

# HAWAII FILIPINO CHRONICLE

HAWAII'S #1 FILIPINO NEWSPAPER

◆ AUGUST 20, 2011 ◆

## DISCOVERING THE MAJESTIC PHILIPPINE ISLANDS

COVER STORY PAGE

# 4



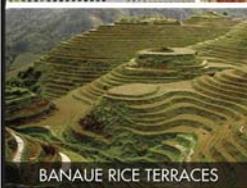
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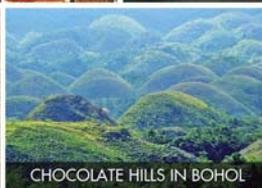
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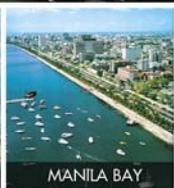
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## EDITORIAL

## Boosting Philippines' Tourism Industry

**T**he Philippine government is only recently tapping into the vast potential of tourism as a source of additional revenues. A record number of visitors—3.5 million—traveled to the Philippines in 2010. However, the amount pales in comparison to visitor arrivals for neighboring countries like Malaysia and Thailand, which boast annual visitor totals of 18 million and 14 million, respectively.

Realizing that a robust tourism sector can provide more jobs and opportunities for its people, government officials are giving the fledgling tourism industry the attention it deserves. The government is expanding infrastructure to increase the number of tourists in the country and has taken steps to liberalize the aviation industry to allow access to friendlier airfares to more tourist destinations. However, much more needs to be done. First and foremost, the budget for tourism promotions needs to be increased. For 2011, the Department of Tourism will spend P476 million on international promotions—an amount that needs to be at least tripled. The Philippines unfortunately suffers from an image as a dangerous place to visit. It's true that the country has had its share of natural disasters, poverty, crime and corruption—but so have many other nations. An effective media and/or public relations can do wonders for the Philippines' reputation and that it is indeed a safe place to visit and do business.

Until tourism gets up to speed, the Philippines should in the meantime look to capitalize on niche markets like eco-tourism. For a nation with vast natural resources, opportunities for eco-tourism are in abundance. Another niche market that is rarely talked about but rapidly gaining momentum is medical tourism. Patients from around the world are visiting the Philippines for procedures such as cosmetic and plastic surgery, dermatology, weight loss surgery, ophthalmology and dentistry—at a fraction of the cost they would spend in the U.S. or Europe. In addition, Filipino physicians are well-trained, having studied at top medical schools in the U.S. and Japan, and have a reputation as among the best doctors in the Pacific Rim. Patients have the added bonus of recovering at one of the Philippines' world-class spas and exotic resorts.

Tourism could be the engine that drives the economy, increases foreign exchange income, spreads benefits to the countryside and enables the Philippines to become more competitive in today's vital global industry. If the government plays its cards right and invests wisely in tourism, perhaps one day the Philippines can truly live up to its nickname as the Pearl of the Orient.

## A New, Different Storm

**S**ome US analysts have said their country is not facing a second double-dip recession but is in fact still suffering from the first one. Meanwhile, World Bank head Robert Zoellick has warned of a “new and more dangerous” time in the global economy, with Europe's debt crisis an ever greater concern than the downgrade of the United States' credit rating. Zoellick said the world is “in the early moments of a new and different storm” that is unlike the global financial meltdown in 2008.

The Philippines survived that meltdown better than many other countries. Today Philippine officials are calming jittery markets with the assurance that the country's fundamentals are strong. But the warning from the head of the World Bank cannot be ignored. And it would be good for the Philippines to prepare for the fallout from America's Triple A credit rating downgrade combined with Europe's lingering crisis.

A slowdown in the US economy and Europe's problems can be expected to be felt eventually by the Philippines, with overseas Filipino workers among the most vulnerable. Unrest in the Middle East and North Africa has already forced the return to the Philippines of thou-

## FROM THE PUBLISHER

**W**e know summer is drawing to a close when students begin returning to school. Summer is largely considered the best time for a vacation by many people but seasoned travelers will sometimes wait until summer's end or early fall before booking that long-awaited trip. The reason? They can find bargains galore due to the sudden excess capacity out there. It's the basic law of supply and demand.

For this issue's cover story, contributing writer Carlota Ader enlightens our readers on the Philippines' fledgling tourism industry and what government officials are doing to boost visitor arrivals. If given the necessary support and cooperation by both government and the private sector, tourism has the potential to help turn the Philippines' economic fortunes around. For one thing, it can provide jobs that could encourage Filipinos to remain at home with their families instead of seeking employment overseas. Now wouldn't that be something? While the volume of tourists to the Philippines may never reach that of its neighbors in Southeast Asia, the Philippines can still focus on quality, rather than quantity, and capitalize on its comparative advantages in niche markets like eco-tourism and medical tourism. Ms. Ader's cover story also includes excerpts from Oahu residents Bernie and Teresita Bernales who participated in a special tour recently organized by Philippine embassies and consulates general in the U.S. and Canada, as well as the Philippines' Department of Tourism and Department of Foreign Affairs. We hope you will enjoy reading the cover story along with the couple's travel experiences beginning on page 4.

To complement the cover story, we have our special “Food & Leisure” and “Summer Travel” columns on pages 8 and 9. These articles on the Ilocos region and Machu Picchu in Peru are sure to whet your appetite for travel to exotic destinations!

Speaking of appetite, if you're looking for something fun to do this three-day weekend, you may want to consider attending Kababayhan Fest 2011 at Wet n' Wild Hawaii theme park in Kapolei on Saturday, August 20. Organizers are billing the event as a daylong celebration and Filipino heritage festival. Please find out more on this exciting event on page 5.

In closing, there are other columns of interest in this issue that we hope you will enjoy reading—columns like “Immigration Guide” (page 7) and “Legal Notes” (page 13). Thank you once again for faithfully supporting the Hawaii Filipino Chronicle. As always, we invite our readers to contact us at: [filipinochronicle@gmail.com](mailto:filipinochronicle@gmail.com) if you have story ideas, tips or concerns regarding Hawaii's dynamic and vibrant Filipino community.

Until next time...*aloha* and *mabuhay!*

*Chona A. Montesines-Sonido*

sands of OFWs, with few employment alternatives in their own land.

OFW remittances grew to \$1.737 billion in June from \$1.623 billion a year ago, despite Europe's debt crisis, political turmoil in the Middle East and North Africa, and the “Saudization” policy of Saudi Arabia. A slowdown in the world's largest economy combined with Europe's woes will inevitably affect the rest of the world, which will have an impact on the millions of OFWs.

With elections approaching in the United States, President Barack Obama has also revived his push to bring back jobs to his country and produce American goods in America instead of overseas. Obama, now seeing his popularity sinking, may be unable to persuade private investors and the US Congress to go along with him. And OFWs have long defied dire predictions about their fate. Still, in periods of uncertainty, it is prudent for the nation to prepare for the worst. ([www.phlstar.com](http://www.phlstar.com))

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## OPINION

# More Fakery in Chopper 'Lease' of Mike, Iggy

**GOCHA** By Jarius Bondoc

**N**o man has a good enough memory to be a successful liar, honest Abe Lincoln advised his fellow-lawyers.

Atty. Mike Arroyo had a nifty answer to a STAR exposé about him last Monday, August 15, 2011. It appeared that the former first gentleman had submitted to the Pasay City court a bogus lease of five helicopters from businessman Archibald Po. The "Aircraft Fleet Service Agreement" was supposed to be Mike's proof in his P20-million lawsuit that Po lied to the Senate. Po had testified that two used choppers falsely sold to the police as brand new in 2009 were among the five that Mike imported in 2004. Through the contract, Mike wanted to show that his LTA Inc. never bought but merely rented five aircraft from Po's LionAir on March 16-May 15, 2004. Signatories were Mike's brother Ignacio T. Arroyo as LTA Inc. president, and Renato Sia as LionAir corporate secretary. There was a hitch, though.

Atty. Lope M. Velasco notarized the lease contract in Makati City on March 16, 2004. But Sia's residence certificate No. 10579800F was issued only on April 2, 2004. By some magic the notarizing was done a good two weeks before Sia got aedula. In short, the lease looked simulated. Mike appeared to have committed the very offenses he was accusing Po of: false testimony, perjury in solemn affirmation, and offering false testimony in evidence.

The day the exposé broke, Atty. Andresito Fornier came to Mike's rescue. Presenting himself as Ignacio's lawyer, he told reporters there was a typo error. Allegedly Attorney Velasco has qualified to them that Sia's cedula is, unnm, dated March 2, not April 2, 2004. Velasco's correction was dated August 15, 2011.

Lawyer-friends phoned the whole of yesterday on reading Fornier's claim. (He was last heard from in 2003, during the failed debarment of a leading presidential candidate, using forged American citizenship records.) The lawyers asked: why make a correction only

seven years after the fact, on the same day the fakery was exposed? Why is the eight-page contract signed by Ignacio but not by Sia on every page as notary rules require? Why doesn't it have Ignacio's cedula or other ID? Why are the two spaces for witnesses blank?

The truth is in the cedula booklet in Pasay where Sia got it. Also, in Attorney Velasco's notary submissions to the Makati regional court and the Supreme Court in 2004. It will surely out.

But Mike's evidence of lease, as signed by brother Ignacio, seems to contain more fakery. Like, it lists five Robinson helicopters supposedly to be loaned by LionAir to LTA Inc., specifically the ones with Philippine registration and corresponding manufacturer serial numbers:

- RP-C 2779 (S.N. 1370),
- RP-C 2780 (S.N. 1371),
- RP-C 2781 (S.N. 1372),
- RP-C 2782 (S.N. 1373),
- RP-C 2783 (S.N. 1374)

From Customs records, the first two choppers, S.N. 1370 and 1371, arrived at Clark Freeport on March 12, 2004. The second two,

S.N. 1372 and 1373, arrived on March 17, 2004. The last unit, S.N. 1374, arrived on March 24, 2004. Even if a helicopter breezes through Customs, it would still take a week to reassemble and test-fly it.

Question: how could Mike or Ignacio lease on March 16, 2004, five choppers that had yet to be delivered to the Philippines, cleared by Customs, reassembled and test-flown starting on March 12, 17 and 24, 2004?

From five certificates issued by the Air Transport Office, S.N. 1370 and 1371 were registered as RP-C 2779 and RP-C 2780 on March 16, 2004. S.N. 1372 and 1373 became RP-C 2781 and RP-C 2782 on March 23, 2004. S.N. 1374 became RP-C 2783 on March 30, 2004.

Again, question: how could Mike and Ignacio list in their lease of March 16, 2004, the registration of five aircraft that had yet to be assigned such numbers?

Po had attached the five certificates of registration to his affidavit at the Senate. Mike's lawyers obtained copies, and presented these to court along with the infirm lease. Mike got

burnt. This is not to say he should fire his lawyers. It's just to say that the lawyers too have some explaining to do, in court and in the Senate. That goes for Ignacio as well; having joined the fray, he cannot invoke anymore inter-parliamentary courtesy as a congressman to avoid being subpoenaed to the Senate.

Rowena del Rosario, Mike's personal bookkeeper since 2001, also must appear once and for all. There she must explain the discrepancies between the bank records and the supposed P9.8-million "lease":

- Why did LTA Inc. pay US manufacturer Robinson, not local distributor LionAir, for the "lease"?

- Why remit dollars for the "lease," when the contract quotes pesos?

- Why pay nine times more than the contract amount — specifically \$500,000 on December 11, 2003; \$408,067.06 on February 27, 2004; \$509,056.41 also on February 27, 2004; and \$148,271.53 on March 1, 2004 — a total of \$1,565,395 or P86,096,725 (at \$1:P55)? ([www.philstar.com](http://www.philstar.com))

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# Discovering the Majestic Philippine Islands

By Carlota Adler

**F**or many international travelers looking for a great escape to an exotic, yet affordable destination, the Philippines may be their best bet.

Surrounded by the waters of the Pacific Ocean and the China Sea, the Philippines is the perfect destination for water activities. Its mountains are rich with vegetation, rare birds and animals, exotic plants and rugged terrains. With so many things to do and places to see, visitors to this country of over 7,000 islands will not leave disappointed.

Visitors immediately notice the warm hospitality of the Filipino people, who are among the most accommodating and happiest in the world. Consider the following additional reasons for visiting the land of 7,107 islands:

- Prices for many goods and services are inexpensive.
- It boasts the world's best beaches and tourist hot spots—namely Boracay,

Laiya, Anawangin Cove, Puerto Galera, Camiguin, Cebu, Bohol and Batangas.

- Visitors can enjoy various colorful cultural events and festivals. There are a number of festivals in every province for visitors to experience.
- The Philippines is a tropical country with good weather year round.

## Record Number of Visitors

In 2010, foreign visitor arrivals reached an all-time high of 3.45 million as increasingly affluent South Koreans and Chinese flocked to the Philippines. The numbers were up nearly 20 percent from 2009 despite a deadly bus hijacking of Hong Kong tourists and unfounded warnings of domestic terrorist attacks.



The Puerto Princesa Subterranean River National Park in Palawan has been nominated as one of the New Seven Wonders of Nature

While the Philippines has long been troubled by a militant Islamic movement engaged in bombings and kidnappings, mainly in the south of the country, government officials insist that conditions overall are safe for foreign visitors. In a press statement, Ronaldo Ledesma of the Philippines' Bureau of Immigration said that the record number of visitors sends a "very clear message that the confidence of the international community in the Philippines and the government of President Aquino is very strong."

The trend of increasing visitor arrivals seems to be continuing for 2011. Philippine tourism officials are estimating a total of 3.7 million visitors for the year, which would top 2010's totals.

According to the Department of Tourism, visitor arrivals for January 2011 were 349,713 which amount to a 17 percent increase from January 2010. The majority of visitors are from South Korea, which comprises 26 percent of the total volume. U.S. visitors account for 18 percent of arrivals, followed by Japan at 9 percent, China at 4.5 percent and Australia at 4 percent.

## From Boracay With Love

The good news keeps rolling in for the Philippines. In the August 2011 issue of Travel & Leisure, Boracay is ranked as the fourth best island in the world and second best island in Asia in the magazine's annual

"World's Best Awards."

Described as "one of the last undiscovered Asian beach getaways," Boracay is accessible via a frequent hour-long flight from Manila to Catilcan, followed by a 10-minute ferry ride. Boracay has over 12 beautiful white beaches, fabulous hotels, exceptionally good food and offers great value for the tourist dollar. Its white sand beaches are picturesque, secluded and offer romantic hideaways for those who prefer quiet and solitude.

For others, its beaches are ideal for picnics and barbecues, or for boating around the island. For the more adventuresome, there are opportunities for reef diving, wreck explorations, windsurfing and kitesurfing. Or landlubbers can simply pamper themselves with a traditional *hilot* treatment—a massage incorporating virgin coconut oil—at any of the world class resorts on Boracay.

While known as an affordable destination, visitors are advised to book their arrivals from June to mid-October (the rainy season) when average hotel rates are lower than usual—and package deals can get fetch up to 30 percent off standard peak rates.

As a testament to Boracay's natural beauty, Sports Illustrated used the island as a photo backdrop for its 2011 Swimsuit Edition. Some of the planet's sexiest models were photographed on Boracay's white sand beaches.

Another visitor hotspot is the island of Palawan, which is blessed with rich natural resources and highly diverse flora and fauna found in both land and sea, unlike any of those found in the rest of the country. National Geographic Traveler listed Palawan among the "20 Best Trips of 2011." The publication praised Palawan for its "limestone karst cliffs, coral atolls, mangrove forests, sugar-white sandy beaches, and extensive fringing reefs [that] create one of the Philippines' most biodiverse terrestrial and marine environments."

Palawan's crown jewel is the Puerto Princesa Subterranean River National Park which has been nominated as one of the New Seven Wonders of Nature. One of the most important biodiversity conservation areas of the Philippines, the underground river features a spectacular limestone landscape that contains an 8.2 km long underground river. The area also represents significant habitat for biodiversity conservation. It contains a full mountain-to-the-sea ecosystem and protects forests, which are among the most significant in Asia. The river is a source of pride and a key element in the identity of the people of Puerto Princesa in particular, and of the Philippines as a whole.

## Eco-Tourism Taking Root

Among the latest tourism trends in the Philippines is eco-

(continued on page 5)

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## COVER STORY

(from page 4, DISCOVERING...)

tourism which is simply responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and improves the well-being of local people.

Slash-and-burn farmers who once cleared forests to make room for crops as well as fishermen who used troll nets and dynamite which depleted fish numbers and damaged coral reefs are now gainfully employed by various ecotourism initiatives supported by the government and local community groups. Such workers are now protecting and showing off the nation's rich forests and marine life, rather than engaging in illegal and environmentally-harmful activities.

Philippine officials, however, stress that ecotourism opportunities are not for the masses, but rather for niche travelers. They point to Metro Manila's wetlands which are a sanctuary for local and migratory birds, including the Philippine duck, the endangered Chinese Egret and the rare Pied Avocet.

Located 30 minutes away from the bustling capital, birdwatchers and nature lovers can escape to the mangrove forest of the Las Piñas-Parañaque Critical Habitat and Ecotourism Area located on the western edge of the Cavite-Manila Coastal Road.

In a 2004 count, the area was home to some 5,000 wild birds, of which 69 were water bird species and 51 migratory. The migratory birds flock to the area during the months of July through May as part of the "East Asian-Australian Flyway."

"We have 600 species of birds, 30 percent of are native to the Philippines," says Michael Lu, president of the Wild Bird Club of the Philippines.



Dr. Teresita Bernales (front row, 3rd from left) with other Hawaii participants of the 6th Ambassadors/Consuls General & Tourism Directors Tours during a luncheon reception with President Aquino at the Malacanang Palace

According to tourism officials, interest in birdwatching is on the upswing as birdwatching enthusiasts from Hong Kong, Singapore and Europe have flocked to the Philippines. Although the increase is welcomed news, officials like Victoria Jamin, Tourism undersecretary, prefer quality over quantity.

"Ecotourism is not for mass tourism," she says. "We want to attract birdwatchers and environmentalists because these are the responsible tourists. We want to have little intervention in the area since it is a critical habitat."

### Promoting Tourism

The Philippine government has been actively promoting tourism to the Philippines via numerous trade shows and other high profile events. One of the most recent was the Sixth Ambassadors/Consuls General and Tourism Directors Tour held July 17-23, 2011. The tour was a joint project of all Philippine embassies and consulates general in the U.S. and Canada as well as the Philippines' Department of Tourism and Department of Foreign Affairs.

The annual tour included a comprehensive cultural immersion on the sites and sounds of Philippine hospitality and the

added activities of exploring business, investment and retirement opportunities. The Philippine Consulate General in Honolulu earned the distinction as the "top notch" among all embassies and consulates in signing-up participants with a total of 132. Participants include Oahu residents Bernie and Teresita Bernales.

After a red-carpet welcome and dinner at the historic Manila Hotel, the 457 delegation were whisked away on a choice of out-of-town tours offering four different venues—*Kulinarya* (food tour) of Laguna and Quezon, Batangas and Cavite, Bulacan and Pampanga and the historical tour of Corregidor.

The couple opted for the Corregidor tour, which they described as "very moving."

"The walk through Malinta Tunnel, where Gen. McArthur had his command center and his family were transferred into during the siege brings back so much of the feelings of patriotism and nationalism for the Filipino and other international visitors alike," says Teresita. "The light and sound show inside in the many branches of the Malinta Tunnel make visitors relive the anxiety and fear during the relentless three months

of bombings by the Japanese."

Next up was a tour of Manila, a luncheon at Malacanang luncheon and a personal meeting with President Noyon Aquino. After several photo-ops and a tour of Malacanang Museum, the couple then visited Manila Ocean Park and Intramuros. Highlights included Fort Santiago, which served as the military headquarters for the Spanish, Americans and Japanese colonizers until its destruction in 1945, and a tour of San Agustin Church, the oldest Spanish structure in Manila which dates back to 1571.

After the basic tour, some participants returned to the U.S., Canada or Guam, while others continued on with post-basic tours or spent time with loved ones in their home provinces.

For Bernie and Teresita Bernales, the tour provided them with an inclusive perspective of the Philippines, its pre-colonial history, 300-plus years under Spanish rule, 50 years of

American regime and 3 years of Japanese occupation, the Independence, Martial law years and the restoration of Democracy.

"The influence of each invading culture were explained in a non-biased manner, leaving one with mixed emotions of what could have or would have been with or without these outside influences," says Teresita. "The role of our national heroes from Rizal to Ninoy Aquino and the EDSA Revolution was a revelation of our love of country and nationalism, resilience and bravery. The preservation of our culture and heritage evoked a lot of pride to all participants, Filipinos and non-Filipinos alike."

The trip is one that the couple will always remember.

"The beauty of our country is replete with splendor that is beyond comparison," says Bernie. "Complimenting this was the warmth, graciousness and legendary hospitality of our people made this trip so unforgettable."

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## HAWAII-FILIPINO NEWS

# Kababayan Fest 2011 Promises Fun for Entire Family

Kababayan Fest 2011 will be held on Saturday, August 20, 2011 at the Wet n' Wild Hawaii theme park in Kapolei.

Billed as the "Largest Filipino Gathering on the West Side of Oahu," the event is a daylong celebration and heritage festival.

Event organizer 600 LBS. promises big family fun, headline talent and tons of Filipino culture.

Similar events held this summer at the Great America Theme Park and Knott's Berry Farm in California drew upwards of 20,000 Filipino-Americans.

Admission Wet n' Wild

Hawaii is \$19.99 each and \$9.99 for Annual, Gold and Fun Pass holders. Admission includes park entry with use of the park's 25 rides and special attractions. There will also be a special concert in the afternoon by AJ Rafael and Erika David, plus performances by Hype 5-0, Kapena Delima, Ciana Peleka and much more.

## HAWAII-FILIPINO NEWS

## COVO Holds Annual Convention on Maui

By Serafin Colmenares

The 24th Annual Statewide Convention of the Congress of Visayan Organizations (COVO) was held on August 13, 2011 at the Maui Beach Hotel in Kahului, Maui. It was hosted by the Santo Nino Club of Maui headed by its president Liezl Oandasan.

The theme of the convention was "Population Growth and Its Implications to the Filipino Community in Hawaii." Dr. Belinda Aquino, professor emerita at the University of Hawaii, was the guest speaker during the morning panel discussion. Members of the reaction panel were Margarita Hopkins of Hilo, Jane Clement of Kona, and Helen Ilin of Maui. Moderator was Jun Colmenares from Oahu. The guest speaker and the panelists tackled the social, cultural, educational, economic and political implications of the changing Filipino demographics in Hawaii. Everybody agreed that an increase in numbers alone is not meaningful unless it is transformed into actual strength,



Officers, members and guests at the recent COVO Convention on Maui

power and influence. Also discussed was the role that Filipino organizations can play in transforming the Filipino community's potential into reality. The discussion was very animated with a number of questions and comments from the audience. Consul Lolita Capco of the Philippine Consulate General also participated in the discussions.

The afternoon session of the convention was presided over by COVO president Jane Clement

and was devoted to COVO business matters and the election of a new set of officers who will serve for a two-year term. Each island council presented reports of their activities (in video format), as did the various standing and special committees. It was announced that the COVO Foundation has just been granted 501(c)(3) status by the IRS. The Oahu Visayan Council was designated as host for the 2012 Annual Convention and 6th Lapu-Lapu Awards. The new set

of officers are as follows:

- *President* - Jane Clement (reelected for second term)
- *Vice President* - Vergel Lonzaga (reelected for second term)
- *Secretary* - Leticia Colmenares
- *Asst. Secretary* - Almie Lonzaga
- *Treasurer* - Felipe Tan (reelected for second term)
- *Asst. Treasurer* - Cora Nelson (reelected for second term)
- Rebekah Godfrey (reelected for second term)
- *Asst. Auditor* - Esther Domingil
- *Governors*
  - Marie Tedios (Windward Oahu)
  - Richard Ancog (Leeward Oahu)
  - Lani Phillips (Kauai)
  - Helen Ilin (Maui)
  - Nida Bolo (Lanai)
  - Cosme Presiados (West Hawaii)
  - William Cogo (East Hawaii)

1985 and is the umbrella of Visayan organizations in the state of Hawaii. Its goals are (1) to unify Filipinos of Visayan ancestry; (2) to promote Visayan culture and language; and (3) to assist in the educational and socio-economic upliftment of Filipinos of Visayan ancestry in Hawaii.

COVO has been very active in the community since its inception. It has initiated the biennial Lapu-Lapu Awards, hosted a radio program (The Visayan Hour), celebrated commemorative events such as the voyage of Florentino Das from Hawaii to the Philippines, the Hanapepe Massacre, and the centennial anniversary of the Visayan arrival in Hawaii, held cultural festivals such as the Sinulog, Ati-Atihan and Dinagyang, participated in Filipino community events, engaged in political education, established sister city/province agreements with the Philippines, and led disaster relief fundraisers for the Philippines. As a result of its accomplishments, it was awarded the 2010 Banaag Presidential Award for Filipino organizations and individuals overseas by the government of the Republic of the Philippines last December.

Currently, COVO and its affiliate clubs on the Big Island are in the process of finalizing the sister city-county agreement between Ormoc City in Leyte, Philippines and the county of Hawaii. The two areas seek collaboration in promoting geothermal as a source of energy. It is to be noted that Ormoc City is 100 percent geothermal while the Big Island is only 15 percent geothermal. A delegation from Ormoc City will be arriving in September to attend an international conference on alternative sources of energy in Honolulu and will make use of the opportunity to visit the Big Island and to formally sign the agreement. In addition, COVO is in the process of preparing a book on Florentino Das, the Visayan who stunned the world when he crossed the Pacific from Hawaii to the Philippines in 1955-56 in his 24-foot self-made wooden sailboat. A children's book based on Das' biography will also be produced and a social studies curriculum developed for use in the intermediate/middle grades. COVO was able to get funding support for this project from the Hawaii Filipino Heritage Fund through the Filipino Community Center.

The evening gala was held at the Maui Beach Hotel Ballroom with more than 250 people in attendance. Guest speaker was Mayor Alan Arakawa who expounded on the theme of the convention, with the message that the Filipino community should take the opportunity that is given them and use it to uplift the community. Philippine consul Lolita Capco also gave a message and installed the new set of officers. Entertainment was provided by local talents.

The COVO annual picnic was also held the following day during which time the first quarterly meeting of the new set of officers was held.

COVO was organized in

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## IMMIGRATION GUIDE



By Atty. Emmanuel  
Samonte Tipon

## Is Deporting Husband Easier Than Deporting Wife?

one, get married -- to hide the shame? They went to the Philippines and met a young man who seemed interested in their daughter. They succeeded in convincing him to marry her. Upon returning to Hawaii, the daughter petitioned for the husband. It was approved. The husband had advisers in the Philippines who counseled him to delay his travel to the U.S. until their marriage was more than two years old so that he would be a lawful permanent resident rather than a conditional resident.

When the young man arrived in Hawaii, he did not go to his wife's home but went to the home of relatives. A relative of the wife found him working at a fast food restaurant and told her. The wife and her parents went to confront her husband and demanded to know why he did not go to their home directly. The man told them that he preferred to go to his relatives and that they could not do anything to

him because he had a permanent green card.

The wife filed for divorce. The man had family support and hired a Chinese lawyer. When they ran out of funds the lawyer gave up the case. Meanwhile, the wife with the assistance of an excellent Filipino lawyer reported the matter to immigration authorities claiming that the man committed marriage fraud and that their marriage was a sham. Immigration picked up the husband and detained him at the Federal Detention Center and filed removal proceedings. Since he had no money to pay for a lawyer to defend him and his relatives no longer wanted to give him financial support or did not want to be involved any more, he opted to leave voluntarily.

**ALIEN HUSBAND HAS CHILD  
WITH USC WIFE BUT PLACED IN  
REMOVAL**

A Filipino couple wanted their daughter to be married. They found a potential husband in the Philippines and introduced their daughter to him. Their daughter "fell in love" with the young man and they were married. She returned to Hawaii, petitioned for her husband, and he arrived in Hawaii within two years of their marriage, so he was a conditional resident. He did not have advisers like the other Filipino.

They lived together and had a child. During their "unhappy marriage" the husband blurted out to his wife's mother that he had married the daughter so he could come to the U.S. The mother was so shocked that she was hospitalized. The daughter then retained an excellent Filipino lawyer who helped her write to immigration authorities to terminate the conditional residence of the man and deport him on the ground that the marriage was a sham. They submitted an article written by the lawyer which cited a case holding that merely having a child

does not necessarily make the marriage genuine for immigration purposes. The alien husband was placed in removal proceedings.

The head of the local immigration agency in charge of removing aliens remarked to the Filipino lawyer, half smiling: "Usually, you are fighting hard to prevent people from being deported; now you are fighting to have them deported."

Retorted the lawyer: "We are simply enforcing the law. If a person is deportable, we want you to deport them. If the person is not deportable, you should not deport them and we'll work hard to prevent their deportation."

(ATTY. TIPON has a Master of Laws degree from Yale Law School and a Bachelor of Laws degree from the University of the Philippines Office, 800 Berkel St., Suite 402, Honolulu, HI 96813. Tel. (808) 225-2645. E-Mail: fil-anlaw@yahoo.com. Websites: www.MilitaryandCriminalLaw.com, andwww.ImmigrationServicesUSA.com. Listen to the most witty, interesting, and informative radio program in Hawaii on KNDI at 1270 AM dial every Thursday at 7:30 a.m., retranscast at www.luko.com.)

There appears to be a double standard practiced by immigration authorities when it comes to deporting a husband or wife. When a U.S. citizen or LPR wife complains to immigration authorities that her alien husband did not fulfill his marital vows, immigration acts rather quickly to place the husband in deportation. But when it is the USC or LPR husband who complains that his alien wife did not fulfill her marital vows, immigration acts very slowly, if at all.

### ALIEN HUSBAND ARRIVES IN U.S. BUT GOES TO RELATIVES' HOME

Take the case of Ilocano parents who wanted to have their daughter, an unwed mother of

## PHILIPPINE NEWS

### DILG Chief Orders Nationwide Anti-Dengue Drive

by Angelo L. Gutierrez  
Wednesday, August 17, 2011

MANILA, Philippines - Department of Interior and Local Government (DILG) Secretary Jesse Robredo today ordered a nationwide cleanup drive amid the

increasing number of dengue cases around the country.

Robredo ordered local executives -- from governor down to barangay chairmen -- and local health officers to conduct search and destroy operations in all potential breeding places of

dengue-carrying mosquitoes.

In his directive, the interior chief said the cleanup activities should include the dredging of clogged canals, creeks, and other waterways in the local officials' areas of jurisdiction.

The local officials were also ordered to trim bushes or tree branches, remove or drain receptacles containing stagnant water and conduct massive information drive on environmental control of breedings sites, especially in areas that have been identified as dengue hotspots.

The DILG said that Robredo ordered the nationwide cleanup drive following a report released by the Department of Health (DOH) on the number of dengue cases recorded around the country since January 1 to July 23.

The DOH said that a total of 38,876 cases have been recorded nationwide, including 250 deaths. The department, however, clarified that the number of dengue recorded from January to July was lower compared to last year's 52,428.

Robredo said in his directive that local chief executives

should order cleanup operations for two consecutive weekends - August 20 and 21 and August 27 and 28.

He stressed the need for coordinated efforts among all concerned government agencies and local government units to lessen the prevalence of the mosquito-borne disease in all parts of the country.

Meanwhile, Robredo ordered members of the DILG's regional management coordinating committee to participate in the anti-dengue drive and make sure that local government units will abide by the directive. (www.philstar.com)

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# Ilocos: Land of Bagnet & So Much More

FOOD FOR THOUGHT by Millie & Karla Reyes

**M**

ILLIE: My mom, Imelda Albano Reyes, is a GI. No, not the GI in military parlance but a “genuine Ilocana,” as my Dad was fond of calling her. Upon the invitation of our gracious host, Governor Imee Marcos, Karla and I suddenly found ourselves in Laog, Ilocos Norte, for four days and it was our most exciting trip in recent months! Karla and I thought it was just going to be a working visit but it turned out to be a virtual food trip, and Gov. Imee made it so thrilling and educational for us in so many ways: food-wise, tourism-wise and otherwise. We were blessed with good weather all throughout our stay in Laog and were billeted at the Plaza del Norte Hotel and Convention Center.

**KARLA:** Ever since I was a kid, I’ve always wanted to go to Ilocos, maybe because it stuck in my head that my *lola* was from there. Every time my *lola* would look for my *lola*, he would refer to her as “Ilocana.” So when Gov. Imee invited us to check out the Plaza del Norte Hotel and Convention Center, we immediately moved our schedules around to be able to accommodate the trip. Arranging the trip was no trouble at all since Philippine Airlines has flights to and from Ilocos once a day. Mom and I decided to take the plane because the bus ride would have been nine hours. It was my first trip to the province

of Ilocos Norte because I had never gone further than Baguio up north. Mom said we might have time to check out the beach so I also didn’t know what to expect; I brought so much stuff. I brought casual wear, evening clothes and my beach bundle, including a whole bag full of sunblock, after-sun spray, goggles, etc.

The whole trip was more of a gastronomical adventure rather than work time. On our first full day, we started off with breakfast at the hotel before heading out to the city. Given the choice between a continental or Filipino breakfast, naturally we both ordered Ilocos *longganisa* with garlic fried rice and sunny-side-up egg. After a little sight-seeing, Gov. Imee and Mark Chua met us for lunch at Herencia Café in Paoy, which sits opposite the St. Augustine Church. While going through the menu, I was taken by surprise as I read “pinakbet pizza” and “crispy *dinuguan*.” Herencia Café is known as the innovator of the *pinakbet* pizza served with Ilocos *bagoong* — which was like liquid anchovies — and the *crispy dinuguan* sauce over crunchy fried *bagnet*. Yum! If *lolo* were with us, he would have definitely enjoyed the *dinuguan* and would have looked for some *puto* to go with it. We also tried the *chicharon* with KBL — *kamatis*, *bagoong* and *lasuna* (onion) — which was *bagnet* all over again.

Herencia is not a fancy place; it’s a homey café with capiz windows and *batbot* chairs. For sale at the counter are homemade taro chips and bottled sweet sorghum vinegar. Instead of dessert, Tita Imee bought *super-sarap* thinly sliced banana chips that she, Mom and I devoured. As we were



Bagnet, or crunchy pork bits with KBL —kamatis (tomato), bagoong and lasuna(onions) — is a classic Ilocano dish

lunching I learned from Tita Imee that *ukoy* was an Ilocano invention. I learned, too, that *chicha-corn* was invented in Ilocos and the original brand is named Nana Rosa. Tita Imee had a bag bought for us to try. Mom kept popping it into her mouth and the next day could not walk and I think it was a bout of arthritis. Haha!

Mark toured us around the famous Paoy church, the *Malacañan Ti Antanan* and Paoy Lake, the Marcos Museum in Batac, and Museo Ilocos Norte near the Capitol. We stopped to have a bite of the famous Ilocos *empanada*, whose crust is made from rice flour with *achute*, giving it an orange color. The filling is made with Ilocos *longganisa*, monggo sprouts and chopped egg and is best eaten with black vinegar.

Right after that, we dropped by Saramsam, a local café in the heart of Laog, to try their *kaiti* or Ilocano fondue, which consists of fresh banana and kamote chunks dipped in melted *panocha* with *bilo-bilo*.

**MILLIE:** The succeeding days found us going further north. We stopped by Cape Bodejador to see the famous 19th-century lighthouse established during Spanish colonial times and climbed about a hundred steps to enjoy the breathtaking view from the top. We then visited the giant windmills of Bangui that provide an alternative source of energy for 40 percent of the province.

As we took pictures of the 15 wind turbines installed along

the shore of Bangui Bay, we posed for jump shots and enjoyed the breeze. From there we found ourselves in Pagudpud, at the tip of the island of northern Luzon, in a hidden cove at a beautiful beach called Blue Lagoon, where the water is a refreshing light blue green. As we stopped for a photo op, Karla, beach bum that she is, could not resist rolling up her pants to wash and I quickly followed!

**KARLA:** After Pagudpud, we had a late lunch at Berg Blick, owned by German chef Detlev Cotte and Pinay wife Marithes, who originally hails from Boni in Mandaluyog. Their cute love story began when they both met in the Maldives, where Detlev worked as a chef and Marithes was a computer engineer. They lived in Munich for 11 years, and have two kids. They came to the Philippines, visited Ilocos and fell in love with the place, opened the restaurant in Pagudpud in October 2010 and are here to stay.

We ordered *pinakbet* ravioli and classic *bagnet*. They also had other *bagnet* variations like lemon-pepper, garlic-chili, sesame, and barbecue. We would have tried them all but figured we’d be eating too much *bagnet* and it was only our third day there. We also ordered an assortment of Ilocano items presented to us in a wheelbarrow, which was very cute. I almost took it home with me.

Last stop before heading back to the hotel was the Pasuquin bakery, which sells the famous *biscocho* and Ilocano *bacuta*.

The next day, we went to the fishing town of Currímao and saw the quaint and beautiful Ilocano houses of Dr. Joven Cuang, one of my *Lola Melody*’s doctors, which were uprooted piece by piece and put together.

The resort had a beachfront but the waves were high and the sea was rough that day. We also checked out a new Balinese-inspired beach resort called Playa Tropical owned by my friend and tennis mate from DLSU, Toni Carag, who also happens to be the tourism officer of Ilocos Norte.

The next stop was the impressive Juan Luna Shrine in Badoc, where reproductions of some of the national artist’s fabulous masterpieces were on display. It made me realize that despite the two whole days we spent going around Ilocos Norte, there still are many more things on my list to see and eat.

**MILLIE:** We had a late lunch with Lily Palafox at La Preciosa, where we finally tried the popular *poqui-poqui* made from tomato, onions, eggplant and egg, which I truly enjoyed eating. It was simple, refreshing and healthy. I can eat it with fried fish or shrimps. I remembered my late mom as we ate typical, simple Ilocano fare of *inabraw* (*dinengdeng*), a soupy dish made with garlic, onion, tomatoes, eggplant, jute leaves and bagoong. We also got to try another Ilocano dish called *imbaklat*, which is stir-fried beef, ginger and onions spiced with fresh peppercorns, hot chili or sukang Iloko. *Adobo* addicts that we are, we ordered the specialty dish of the house, chicken *adobo* cooked with potatoes. Karla’s friends Toni Carag and Kenji Numano joined us for coffee and dessert of carrot cake, a La Preciosa bestseller.

After lunch, we were set to return to our hotel to finish packing but first decided to stop by the San Nicolas market to buy *bagnet* and Ilocos *longganisa* to take home. The next problem was how to pack the goodies and manage the excess weight! Hahaha!

We had a couple of hours before departure and decided to go see the sand dunes as Karla was nagging me since the day we arrived, wanting to try to go sand-boarding or drive a 4x4 along the rugged, desert-like landscape. This National Geographic monument was just awesome and it stretches from Currímao to Pasuquin!

Karla and I were both happy to have made the whirlwind Ilocandia trip and know that we will be back sometime. We are proud of our roots!

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



Author Millie Reyes with Gov. Imee Marcos and Mark Chua

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## SUMMER TRAVEL

## On Our Bucket List: Machu Picchu

by Vicki Belo

**M**ANILA, Philippines - Twenty years ago I read a book written by Shirley MacLaine called *Out On A Limb* which led me to add the UNESCO World Heritage site Machu Picchu to the Top 3 of my bucket list. She described this magical place on top of the Andes Mountains that was so beautiful and overflowing with positive spiritual energy. She even spoke about how UFO sightings were so common that the locals thought them ordinary. When I first met Hayden six years ago, I was thrilled when he said that one of his dreams was also to visit Machu Picchu. "Ka-ching! Soulmate!" I rejoiced.

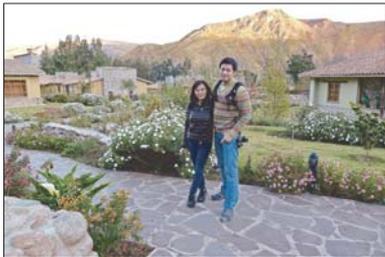
Luckily, Audrey Puckett Chiu told me about Choy Urra of the "Global Nomad" who was a Hong Kong-based Filipino "travel designer" and specialized in one-of-a-kind custom-made tours that created memories to last a lifetime.

Choy advised me that the

quickest and easiest way to get to Machu Picchu was to go to Los Angeles and then take a nine-hour flight to Lima, the capital city of Peru. We spent one day there, exploring the colonial city and visiting the Larco Museum to appreciate the evolution of Peruvian art and culture. The highlight of our Lima tour was having cocktails at the Casa Aliaga, which is perhaps the oldest colonial mansion in the whole of South America. It was like stepping back in time 500 years. It has been owned by descendants of Jeronimo de Aliaga, one of Francisco Pizarro's right-hand men for 17 generations. I have never tasted such delicious foie gras, which perfectly matched Peru's favorite drink, the "Pisco sour."

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Kept warm in their Peruvian alpaca wool sweaters, Vicki and Hayden KHo smell the flowers at Hotel Sol y Luna in Cusco

Los Angeles and then take a nine-hour flight to Lima, the capital city of Peru. We spent one day there, exploring the colonial city and visiting the Larco Museum to appreciate the evolution of Peruvian art and culture. The highlight of our Lima tour was having cocktails at the Casa Aliaga, which is perhaps the oldest colonial mansion in the whole of South America. It was like stepping back in time 500 years. It has been owned by descendants of Jeronimo de Aliaga, one of Francisco Pizarro's right-hand men for 17

generations. I have never tasted such delicious foie gras, which perfectly matched Peru's favorite drink, the "Pisco sour."

The next day Hayden and I took a 90-minute plane ride to Cusco. From there our personal tour guide Francis Casapino drove us to the sacred Urubamba Valley. It was fun because we visited a llama and alpaca farm where we got to play with them. We were also able to buy some gorgeous sweaters made from their wool, including that of the vicuña, which is known to be the world's finest wool. Actually, the

real reason we had to stay in the Urubamba Valley is to get acclimated to the higher altitude. As you know, in high altitudes the oxygen in the air is much less concentrated and people tend to get dizzy, feel nauseated or faint if they're not given time to adjust.

The next day we took the famous Hiram Bingham train, which took us to the Machu Picchu Pueblo in the village of Aguas Calientes. This train is run by the Orient Express and is quite luxurious, with little chandeliers, a private bar and dining carriages. At the train station we were entertained by local dancers wearing colorful costumes. Upon arrival in Aguas Calientes we had to ride a public bus, which was the only way to reach the entrance to the ruins. Machu Picchu is often referred to as the "Lost City on the Incas." It was only discovered 100 years ago by Yale archaeologist Hiram Bingham, although the site was already in existence for 600 years. It is 7,972 feet above sea level. Most authorities agree that this was the royal es-

(continued on page 10)



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**SUMMER TRAVEL** *(from page 9, ON OUR BUCKET...)*

tate of Pachacuti, the great Incan who started the expansion of the huge empire.

Going up this very steep mountain left me breathless and gasping for air. We had to hike up huge rocks to reach many of the important sites and, at one point, Hayden had to carry me (but only for 20 seconds because he started panting as well). The weather was cool, but the sun was scorching hot. Thank God I brought lots of Belo Sun-block. Both Hayden and I were awed by how the Incas were able to build this magnificent sanctuary on top of this mountain, since they lacked any modern tools. The Incas, it turns out, were superb engineers and architects. Everything was well thought-out, from the water channels to the stones placed with perfect precision. It has survived 600 years of torrential rains and mudslides.

After spending hours exploring the Machu, we were dog-tired, so we returned to Aguas Calientes. I was getting apprehensive as we walked along dusty, dirt roads, imagining that our hotel would be ugly. At the end of this dirt road, though, there was a rope bridge; and suddenly, we were confronted by what seemed to be a beautiful oasis: the Incatero Hotel. This hotel is a bird sanctuary and has 370 varieties of indigenous orchids grown here.



You have to take 11,000 steps to reach the peak of this World Heritage Site which Shirley MacLaine described as magical, overflowing with so much positive energy.

Each casita was well appointed with comfortable beds, 600-thread-count sheets and an indoor and outdoor shower. We spent two days exploring the fascinating Machu Picchu town.

Our last stop was the town of Cusco. Most of Cusco looks like Intramuros so the highlight of our stay was staying at our breathtaking hotel, the Hotel Casona. It fused Incan and modern architecture in perfect harmony. We also had a session with a real shaman named Lucas. He read our fortunes using coca leaves, which he also made us chew so we could connect better. While he was pretty accurate, I felt dizzy and my mouth was numb from the coca leaves. No wonder, Cocaine is derived from coca leaves. The next day we flew back to Lima and on to Los Angeles. I did not get to see any UFOs or buy any designer bags or shoes. Instead, I learned so much about the Incan culture and met some of the kindest and most hospitable people in the world. ([www.philstar.com](http://www.philstar.com))

**PHILIPPINE NEWS**

**Nearly 5,000 Metro Workers  
 Lost Jobs in Q1**

by **Mayen Jaymalin**  
**Monday, August 15, 2011**



more than 3,000 workers in the country.

Employers also claimed financial losses and lack of market as among the factors that forced them to lay off workers or close down their firms.

**M**ANILA, Philippines - Nearly 5,000 workers in Metro Manila lost their jobs following the closure of various commercial establishments in the National Capital Region, according to the Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE).

Records from the DOLE-Bureau of Labor and Employment Statistics (BLES) showed that a total of 4,925 workers or a daily average of 55 workers were laid off in the first quarter of the year.

Based on DOLE data, Metro Manila accounted for the biggest number of displaced workers after various commercial establishments shut down nationwide.

A total of 457 companies nationwide closed down in the first three months of the year, affecting a total of 6,250 workers.

Other regions that reported high number of laid off workers were Central Luzon with 695 and Central Visayas with 346.

The top reason cited for retrenchment and closures of establishments was downsizing, which led to the displacement of

Labor officials, however, stressed that the number of company closures and retrenched workers due to economic difficulty was lower than the past years.

In 2009, DOLE reported a total of 61,360 workers laid off following the closures of 2,522 commercial firms nationwide. Around the same number of firms also folded up last year, but only 36,583 workers were displaced.

Earlier, Labor Secretary Rosalinda Baldoz expressed confidence that the prevailing economic crisis in the United States would not result in massive layoff of Filipino workers.

Baldoz said the department is closely monitoring export companies, particularly those in the US as major market so that immediate necessary measures could be put in place to avoid displacement of workers. ([www.philstar.com](http://www.philstar.com))

## PHILIPPINE NEWS

**'Cha-Cha Not Ready for Prime Time'**

by Aurea Calica  
Wednesday, August 17, 2011

**M**ANILA. Philippines - President Aquino reiterated yesterday that amending the Constitution was not among the priorities of his administration.

Aquino said any move to amend the Constitution "is not yet prime time" even if there are mounting calls to change the economic provisions of the Charter.

"We just tackled that on a peripheral basis, on the slight discussions on the economic provisions in the Constitution. That is not yet ready for prime-time, we still have to discuss the particular details," Aquino told reporters in a press briefing after the Legislative-Executive Development Advisory Council (LEDAC) meeting at Malacañang.

Senate President Juan Ponce Enrile and Speaker Feliciano Belmonte attended the LEDAC meeting yesterday with Aquino to map out the legislative agenda of the administration.

Enrile and Belmonte earlier

discussed how the Senate and the House of Representatives could come up with a harmonized approach to introducing amendments to the economic provisions of the Constitution.

Belmonte said Enrile shared the view that voting on the measure to introduce amendments to the Constitution should be done separately by the two legislative chambers.

Charter change advocates led by Misamis Occidental Rep. Loreto Leo Ocampos, chairman of the House committee on constitutional amendments, said the Philippines could easily triple the inflow of foreign direct investment to at least \$8 billion annually in just a few years by doing away with the restrictive economic provisions in the Constitution.

Gabriela party-list Rep. Luzviminda Ilagan, however, warned lifting the restrictive economic provisions in the 1987 Constitution would not necessarily lead to economic growth.

"Let us not be fooled by Cha-cha's promise of investment. Our experience shows that foreign direct investments



President Aquino, Senate President Juan Ponce Enrile and Speaker Feliciano Belmonte Jr. answer questions from reporters following a meeting of the Legislative-Executive Development Advisory Council at Malacañang

have not resulted in employment, poverty alleviation and economic growth," Ilagan said.

She said that while direct investments grew by an average of 7.8 percent from 2004 to 2009 "this increase in investments did not translate to economic growth nor did this trickle down to the majority of our population."

"It would be foolish to think that amending the economic provisions of our Constitution to bring in more foreign investors would be a panacea to our ailing economy. Instead, let us pour our efforts towards strengthening support for agriculture and

building local industries," she said.

House Majority Leader and Mandaluyong Rep. Neptali Gonzales said the House committee led by Ocampos would focus only on the economic provisions of the Constitution.

Gonzales said the House would likely propose the amendments through simple legislation.

Ocampos said the committee is set to resume hearings next week on the various proposals, particularly on relaxing the restrictions on foreign ownership of business in the Philippines.

He said the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the Asian Development Bank (ADB) have pointed out the need for the Philippines to raise its investment rate for its growth to be sustainable.

Ang Kasangang sa Kaunlaran party-list Rep. Teodorico Haresco, vice chairman of the House committee on small business and entrepreneurship development, said many sectors are in favor of reforming the economic provisions of the Constitution.

Haresco claimed as much \$50 billion in investments could easily come out in if the constitutional provisions on foreign ownership are lifted.

Haresco argued the world economy is practically borderless and that a restrictive Constitution would block foreign investments and divert them to more receptive economies. "Global giants have many choices for their investments and restrictive national laws would spell economic stagnation for us," he said.

Haresco said the success of the Aquino administration's Public Private Partnership (PPP) program hinges on reforms in the Constitution. ([www.philstar.com](http://www.philstar.com))

**House to Flush Out 'Ghosts' in AFP, PNP**

by Jess Diaz  
Wednesday, August 17, 2011

**M**ANILA. Philippines - The House of Representatives will try to flush out "ghost" soldiers through special provisions in the proposed P1.8-trillion 2012 national budget.

Cebu City Rep. Tomas Osmeña, who heads an appropriations subcommittee, said he would recommend certain safeguards in the budget to make sure that billions in funds for salaries are received only by "warm bodies" in the military and are not pocketed by corrupt officers and civilian personnel.

Osmeña's subcommittee is in charge of the combined budget of the Department of National Defense, the general headquarters of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) and its three major commands.

Osmeña said one special provision he intends to recommend would require all soldiers to register themselves as voters through the biometrics system of

the Commission on Elections.

He said a voter's ID would be one of the documents a soldier would need before he can claim his salary.

As a complementary measure, he said he would suggest that all military payrolls be handled by the Land Bank of the Philippines, which would be required to ensure that all salary claimants are legitimate soldiers.

"With these safeguards, the military would have to convert those ghost soldiers into flesh and blood," he said.

Some appropriations committee members suggested that the planned safeguards should also be put in place in the Philippine National Police (PNP), where there are also "ghost" policemen and other personnel, and whose staffing size is almost the same as the AFP.

The two internal and external security agencies are believed to have combined personnel of between 240,000 and 260,000.

According to former AFP budget officer George Rabusa, at least 20 percent of the personnel

staffing of the military is not filled with warm bodies.

He alleged that the funds for these unfilled positions are "converted" into cash and shared by high-ranking AFP officers and used as "pabaon (sendoff gift)" and "pasalubong (welcome gift)" for outgoing and incoming chiefs of staff.

Rabusa has accused former chiefs of staff of receiving millions of pesos in send-off money. He has filed plunder charges against them.

Osmeña revealed his plans to plug loopholes in the use of AFP funds in the course of a House budget hearing on the proposed 2012 budget of the Commission on Audit (COA).

Rep. Neri Colmenares of the party-list group Bayan Muna asked COA officials if they are auditing the staffing pattern of the AFP down to the last foot soldier, and if they have an actual count of military personnel.

COA officials informed him that every time they seek a listing of soldiers from the AFP, they are told that the document is

"classified and secret."

They added that they don't know whether the billions in funds for soldiers' salaries they found in audit are actually paid to warm bodies.

COA officials also said though

they have lifted the pre-audit of transactions in most government offices, they want the AFP and the PNP to keep the system.

"It is military and the PNP where we found internal controls to be weak," COA Chairperson Grace Pulito Tan said. ([www.philstar.com](http://www.philstar.com))



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## China, Philippines Pledge Closer Law Enforcement Cooperation

from [www.philstar.com](http://www.philstar.com)  
Tuesday, August 16, 2011

**B**ELING (Xinhua) - China and the Philippines on Tuesday agreed to seek stronger law enforcement cooperation ranging from fighting terrorism to combating drug-trafficking.

The agreement came out of the meeting between China's police chief Meng Jianzhu and Philippine Secretary of Justice Leila de Lima in Beijing on Tuesday afternoon.

Meng, state councilor and minister of public security, thanked the Philippines for helping Chinese police investigate cross-border telecommunications fraud earlier this year.

Over the years China and the Philippines have worked productively in law enforcement thanks to the mutual understanding and close coordination, Meng said.

Meng called on the two countries to work more closely in fighting cross-border crimes, repatriating

suspects, investigating into cases, improving law-enforcement capability, and protecting Chinese citizens and agencies in the Philippines.

Lima said the Philippine government takes its cooperation with China very seriously and would like to seek stronger bilateral and multilateral cooperation.

She highlighted the importance of deeper bilateral cooperation on anti-narcotics, anti-terrorism and combating economic crimes.

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

## Philippines Seeks to Strengthen Anti-Terror Law

from [www.philstar.com](http://www.philstar.com)  
Tuesday, August 16, 2011

**M**ANILA, Philippines (AP) — President Benigno Aquino III says his administration has asked legislators to strengthen an anti-terror law by easing safeguards against abuse that have deterred authorities from using it.

Aquino said Tuesday that one proposed amendment to the Human

Security Act would drastically reduce a \$11,700 (\$500,000) fine for each day the police or the military wrongfully detain a terror suspect.

Then-President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo signed the anti-terror law in 2007 to strengthen the Philippines' battle against al-Qaeda-linked militants.

The law was welcomed by Washington, but authorities have hardly used it, fearing the harsh penalties it provides to guard against abuses. ([www.philstar.com](http://www.philstar.com))

## OFW Families Urged Not to Hoard Dollars

by **Lawrence Agcaoili**  
Monday, August 15, 2011

**M**ANILA, Philippines - Bankers are urging beneficiaries of remittances from overseas Filipino workers (OFWs) not to accumulate US dollars as economic growth in the economic superpower is expected to crawl in the long term.

Bankers Association of the Philippines president Aurelio Montinola III, in an interview with reporters, advised the beneficiaries not to hold on to their dollars and instead exchange these to peso immediately.

"The most obvious (is) change, since the US is expected to experience a long-term low growth and long-term low interest rate. So if you exchange it (dollars) into pesos you'll get a higher interest rate and possibly appreciation of the peso," he stressed.

The peso has strengthened a little over three percent to 42.475 to \$1 the other day from 43.84 to \$1

last Dec. 31.

Montinola, who is also president and chief executive officer of Ayala-controlled Bank of the Philippine Islands (BPI), pointed out that it is not wise to hold on to other currencies.

"But many people, for many reasons, don't like to have everything only in one currency. Therefore, they keep it in other currency. I think for a practical point of view unless you'll be able to use the money yourself it's hard to have other currencies," he added.

Latest data from the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas (BSP) showed that the growth in OFW remittances picked up in May, expanding 6.9 percent and posting its fastest monthly growth since January amid the political tensions in the Middle East and North African (MENA) states, the disasters in Japan, and the recent decision of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to stop hiring domestic helpers from the Philippines.

The amount of money sent

home by Filipinos abroad to the Philippines reached \$1.688 billion in May or \$110 million higher than the \$1.578 billion booked in the same month last year.

The BSP said the 6.9 percent growth in OFW remittances in May was the fastest since January when the amount rose 7.6 percent while the amount was the second highest versus the record monthly remittance of \$1.694 billion recorded last December.

Remittances climbed 6.2 percent to \$7.898 billion in the first five months of the year from \$7.438 billion in the same period last year. Major sources of remittances from January to May were the US, Canada, Saudi Arabia, the United

Kingdom, Japan, Singapore, United Arab Emirates, Italy and Germany.

OFW remittances grew 8.2 percent to a record level \$18.76 billion last year from \$17.35 billion in 2009 due to the continued demand for skilled Filipino workers abroad as well as the expansion of remittance centers abroad giving OFWs more options to send money.

Last April, the BSP lowered its OFW remittance growth forecast to seven percent or \$20.1 billion instead of the original target of eight percent or \$20.2 billion this year due to the tensions in the MENA region and the disasters in Japan.

Next year, it expects a slower growth of five percent or \$21.2 billion.

## HK Firm to Invest \$30M in Bataan Freeport

from **Punto Central Luzon**  
Wednesday, August 17, 2011

**M**ARIVELES, Bataan - A Hong Kong firm on Wednesday signed a memorandum of agreement with the Freeport Area of Bataan (FAB) signaling the start of its operation here by the first quarter of 2012 with an initial investment of \$30-million.

Raymund Tan, president of Luen Thai International, said they will be operating in Bataan their fourth unit in the country under Luen Thai Group Philippines.

The publicly-listed company in Hong Kong will invest in fabric mill and garment-related factory in the former Bataan Economic Zone turned FAB that will create jobs for 6,000 workers.

He said that depending in the global market, he will increase investments in five years.

Luen Thai has been in the Philippines for 22 years with a unit

producing polo shirts in Pampanga, another unit manufacturing Adidas products in Cebu and another area manufacturing coat with combined manpower of more than 20,000 workers.

In Bataan, he is eyeing the production of a well-known polo brand like the one he wore in the MOU signing.

When asked why he chose Bataan and not establish in Cebu or Pampanga where he already has been operating for some time, Tan mentioned his strategy of diversifying focus. He said that each of his unit focuses on one particular customer.

"The company will not fight for the same workers and management team in the same way that workers will not be competing in one area," he said.

Adidas is one particular customer he meant. He said that to be successful, a firm has to partner with the right customer. "I chose my customer and I do not allow customer to choose me," he said.

"There is a need to manage

well, balance the market and to have incomes in yen, euro, dollar and other currencies to counter the weakening of the market because of the depreciation of the United States dollar," he added.

Tan admitted that the poor showing lately of the US. dollar is a global problem that affects many countries.

"But it opens new opportunity because when the American currency weakens, we will see China coming up and other Asian countries growing fast," he said.

Joes Villanueva, director general of the Technical Education Skills Development Administration, said that TESDA is ready to supply Luen Thai with skilled and competent workers.

The former party-list representative even announced that Pres. Benigno Aquino by text has sent congratulatory message to Bataan officials, FAB management while thanking Luen Thai.

Rep. Albert Garcia of Bataan's Second District said that FAB is the

(*continued on page 13*)

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## LEGAL NOTES



By Reuben S. Seguritan

# Entrepreneurs Now Have Faster Route to Green Card

a job offer and a labor certification from the Department of Labor.

An entrepreneur may qualify for EB-2 classification if he/she is a member of a profession holding an advanced degree or its foreign equivalent, and the underlying position requires, at a minimum, a member of a profession holding an advanced degree or its equivalent.

Another way that an entrepreneur may qualify is if he/she is an individual of exceptional ability in the sciences, arts or business. It must be demonstrated that the entrepreneur will substantially benefit the national economy, cultural or educational interests, or welfare of the United States. To establish exceptional ability, at least 3 of 6 criteria must be met, which include academic proof, employ-

ment letters showing at least 10 years of full-time experience in the occupation, a license or certification, and evidence of salary or remuneration that demonstrates exceptional ability.

In either case, there must be a U.S. employer filing the petition on the entrepreneur's behalf and which has received a labor certification. The entrepreneur must also meet all the specific job requirements listed on the labor certification.

The job offer and labor certification requirements may be waived if it's in the national interest to do so. Entrepreneurs may now obtain a National Interest Waiver (NIW) under EB-2 if they can demonstrate that their business endeavors will be in the interest of the United States. With a NIW, the entrepreneur may be able to file a pe-

tion for him/herself.

"National interest" for purposes of the waiver is not defined by statute or regulation. However, the threshold for eligibility for the waiver is determined by three criteria. First, the NIW applicant must seek employment in an area that has substantial intrinsic merit. The focus is on the area of activity and not the entrepreneur's qualifications.

Second, the waiver applicant must demonstrate that the proposed benefit will be national in scope. For example, according to the USCIS, the entrepreneur can demonstrate that his/her enterprise will also create or spin off jobs in other parts of the country, or that the jobs created locally will have a positive national impact.

Third, the waiver applicant must demonstrate that the national interest would be adversely affected if the position

sought by the applicant were made available to U.S. workers. In other words, the applicant must show a national benefit so great that it outweighs the national interest in protecting U.S. workers through the labor certification process. The entrepreneur may fulfill this by demonstrating that his/her business enterprise will create new jobs for U.S. workers.

Except for nationals of China and India, there is currently no visa backlog under the EB-2 preference category. With the substantial backlog in the EB-3 category, qualifying under the EB-2 category assures a considerably shorter waiting time for permanent resident status.

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

**T**he USCIS recently modified its policies to allow immigrant entrepreneurs to obtain a green card faster under the employment-based second preference (EB-2) category. This is one of several measures taken by the USCIS intended to help ensure that the United States "out-innovate and out-compete" the world in today's global economy.

The USCIS clarified that an entrepreneur may qualify under EB-2 if he/she fulfills existing requirements as an advanced degree professional or individual of exceptional ability, and meets the requirements which include

## PHILIPPINE NEWS

## 'Arroyo's Condition Not Critical'

by Jun Pasaylo  
Wednesday, August 17, 2011

**M**ANILA, Philippines - Former president Gloria Macapagal Arroyo's doctors today denied rumors that she is in critical condition and needs to seek medication abroad, as reportedly claimed by her lawyer Raul Lambino.

"She is not normal in the sense that she has a halo vest (neck brace). We are stabilizing her with some nutrition, but she's not in a serious condition," Dr. Juliet Cervantes, Mrs. Arroyo's main physician, told reporters outside St. Luke's Medical Center-Global City.

Dr. Brian Cabral, head of the hospital's Renal Diseases and Transplant Services, said that Mrs. Arroyo can already walk, eat and do regular activities.

"She is doing very well... Very stable," Cabral told reporters, allaying rumors that the former President's health is already deteriorating.

(from page 12, HK...)

most strategic location for investments being nearest to Manila.

The Bataan Freeport, the congressman said, offers generous incentives, has ready facilities already existing, has highly-reliable manpower and has deep harbor that will complement the seaport in Subic Bay Metropolitan

There were also rumors that she has gone into coma.

Cervantes, meanwhile, said that Mrs. Arroyo remains confined in the hospital's Critical Care Unit and only her immediate family members are allowed to visit her.

She said they are now preparing the former president for a third cervical surgery, which may take place early next week.

She explained that the third surgery is taking place earlier than they initially announced because they have already resolved the infection that developed after her first operation.

The infection was discovered after Mrs. Arroyo's second operation, where her doctors tried to fix the dislodged implant.

During the press briefing, Cervantes said that they have found out that Mrs. Arroyo's implant was dislodged because her bones had poor quality caused by hypoparathyroidism.

She explained that because of

Authority and airport in Clark, Angeles City.

As add-on advantage, the young Garcia said that Bataan will soon have the cheapest power with the operation of GN Power, a Chinese firm, in Mariveles.

The Bataan lawmaker is the principal author in the House of Representatives in the creation of

Mrs. Arroyo's bones are poor in quality, the screws placed on her affected cervical bone loosened.

"It contributed to the problem, poor quality of bone. We are now in a situation where we are supplying all the necessary materials or ingredients that are needed to have stable, strong bones," Cervantes said.

She said that after the second operation, they found out that Mrs. Arroyo is suffering from a deficiency in calcium, caused by hypoparathyroidism.

Cervantes said that during the third surgery, a titanium mesh that contains bone graft will be inserted through Mrs. Arroyo's throat. She said that they intend to reinforce the titanium plates attached to the former president's cervical bones during the first surgery.

Meanwhile, the doctor said that she and the other doctors in St. Luke's who are treating Mrs. Arroyo did not advise her to seek medication abroad.

The Area of the Freeport Authority in Bataan (AFAB). He is chairman of the House Committee on Trade and Industry.

For his part, Gov. Enrique Garcia announced that they will be building a temporary port since AFAB is still preparing a master plan for a permanent port facility. ([www.philstar.com](http://www.philstar.com))



File photo of former President-now-Congresswoman, Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo wearing a neck brace

She also denied that no one from their group talked to Lambino.

"We never had a chance to talk with Atty. Lambino. I don't know who among her doctors said that she

has to go abroad. That never came from us," Cervantes said.

She added: "We did not recommend her flying to other countries for the problem." ([www.philstar.com](http://www.philstar.com))

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## MAINLAND NEWS

## Bill to Revive Phil Textile Industry Gains Support in US Congress

by Jose Katigbak  
Monday, August 15, 2011

WASHINGTON — Support for Save Our Industries act among US legislators is growing and the measure, which seeks to allow Philippine-made apparel using US fabrics to enter the United States duty free, could be taken up by the US Congress in the coming months, said Philippine ambassador to Washington Jose Cuisia.

In a message to the Filipino-American community, Cuisia said he had been informed the SAVE Act could be taken up as part of a trade package in the current 112th Congress, as soon as legislation was concluded on pending US free trade agreements with Colombia, Panama and South Korea.

"It is crucial that Filipino-Americans be heard by the US Congress in the coming months to ensure SAVE's passage this year,"

he said.

Cuisia said this would be the first bilateral trade arrangement between the two countries in nearly four decades.

For the United States, SAVE Act would expand US export of fabrics to the Philippines, from \$11 million to up to \$500 million annually within 3-5 years of implementation, and save or create some 3,000 jobs in the US textile industry.

Times." The issue contained an article on the Baguio Lions members who organized "Eye Run" which raised funds for the city's visually impaired children. The event, which was held on October 24, 2010, drew an estimated 700 runners.

Some 20 blind children were also allowed to participate in the fun run. They were guided by Lions members and college students along a 400-meter stretch of Lake Drive near Burnham Park in Baguio. Many spectators and participants cheered as 6-year-old Paulene Navalta—the poster girl for the 3K race—and her father crossed the finish line.

Proceeds raised hit the P40,000 mark and were given to the Northern Luzon Association for the Blind and the local Red Cross chapter. (Good News Philippines)



"For the Philippines, it would restore hundreds of thousands of apparel manufacturing jobs, and over \$1 billion of Philippine apparel exports to the US lost since the lifting of the US apparel import quotas and the resulting dominance of China in the US market," Cuisia added.

Supporters of the SAVE Act include Democratic senators Harry Reid, Daniel Akakas and Daniel Inouye and Republican Sen. Roy Blunt and Representatives Charles Rangel and Peter King, both of New York and Ohio Republican Steve Austria, the first, first-generation Filipino to be elected to the United States Congress.

No less than President Aquino himself during a visit to New York last year to attend the UN General Assembly asked all Filipinos in the United States to actively support the SAVE Act to bail out the dying textile industry in the Philippines. (www.philstar.com)

## Baguio Wins Lions Intl Award in Seattle

The Baguio City Lions Club received the Beacon Award for Outstanding Service last month at 94th Lions Club International Convention in Seattle, Washington.



those who founded the club," he says. "The award recognizes team and community work, including the residents of Baguio."

Lions International has over 1.4 million members and 45,000 clubs located in 206 countries. President Sid Scruggs III presented the award to Baguio Lions members, just after a roving speech by U.S. multi-billionaire and philanthropist Bill Gates.

Baguio also received an award for the best newsletter with its March 2011 issue of "The Roaring

Baguio's "Eye Run Coz I Care" was ruled the best service project for the blind or visually-impaired. Baguio Lions president Moody Imayaho describes the award as "overwhelming."

"It was an awesome confirmation of the power of the collective work of our members and supporters and of the vision of

## GLOBAL NEWS

### Govt Not Contemplating Deployment Ban to UK

Despite the continuing riots and looting in the United Kingdom, the Philippine government still sees no reason of imposing a deployment ban of Filipino workers there, according to the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA).

DFA spokesman Raul Hernandez said that the Philippine embassy in London is closely monitoring the situation and so far has not made any recommendation for a possible deployment ban. He reminded Filipinos in London to avoid commercial districts.

In a radio program interview, Hernandez assured the public that the Philippine embassy in London has existing contingency plans in case the need arises to relocate Filipinos. He added that the embassy is coordinating with the UK Met-

ropolitan Police and Diplomatic Protection Group in London.

There are currently 250,000 to 300,000 Filipinos in the United Kingdom, mostly in Greater London, records from the DFA showed, but data on specific locations of OFWs are not readily available. Most Filipinos there work as nurses and professionals in hotels, as well as caregivers and domestic helpers.

Reports said that hooded youths set buildings and cars on fire, as well as destroyed public properties during the recent riots and looting.

The incidence is considered to be Britain's worst unrest in a decade. Violence erupted in London's northern Tottenham district when a peaceful protest over the shooting of a suspect that resulted to outbreaks. (OFW Journalism Consortium)

### APEC Forestry Ministers to Meet in Beijing

BEIJING (Xinhua) — The first forestry ministerial meeting of Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) nations will be held in Beijing during Sept. 6 to 8, according to the State Forestry Administration of China.

As a major campaign of the Asian-Pacific region to participate in the "2011 International Year of Forests," the meeting will touch upon the meaning and challenges of the sustainable forestry development to boost regional economy.

Forestry ministers from 21 APEC economies and representatives of international organizations including the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization will attend the meeting and exchange experiences to cope with the global climate change.

The meeting will publish a "Beijing Forestry Declaration" to highlight the willingness of all parties to propel green growth for economic and social development. (www.philstar.com)

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## COMMUNITY CALENDAR

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Restaurant • For details call Maggie  
Domingo @ 841-2841

**ILOCOS SURIAN ASSOCIATION OF HAWAII,  
DINNER AWARDS AND FUNDRAISING/  
SATURDAY**  
August 27, 2011 • Coral Ballroom, Hilton  
Hawaiian Village • Contact: Danny Vil-  
laruz @ 778-0233 or Maria Etrata @ 392-  
2962

**ANNAK TI BATAK INTERNATIONAL QUEEN  
OF QUEENS CORONATION BALL / SUNDAY**  
September 18, 2011, 6pm • Pacific  
Beach Hotel • Contact: Dolores Ortal -  
422-1667

**VINTAR NATIONAL HIGH SCHOOL ALUMNI  
GLOBAL NETWORK, REUNION & REAFFIR-  
MATION OF OFFICERS / SATURDAY**  
September 24, 2011, 6pm • Hibiscus  
Room, Ala Moana Hotel • Call Gloricia  
Agraan @ 676-1567 or 671-7774

**63RD ANNIVERSARY OF UNITED VISAYAN  
COMMUNITY OF HAWAII / SATURDAY**  
August 20, 2011 • Club House @ 94-  
833 Awane'i St., Waipahu • Contact:  
George Carpenter, 554-0495

**60TH ANNIVERSARY AND 40TH ANNUAL  
MARIA CLARA BALL / SATURDAY**  
September 10, 2011, 6pm • Ala Moana  
Hotel • For details call Cecilia Villafuerte  
@ 778-4985

## GLOBAL NEWS

# 17,000 Pinoys Face Evacuation from Syria

by Aurea Calica  
Wednesday, August 17, 2011

**M**ANILA, Philippines - Malacañang yesterday said it is preparing for the repatriation of about 17,000 overseas Filipino workers (OFWs) in Syria after tension escalated in the troubled Middle Eastern nation.

President Aquino said the evacuation of Filipinos in Syria was underway but it was unfortunate that only a few responded to the government's call to leave due to the deteriorating human rights situation in the region.

Labor Undersecretary Danilo Cruz said the Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE) would automatically impose a total ban in deployment of Filipino workers since the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) raised the alert level in Syria to 3.

The President, speaking in a press briefing after the Legislative-Executive Development Advisory Council meeting at the Palace yesterday, said Foreign Affairs Secretary Albert del Rosario informed him that the alert level was raised to 3 in the entire Syria instead of just three cities.

"There is already a quick response team already deployed, I don't remember exactly since when but same with Libya, there is a quick response team (deployed there) also. There are contingency plans that are actually being implemented already, among them, of course, getting the necessary vehicles to move them out," Aquino said.

The President told reporters that the government was looking at the Syrian situation "very intensely" because most of the Filipinos there were domestic helpers.

"There are something like 17,000 of our compatriots there and 95 percent of them are domestic helpers so the assumption is they are not, it appears, that they don't possess the ability as readily as professionals to take care of themselves," Aquino said.

"Unfortunately, as I understood it, only a few accepted our offer to repatriate them from the beginning so I assume that most of the 17,000 (Filipinos) are still there," he said.

Aquino said the government would take other necessary steps to ensure that Filipinos would be taken care of in Syria.

The Philippines will not cut political

and economic relations with Syria but the government has expressed concern over the 17,000 Filipinos who might be affected by the unrest in that Arab country.

US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton urged countries still buying oil and gas from Syria and those sending weapons and giving political and economic support to Syrian President Bashar al-Assad or who "give him comfort in his brutality" to get on the right side of history.

Clinton made the call to put more pressure on al-Assad's regime to stop the crackdown on protesters.

Presidential spokesman Edwin Lacorada said Malacañang was calling for a peaceful resolution to the crisis but "we are not (cutting off ties with Syria)."

### DFA: TIME TO LEAVE IS NOW

Labor Undersecretary Cruz said they have just received an official notice from the DFA "so we would convene the governing board of the Philippine Overseas Employment Administration (POEA) for the issuance of the order imposing a deployment ban."

Cruz said that under the law, the POEA board is required to convene and approve the issuance of a resolution to terminate or impose a deployment ban.

"We are definitely complying with the rules of automatic ban upon raising of alert level 3 although we are convening the board to formalize the order," he said.

He said as soon as the ban is imposed, all Filipino workers, including those returning to their old employers, would no longer be allowed to leave the country and seek employment in Syria.

Before DFA raised the alert, the POEA has ceased the processing of new hires and only allowed the deployment of returning workers to Syria.

Cruz, however, clarified that at the moment only three areas in Syria - Homs, Latakia and Daraa - are severely affected by the ongoing hostilities.

He said there are more than 3,800 OFWs currently employed in the three places in Syria; majority of them are domestic helpers.

Most of those Filipinos there are still reluctant to leave Syria as they insisted that the hostilities were isolated in three areas.

Del Rosario said he has directed the Philippine Embassy in Damascus to intensify its efforts to reach out to Filipinos and convince them that "now is the time

to leave."

"In view of the escalating violence in Syria, the DFA will be raising alert level 3 for the entire country of Syria, effective today," he said.

"Under alert level 3 (voluntary repatriation), all Filipinos working and residing in Syria are enjoined to leave Syria and the Philippine government will provide for the repatriation cost," he said.

Cruz said a report from a special team sent to assess the situation in Syria last Saturday showed that the situation in Damascus remained to be normal.

Citing a report from the Philippine Overseas Labor Office in Syria, Cruz said only four OFWs have already expressed their desire to be immediately repatriated to escape the hostilities in Syria.

"There are six others who are seeking repatriation, but they have other reasons like problems with their employment," he said.

Overseas Workers Welfare Administration (OWWA) chief Carmelita Dimzon said the government is ready to repatriate those who would ask for their immediate return to the Philippines.

"We have a continuing repatriation from Syria and our embassy, labor and OWWA officers are already attending to the needs of our workers there," Dimzon said.

But DFA spokesman Raul Hernandez said that since the start of the revolt in Syria, no Filipino has asked to be repatriated.

In a forum yesterday morning, hosted by the Catholic Media Network and the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines, Hernandez said, "So far no Filipino has been affected in Syria and no one wants to be repatriated back to the Philippines; maybe they still feel safe there."

He said that while there have been cases of repatriation, these were triggered by labor and other kinds of problems, "but not on account of the violence there."

Hernandez gave assurance that in the event the tension escalates in Syria, the DFA and its embassy in Damascus have a contingency plan "so that if there is a need to repatriate, we could immediately take our people out."

About 90 percent of the estimated 17,000 OFWs are undocumented, majority of them domestic helpers, while professionals account for only a smaller percentage. ([www.philstar.com](http://www.philstar.com))

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