Upang makahingi ng interpreter sa Public Hearing, tumawag sa 566-2299 anim na araw bago ganapin ang miting. Ibigay ang iyong buong pangalan, numero ng telepono at sariling wika (lenguage) ginagamit.



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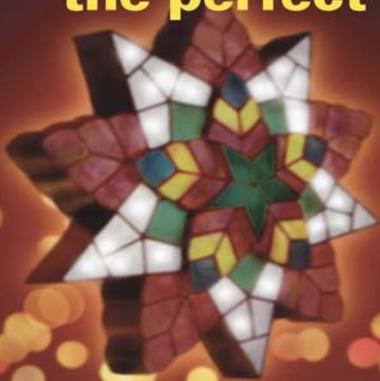
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# Impeach Junking Going to SC

By Jose Katigbak /  
Thursday, Dec. 4, 2008

WASHINGTON — Pangasinan Rep. Jose de Venecia Jr. said he will challenge before the Supreme Court (SC) a decision by the House of Representatives to throw out the latest impeachment complaint against President Arroyo.

Voting 183 to 21, allies of Mrs. Arroyo in the House voted late Tuesday night to uphold the report of the justice committee that declared as "insufficient in substance" the latest impeachment complaint against the President.

The former speaker said he will meet with House Minority Leader Ronaldo Zamora and Reps. Rufus Rodriguez, Teddy Casioño and Satur Ocampo and their lawyers on his return to Manila next week to map out the case they will take to the Supreme Court.

"At least we have a 50 percent fighting chance in court to get our case heard whereas we had a zero chance in the House's Committee on Justice," De Venecia told The STAR on Tuesday.

De Venecia, who was conspicuously absent during the crucial voting, is in the US capital to speak before The Heritage Foundation and formally launch "Global Filipino," his authorized biography written by Washington-based journalist and author Brett M. Decker.

Then he is off on book-signing tours of New York, Los An-

geles, Las Vegas and San Francisco.

The hardcover book published by Regnery Publishing Inc. retails for \$27.95 a copy and according to De Venecia's aides has a first run of 10,000 copies.

In an interview with The STAR De Venecia did not seem unduly worried he might be expelled from the ruling Lakas-CMD party and disclosed he was laying the groundwork for the formation of a powerful rainbow coalition which he expected would sweep the 2010 elections.

As Decker in a preface to "Global Filipino" wrote, "The man does not think in small or modest terms."

"To revive the body politic, he works under the assumption that bold decisions must be made, bold efforts launched, bold risks taken."

De Venecia said he would unveil details of his proposed coalition in the first quarter of 2009.

Referring to a recent finding by the Ateneo School of Government professors, the Makati Business Club and the Integrated Bar of the Philippines that corruption in the Arroyo administration is the worst since the time of former President Ferdinand Marcos, he said "it is unprecedented because it is large-scale, deep-seated and widespread."

Barring a miracle President Arroyo "is beyond salvation," he added.

## It was expected

The result of the voting, which dragged up to past 1 a.m.,



Cong. Jose De Venecia

was more or less expected with the majority ganging up on the minority who never gave up the fight.

The administration coalition, comprising almost 200 in the 238-member chamber, voted to uphold Committee Report 1551 and House Resolution 892 that threw out the complaint of businessman Jose de Venecia III, son and namesake of the ousted speaker.

Three lawmakers — Reps. Didagen Dilangalen of Shariff Kabunsuan with Cotabato City, Carlos Padilla of Nueva Vizcaya and Mariano Piamonte of A-Teacher — abstained.

Panel chairman Matias Defensor stated during his sponsorship speech that pro-impeachment complainants utterly failed to present clear and direct proof to hold the Chief Executive accountable and should be removed from office.

Defensor noted that pro-impeachment forces only made "innuendoes," but failed to mention overt and direct evidence, and presented only newspaper clippings that are "hearsay evidence" which according to the Supreme Court has "no probative value."

Bayan Muna's Casioño, one of those who endorsed the complaint, said the "most shocking ruling is one that dismisses NBN/ZTE deal, Hello Garci, human rights, fertilizer scam and Northrail charges on the principle of res judicata (barred by prior judgment)."

"This implies that a President can insulate herself forever from an impeachment by having allies file a weak complaint, having it dismissed on technicalities, and then use it to dismiss future complaints," he said, citing the dismissal of the 2005 and 2007 complaints.

De Venecia III, who lost his bid in the national broadband network contract to China's ZTE Corp., warned that the dismissal of his complaint means "a tidal

wave of anger will follow," adding that administration lawmakers "acted true to form."

"To the congressmen who chose to grant Gloria Macapagal Arroyo the means of escaping her guilt rather than the opportunity to prove her innocence, one final battle: You may have won this battle, but the war is far from over," the younger De Venecia said.

Among those who voted to impeach Mrs. Arroyo were Minority Leader Zamora, Reps. Ocampo, Casioño, Luz Ilagan, Liza Maza, Teofisto Guingona III, Risa Hontiveros, Edno Josen, Rafael Mariano, Roilo Golez, Joel Villanueva.

Reps. Florencio "Bem" Noel, Abigail Binay, Mujiv Hataman, Laarni Cayetano, Darlene Antonino-Custodio, Cynthia Villar, Justin Mark Chipeco, Cinchona Cruz-Gonzales, Benjamin Asilo and Rodriguez also voted for impeachment.

## Not for sale

In a related development, the House ethics committee will start its hearings next week on allegations that congressmen received huge sums of money in connection with the dismissal of the 2007 and this year's impeachment cases against President Arroyo.

Romblon Rep. Eleandro Madrona, committee chairman, said yesterday his panel would look into the separate complaints of Agusan del Norte Rep. Edelmiro Amante and Rep. Maza of the party-list group Gabriela.

Last week, Amante told his colleagues in plenary session that he resented the statements made by the former speaker before the justice committee that "congressmen are for sale" and that Malacañang distributed gift bags stuffed with P500,000 in cash on Oct. 11, 2007 to more than 150 House members after they met with Mrs. Arroyo at the Palace.

"He should produce the gift bags and their contents of cash that he claimed were distributed in Malacañang. He should produce the money given to him," Amante said, adding that if De Venecia cannot substantiate his claims, he should be expelled from the House.

Last Tuesday, Maza filed a resolution seeking an inquiry into reports about a new round of distribution of P500,000 to congressmen in connection with the dismissal of this year's impeachment case against Mrs. Arroyo.

She said the distribution took place at the Linden Suites in Ortigas Center, Pasig City, where Mrs. Arroyo once held office.

De Venecia welcomed the inquiry sought by Amante and other administration allies, saying it would "bring out the truth."

He said he did not make a shotgun accusation that all of his colleagues received money from the Palace.

He cited media reports quoting Representatives Bienvenido Abante Jr. of Manila, Antonio Cuenco of Cebu and Rachel Arenas of Pangasinan, and Governors Ed Panlilio of Pampanga and Jonjon Mendoza of Bulacan as admitting to receiving P500,000 after the Malacañang meeting with the President on Oct. 11, 2007.

De Venecia also cited the admission made by Mindoro Occidental Rep. Amelita Villalosa, an official of Kabalikat ng Malayang Pilipino, that the money given to congressmen came from Kampi.

## Welcome development

Meanwhile, Malacañang called on Filipinos, particularly critics, to "move on" to allow the nation to prepare for the fallout of the global economic crisis after the House junked the latest impeachment complaint against President Arroyo.

Executive Secretary Eduardo Ermita and Deputy Presidential Spokesperson Lorelei Fajardo, in separate statements, said the dismissal of the impeachment complaint should allow the nation to focus on efforts to cushion effects of the global economic crisis that are expected to be most felt in the first quarter of 2009.

Mrs. Arroyo arrived last night from Hong Kong as one of the speakers of the Clinton Global Initiative forum without issuing any statement. "We're glad that the impeachment case is over and only one such case can be filed in a period of one year. We can move on to effective governance and strengthen the position of government in anticipation of economic slowdown in the first quarter of 2009 so we can prepare for our people," Ermita said.

When asked whether the President was aware of the developments in the House, he said, "The President, I would know, welcomes this development." ([www.philstar.com](http://www.philstar.com))



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## PHILIPPINE NEWS

## Erap Vows to Lead Masses vs Cha-cha

By Jose Rodel Clapano /  
Thursday, Dec. 4, 2008

Former President Joseph Estrada declared yesterday he would lead mass actions against moves to amend the Constitution to lift the term limits of President Arroyo and other elective officials.

Estrada said he would lead the urban poor in rallies to protest Charter change (Cha-cha) initiatives of the administration.

"I will lead the people in the streets to make our voice heard even if they (the administration) threaten to imprison me again. I have always maintained that my freedom is only secondary to the freedom of the Filipino people, including the freedom from abuse by this administration," Estrada said.

Estrada made the announcement as critics and the opposition are gearing up for mass actions next week to protest Cha-cha initiatives by administration lawmakers.

Led by religious groups, various sectors that included militant groups, peasant leaders and the urban poor are scheduled to hold mass actions in Makati City on Dec. 12 to rally against the 167 congressmen supporting Cha-cha.

Caloocan bishop and Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines-Public Affairs Committee (CBCP-PAC) chairman Deogracias Iniguez said next week's rally would be more united.

But Iniguez said yesterday that the CBCP would not take the lead in the protest rallies



Former Pres. Joseph Estrada against Cha-cha.

He said civil society groups would only be waiting in vain if they believe that the Church would take the lead in the protests.

"That's impossible. They are waiting for the wrong thing. I don't think the CBCP will say that 'you should go the streets

and bring down the present government'. I don't think that the CBCP is in any position to say that because that is the decision of the populace, the decision of the Filipino people," he said.

Estrada noted the growing opposition against Cha-cha, citing the declaration of Catholic charismatic leader Mike Velarde of the El Shaddai to join in the protest actions.

Velarde declared he would gather at least one million of the faithful in street protests to stop Cha-cha initiatives.

Estrada said Velarde's statements reflect the growing adverse public opinion against moves to amend the Constitution.

The United Opposition (UNO) also expressed their support for Velarde.

"We urge him (Velarde) to make good his threat and we welcome him to join our rally on Dec. 12 at Makati," UNO spokesman Adel Tamano said.

Malacañang, on the other hand, sought to dissuade Velarde from carrying out his threat to lead the protest rallies.

"Brother Mike should call on the people to rally behind the government and help the country," presidential deputy spokeswoman Lorelei Fajardo said.

"Charter change is a matter for Congress to tackle on its own," she said.

Mrs. Arroyo and administration allies have in the past sought to amend the Constitution to turn the current presidential system into a parliamentary one to unclench the policy gridlock that often comes from the presidency and legislature having a different agenda. ([www.philstar.com](http://www.philstar.com))

## Government to Declare Yule Truce with NPA

By Marvin Sy /  
Thursday, Dec. 4, 2008

The government will suspend military operations against the New People's Army during the Christmas holidays despite the breakdown of peace talks with communist rebels, Malacañang said yesterday.

Executive Secretary Eduardo Ermita said presidential adviser on the peace process Hermogenes Esperon Jr. told him the National Democratic Front refused to resume the peace talks in Oslo, Norway un-

less the government works for their removal from the terrorist lists of the United States and the European Union.

However, he has yet to receive a report from peace panel chairwoman Nieves Confesor, he added.

The government has refused to accede to the NDF's demand on ground that it could not interfere in the actions of sovereign nations.

Ermita said the Armed Forces, the Department of the Interior and Local Government, and the Philippine National Police have been directed to sub-

mit their recommendations on the suspension of military operations against the NPA.

"We just might do that in the spirit of Christmas and it has nothing to do with the attitude of the other side," he said.

The government would decide how long military operations would be suspended based on the recommendation of security agencies, he added.

Recently informal talks were held between the government and the NDF in Oslo after the peace negotiations broke down several years ago.

The informal talks broke down because the government had insisted on a prolonged ceasefire before peace talks could resume, the NDF said.

The NDF has issued a three-point guideline for any

ceasefire with the government:

- Declaration of a holiday ceasefire from Dec. 23, 2008 to Jan. 3, 2009;
- Declaration of a ceasefire during the formal meetings between the government and the NDF as goodwill and confidence-building measures and as incentive to substantive negotiations; and
- Declaration of a ceasefire for the possible orderly and safe release of prisoners in the hands of the NPA.

However, Fidel Agcaoil, NDF peace panel chairman, said the government had rejected the proposal.

"The (government) negotiating panel in Oslo was so obsessed with demanding that the NDF surrender through a pro-

tracted or localized ceasefire and with seeking to convert the peace negotiations into ceasefire negotiations," he said.

Agcaoil said the government has failed to destroy the NPA or reduce it into an inconsequential level.

"The falsity of the regime's pipedream is exposed everyday by the NPA's tactical offensives on a nationwide scale," he said.

Agcaoil said the administration is trying to trick the NDF into capitulating through a protracted ceasefire with local communist rebel groups.

"It is clear in the substantive agenda of the GRP-NDFP peace negotiations that the end of armed hostilities and disposition of forces are the final item of the agenda and are the logical result of agreements on social, economic, political and constitutional reforms," he said.

([www.philstar.com](http://www.philstar.com))

## Bus, Jeepney Fares Cut by 50¢

By Perseus Echeminada/  
Thursday, Dec. 4, 2008

The Land Transportation Franchising and Regulatory Board (LTFRB) approved yesterday a provisional 50-centavo cut in the minimum fare for public utility buses and jeepneys nationwide effective Dec. 15.

LTFRB chief Thompson Lanton also announced the suspension of the P10 taxi tip that would take effect nationwide next week.

The provisional reduction

lowers the minimum fare from P8 to P7.50 for jeepneys and P9 for ordinary buses in Metro Manila.

Lanton said the new fare would be implemented for the first five kilometers.

For provincial buses, the LTFRB approved a 5-centavo reduction for every kilometer on the existing fare provincial fare rate.

Taxi operators also agreed to suspend the P10 tip, noting the decreasing prices of LPG in the local market.

Most taxicabs in Metro

Manila are using LPG as an alternative to more expensive gasoline.

The new fare cut was approved after the National Council for Commuters Protection (NCCP) and transport groups agreed to the reduction after a three-hour hearing at the LTFRB main office along East Avenue in Quezon City.

Lanton said the provisional fare reduction would be implemented for three months effective this coming December 15, 2008. ([www.philstar.com](http://www.philstar.com))



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## FEATURE

# Yap: Land of Stone Money ROCKs for Filipino Workers

By Glenn Wakai

**J**omarie Pigao has taken a step back in time - far, far away from her home in La Union, Philippines. She sits on a boat, as the sun sets in Yap, Micronesia. The 23-year old Filipino now lives in one of the most remote islands in the world. She is here, not by choice, but by necessity.

Pigao works as a registered nurse at the Yap Memorial Hospital. Her home for the past year and a half is a place forgotten by the 21st Century. It is a 38 square mile island, 450 miles southwest of Guam. A Continental flight touches down here three times a week.

It is a place where no one drives more than ten miles per hour, women freely walk around topless, and stone money still has value. The donut shaped rocks, ranging from a few inches to 16-feet, are still the currency to purchase valuables, such as a house or a wife.

"I was thinking it was a civilized place. When I got off the plane, I was asking 'What kind of place is this? It's all jungle,'" says Pigao.

The recent nursing graduate pulls in an annual salary of \$4,700. By comparison a registered nurse in Hawaii can make \$90,000 per year. "It's not easy finding work in the Philippines and if you get a job, the pay is terrible," says Pigao. "It's been hard to adjust to life here, but for me it's an opportunity to work abroad. Perhaps a future employer will see (the value of) my experience working in a foreign country."



Jomarie Pigao, stands next to one of only two incubators in the Yap Hospital.

Pigao toils along with another 243 Filipino contract workers on Yap. She is in the last six months of her contract and intends to return home next year.

She is the second generation in her family to venture to this little known corner of the Pacific. Pigao rarely saw her father while growing up in northern Luzon because he was a welder on Yap for 17 years. Before returning to the Philippines, he secured employment for his daughter. Now they are apart again.

Such is the recurring plight of Filipinos. They are the country's number one export. No economic opportunities at home compel them to seek work abroad, then remit money home so relatives may survive.

In 2007 there were an estimated 1.75-million Filipino Overseas Contract Workers (OCW). That is up 15% from the previous year. They sent home 110-billion pesos, or \$2.4-billion. 20% of OCW work in Saudi Arabia, 12% work in the United Arab Emirates, and another 9% work in Europe.

Pigao has no intention of working abroad again. She does not hesitate when asked what she misses the most about her days in La Union. "I miss the malls. There are no elevators or escalators here. I was at the malls three days after school and I spent my entire weekends hanging out there with my friends."

Yap has a couple of poorly lit and poorly stocked variety stores, but there are no department store chains or fast food outlets to be found. Internet service is dial up and there are

no traffic lights.

It's this rustic setting that is alluring to Elna Sacres. She is on the opposite side of the spectrum and enjoys her life in Yap. The native of Boracay has been here for ten years and even found her husband in Yap - another Filipino contract worker. They have two boys, ages 9 and 16.

Sacres is also a registered nurse. "Yap is a small island. Everyone is hospitable," says Sacres. "I like the simple life. On my days off I stay at home with the family. We watch DVDs and I take my sons to basketball practice."

Living in a rural setting has its challenges in the community and in the hospital. "We don't have enough equipment. For example we don't have a CT scan. (Special x-ray machine to search for tumors and blood flow) Things you can find at bigger hospitals. When someone is really sick, we have to send them to Guam or the Philippines," says Sacres.

She sees an usually high number of patients suffering from diarrhea, due to the tainted water. Sacres says too



Elna Sacres draws antibiotics into a syringe at the Yap Hospital.

many people are regularly consuming soda and instant noodles. Coke is even put into baby bottles. The island's drastically changing diet is leading to more rotten teeth and an alarming spike in diabetes and hypertension.

Sacres enjoys taking care of patients. She also wishes her paychecks were a bit healthier. She takes home a monthly salary of \$580. She shares a house with her sister's family. After they split the rent and utility bills, there is a little left over to send to the Philippines.

"My dream is to get to America. I want to go there for financial reasons," says Sacres. If that doesn't happen she plans to stick it out on Yap until

her 9 year old boy graduates from high school, then it is back to Boracay. "That's my home country, so I miss my family and friends," says Sacres. "Here compared to the Philippines, there are no crowds. I like it here."

Pigao and Sacres have different perspectives on their experiences in Yap. One longs for the energy of a big city, the other relishes in the tranquility of island life. For both, it's not an ideal situation. It is simply a means to chase dollars in the land of Stone Money.

GLENN WAKAI is a State Representative (Moanalua-Salt Lake) and former television reporter.

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## LEGAL NOTES

## New U.S. ICE Initiatives Affecting International Students



By Reuben S. Seguritan

**A**t the time when the U.S. faces critical challenges in its role in the global community, the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) announced a series of initiatives to improve the Student Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS) implemented under its Student and Exchange Visitor Program (SEVP).

SEVIS is an interactive web-based information system designed to collect and monitor data of all international students and exchange visitors in the F (student), M (vocational) or J (exchange visitor) visa categories and their dependents. It was first launched in 2003 as a response to the 9/11 mishap in order to provide a better way of keeping track of international students and scholars who come to the U.S. to study or engage in vocational research or training.

Since its inception, it was successful in effectively capturing real-time data on inter-

national students and exchange visitors in the U.S. by securing the collaboration of school officials and government entities in collecting and encoding this information in the database system.

In the SEVP quarterly report issued on October 7, 2008, it showed that as of September 30, 2008, there were 1,123,321 active nonimmigrant students, exchange visitors and their dependents in the SEVIS database. There were 1,435 exchange visitor (J-1) programs throughout the country with a total of 220,415 active J-1 exchange visitors. 9,542 schools were approved to issue F-1 and M-1 to a combined total of 773,077 students. The highest concentration of international students is in California, New York, Texas, Massachusetts, Illinois and Florida.

The top five universities that issued F-1 are: The City University of New York (12,237), University of Southern California (6,695), Columbia University (5,944), Purdue University (5,866) and University of Illinois (5,574).

The top five schools that issued M-1 are: PanAm Inter-

national Flight Academy (423), Sabena Airline Training Center, Inc. (248), Stmc Training Institute (223), Bethel School of Supernatural Ministry (207) and Sierra Academy of Aeronautics-International Training Center (204).

For both F-1 and M-1, the top five schools are Cornell University (3,788), Houston Community College System (3,245), Santa Monica College (3,193), San Francisco State University (SFSU) and Northern Virginia Community College (2,018).

The leading fields of study for international students are in Business, Management, Marketing and related fields with 150,211 active students. Other top majors include Engineering, Basic Skills, Computer and Information Studies, Health Professions and Clinical Sciences, Visual and Performing Arts, Biological and Biomedical Sciences, Social Sciences, and lastly, high School and secondary diplomas and certificates.

Overall, South Korea has the highest number of enrollment with 115,852 active students followed by India, China, Japan, Taiwan, Canada, Mex-

ico, Vietnam, Turkey and Nepal.

In line with the ongoing commitment to improve the SEVIS system, the following initiatives are under way for full implementation in the year 2009.

First, as groundwork to support these initiatives, the SEVIS fees were increased on October 27, 2008 from \$100 to \$200 for nonimmigrant students and from \$100 to \$180 for most exchange visitors. Other fee increases included those for school certification and change of school ownership from \$230 to \$1,700; and for school or campus site visits from \$350 to \$655.

Second, recertification of schools that issue F, M or J will begin on January 2, 2009. Recertification entails the continued ability of the school to meet eligibility requirements, regularly meeting school reporting and record-keeping requirements, and validation of student-reporting requirements, among others.

Lastly, the SEVIS II system will be launched to enhance the performance of the original SEVIS. This programmatic effort was an off-

shoot of the collaborative inputs of the educational community, law enforcement, government agencies and IT experts in making the program more timely, user-friendly and adaptable to the current needs.

Among the key features of the enhanced program are: more user-friendly and simplified data entry and standardized formats; the use of unique biometrics-identifier system to prevent document fraud; more advanced query and reporting tools and more efficient interface among users by expediting standard transactions through real-time availability of information and generation of completed forms and data.

These initiatives show that while national security remains a priority as the U.S. faces the challenges of international terrorism, there is a continued recognition that international education and exchange programs remain vital tools in opening minds, bridging gaps and promoting global awareness and mutual respect and understanding among members of the international community in these critical times.

REUBEN S. SEGURITAN has been practicing law for over 30 years. For further information, you may call him at (212) 695-5281 or lag on to his website at [www.seguritan.com](http://www.seguritan.com)

## MAINLAND NEWS

## New York City Expands 311 Service to Include Filipino

**T**he Philippine Consulate General of New York was recently informed by the Office of the Mayor that New York City has expanded its 311 Customer Service Center, which now provides access to non-emergency government information, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, in 170 languages, including Filipino.

New York City officials are committed to improving their ability to serve the needs of non-English speaking New Yorkers. They have increased the number of foreign languages they can engage in, with the help of a foreign language interpretation service that provides on-call interpreters.

When a non-English speaking client calls 311, the customer



service center will call in an interpreter, who joins in a three-way conference call. The customer service center and the non-English speaking caller communicate via the interpreter, who facilitates easy communication between all parties. The result is successful implementation of public services without language barriers.

Consul General Cecilia B. Rebong was elated with the news to include Filipino in the list of foreign languages.

"This will make it easier for our countrymen to ask for services from the city without having to be concerned that they would not be understood," Rebong says.

## Filipino Cooking Goes Mainstream With New DVD Release

By HFC Staff

**D**C Entertainment, a Los Angeles-based film production company, has released the first ever instructional DVD on Philippine cuisine.

"The Best of Filipino Food, Vol. 1" introduces the world to Filipino cuisine and features a blend of traditional and contemporary takes on Philippine cooking.

The DVD provides a step-by-step instructions on how to prepare and cook a selected array of popular dishes in the Philippines, including main courses, snacks and desserts. Producers hope it will appeal to cooking enthusiasts of all ages and cultures.

"My mission is to share as much of the Philippines to the world," says Glenda De Castro,

producer of the series. "I wanted to bring a taste of my home across the seas."

The Best of Filipino Food Series is 3-part series. Subsequent volumes are scheduled for release in 2009. Distribution is global.

More information on the DVD is available online at: [www.dcefilms.com](http://www.dcefilms.com)



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## PHILIPPINE LANGUAGE

## ILOKO



By Amado L. Yoro

**A**gur-uray kenka ti suknal iti rabaw ti turod  
A yan ti balay dagiti agpasungad

Itag-ay ti sagut; rag-o daytoy awis  
Iti balay iti turod.

**Daytoy ti balay ti Dios**

Ni Jacob  
Daytoy ti dalan a mapan  
Iti pantok ti Zion

# Ti Balay Iti Turod (Pammasungad iti Adbiento iti Pannakaipasngay ti Mesias)

Dagiti pannuro ti Apo

**Usigen ti dagem ti basol**  
Ket magna iti silaw ti Dios

Rag-o daytoy awis  
Iti balay iti turod.

agdakiwas dagiti dapan. Ala wen, adda lemma  
ti tugot ni Juan a Mammunniag a sukmal ni Nasantuan a Daga  
Naraniag ti alinaga ti Bethlehem  
ti yan ti Kulluog ken taberna iti yan ni Maladaga a Jesus

surotan  
dagiti Paddak ti Apo a natda a lemma dayta nasantuan a daga

sakduen, wen, punnuen ti botelia  
ti nasantuan a danum dayta Karayan Jordan; adda ibabatok ti ulu  
Ti bagi iti baro a buniag Mamatika, wen, mamatika iti Nasantuan  
dayta narud ti gandat ti nasapataan a panagserbi iti simbaan ni San Pablo  
Uray la agkutimermer ti lasag

Ti lamiis ti karayan Isangpet ti talek, ti talged ti ayat ken nalablabon nga asi Tumulong kadagiti nakurkurang ti gasat  
Iti biag dagiti baldado ti bagi ken nakem  
Ammok a naragagsakka ita a makatulong  
iti simbaan, dagiti marigariat, dagiti desitute,  
feeding the street people....

Napasnek a kararag: Adda koma a kanyon  
kenka ti Dios: ti puso nga agayat

ti natulong, natulnog ken natudiao  
iti agtalinaed a sin-aw ti ayat ken ti biag, mapnoka iti gasat ken talingengen daytoy a panagbaniaagam  
dayta, iti sakup wenna Ili ni David  
Iti Bantay ti Sinai iti libro ni Moses  
dagiti Sangapulo a Bilin  
Adda ditoy ti balay iti turod  
Agkankanta dagiti agpaspastor  
Iti sirok ti naraniag a Bituen!

## GLOBAL NEWS

## Two Filipino Journalists Receive 2008 Developing Asia Journalism Awards

Two Filipinos were among the 25 journalists from 13 developing countries in Asia who recently received the 2008 Developing Asia Journalism Awards (DAJA) sponsored by the Asian Development Bank Institute.

The awards are meant to acknowledge Asian and Pacific print journalists who cover development trends and their impacts on the countries and people of the region.

The recipients were selected by a distinguished panel of judges. This year's awards

focused on four strategic areas of development as categories: governance, infrastructure, the environment, and regional integration.

Alexander Pacibo from the Philippines topped the governance category for his article entitled "People Power Thrives

in Naga City." The article tackled the strong tradition of people participation in Naga that Jesse Robredo harnessed in 16 years in office as city mayor to institute reforms, but whose long-term sustainability, many think, could be challenged in a post-Robredo era.

Another Filipino finalist, Roel Landtngin, won as runner-up in the infrastructure category for his article "Bids Sans Caps: Tied Loans Favor Foreign Contractors." His story delved into how the absence of caps on bids, tied loans and conditionalities of lenders have

favored foreign contractors and triggered cost overruns and project delays.

Both Filipino reporters are members of the Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism (PCIJ), which is an independent, nonprofit media agency that specializes in investigative reporting.

The countries represented this year among the twenty-five finalists are China, India, Indonesia, Kyrgyz Republic, Thailand, Bangladesh, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan, Philippines, Bhutan and Sri Lanka. (DFA/the Daily PCL)

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Filipino journalists Alexander Pacibo (top photo) and Roel Landtngin receives their awards

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## GLOBAL NEWS

### Ayala Malls Receives International Awards

Ayala Malls has won three awards from the prestigious International Council of Shopping Centers (ICSC).

The ICSC recognized and honored the shopping center industry's most cutting-edge properties, innovative solutions and creative responses to market trends, as well as outstanding examples of design and development throughout the world during the recent Asia Expo in Macau.

The ICSC says Ayala Malls is known for innovative retail developments, creating well-planned lifestyle centers, and building beyond commercial spaces.

Ayala Malls received top recognition under the categories of Design & Development and Marketing.

"Bravo Filipino: A Tribute to Filipino's Creativity and Ingenuity," which featured a four-



Ayala Mall's Trinoma month long festival celebrating the Filipino creative genius during the opening of Greenbelt 5, garnered ICSC's Gold Award for Marketing excellence.

Bonifacio High Street, the country's first "main street" development, and Trinoma, which offers a refreshing and rewarding shopping experience in northern Metro Manila, won for Ayala Malls a gold and silver awards respectively, for outstanding design qualities and creativity in development.

(Good News Filipinas)

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