

HAWAII-PHILIPPINE NEWS EDITION

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HAWAII FILIPINO CHRONICLE

HAWAII'S ONLY WEEKLY FILIPINO-AMERICAN NEWSPAPER

TWO FILIPINO PROFESSIONALS WIN PRESTIGIOUS AWARDS

By Belinda A. AQUINO, Ph.D.

Two leading professionals in the Filipino community recently received the 2011 "Best Awards" in their respective fields from the Honolulu Magazine and Hawaii Business. Winners were chosen following a rigorous screening process consisting of peer reviews and survey responses.

Dr. Cecile D. Sebastian, D.D.S. and Richard D. Pecson, owner of Pecson and Associates, both of Honolulu, were selected as the best in dentistry and financial planning, respectively. Sebastian was chosen by her peers, while Pecson was selected based on survey information from thousands of respondents for the "2011 Five Star Wealth Manager Award."

The peer-review methodology is considered a very effective technique of selecting "the best in the field" because it's based on

the objective opinions of those who should know—meaning one's peers and colleagues in the profession.

The survey for the Five Star Awards was sponsored by the Hawaii Business Magazine, which commissioned Minnesota-based Crescendo Business Services to undertake the survey.

Considering that Sebastian and Pecson went through such stringent and rigorous screening, their awards should be renamed "The Best of the Best," because that's really who they are—the best in their professions.

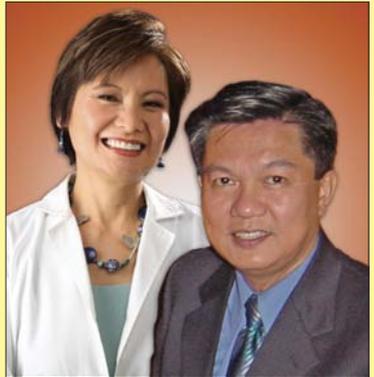
So congratulations to both of them. They are treasures not only in their professions but also in the larger Filipino and Hawaii community.

CECILE D. SEBASTIAN

Sebastian is no stranger to awards, distinctions and citations. She has won the "Best Dentist" award in previous years. This year, she is one of only 165 dentists so awarded in the whole state of Hawaii.

Drawing inspiration from her fa-

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Dr. Cecile D. Sebastian, D.D.S. and Richard D. Pecson



PAL Celebrates Milestone 70th Anniversary

By HFC Staff

Philippine Airlines (PAL) marked its 70th anniversary with simple, yet meaningful activities, including church masses held at the airline's various domestic and international facilities.

PAL officials held a special mass at its sales/ticket office in Honolulu. Attendees in-

cluded Consul General Leoncio Cardenas, Philippine Air Force Military Attaché Col. Restituto Padilla, Transportation Security Manager Olivier Jodjoman, Edith Gudoy of Everlasting Services Inc., Rose Galanto of Aloha Tours & Travel, Mel

(continued on page 4)

Erap: GMA Should Be Tried First in Anomalies

By Jose Rodel CLAPANO

MANILA, Philippines - Former President Joseph Estrada believes former President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo should be the first to be tried on the alleged anomalies in her administration.

Estrada said Ombudsman Merceditas Gutierrez could not be completely blamed if her office has been unable to fully process Arroyo's cases of wrongdoing.

"The first one who should be tried is the mastermind or the architect of the corruption," he said.

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Former President Joseph "Erap" Estrada

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EDITORIAL

Japan Quake a Reminder to Prepare Now for Emergency

Our thoughts and prayers are with the people of Japan, which last Friday suffered its worst earthquake ever. A scientific and technologically-advanced nation like Japan was relatively well-prepared for the 9.0 quake, as evidenced by the number of tall buildings that by and large withstood the violent shaking. Tens of thousands of lives, if not more, would have been lost if not for the nation's earthquake-proof structures. What the Japanese people were unprepared for was the 23-foot high wall of water that swept miles inland and wreaked destruction.

The calamity in Japan left many of us wondering what would happen if a similar natural disaster hit our shores. If one were to hit, we would be in a world of hurt. It would take several days for relief efforts just to reach us, given our extreme isolation.

State and County civil defense officials and emergency coordinators during the fateful evening/morning of March 10-11 did an admirable job in evacuating residents out of harm's way. However, there is still room for improvement. One problem that definitely needs to be addressed is the handful of emergency sirens on Oahu that conspicuously failed to work.



As a result, police were forced to drive into pockets of rural Oahu and use bullhorns to alert individuals. Officers also went door-to-door urging to leave for higher ground. To ensure public safety in the event of another natural disaster, we urge city, state and federal governments to prioritize and expedite the installation of new civil defense sirens and to repair and upgrade existing sirens on Oahu.

With the state avoiding large-scale tsunami damage for the most part, the tendency now may be for Hawaii residents to brush off the next warning and tune out, rather than tune in. Let's avoid making that costly mistake and start thinking NOW about disaster preparedness. What will happen to your pets during the next emergency? Does your family have an emergency plan? Have you decided a central meeting place? Do you

have at least three days of food, water and necessary medications stored in case of an emergency? For help with these questions and other helpful tips on emergency preparedness, go online and visit: <http://www.ready.gov/>.

Very few people enjoy discussing such matters, but more households need to have this conversation—before they need it. ■

Challenge

Business optimism has reached a new all-time high, according to a survey conducted by the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas. Let's hope the optimism will translate into more investments, particularly the type that will generate jobs and other livelihood opportunities.

Continuing business optimism, boosted by the rise to power of a man who won the presidency on an anti-corruption platform, was one of the causes for celebration as the nation marked the 25th anniversary of the 1986 people power revolt. Through the tumultuous years of rebuilding the nation and nurturing a fragile democracy, the Philippines managed to achieve economic growth. Last year, the economy posted its highest growth in 34 years of 7.3 percent, on the back of sound monetary and fiscal policies, a recovery in manufacturing and exports, and election spending.

The seemingly insurmountable challenge is making the benefits of growth trickle down to the grassroots. A World Bank report, released last

Wednesday, focused on the country's "robust growth, stubborn poverty." Over a third of the country's population, according to the report, did not feel the benefits of economic growth.

About 3.3 million Filipinos were added to the ranks of the impoverished from 2003 to 2009, raising the total to 23.1 million or about 26.5 percent of the population, according to the report. One positive aspect noted by the World Bank is that the poverty gap also narrowed during the same period as the government expanded the conditional cash transfer program to the poorest families. The program, backed by the WB, is being further expanded by the Aquino administration not only in terms of coverage but also in encouraging beneficiaries to engage in sustainable livelihood activities.

Dole-outs, even if conditional, can only go so far. The government needs to further stimulate domestic economic activity and attract more foreign direct investment to create decent employment and livelihood opportunities. Twenty-five years after the people power revolt, the nation must stage another type of revolution, one that will make the masses enjoy the fruits of economic growth and lift millions out of poverty. (www.philstar.com) ■

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LEGISLATIVE CONNECTION



by Senator Will ESPEROSO

Crossover

correctional facilities; mental health services for committed persons; gender-responsive community-based programs for women; cognitive restructuring programs; programs relating to children of incarcerated persons. The report, however, does not include management-type information. This bill would require the DPS to begin collecting and reporting data to measure the effectiveness of the programs in rehabilitating inmates. Through the use of key performance indicators, both the DPS and the Legislature can evaluate program effectiveness. This outcomes data will help the Department assess program strengths and weaknesses to optimize its rehabilitative efforts. The report will be posted on the Department's website.

The Legislature is at **CROSSOVER**, the halfway point and deadline for a chamber to decide on bills that originated in it. As Chair of the Senate Committee on Public Safety, during the interim between sessions, I worked with the Department of Public Safety (DPS), groups who work with prisoners and ex-offenders, and other stakeholders to develop bills in this area. These bills were approved by the Senate and will move on to the House for its consideration.

SB 44, Inmate Rehabilitation. Requires the Department of Public Safety to establish and report on key performance indicators for the inmate reentry system.

Each year the Department of Public Safety reports to the Legislature on a number of items: mental health services at certain

reduction in their minimum sentence and the reasons for denials; and (g) whether their parole revoked, and explanations for the results. This data will reflect progress toward (1) reducing the rate of recidivism; (2) decreasing prisoner assaults on correctional staff; (3) reducing correctional staff turnover; and (4) improving departmental efficiencies in staffing, budgeting, and data management and analysis.

SB 48, Inmate Transfers. Specifies criteria for transfers of prisoners from Hawaii to the mainland. Prohibits transfer to the mainland of inmates who are within 12 months of eligibility for parole.

Mainland transfers are a concern in the corrections system. Rehabilitation programs are not uniformly available at all facilities, so transfers can disrupt an inmate's treatment, education, vocational training, or other re-entry program participation. For many inmates family support is important, and being on the mainland makes this extremely difficult. Currently there are no standards for transfer decisions, so this bill establishes transfer criteria. The decision should take into account whether there are volunteers for transfer; the current

participation in or availability of required re-entry programs; and whether the inmate has regular visits with his/her children.

SB 1357, Return of Mainland Inmates. Directs the Department of Public Safety to develop a master plan for the return of Hawaii inmates housed in mainland prisons.

About 15 years ago, overcrowding in our prisons due to insufficient space in-state led to the decision to house inmates in mainland prisons. Families are separated. It can be harder for inmates to prepare to re-enter the community without family support. This bill will require the DPS to develop a master plan and timetable for bringing Hawaii's inmates back to Hawaii. This plan includes determining the logistics for increasing prison space and local availability of intervention and rehabilitation programs. We currently spend about \$60 million to care for prisoners out of the state, and those funds would be better spent here. The plan is due to the Legislature by January 2012.

SB 1358 Reopening of Kulani Correctional Facility. Requires the Department of Public Safety to, by 12/31/2011, develop a plan to reopen Kulani Correctional Facility and implement transfers.

Near the end of 2009, the Kulani Correctional Facility on the Big Island was closed. Its approximately 120 inmates were transferred to the Halawa Correctional Facility, the federal detention center in Honolulu, or to mainland prisons. Kulani was the corrections center specifically designated for the treatment of sex offenders. Its treatment programs have been found to be one of the most successful in the country.

This bill would require the DPS to formulate a plan to reopen the

Kulani Correctional Facility, with the emphasis on once again provide sex offender treatment rehabilitation services, and to re-transfer here those inmates who should participate in its corrective program. This re-opening is warranted because (1) Kulani's sex offender treatment services were highly rated nationally; (2) we need more beds in Hawaii for inmates; and (3) living in familiar surroundings and in proximity to supportive relatives enhances inmates' rehabilitative potential. As the Legislature found, "[s]uccessful rehabilitation eventually results in lower recidivism and lower costs."

SB 166, Clean and Sober Home and Halfway House Task Force. Establishes a task force for regulating clean and sober homes and halfway houses.

Ex-offenders who have served their terms and are dealing with the stress of trying to lead a productive life after prison and maintain sobriety need the support of a stable home environment. Balanced against that is the concern in communities regarding having these "next step" houses nearby. This bill would create a task force to address the needs of both communities and residents of these facilities, and develop procedures and protocols for accountability of these homes without formal licensure.

SB 49, Correctional Facility Deaths. Requires the Department of Public Safety to report to the Legislature any inmate or correctional facility employee death within 48 hours.

SB 52, Sex Offender Registration. Requires persons convicted of violation of privacy in the first degree to register as sex offenders. Individuals who use cameras and video records secretly and improperly for sexual content would be labeled sex offenders.

EDITORIAL

Mourning

The official death toll in Japan soared to 2,800 last night, as disaster teams reported finding 2,000 bodies in Miyagi prefecture, one of the worst hit by the cataclysmic tsunami spawned by the Magnitude 9 earthquake that struck the country's northeastern region last week. The port town of Minamisanriku has been erased from the map, with some 10,000 of its population of 17,500 unaccounted for.



In high-tech Japan, the grievous loss and devastation have been documented in terrifying detail. There were the walls shaking for an interminable time, and then the items literally flying off supermarket shelves. Then the massive wall of water roared in with the speed of a jet, like a scene from a Hollywood movie, engulfing farms, and bringing ships, light aircraft and cars smashing into homes and office buildings.

With utilities down, another nightmare confronted the Japanese: the meltdown of reactors after cooling systems bogged down at the nuclear power plant in Fukushima prefecture. Explosions have rocked two of the reactors so far, and several workers have been rushed to hospitals after being exposed to radiation. Survivors of the earthquake and tsunami have been

evacuated from the power plant site.

Video footage showed little visible movement after the tsunami had done its worst, raising the possibility that the death toll, even for a country used to great suffering, would be horrific. In the midst of tragedy, the Japanese have shown remarkable calm. As younger survivors said, their elders have seen worse during World War II, when their country became the first – and still the only one – to see two cities obliterated by atomic bombs.

Young and old, the Japanese of 2011 have gone about the grim task of finding missing loved ones and surviving from day to day in an orderly way. Occasionally, some survivors are shown quietly grieving, and there is no doubt that sorrow has gripped the entire land. We mourn their loss and wish Japan a speedy recovery.

(www.philstar.com/March 15, 2011) ■

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HEADLINES (CONT.)

(cont. from page 1: TWO FILIPINO ...)

ther who was a medical surgeon, she got interested in science and surgery at an early age. She migrated to the U.S. with her family when she was only 15 and graduated from Purdue University with a B.S. in biology. She later attended Northwestern University Dental School where she earned her Doctor of Dental Surgery (DDS) degree.

Sebastian has consistently achieved top awards and distinctions recognizing her talent and skills. In addition to her award this year, she has received similar awards over the years from such organizations as Best Cosmetic Doctors of America; Better Business Bureau Torch Awards (Individual business); and Top High Tech Leader Awards from Technology Network and Pacific Technology Foundation.

Her community service is equally impressive. She has been on the Board of the National Foundation of Dentistry for the Handicapped for the past 10 years. Her office also partners with Patterson Dental Supply to host the annual "Future Dentists" symposium, a free event for high school juniors and seniors.

Sebastian delivers lectures to business and community groups on various topics on dentistry and dental care. She has also worked with the Hawaii Food Bank to promote dental awareness and helps with fundraising activities for the organization.

Her outstanding contributions to the community, notably her volunteer work as a dentist, have been featured in many publications, including the Good Neighbor section of Midweek Magazine in March 2010.

Sebastian's professional expertise is enhanced by her engaging personality and cheerful

temperament. Patients are sometimes afraid of dentists and their dreaded drills and other intimidating instruments. But with Sebastian's "gift of touch," they can rest assured that their stay in her dental chair will be a pleasant experience, not a treatment in torture.

She is married to Dr. Wade Nobuhara, fellow "Best Dentist" awardee, with whom she has four children.

RICHARD D. PECSON

Pecson, who owns Pecson and Associates, LLC, also brought home the bacon by winning one of the 2011 "Five Star" Awards for his expertise as a financial planner. For this special award, the survey utilized the following criteria: customer service, integrity, knowledge and expertise, communication, value for fee charged, meeting of financial objectives, post-sale service, quality of recommendations and overall satisfaction. The business specialties surveyed were: business planning, estate planning, financial planning, investments, taxation and trust services.

But what exactly is a wealth manager? Broadly defined, wealth managers are those individuals who help you manage your financial world and/or implement aspects of your financial strategies. Examples are financial planners, tax or investment advisors and estate planning attorneys.

With over 7,000 wealth managers in the state of Hawaii, the choice of Pecson as one of the Best Awardees is a distinct honor, considering that the short list of candidates for the coveted 2011 Five Star Wealth Managers is an elite group representing less than four percent of the wealth managers in the State of Hawaii.

Pecson started his financial ca-

reer at AXA in 1988 and in 2002, he established his own firm, Pecson & Associates, LLC, which is affiliated with LPL Financial, the largest independent broker-dealer in the country. Today, his firm has grown to managing a considerable portfolio in the medical profession.

Pecson originally hails from Tuguegarao, Cagayan in the northern Philippines. He obtained his Bachelor's degree in Forestry from the University of the Philippines in Los Banos in 1975. He worked with the Development Academy of the Philippines as Project Officer handling countryside development programs.

He emigrated to the United States in 1982 when he received a research assistantship at the University of Hawaii-Manoa under Dr. James Brewbaker, a well-known Professor of Horticulture. He later received his Master's in agronomy and soil science in 1985 and another MS in agricultural economics with a grant from the Pacific-Asian Scholarship Program.

The fact that Pecson shifted professional fields with relative ease

(cont. from page 1: PAL ...)

Danglapin of Panda Travel, Jayson Agustin of Diplomat Tours & Travel and Henry Ou of Air & Sea Travel.

In the Philippines, PAL officials hosted a gala anniversary reception at the Newport Performing Arts Theater at the Resorts World Manila complex in Pasay City. In attendance were some 1,500 guests and dignitaries from government, the diplomatic corps, as well as the aviation, travel and business sectors. A host of entertainers—led by Gary Valenciano, Martin Nievera, Kuh Ledesma, among others—participated in a star-studded and nostalgic program that portrayed PAL's first seven decades of service.

A GLORIOUS PAST

PAL was founded by a group of prominent Filipino industrialists on February 26, 1941. On March 15, 1941, a tiny Beech Model 18 aircraft carrying five passengers took off from Nielson Airport in Makati bound for Baguio—earning PAL the distinction of being Asia's first airline.

PAL's first flight to Honolulu was 65 years ago in July 1946 when it started commercial service to San Francisco via Honolulu. PAL earned yet another distinction as the first Asian airline to cross the Pacific.

As PAL turns 70, the airline will continue to keep one eye on the legacies of its past and another on its future goals. Since its founding 70 years ago, PAL has been inextricably linked with the Filipino nation as the pioneer flag carrier, major air transport utility and loyal partner in nation-building.

Currently, PAL flies three times a week direct from Honolulu to Manila every Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday and also flies out of Manila on the same days.

is another tribute to his competence and versatility. Academically-trained as an agronomist and resource economist, his success in the world of finance becomes even more remarkable.

When asked what his basic philosophy is in his profession, he answered that he tries to anchor his financial planning practice on the highest levels of integrity, trust and service. He believes that these values reflect the fundamental principles of his deeply-rooted faith, which is his guiding light in the pursuit of his career.

Pecson is regularly invited as a guest lecturer at UH-Manoa and Hawaii Pacific University to enlighten students on the intricacies of investment and estate planning courses they are taking. He is a popular speaker who has earned industry-wide recognition for providing outstanding service to his clients and various seminars and interviews on a wide range of financial topics.

He continues to be active in community affairs, having served as president of the University of the

Philippines Alumni Association in Hawaii, chair of the Filipino Coalition for Solidarity, a strong supporter of the Aloha Medical Mission and the Philippine Medical Association of Hawaii Foundation, and as a member of Grace Bible Church.

Pecson and his wife Greta have three sons. Greta, daughter-in-law Michelle and Ron Gregorio all work as a team with Richard to run Pecson and Associates.

CONCLUSION

It cannot be felt proud of and honored by the top-of-the-line performance of these two super-achievers. As successful and talented practitioners of their craft, they have set an exemplary standard as role models for younger generations of Filipinos and Filipino-Americans in Hawaii.

Their examples have established a trend for the infusion of talent to the rapidly growing Filipino community in Hawaii, which can only contribute tremendously to the development of the community as a major player in Hawaii's multicultural society in years to come. ■

According to Monet Trespezes, District Sales Manager for PAL in Hawaii, there are no plans to increase the number of flights from Honolulu to Manila. Still, the Aloha State will continue to figure prominently in PAL's future plans.

"With the Filipino population known to be the second largest ethnic group in Hawaii and continuing to grow yearly, it is considered as PAL's number one market," says Trespezes.

PAL has managed to remain competitive, despite stiff competition from other airlines that also fly to and from the Philippines.

"Our biggest asset is our people and the product itself. All the way from the ground staff, cabin crew and pilots up to the management who are all committed to provide utmost service combined with the popularly known Filipino hospitality," Trespezes says.

FUTURE CHALLENGES

The flag carrier is bidding to replicate its past success in the more demanding operating and competitive landscape of the future. It faces a slate of tough challenges in this quest.

PAL reported a modest profit of \$15.1 million in the third quarter (October to December 2010) of its current 2010-2011 financial year—a period when air travel gingerly recovered from a slump the previous year.

But the succeeding months from January 2011 to the present, showed just how fragile the recovery was. The sudden eruption of political unrest in the Middle East sent crude oil prices skyrocketing to nearly \$120 per barrel in late February 2011—the highest in two and a half years.

This forced the global airline in-

dustry to flag a potential loss for carriers by the end of 2011. In fact, the International Air Transport Association (IATA) already downgraded its outlook for the year.

"Our current forecast is based on an average oil price of \$84 per barrel," says IATA director general Giovanni Bisignani. "Today, the price is over \$100. For every dollar it increases, the industry is challenged to recover \$1.6 billion in additional costs, so 2011 has started out as a very challenging year for airlines."

SUPPORT FROM KABABAYANS

Still, there's no denying that the majority of Hawaii's Filipinos continue to choose PAL whenever returning home to the Philippines. According to Trespezes, several factors may contribute to PAL's popularity including, bigger Airbus 340 aircraft that provide comfort to passengers, particularly in business class; hot meals served on-board, including snacks; hassle-free transfers to domestic flights via PAL's exclusive integrated terminal at Ninoy Aquino International Airport; and numerous destinations throughout the Philippines world.

"We fly to 20 points across the Philippines, deploying the largest capacity and only premium-class service in the domestic market," Trespezes says. "PAL is also the major Philippine flag carrier to the world, flying to 25 destinations in 14 countries and territories across Asia, Australia and North America. On March 29, we are touching down on our 26th international point in New Delhi, India.

"I believe that PAL will continue to enjoy support from our kababayans because of these advantages." ■



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HAWAII-FILIPINO NEWS

Tsunami Relief Efforts: Do Research Before Giving to Charities, Hiring Repair Crews

IN WAKE OF THE MOST POWERFUL EARTHQUAKE to ever hit Japan, many residents may feel compelled to help those impacted by the earthquake and ensuing tsunami.

Hawaii's Better Business Bureau (BBB) is warning potential donors to exercise caution when making donations to relief agencies and charities—and to wary of scams by traveling repair crews offering emergency repair services.

As with every natural disaster, there are dishonest people who will take advantage of the public's willingness to help victims.

"In the wake of any major natural disaster, many people will immediately step forward with donations to aid victims and their families,"

says Dwight Kealoha, CEO of Hawaii's BBB. "Unfortunately, there are those who will try to take advantage of the generosity of the public after a disaster. That's why it's so important to do your research before donating your hard-earned money to relief efforts."

Hawaii's BBB offers the following advice for donors to ensure their donations go to trustworthy relief efforts:

- Before donating, visit www.bbb.org/charity to research organizations you're considering supporting.
- Be suspicious of any charity that is inexperienced in carrying out relief efforts but is suddenly soliciting aid in the wake of the Japan earthquake and

tsunami. Although well intentioned, they may be unable to quickly deliver aid to victims.

- Be wary of charities that are reluctant to answer reasonable questions about their operations, finances and programs.
- Ask for written information about the charity's programs and finances such as their latest annual report and financial statements.
- Don't give cash. Checks or money orders should be made out to the name of the charitable organization, not to the individual collecting the donation.
- Beware of fake charities that imitate the name and style of well-known organizations in an attempt to confuse donors.

Don't give into excessive pressure on on-the-spot donations. Be suspicious of any request to send a "runner" to pick up your contribution.

Be wary of appeals that are long on emotion, but short on describing what the charity will do to address the needs of victims and their families.

Don't give your credit card number or other personal information to a telephone solicitor or in response to an e-mail solicitation.

Make sure your contribution is tax deductible. Donations should be made to charitable organizations that are tax exempt under section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code. Go to IRS Publication 78 on the IRS' website for a current list of all organizations eligible to receive contributions deductible as charitable gifts.

well-established building repair companies will be working their crews around the clock," says Kealoha. "Some people don't want to wait for estimates on repairs, so when there is a knock on the door from a repair crew, good consumer and business practices are sometimes forgotten."

Checking with the BBB on the reliability of a company can provide valuable information on its history, including whether the company is a BBB Accredited Business; information its principal offices; business start date; number of complaints; and what to do if you experience a problem.

The BBB offers the following tips on how to avoid being the victim of a "fly-by-night" repair crew:

- Check with the company's history by getting a Reliability Report from Hawaii's BBB.
- Avoid conducting business with crews that offer unsolicited help.
- Ask for proof of contractor's license and insurance coverage.
- Ask for identification such as driver's license. Do not accept business cards or name badges as identification.
- Never pay in advance.

Scammers also prey on victims' urgency to get life back to normal in the aftermath of natural disasters. Traveling repair crews have been known to offer unsolicited emergency repair services to homeowners and businesses following these types of events.

"These repair crews know that demand will be high and that local,

For additional information, visit www.bbb.org. ■

Fil-Com Center Accepting Donations for Japan Quake Victims

IN THE SPIRIT OF BAYANIHAN, the Filipino Community Center will be accepting donations for victims of Japan's recent earthquake and tsunami on Saturday, March 19, 2011 from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. in Waipahu.

Fil-Com board members and volunteers will be on-hand to accept the donations. Those who want to donate can do so in person or by mailing checks payable to the Fil-Com Center to:

The Filipino Community Center, Inc.
94-428 Mokuola Street,
Suite 302
Waipahu, Hawaii 96707

Fil-Com officials are asking donors to note "Japan Disaster Relief" at the bottom left corner of their checks.

"Our hearts go out to the people of Japan," says Abelina Madrid Shaw, chair of the Fil-Com Center Board. "At this time of need, we cannot do enough. Along with donations, the Fil-Com Center, Filipino organizations and the Filipino community in Hawaii are offering our prayers for Japan."

Scott Arakaki, fundraising chair of the Japan Disaster Relief for the Fil-Com Board of Directors, is grateful for the outpouring of support.

"As a Fil-Com Board member for many years, I've seen the many generous relief funds for aid to the Philippines," Arakaki says. "I am humbled by this effort to help survivors of the catastrophic conditions which will go on for a long time."

Watching the tragic events of the past few days unfold on television has been heart-wrenching for many in the Filipino community, including Kailhi resident Rhea Ruiz. She has vowed to do her part to help those in Japan who are suffering from the catastrophe.

"How can anyone sit idly without doing anything to help?" she says. "I hope others will have the compassion in their heart to give what they can because it will come back to you. When we ourselves will be in need, others will come to our aid."

Contributions will be accepted daily at the Fil-Com Center through March 31st between 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., including Saturdays and Sundays. All donations will be given to the Japanese Red Cross via the American Red Cross. ■

HEADLINES (CONT.)

(cont. from page 1; ERAP...)

Estrada said Gutierrez was unable to find sufficient evidence because Arroyo administration officials had already disposed of or hidden important evidence.

The impeachment complaints against Gutierrez stress her failure or refusal to act on big cases like the P728-million fertilizer fund scam and the botched \$329-million NBN-ZTE deal, he added.

Estrada said in the anomalous NBN-ZTE broadband deal, the signatories hid the contract from the public on the unbelievable pretext that it was stolen in China.

"(Senate President Pro-Tempore) Jinggoy (Estrada) even had to insist the Chinese executives surrender the contracts," he said.

"Even the Senate could not acquire the evidence from the Arroyo administration officials. How would the Ombudsman find the

evidence if it was already conveniently lost by those who involved in the Arroyo administration?"

Estrada said the Senate must go after the brains behind the anomalies.

"First they try GMA and the (former) first gentleman (referring to Mike Arroyo) because the government must first go after the brains behind these anomalies," he said.

Estrada said Gutierrez, who was just used, is fortunate because she was given due process by Congress.

"Unlike my impeachment, which was railroaded by (then Senate President Manny) Villar," he said.

Estrada said he believes Gutierrez will receive a fair trial at the Senate if an impeachment trial pushes through because "senators have independent minds and cannot be dictated upon." (www.philstar.com) ■

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HAWAII-FILIPINO NEWS

Hawaii Meth Project Launches Fundraising Campaign

THE HAWAII METH PROJECT HAS LAUNCHED a fundraising campaign to raise funds for its prevention programs that focus on reducing meth use among Hawaii's teens and young adults.

To kick off the campaign, the Hawaii Meth Project announced several significant donations from charitable foundations and local businesses, and individual contributions from supporters in the community, totaling \$732,278.

"Many people in Hawaii know first-hand the devastation that meth use causes families," says Cindy Adams, executive director of the Hawaii Meth Project. "It is important that the community participate di-

rectly in the prevention effort if we are to break the multi-generational impact of this drug in Hawaii, which is why we are so very grateful for the generous support from local businesses, foundations and individuals."

The singular distinguishing issue about meth is its pervasive impact on Hawaii's family structure and children, education, employers, all facets of health and human services, law enforcement and the judiciary system. Donating to the Hawaii Meth Project helps to mitigate the enormous cost of downstream implications which are estimated at \$500 million each year.

Honolulu Prosecutor Keith Kaneshiro says crystal meth is the

biggest drug problem in Hawaii and that its use is the most significant driver of crime across the state.

"This problem can only be tackled by focusing simultaneously on prevention, enforcement and treatment," he says. "I've seen the positive results that the Meth Project has achieved in Montana since the program was launched there in 2005 and we're already seeing results in Hawaii in the program's first year here. It is imperative that we continue to support the Hawaii Meth Project if we are to stop the next generation from falling into the grips of this devastating drug."

This year's fundraising campaign will enable the Hawaii Meth

Project to build on the success of last year's statewide awareness and community action plan, which extended the reach of the Hawaii Meth Project's message and engaged teens and families throughout the state in prevention efforts.

Bank of Hawaii Foundation President Donna Tanoue commends the Hawaii Meth Project for educating teenagers and young adults about meth. She encourages other businesses to join in the efforts to fight meth use in Hawaii. Others have begun to mobilize their own initiatives, demonstrating a genuine grassroots effort to fight meth. Initiatives to fundraise and raise awareness for the Hawaii

Meth Project and its core message, "Not Even Once," are being spearheaded by individuals who are organizing their own fundraisers.

"It is critical that we not get complacent with our outreach," Adams says. "This fundraising campaign will help ensure the program has the resources to continue to educate our teens about the dangers of meth and prevent them from trying it."

If you are interested in donating to the Hawaii Meth Project, go online to: https://www.hawaiimeth-project.org/Take_Action/. Checks can also be sent to: Hawaii Meth Project, 999 Bishop St., 24th floor, Honolulu, HI 96813. ■

Abercrombie Signs Accountability in Public Education Bill

GOV. NEIL ABERCROMBIE HAS SIGNED INTO LAW a bill that gives the governor more accountability over Hawaii's public education by establishing the process for an appointed State Board of Education (BOE).

SB 8 SD1 HD2 sets up the process for the governor to appoint the nine members of the BOE—three from Oahu, three at large and one each from the Big Island, Maui and Kauai. Abercrombie will also select the chairperson. All members will need to be confirmed by the State Senate.

"The future of our children and state depends on the success of our

public schools," Abercrombie says. "In first voting for an appointed Board of Education and then passing this measure in such an expeditious manner, the people of Hawaii and the State Legislature cleared the way for a new era of leadership for our public school system."

In November 2010, voters approved a constitutional amendment to switch from an elected board to an appointed one.

The BOE oversees the Department of Education (DOE), which has a \$1.7 billion operational budget. The DOE is one of the state's largest organizations with more employees than the state's

five largest private sector employers combined.

Abercrombie is looking for talented and dedicated leaders committed to public education and Hawaii's future. He is reviewing applications submitted through the governor's website and will appoint diverse individuals with varying skills, talent and experience.

"We continue to welcome everyone interested in serving on the Board of Education to apply," Abercrombie says. "We need to move quickly and have an appointed Board of Education in place so we can move forward on bringing change to public education

in Hawaii."

Governor Abercrombie has until April 1, 2011 to submit his nominees for boards and commissions to the State Senate for con-

firmation through this legislative session. He encourages those interested in serving on the BOE and other boards to apply online at: www.hawaii.gov/gov. ■

UH Ethnic Studies Group to Present 'Voices of Color'

THE ETHNIC STUDIES STUDENT ASSOCIATION (ESSA) at the University of Hawai-Manoa will host "Voices of Color," a fundraiser that will showcase the work of multidisciplinary artists whose work centers around themes of identity, culture, sexuality and other socio-political issues.

The event is scheduled for March 18, 2011 from 8 p.m. to 1:30 a.m. at Blue Ocean Thai Restaurant located at 327 Keawe Street in Kakaako. The purpose of this event is to raise funds for ESSA and provide a supportive space for artists to voice their own unique narratives and a chance to sell their own work.

"Voices of Color" will be an 18 and over fundraiser that will feature Hawaii's hottest local hip hop and rap artists, including Creed Chameleon, Prie, Ill Hill Society, and K-Luv and Big Mox of the Prolific



Unknowns. The event will be hosted by Seph1.

Pre-sale tickets are \$8. Tickets at the door will be \$10. To order your pre-sale tickets, please contact ESSA-Hawaii@hotmail.com.

ESSA is a student organization from multidisciplinary backgrounds that works in collaboration with UH-Manoa's Ethnic Studies Department to promote awareness and interest in Ethnic Studies, its major and certificate programs, and other academic events promoted by the department.

ESSA also functions independently to bring enjoyable social activities and events that allow students and the community to interact with and engage in a dialogue about culture, identity and socio-political issues that are explored in ES courses and in everyday life.

For more information about ESSA or "Voices of Color," please contact Camille Cabalo at Cmcbalo@hawaii.edu. ■



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by Atty. Emmanuel Samonte TIPON

“Sham/Green Card” Marriage – Is It Valid?

erly man can still be attracted to a woman, whether or not he can still perform the marital function. They dated, fell in love, married, and lived in his home in the Philippines. The veteran returned to the U.S., petitioned his wife, and it was approved.

The wife applied for a visa. She asked for an Ilocano interpreter but was given a Tagalog one. She did not understand the questions and her answers were not responsive. The consular denied the visa saying she had “no petitionable relationship.”

An immigration herbolario (“consultant”) told him that the marriage was a sham and void. The veteran spoke with a lawyer with a successful track record of overcoming visa denials of the spouses of elderly men. The lawyer told him that the words meant that his wife could not establish that their marriage was genuine and that it was not en-

tered into for immigration purposes. It did not mean that their marriage was void. They might call it a sham sham marriage, but that does not affect its validity. Immigration authorities have no power to declare a marriage void. That is a function of the civil courts.

The lawyer advised the veteran to seek reconsideration. “It’s not necessary,” he said, “I’m going home to be with her, she’s still my wife.” The veteran is now in the Philippines living happily with his wife in their own home, compared to the one bedroom they would have shared in Hawaii. Some might say “Hindi bale, Hawaii naman”. (Never mind, it’s Hawaii!).

ILLEGAL ALIEN’S WIDOW STILL A WIFE

A male illegal alien married a U.S. citizen. Of course the citizen was a woman, stupid. The federal government does not recognize gay marriage, even though the Obama administration announced it would not defend suits challeng-

ing the validity of the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) providing that a marriage is between a man and a woman. (Whether it is an impeachable offense to refuse to fulfill a President’s oath to faithfully execute the Office of President is another story.)

The alien died in an industrial accident. The Workers’ Compensation Commission awarded dependent benefits to his widow. The employer challenged the award, contending that their marriage was illegal and void because it was a “sham green-card marriage.” The court held that the marriage was a legal marriage. Neither the alien nor his wife had been convicted of violating a federal law, 8 USC § 1325(c) penalizing sham/green card marriages. Even if they were, the federal statute does not address the question of the validity of the marriage, but only the intent with which the parties entered into the marriage. No federal statute says the marriage itself is illegal. Marlex Design Intern. v. Stevens,

VA. App. No. 1545-08-4 (2009). ■

(ATTY. TIPON has a Master of Laws degree from Yale Law School and a Bachelor of Laws degree from the University of the Philippines. He practices in Hawaii, specializing in immigration law and criminal defense. Tel. (808) 225-2645. E-Mail: filamlaw@yahoo.com. Website: www.ImmigrationServicesUSA.com. He is from Laog City and Magstingal, Ilocos Sur. He served as an Immigration Officer. He is co-author of “Immigration Law Service, 1st ed.” an 8-volume practice guide for immigration officers and lawyers. Listen to the most funny, witty, and useful radio program in Hawaii on KNDF at 1270, AM dial every Tuesday at 7:30 a.m. and on KHBC at 1060, AM dial every Thursday at 8 p.m. This article is a general overview of the subject matter discussed and is not intended as legal advice. No warranty is made by the writer or publisher as to its completeness or correctness at the time of publication.)

HAWAII-FILIPINO NEWS

DOH Monitors Air, Detects No Elevated Levels of Radiation

STATE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH (DOH) OFFICIALS say no elevated radiation levels have been detected since recent explosions at nuclear plants in Japan.

Two of the country’s nuclear reactors were damaged in the wake of the magnitude 8.9 quake and tsunami on March 11, 2011.

According to the DOH, air samples remain at ambient or normal background levels following a small release of radiation on March 12, 2011 at a nuclear reactor facility in Japan. A news release from the Japan Nuclear and Industrial Safety Agency (NISA) indicated that the amount of radioactive material released from the Fukushima Dai-ichi Nuclear Power Station was relatively small.

DOH’s Indoor and Radiological Health Branch (IRHB) is closely monitoring information on the radiation release and expects no public health risk to the state, considering the size of the release and distance from Hawaii.

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) released a statement on March 13 stating, “All the available information indicates weather conditions have taken the small releases from the Fukushima reactors out to sea away from the population. Given the thousands of miles between the two countries, Hawaii, Alaska, the U.S. Territories and the U.S. West Coast are not expected to experience any harmful levels of radioactivity.”

The nuclear plant incident raised concerns about wind-blown radiation traveling

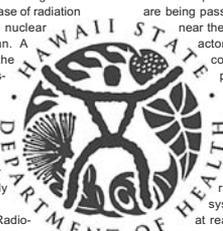
across the Pacific to Hawaii. In the event of a significant release from the reactor, officials say radiation would be diluted before reaching the state and levels would be so low no protective action would be necessary.

Should the situation change, DOH officials are making preparations by coordinating with national and statewide partners and ensuring medical stockpiles are readily available. In Japan, potassium iodine pills are being passed out to people living near the threatened nuclear reactors. The iodine helps combat against radiation poisoning.

The DOH in partnership with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has a system in place for ambient monitoring for radioactive dust. The system (RADNET) looks at real-time data as well as particulate sampling (from monitors located on the islands of Oahu and Hawaii) which are analyzed by the DOH and at a laboratory in Alabama.

DOH’s radiological health staff is currently working with other state and federal entities on radioactive plume modeling. All models are based on real-time atmospheric conditions and indicate that the release is headed away from the Hawaiian Islands.

For further information go to the DOH website at www.hawaii.gov/doh or go to the following sites: U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: http://emergency.cdc.gov/radiation/; U.S. Environmental Protection Agency: http://www.epa.gov/radiation/rert/monitoring.html or http://epa.gov/nareil/radnet/.



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OPINION

Who's Afraid of the Taxman?

AS I WRECK THIS CHAIR by William M. ESPOSO

Why should some Congressmen be bothered to the point of agitation by the announcement of the Bureau of Internal Revenue (BIR) to mandate starting next year the so-called Annual Income Report (AIR) from every taxpayer with an annual income of over P500,000? Per BIR Commissioner Kim Henares, some 54,000 taxpayers will be affected by the AIR requirement.

Some of the AIR's most vocal critics in Congress are claiming that it's unconstitutional because it's tantamount to an invasion of privacy. Since when and how did a BIR that's diligently trying to do its job of collecting all taxable revenues from taxpayers ever commit an invasion of privacy? That is as gobbledygook as gobbledygook can be.

Let's review the mandate of BIR and the BIR Commissioner under relevant Sections 5 and 6 of the National Internal Revenue code, as follows:

SECTION 5. Power of the Commissioner to Obtain Information, and to Summon, Examine, and Take Testimony of Persons. — In ascertaining the correctness of any return, or in making a return when none has been made, or in determin-

ing the liability of any person for any internal revenue tax, or in collecting any such liability, or in evaluating tax compliance, the Commissioner is authorized:

(A) To examine any book, paper, record, or other data which may be relevant or material to such inquiry;

(B) To obtain on a regular basis from any person other than the person whose internal revenue tax liability is subject to audit or investigation, or from any office or officer of the national and local governments, government agencies and instrumentalities, including the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas and government-owned or -controlled corporations, any information such as, but not limited to, costs and volume of production, receipts or sales and gross incomes of taxpayers, and the names, addresses, and financial statements of corporations, mutual fund companies, insurance companies, regional operating headquarters of multinational companies, joint accounts, associations, joint ventures of consortia and registered partnerships, and their members;

Section 5 adds: The provisions of the foregoing paragraphs notwithstanding, nothing in this Section shall be construed as granting the Commissioner the authority to inquire into bank deposits other than as provided for in Section 6 (F) of this Code.

From SECTION 6. Power of the Commissioner to Make assessments and Prescribe additional Requirements for Tax Administration and Enforcement. —

(B) Failure to Submit Required Returns, Statements, Reports and other Documents. — When a report required by law as a basis for the assessment of any national internal revenue tax shall not be forthcoming within the time fixed by laws or rules and regulations or when there is reason to believe that any such report is false, incomplete or erroneous, the Commissioner shall assess the proper tax on the best evidence obtainable.

In case a person fails to file a required return or other document at the time prescribed by law, or willfully or otherwise files a false or fraudulent return or other document, the Commis-

sioner shall make or amend the return from his own knowledge and from such information as he can obtain through testimony or otherwise, which shall be prima facie correct and sufficient for all legal purposes.

(C) Authority to Conduct Inventory-taking, surveillance and to Prescribe Presumptive Gross Sales and Receipts.

— The Commissioner may, at any time during the taxable year, order inventory-taking of goods of any taxpayer as a basis for determining his internal revenue tax liabilities, or may place the business operations of any person, natural or juridical, under observation or surveillance if there is reason to believe that such person is not declaring his correct income, sales or receipts for internal revenue tax purposes. The findings may be used as the basis for assessing the taxes for the other months or quarters of the same or different taxable years and such assessment shall be deemed prima facie correct.

When it is found that a person has failed to issue receipts and invoices in violation of the requirements of Sections 113

and 237 of this Code, or when there is reason to believe that the books of accounts or other records do not correctly reflect the declarations made or to be made in a return required to be filed under the provisions of this Code, the Commissioner, after taking into account the sales, receipts, income or other taxable base of other persons engaged in similar businesses under similar situations or circumstances or after considering other relevant information may prescribe a minimum amount of such gross receipts, sales and taxable base, and such amount so prescribed shall be prima facie correct for purposes of determining the internal revenue tax liabilities of such person.

Letter F, Section 6 of the code authorizes the BIR Commissioner to inquire into bank deposits. Furthermore, Letter H of Section 6 states that: "The Commissioner may prescribe the manner of compliance with any documentary or procedural requirement in connection with the submission or preparation of financial statements accompanying the tax returns."

With such a BIR legal mandate, how can some Congressmen consider the AIR as an invasion of an individual's right of privacy? Maybe they're just protecting some of their big donors who also happen to be big tax evaders. (www.philstar.com) ■

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PHILIPPINE NEWS

Romulo Turns Over DFA Reins to Del Rosario

OUTGOING FOREIGN AFFAIRS SECRETARY ALBERTO G. ROMULO formally turned over the leadership of the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) to Foreign Affairs Secretary Albert F. del Rosario in a ceremony held March 2, 2011.

Romulo said that the appointment of Secretary Del Rosario is both a blessing and boon for the DFA.

"Secretary Del Rosario has an outstanding record in public service, as well as an unswerving reputation and great achievements," he said.

Romulo also credited the men and women of the DFA, noting that they have been superb in fulfilling their duties.

"They have always been in the frontlines and have performed superbly crisis after crisis—from Iraq, Lebanon and Afghanistan before to Egypt and Libya now," he stated.

Romulo highlighted several DFA achievements under his watch, including the shift to machine-readable passports in 2007, electronic passports in 2009, the transfer of the DFA Office of Consular Affairs to the Aseana Business Park in Paranaque City, the adoption of the Philippine Base-line Law and the granting of benefits to Filipino veterans by the U.S. Congress.

Incoming Foreign Affairs Secretary del Rosario said that his foreign policy vision would not veer away from the three pillars of Philippine foreign policy—national security, economic diplomacy and protection and promotion of the welfare of Filipino nationals.

Del Rosario added that the DFA will consider inputs and suggestions on foreign policy from other sectors, saying "We will open up foreign policy by engaging Congress and other sectors involved in crafting the direction of our foreign policy." (DFA) ■

PHILIPPINE NEWS

DOST: No Acid Rain in Phl

by Helen FLORES/
Tuesday, March 15, 2011

MANILA, Philippines - THE DEPARTMENT OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY (DOST) yesterday dismissed reports circulating via text message that the Philippines will be affected by a radiation leak from an earthquake-damaged Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant in Japan.

Science Secretary Mario Montejo said the level of radiation in the environment in the country has remained stable since the Fukushima incident.

"No increase in radiation level means that, as of the moment, there are no immediate effects of the Fukushima nuclear power plant explosion to the Philippines," Montejo said.

According to the text message that quoted the British Broadcasting Co. (BBC), "Radiation may hit the Phil. Starting 4 p.m. today (Monday)."

"The explosion (at the Japanese nuclear plant) happened last Saturday, the critical period is one to two days," he said, adding "it was a small radiation leak."

Montejo said the DOST's Philippine Nuclear Research Institute (PNRI) is closely monitoring developments through its 24-hour linkup with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).

PNRI Director Alumnanda de la Rosa also cited a plume trajectory study provided by Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration (Pagasa) showing that the plume from the site of the incident at Fukushima will not pass the Philippine territory as of March 14.

"The direction of the smoke appears to go away from the direction of the country," De la Rosa said. "The smoke is carried away by the northeast monsoon (amihan)."

Containment remains intact at the Fukushima Daiichi Units 1, 2 and 3, according to Montejo, quot-

ing reports from the IAEA.

"The design of the Fukushima reactor is different from that of the Chernobyl nuclear power plant (in Russia)," Montejo said. "In the event of a meltdown at Fukushima, the melted fuel is expected to stay within the stainless steel containment dome, preventing its release to the environment."

The Chernobyl power plant did not have a reactor building concrete shield and steel containment, he added.

Montejo also explained that the explosion at the Unit 1 reactor of the Fukushima Daiichi plant occurred outside the primary containment vessel (PCV), not inside.

The plant operator, Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO), has confirmed that the integrity of the primary containment vessel remains intact, Montejo said.

To limit damage to the reactor core, Japan's Nuclear and Industrial Safety Agency (NISA) approved the pumping of seawater mixed with boric acid into the primary containment vessel. Boric acid absorbs neutrons to prevent reactor criticality.

NISA has likewise confirmed the presence of radioactive elements cesium-137 and iodine-131 in the vicinity of Fukushima Daiichi Unit 1. NISA reported an initial increase in levels of radioactivity around the plant earlier today, but these levels have been observed to lessen in recent hours.

The PNRI's National Radiological Emergency Preparedness and Response Plan had put in place an organized emergency response facility for a timely, coordinated action of Philippine authorities in the event of a radiological emergency, De la Rosa said.

"The PNRI is closely monitoring developments at Fukushima every six hours and maintains a 24-hour linkup with the IAEA," she said.

The World Health Organization (WHO) yesterday assured the peo-



DOST Sec. Mario Montejo

ple that the partial meltdown at the two nuclear reactors in Japan does not pose an immediate threat to the Philippines.

In a press conference at the Department of Health (DOH), WHO country representative Dr. Soe Nyunt-U said "even within Japan, there is minimal effect of radiation."

Soe maintained that for one, the wind direction is not going to the Philippines.

"The direction of the movement of the radioactive materials (is dependent) on wind direction. It is very good to know that the prevailing wind condition is from the Philippines to Japan. Even if things happen, the radioactive materials will not come to the Philippines," he added.

Health Undersecretary Mario Villaverde echoed this, citing a report of the DOST's Philippine Nuclear Research Institute that "the level of radiation in the country has remained stable since the Fukushima incident (meltdown) in Japan."

"The conclusion is that there is no immediate threat to the Philippines. Just in case, we have the National Radiological Emergency Preparedness and Response Plan and this will be the one that will be put in place if there is a threat to the Philippines," Villaverde added.

The National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council (NDRRMC) urged the public to ignore rumors about the radioactive

materials from Japan reaching the Philippines.

NDRRMC executive director Benito Ramos said the people should verify the information they get from experts such as scientists from the Philippine Nuclear Research Institute.

"They should not immediately believe the information relayed to them... They should get the information from the authorities," Ramos said.

NUCLEAR SCARE SUSPENDS CLASSES AT PUP

The warning of nuclear radiation from Japan caused panic among parents and students of the Polytechnic University of the Philippines (PUP) in Manila and the school's other campuses in Luzon that forced school officials to suspend classes.

Dr. Dante Guevarra, PUP president, said that he saw no need to keep the students in school since they could not concentrate anyway.

"There is so much anxiety among the students. They were also passing the word around (about the text message warning) so we decided it was better to suspend classes," Guevarra told THE STAR.

Guevarra said tension at the campus started as early as 7:30 a.m. when they started getting calls inquiring about the text messages.

"We were being swamped by calls, by texts," Guevarra said.

The order for the suspension of classes at the PUP - which has a total student population of 65,000 in all its campuses in Luzon, while its main campus in Santa Mesa, Manila, has a population of 37,000 - came at 1:30 p.m.

Cristina Ganzon, Department of Education Communication Unit chief, said they saw no need to suspend classes after a DOST advisory was released denying any danger of radiation from Japan.

"As advised by the Department of Science and Technology, there is

no need to suspend classes based on the allegations circulating in text messages about rains that can burn or cause cancer," Ganzon said.

Meanwhile, warnings of acid rain from the nuclear fallout from Japan have forced officials of some elementary schools to suspend classes and let the school children go home in Bangued, Abra.

"My daughter went home pale because of fear from the radiation that will come at 4 p.m.," Department of Justice-Abra administrative officer Jack Turqueza said.

Pagasa however denied reports that there will be "acid rain" in the Philippines supposedly because of radioactive clouds from Japan.

"The winds from Japan are moving away from us. It's not true that these winds contain acid rain," Pagasa weather forecaster Aldazar Aurelio said in a radio interview.

The Philippine Institute of Volcanology and Seismology also allayed fears of a tsunami following the strong aftershock that hit Japan yesterday.

Philovics Director Renato Solidum said that even if there were an aftershock measuring up to magnitude 7.5, it could not generate a tsunami that can affect the Philippines.

"We have received many inquiries on whether there is a tsunami warning in the Philippines. We have to stress the official warning can come only from us," Solidum said.

The Department of Foreign Affairs had advised Filipinos near the damaged Fukushima nuclear plant to move away from the area to avoid exposure to radiation.

DFA also reported that the Philippine Permanent Mission to the United Nations and other international organizations in Vienna said the IAEA based in Vienna is monitoring the situation at the nuclear power plants in Japan that have been affected by the earthquake and tsunami. (www.philstar.com) ■

P-Noy Orders Assessment of Phl Disaster Preparedness

by Aurea CAICUA/
Tuesday, March 15, 2011

MANILA, Philippines - PRESIDENT AQUINO ORDERED GOVERNMENT AGENCIES yesterday to review and come up with a comprehensive assessment of the country's disaster preparedness.

However, Presidential Communications Secretary Ricky Carandang said the government was still studying the impact of the disaster in Japan on the Philippine economy.

The issuance of Samurai bonds might be reviewed, he added.

Carandang said the Philippines was considering a Samurai bond sale with maturity of 15 years as

early as April and was in talks with the Japan Bank for International Cooperation for a guarantee.

"It's also difficult for us to come up with our own assessment as to whether or not bond issue will push through, as to whether or not this will have an impact on our economy," he said.

Aquino met officials of the Philippine Nuclear Research Institute, Department of Science and Technology, Department of Health, Department of Budget and Management, National Security Council, Presidential Management Staff and the Office of the Executive Secretary.

Carandang said Aquino or-

dered a review of the country's disaster-preparedness particularly for earthquake and tsunami.

"He's going to get a briefing from officers of the defense probably, most likely this week - just to review the status of all of these disaster-preparedness in light of what's happening," he said.

Carandang said the government was focused on the immediate safety concerns as well as the nuclear crisis in Japan.

"The President ordered a review of our disaster capabilities particularly with earthquakes and tsunamis - there are a number of initiatives that had begun to be undertaken," he said.

"For example, the tsunami

(continued on page 10)

Joseph M. Zobian, M.D.



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■ **PHILIPPINE NEWS**
**Budget Surplus Reaches
P13.4 B**

by Iris GONZALES/
Wednesday, March 16, 2011

MANILA, Philippines - **THE GOVERNMENT POSTED A BUDGET SURPLUS** of P13.4 billion in January, a reversal from a budget deficit of P37.1 billion incurred in the same period last year, Finance Secretary Cesar Purisima announced yesterday.

The finance chief said remittances from government-owned and controlled corporations to the national government as well as improved collections of both the Bureau of Internal Revenue (BIR) and the Bureau of Customs (BOC) reversed the January fiscal position to a surplus.

Revenues in January reached P135.9 billion, 47 percent higher than the P92.3 billion reported in the same period last year. The BIR and the BOC registered growth of 15 percent and 17 percent, respectively.

Data from the Department of Finance showed that the BIR collected P74.6 billion while BOC revenues amounted to P20.5 billion. The Bureau of Treasury, meanwhile, collected P31 billion and remittances from other government offices amounted to P9.8 billion.

Expenditures, on the other hand, amounted to P122.5 billion or five percent lower than the disbursements in the same period last year.

Purisima said the fiscal performance of the

government in January showed that the reforms put in place by the Aquino administration to improve revenues have been working.

The reforms include the filing of cases against tax evaders and smugglers.

"As of mid-March, BOC has filed 28 criminal complaints since July 2010. These cases have a combined dutiable value of P42.5 billion and involved 134 respondents consisting of importers, brokers as well as BOC employees," Purisima said. "As of mid March 2011, the BIR has filed a total of 33 tax evasion cases since July 2010 against high-profile individuals," he said adding that the "fear factor" is working.

"Our message to our non-tax compliant countrymen is very simple. They have to pay their taxes promptly or face legal consequences, including fines. They should not wait for cases to be filed against them," he said.

"We are also encouraging all Filipinos to ask for official receipt on their purchases to make sure that the taxes they pay on those products and services go to the government and not somewhere else," he said.

The Finance chief said the government would continue to file criminal cases against tax evaders, smugglers and unscrupulous government employees.

"This will increase the risk that those who participate in corruption face. Finally, we will rationalize our processes, invest in technology and external information so that we can drive performance in the DOF, BIR and BOC," he said. (www.philstar.com) ■

**Bulusan Lahar Flows; 200
Evacuated**

by Marvin SY/
Tuesday, March 15, 2011

MANILA, Philippines - **AT LEAST 200 VILLAGERS IN IROSIN**, Sorsogon, were evacuated after lahar and mud from Bulusan volcano flowed before dawn Tuesday.

The National Disaster Risk Reduction Management Council (NDRRMC) said in a report that the lahar flow occurred at Barangay Patag, around 1 a.m., following heavy rains Monday night.

The NDRRMC said three houses were partially damaged by the lahar flow and 50 more were reached by mudflow.

(cont. from page 9; P-NOT...)

warning system which has begun, we'd like to find out exactly what the status is of that - all of that will be told to the President this week when he's briefed by the OCD (Office of the Civil Defense).

SENATE TO PROBE GOV'T'S DISASTER PREPAREDNESS

The Senate will conduct an inquiry tomorrow into the preparedness of government agencies in dealing with a strong earthquake and a tsunami.

Acting on a resolution of Sen. Juan Miguel Zubiri, the committees on environment and climate change would look into the programs of various government agencies, as well as the preparation of local governments for a national crisis scenario.

In his resolution, Zubiri said the Senate needs to look into the status and preparedness of national government and local government disaster risk reduction and management plans

The affected residents were evacuated to the Patag Barangay Chapel and the municipal hall of Irosin.

Field reports reaching NDRRMC said that the Rangas river in Irosin town also overflowed due to heavy rains.

Residents in Juban town were also alerted against possible flooding due to continuous rains.

The NDRRMC said its municipal office is continuously monitoring the situation in the town and assessment of the actual number of affected families was continuous.

The municipal disaster risk reduction management council in Juban town has also been activated. (www.philstar.com) ■

following the 8.9 magnitude earthquake that struck Japan last Friday.

Sen. Loren Legarda said national and local government leaders should clearly state what they are doing to reduce the possible damage and loss of life in the event of a strong earthquake.

The Metro Manila Earthquake Impact Reduction Study conducted jointly by the Japan International Cooperation Agency, Metropolitan Manila Development Authority and the Philippine Institute of Volcanology and Seismology has outlined the measures that should be undertaken to reduce the impact of a major earthquake in Metro Manila, she added.

The report indicated that a 7.2 magnitude earthquake in Metro Manila would result in the destruction of 169,000 houses, the damaging of 340,000 other houses, representing 40 percent of all residential buildings in the metropolis.

Thirty five percent of all public buildings in

(continued on page 11)

PHILIPPINE NEWS

Food from Japan Being Inspected

by Aurea CAUCA/
Tuesday, March 15, 2011

MANILA Philippines - **THE PHILIPPINES WILL BEGIN TO INSPECT FOOD** imports from Japan to check their radiation levels but downplayed any direct and immediate threat to the country following explosions in nuclear plants in Fukushima.

This developed as Singapore said yesterday that it was testing food products from Japan for radiation.

The government also appealed to "alarmists" to stop spreading through text messages that acid rain would fall because of radiation coming from a leak in a devastated Fukushima nuclear plant that might hit local winds.

Presidential Communications Development and Strategic Planning Office Secretary Ricky Carandang said President Aquino met with the heads of the Philippine Nuclear Research Institute, Department of Science and Technology, Department of Health, Department of Budget and Management, Na-

tional Security Council, Presidential Management Staff and the Office of the Executive Secretary to make sure that the Philippines would be safe from any possible effects of the nuclear crisis in Japan.

"Just as a precaution, imports from Japan, mostly foodstuffs, will be checked for levels of radiation," Carandang told reporters after the meeting in Malacañang.

The PNRI will be in charge of the tests because the Department of Agriculture checks agricultural products while the DOH is in charge of processed food.

"I'm not sure how quickly they can get it done but at the soonest possible time," Carandang said.

But Carandang said there was no plan to screen any travelers from Japan at this time.

Carandang said the President and all the other government officials received information that there was no nuclear meltdown that occurred.

"The information that we have was that there was no meltdown, that the worst of it has been contained. So according to (DOST)



Secretary Ricky Carandang

Secretary (Mario) Montejo, there is no immediate threat to the country right now from the explosion that happened at the nuclear plant. I think the nature of the explosion has been covered already by international media—the explosions occurred not in the reactor but outside of the reactor. It was hydrogen explosion that apparently did not affect the reactor so that's very good news for everyone," Carandang said.

"I think we were all relieved. But of course, there's so much that needs to be considered at this point. The preparations still have to

be reviewed," Carandang said. Japanese officials confirmed three nuclear reactors north of Tokyo were at risk of overheating, raising fears of an uncontrolled radiation leak.

Engineers worked desperately to cool the fuel rods in the damaged reactors. If they fail, the containers that house the core could melt, or even explode, releasing radioactive material into the atmosphere.

But Carandang said the Japanese government managed to prevent a meltdown "which would have been the worst case scenario."

Carandang said there was no need to panic and denied that the text messages were coming from credible news organizations like BBC.

"There's no truth to that, in fact, based on the briefing to us (yesterday) morning, as you know, there are some concerns that some radioactive material was released. They released some radioactive material to prevent a larger problem from occurring. We are following the wind patterns over the weekend and the wind patterns seem to be

moving toward the east—towards the Pacific Ocean—not south, towards us. So there's no truth to those text messages," Carandang said.

PRECAUTIONARY MEASURE

In Singapore, the country's food regulator said that as a precautionary measure, it will monitor Japanese produce based on source and potential risk of contamination.

"Samples will be taken for testing for radiation. Fresh produce will have priority. AVA (Agri-Food and Veterinary Authority of Singapore) will continue to closely monitor the situation and its developments," it said in a statement.

The AVA said the bulk of Japanese imports arrive by sea, but high-end Japanese restaurants in Singapore routinely use air freight to fly in produce such as raw fish — integral to sushi and sashimi — to ensure its freshness and quality.

The city-state has a large concentration of restaurants serving Japanese cuisine, which is very popular among Singaporeans.

Government figures showed the city-state's imports from Japan totaling \$26.2 billion last year. (www.philstar.com) ■

(cont. from page 10; P-NOY...)

cluding schools and hospitals, city halls, fire and police stations, would also be damaged and seven bridges would likely collapse.

Legarda also called for a review of the early warning systems for earthquakes and tsunamis as well as the country's system for requesting and receiving international humanitarian assistance.

She emphasized the need to establish disaster preparedness measures especially at the barangay level, such as ensuring the soundness of critical infrastructure through evaluation and retrofitting to allow them to withstand destructive earthquakes.

"Restoring our coastal mangrove forests and continuous tree-planting activities are simple yet effective defenses against several types of hazards," she said.

While trees serve as buffers from heavy rains, mangroves serve as shield from storm surges and rising sea levels.

Legarda said mayors of Metro Manila, including the Alliance of Seven Mayors, and more than 50 local executives in Cebu and Central Visayas have already committed to the United Nation's Making Cities Resilient campaign.

"I am happy with our local leaders' and citizens' growing awareness on the issue of climate change. This is what we need, to put together our political will and actions for a country that is prepared to ward off the ill effects of natural hazards."

QUILAPO CHURCH IN GOOD CONDITION

The Minor Basilica of the Black Nazarene or Quiapo Church in Manila is subjected to periodic in-

spections to ensure its structural soundness.

Monsignor Clemente Ignacio, Quiapo Church rector, said a full-time engineer, Vic Mallin regularly checks the centuries-old church.

Ignacio said they are seeking the assistance of a heritage architect and will coordinate with the National Historical Commission.

"I want everything to be sure that the building is in good condition," he said.

"When you are checking a structure, there is what we call a physical check - what we look at here are the posts or the pillars.

"If there are signs of cracks and it breaks, then that is the first level of checking. There is also the historical, wherein you look at the number of earthquakes that a structure has."

Ignacio said the Quiapo Church structure seems okay in the aspect of physical and historical check-ups.

"But if you want a more extensive way of checking, you would need an X-ray and sophisticated machines," he said.

Quiapo Church has also a disaster management team as required by the Manila city government to respond to emergency situations.

"We also have lectures with our staff," he said.

"Our ushers have been trained for bomb (detection), next time they would undergo training for fire and earthquake drills.

"These are necessary steps to ensure the parishioners' safety."

Ignacio said they started beefing up their safety measures after Archbishop of Manila Gaudencio Cardinal Rosales gave verbal instructions to have the structures double checked.

"We should make sure that the structures are strong," he quoted Rosales as saying.

The instructions were given after the earthquakes in Haiti and Indonesia last year, he added.

THE 'BIG ONE'

Officials of the Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH) and the Philippine Institute of Volcanology and Seismology (Phivolcs) are set to meet this week to assess the impact of a big earthquake on Metro Manila.

Public Works Secretary Rogelio Singson said he would have a "technical discussion with Phivolcs to cushion the impact of the Big One."

One of the topics that might be taken up is the study conducted by the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) that allegedly hints on the possibility that buildings in Metro Manila would collapse in a 7.2 magnitude tremor, he added.

The JICA study said Metro Manila was not prepared to deal with a 7.2 magnitude earthquake in

terms of resources and given the old structures surrounding it.

The quake would result in major fires in Manila, Pasig and Quezon City, the study added.

Phivolcs is reportedly monitoring three fault lines: the Markina Trench, Manila Bay Fault Line and the West Valley Fault.

Singson said they would have to determine if the structures along these fault lines would be able to withstand an 8.9 magnitude quake.

PALACE TO PALAFOX: STOP BEING AN ALARMIST

Architect Felino Palafox Jr. should help the administration craft a disaster preparedness plan instead of being an alarmist, Malacañang said yesterday.

Deputy presidential spokesperson Abigail Valte said everytime a disaster occurs, the expert on urban planning seems to be all over the news in radio stations, and contrary to his claims, he has not given President Aquino a copy of his proposals.

"We'd like to stress that while

these are all projections, (it would be better if these are) preventive rather than alarmist," she said.

"For every calamity that passes, it seems that we see a lot of Jun Palafox on the news and on TV," she said.

"We've not heard from Mr. Palafox," she added, referring to any recommendation that may have been forwarded to them. "So far we have not received anything. We have not received any plan from architect Palafox."

Valte said Aquino's instructions are continued monitoring for disaster officials and regular briefings for the communications group, so that everyone will be notified of what will happen, be it fear of nuclear radiation, tsunami or earthquake.

"Certainly, it's a point of concern for the President," she said.

"It's a point of concern, which is why he did ask for regular updates on the matter. I believe there are six (nuclear) reactors in Fukushima, so he wanted regular updates on how this would affect us." (www.philstar.com) ■

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TRAVELOGUE

It's Time for TAAAL

by Lester Gopela HALLIG

MANILA, Philippines - We jumped at the chance to visit Taal, Batangas. It sounded more like an invitation, really, to get to know the town better. Despite our frequent travels, we sheepishly admit that our knowledge of Taal was limited only to the overly popular volcano and the lake, and to the Internet. Of course, we cannot depend on what turns up on the Web. It is always different and more satisfying to experience the town itself, walk through its streets, talk to its people, take in its history, and appreciate its heritage.

So there we were in Taal, with our first stop at the Villavicencio Ancestral House. It was also here

where we were welcomed by our host, heritage warrior Ernie Villavicencio. The ancestral house proved to be a perfect introduction to Taal's rich heritage.

The pre-1850 Eulalio and Gliceria Marella Villavicencio Ancestral House figured famously in the Philippine Revolution, as it was the refuge of Filipino soldiers and the secret meeting place of revolutionary leaders. This was the place where the Katipuneros sought the advice of Gliceria, who earned the title "The Forgotten Heroine of the Philippine Revolution."

Thanks to the restoration of her house by great-grandson Ernie and his wife Ria, Ailing Eriang would not be easily forgotten now. The ancestral house offered a sneak peek into the heroine and her family's life in those days.

Noticing our quizzical look at the two living rooms in the house, Ernie explained: "There used to be levels of intimacy among Filipino families back then. If you are not that close to the family, you are relegated to the ante sala, which is smaller. If you are considered family friends or relatives, you get to sit in the main sala."

The living area has large windows, with chairs purposely placed beside them. We were told the



chairs were called silyang pamimintana. Our guide laughed, "Since television was not yet invented, people amused themselves by watching other people pass by."

The ancestral house best illustrates the bahay na bato in the southern region. Ernie said, "In this part of the country, the stone part is the lower level. The upper portion is made of wood." In this case, they used local hardwood such as narra, ipil, and molave. The main living room features portraits of Eulalio and Gliceria Marella by Juan Luna. There are the well-preserved polygonal paneling, the oil-on-canvas murals dating back to the early 1900s, crystal chandeliers of the Victorian age, and the only original tin ceiling in Taal. The Villavicencio house is easy to find along Marella Street: it has a bronze bust of Gliceria Marella.

Adjacent to this house is the Villavicencio Gift House, built by Eulalio as a wedding gift to his wife. It is just as grand as their main abode. Its restored incarnation shows how the house looked in its glory days. We saw this house in the day but what a sight it was in the evening. The lighting made the house truly alive, with the decadent colors and the intricate wall details ready to jump on us. The housekeeper here informed us that the Gift House can be booked for private functions.

"I restore houses because I want to preserve our heritage. It is part of my commitment to the town. It is my way of giving back to the town that made me. It is also my way of inviting tourists over to experience Taal," Ernie declared. "We welcome tourists here in Taal. We want to make this as tourist-friendly as possible."

As we found our way into some notable houses in Taal, such as Philippine flag-maker Marcella Agoncillo's shrine; the Ilagan-Martinez house which has become Galleria Taal, a camera museum; and Gregorio Agoncillo's White House, we wondered aloud how much the town reminded us somewhat of Vigan.

"What we really want to emulate is Vigan," Ernie nodded. "The people of Vigan are our idols. We look up to their vigilance into ensuring that everything is preserved.

Vigan used to have the same problem: nobody wanted to restore old houses. But they kept on. That is our plan, too. The entire town of Taal has ancestral homes, not just a portion of it. With that in mind, we have to be patient. It does not happen overnight anyway."

Meanwhile, they are busy building the necessary infrastructure to make Taal more enticing to tourists. Restaurants, diners, and bed-and-breakfast inns are being put up to make the Taal experience more rewarding to tourists.

We were so busy absorbing the exciting sights and stories that we hardly noticed that lunchtime had arrived. We trooped back to the Villavicencio House and feasted on Batangas favorites such as chicken adobong dilaw, which does not use soy sauce, just vinegar and yellow ginger; and sinigang na maluputo. The latter was a real treat as maluputo is a fresh water fish found only in Taal Lake. We must say that the dish got more delicious when the soup began to thicken. Fish oil surely did wonders.

The afternoon proved to be just as interesting as we headed to more Taal attractions. Indeed, how could we have lived our entire life without knowing this place? As they say, it is never too late for discovery. And discovery was what we truly got when we visited the centuries-old Our Lady of Caysasay Church. We were able to access the church via the San Ruiz Steps—that's 125 granite steps.

Next on our itinerary was the Sacred Well of Santa Lucia. This used to be a brook where the Lady of Caysasay granted miracles and where a church was previously built. We could see the half-submerged church facade peering out of the earth. It is several steps away from the Caysasay Church.

A visit to Taal would not be complete without going to the Saint Martin of Tours Basilica. This church has the distinction of being



Saint Martin of Tours Basilica

the largest Catholic church in Asia. It stands 96 meters tall and 45 meters wide, and just about looms above Taal. The facade bears more than a passing resemblance to Saint Peter's Basilica in Rome, but its tabernacle is most unique—it is made of silver.

The day we arrived, there was construction happening in the basilica. That, however, did not prevent us from climbing up the bell tower where a magnificent view of the whole town greeted us. From above, the rows upon rows of ancestral houses were in plain sight. Further on, we could see Taal's beach and the setting sun.

It was truly a sight to behold, something we could honestly say about Taal, too. The town may look spectacular in the photos found in the media, but trust us on this one: it is even more extraordinary when experienced first-hand. We always push family and friends (and even total strangers) into exploring their own country more. It is, after all, not just another reason for a road trip. Consider it as a way to go beyond mere acquaintance with the country's towns and cities, a means to establish a deeper connection with one's heritage.

Taal truly provides that opportunity. It is more than just ancestral houses. Now we realized that Taal is a history book in itself, with each turn a story that left us enthralled and wanting for more.

(www.philstar.com) ■



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LEGAL NOTES

Student Employment While Under Practical Training



by Reuben S. SEGURITAN

In this year's State of the Union Address, President Obama made mention of the unfortunate repatriation of international students enrolled in U.S. colleges and universities. His comment is a recognition of the significant contributions of international students and scholars to this country.

The United States gains by allowing foreign students to get training not only in terms of the economic impact of the students' presence and the diversity and global character that they bring to the workplace, but also because the country benefits from the application of the students' knowledge which they acquired in their advanced studies.

Apart from formal classroom education, another way that stu-

dents learn is through practical training. Practical training allows qualified foreign students to gain work experience by applying their academic knowledge to a position directly related to their area of study.

Employment may be authorized for F-1 students enrolled for one full academic year in a Department of Homeland Security (DHS)-approved college, school, university, conservatory, or seminary, except students in English-language training programs.

There are two types of practical training: curricular practical training (CPT) and optional practical training (OPT).

The first type, CPT, is approved by the designated school official (DSO) for an activity that is an integral part of an established curriculum, such as a work-study program, internship or practicum offered through cooperative agreements between a school and an employer.

The DSO issues the student an I-20 with the CPT endorsement after updating the student's information in the SEVIS, the online database that

tracks information on international students and visitors who are in the U.S. under the F visa, among others. The I-20 with the CPT endorsement constitutes the student's employment authorization.

There is no limit as to the duration of part-time (20 hours or less) or full-time CPT, but a student who has one year of full-time CPT may no longer be granted OPT at the same academic level. Part-time CPT is not accumulated or deducted from OPT.

The other type of practical training, OPT, is not limited to students who are currently enrolled in any class. Pre-completion OPTs are available for students on a part-time basis during school sessions, and on both part- and full-time basis during annual vacations and school breaks for students who are enrolled and will register for the next school session.

A maximum of 12 months OPT authorization is allowed for each educational level. This means that a student can have 12 months of OPT each for the bachelor's, master's, and doctoral levels. A one-

time 17-month STEM extension of a post-completion OPT is possible for F-1 students who earn a degree in science, technology, engineering, or mathematics.

According to a policy guidance, employment under OPT may be part-time or full-time employment. It may be for a single or for multiple employers, for multiple short-term employers, for an agency or consulting firm, or for the student him/herself as the business owner. Unpaid volunteer work and internships are also allowed. Moreover, the student may perform work as a contractor paid on tax form 1099 and need not be an employee. However, the employment practice must not be in violation of labor laws, and in all cases the employment must be directly related to the student's major area of study.

The student initiates the process by asking the DSO to recommend the OPT. The DSO makes such recommendation by issuing a Form I-20 with the OPT endorsement. The student will then file Form I-765 with the USCIS. If the application is approved, the student will receive a Form I-766 Employment Authorization Document. Regulations require the student to

report any change of name or address or interruption of employment to the DSO.

In cases where their employers are willing to continue their employment under an H-1B visa, foreign students most of the time encounter the "cap gap" - the period between the expiration of the OPT and the start of their H-1B status, which usually occurs on October 1 of each year. Because of the limited number of available H-1B visas, highly qualified students often face difficulty in continuing their employment.

In an effort to remedy this, the USCIS implemented the "cap gap" rule which offers automatic extension of duration of status and any OPT employment authorization until October 1 of the fiscal year where the student is the beneficiary of a petition requesting a change of status to H-1B. This will allow the student to remain and continue working in the U.S. until the change of status takes effect. ■

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

MAINLAND NEWS

S&P Sees Slower GDP Growth of 5.5% this Year

MANILA, Philippines - NEW YORK-BASED CREDIT RATER STANDARD AND POOR'S (S&P) sees the economic growth of the Philippines slowing down to 5.5 percent this year due to the absence of additional stimulus measures after the country posted its fastest expansion in 34 years last year.

In a report, S&P analyst Agost Benard said the absence of stimulus measures as well as election-related spending would lead to a slower economic growth this year. "With these additional stimulus measures absent this year, and the base effect working in the opposite direction, we expect growth to be lower at about 5.5 percent," Benard said in a report.

The Philippines posted a stronger-than-expected gross domestic product (GDP) growth of 7.3 percent last year surpassing the revised target of five percent to six percent set by the Cabinet-level Development Budget Coordination Committee (DBCC). The country was on the verge of a recession after its GDP growth slackened to



1.1 percent in 2009 from 3.8 percent in 2008 due to the full impact of the global financial crisis.

"As customary, remittance-fueled private consumption growth was a key driver, but investment and net exports made notable contributions. This stellar performance benefited from a base effect, given 2009 growth of 1.1 percent, election-related spending during the first half of 2010, as well as some measure of fiscal stimulus on account of the earlier downturn," he added.

The DBCC sees the country's GDP posting a GDP growth of between seven percent and eight percent.

Despite the expected slowdown this year, he pointed out that the average GDP trend growth of

4.5 percent over the past decade would continue to improve.

"Nevertheless, with the expansion of the services and construction sectors, the trend growth rate for the Philippines is likely in the process of rising from the 4.5 percent average seen over the past decade," Benard said.

According to him, the Aquino administration's public private partnership (PPP) scheme would help boost private sector economic activity.

However, S&P said the faster economic growth last year failed to boost revenue collections as it improved only by 7.5 percent while nominal GDP surged by 11 percent.

The credit rater also cited the ability of fiscal authorities to curtail expenditures in the second half of

last year resulting in a single-digit growth of 7.1 percent in government spending.

The country's budget deficit swelled to a record level of P314.5 billion or 3.7 percent of GDP last year from P298.5 billion or 3.9 percent of GDP in 2009. The shortfall was better than the programmed deficit of P325 billion or 3.9 percent of GDP. This year, authorities hope to trim the deficit to P290 billion or

3.2 percent of GDP.

"This will add credibility to the new administration's commitment to a gradual fiscal consolidation," Benard said as the Aquino administration vowed to trim the deficit to two percent starting 2013 until 2016.

S&P sees the Philippines trimming the budget deficit to 2.1 percent of GDP as early as this year. (www.phitstar.com) ■

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PHILIPPINE LANGUAGE

Semana Santa – Aldaw A Pananggilin Pannakarikna Ti Nadiosan A Paltiing



DAYASADAS

by Pacita C. SALUDES

No dadduma adda lattan iti panunot dagiti inaldaw nga aramid manipud panangirig iti agsapag agingga iti rabii a panaturong. No dadduma di magmalagipen ti mangted ti panagayaman iti Apo ti nalak-aman a ragsak

wenno gin-awa iti nagmalem. Malagip laeng a dagus no adda dakes a mapagting wenno saan a nasayaat a malak-aman.

Kasta ti panangratay ti biag iti inaldaw kadagiti kaaduan a panawen. Ngem no madanon ti Semana Santa a kunatayo idiy Kailokuan maipaagsep iti rikna ti pannakaipalagip ti panagtuotok ni Apo Jesus a nangsubbot ti basbasol tayo. Kaaduanna kadatayo a maliblawan nga aramid kangrunaanna ti panawan ti SEMANA SANTA a makuna a mangriing kadatayo. Saan a panangsermon daytoy

ngem pangpalagip laeng.

Umuna nga aldaw ti Semana – Mierkoles ti makuna a Kurkuros mapantayo iti simbaan ket KUROSAN ni Apo Padi iti munging-tayo iti dapo a mangpalagip a datayo a tao naggaputayo iti (TAPOK ket sumubitayo iti TAPOK). Makapakitangay a panunoton no dadduma ngem isu ti pudno. TAPOK ti naggapuantoayo ket madanon to met laeng ti panagsubitayo iti tapok a naggapuantoayo.

Kabayatan ti kaadda tayo iti rabaw ti daga a kas tapok, inlankan ti Apo ti kada maysa kadatayo iti

kaibatugan, maikkan tayo iti sirib, pagsaniakuan, kinapintas, kinataer, ken kinasalu-an a parabur ti biag ken bagi kabayatan ti panagbiagtayo. Ar-aramtan tayo kad met laeng dagita magamag a naited kadatayo iti nasayaat a wagas?

Impabulod ti Apo nga nailangitan dagita a mainanama nga aramanen a wagas kabayatan ti panagsubitayo kadatayo iti TAPOK a naggapuantoayo. Iti Semana Santa, ipakita ni APO Jesus kadatayo dagiti basbasol tayo. Ipalagip ti SEMANA Santa nga ilawawan ni Apo Jesus a nangbak-

lay kadagiti amin a basbasoltayo ditoy lubong.

Biermes Santo ti pannakapugsat ti anges ti Apo Jesukristo gapu kadatayo. Kaingetan nga aldaw ti semana a ditay unay ikasako a dadduma ditoy America. Addatay latta kadagiti trabaho ken aniaman nga aramid tayo gapu ta ditay met maisango ti mapan iti balay a pagkararagan (simbaan).

SABADO GLORIA, nalpasen ket Agyamantayo. Domingo Pasuca (Easter Sunday). Nalpas manen ti pananggilin. HAPPY EASTER TO EVERYONE! ■

GLOBAL NEWS

Couple Survives New Zealand Quake

By HFC Staff

DOUG AND EVELYN FORNO WERE IN THE MIDDLE OF CHRISTCHURCH, New Zealand when a magnitude 6.3 quake hit shortly before 1 pm on February 22, 2011.

The couple—who travel frequently to Hawaii and who once owned property in Waikiki—was vacationing in New Zealand with friends Anthony and Gail Seymour, Darrell Donald and Beverley Barrett.

The Fornos were enjoying the beautiful rosebushes in Christchurch's famed botanical gardens when the quake struck. They heard a loud rumble that sounded like a jet taking off, then felt the earth shaking violently.

"I tried to keep upright but to no avail," says Evelyn, who fell to the ground and reached for a rosebush to steady herself, pricking her fingers. Sirens began blaring from all directions.

When the violent shaking stopped, the stunned couple exited the botanical gardens and saw numerous cracks and fissures in the ground. They decided to head back to their hotel, where they had checked-in the previous afternoon. Less than an hour earlier, they had toured the town's museum and cathedral, which they later learned had collapsed, killing most of those who had been inside.

"We saw chaos everywhere," Evelyn says. "As we walked across the central area, we saw buildings teetering, collapsed or burning; dust, piles of bricks and broken glass, traffic going nowhere. We even came across at least one dead person, many injured and bleeding and others walking around stunned."

The couple immediately thought of their dear friends the Seymours and the Barretts who had traveled with them, but finding them in the midst of the chaos would be next to impossible.

FROM BAD TO WORSE

The Fornos reached their hotel, which fortunately was still intact. The seven-story building next to it, however, had collapsed and killed many foreign students who were studying English inside. Unable to enter the hotel or other buildings for fear of collapse, the couple was told by police to keep moving. They reluctantly did, but did not venture too far from the hotel, hoping to catch a glimpse of their friends.

"Fires were beginning to take hold all around," Evelyn says. "We did not want to go too far for fear of missing our friends, so we stayed close to the hotel and prayed that they would walk to where we were." They were directed by authorities to move towards a nearby park, which became a staging area. They were careful to walk in the middle of the street and stepped over piles of debris.

"There was so much devastation," Evelyn says. She noted that the streets had liquefied—similar to wet lahar after a volcanic eruption but coming from underground in huge amounts that swamped roads, cars and caused huge trees to topple. Later, sewage would bubble to the surface.

A SEARCH FOR FRIENDS

The Fornos circled the park looking for their friends. It was nearly 3 pm and having eaten only breakfast that fateful day, hunger pangs were beginning to set in. Fortunately, they spotted staff from their hotel and inquired about their friends but were told that they had yet to be seen.

They were then instructed by the authorities to move to another staging area at a much larger park on the opposite side of town. The park where they presently were to be used as a makeshift emergency hospital and morgue.

"So off we went again, having to circle the city which was in the process of being shut down by the police," Evelyn says. "Thankfully, the husband of our hotel manager gave us a box of trail mix bars and a bottle of water. As we walked, I picked up an apple on the footpath, obviously dropped by someone trying to get away, and kept it since we had no idea how long we'd be without food. We were on survival mode and many roads were blocked by debris or by the liquefaction that had gushed up from underground and swamped cars and streets."

The couple arrived at the fenced emergency shelter, which was not far from the botanical gardens where they originally were when the quake hit. There, they found others

like themselves—refugees of sorts, wearing black plastic garbage bags that shielded them from the cold rain and winds that began blowing.

They again searched in vain for familiar faces...but with no luck.

"We tried to rationalize and imagine different scenarios," Evelyn says. "It was starting to get pretty cold and wet, not to mention our deepening worry for our friends."

They asked the authorities for possible locations where other survivors could be grouping and learned there was a gathering next to the town's museum. Off they went again but upon arriving, the "gathering" turned out to be people lining up for food. The Fornos decided to join the queue, thinking they'd at least be better off with food in their stomachs. While in line, they befriended a Dutch couple and a young Spanish backpacker. Together, they ate dinner.

Afterwards, they parted ways and headed back to the emergency shelter to continue searching for friends. At about 7 p.m., they were told that all "refugees" were to be transferred yet again and that the Red Cross was setting up a registry.

Fortunately, they ran into the Spanish backpacker who informed them of a motel with available rooms. The Fornos decided to walk the kilometer to the motel in the pouring rain.

"We were soaking wet upon ar-

(continued on page 15)

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