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APRIL 12, 2014

HAWAII'S ONLY WEEKLY FILIPINO-AMERICAN NEWSPAPER

GOVERNMENT AND MILF INK PEACE DEAL IN MINDANAO

by Federico V. Magdalena, Ph.D.



Muslim women in Manila euphoric over the signing of the Peace Agreement on March 27, 2014 | Photo courtesy: Jez Aznar, Mindanews

After 17 long years of contentious peace talks, the Philippine government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) have signed the Comprehensive Agreement for the Bangsamoro (CAB) in Malacanang before officials and invited guests. Witnessing the historic event were Philippine President Benigno Aquino III, Malaysian Prime Minister Najib Razak and panel officials Miriam Coronel Ferrer, Ging Deles, Al Hadj Murad Ibrahim and Mohagher Iqbal. Also present were Malaysian facilitator Ab Ghafar Mohamed, Cardinal Orlando Quevedo and foreign dignitaries from Saudi Arabia, Libya, Germany, Turkey, the United Nations and local officials.

This event is historic because President Aquino accomplished what his mother and former Philippine president Cory Aquino had failed to do. In 1987, Cory sued for peace and

brought back Nur Misuari of the Moro National Liberation Front, MILF's rival, to the negotiating table. The talking points were based on the 1975 Tripoli Agreement, as Misuari scaled up his demands to cover Min-

danao, Sulu and Palawan as areas of Moro autonomy. The talks bogged down after months of futile discussions.

Much later, the MNLF forged an agreement in

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STATE EXPANDS ONLINE UNEMPLOYMENT SERVICES

by HFC Staff

The State Department of Labor & Industrial Relations (DLIR) has expanded its online unemployment services to include an unemployment appeals system and the ability for employers to electronically file weekly reports. Currently, employers can file payments and access account information online, while employees can file and report for unemployment claims.

"Improving online services is a key part of the Abercrombie administration's efforts to streamline

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PHILIPPINE SUPREME COURT UPHOLDS REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH LAW

by HFC Staff

After more than a year deliberating the constitutionality of the historic Reproductive Health Law which was passed in 2012, the Philippine Supreme Court has upheld the law which gives millions of Filipinos free access to contraception and expanded reproductive health education.

The groundbreaking Responsible Parenthood and Reproductive Health Act of 2012 guarantees universal and free access to nearly all modern contraceptives for all citizens, including impoverished

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SC spokesman Atty. Theodore Te announces the decision on RH Law's constitutionality

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HAWAII FILIPINO CHRONICLE
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EDITORIAL

Time's Person-of-the Year, Pope Francis Was A Good Choice

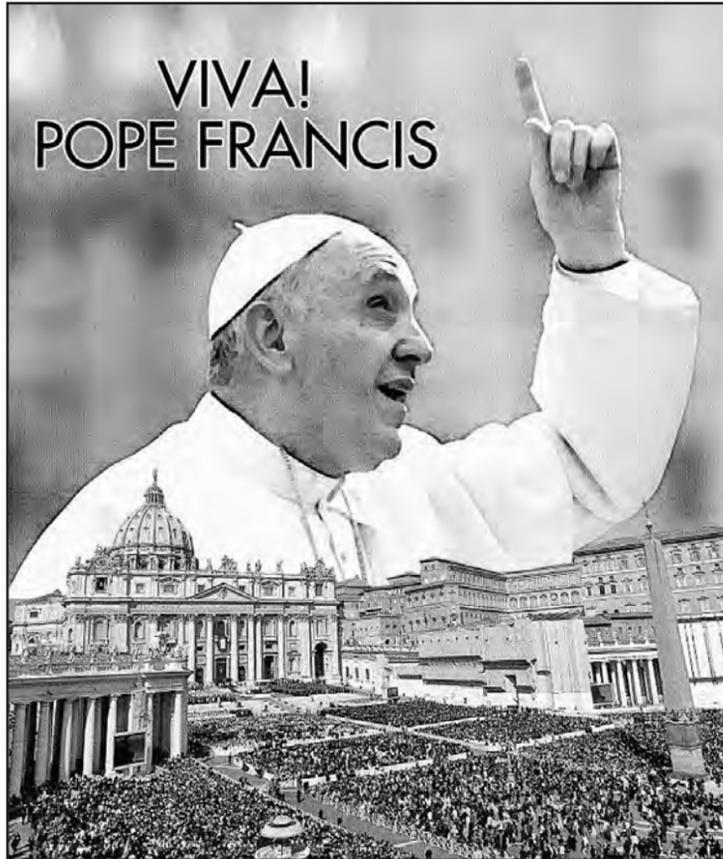
Since Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio became Pope Francis in March of last year, the world, secular and religious, Catholic and non-Catholics, have been captivated by his fresh leadership style and humility. Some have even called Pope Francis the first real priest to be elected to the papacy, as an exceptionally humble, meek Jesuit who has unconventionally risen to the top ranks of the Church's very political hierarchy.

So when Time magazine named Pope Francis its Person of the Year 2013 in December, it came as no surprise to not only the 13.5 million Catholics globally, but to almost anyone up on current events of the world. Pope Francis was only the third pope to be endowed with that prestigious media distinction, the last being Pope John Paul II.

It wasn't just the peculiar series of events leading up to Pope Francis' selection in conclave -- that his predecessor Benedict XVI suddenly announced his abdication of the papacy, a first in 600 years -- which instantly made him a media darling. Rather, it has been Pope Francis' collective charm, message, and leadership that has sustained his popularity.

In one of his first orders of business, Pope Francis moved quickly to clean up the mess surrounding Vatican Bank, an institution widely known to be plagued with corruption. Francis brought in a special commission to investigate the bank and ordered an independent firm to conduct an audit. He also enacted new initiatives to prevent money laundering and strengthened monitoring of the Vatican's finances. For the first time in its 125-year history, Vatican bank has even disclosed an annual report.

Just last month, Pope Francis named his first batch of new cardinals, which composition will reflect the future of the Catholic Church and play a part of electing the next pope. His selection of 19 cardinals are mostly from emerging, developing countries, unlike a traditionally European-heavy cast normally chosen by a pope. A few among the new set of cardinals are Philippine Archbishop Orlando



B. Quevado of Cotabato, Nicaraguan Archbishop Leopoldo Brenes Solarzano, Korean Archbishop Andrew Yeom Soo-jung of Seoul, Haitian Bishop Chibly Langlois of Les Cayes, and Chilean Archbishop Ricardo Ezzati Andreello of Santiago. Ten are from Latin America, the Caribbean, Asia and Africa; the other nine from Europe. Catholic analysts say Francis' picks represent pastoral leaders and men who bring a moderate, less doctrinaire and less flamboyant approach to ministry -- prelates much like himself. His selection also reflects a desire to make the Church more universal and to correct imbalances that has historically placed the power of the Church mostly in the hands of Italians and other Europeans.

As if pressed for time in his desire to rebuild the Church, Pope Francis

will hold a Extraordinary Synod of Bishops, only the third such gathering in almost 50 years, this October 2014 to discuss challenging pastoral issues that face modern families, including sexual ethics, divorce, cohabitation and reproduction.

So to date in just a few months, Francis has moved to shake up the Church's power structure: bringing order to its financial arms through the Vatican Bank; adding political legs to its current and future leadership with the appointment of new cardinals, the prime elective body; and lastly to come later this year via the Synod of Bishops, a chance to perhaps change the heart of the Church by taking on highly sensitive issues that have alienated many followers of the Catholic faith.

MODERN MESSAGE

All these monumental changes within the Church speaks volumes of the kind of progressive leader Francis is shaping out to be. But where his massive world-wide appeal, that is building up beyond the religious community and essentially the reason Time magazine has made him Person of the Year, is really anchored in Pope Francis, the charismatic leader with a message that radiates outside religious doctrines and dogma.

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Elections Are Now Easier To Buy With New Supreme Court Ruling

by Edwin QUINABO

Democracy will take a big hit at the ballot box starting this year's election season.

A new U.S. Supreme Court decision will further undermine the elections process to favor wealthy political donors, and in many ways, is resembling a system of legalized corruption.

In *McCutcheon v Federal Election Commission*, the SC voted 5-4 to strike down a federal law that placed caps on donations in a single election to national political parties and federal candidate committees. Striking down that law now makes it possible for people to make unlimited number of federal campaign donations in a two-year period.

The ruling doesn't extend the \$2,600 limit a donor can give to a federal candidate in each primary and general election or the \$32,400 limit that can go to a national party committee. But it removes an earlier cap of \$123,200 for total contributions.

So theoretically, one person could make as many donations of that single limit to as many candidates that the donor supports. Experts believe that loopholes have been opened. Some even believe that this ruling could be the staging before all limits are eventually taken away from campaign spending.

The previous federal law, called the Federal Election Campaign Act (FECA) was first passed in 1971. It aimed to limit influence of big donors. But in the SC's latest ruling, the high court interpreted that limitation as invalid under the First Amendment, or an unconstitutional curb to free speech.

Heather Gerken, an election law expert at Yale University said: "The opinion is going to cause a sea change in campaign finance. The court's decision reflects a profound naïveté about the way money moves through the party system, and we are going to bear the costs of this mistaken view for a long time."

Miles Rapoport, president of Common Cause re-

marked that the decision: "is Citizens United round two, further opening the floodgates for the nation's wealthiest few to drown out the voices of the rest of us..."

Robert Weissman, president of Public Citizen called the SC opinion a "devastating blow to our democratic system, and will go down along with Citizens United as one of the worst in history of Supreme court jurisprudence. It means a person can write a single check for \$5.9 million. Only a few hundred people in the country who might plausibly do that and they're going to expect something in return."

In 2010, in the controversial Citizens United case, the SC ruled that corporations and labor unions can spend as much as they wish on campaign advocacy, as long as it is independent of candidates and their campaigns. In other words, this allowed corporations and unions to spend as much as they want to make their own pricey commercials and ads to bolster candidates of their choice or attack opposing

candidates, as what occurred in the last election when former Gov. Ben Cayetano ran for mayor as an anti-rail candidate.

This 2014 SC ruling, can be viewed as part two of Citizens United, essentially covering all the bases in ensuring the wealthy, special interest groups, have even greater influence in who gets elected and who doesn't.

Ultimately this translates to wealthy donors buying favors of which politicians will be more beholden to because the entire election system has been corrupted and become even more dependent on how much money a political candidate can raise.

Shaun McCutcheon is a Republican activist who challenged the constitutionality of the former cap all the way up to the SC. The national Republican party and both leaders of the GOP from the House and Senate applauded the recent high court's ruling.

Clearly, the Republican party believes it would be a greater beneficiary of this cap removal. But the voting public should also consider that what this decision means for the Democratic party, is that it too must play the "pay-for-votes" game or

be squashed in election defeat. The Democratic party's hands could be just as dirty as Republican's under these new rules.

The end result, theoretically, puts both parties in a bind to a system that will further empower the most influential sectors of our society.

It's interesting how day by day, the average person, the average income earner, see life becoming increasingly difficult. Many of us wonder why or how did it become this way. There is a direct correlation with politics, power, and money, to society's current woes. We just need to open our eyes to see this correlation. This SC ruling is yet another example that takes away power from the people to benefit the wealthy. To most people, this ruling may go unnoticed. But the effects will be felt.

What will be the tipping point before the majority of people demand election reform and true change? That push will not come from career politicians from both political parties who benefit from the system. We also know on which side the country's highest court is on with this latest ruling. What will it take to tip the balance of this game to once again bolster the interests of the majority of the people? ■

EDITORIAL

(cont. from page 2; TIME'S...)

Francis' harsh criticisms of the global economic system and the idolatry of greed that has caused massive economic inequity around the world is a message millions can relate with. Francis said: "Some people continue to defend trickle-down theories which assume that economic growth, encouraged by a free market, will inevitably succeed in bringing about greater justice and inclusiveness in the world. This opinion has never been confirmed by the facts." To have a strong leader, religious or otherwise, to be able to speak up against this systemic injustice, would naturally bring about a connection and admiration for that leader by millions who share that opinion.

Francis' famous quote of gay people: "If a homosexual person is of good will and is in search of God, I am no one to judge," shows a kind of compassion and unique understanding unseen, at least publicly, by any modern head of a major world religion (aside from Buddhism).

To divorced and remarried Catholics who are forbidden from taking Communion, Francis said that this crucial rite "is not a prize for the perfect but a powerful medicine and nourishment for the weak."

Of making women more influential in the Church, he said: "We need to work harder to develop a profound theology of the woman." And he called for a need for women to play a more important role in the Church.

Whether or not Pope Francis' personal convictions that he openly expresses actually translate to concrete institutional changes is a big question mark, which perhaps only God knows what could happen. But at the very least, Pope Francis, the "People's Pope," as dubbed by many in the media and religious sectors, has made tremendous strides in moving the Church to modern relevancy, and perhaps more importantly, become a powerful advocate for justice around the world. ■



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

1996 with the next administration under Fidel Ramos. However, five years of running the Moro autonomous government under Misuari did not amount to much, until Aquino came to power in 2010. He declared that this autonomous government was a "failed experiment." That gave more reason for the peace panel he had formed to talk serious business with the MILF, a breakaway faction that was hell bent on pursuing Muslim independence. Then in October 2012, the two groups signed the Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro that led to the current peace deal, acronymed CAB like a fast moving vehicle. In effect, it operationalized and consolidated four annexes (transitional mechanisms, power and wealth sharing arrangements and normalization) that substantiate it.

Moro (Muslims) rebels have been up in arms in a secessionist struggle since the early 1970s. In effect, the war that ensued has made everybody a loser. Consider this: Since that time, more than 120,000 have died and millions of people displaced. It costs the government billions of pesos worth of lost opportunity, heavy military expenditure and untold damages to property.

At this time, there is reason for jubilation. CAB promises to end four decades of Islamic secessionist conflict. It hopes to bring about lasting peace, development and prosper-

ity for Mindanao. MILF Chair Ibrahim calls the pact "the grandest articulation of our aspirations." Mindanao's first cardinal Orlando Quevedo opines that this will terminate the injustice committed against the Moros since colonial times.

But there is also reason for concern. The roadmap to peace and development is long and arduous, its path is bumpy and littered with numerous obstacles. For one, Congress has to approve the proposed bill, which is already being called as the Bangsamoro Act. The peace agreement cannot fly unless it wins the support of Filipinos through their representatives, as well as by civil society.

What now? After CAB is the congressional passing of a Bangsamoro bill that eventually replaces the Autonomous Region for Muslim Mindanao. Since the devil is always in the detail, observers expect heated debates on how the political arrangements will play out. What are the limits of sharing power and resources? How are the constitutional issues to be resolved, for instance, regarding the state's monopoly of resource exploration? Can the Bangsamoro form a "ministerial government embedded at the heart of the Philippine presidential system? Once approved, a transitional body will have to be established until the officers of the Bangsamoro government are elected in 2016.

Feisty Senator Miriam Santiago fired a volley of criticisms against CAB for



MILF chief negotiator Mohagher Iqbal (left) exchanges copies of the agreement with his government counterpart, Miriam Coronel-Ferrer, as MILF Chairman Al Haj Murad Ibrahim, Peace Facilitator Tengku Dato Abdul Ghafar Tenku Mohammed, Malaysian Prime Minister Najib Razak, President Benigno Aquino 3rd and Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process Secretary Teresita Quintos-Deles applaud. | MALACANANG PHOTO

being unconstitutional. Santiago said the agreement violated the constitution by (1) allowing a "sub-state" for the Moros far beyond the limits of autonomy and thereby derogating the sovereignty of the central government, (2) providing for powers reserved for the state (e.g., exploring natural resources), and (3) that the executive misrepresented itself as the government when there are three branches that comprise it, among others. These issues can be settled in the legislature by granting more powers to, or allowing power-sharing schemes with, a local government like the Bangsamoro. After all, the 1987 constitution recognizes it as one of two regions entitled for autonomy. Constitutionalist Fr. Joaquin Bernas also believes this arrangement is legally possible though it provokes intense and protracted debate. On charter change, he believes that "if it is not prohibited, then it is allowed." The terrain is wide open and civil society groups can also play a critical role in the shaping of public opinion.

Still, some sectors harbor "spoilers" who may not want the agreement to prosper. Some members of this group protested the CAB predecessor, called the Memorandum of Agreement on the Ancestral Domain, due for signing in Kuala Lumpur in August 2008. The Supreme Court ruled the MOA-AD as un-

constitutional.

Unmindful of these scenarios, the general feeling in Mindanao seems to be one of approval. More than 85 percent yearn for peace, according to latest SWS surveys. Moros in particular have been expecting peace as an alternative to the pes-tering conflict that has threatened their lives and those of Christians and Lumads (tribal communities). The peace deal is welcomed by many war-fatigued Mindanao residents. The Mindanao Business Council believes it will spur growth and investments. Moody's credit rating for the Philippines may go up even higher than the "Baa3" it reported in 2013.

For now, the talking has yielded fruit and may silence the guns that do most of the exchanges. As part of the deal, the 12,000 or so MILF rebels will be gradually "decommissioned" and their arms kept somewhere. Meanwhile, shortly before the approval of the CAB, the media also reported the arrest of U.S. Senator Leland Yee (Democrat, California) who was charged with arms dealing with "Mindanao Muslim separatists." The MILF has denied involvement in the matter.

Will the peace treaty finally deliver what it purports to do? Cardinal Quevedo and other advocates argue that peace is the only alternative now that CAB is finally in motion. Local news from Mindanao report stories about those who see in it much progress and hope

for a better life. Euphoria pervades the air in many provinces, particularly in Maguindanao and Sultan Kudarat, the MILF lair. There, people from all walks of life, including women, children and even the aged express high optimism over a brighter future. Women paint their faces green, a signature color of the MILF. Mothers now envision their sons to grow up as workers rather than rebels.

But some are not convinced about the turn of events, expecting more troubles. For example, a splinter group called Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF) vowed to continue the secessionist goal of independence. Led by Umbra Kato, who is reported to be either dead or ailing, the BIFF has stepped up attacks against military targets in the Cotabato areas. BIFF spokesperson Abu Misry Mama has told Agence France-Press: "We want independence ... through armed struggle."

Also, Sultan Jamalul Kiram III (deceased) and his Tausugs sympathizers felt sidelined by the agreement and government inaction in the Sabah issue. Kiram's forces were involved in a deadly incident in Lahad Datu, Sabah in February 2013. His brother led a group that pressed the Malaysian government to recognize their historic claim over Sabah. Joined by MNLF fighters, they engaged Malaysian troops that resulted in heavy casualties. In fact, Misuari's MNLF was also responsible for the Zamboanga City siege in September 2013, a reprise of the 2001 Caba-tangan incident. Both groups have made veiled threats that more wars in Mindanao are forthcoming.

Concerned citizens hope that the Bangsamoro government would face off these problems. Will it be make or break for the MILF? Or to the national government?

Keep tab of events that unfold soon. *Abangan!* ■

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Council Reviews City's FY 2014 Budget



by Councilmember
Ron MENOR

Last March 22nd, I presented an honorary certificate on behalf of the City Council to Julius D. Torres, who recently retired as consul general, a position he has held since 2011. Many leaders in the Filipino community bid him a fond aloha at a retirement party held in his honor at the Philippine Consulate. A seasoned diplomat with impressive credentials, Consul General Torres has been assigned to posts all over the world, including Europe, the Middle East, the Pacific

and Canada.

Here at City Hall, the Council is reviewing the mayor's proposed \$2.15 billion operating budget for Fiscal Year 2015 and \$640 million Capitol Improvement Projects (CIP) budget. I've been attending the Budget Committee briefings to make sure that we get the most bang out of each taxpayer dollar. As for bills and resolutions of note, the Council approved Resolution 14-9 CD1 FD1, which allows the public to exchange unused fireworks permits issued for use between December 31, 2013 and January 1, 2014 for a new fireworks permit for use between December 31, 2014 and January 1, 2015. This is good news for those of you who purchased permits but were unable to obtain fireworks due to an



Councilmember Menor with Joy Gabriel

unexpected shortage of fireworks this past New Year's.

For you bus riders, I am continuing to urge Mayor Caldwell to fully restore the original Country Express Route E which continues to be heavily used by West Oahu residents who work in Downtown or Waikiki. The mayor indicated a willingness to do so, provided that Council approves a bill to allow advertisements on the exterior of City buses and Handi-Vans. Revenues gen-

erated from advertisements would be used to fund the restoration of Express Route E and other bus routes. However, the Council's Budget Committee deferred action Bill 69 (2013) until legal and funding concerns are ironed out. I would support the bill only if all revenues generated are used exclusively for the bus and Handi-van system.

Lastly, I had an opportunity to meet an extraordinary teenager from Ewa Beach named Joy Gabriel who was named Youth of the Year. She represented the Boys & Girls Club in a state competition last March 27th at the State Capitol. Several years ago, she and her sister Angela joined the Hale Pono Clubhouse. Its welcoming environment provided a sense of safety and security, allowing them

to bloom as individuals. The Clubhouse's programs also helped the sisters to overcome personal challenges and learn leadership, management and communication skills. Both are now serving as mentors for their younger peers and have volunteered for numerous community service projects. Congratulations to Joy and Angela for serving as inspirational examples, and my personal mahalo to the Hale Pono Clubhouse for giving both of these girls hope for a brighter future!

In closing, please contact me at 768-5009 or via email at: rmenor@honolulu.gov if you have any concerns or need assistance. For my latest activities as a City councilmember, log on to: www.facebook.com/RonMenorHawaii. ■

HEADLINES

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

and transform the way state government operates," says DLIR Director Dwight Takamine. "Expanding the online unemployment system makes crucial services more readily available to both claimants and employers."

The web-based paperless appeals system allows

all parties to receive hearing notices, submit requests to reschedule a hearing date, monitor the status of an appeal and receive decisions via electronic notification. The user-friendly system is convenient, secure and available Monday to Friday from 6:30 am to 5:30 pm, and on weekends and holidays

from 9 am to 5:30 pm.

DLIR's online unemployment service also allows employers to file electronically the Low Earnings Report. Employers can now file weekly reports of low earnings, file amended reports, receive notifications of missing reports and verify report filing. This will expedite claimants' benefit

payments and eliminate the time-consuming and inefficient paper process for employers.

Claimants and employers who wish to access these services must register for an account at uiclaims.hawaii.gov. To establish an account, businesses need to have the following:

- address
- FEIN and DOL numbers
- Gross quarterly wages reported on the most recent quarterly reported submitted
- Email account for notifications.

Please call 586-9075 for more details on DLIR's online unemployment services. ■

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

communities, at government health centers. The law also mandates reproductive health education in public schools and recognizes a woman's right to post-abortion care as part of the right to reproductive healthcare.

"With universal and free access to modern contraception, millions of Filipino women will finally be able to regain control of their fertility, health and lives," says Nancy Northup, president and CEO of the Center for Reproductive Rights. "The Reproductive Health Law is a historic step forward for all women in the Philippines, empowering them to make their own decisions about

their health and families and participate more fully and equally in their society."

Signed by President Benigno S. Aquino III in December 2012, the RH Law was immediately challenged in court by various conservative Catholic groups. On March 19, 2013 the Supreme Court issued a status quo ante order for 120 days that was later extended indefinitely, halting the RH Law from taking effect. Fourteen petitions questioning the constitutionality of the law on the grounds that it violated a range of rights, including freedom of religion and speech, were consolidated for oral arguments that lasted through August 2013.

In reaching its decision, the Supreme Court struck down a number of provisions in the RH Law. Health care providers will be able to deny reproductive health services to patients based on their personal or religious beliefs in non-emergency situations. Spousal consent for women in non life-threatening circumstances will be required to access reproductive health care. Parental consent will also be required for minors seeking medical attention who have been pregnant or had a miscarriage.

Petitioners in the case will now have 15 days to appeal the Supreme Court decision.

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Annual Fiesta and Community Health Fair Set for May 10

THE 22ND ANNUAL FILIPINO FIESTA IS SCHEDULED for Saturday, May 10 from 10 am to 7 pm at the Honolulu Municipal Grounds near City Hall.

Sponsored by the Filipino Community Center, the Fiesta will conclude the week-long Flores de Mayo Filipino Festival and will feature a full display of Filipino culture in Hawaii. The

day-long event is open to the public and is supported in-part by the City & County of Honolulu.

The Fiesta includes the annual Community Health Fair which offers attendees a myriad of health screening and consultation services—including check-ups of blood pressure, cholesterol, dental and diabetes—that will be offered at no charge. The

Health Fair is scheduled from 10 am to 5 pm. Contact J.P. Orias at 387-8297 or via email at jporias808@aol.com for more details on the Health Fair.

The Filipino Fiesta will include traditional Filipino food, games, cultural exhibits, a Philippine regional village and live entertainment including a traditional Santacruzian processional

pageant. Event organizers are also planning to have an update on relief efforts for victims of Typhoon Haiyan.

Because of the new location, the FilCom Center will provide venue information including a site map and parking areas at the center's official website, filcom.org.

The first Filipino Fiesta was held 22 years ago when L&L Drive-Inn founder Eddie

Flores initiated the celebration as part of an awareness campaign to garner support for the building of the FilCom Center. The Fiesta has since become Hawaii's largest showcase of the rich Filipino culture with upwards of 10,000 attendees each year.

For more information about the Filipino Fiesta, please visit www.filcom.org or call 680-0451. ■

Final Week to Take Advantage of Charitable Giving Assistance Act

TIME IS RUNNING OUT for those wanting to help victims of Typhoon Haiyan victims and receive a 2013 tax deduction.

Thanks to the bipartisan Philippines Charitable Giving Assistance Act, co-sponsored by U.S. Sen. Mazie Hirono and three Senate colleagues, the public has until April 15, 2014 to donate to relief efforts and take a charitable deduction when fil-

ing your 2013 tax returns. The law also allows taxpayers who have already filed their 2013 returns to make a donation and then file an amended return to take advantage of this benefit.

"Please take advantage of this and help us achieve a much-needed boost in ongoing efforts to raise critical funds for the victims of Haiyan," says Constance

Lau, chair of the Consuelo Foundation board and president and CEO of Hawaiian Electric Industries.

On Saturday, April 12 from 10 am to 11 am, the Filipino Community Center (FilCom) will host a public presentation on the Consuelo Foundation's Project HOPE (Haiyan Operations for Protection & Empowerment) to aid disaster victims.

Dr. Jon Matsuoka, Consuelo Foundation president and CEO, will provide an update on how the project is helping disaster victims regain their livelihoods and rebuild their communities. Light refreshments will be served. If you want to attend, RSVP by calling 680-0451.

To date, FilCom has collected nearly \$700,000 for the relief effort. Donations will

be contributed to the Consuelo Foundation, who has generously agreed to match all funds given by the FilCom Center.

"Mahalo to Senator Hirono and her colleagues for encouraging Americans to contribute to the relief efforts," says Edmund Aczon, chairman of FilCom's Board of Directors. "Everybody can make a difference, even if it's donating just a little bit." ■

SOCIAL SECURITY UPDATE

Answers to Common Social Security Questions

by Jane YAMAMOTO-BURIGSAY

Q: We adopted a baby girl overseas and brought her home with us to the U.S. We need to get a Social Security number for her. What do we do?

A: In general, to apply for a Social Security number for your child, you must:

- Complete an "Application For A Social Security Card" (Form SS-5), which you can find online at: www.socialsecurity.gov/ssnumber.
- Furnish documents proving your child's U.S. citizenship or immigration status, adoption, age and identity.
- Furnish a document proving your identity.
- Provide evidence that establishes your relationship to the child if your name is not noted as the parent on the child's evidence of age. The adoption decree or the amended U.S. birth certificate will suffice.

In most cases, you can mail or take your application and original documents to your local Social Security office. All documents must be either originals or copies certified by the issuing agency. Photocopies or notarized copies of documents will not be accepted. If you do not yet have proof of your child's citizenship, a Social Security number can be assigned based on documentation issued by the Department of Homeland Security upon the child's arrival in the U.S. When you do receive documentation of your child's citizenship, bring it to the nearest Social Security office and have your child's records updated. Your child's number and card will be mailed to you as soon as your documents with the issuing offices have been verified.

Q: Can I use the metal or plastic versions of Social Security cards that some

companies make?

A: There is no need to have a replica of your card. In most cases, the only time you may need to produce your Social Security card is when you apply for employment. It is recommended that you keep any documents with your Social Security number on it together with your other important papers.

Also, do not carry your Social Security card with you, nor have it laminated. You should question anyone else other than your employer who asks for your Social Security number or your card. Not everyone you do business with needs it. Learn more at: www.socialsecurity.gov/ssnumber.

Q: How long do I need to work to become eligible for retirement benefits?

A: Everyone born in 1929 or later needs 40 Social Security credits to be eligible for retirement benefits. You can earn up to four credits per year, so you will need

at least 10 years of work to become eligible for retirement benefits. During your working years, earnings covered by Social Security are posted to your Social Security record. You earn credits based on those earnings.

If you become disabled or die before age 62, the number of credits needed to qualify for Social Security benefits depends on your age at the time you die or become disabled. A minimum of six credits is required to qualify for Social Security benefits regardless of your age. You can create a "My Social Security" account to check and periodically monitor how many credits you have. Just go to: www.socialsecurity.gov/myaccount.

Q: I have children at home and plan to retire by next Fall. Will my children be eligible for monthly Social Security payments after I retire?

A: Your children may get monthly Social Security

payments if they are unmarried and under age 18; are age 19 and still in high school; or are age 18 or over and became severely disabled before age 22 and continue to be disabled. For more information, read "Benefits For Children" available at: www.socialsecurity.gov/pubs.

Q: Is there a time limit on how long you can get Social Security disability benefits?

A: No. Your disability benefits will continue as long as your medical condition has not improved and you cannot work. Your case will be periodically reviewed to determine if you continue to be eligible. If you are still receiving disability benefits when you reach your full retirement age, your disability benefits will automatically be converted to retirement benefits. The amount you receive will remain the same. Learn more about disability benefits at www.socialsecurity.gov/disability. ■



by **Atty. Emmanuel Samonte TIPON**

FilAm Avoids Deportation By Having Immigration Regulation Voided

of \$250 to \$300.

INS issued an Order to Show Cause, alleging that Conchita had violated the conditions of her nonimmigrant status pursuant to 8 C.F.R. § 214.1(f) by falsely stating to an INS special agent that she "had never told any alien that [she] could assist in obtaining an extension of nonimmigrant status for money." The OSC alleged that Conchita had told Rodolfo that she knew someone who could get him an extension for \$200 to \$300.

Rodolfo testified that Conchita had mentioned \$300 to \$400 or even more. The customs inspector's wife said she spoke to Rodolfo about helping him fix his immigration papers and did not quote him a price, but asked him to take her to dinner.

The special agent testified that he was working with the Customs Service to investigate alleged corruption among customs officers in San Francisco. The customs inspector was the key target of the investigation. Conchita testified that she talked with Rodolfo about his visa problem, but did not tell him that someone would help him for money, although she referred him to the customs inspector's wife.

The IJ ordered Conchita deported, finding that Conchita had made the false statement. The BIA held that Conchita gave false information to an INS agent in violation of 8 C.F.R. § 214.1(f),

and was deportable under 8 U.S.C. § 1251(a)(9).

The Court of Appeals reversed, holding that the Attorney General exceeded his authority when he promulgated 8 C.F.R. § 214.1(f). It provides: "A condition of a nonimmigrant's admission and continued stay in the United States is the full and truthful disclosure of all information requested by the Service. Willful failure by a nonimmigrant to provide full and truthful information requested by the Service (regardless of whether or not the information requested was material) constitutes a failure to maintain nonimmigrant status under section 241(a)(1)(C)(i) of the Act."

The regulation interprets 8 U.S.C. § 1251(a)(1)(C)(i) (Supp. V 1993). It provides: "Any alien who was admitted as a nonimmigrant and who has failed to maintain the

nonimmigrant status in which the alien was admitted or to which it was changed under section 1258 of this title, or to comply with the conditions of any such status, is deportable."

An agency's interpretation

of a statute that it is entrusted to administer is entitled to considerable weight unless it is "arbitrary, capricious, or manifestly contrary to the statute." Congress did not intend to bestow unfettered discretion on the INS to request any information it desires, and then deport an alien for failing to deliver it truthfully. The truthful disclosure requirement must have some relevance to the alien's status.

Deportability or exclusion based upon misrepresentation is limited to willful misrepresentation of material facts. Congress did not intend to allow the INS to deport aliens for nonmaterial misrepresentations. The regulation is inconsistent with the statutory scheme.

The deportation order was based solely upon a finding that Conchita had made an untruthful state-

ment to an immigration official. That statement was not material to her immigration status but related to a criminal investigation of other persons. *Romero v. INS*, 39 F.3d 977 (9th Cir. 1994) ■

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 is originally from Laoag City and Magsingal, Ilocos Sur. Atty. Tipon specializes in immigration law and criminal defense. He served as an immigration officer and co-authored "Immigration Law Service, 1st ed.," an 8-volume practice guide for immigration officers and lawyers. His radio program airs Thursdays at 7:30 am on KNDI 1270 AM. He can be reached via mail at: 800 Bethel St., Suite 402, Honolulu, HI 96813, by telephone at (808) 225-2645 or by e-mail: filamlaw@yahoo.com. For more on Atty. Tipon, go online to: www.MilitaryandCriminalLaw.com. This article is a general overview of the subject matter discussed and is not intended as legal advice.

The U.S. Attorney General (Secretary of Justice in the Philippines) is the chief enforcer of immigration laws. He is authorized to prescribe regulations to interpret and implement the immigration statutes. These regulations have the force of law. It is very rare to get an immigration regulation invalidated by the courts. A Filipino American did it and avoided deportation.

Conchita, a Filipina, was admitted to the U.S. as a nonimmigrant treaty investor. Rodolfo asked her if she knew somebody who might be able to help him get an extension of his visa. Conchita replied that she might. Later, Rodolfo cooperated with the Government in their investigation of a visa fraud scheme.

When Conchita re-entered the U.S., she was questioned by an immigration special agent about what she told Rodolfo. The agent said Conchita admitted that she had telephoned Cecilia, wife of a U.S. customs inspector, about Rodolfo's immigration problem. The special agent reported that Conchita denied having told Rodolfo that she knew a person who could help him with an extension of stay for a fee

— HAWAII-FILIPINO NEWS —

Kuakini Health System Hosts Open House for Students

KUAKINI MEDICAL CENTER opened its doors to hundreds of local elementary and middle school students for its annual open house held April 10-11, 2014 at the Hale Pulama Mau Auditorium.

Students got an up-close introduction to healthcare services, careers in the medical field and ways to stay healthy. They also participated in brain exercises, washed their hands and then checked to see how clean their hands were, learned how physicians perform a cardiac catheterization procedure, learned about healthy eating and the importance of saving money, and measured the oxygen level in their bodies.

The Open House also featured exhibits from Kuakini's various departments and services, as well as displays of a City ambulance, the University of Hawaii's Hyperbaric Treatment Center and Kuakini's HazMat shower unit. ■

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MARILOU DIAZ-ABAYA: FILMMAKER ON A VOYAGE

by Belinda A. AQUINO, Ph.D.

Marilou Diaz-Abaya, often referred to as the "First Lady of Philippine Cinema" is more than just a "First."

Even if she has passed on, I refer to her in the present, as well as in the future tense. For indeed, she is an enduring icon for all time.

And instead of First Lady, I prefer to call her the "Grand Lady of Philippine Cinema," because "First Ladies" are not necessarily "Grand" or "Great."

I watched with great intensity on April 6 the 87-minute documentary on Marilou which Mona Lisa Yuchengco wrote, produced and directed in 2012 and presented at the ongoing Filipino Film Festival at the Honolulu Museum of Art. Mona Lisa, who lives in San Francisco, was invited to make a presentation of her film and hold an open forum after the showing.

As Mona Lisa indicated in an interview before presenting her film, Marilou was not just a friend to her. She was more than that and it would not be inaccurate to call them "soul sisters."

Marilou's husband, Manolo Abaya, also a filmmaker, is a brother to Mona Lisa's first husband, Rafael Abaya. The two women had known each other from way back and people would mistakenly identify Mona Lisa as Marilou, for they indeed had striking similarities, even if they were not related by blood.

In her introduction to the film, Mona Lisa recalled that eventually Marilou became her mentor in film production when she embarked on a new venture in life following her 12-year career as owner and pub-

lisher of *Filipinas Magazine*, so far the longest-running Filipino popular publication in the U.S. before she sold it to a new owner.

Having an artistic bent herself, Mona Lisa chose to follow in Marilou's footsteps as an outstanding filmmaker and director. She could have opted to resume her earlier business career in the tradition of the Yuchengco family in the Philippine corporate sector. She could have gravitated to a humanitarian calling having already established the Philippine International Aid Foundation, which helps disadvantaged youth in the Philippines.

But the inspiration and "pull" that Marilou had provided Mona Lisa was too good to pass up. And so Mona Lisa packed up her things from San Francisco and flew to Manila to undertake a special training on film making, courtesy of Marilou Diaz-Abaya.

The result is a seminal work documentary-making by Mona Lisa, but it could be the definitive work on Marilou Diaz-Abaya's remarkable career as the Grand Lady of Philippine Cinema.

ABOUT MARILOU

Mona Lisa's film entitled, "Marilou Diaz-Abaya: Filmmaker On A Voyage," is a powerful and compelling drama surrounding the life of a great artist and an even greater human being.

Already stricken with Stage IV cancer when Mona Lisa interviewed her on several occasions, Marilou was, alternatively exuberant reminiscing on her career in the Philippine film industry, and somewhat sad about her impending



▲ Dr. Lindy Aquino, Nieva Elizaga, Mona Lisa Yuchengco, Dr. Vilo Hereniko and Jeannette Paulson Hereniko at the showing of "Marilou Diaz-Abaya: Filmmaker on a Voyage" at the 6th Annual Filipino Film Festival.

departure from the world of mortals. At one point, she remembered telling her friends jokingly that she was already "in the pre-departure area."

Art was in Marilou's blood even before she became an adult. Convent-bred and socialized in high culture circles, she took to the arts with great gusto. She even took ballet lessons. She would go abroad to such institutions as the Loyola Marymount College in the U.S. to pursue further education in the arts.

When she returned to the Philippines some years later, there was no doubt that her longterm career would lead to filmmaking as director. And she became one of the first female directors in the Philippines during her time.

She recalled her bitter-sweet struggles to make it through a profession dominated by male authority figures and actors. One time, popular movie director Ishmael Bernal, a graduate of the University of the Philippines where he was my classmate in some English literature classes, wanted to meet Marilou and had sent her a message addressing her as "Directress Abaya."

Not minding the sexist language that Ishmael had used, Marilou went on to establish a personal friendship with him due to their mutual interest in films. In time, Ish-

mael became not only a friend and colleague, but also a close member of the Abaya family. By this time, Marilou and Manolo had two boys, who would become film personalities themselves and sources of constant support for Marilou. She would always talk about her two boys with pride.

By the time she finished her second film "Brutal," Marilou was already a household name not only in the Philippines but internationally.

In 2011, when she received the prestigious Fukuoka Asian Cultures Prize in Japan, part of her citation reads, "Her superb films are indictments that harshly examine the reality of the Philippines... and are filled with warmth and affection for the common people surviving on their strength."

Considering that Japanese critics seldom use superlatives like "superb," this was indeed the supreme tribute given to a Filipino artist, the best of her generation, and possibly for all time.

Her subsequent award-winning films, too numerous to mention, include "Jose Rizal," "Muro Ami," "Sa Pusod ng Dagat," "Karnal," and "Bagong Buwan." She also produced documentaries like "American Junk" and "Silsilah."

The movie "Bagong Buwan" (New Moon) about



▲ The late filmmaker Marilou Diaz-Abaya who is widely considered as the "First Lady" of Philippine cinema.

the Muslim situation in Mindanao in the early 2000s, is part of the Filipino Film festival now going on in the Honolulu Museum of Art.

TRIBUTES FROM MARILOU'S COLLEAGUES AND EXPERTS

All the film authorities and experts on literature, history and media that Mona Lisa interviewed for her film, think the world about Marilou for her extraordinary talents and they talk about her with great respect and affection.

Dr. Bienvenido Lumbera, a University of the Philippines (U.P.) professor emeritus of literature, writer and Magsaysay Award recipient, singles out "social consciousness" as the hallmark signature of most of Marilou's films. This element is what gives her films a distinctive character whether she is portraying (but not romanticizing) poverty, inequality, abuse, corruption and other negative forms of social relations.

Professor Randy David, a U.P. sociologist, writer, media specialist and activist, likewise speaks about Marilou's devotion to her craft, thus elevating the art of cinema to a new level of excellence and sophistication.

Ricky Lee, famous writer in Filipino eventually became a collaborator to her mentor Marilou in the production of socially-conscious films reflecting the

(continued on page 9)



by Emil GUILLERMO

Filipinos Stung in Undercover Case of Sen. Leland Yee

You're in Hawaii and may think that Asian-Americans, including Filipinos, are the center of the universe.

Now all you need is a little more power—political power. And all that it takes is cash.

Apparently, that's easier to come by in Hawaii where there have always been a number of Filipino members of the State legislature. But in California, they recently just elected the first one, Rob Bonta of Alameda in 2012. The majority of Filipino-Americans in San Francisco and Daly City in San Mateo County have had to rely on others for political power.

You might call it the "kindness of strangers" but Leland Yee always seemed like one of us. He was in all the Filipino papers with a column. He at-

tended all the functions, where he was quick to present a proclamation to your public *barkada*. He'd do it personally, or send a Filipino aide.

That's retail politics, right?

Yee knew how to play the corporate side of things for campaign cash from special interests—\$81,000 from city and state workers unions; \$54,000 from health professionals; and \$42,000 from the insurance industry.

All of them looked to Yee for a little push on bills currently in the process. And that's politics, too.

But Yee also knew the importance of racial empowerment. Yee's own resumé is all about Asian-American political empowerment. As the first Chinese-American elected to the California State Senate in 2006, he was also the first Asian-American elected Senate Speaker *pro tem*, the number two post of that body.

And because he knew that his district was demo-



California Sen. Leland Yee

graphically Filipino, Yee developed relations with his Filipino-American friends, maybe even more so than his Chinese constituency. And he did—almost too well.

After a failed run for mayor in San Francisco in 2011, Yee found himself about \$70,000 in debt as of late last year.

Being term limited in 2014, he was also looking for a new job—the office of secretary of state. Not terribly exciting like John Kerry's job. But he does oversee elections and has a role in business develop-

ment in one of the biggest economic environments in the world.

All he needed was more money.

That's fundamentally the driver in this news story. What will a politician do for money to feed his need for political power? What is he willing to compromise?

Yee leaned on the Filipino community for whatever campaign cash they could donate. And despite being notoriously cheap, a few doctors, lawyers and dentists stepped up, including Filipino dentist Wil-

son Lim. Yee told an associate that Lim could provide illegal firearms from the Moro Islamic Liberation Front in Mindanao. When the associate told him he was looking at a deal that could bring up to \$2.5 million, the bells must have gone off like Yee had hit the jackpot.

From the affidavit, Yee was at times cautious but clearly blinded to the truth as the prospective buyer was an undercover FBI agent.

After a five-year inves-

tigation that began with a Chinatown gang leader named Raymond "Shrimp Boy" Chow, the stub ended once the Feds felt they had a bingo—a big name state politician who started talking about his Filipino dentist who dealt in more than nitrous oxide.

Bingo? We'll see. Yee remains free on \$500,000 bond after his arrest on six charges of public corruption, as well as conspiracy to sell and import illegal firearms. This week, Yee formally entered a plea of not guilty.

And now the real fight for his political life begins. Yee has nearly \$1 million dollars raised for his now-withdrawn secretary of state bid. But most of that money will now help pay for the best former U.S. attorneys who know how to fight their former employer.

It should result in the best entrapment defense Yee can buy and will definitely show how money drives politics and justice. ■

EMIL GUILLERMO is a journalist and commentator based in California. He was on the editorial board of the Honolulu Advertiser.

POSTSCRIPT

(cont. from page 8; MARILOU...)

human condition in Philippine society.

Several others remember with fondness Marilou's talents, creative energy and her being a "perfectionist." When she was filming "Muro Ami," which has underwater sequences reflecting the life of coastal minority groups in Mindanao, she herself would dive into the deep just to supervise the filming of the reefs and other underwater scenes. She was a snorkeling expert to begin with and her film had to be perfect. It is acclaimed as one of her best movies.

MARILOU'S LEGACY

Marilou's lasting legacy to Philippine culture and society, especially to the

young artists in the profession, is the evocation and articulation of the greatness of the human experience in the art of filmmaking.

As Mona Lisa comments in her interview, "Marilou taught students to always look for the significant human experience in making films." What should a film convey to the audience?

Marilou's answer from Beyond will undoubtedly be, "a compelling narrative, a powerful story to tell."

Sadly she passed away at the relatively young age of 57 a few years ago with 26 films to her credit and other achievements in the world of films and art. But one of her former students at the Ateneo de Manila University, Jeffrey Jeturian

is already a director himself and his film, "Extra: The Bit Player," is also being shown in the current Filipino Film Festival.

But her legacy of wanting to portray with vitality

and depth the greatness of the human spirit and the rich diversity of the human experience will endure for generations to come to draw inspiration from.

DR. BELINDA A. AQUINO is cur-

rently Professor Emeritus at the University of Hawaii at Manoa where she was professor of Political Science and Asian Studies and founding of the Center for Philippine Studies at the School of Pacific and Asian Studies. She is an internationally known authority on contemporary Philippine society, culture and politics.)

PICTORIAL NEWS



U.S. Rep. Colleen Hanabusa and G. Lincoln McCurdy, president of the Turkish Coalition of America, present a \$25,000 check to Edmund Aczon, chair of the Filipino Community Center (FilCom). Surrounding them are members of FilCom's Board of Directors, representatives of the Consuelo Foundation and friends from the Turkish community in Hawaii. The Consuelo Foundation will match the Coalition's \$25,000 donation, which will be used for Typhoon Haiyan relief efforts.



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**INFOGRAPHIC: Tax-evading
Customs, DOF employees**

by www.philstar.com/
Monday, April 7, 2014

MANILA, Philippines — **THE DEPARTMENT OF FINANCE (DOF) RELEASED AN INFOGRAPHIC ON MONDAY** summarizing abuses of its employees and those of the Bureau of Customs (BOC) in recent years.

The DOF's Revenue Integrity Protection Service (DOF-RIPS), an anti-graft arm, said that it "scored big" in battling corruption within the department's ranks as well as in the BOC.

The BOC had been rocked by controversies related to corruption and smuggling, which is said to fuel criminal activities in the country amounting to P12.6 trillion in illegal transfers.

DOF-RIPS said it has secured eight decisions by the Office of the Ombudsman in the first quarter of the year alone. ■

LEGEND	EMPLOYEE	DID NOT DECLARE IN SALN
SENTENCED TO PRISON		
	Ana Marie Concepcion Maglasang Customs Examiner, South Harbor, Port of Manila	Cars: Ford Expedition, Pajeros Properties: Houses in Valle Verde and Royale Tagaytay Estates
DISMISSED, PERPETUALLY DISQUALIFIED FROM CIVIL SERVICE, FORFEITURE OF RETIREMENT BENEFITS AND FORFEITURE PROCEEDINGS TO FORFEIT ILL-GOTTEN WEALTH		
	Zenaida Chang BIR Assistant Commissioner of Financial and Administrative Services	Cars: Mercedes Benz MB-100, 2 Pajeros, Mitsubishi L-300, Toyota Revo, Toyota Altis Properties: 3 house and lots in Felville Subdivision, 2 lots in New Intramuros, 3 lots in Goldridge Estate
	Marlon and Emma Pascual BIR Revenue Officer I and II, respectively; Spouses	Cars: Ford Explorer, Honda CRV, Hyundai Starex, and Mitsubishi car registered to daughter, an unemployed minor
	Prudencio Lopez Macaranas Customs Operations Officer V	Extravagant Collection of real estate, motor vehicles, jewelry Unexplained wealth of P22,800,000
	Eduardo Ginea Wong Acting Chief of the BOC Assessment Division, Port of Cagayan de Oro	Properties: Houses worth P1,386,730, real estate in Misamis Oriental, 15 residential properties for renting Businesses: My Rice & Corn Mills, My Fastfoods, Anton's Barbershop, MGW Enterprises
	Rafael Mendoza Merencilla Chief Customs Operations Officer	Properties: Agricultural and residential lots in Lipa, Batangas
SUSPENDED WITHOUT PAY		
	Marina C. De Guzman Assistant Regional Director, Quezon City Revenue Region 7	Properties: Land in Malibo, Matanda, and Pandi, Bulacan, agricultural rice land in Masuso and Pandi, Bulacan, memorial lot in Dasmarias, Cavite
FINED, FORFEITURE OF RETIREMENT BENEFITS, AND BANNED FROM RE-EMPLOYMENT IN ANY BRANCH OF GOVERNMENT INCLUDING GOCCS		
	Paulino C. Elevado Porsche-driving Customs Clerk	Businesses of buy and sell of cars, general merchandise, and small businesses

*fined only because he resigned before the Ombudsman decision was made

Jinggoy to Ombudsman: Plunder Charge is Based on Suspicion, Speculation

by Camille DIOLA /
Tuesday, April 8, 2014

MANILA, Philippines — **SENATOR JINGGOY ESTRADA ON MONDAY TOLD** the Office of the Ombudsman that there is no reason for his indictment based on the "pork barrel" fund scam.

Estrada filed a 26-page motion for reconsideration at the Ombudsman, which elevated the plunder complaint filed against him by the Department of Justice to the Sandiganbayan.

In his appeal, Estrada said there is no direct proof that he amassed hundreds of millions from his Priority Development Assistance Funds (PDAF) through ghost projects with alleged bogus non-government organizations linked to businesswoman Janet Lim-Napoles.

The petition said that even the ledgers of scam whistleblower Benhur Luy could not be used as proof of his supposed involvement in the multi-billion peso fraud.

"There is nothing on record which established that Sen. Estrada received kickbacks of around '50 percent of the PDAF amount involved,' Benhur



Sen. Jinggoy Estrada

Luy and other witnesses never claimed to have personally handled and / or witnessed the delivery of 'around 50 percent of the PDAF amount involved' to Sen. Estrada," the document stated.

The petition also explained that Luy's ledgers do not support the National Bureau of Investigation's findings that lawmakers receive at least 50 percent cut from the scheme.

Estrada also rejected the Ombudsman's move to indict him along with fellow senators Juan Ponce Enrile and Ramon Revilla, Jr. for plunder, denying that there is "probable cause" established on record.

"Charges based on mere suspicion and speculation, on bare and unsubstantiated allegations and on hearsay evidence cannot become basis of proba-

ble cause," he said.

Estrada stressed that neither Luy nor other witnesses are privy to his participation in the scam, as their statements were based "merely on what they heard from Mrs. Janet Napoles."

"Provisional" state witness Ruby Tuason, however, said that she personally handed to Estrada bags containing cold cash in his Senate office.

The legislator dismissed Tuason's testimonies as "unsubstantiated and untrustworthy" and alleged that she was only after immunity as she is among the respondents in the pork barrel case.

The embattled lawmaker lamented that he was not given the opportunity to contradict statements of the witnesses, despite being solicited his counter-affidavit.

"We were not provided copies of the affidavits of the additional witnesses, thus, we were not properly apprised of the evidence offered against us, which were eventually made the bases of the finding of probable cause for indictment," Estrada said.

He also said that lawmakers cannot be faulted for "manifest partiality" in repeatedly endorsing the same non-government organizations purportedly connected with Napoles.

Estrada explained that the organizations were accredited by the implementing agencies such as the Technology Resource Center and the National Agribusiness Corporation.

"Given that the NGOs endorsed were accredited at the time of endorsement, it cannot be said that there was no rhyme or reason for such endorsement. Given the factual basis for such endorsement, evident bad faith cannot be imputed," he said.

He also noted that the agencies, and not the senators, have the final say in the actual selection of NGOs.

"If at all, the act of endorsement by the legislator concerned is merely recommendatory, with the decision to award or not to the discretion of the implementing agency," Estrada said.

The Department of Budget and Management and not lawmakers controls the releases of the PDAF with the implementing agencies as conduits, he added. (www.philstar.com) ■

HEADLINES

(cont. from page 5; PHILIPPINE...)

"While it's concerning that certain provisions in the Reproductive Health Law were struck down, the Supreme Court has put women first and now the benefits of this law can finally become a reality," says Melissa Upreti, regional director for Asia at the Center. "Women have waited long enough for the reproductive health services and information they deserve, and the government must now move quickly to implement all the necessary policies and programs without delay."

Catholic bishops in the Philippines were disappointed with the ruling but

were grateful that the court strengthened parental rights and religious freedom.

"Although the Supreme Court has upheld the constitutionality of the RH law, it has truly watered down the RH law and consequently upheld the importance of adhering to an informed religious conscience even among government workers," says Archbishop Socrates B. Villegas of Lingayen Dagupan, president of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines.

According to Villegas, the Church cannot "see eye to eye" with the bill's proponents but is willing to work

with them "for the good of the country." He says that the Church must "continue to uphold the sacredness of human life" and "safeguard the life of every human person from conception to natural death."

Around the world, the need for safe and effective contraceptive services is staggering. Roughly 222 million women in developing countries who want to avoid pregnancy rely on traditional contraceptives with high failure rates or do not use contraceptives at all.

The Philippine government's long-standing opposition towards modern contraception has contributed to 4,500 women

dying from pregnancy complications, 800,000 unintended births and 475,000 illegal abortions each year.

The Center for Reproductive Rights works on reproductive health issues throughout Asia, with major campaigns addressing issues ranging from maternal mortality in India to access to modern contraception in the Philippines. In Manila, the Center has documented human rights violations that stem from an executive order that effectively bans access to modern contraceptives and that prevents women from protecting their health and exercising reproductive autonomy. ■

LEGAL AD

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Mariano, Merly & Michael, \$556.19.
Rodrigues, Michael F., \$1,106.28.
Regis, Chantel, \$756.24.
Sanchez Lydiann, \$705.68.
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The Rites of Holy Week

by Lilia QUINDOZA SANTIAGO, Ph.D.

Easter Sunday in the Christian world is celebrated each year much like Christmas. At Christmas, the birth of the child Jesus is celebrated. At Easter, Christians observe the passion, death and resurrection of the Lord. Both seasons have vigils, prayers and songs, rites and rituals which vary according to a country's customs and beliefs.

I grew up in Baguio City, the summer capital of the Philippines. As a child, my remembrances of Holy Week are not quite "holy" or solemn at all. This was due to the fact that Holy Week in Baguio was a season to entertain visitors from Manila and other parts of the Philippines who flock to the city to enjoy the cool weather. I remember the times when we took visitors to Burnham Park, Mines View Park, Mansion House and Camp John Hay on Holy Thursdays after the so-called *Visita Iglesia* or "round up of churches." We accompanied our cousins in climbing the stairs up the Baguio Cathedral or the Grotto of Lourdes at Mirador Hill. The climb was fun and the occasion less solemn as we raced each other to the top. Once there, it was difficult to reflect, much less contemplate on a prayer as we caught our breath after the exhausting climb.

I think the only ones in our family who celebrated

holy week with solemnity was my father and grandmother. My father was a devout Catholic who insisted that all his children be baptized Catholics even though my mother and grandmother were Protestants who belonged to the Seventh Day Adventist Church.

Yet, even with different religions within the family, we still observed Holy Week harmoniously. My grandmother would read the Bible to us every night and urged us to pray with her. On Holy Monday after work, my father would sit in a corner of the house, next to a made-up altar with the statue of the Virgin Mary and read a copy of the Tagalog *Pasyon*. Sometimes, he would chant verses, especially on Good Fridays, and read the booklet until the very last page. It was only later, when I took Philippine literature courses at the university that I learned to appreciate the significance of the *Pasyon*.

I realize now why my father solemnly observed the holiness of the season. For him, it was *mahal na araw*—a season for spiritual rebirth and contemplation. He hails from Marinduque, home of the celebrations of the Moriones. In his hometown of Santa Cruz, the legend of Longinus is re-enacted, complete with masks, horses and throngs of people. Longinus is the Roman soldier who speared the side of Jesus as He hung

on the cross. Longinus later converted to Christianity and is beheaded by Roman soldiers for his faith. His beheading becomes the center of the Holy Week celebrations. The Moriones mask has become an artwork which every visitor who partakes of the rites brings home as a remembrance.

There are other areas in the country where celebrations have become rather absurd, weird and a bit exaggerated. In Candaba, Pampanga, there is actual slashing of penitents with the *buntot page*, carrying of the cross and actual crucifixions. A nailing on a cross is done each year by penitents as a sort of penance. Visitors have come to view these crucifixions as a tourist attraction. There are also dramatizations of the treachery of Judas and how he suffered until he hung himself. Unlike a real crucifixion of the penitents, the "hanging" of Judas does not actually occur. Rather, a symbolic figure is made to hang on a tree holding a little bag of the pieces of silver that Judas accepted for betraying Jesus.

The season of Lent, where Easter Sunday is the final ceremony is ushered in by Ash Wednesday. On this day, people allow themselves to be marked with a cross on their foreheads. This is done through ashes by the officiating priest during mass. The black cross

marks are intended to remind people of their own mortality—from dust though art to dust returneth." People reflect on the sinfulness of humankind and of the sacrifice that the Lord has made to redeem mankind from evil. The narrative of Easter brings home multifarious messages—the necessity for repentance of sins, the eternal sacrifice toward redemption and salvation.

After four weeks of Lent where Fridays are usually meatless comes Holy Week itself which begins with Palm Sunday or *Domingo de Ramos*. On Palm Sunday, people go to church with palm leaves to be blessed by the priests. In deeply Catholic localities, the *Pasyon* or the chanting of the life, death and resurrection of Christ begins immediately and lasts through Holy Thursday. The chanting is usually led by cantoras who know the tune and take turns in leading the community. The singing at times lasts for up to three days non-stop at a chapel, home or designated place.

When I moved to Obando, Bulacan where my spouse is from, I witnessed some of the more syncretic rituals that Filipinos observe during Holy Week. "Syncretic" meaning, the rites have been indigenized to suit local tastes and styles. For example, Holy Thursday is the occasion for a parish priest to gather the leading members of the town whose feet will be washed and kissed by him during mass. These community leaders are also the ones to deliver

sermons on Christ's Seven Last Words.

Then on Good Friday, all the iconic saints, which prominent families keep in their households throughout the year, like San Antonio, San Pascualm Santa Clara and others are garbed in regal clothing and placed on floats or *karosas* for procession in the town's main streets. The procession is also a time for the rich and powerful to show off their wealth, newly-acquired jewelry and their *en-grandeng kasuotan* or fashionable attire.

The *salubong* is probably the most dramatic of these syncretic rites. The *salubong* or the meeting of Jesus and Mary is staged in very colorful rites, with little angels in costumes accompanying Mary and Jesus as they meet to usher in the final rites of resurrection. The *salubong* is usually done on the eve of Saturday, or *Sabado de Gloria* and is held in the middle of the church, with accompanying cantata by the church choir.

Christ's resurrection is then celebrated as another Christmas—the *Pasko ng Muling Pagkabuhay*, which heralds new life for all of Christendom and for which every person is enjoined to celebrate and be thankful for.

I actually have no recollection of an Easter egg hunt during celebrations in Baguio, Obando or other places. I don't recall partaking in one, except when I was an exchange student at Fort Plain, in upstate New York. This is one of the differences in celebrating Easter in the U.S. as compared to the Philippines

At any rate, it's tempting to get immersed in all of the rituals, vigils and celebrations but still lack concentration and spirituality. Pope Francis' latest tweet is very relevant in this regard as he says: "We need to re-discover a contemplative spirit so that the love of God may warm our hearts." Good theme for Holy Week. ■



by Reuben S.
SEGURITAN

Parole for Military Family Members

gent humanitarian reasons or significant public benefit" is used to permit an alien outside the United States to enter the country. The policy clarified that aliens who are physically present in the US but who entered without inspection or admission may also be granted parole. This is called "parole in place."

Under the current law, an individual cannot adjust his status even if he is the spouse, parent or child of a U.S. citizen if he entered the U.S. without admission or parole. For him to get a green card, he has to travel abroad to a U.S. consulate. However, once he leaves the U.S. he will be subject to the 3 year/10 year inadmissibility bar. If he is granted parole he does not have to depart and may adjust status in the U.S.

The new policy was issued to address concerns that the members of the military could face stress and anxiety because of the immigration status of their family members. This has the potential effect of adversely affecting military preparedness.

Many of those serving in the military are foreign-born. Since 2002 over 92,700 have become U.S. citizens. Data from the Department of Defense in 2011 showed that Mexico (12 percent) and the Philippines (10 percent) were the leading countries of origin for immigrants in the military.

Eligible family members specified in the policy memorandum include the spouse, child or parent of an Active Duty member of the U.S. Armed Forces or

the Selected Reserve of the Ready Reserve or an individual who previously served in U.S. Armed Forces or the Selected Reserve of the Ready Reserve which includes the National Guard.

The Secretary's authority to grant parole is discretionary. However, the memorandum emphasized that one of the factors which weigh heavily in favor of parole in place is when the applicant is a spouse, child or parent of an Active Duty member or an individual who previously served in the U.S. Armed Forces or the Selected Reserve of the Ready Res

If the applicant has no criminal convictions and absent other serious adverse factors, parole in place would generally be granted in the exercise of discretion. Parole is granted in one-year increments and request for extension may be granted, if appropriate.

Request for parole is made on Form I-131 and is filed with the director of the USCIS office with jurisdiction over the alien's place of residence. Evidence of family relationship as well as evidence of the alien's family member is an Active Duty member or an individ-

ual who previously served in the U.S. Armed Forces or the Selected Reserve of the Ready Reserve must be submitted with the application.

When parole is granted, the two inadmissibility grounds under the immigration law are eliminated. The first inadmissibility ground relates to an alien who is "present in the United States without being admitted or paroled," or those who already entered the US without inspection. The second inadmissibility ground relates to the alien "who arrives in the United States at any time or place other than as designated by the [Secretary of the Homeland Security]." This refers to aliens who are in the process of entering the US without inspection.

An applicant for adjustment of status must comply with the other requirements such as maintenance of status if he is not an immediate relative or Section 245(k) does not apply. He also must satisfy all the other grounds of inadmissibility. ■

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

Hirono Co-Introduces Visa Waiver Bill

U.S. SEN. MAZIE HIRONO HAS CO-INTRODUCED the bipartisan Subnational Visa Waiver Program Act, which aims at creating jobs by boosting foreign travel and tourism to the U.S.

The bill grants the Secretary of Homeland Security the authority to consider subnational territories currently treated separately from their countries under U.S. law for participation in the visa waiver program, enabling residents to travel to the U.S. without a visa for stays of 90 days or less. Territories that could be considered under the Subnational Visa Waiver Program Act include Hong Kong, Macau, Bermuda, the Cayman Islands, the British Virgin Islands and the Turks and Caicos Islands.

The Subnational Visa Waiver Program Act aims to help the U.S. better com-



pete globally for tourism markets with strong potential. Territories such as Hong Kong and Macau, with a combined population of over 7.5 million, have been a missed opportunity. According to the U.S. Commerce Department, out of the 86.8 million estimated departures Hong Kong residents will make from their territory in 2014, just 132,400 are expected to visit the U.S. Hong Kong and Macau passport holders already have visa-free access to Canada, the European Union and over 100 countries around the world.

"The bipartisan support for the Subnational Visa Waiver Program Act speaks

to the strong impact this bill would have on jobs and our economy," says Sen. Hirono. "Travel and tourism support 14.4 million American jobs, with one in eight of all private sector jobs supported by travel, and this bill will help our country develop opportunities in new foreign markets.

"With our current visa policy, our nation cannot compete fairly with Canada and the European Union for markets with tremendous potential, such as Hong Kong and Macau. This bill will help put us on a level playing field and I urge my colleagues to support this bipartisan jobs bill." ■

Joseph M. Zobian, M.D.



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DAYASADAS

by Pacita C. SALUDES

Adda dagiti mang-mangngeg a maibal-balikas a “Nangato TI ADAL NI POLANA ngem” AWAN SURSURONA! Ania dagitoy a balikas? A w a n a n t a k n e n g . Nakanomnomo a galad ti maysa nga Ilokano.

Kas madlaw ngamin a dagiti dadduma a nangato ti adalna a naggraduar kadagiti nangato a pagadalan, dida mailemmeng no dadduma ti agtignay wenno agiyebkas kadagiti nababa wenno awanan nagun-od nga adal iti pagadalan. Ata nakurang ngarud ti naipaagsep kadakuada a naadal. Ipakita unay dagiti nakaadal ti kabaelanda a di kabaelan dagiti awanan adal. Ta kunada a gapu ta nangato ti adalda nakurku-

Balikas Nga Adal Ken Sursuro Nagduma Ti Kaipapananna Kadagiti Ilokano

rang ti pagrukodanda kadagiti awanan adal.

Dayta ti pamuidan dagiti makadlaw a dagiti De-Adal a dadduma makaipakita ti pannakamenos wenno a pannaka dasig dagiti makadlaw a dida pannakaawat wenno pannakakita a dagiti awanan adal kasda la nanumo unay. Gapu ti kinapakumbaba, kinatalugod ken nadayawda unay a mangipakita ti kinnaadda sursuro a naadal ti nakaisigudan a biag manipud nagannak. Sursuro a mangipakita ti panagraem, panagdayaw kadagiti padada a tao. Galad a napakumbaba nga agisawang kadagiti panagdayaw ken panangipakita iti na-an-anay a panagraem iti sabali wenno ginugubsang a sao wenno aramid. Makilangen a sipapakumbaba ken siaanus a mangitungpal kadagiti pagrebbenganna. Addaan ti SURSURO a naadawna kadagiti naag-

sawna a tignay ti aglawlawna. Napakumbaba saan a managindadakkel ken mang tagibassit kadagiti kapadpadana.

Ngamin ta dagiti dadduma De-adal a makuna ipakatda lattan dagiti inadalda a didan maalubog ti kina-asino ti pagsaw-an wenno pangipakatandan ti inadalda.

Nagimnas laketdi a denggen no makunada nga adda ADAL NI POLANA ken ADDAAN TI SURSURO, KABABALIN a makilangen ti kaaduan. Nasayaat unay no maikutantay maysa a tao ket maipakitana nga addaan ADAL ken SURSURO a nakaisigudan tay maysa nga ILOKANO.

Puera de los Buenos saan met a padapada dagiti TAO. Ta dagiti makuna nga adda adalna, naadalna amin a wagas, panagbiag a natakneng ken naurnos. Nangruna unay ti pannakilangen ken pannakikadua. ■

Kenka Naslag A Reyna

O! REYNA SIKAT PAGTAMDAN A DAYAG
PAGTALIMUDUKAN TI AMIN A PANAGRUKBAB
SIKAT AGIKUT TI NAPUDNO A KINAPUSAKSAK
BANGLOM AGAYAMUON, DITTOY LUBONG AGSAKNAP

NO TA NASLAG A RUPAM INNAK MATMATAN
AGANDAP DAYTA MUGINGMO A NABALANGATAN
SIKAN TAY BITUEN A NARIMAT MAKASISIRAP
TAPNO TOY LUBONG A NASIPNGET SIKAT, MANGSILNAG

ITI RABII SIKAT MAKAEP-EP SIKUR KEN PAGEL
KINADAYAGMO KAYARIGAM TAY MAYSANG ANGEL
PAGTAMDAN, PANGNAMNAMAAM, MAKATENGNEL
PANAGSAKNAP GURANGURA ITI BIAG MANGPADAWEL

NASLAG A MUTYA, ILOKANA A NANAKMAN
DAGITI NAPUNGAY A MATAM IWARASMOMAN
KAYAWAM PUSPOSOMI BINALAYAN NI PAIDAM
TAPNO PUMADAKAMI AMIN NGA ITURAYAM

TA PINTASMO TI PAGANDAPAN TI SINAMAR
A DUMANON URAY KASIPNGETAN A LUGAR
AGTAMED TI AMIN TA BITUENKA A TUMPUAR
PAGDAYDAYAWAN, PAGLIWLIWAAN, MANGTED BANG-AR

— **MAINLAND NEWS** —

Sen. Schatz to Chair Commerce Subcommittee on Tourism

U.S. SEN. BRIAN SCHATZ has been named to chair the Commerce Subcommittee on Tourism, Competitiveness and Innovation. The new subcommittee will focus on tourism issues.

“A high quality visitor industry is one of the fastest ways to boost the entire economy,” Schatz says. “Through this new subcommittee, we’ll be able to make sure federal travel and tourism policies support the hospitality industry.”

Schatz’s plan to boost tourism includes expanding visas and renewing successful programs—like Brand USA, the nation’s first cooperative destination marketing organization—to support jobs and grow Hawaii’s local economy.

To strengthen tourism in Hawaii, Schatz’s agenda includes:

- **Attracting international visitors.** Schatz’s plan will highlight Hawaii and the U.S. as a world-class tourist and vacation destination. He will also work to promote smart and efficient use of government travel and meetings,

spurring additional growth in tourism and hospitality.

- **Making it easier to travel.** Visitors should be able to enter the U.S. more efficiently. Schatz will work to streamline the visa process, reduce wait times at U.S. entry ports, facilitate interisland and domestic travel, and modernize infrastructure to provide travelers a hassle-free experience.

- **Providing a world-class experience.** Schatz will make sure that the U.S. Department of Commerce and other agencies have the resources they need to help Hawaii hotels, restaurants and attractions stay competitive with other tourist destinations and continue to provide visitors with a unique experience.

According to Roy Yamaguchi, owner of Roy’s Restaurants and a member of Brand USA’s board of directors, Schatz’s chairmanship will help support Hawaii jobs and businesses.

“I look forward to working with Senator Schatz on our national tourism efforts and promoting Hawaii as a world-class visitor destination,” Yamaguchi says. ■

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GLOBAL NEWS

US Sending 2 Warships to Japan to Counter North Korea

TOKYO — **US DEFENSE SECRETARY CHUCK HAGEL** delivered a two-pronged warning to Asia Pacific nations yesterday, announcing that the US will send two additional ballistic missile destroyers to Japan to counter the North Korean threat, and saying China must better respect its neighbors.

In unusually forceful remarks about China, Hagel drew a direct line between Russia's takeover of Ukraine's Crimea region and the ongoing territorial disputes between China, Japan and others over remote islands in the East China Sea.

"I think we're seeing some clear evidence of a lack of respect and intimidation and coercion in Europe today with what the Rus-

sians have done with Ukraine," Hagel told reporters after a meeting with Japanese Defense Minister Itsunori Onodera. "We must be very careful and we must be very clear, all nations of the world, that in the 21st century this will not stand, you cannot go around the world and redefine boundaries and violate territorial integrity and sovereignty of nations by force, coercion and intimidation whether it's in small islands in the Pacific or large nations in Europe."

Hagel, who will travel to China later this week, called the Asian nation a "great power," and added, "with this power comes new and wider responsibilities as to how you use that power, how you employ that military power."

He said he will talk to the



Chinese about having respect for their neighbors, and said, "coercion, intimidation is a very deadly thing that leads only to conflict. All nations, all people deserve respect no matter how large or how small."

Still, he said he looks forward to having an honest, straightforward dialogue with the Chinese to talk about ways the two nations and their militaries can work better together.

The announcement of the deployments of additional destroyers to Japan came as tensions with North Korea spiked again, with Pyongyang continuing to

threaten additional missile and nuclear tests.

In recent weeks the North has conducted a series of rocket and ballistic missile launches that are considered acts of protest against annual ongoing springtime military exercises by Seoul and Washington. North Korea says the exercises are rehearsals for invasion.

North and South Korea also fired hundreds of artillery shells into each other's waters in late March in the most recent flare-up.

Standing alongside Onodera at the defense ministry, Hagel said they discussed the threat posed by Pyongyang. He said the two ships are in response to North Korea's "pattern of

provocative and destabilizing actions" that violate UN resolutions and also will provide more protection to the US from those threats.

On Friday, North Korea accused the US of being "hell-bent on regime change" and warned that any maneuvers with that intention will be viewed as a "red line" that will result in countermeasures.

Pyongyang's deputy UN ambassador, Ri Tong Il, also said his government "made it very clear we will carry out a new form of nuclear test" but refused to provide details.

The two additional ships would bring the total to seven US ballistic missile defense warships in Japan, and it continues US efforts to increase its focus on the Asia Pacific. Vatican bank accounts. (www.philstar.com) ■

MAINLAND NEWS

Philippine Carriers Allowed to Add Flights to US After Rating Upgrade

MANILA, Philippines - **AIR CARRIERS FROM THE COUNTRY** can now add flights and service to the United States (US) and carry the code of US carriers after the US government's announcement that the Philippines now complies with international safety standards.

The US Department of Transportation's Federal Avi-

ation Administration (FAA) announced on Thursday that the country complies with standards set by the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) and has been upgraded to a Category 1 rating after a review last March of the Civil Aviation Authority of the Philippines. ICAO is the United Nations' technical agency for aviation.

With the upgrade, Trans-

portation Secretary Joseph Emilio Abaya said Philippine Airlines can now also increase flight frequencies to and from the US, using more fuel-efficient aircraft.

Abaya said the upgrade will have a significant impact on the country's economic thrust as it will allow airline carriers to open more direct flights to and from the US.

(www.philstar.com) ■



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- It supposedly beautifies and protects the skin, even against skin cancer.
- It contains a unique combination of fatty acids with powerful medicinal properties, plus a specific healing compound that fights bacterial and viral infections.
- Entire island nations escaped Western diseases for generations by consuming coconut oil.

Coconut oil is a saturated fat and chock-full of health-

promoting properties. It has earned the title “the Cure for All Illnesses.” They are getting evidence to prove this claim and medical researchers prove that coconut oil makes you less hungry, contains ketones that reduce seizures, improves blood cholesterol, burns fat, and boosts brain function in Alzheimer’s patients.

But more importantly, scientists have uncovered the potential of coconut oil to aid cannabis (marijuana) in the fight against cancer.

As an aside, I have a friend who is battling cancer with the aid of medicinal marijuana, in liquid form. His tumor has shrunk in size substantially, much to the astonishment of his doctors. He shared this information with a fellow cancer patient who decided to do the same and, lo and behold, his tumor is also shrinking in size. There must be some truth to this finding even if some conservative Western doctors have vilified

Power team: Scientists have uncovered the potential of coconut oil to aid cannabis (marijuana) in the fight against cancer.



the use of marijuana as dangerous and more of a threat than heroin, cocaine, and other dangerous drugs.

Former US Surgeon General Dr. Joycelyn Elders wrote in a report on March 26, 2004 titled “Myths about Medical Marijuana” and published in the Providence Journal: “The evidence is overwhelming that marijuana can relieve certain types of pain, nausea, vomiting, and other symptoms caused by such illnesses as multiple sclerosis, cancer, and AIDS—or by the harsh drugs sometimes used to treat them. And it can do so with remarkable safety. Indeed, marijuana is less toxic than many of the drugs that physicians pre-

scribe every day.”

But relieving pain and symptoms is just the tip of the iceberg. Medical marijuana is said to slow the onset of Alzheimer’s disease and moderate autoimmune disorders, including multiple sclerosis, inflammatory bowel disease, and rheumatoid arthritis.

Scientists believe that, coupled with coconut oil, the healing potential of medical marijuana is amplified even more.

Medical marijuana capsules, infused in coconut oil, are an alternative way to therapeutically use cannabis without having to inhale it through smoking. Infusing cannabis into coconut oil also allows for easy entry into the liver where it can be rapidly processed.

The Alternative Daily reports that coconut oil is used because of its high amount of essential fatty acids, which makes it a good binding agent for the cannabinoids. Couple this with its amazing

health properties and you superpower the combination. Half of the fat in coconut oil is comprised of a fat that is not frequently found in nature, lauric acid. Lauric acid is called a miracle ingredient because in the body it is converted to monolaurin, which is a potent antiviral, antibacterial, and anti-protozoal substance. Monolaurin can destroy lipid-coated viruses including measles, flu, HIV, herpes, and a number of pathogenic bacteria.

More and more medical researchers are intrigued by this powerful combination of cannabis and coconut oil and I am almost sure that the medical world will consider treating cancer with this pill, especially doctors who believe in alternative cures.

But even without the cannabis element, I am now inclined to use coconut oil in my salad dressings, cooking, hair conditioner, and as skin moisturizer. After all, it is plentiful in our country!

(www.philstar.com) ■

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