

Rice shortage threatens Asia



A farmer harvesting rice, a typical scene in the rural areas of an Asian country.

Three billion people in Asia are the rice guzzlers of the world and they are facing a supply shortage. Production at about 420 million tons a year has been static for the past four years. In this period about 100 million additional mouths have been added, which are putting a dent in the supply-demand chain.

Prices of rice have shot up 30 percent in the two years from 2005 to 2007 and 40 percent since the middle of last year alone. These have reached a level, like wheat prices -- which are 130 percent up -- that have made governments nervous. India has banned the export of most varieties of rice, except the high-end basmati rice, to conserve as much rice at home as possible. Other rice surplus countries have followed suit. They are scared of shortages at home and the unrest that follows shortages.

A Chinese saying of earlier times is directly applicable to today's food

shortages: "When the price of rice goes higher than a common man can pay, heaven ordains a new ruler."

In Haiti, the prime minister was dismissed after food riots. In Egypt, less publicized food riots have created a storm. In Pakistan, gun-toting police have been guarding food warehouses for the last six months. In Thailand, farmers with guns are guarding their rice fields. Even if the world gets over the present crisis, future crises are likely to be much more severe. Expensive food or severe food shortages will topple governments and unrest will follow.

Of the world's rice, 80 percent is grown in Asia -- which also consumes it all, plus some. Rain plays the greatest role in rice cultivation. Lack of rain is sad news for rice growers. Rice cultivation is labor intensive, making it unproductive in countries with high

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May Ann Miras wins Bb. Pilipinas title



May Ann Miras, newly crowned Bb. Pilipinas - Montreal
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Montreal, April 12, 2008 - Over 600 people witnessed the 34th year of the Bb. Pilipinas beauty pageant sponsored by FAMAS on Saturday, April 12, 2008 at the Hellenic Community Center. It was probably one of the largest crowd ever gathered for such an event and a memorable night for all the candidates and their parents. The excitement and anticipation could be felt right from the beginning as enthusiastic supporters applauded loudly and cheerfully their favorite candidate.

The program featured the past Bb. Pilipinas title holders who were asked for their advice to the new candidates. Several folk dances were performed by the Kalinangan Dance Troup and the Pamana Dance Troup. The talent performances of all the candidates added to the evening's entertainment to the delight of the audience. All the contestants displayed great talents in dancing and singing. Moreover, they were all beautiful in their swimsuits and evening gowns. The judges must have had a difficult time choosing the winners in the different categories.

Marie Antonette Carbon, a 16-year old high school student, won three titles, namely, Miss Popularity, for having sold the most tickets; Miss Charity, for having solicited the most ads in the souvenir programme; and Miss Friendship for having been voted the most helpful by her peers. The title of Best in Evening Gown, Best in Swimsuit and Best Talent were

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EDITORIAL

Think globally, act locally

Global issues are really local problems which require a concerted action. This idea is best exemplified by the celebration of Earth Day on April 22, around the world in 174 countries. This annual event gives our students the chance to teach and become leaders in the movement to save our Earth. Earth Day seems to gather more momentum every year. Many polluted waterways have improved. Recycling is widespread. Conservation is top of mind. Started in the late 1960s amid the "environmental crisis," Earth Day has become a huge success. Or has it?

Although there have been some great accomplishments, mostly as a result of increased awareness of environmentalism since the 1960s, it's hard to imagine the planet is better off today than it was five decades ago. Despite the community cleanup programs, the schoolyard tree plantings, the endless legislation and all the talk, we still have a long way to go before we can rest on our laurels. The main culprit is not government or industry or agriculture; it is us. Many people might do something on Earth Day, but simply slide back into our comfortable ways afterward. There are more of us every day (almost double the world population, in fact, since 1970). SUVs were rare in 1970; now they dominate the North American highways. Bottled water was almost unheard of in 1970; now millions of litres are shipped back and forth across the oceans daily to suit the particular tastes of people who don't like the stuff from the tap. Lettuce didn't come in plastic boxes in the 1970s. Nobody in Canada had ever heard of raspberries in January. Air conditioning is now commonplace in cars and homes. The leafblower has replaced the rake; the snowblower has nudged aside the shovel; the electric hedge trimmer and the weed-whacker are making the garden shears obsolete.

Lately, we have had a debate whether or not to ban the use of plastic shopping bags. They are usually given free to every shopper but they end up in trash cans, or on the streets. Is it a good idea to ban them completely or charge customers for their use? Ikea Canada did the latter and it had a dramatic effect on their use. It resulted in a 90% reduction

when customers had to pay to use them. Perhaps, this is how we should discipline ourselves – through our pocketbooks.

On the other hand, if we observe the following environmental-friendly measures in the workplace, we may succeed in reducing the waste we produce everyday:

- * Buy recycled content, remanufactured, and recyclable office products, and recycle them when appropriate (including e-cycling electronics). At a minimum, buy recycled paper and recycle it again. See the small business guide to pollution prevention for more information: <http://www.epa.gov/ecycling/index.htm>.

- * Clean Out Your Files and recycle papers you no longer need. Many organizations sponsor cleaning weeks; check with your office management staff.

- * Use spell check and proofread before you print or copy. Print double sided whenever possible. Minimize the amount of paper you use.

- * Buy reusable office supplies instead of disposable supplies.

- * Set up an area to store and exchange reusable office supplies, such as binders

- * Recycle fluorescent bulbs properly to prevent hazardous mercury from entering the environment.

In addition to individual efforts, government initiated programs are worthwhile. For example, the CDN-NDG Borough held a community forum on Earth Day, April 22, where they invited citizens to voice their opinions as to what should be included in the Green Plan to create an environmental model in five years' time. How do we promote public transport more actively? Can the Borough's service reduce electric consumption, use more fuel efficient vehicles, switch to cleaner fuels? Is our tree policy sufficient? Can we add more mini-parks? Is our garbage policy outdated? Do we need more recycling and composting? Do we need to modify snow removal policies?

More public discussions and research are certainly going to be helpful in looking for the right answers to the above questions. Hopefully, the Borough's Green Plan will receive the support of the whole community.



FILIPINO SOLIDARITY COOPERATIVE

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New administration of the Filipino Coop appeals to the community

It is almost two years ago when the Filipino Solidarity Cooperative has been abandoned by its first president and founder. It is still open in spite of great financial difficulties. I was just a member when I offered my help to keep the Coop open. I used all my financial resources to pay some of the bills. Since August 2006, there are no funds available except the loans from different people but they have never been enough. I have been scraping every single penny to keep the Coop open. But I can not continue saving the Coop alone. I need the community to help out. Since the election of the new board of directors during the 3rd general assembly, and my assumption of the presidency recently, I have been working hard in recruiting people to become members, and talking to everyone who will listen that we can make the Coop become a profitable enterprise by working together and raising the capital needed to make this a reality.

Perhaps, people wonder why I have committed so much to the survival of the first Filipino cooperative in Canada. It is not out of blind ambition but it is out of my sincere desire to have a community resource which can be developed to train our future business leaders. It is my goal to prove many people wrong when they say that Filipinos are not able to be united, and that they never wanted to support their fellow citizens' business. Through the Cooperative, I would like to open their eyes to use our potential of numbers. If all the 15 000 Filipinos living in Cote des Neiges become members of the Coop, we will have enough capital to build our cooperative and turn it into a profitable enterprise in a year or two. If all these 15 000 members buy from their own Cooperative, the volume of business they will bring is unbeatable. Needless to say, this will be the beginning of our economic prosperity as a community. It will enable us to get the benefits of owning a business. Art Cortez, who I spoke to recently, gave me a very interesting observation. He said that there are only four groups of people in the world - the employer, the employee, the unemployed and the self-employed. It is up to each one of us to decide to which group we want to belong. If you want to be prosperous, be either the employer or the self-employed, and if you want to be poor,

be the unemployed, and if you want to be working forever without any advancement, then be an employee. Through the cooperative, each one of us becomes like an employer or owner of a business. Putting our funds together to run a business is much easier than having to put up our own capital to open a business by ourselves. Of course, some people have succeeded in doing this but as far as we can see, there is a lot of struggle behind sole proprietorships.

Before I got involved with the Filipino Solidarity Cooperative, I did not know anything about cooperatives. I was not familiar with any of its advantages but when I started to understand what it can do to help a community, I became very much interested in learning more about it and making sure that it works. I had tried to apply for a credit cooperative in 1992 by contacting the Caisse Populaire Desjardins near the school I founded as I had wanted to offer my students their own credit facilities. I was told that there was not enough Filipino clients who would be using the Caisse Populaire services. Our population then was not as big as it is now. If we increase the membership in our cooperative, we may also be able to look into the possibility of applying for a Caisse Populaire franchise.

Although there are subsidies or grants available to support businesses and cooperatives, it takes a lot of time and effort to prepare a proper business plan and proposal in order to be accepted by the government. Considering that I have my own businesses to run - Gilmore College and the North American Filipino Star - I do not have the time to sit down and submit an application for a subsidy right away. Hence, the fastest way I know and the best source of financial support is to recruit immediately at least 500 members who will pay for their qualifying shares of \$100 each. This will raise \$50 000 capital for the Coop. So far, I have recruited around 30 people over a period of 30 days but they are not all fully paid. I have asked other members to recruit as well but they still have to show results of their efforts. Meanwhile, there are many outstanding bills to pay - the monthly installments for loans borrowed to pay back Paluagan members, the rent which must be paid on time, utilities, and salaries. My cash advances to the

Coop now amount to several thousands of dollars plus printing and office supplies that I provide frequently. In other words, I have been spending my own money and resources as if the Coop is my own business. Moreover, I constantly have to worry where I will get the next month's rent and where I will get money to buy more merchandise.

Now that I have explained to all and opened my heart to the community, will there be enough sympathy for the cause I have undertaken to make the Coop survive? Will there be many of our community leaders who will join me in the promotion of the cooperative movement?

During the time of Joe Gaviola, he recruited around 500 members but only one third have paid their full membership shares. To date, there are 631 members, 30 of them I recruited from January to date. There are over 200 members who have paid their full qualifying shares and around 400 members who paid only \$10 or \$20 each, for a total receivable of about \$30 000. If they pay, they will help us improve our cash flow.

Besides improving the cash flow, the Filipino Coop's store must be properly furnished and organized in order to make it attractive to customers. There are too many freezers occupying valuable floor space. This is because the previous administration bought too many freezers which are not for commercial use. I just found this out when I contacted a refrigeration company who did not want to accept these freezers for trade-in as they are only for residential use. I obtained information on how much it will cost to get the proper equipment. We received a quotation for two reconditioned equipment for \$8000. A new one will cost \$9 000 each. We are still trying to canvass other suppliers but it seems that the price is similar in other stores. We are hoping to find a store that maybe closing down to get a deal but so far we have not yet succeeded.

There are eight (8) freezers (see advertisement on page 2) that must be disposed off in order to have some money to be used to buy the proper equipment we need to store all the products that our customers need.

The board of directors in the previous administration had already

passed a resolution to issue interest bearing shares but a stock prospectus will have to be prepared yet to list the conditions, rights and privileges of interest-bearing shares. Investments must be in the form of cash only, not merchandise. Merchandise are accepted as consignments which are subject to a minimum mark up of 20% or more when possible as we need to cover our fixed overhead costs.

In order to save on salaries, and wages, we need volunteers to do some of the tasks required in a retail store. We need members who can volunteer to do the cashier's job during the paid employee's day off, to canvass other stores prices, to buy stock when they are on sale, to display, arrange and check merchandise. We need handymen or handywomen to help us in doing carpentry, checking and fixing electrical outlets, cleaners to keep the store neat and tidy. My students already started cleaning up. They swept and mopped the floors during the past two weeks. The more volunteers there are, the faster we will be doing the work needed to improve the Filipino Coop.

Other plans include establishing a coffee shop in the Coop where members can sit down and meet old and new friends. Info sessions and seminars will be organized and guest speakers and resource people will be invited to discuss topics of common interest to members. To start the ball rolling, a fundraising social dance on June 27, 2008 at 6767 Cote des Neiges, headed by Salve Desprèz, through the auspices of the Philippine Centre Foundation of Greater Montreal has been set up. You can get your tickets at \$10 each from the Coop at any time you visit the store.

With the election of a new board, I feel quite optimistic that we will be able to work together and find solutions to solve the problems of the Filipino Coop. I am not going to give up no matter how difficult it may seem as I know that there are enough people in the community who really care about helping others. I hope I am not going to be disappointed.

Please send me your feedback and comments by sending an e-mail message to: filipinocoop@gmail.com

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From Page 1

FAMAS

awarded to May Ann Miras, a 19-year old high school graduate who showcased her singing and dancing skills.

The long awaited moment arrived when the judges announced the finalists: May Ann Miras, Marie Antonette Carbon, and Katherine

Miras, the daughter of Ofelia and Eulogio Miras.

Besides the excitement and enthusiasm created by the pageant, the Philippine Ambassador to Canada, Hon. Jose Brillantes, pointed out that the great attendance during the pageant was a clear proof that the people from Montreal can be united. He noted that many of Montreal's



May Ann Miras as she walks around the hall with the other contestants

Mariquit. The question asked was not given to them ahead of time. What do

community leaders were in attendance which led him to believe that the Red



The candidates in their evening gowns and their escorts

you think of the new law banning cell phone use while driving? The judges determined the ranking of the winners according to the way they answered the question.

After a brief deliberation, second runner up was given to

Deer Alberta syndrome would most likely be happening also in Montreal. Red Deer syndrome is the Ambassador's figure of speech that refers to the idea of being united and working together as a community. He urged everyone to support Fammas under the leadership of its president,



Ambassador Jose Brillantes in conversation with Claro Bermudez, FAMAS president and other Fammas officers and members.

Katherine Mariquit, first runner up to Marie Antonette Carbon, and the coveted title of Bb. Pilipinas of Montreal was awarded to May Ann

Claro Bermudez.

It was past one o'clock in the morning when the pageant ended but there was still a big crowd around.

From Page 1

Rice shortage

labor costs in Europe and North America.

A wide variety of rice is grown in Asia, of which basmati rice from India and Pakistan and pathumthani fragrant rice from Thailand are top quality. The latter is a benchmark for rice pricing.

Driving today's food price increases are the tripling of oil prices; the conversion of good cultivable land in the United States to biofuel producing corn; the negative impact of climatic changes; and the general inability of governments to focus on food grain production both in India and China. This has resulted in all food grains, including rice production, remaining stagnant. Crop failures in a particular year exasperate the situation, which occurred this year with lower-than-expected crops in Australia and the United States.

World trade in rice is about 30 million tons. Major exporters are Thailand, Vietnam, the United States, India and Pakistan. The United States does not produce a lot of rice -- about 8 million tons a year -- but it exports half of its output, which gives it a major status among exporting countries. Rice importers are Indonesia, Brazil, Iraq, Philippines, Bangladesh and the Arab world.

Indian rice paddies produced about 140 million tons in two sowing seasons in 2007, about 1 percent higher than the previous year. This produces about 93-94 million tons of milled rice for human consumption. Last year India exported 3.6 million tons of rice. This year it will be a lot less. With a rising population, this exportable surplus is shrinking. Only a month ago India resorted to an export ban on rice. Bangladesh is the most affected by this ban.

India maintains about 20 to 22 million tons of reserve rice stock, which is used to feed the poor at subsidized prices. It is drawn down during a bad production year. Later it is supplemented during a good harvest year.

Chinese paddy crop output has been at about 180 million tons a year, giving about 122 million tons of milled rice. This production is in balance with its demand. At times, China imports rice to relieve spot shortages. A carefully managed public distribution system maintains about 40 to 42 million tons of reserve, enough to tide the country over if there is a major climatic event. If a climatic event results in a production drop, however, the public distribution system will break down. These climatic changes are unpredictable. Nobody could predict that central China would be buried under huge piles of snow last season.

With its focus on industrialization, China has paid less and less attention to agriculture; hence agricultural production is not keeping pace with demand. In addition pollution and acid rain are playing havoc with agriculture.

China and India are vulnerable to a drop in rice production, but they have large reserves. It is the rice importing

countries that are hit the worst, relying on imports to supplement local production. Although the Philippines is not short of rice today, if trade in rice is halved from 30 million tons a year, the impact on its supply will be great. That is one reason that supplies of rice are very carefully watched in the Philippines.

The U.N. Food and Agricultural Organization is optimistic about getting over the present spot shortages of rice. It expects a 7 to 8 million-ton increase in rice production in 2008. Production is expected to recover in Africa and Latin America and additional incentives to farmers in Asia may bring results. This may help to dampen the current market volatility.

The long-term prognosis is not good, however. Until the world refocuses on increasing its food grain output and controlling the population, supply shortages, followed by food riots, are going to be the norm.

Spiraling inflation in India and China is mainly due to higher oil and foodstuff prices. When India and China calculate inflation based on local conditions, foodstuff accounts for about 30 percent of the inflation factors. Oil is the next big factor. Inflation at 7 percent in India has put the political survivability of the present government in doubt, although it is less to blame. Food price increases are a worldwide phenomenon and India cannot control the world. This is true in China also. China is also running 9-10 percent inflation, with food prices leading the price increases. China, like India, cannot control it, although China's problem is rooted in unbalanced development.

A lot of these supply shortages have their root in excessive industrialization drives both in China and India. Along with the West's excessive love affair with cars, they are responsible for today's oil shortage. The tripling of oil prices was a signal for price increases for other commodities. Now inflation has taken hold, it is unlikely to be tamed easily.

China and India consciously fell into the trap of industrialization, dependence on foreign direct investment, and infrastructure renewal in the last 15 years. They ignored the very basic necessity of life -- food grain production. The Chinese believed that with a mountain of cash at hand they could buy food anywhere. That turned out to be a mirage as food surpluses have disappeared all over the world, and there is nothing they can do with their reserves.

Unwittingly, India followed the Chinese example. Since the mid-1990s, India concentrated on industry and let agriculture take a back seat. In the last five years India's total grain production, including rice, has been stable at about 208 million tons. This year it is projected to be 215 million tons. The latter amount will feed the nation and replenish the reserves. This may be good for today but the future is bleak. To feed the rising population, a 4 percent sustained growth in agriculture is needed.

Just as easily as they party,

Top regional entries for Aliwan Festival competition

(see photos on page 12 - Star Photo Gallery)

Filipinos find an excuse to dance – for leisure or entertainment. . . as a manifestation of worship. . . or as a social valve for relationships. For this year's Aliwan Fiesta – the annual cultural extravaganza organized by Manila Broadcasting Company and the Cultural Center of the Philippines in cooperation with the cities of Manila and Pasay – dance in its myriad forms once more takes centerstage, as interpreted in the festival context by contingents from various regions all over the country. As early as January, the roster of entries had reached the maximum number set by the organizers – solid proof of how keenly anticipated the festival is.

Metro Manila will be represented by the Pakalog Festival of Pasig City, anchored on the native delicacy called the "bulig," and Navotas' Pangisdaan which celebrates the city's basic industry and the different phases of its livelihood development program.

From the Cordillera Administrative Region, Baguio City showcases its myriad blooms for which Panagbenga has become immensely popular, while highlighting the city's feverish preparations for its forthcoming centennial celebrations. Mountain Province, in turn, will present the Langay festival of Bontoc, which emphasizes the breakdown of barriers as indigenous practice merges with modern-day traditions in unifying the entire community.

Laoag City's Pamulinawen Festival pays tribute to the hard-working Ilokano in the context of "Panagdaklis" or fishing as livelihood. Angadanan Isabela, in turn, will feature its Gakit festival.

Once more showcasing the artisans of Hagonoy and the Bulakeno's mien for lyricism in its art forms is the Desposorio Festival. As residents of Catanaun, Quezon

present the wild revelry of the Boling-Boling Festival, the Bicol region showcases religious fervour in the Penafrancia Voyadores and Pilgrims Festival of Naga City.

Townfolk in San Carlos City, Negros Occidental blend dance and drama in presenting the legend of Princess Nabingka in the Pinta Flores festival. Iloilo, in turn, fields two entries – the Sa-ad Festival of Leganes, which is anchored on the miraculous deeds of St Vincent Ferrer, and the highly acclaimed Dinagyang Festival, which features the aboriginal tribes' offering to the Infant Jesus.

This worship of the Santo Nino, which prevails in many parts of the country, likewise finds fruition in the breathtaking showcase of Midsayap, Cotabato's Halad Festival, along with Cebu's two-part pitch of the Sinulog, as interpreted by defending champion Lumad Basakanon, and the contingent from the municipality of Carmen.

Not to be outdone, Leyte also brings forward a double-header. The Alikaraw festival of Hilongos showcases its equally fervent religious devotion manifested by tribesmen who also learned to co-exist with their environment, while the town of Abuyog bring life to the mystical bees of the magical fairy Opayda in the Buyogan festival.

Ecological concerns also comprise the theme of Kabasalan, Zamboanga Sibugay's Bakhawan Festival, which draws public attention to the role of mangroves in protecting the community's marine resources.

The Shariff Kabunsuan festival of Cotabato City is a grandiose portrayal of how the city was introduced to the Islamic faith. From the province bearing the shariff's name, the town of Upi presents the Meguyaya Festival which highlights their ritual traditions in a grand celebration prior to beginning

the work cycle. Sultan Kudarat displays its opulent coronation rites in the Kang'Gelal, while Parang presents its Buklod Festival as a show of unity and peaceful coexistence among Muslims and Christians.

From the young township of Mamasapano, Maguindanao comes the eternal story of of ill-fated love and a community's quest for peace in the Kalilitad festival. And finally, from Lamitan, Basilan is the Lami-Lamihan, a joyous festivity showcasing the skill of their master weavers as the Yakan chieftains gather to preserve and propagate their cultural heritage.

Supported by Smart Buddy, Tanduay, Unilab, Sulpicio Lines, and Dunkin' Donuts, Aliwan Fiesta is now on its sixth year, and will be held on May 1-3, with the grand culminating parade traversing Roxas Boulevard from Quirino Grandstand to the Aliw Theater at the CCP Complex. For enquiries, call 832-6125 or email siouxstar@gmail.com

Aliwan Fiesta Showcasing Filipino Craftsmanship and design

Fiestas provide excellent opportunities to celebrate Filipino craftsmanship and ingenuity. So when the nation's most popular festivals converge in one single event, expect pre-eminent craftsmen in the different regions to bring out their most innovative ideas.

For the sixth consecutive year, entries to the float competition of the Aliwan Fiesta, organized by Manila Broadcasting Company and the Cultural Center of the Philippines, in cooperation with the cities of Manila and Pasay, will bring out the ingenuity of Filipino artisans and designers in the quest to earn the grand prize of half a

million pesos. Banking on local folklore and indigenous traditions are floats from all regions of the country, including NCR.

Float designs will make use of local textiles, decorative mats, and basketry in vibrant colours – all bearing distinct regional imprints of master weavers. Agricultural produce and flowers also find their use as accessories and raw material for the floats.

Okkil, originally from the middle-eastern Islamic art of the Umayyad dynasty in the eighth century, lends a whole repertoire of plant-shaped folk motif to carved, woven and brass-cast pieces common to the Maranao, Tausug, Samal, and Badjao. The skill and creativity of Mindanao natives which also found fruition in their seafaring and boatbuilding skills, are also highlighted. Ilokano damili pottery, with its solid role in the indigenous lifestyles celebrated during festivals, are also dominant fixtures, in the same way that Bulacan's folk art, Singkaban, gives rise to the decorative arches whittled from special wood.

Collectively, the float parade of Aliwan Fiesta, supported by Smart Buddy, Tanduay, Unilab, Sulpicio Lines, and Dunkin' Donuts, which will be held on May 3, traversing Roxas Boulevard from Quirino Grandstand to Aliw Theater at the CCP Complex, will once more emit a blaze of kaleidoscopic colour as the participating festivals reflect their own community spirit.

Comprising the judging panel are renowned floral architect Rachy Cuna; the Director of the Metropolitan Museum of Manila and Vice Chairman of the NCCA's Committee on Monuments and Sites - Eric Zerrudo; the president of the Art Association of the Philippines Raul Isidro; National Museum Director Dr. Corazon Alvina; and the Ayala Museum's Senior Curator and Head of Conservation Kenneth Esguerra.

Let's go to the tulips festival on Sunday, May 18, 2008

(Victoria Day weekend)

Organized by Gilmore International College



Departure time: 6:30 P.M.

Return to Montreal: 7:00 P.M.

Meeting place: Plamondon Metro (Van Horne exit)

Itinerary: Parliament Building visit, Museum of Civilization, Boat Festival on Dows Lake

Reserve your tickets Tel.: 514-485-7861

Bring your picnic basket.

TOURISM

GUIMARAS

Beach, sun and lots of mangos!

Guimaras is an island province located mid-way between the islands of Panay and Negros. Bordered by Iloilo City in the north, Bacolod in the east, Panay in the west and Panay Sea in the south.

The province is largely agricultural with principal crops palay, coconut and mangoes. Guimaras' golden **carabao mango** is renowned worldwide for its sweetness and quality, which makes it the most important commercial crop in the province.

Guimaras is also the location of the much-admired Roca Encantada (Enchanted Rock), summer house of the distinguished Lopez family of Iloilo. The house is perched on a promontory overlooking Guimaras Strait. Across the promontory is a picturesque group of coral islets called Siete Pecados (Isles of the Seven Sins), a curious counterpoint to the attractions of

spiritual value in Guimaras.

Guimaras is noted for its great number of pilgrimage sites. The town of Jordan is known for its Holy Week presentation called Ang Pagtaltal sa Guimaras, a re-enactment of the Passion of Christ. Its climax is a one-kilometer procession of flagellants and devotees in biblical attire that ends in the Bala-an Bukid Shrine (Holy Mountain Shrine), a huge white cross atop a hill. In Catiliran Cave in Nueva Valencia, the people perform a Good Friday ritual known as the Pang-alap, where devotees crawl throughout a long passage of the cave while uttering prayers in Latin, in the belief that they shall acquire supernatural powers, particularly for use against evil spirits. Also note ear the capital town of Jordan is a Trappist Monastery, the only one in the Philippines

The island-province also has a



Macopo Falls, Balcon Falls, Ambacan Falls, and Sadsad Falls are the most famous waterfalls on Guimaras. Ask a local or a tourguide to bring you to them. These crystal clear, cold, refreshing falls are fun to swim underneath



The famed Roca Encantada (Enchanted Rock), summer house of the distinguished Lopez family of Iloilo.



Hidden Paradise? A beach resort in Guimaras, Iloilo, as seen from the other side of the island.



As you would expect, accommodations are top class in Guimaras, with some offering spectacular views of the countryside, such as here at inland resort.



Alubihod Beach in Guimaras is a favorite destination, and a good alternative to Boracay

wealth of white sand beaches and small coral islands. There are good spots for spear fishing, scuba diving and snorkeling that will sure delight any water-sport enthusiast. The best beaches are at Alubihod, Tatlong Pulo, Baras and Inampulungan. The interior of the island is ideal for hiking and mountain biking.

Other than the beautiful beaches, one should also think of visiting one or more of the dozen or so mango farms. There are more than 50,000 mango trees on the island and a tour to any of these farms is a unique experience on its own. The only reason anyone would want to pass up the chance to see the mango plantations is perhaps a dislike for the mango.

There are three major farms on Guimaras which are some of the largest in the Philippines, they include Southern Orchard in Jordan, Oro Verde and Guimaras Tree Farm in Buenavista. In general they are open for public visit and you would be welcome to visit any of them with open arms even though they don't often have too many visitors.

Great resorts worth mentioning:

Valle Verde is one of the few nature resorts found in the southern part of Guimaras. Situated in one of the dense forests of Ravina in the municipality of Sibunag (used to be part of Nueva Valencia), Valle Verde is just one quiet place you can stay to relax, breathe some fresh air and witness one of the best sunsets on the island.

Villa Igang is one of the many smaller and secluded resorts up in the northern part of the municipality of

Nueva Valencia in the island of Guimaras. Situated just beside Puerto del Mar which is ran by John B. Lacson Colleges Foundation (a local maritime college), Villa Igang sports dozens of cottages for local and foreign tourists to rent for long vacations.

The great thing about this resort is that the beach front is surrounded by mountains extending into the sea, so the northern winds are blocked off and the shore doesn't get pounded by huge waves. Huts or cottages can be rented for P500 per day (with two beds) or go for the aircon ones which is P900 per day. You'd be able to get discounts if you rent them on a weekly or monthly basis. Food is cheap as well — you can ask the local resto to cook you any fish, chicken or pork viand which could cost from P45 for a chicken inasal or P75 for a kilo of grilled fish.

Alubihod Beach, where the sand is almost as white as that of Boracay's but less fine and a little off-white. It has changed some over the years, and is now sub-divided into several great resorts, the bigger one would be **Raymen Beach Resort** followed by **Rico Beach Resort**, both offer great accommodations.

More on the Mangoes of Guimaras:

Mangifera indica, or simply known as mango, is considered to be the national fruit of the Philippines.

Mangoes in Guimaras can be eaten ripe or unripe. Unripe Carabao mangoes can be a dessert or a snack. Some Filipinos slice these unripe Carabao mangoes into smaller pieces and they mixed it with chopped onions and tomatoes. They call it Ensalada — a

local version of Spain's green salad. On the other hand, the ripe mangoes in Guimaras are considered as the best fine-tasting mangoes in the world. It has a unique sweetness that one can never taste anywhere else. There's no need to use any kind of sweetener if you wanted to have a mango shake.

The guimaras mango possesses a unique sweetness, firm flesh, sweet-smelling aroma, thin seeds as well as a

very smooth peel, all of which contribute to its exotic taste and make it a prized fruit the world over. The uniqueness of its taste is largely due to the island's climate and nutrient-rich soil.

Guimaras can be reached by ferryboats, pump boats, and other sea-going vessels via Iloilo Strait from Iloilo and via Guimaras Strait from Negros. ■



April is the season for mangoes, lots of mangos! Guimaras Island is quite famous for its sweet mangos. The province celebrates its Manggahan Festival in April, which is harvest time for this delicious fruit.



Pumpboats or Paraw boats, the preferred local mode of islan-hopping, line the beaches at the popular Raymen's Beach Resort



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Jamby, at 50, reaches Madrigal crossroads

April 21, 2008

Senator Ana Consuelo "Jamby" Madrigal, who is turning 50 on Saturday, has reached a crossroads of sort that could expose the billionaire clan into a public feud over the fabulous estate left by her childless aunt, Consuelo "Chito" Madrigal-Collantes.

Reporters had already been alerted by the senator's staff that Madrigal would either issue a statement or hold a press conference, perhaps as early as today, to clarify her lawyer's letter questioning the validity of the probate for the last will and testament of the late billionaire, after whom the senator was named.

According to sources close to the family, Jamby is supported by her younger sister Tana in the incipient legal assault, an action that could pit the two against their eldest sister, Ma. Susana "Chu Chu" Madrigal-Eduque, who was bequeathed a generous 40 percent of Doña Chito's undetermined residuary estate.

Doña Chito, 87, passed away on March 24, leaving her husband, Marcos-era Foreign Minister Manuel Collantes, as the lone compulsory heir, inheriting a house in Forbes and a one-hectare property in Ayala Alabang.

Another 40 percent was bequeathed to a young grandson, with the balance of 20 percent given to another niece, lawyer Gizela M. Gonzalez-Montinola, wife of Bank of the Philippine Islands president Aurelio Montinola III.

The banker was named by Doña Chito as one of the two estate trustees and executors of her will, along with

another Doña Chito counsel, Perry Pe, a fellow partner of Gonzalez-Montinola in the Romulo Mabanta law firm.

According to sources close to the Madrigals, the senator's inquiry not only raised doubts on the valuation of the Doña Chito's estate, a modest P26 million, but also the unexplained disappearance of the estimated \$400 million to \$800 million private banking account that her aunt had supposedly maintained at Citibank New York.



Madrigal sisters Tana, Chu Chu, Jamby before a portrait of their late mother.

Pe, who declined repeated

requests for an interview, would only volunteer that Doña Chito, a corporate lawyer herself, had already conducted "judicious estate planning" even before her health declined in 2006, when the Makati Regional Trial Court probated her last will and testament.

Still, despite Jamby's grumbling, Doña Chito advanced her niece's share of the Madrigal fortune. Senator Madrigal sent word that the P100-million figure quoted in an earlier story was "too small" when Doña Chito underwrote Jamby's senatorial campaign in 2004.

In addition to tracing her aunt's overseas bank account, Senator Madrigal, according to the Madrigal chatter, was also specifically interested in the rarely used Agusta Westland Power helicopter that Doña Chito left behind.

The eight-seater executive helicopter was left in the name of a family corporation, along with Doña Chito's house in North Forbes, as well as various other commercial properties and houses not detailed in the will.

Ironically, the Madrigal matriarch had left specific instructions in her will that she would not brook any inheritance feud about her undisclosed fortune even in her after-life.

"I do not wish any conflict between my beneficiaries involving my estate after my death," Doña Chito said.

"Anyone of the beneficiaries, who should contest or question the acts or decisions of my executor/trustee in any proceedings, whether judicial or otherwise, shall be disqualified to be a beneficiary of my residuary estate." ■

Suspects in Comelec slays now known

April 15, 2008

The Manila Police District (MPD) on Monday disclosed the identities of the suspects behind the slaying of the two former heads of the Commission on Elections Law Department.

In a press conference, MPD Director Chief Supt. Roberto Rosales identified the suspects in the slaying of Lawyers Alioden Dalaig and Wynne Asdala as Basser Ampatuan, a Moro National Liberation Front integrate-turned policeman, and a certain "Irving," a former policeman. In both cases, Ampatuan was pinpointed as the gunman while Irving was one of those who plotted the execution of slay plans.

Rosales said the identification of the two resulted from the information gathered from three unnamed witnesses. "The three witnesses' [description] matched Ampatuan's description," he added.

"The suspects will be facing two separate murder charges that will be filed this afternoon," Rosales said. Rosales said both killings were politically-motivated, and involved election-related cases in Shariff Kabunsuan.

"This is related to the governorship in Shariff Kabunsuan. We are now on-track of that angle and will be investigating it further," Rosales said.

Dalaig was shot on November 10, 2007 while on his way out of Hyatt Hotel Casino in Ermita, Manila. He was the head of the poll body's legal department at the time that he was shot.

Asdala became the poll body's legal department officer-in-charge after Dalaig was killed. He was shot on March 24, 2008 in Intramuros, Manila. ■

Robinsons to build 16 malls in 5 years

April 19, 2008

Robinsons Land Corp. is spending P12 billion to put up 16 malls over the next five years—or an average of three malls a year—in a bid to catch up with market leader SM Prime Holdings Inc., its top official said yesterday.

The listed property unit of JG Summit Holdings would also open four malls this year—one each in Cabanatuan City in Nueva Ecija, Pulilan in Bulacan, and in Ermita and Paco both in Manila—company president Frederick Go told reporters following Robinsons Land's stockholders' meeting.

The four new malls would bring the company's malls to 24 and their total gross floor area to 1.4 million square meters this year from 1.3 million last year, Go said.

By comparison, the Sy family had 30 SM malls in 2007 and is poised to open three more and to expand two others this year, which would bring the total gross floor area of its malls to 4.1 million square meters.

The SM group is opening SM Supercenter in Rosales in Pangasinan, SM City in Baliuag in Bulacan, and SM City in Marikina City. It is also expanding SM City in Fairview, Quezon City, and SM

Megamall in Mandaluyong City.

Go said several of the company's new malls would rise up in the provinces including Mindanao, and some would cater for business process outsourcing firms.

He said the company also had six housing projects, a high-rise condominium, and a hotel in Tagaytay City in the pipeline—including two new office buildings in Mandaluyong City and in Ortigas Center.

The company would also manage a 120-room boutique hotel in Tagaytay City, he said.

Go said earlier that Robinsons Land was setting aside P10 billion for capital expenditures this year against P7 billion last year.

The company now counts 20 shopping centers, 23 residential condominiums, five office buildings, 27 housing and land developments and three hotels.

Its net income rose 48 percent to P1.82 billion last year after revenue increased 24 percent to P5.96 billion.

Revenue from its high-rise buildings jumped 60 percent to P2.3 billion. ■

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Pinay bags \$10,000 in McDonald's singing tilt

April 22, 2008

Now she has some big things to show that a small country like hers can produce singing sensations faster than the world can say, "To go."

Margaret Yu of Davao sang



Runner up singer Margaret Yu, 22, of Davao. "This is a great privilege and honor to me", she said. "My family helped me, especially in prayers. I really thank and praise God for the opportunity and blessings He has given me."

Whitney Houston's "I Have Nothing" at the recent "Voice of McDonald's 2008" in Orlando, Florida, and came

out as first-runner up. She got a standing ovation and \$10,000.

Yu, 22, was among 3,600 contestants from McDonald's stores in 118 countries. A worship leader who sings in a church choir in Davao, she said she dedicated her winning song to God.

Natercia Pintor of Portugal won the grand prize.

The judges, evidently, were impressed with what they had heard, said juror and multi-platinum artist Ne-Yo. "I was blown away by the talent. They [contestants] brought the house down. It was really difficult to choose a winner. I applaud McDonald's for doing this."

Two of the other judges were Jody Gerson, co-president of Sony/ATV Music Publishing, and Ken Hertz, LLP senior partner.

Two other Filipinos made it to the semifinals—Canada-based **Candido Revilles**, who eventually placed third, and Yu's best friend, Paulina Susan Bacarat, also from Davao.

The contest is the biggest singing competition of its kind for 1.6 million McDonald's employees from around the globe and from more than 30,000 restaurants in over 100 countries.

Yu and Bacarat will be the international fast-food chain's singing ambassadors. They will help raise funds for McDonald's Charities, which looks after poor children in the Philippines. ■

Boracay Mansion's asking price: P143 million

April 18, 2008

The Quezon City property that the government seized as part of former President Joseph Estrada's assets could be sold for a minimum P142.918 million, according to government auditors.

The 7,400-square-meter property, called Boracay Mansion because it had a swimming pool with sand from the famous resort island in Aklan, is on 100 11th Street in Quezon City's posh New Manila district.

The anti-graft court seized it after convicting Estrada of plunder in September, but Estrada has always denied ownership of the property, which he was said to have bought for his common-law wife and former actress Larni Enriquez.

Now a legal tussle over the property between the Sandiganbayan and the Quezon City government has raised questions on who really owns it.

The Sandiganbayan says the property was forfeited in favor of the national government following Estrada's conviction. The Quezon City government claims the mansion became its property after its registered owner, St. Peter's Holdings Corp., failed to pay taxes on it for five years.

Quezon City says the property may not be sold until its unpaid real

estate taxes are settled.

Quezon City Treasurer Victor Endriga says St. Peter Holdings Corp., supposedly owned by businessman Jose Yulo, owes the city P1.7 million in back taxes, and that it is among the properties listed as delinquent since 2000.

He says the city government put the mansion under auction in 2005, and that it became the property's owner after no one submitted a bid.

The owner could still redeem the property by paying P1,292,842 in back taxes and P440,741.72 in penalties, he says. ■



The so-called "Boracay Mansion," once described as the palatial residence of a mistress of ousted president Joseph Estrada, which figured in Estrada's trial and eventual conviction for plunder, is a shadow of what it was. It is abandoned, dilapidated, and now nobody even seems to want it.

Penalties urged over video clip

April 19, 2008

A HOSPITAL recommended penalties Friday, including possible dismissal, for three doctors and a nurse who conducted a rowdy operation on a patient that was videotaped and posted on YouTube.

The unidentified doctors and nurses from Cebu have been condemned by medical associations.

Health Secretary Francisco Duque III has ordered an investigation.

The Vicente Sotto Memorial Medical Center in Cebu, where the operation to remove an object from the patient's rectum took place Jan. 3, recommended filing administrative

cases against the four personnel, with penalties ranging from reprimands to dismissals for violating a code of conduct and ethical standards.

Medical center spokesman Emmanuel Gines said the government-run hospital could only recommend penalties to the Health Department and may not take action on its own.

The nearly three-minute video of a noisy operating room shows doctors and nurses laughing, giggling and cheering. At one point, a hand appears with a cell phone camera taking a close-up picture of the surgery.

As a doctor gingerly pulls out a six-

inch-long spray canister from the male patient's rectum, someone shouts, "Baby out!" amid loud cheers.

The doctor then removes the canister cap and sprays the contents toward a crowd of nurses and doctors viewing the procedure.

The 39-year-old patient, who remains unidentified, plans next week to file a complaint seeking the revocation of the licenses of those responsible and a civil suit for damages, his lawyer, Guiller Ceniza, said.

A hospital committee that looked into the incident reported that the successful operation might have

prompted the cheers, but added they were "excessive and inappropriate and some acts were already in violation of some hospital policies," the hospital said in a statement.

Gines said a fourth doctor and three other nurses were "sternly warned," and a clinical instructor who supervised a group of nursing students from a local school who observed the operation was banned from the hospital.

He said a nursing student suspected of uploading the video to YouTube would be dealt with by the school.

Ceniza said his client was

Taxi operators seek P40 flagdown

April 17, 2008

Taxi operators petitioned the government yesterday for a 10-peso increase in their 30-peso flagdown rate, citing surging fuel prices, while provincial bus operators asked for a similar increase in fares.

"We are only requesting a hike in the flagdown rate and not in the per-succeeding-kilometer rate because we don't want commuters to be affected that much," said Jesus Suntay, president of the Philippine National Taxi Operators' Association.

"We have agreed that would minimize the effect on commuters."

Taxis now charge P30 for the flagdown and P2.50 for every succeeding kilometer.

"This will be nationwide. We are

filing [the petition] on behalf of everyone—including our members in the provinces," said Suntay who is also a Quezon City councilor.

He said his group had wanted to file its petition as early as March, but Thompson Lantion, chairman of the Land Transportation Franchising and Regulatory Board, requested them to defer it.

Homer Mercado, president of the Provincial Bus Operators Association of the Philippines, said they were asking a 30-centavo increase per kilometer for all ordinary buses and a 45-centavo increase per kilometer for air-conditioned buses.

"The existing per-kilometer rate for ordinary provincial buses is P1.30. We want to raise it to P1.60," Mercado

said.

"On the other hand, the existing fare rate in air-con buses is P1.45. We want to raise it to P1.90."

Meanwhile, the House committee on labor yesterday recommended to the wage boards a 36-peso increase in the daily wage of private workers.

Valenzuela Rep. Magtanggol Gunigundo, chairman of the committee, said he was also pushing the early passage of a bill seeking to exempt all minimum-wage workers from paying tax.

"I think a 36-peso daily wage hike is enough for workers in Metro Manila," Gunigundo said.

"The amount represents 10 percent of the 362-peso minimum wage in the region that includes the

12-peso daily wage hike for minimum-wage workers in August 2007."

Militant labor unions are pushing for a 125-peso increase in the minimum wage, but Gunigundo said that might not be possible because employers were expected to resist it.

Crispin Beltran, a congressman representing the leftist party-list group Anakpawis, said granting wage increases to the 33.7-million labor force was urgent.

"Giving limitation to the granting of additional wages only to 5 million minimum-wage earners, or 15 percent of the total labor force, is discordant to the just demand of all workers for an across-the-board wage increase," he said. ■

FILIPINO STAR SHOWBIZ GOSSIP

Marian Rivera keeps her promise to go topless in "Dyesebel"

Truly the biggest female star of GMA-7 today, isang napakapabulosang presscon ang ibinigay ng Kapuso network for Marian Rivera's follow-up project after the phenomenal Marimar, ang Dyesebel. Done at the poolside of Sofitel Philippines Hotel last night, April 21, the press launch included mermaids and mermen swimming in the big pool of the hotel

cycling shorts lang daw para mas magagaan dahil as is, napakabigat na ng costume niya.

"Gumagaan lang ito kapag nasa tubig na. Pero kapag nasa lupa ako, ang bigat nito. Naaawa nga ako sa mga nagbubuhay sa akin kasi alam ko ang bigat ko dahil sa costume ko," aniya.

Sabi rin ni Direk Joyce Bernal, mas close ang character niyang Dyesebel sa



Marian Rivera

before the presscon started and the performance of the Philippine synchronized swimming team doing their water acrobatics while the theme song is being sung by Julie Ann of Sugarpop.

Si Marian ang naging star of the night sa kanyang suot na red gown. Halos lahat ay tinanong sa kanya ng entertainment press, which she all answered impressively.

"Topless kung topless."

Ang unang tanong, kapansin-pansin sa ilang eksena na lumalangoy siya bilang Dyesebel na dangerously risqué, kung saan palaging parang muntik-muntikan nang makita ang kaniyang dibdib. Tinotoo niya kasi ang promise niyang "topless kung topless" playing the most famous Filipino mermaid.

"Let's just say well protected ako. Hindi naman siguro ako makikitaan dito kasi wholesome ang show namin na puwede ring panoorin ng bata," paliwanag niya.

Asked kung ano ang suot niya underneath the mermaid costume,

tunay na Marian Rivera kesa kay Marimar. Sumang-ayon naman dito ang young actress.

"Kasi ang character ni Dyesebel, kalog. Ganoon din ako, masayahin akong tao," paghahambing niya.

Wala ring expectation si Marian sa Dyesebel kung malalampasan ba nito ang nagawang phenomenon ng kanyang first solo soap na Marimar.

"Ayokong mag-expect. Ang sa amin, basta mas mapaganda namin ito, mas magustuhan ng tao, at mas maging masaya sila sa Dyesebel, okay na ako."

Intriguing Dyesebel

Inintriga rin namin si Marian. Sa presscon kasi ng Maligno ni Claudine Barretto last week sa ABS-CBN, isa sa mga co-stars nitong si DJ Durano ang nagsabi na "makakalimutan n'yo ang babaeng lumalangoy-langoy" habang ipinu-promote ang bagong horror series ng ABS-CBN, na incidentally ay magpi-premiere din sa April 28 gaya ng Dyesebel. Obviously, ang Dyesebel nga ang tinutukoy ni DJ.

"Ay, hindi ko pa nga alam kung ano

ang makakatapat namin, e," reaksiyon ni Marian. "Trabaho lang ang iniisip ko. Saka alam ko naman na hindi mo mapiplease ang lahat ng tao. Sadyang may mga maka-Kapuso at may maka-kabila. Kung mas magiging masaya ang mga Kapuso dahil sa show namin, okay na yun."

Isa pang intriga, bali-balita noon na kay Anne Curtis unang in-offer ang Dyesebel ngunit hindi lang ito natuloy dahil hindi nakalipat si Anne sa GMA-7. Ano ang masasabi niya rito?

"Wala akong narinig," sabi ni Marian. "Alam n'yo, nang in-offer sa akin ang Dyesebel, may tinanungan din ako kung na offer na ba ito sa ibang artista."

Angelica Jones lost P2-M worth of jewelry in fire



Angelica Jones

Sexy actress Angelica Jones lost almost P2-million worth of jewelry and other belongings in a fire that gutted her

Ang sagot sa akin, wala raw.

"Pero kung sakaling may una ngang na-offer-an ng Dyesebel at tapos ibinigay sa akin, tatanggapin ko pa rin nang maluwas. Dyesebel ito, bakit ko naman tatanggihan?"

Pinaalala naming noong kalagitnaan pa lang ng Marimar, when we asked her kung ano ang gusto niyang maging next project, ang lumilipad (Darna) or ang lumalangoy (Dyesebel), noon pa lang, Dyesebel na ang pinili niya.

"Ah talaga? Kung gayon, pinagpala pa rin ako ni Lord," sabi ni Marian.

residential unit at Highway Hills Commercial Apartelle in Sierra Madre, Mandaluyong City. The fire reached fifth alarm before seven in the morning. Initial investigation said the fire started at the third floor in the kitchen area of the actress' unit and that the blaze was caused by a defective switch. Aside from Jones' room the fire also damaged another unit of the apartelle.

According to Jones she was caught by surprise as she woke up seeing her unit was already covered with smoke and fire. She recalled that she just shouted "fire!" and even thought of saving her things before she decided to run downstairs.

The actress said that she lost her mobile phone, money and other personal items but members of Bureau of Fire were able to save some of her money and belongings after fire out was declared.

Sarah to duet with member of boy band In L.A.

Sarah Geronimo is tireless. Not content to rest on her laurels, she has added several more awards to her ever-growing collection. The Viva singing star emerged top winner in this year's MYX Music Awards. She copped the Favorite Song award for the Medwin Marfil composition "Ikaw," one of the cuts in her all-original Filipino album, "Taking Flight." Sarah was also named Favorite Artist of the Year, Favorite Female Artist of the Year and MYX Celebrity VJ of the Year. On top of that, Sarah was chosen Best Female Performer in the recently-concluded Guillermo Mendoza Awards. Martin Nievera was Best Male Performer.

Unfortunately, Sarah was not around to personally receive her harvest of awards. She is now in Canada, where she is on a concert tour with the old gang, Rachelle Ann Go, Mark Bautista and Christian Bautista. She had just performed in Winnipeg where fans packed the musical hall. Thanks to new technology however, the enterprising guys in MYX USA were able to shoot Sarah giving her thank you speech.

There is no question that the young superstar deserves the awards. She is one of a few artists who can draw a big crowd at the Araneta Coliseum. Her last concert, "Sarah Geronimo in Motion," rocked the Big Dome and has been preserved on

DVD. Her fourth album, "Taking Flight," also topped the music charts. Almost 500,000 have viewed her music video, "How Could You Say You Love Me," on YouTube.



Sarah Geronimo

Reports have it that Sarah will stay behind in Los Angeles after the "Champions" tour to record a duet with a cute member of one of the biggest boy bands in pop music history. The song will be included in her new album for release in July, her birth month.

Ramiele's busy life after 'Idol'



Like some lucky castoffs before her, Filipino-American Ramiele Malubay is busier than ever—that is, even after being voted off the reality talent search "American Idol" last week.

A member of her fans' club sent Inquirer Entertainment an e-mail detailing Malubay's TV appearances on several popular US shows, including "Live With Regis and Kelly" and "Ellen" (Monday), and "The Morning Show with Mike and Juliet" (Tuesday).

Malubay is the latest Pinoy performer to be featured on comic Ellen DeGeneres' gabfest, following Charice Pempengco and Arnel Pineda.

A YouTube clip shows Ellen praising the petite Pinay for her "fantastic voice"—particularly in her farewell performance last week.

On "Ellen," Malubay sang her AI signature song, Dusty Springfield's "You Don't Have to Say You Love Me," which earned raves from judges Randy Jackson, Paula Abdul and Simon Cowell in the show's first week.

Last Friday, she granted a phone interview with US journalists and the Inquirer.

Throughout the phoner, arranged by Star World (which airs the show in Asia), she candidly admitted her struggle to

recapture the magical moment during that first week.

She offered several theories on what went wrong in her AI journey, and discussed the possibility of coming back to the Philippines and pursuing a recording career à la Jasmine Trias.

Q: You've probably heard of Jasmine Trias' success in the Philippines after AI. Have you considered following in her footsteps?

Well, I definitely want to go back home ... (simply) because it's home.

I also want to see what I can do over there. I'm pretty sure I've learned some things over here. Jasmine has opened doors for us and I'm really grateful to her for being the first Filipino [who did well] on AI and for going beyond the show and achieving big things.

Q: Why did you decide to do Heart's "Alone," which Carrie Underwood made her own in Season 4? Were you aware of the risk involved?

Oh, yes. I watched Carrie's performance. But I was just trying to bring back that first week [when I did the Dusty song]. That was my goal. So if it didn't work, then it didn't work.

Q: After that first week when you came out strong, it seems something happened. Was it nerves?

Honestly, I didn't realize that the first week was such a big deal until people kept telling me about it.

I think I let it go to my head. So I was always trying to be better than I was in the first week. Thing is, when you over-think things, you end up not knowing how to handle yourself and the song gets out of hand. You're not in control anymore.

People were telling me that my confidence dropped. I shouldn't have listened or second-guessed myself. I should have just gone with my gut feel.

Q: You felt the pressure of that first performance each week?

Jennylyn wants Mercado for her baby's surname



If you don't know she's pregnant, you won't notice that Jennylyn's already five months pregnant. Aside from not getting fat on her pregnancy, she still

Kind of. Also, I was just terrified to be onstage. But now that I'm going on tour (with the other Top Ten finalists), I have to go up on a lot of stages.

Q: t the start, you said that you held the record for changing your song the most number of times, and that your family kept giving you song choices. Was that the case up till towards the end of your stint on the show?

No, they eventually stopped. I was like: C'mon, let me be. [Towards the end] I was the one who picked the songs, but I was trying to tune out everyone so I wouldn't get stressed and psyched out.

Q: Do you feel that Simon, who initially said no to you, eventually warmed up? Do you think you proved him wrong?

Oh, he likes me. I know he does. He's actually a nice guy.

Backstage, on the night I got voted off, he approached me and said: "Okay, cry on my shoulder." He kept reassuring me that (the only reason I got kicked out) was because of my song choice.

I know that sometimes he overdoes it because it's on TV, but I really believe in my heart that he just wants us to be better.

Q: What's the biggest lesson you've learned on AI?

I learned to be more humble. To be more appreciative. To be more courteous and acknowledge every single person who works on the show because they all help you become better. I learned so much from the band, the mentor (Dolly Parton) and the vocal coaches.

Q: What advice would you give to other young people who hope to join AI?

Just be yourself and enjoy every single minute. Don't think too far ahead because that will make you miss the fun stuff. When I look back, I'm glad that I took everything in. I have no regrets. ■

wears sexy outfits like what she wore in Showbiz Central last Sunday.

According to Jen, she really hoped that she will not get really fat.

"Sana talaga huwag na 'kong tumaba! At saka, ano naman, e, nagdadiet din naman ako. Yung mga tamang pagkain lang talaga yung kinakain ko para hindi talaga 'ko masyadong tumaba o lumaki masyado yung baby. Mga healthy vegetables and fish ang kinakain ko, pero walang rice," explained Jen.

As of now, there has been no planned name for the baby, be it a girl or a boy. But according to the actress, she really would love to have a baby girl. And when it comes to the baby's surname, Jen immediately said that it will be Mercado, contrary to what Patrick wants. ■

More Showbiz Gossip - SEE PAGE 16

Sam Milby still courting Anne Curtis



Anne Curtis & Sam Milby

According to a reliable source, after Anne Curtis watched Sam Milby's

concert in Manila Hotel last Valentine's Day, she reportedly went to the new house of Sam in Pasig City. A dinner date was waiting for them at the rooftop of Sam's new house; with red roses, red wine with matching candles in the table. And because it's cold in the rooftop, a blanket was there for the two of them.

Until now, there has been no official statement by Anne or Sam that both of them are officially on. But the lass didn't deny the fact that Sam is courting the actress.

"Right time. Siyempre gusto ko, I want to be sure na talaga. Ayoko na ng break-break na 'yan. Ayoko na ng mga ganun, 'no?! Twenty-three na ako," pahayag pa ni Anne sa amin," answered Anne when asked on when she will finally answer Sam. ■

STAR PHOTO GALLERY

**Aliwan Festival
in Manila (see page 5)**

Photos by Joey de Leon



Sultan Kudarat children



Aliwan Festival Participants

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TFC on Demand

COMMUNITY NEWS

OMEGA sponsors benefit dance for Scouts Canada Laging Handa

The idea all began one December night during a get-together in our home right after our caroling practice. Present were MR. MOISES MEDINA, a Scout volunteer, his wife MRS. DORIS KING-MEDINA, an APO member, my husband, MR. ROMY VALENZUELA, a Scout Leader and an APO adviser, MS. RORY POSCABLO, our (APO) treasurer and myself.

After a few drinks and topics as well, one that definitely caught everybody's interest is one problem that Scouts Canada 0592 Laging Handa is facing right now. According to MR. ROMY VALENZUELA AND MR. MOISES MEDINA, there is a very low number of membership for a while now since this group was organized and partly because some parents cannot afford the cost of membership registration.

Our organization, ALPHA PHI OMEGA, was founded by a Scoutmaster himself, MR. FRANK REED HORTON, and was founded based on the same principles as the Scouts. We share and recognize the

importance of the Scout's mission to help young boys and girls develop into self-fulfilled individuals through a non-formal education process.

Before the end of that night, Doris, Rory and myself came up with an idea--how about doing a dance sometime in the Spring and the proceeds, or part of it could be used to help tackle this particular problem. Such donation will help encourage new Scouts to register as members this coming June 2008 especially those who are not financially able. We came up with this Disco-themed 70's Dance so it will be a nostalgic fun as well. The night ended with a positive outlook and the rest is history.

For now, we are calling everybody's support to this upcoming Dance that is really for a very good cause. (Please see our advertisement in this newspaper.)

CRISTY TIBURCIO-VALENZUELA

Overseas Filipinos and Member of Parliament hold press conference to oppose immigration changes from Bill C-50

Montreal, QC - On Wednesday, April 23rd at 10:00 AM, the Filipino community in Montreal and a representative from MP Thomas Mulcair's office will hold a press conference to speak against the passing of Bill C-50, a budget bill that proposes unprecedented and dangerous changes to the immigration system.

Under Bill C-50, the Citizenship and Immigration Minister will be given the right to select applications and determine if applications should be fast-tracked, frozen, or even denied, despite already fulfilling the strict requirements. The Conservative government justifies these policy changes as an effort to reduce a backlog of 800,000 applications, and further reduce the small amount of funding allocated for immigrant application processing. The government funding set aside for immigration processing is currently 1% of the overall immigration budget. In reality, this is a move to increase the arbitrary power of the government to

approve permanent residency applications.

"Bill C-50 will certainly leave the Filipino community more vulnerable to human rights violations as temporary workers," states Roderick Carreon, National Chairperson of SIKLAB-Canada (Advance and Uphold the Rights and Welfare of Overseas Filipino Workers in Canada). "Under the racist and anti-woman policies of the Live-In Caregiver Program (LCP), Filipinos have been placed in slave-like working conditions where they already experience abuse by their employers and long hours without overtime pay. Now, the Canadian government wants to heighten their exploitation by removing the little protection they currently receive under Canadian laws."

Filipino women, make up over 90% of those entering Canada under the Live-In Caregiver Program. After completing 24 months of service, within a 36-month period, they are eligible to apply for permanent residency and sponsor their families. Since the early 1980s, nearly 100,000 Filipino women have come to Canada under the LCP

and its predecessor program, the Foreign Domestic Movement (FDM). With this new bill, women currently working under the LCP are vulnerable to having their permanent residency applications arbitrarily denied. For nearly 20 years, the organizations under the National Alliance of Philippine Women in Canada has been documenting and researching the experience of the Filipino community under this program and calling for the scrapping of the Live-In Caregiver Program and all anti-immigrant policies. This call is all the more stronger with the introduction of this new bill.

The press conference speakers will include a representative from NDP-MP Thomas Mulcair's office, Mr. Graham Carpenter; Roderick Carreon, Chairperson of SIKLAB-Canada, and Joanne Vasquez, Board Member of the Kapit Bisig Centre at 4900 Fulton Street, Montreal.

Lmatters".

"Immigrant families can't count on Dion's Liberals to stand up to Stephen Harper," says Chow.

-30-

For more information please contact: Rupinder Kaur, media officer: (613) 222-5048 or rupinder@ndp.ca

Nathan Rotman, Office of Olivia Chow: (613) 995-1594

PHOTO COMPETITION FOR ALIWAN FIESTA

Manila Broadcasting Company is mounting a photography competition in line with this year's Aliwan Fiesta, scheduled on May 1-3 at the CCP Complex in Pasay.

The contest, which carries the theme "Sayaw, Padyak, Indak" is open to both amateur and professional photographers, using digital or film-based cameras. Photos of the streetdance contingents must have been taken during the competition period, and should not have won nor have been published in any book or photography magazine. Entries must be printed in full colour on any brand of photo paper in 8R size (8 inches x 10 inches). These should be submitted to Elroi Baltazar at the MBC office, Sotto Street, CCP Complex, Pasay City in an envelope with an Aliwan Fiesta Photo Competition entry form in triplicate (one copy attached to the photograph, one for the receiving staff, and one copy for the photographer-entrant). The name of the contest participant should not appear on the face of the entry. P50,000 are at stake for the first prize winner, with P25,000 going to second place, and P10,000 for the third prize.

All entries become the property of MBC, which will have the right to reproduce, exhibit, or publish the images for promotional purposes, indicating and acknowledging the photographer.

Deadline for submission of entries is on May 16, 2008 at 5 p.m. Complete details may be found on the Aliwan Fiesta link of the MBC website at www.mbcradio.net

Sponsored by Smart Buddy, Tanduay, Unilab, Sulpicio Lines, and Dunkin' Donuts, the grand parade of Aliwan Fiesta 2008 takes place on May 3, traversing the length of Roxas Boulevard, and culminating in front of Aliw Theatre.

ALIWAN FIESTA: SHOWCASING FILIPINO CRAFTSMANSHIP AND DESIGN

Fiestas provide excellent opportunities to celebrate Filipino craftsmanship and ingenuity. So when the nation's most popular festivals converge in one single event, expect pre-eminent craftsmen in the different regions to bring out their most innovative ideas.

For the sixth consecutive year, entries to the float competition of the Aliwan Fiesta, organized by Manila Broadcasting Company and the Cultural Center of the Philippines, in cooperation with the cities of Manila and Pasay, will bring out the ingenuity of Filipino artisans and designers in the quest to earn the grand prize of half a million pesos. Banking on local folklore and indigenous traditions are floats from all regions of the country, including NCR. Float designs will make use of local textiles, decorative mats, and basketry in vibrant colours - all bearing distinct regional imprints of master weavers. Agricultural produce and flowers also find their use as accessories and raw material for the floats. Okkil, originally from the middle-eastern Islamic art of the Umayyad dynasty in the eighth century, lends a whole repertoire of plant-shaped folk motif to carved, woven and brass-cast pieces common to the Maranao, Tausug, Samal, and Badjao. The skill and creativity of Mindanao natives which also found fruition in their seafaring and boatbuilding skills, are also highlighted.

Ilokano damili pottery, with its solid role in the indigenous lifestyles celebrated during festivals, are also dominant fixtures, in the same way that Bulacan's folk art, Singkaban, gives rise to the decorative arches whittled from special wood. Collectively, the float parade of Aliwan Fiesta, supported by Smart Buddy, Tanduay, Unilab, Sulpicio Lines, and Dunkin' Donuts, which will be held on May 3, traversing Roxas Boulevard from Quirino Grandstand to Aliw Theater at the CCP Complex, will once more emit a blaze of kaleidoscopic colour as the participating festivals reflect their own community spirit. Comprising the judging panel are renowned floral architect Rachy Cuna; the Director of the Metropolitan Museum of Manila and Vice Chairman of the NCCA's Committee on Monuments and Sites - Eric Zerrudo; the president of the Art Association of the Philippines Raul Isidro; National Museum Director Dr. Corazon Alvina; and the Ayala Museum's Senior Curator and Head of Conservation Kenneth Esguerra.



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SCOUTS CANADA

Why You Should Make Your Funeral Pre-Arrangement

I recently gave a seminar on Saturday, April 12th on the topic of funeral pre-arrangement for members of the Philippine Centre Foundation of Greater Montreal here at the Centre funéraire Côte-des-Neiges. The members in attendance found the information to be valuable and were pleasantly surprised by the logic, simplicity and advantages of our pre-arrangement procedure once they learned how our program worked.

Having worked as a family counsellor in pre-arrangement services for the last eight years, I have witnessed the growing tendency among adults of all ages to prefer removing the burden on their families and friends by planning and paying for their own funeral arrangements. For the benefit of those of you who are unaware of the importance and advantages of pre-arrangement, I would like to outline a few pertinent points.

Survey results overwhelmingly name the death of a loved one as the most stressful event in our lives. They also indicate that 72% of adults agree that planning ahead makes sense as death is something we all must face. However, even though more and more people today are making their final arrangements, unfortunately the vast majority of us avoid discussing death and funerals and procrastinate against looking into it, until a tragedy strikes

and we are forced to deal with it. When arrangements have not been made prior to a death, families are left to make the numerous and complex

time of death. A funeral pre-arrangement enables you to express your preferences regarding your final farewell without pressure and while



A souvenir photo of the information seminar held at the Centre Funéraire Cote des Neiges given by Sandra Wong and Teresa Di Palma Melchior (5th and 6th from the right).

decisions involved in planning a funeral within a very short period of time. As a result, families typically experience tremendous emotional strain and financial difficulties.

Fortunately, there is a better way. Making your own arrangements spares your loved ones the emotional and financial difficulties involved in making funeral arrangements at the

you are in full control of all decisions, and guarantees that your wishes will be carried out as stipulated in your contract. Moreover, your family knows and thus understands your choices; which, eliminates any lingering doubts in their minds as to whether or not they made the right decisions.

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on all products and services; which, protects you against inflationary price increases, and also reduces the possibility of overspending. We offer five (5) year interest-free financing made by monthly or annual instalments. The sums paid are deposited in trust in the name of the buyer in accordance with the Act respecting pre-arranged funeral services and sepultures to be transferred at the time of death.

Furthermore, Centre funéraire Côte-des-Neiges is a proud Dignity Memorial Provider, so your pre-arrangement plan is transferrable to any one of our 1500 affiliates throughout Canada and the United States. Pre-arranging with us provides you the additional flexibility of modifying your arrangement should your wishes change.

Ultimately, a pre-arrangement provides peace of mind for you and your loved ones. In eight years, I have yet to meet someone who has regretted giving or receiving such a loving gift. If you prefer to facilitate things for your family, I would encourage you to get your questions answered by contacting me for a personal free consultation or to attend one of my group seminars at (514) 342-8000.

Sincerely yours,
Sandra Wong
Pre-arrangement Counselor
Centre funéraire Côte-des-Neiges



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Showbiz Gossip *Continued from p.10* Charice to guest on Oprah



Charice Pempengco

Kid singing sensation Charice Pempengco has returned to the United States as guest in the highest-rating talk show Oprah, hosted by Oprah Winfrey.

Based on the talk show's teaser for May, Oprah will feature children with extraordinary and amazing talents, including our very own Charice Pempengco.

The global singer confirmed this in an interview with ABS-CBN News, but other than that, she refused to give off any details about her guesting in the talk show.

Charice just came from London for her guest appearance in Paul O'Grady Show, a British talk show, last April 8. She wowed the audience with her powerful voice, singing her signature song, "And I Am Telling You I'm Not Going." ■

Indie Film actress for an international movie



Mercedes Cabral

Another Filipino talent is set to cast

in an international movie, after T.V. Carpio, who has a role in the Hollywood movie musical Across The Universe. The Filipino talent is no other than Mercedes Cabral, an Indie film actress, who has been chosen by acclaimed Korean director Park Chan-wook. She will play an important role in the horror film Thirst.

Joint Security Area (2000), Sympathy for Mr. Vengeance (2002), Oldboy (2003), Sympathy for Lady Vengeance (2005), and I'm A Cyborg, But That's OK (2006) are some of the South Korea's critically acclaimed flicks that he directed.

Mercedes Cabral, a 21-year-old Fine Arts Student at the University of the Philippines, is quite known in the independent film hub. She garnered the Best Supporting Actress award at the 2007 UP Inbox TV and Radio Festival for her performance in the digital film Bitin..

Childhood dream finally came true for Anne Curtis

This summer, Anne Curtis' dream will finally come to a reality. As young as 12 years old, when she just started acting, she already dreamt of having to pair with Matinee Idol Aga Muhlach.

Star Cinema's latest flick When Love Begins, Anne Curtis will be paired with Aga Muhlach.

"Tandang-tanda ko pa na nasabi ko yun, as in I was still a child then," laughed Anne. "Hindi nga ako makapaniwala, then may kissing scenes pa kami. Hindi naman sa nailang ako, pero I was so tensed the first time we got together sa mga eksena namin," continued Anne.

"I'm so happy, kasi lagi niyang ipinapaalala sa akin na mag-relax lang ako, magiging maganda ang mga eksena namin. Never kong naramdamang nag-take advantage siya, and when in front of the cameras, I'm always aware na trabaho lang

talaga ang lahat," admitted Anne on her first time with Aga ■



Actress Anne Curtis

Kris Aquino suffers miscarriage



Kris Aquino

Talk show host and TV game show queen Kris Aquino suffered a miscarriage on Tuesday, a day after announcing that her mother, former president Corazon Aquino, was diagnosed with colon

cancer.

"I had a miscarriage. Collapsed gestational sac and blighted ovum. We just have to wait for my body to expel on its own. Seven and half weeks. God's will so I can take care of my mom. Just came from Dr. Pastoride with my mom now. On our way home from the hospital," Aquino said in the text message.

Last March 13, Aquino said she was pregnant with her second child by husband and star cager James Yap.

Aquino said her gynecologist told her that there were already heartbeats heard during the Doppler Test.

Kris, Kristina Bernadette Cojuangco Aquino in real life, is the daughter of former president Corazon Aquino and the late senator Benigno Aquino Jr., both key figures in toppling the Marcos regime. She has a son, Joshua, with her former live-in-partner, actor Philip Salvador. She also has a son, James, by Yap. ■

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"Sisig", a truly Philippine dish



Sisig is truly Filipino. From what I heard it was concocted by the food loving folks in Pampanga. In fact there's a place in Angeles City, about 10 minutes drive from Clark, where you will find authentic sisig being served. Some even claim this was the place where this humble dish originated.

Originally, sisig was made from chopped parts of a pig's head — ears, snout, the brain, etc. Over the years it was reinvented into simple minced meat served on a sizzling platter with chili, liver, onion and seasoned with calamansi and vinegar.

Different orders of sisig come in pork, chicken, tuna, chorizo, bangus, and tofu. Adding raw egg on the dish while it's sizzling hot heightens the flavor as well.

Here's a simple sisig recipe taken from a Kapampangan Food Recipe page:

Ingredients:

- 1-1/2 lbs pork cheeks (or 2 lbs deboned pork hocks)
- 1/2 lb beef or pork tongue
- 1/2 lb beef or pork heart
- 1/2 lb liver (pork, beef or chicken)
- 2 cups water (for boiling)
- 1 cup pineapple juice (for boiling)
- 1 tsp whole black peppers (for boiling)

Marinade seasonings:

- 1 cup chopped onions
- 3-4 finger hot peppers (siling labuyo) (seeded and chopped)
- 1/4 cup vinegar
- 1/4 cup calamansi juice (lemon juice)
- 1/4 cup pineapple juice
- 1 tbsp minced fresh ginger
- 1 clove garlic, minced
- 1 tsp whole black pepper (crushed)
- 1 pc bay leaf (crushed)
- Salt to taste

Preparation:

Hot sisig plate

* Combine pork cheeks (or deboned pork hocks), heart, and tongue in pineapple juice, salt, water and crushed whole black pepper and bring to a boil; simmer for about 1 hour or until tender.

* Drain and cool to room temperature.

* Slice pork cheeks/hocks, liver, heart and tongue, into 2X3X 3/4" thick pieces.

* Place in bamboo skewers and grill over charcoal briquettes until pork rind is crisp and browned.

* Chop the grilled pork cheeks/hocks, liver, heart, and tongue into 1/4 inch sized cubes;

* Mix the chopped meat with the marinade seasoning mix of garlic, ginger, onions, vinegar, calamansi juice, hot peppers (siling labuyo), bay leaf, salt and pepper;

* Keep the marinated mixture in the refrigerator for 2-3 hours before serving.

A warning, though, for the weak of heart, sisig can be very fatty and may cause hypertension attack. So it's good to know that you have healthier options in tuna, bangus or

tofu sisig. Still they should be taken moderately.

And as we said, sisig is perfect with a cold bottle of San Miguel beer to wash it down. So if your adventurous appetite is looking for authentic Filipino food, sisig can do no wrong.

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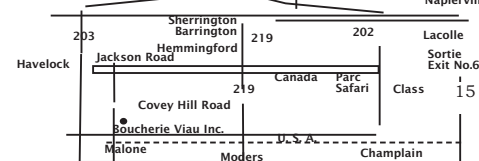
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Isaac T. Goodine

Global Perspectives



From Limbo to Heaven: Stateless Vietnamese people move from the Philippines to Canada.

One family of six stateless people became the beneficiary of the confluence of three developments: (1) The Canadian Government has recently granted stateless Vietnamese people living in the Philippines permanent entry on humanitarian and compassionate grounds; (2) Ever since the war in Vietnam ended in 1975, the Philippines has provided safe haven for thousands of Vietnamese who left,

history for just one "boat" is particularly relevant to Canadians and Filipinos as it involved cooperation and coordination rarely seen in international incidents aimed at purely humanitarian efforts, particularly when the military is involved in helping innocent victims of someone else's war.

The following is a transcript taken from a videotaping of an incident



Nahan Thanh Nguyen, his wife Hue Thi Le, and their children are starting over in Canada after living in the Philippines as stateless Vietnamese people ...Photo from the Ottawa Citizen, April 18, 2008

mainly by boat, and those who have stayed in the Philippines are considered "stateless", and therefore in a kind of "limbo" without jobs as they await opportunities to immigrate somewhere; and (3) Finally, the Vietnamese Canadian Community's project Freedom at Last, and a local branch organized by Haquyen Nguyen called Ottawa Friends has rallied 19 people to raise enough money to sponsor the family of six and provide a fully furnished rental unit as well as job opportunities as soon as they are settled. They are finally out of limbo. Ultimately, 159 other persons will follow as, and when, the other 40 chapters of the Freedom at Last are able to sponsor them in other communities across Canada.

Some have been waiting for decades and many were born stateless. How they got to the Philippines is yet another story. A case

at sea. It occurred just prior to the First Gulf War and was recorded on board a Canadian Navy vessel, part of the Task Force preparing for the First Gulf War. (June, 20 & 21, 1990)

Scene 1—The video shows a small boat in the midst of Canadian navy vessels. The video is made from the supply ship Provider

"We have come across a boat load of boat people. It is really amazing -- it is a small boat packed with people. Again, this is a video off the Provider and we have come across some boat people in the South China Sea. We don't know how many miles between Vietnam and the Philippines but this is many miles from nowhere and we are wondering what to do with these people. It is amazing how many people they have on board that small boat. We are about 300 miles off the coast between Vietnam and the Philippines and this is just amazing that

this boat has made it out as it has.... Again, we are still watching the people... Problem with the camera there is a lot of humidity and these people have been in the water quite awhile. Even some of the other ships are watching this -- it could be interesting to see what will happen to these people."

Scene 2—(No conversation at first -- just seeing refugees -- men, women and children being helped on board the ship. Some young children being carried by seamen/women)...

"It is just unreal -- I am choked -- I am very shocked to see the number of people that have come off that boat. I don't know what they have experienced and if we had not come along, how long they would have lasted. They are weak, disoriented.... Again, this is still bringing the people off from the boat. It appears that looking down into the boat, it looks like there are people down in the hold. We don't know if they are alive or dead -- we will find out in a few minutes."

Scene 3—The rescue operation.

"We are helping them aboard. Most of the assistants are in coveralls and wearing rubber gloves. It is a good idea from a safety aspect because nobody knows whether or not these people are carrying diseases and perhaps this could spread quickly. Seems now that some of the weaker ones -- those that were neglected earlier, are starting to come aboard. I don't know whether he is alive or dead -- a young child on the boat -- yeah he is all right. I believe they are now pulling up stretcher cases. This is a view down into the hold of the boat peoples' ship and it seems to be quite a few people in there and I don't know what kind of shape they are in but there seems to be movement. It looks like that everyone else is coming up in stretchers from now on -- most of the ones that could walk have already been helped on board. It is starting to get dark now and it is awkward to film but looks like they are not in very good shape down below."

"They are getting washed down and changed into clean clothes.

There is an area where the people who have handled the boat people are getting washed. They are getting blankets, soap and water and these are the things that people need most in life right now. This is one of the refugee children -- she is probably feeling a lot better than yesterday -- hi honey -- she is so sweet. Monday, 20 June -- this is the second day the refugees have been on board. They are putting the refugees into cleaning stations to clean them up and once showered and cleaned up, they will be given clean overalls. Before that they are checked out and inoculated. It seems to be a system to be working very well that for everyone on our boat, this is the first time they have ever seen anything like this -- a feeling of joy and sorrow together -- kind of sad to see the conditions these people are in and happy that we got them out of the situation they have been in. When you are in the situation, it really does affect you. This is the area inside the hanger where the refugees are in -- a lot of them are still bedridden. We had one that expired last night -- they had a

funeral for him and burial at sea. Even the rest of them still with us, they are doing a lot better than on the boat. They are fed, given beds, clean clothes and medical assistance right now. There is a young lad, they brought him in yesterday -- he just lay there and he could not even speak, his eyes were near death. Now he is up and about and seeing the rest of the refugees. Some are not so happy in this area here and some are not responding too well, although we have a lot of old people. We see a lot of people up and about -- they were at sea from 31 May till 20 June. They had no water or food for 9 days and had run into a storm and lost their engine and had been drifting ever since."

When I met these sailors they were feeling very good about the fact that the fact that they had performed a humanitarian role while in uniform. Certainly, it was the ethical thing to do. One hundred and seven people were rescued, two of whom died on board and were given the dignity of a burial at sea ceremony. board

First and foremost, credit is due to the Commander of the task force who made the ethical decision to bring the people on board. Then their "boat" was blown up so it would not be a hazard to shipping. Then negotiations began, involving the Government of the Philippines, where the navy was headed; the Canadian Ambassador to the Philippines; the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and Canadian Departments of Defense and External Affairs. Due to sincere and humanitarian concern shown by all the actors in this drama the issues were resolved and the survivors were delivered to a refugee camp under the Jurisdiction of the UNHCR on the Island of the Palawan where they would await "possible" immigration to a friendly country. This camp has no barbed wire enclosures and the people are virtually self governing. Their main impediment is that they are stateless and may never be granted permanent entry to any country.

Since May is Asian Heritage Month, the recent happy turn of events, although slow in coming, should be a cause of celebration and respect for Canadians, Filipinos, and Vietnamese as well as the UNHCR people who have given new hope to stateless people. Welcome to Canada.

Isaac Goodine can be reached at: itgoodine20@hotmail.com
His Website is : www.ikes-world.com

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Philippine Parliamentarian Tour of Canada 2008



Members of the working committee pose with the visiting parliamentarians and Hon. Thomas Mulcair.



Photo taken after the press conference, Hon. Thomas Mulcair flanked by Rep Luz Ilagan and Laura Julie Perreault, La Presse reporter.

Montreal, April 12, 2008 - A delegation of Philippine parliamentarians held a press conference at the FAMAS building. Rep. Crispin Beltran and Rep. Luz Ilagan were interviewed by a La Presse journalist, and were later joined by Rep Satur Ocampo.

Questions revolved around the current political situation in the Philippines and criticisms of the administration of President Gloria Arroyo. They cited human rights abuses, severe economic and political

crises, widespread high-level corruption, and extra-judicial killings allegedly committed by the government.

This community event was organized by members of the working committee Riza Esmeralda (FAMAS), Tony de Jesus (CAP-CPC), Joey Calugay (CAP CPC), Tess Tesalona (CPC & PWC), Thelma Castro (PINAY), Jojo Nicolas (FNAQ), Father Art Claycay (IFI Montreal), Reggie Villamor (CFFQ) and May Vurika (PINAY).



Hon. Thomas Mulcair signing the guest book of FAMAS others look on.



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WORLD RICE CRISIS - SPECIAL REPORTS (CONTINUED)

Military camps get own allocation of P18.25 rice Prison awaits rice hoarders, President warns

April 19, 2008

President Arroyo ordered the military to make sure that government-subsidized rice is sold in camp commissaries nationwide so soldiers may benefit from it.

She gave the order to Armed Forces Chief Hermogenes Esperon Jr. in Camp Aguinaldo, where she attended the first meeting of the Association of Generals and Flag Officers and briefly sold rice at the commissary there at P18.25 a kilo.

She expanded the coverage of government-subsidized rice even as rice futures rose for a fifth day, recording the biggest weekly advance in at least seven years, on concern export curbs imposed by China and Vietnam will spread as importing nations struggle to meet their needs.

In other developments:

- American banking giant Citibank said high food prices and limited rice supply would not result in food riots and political instability in the Philippines, but warned the cost of the country's rice subsidy would run to P51 billion
- The government plans to conduct two more tenders for 500,000 and 300,000 tons of rice, respectively, in May following a successful tender on Thursday
- The National Food Authority said it would not give up its rice subsidy despite soaring rice prices in the world market.

Rice for May delivery rose as much as 93.5 cents, or 4 percent, to a record \$24.235 per 100 pounds on the Chicago Board of Trade on Thursday. The contract has gained as much as 16 percent this week, and more than doubled in the past year.

India and Egypt have also curbed sales this year to safeguard local supplies. The gain in rice, as well as energy, has prompted warnings that civil unrest may spread as the poor in Africa and Asia can't afford to eat, and their governments can't fund or find sufficient imports.

"More and more countries will have restrictions on exports," Frederic Neumann, an economist at HSBC Global Research, said by telephone from Hong Kong.

"There's some pressure on the Thai government to curtail shipments."

Thailand, the world's largest rice exporter, boosted shipments 66 percent in the first three months, according to Commerce Minister Mingkwan Sangsuwan on April 16. The nation's 100-percent Grade B White Rice gained 54 percent in the month to April 9, according to data from the Rice Exporters' Association.

The Philippines, the world's biggest rice importer, received offers for just two-thirds of the grain it sought at a tender Thursday at prices about 40 percent higher than in March. The country, which shipped in 1.9 million tons of rice last year, fills 10 percent to 15 percent of local needs from imports.

The jump in rice prices has forced

some buyers to cut the size of their orders, said Apichat Chansakulporn, managing director of President Agri Trading, Thailand's fourth-largest rice exporter.

"Clients are slowing their purchases because the prices are very high," Apichat said by telephone from Bangkok. Price gains were "driven more by psychological impact than real demand and supply. The perception is now toward an uptrend."

A global food crisis had reached "emergency proportions," United Nations secretary-general Ban Ki-Moon said April 14. The World Bank has forecast that 33 nations from Mexico to Yemen may face social unrest after food and energy costs increased.

China, the world's most populous nation, has started to block or tax some food-related exports to make sure that local supplies remain adequate. The country set a tax on rice shipments at 5 percent this year and started to tax wheat exports at 20 percent.

The world's fastest growing major economy announced Thursday that it was increasing the tax on fertilizer shipments to "control exports" and damp local prices, according to the Finance Ministry.

China also turned down a Philippine request for wheat exports, Trade Minister Peter Favila said April 11.

Sumeth Laomorphorn, president of C.P. Intertrade, Thailand's sixth-largest rice exporter, also said the pace of purchases from some nations was beginning to slow.

"Orders from China are slowing, they may perceive that fragrant and white rice from Thailand and Vietnam is overly expensive," Sumeth said.

"Some African countries are chasing prices up, but some in that region are balking at buying more because they have limited financial resources."

The Chicago rice contract's so-called relative-strength index reached 84 on Friday, and has traded above 70 all this week. A reading above 70 is regarded among traders as a signal the price may be set to drop. The contract was at \$24.16 at 8:50 a.m. in London.

The Philippines called this month for an Asian summit on escalating food prices, especially rice, and urged India, China, Japan and the members of the 10-state Association of Southeast Asian Nations to attend.

World leaders "must come together and identify the issues, including rising fuel prices and rising demand," Al-Ghazim Wurie, the World Food Program's country director for the Philippines, said in an interview.

After collective steps to increase output "we'll begin to see a downward trend in prices."

Households in poorer countries spend a larger share of their income on food compared with those in richer nations, magnifying the impact of costlier rice, wheat and meat, according to the US Department of Agriculture. ■

April 16, 2008

President Gloria Arroyo on Tuesday vowed to imprison anyone who hoards state-subsidized rice. She assured the public of enough supply of the grain and that the country will be spared riots similar to those overseas caused by soaring food prices.

"Anyone caught stealing rice from the people must be thrown into jail," President Arroyo said after the regular Cabinet meeting held at the Department of Justice to discuss the rapid rise in the price of rice, the country's staple cereal.

She added that she will lead the crackdown on any form of corruption by public or private persons who would divert supplies or pervert the price of the essential commodity in any way.

During the Cabinet meeting, Mrs. Arroyo was told that the National Bureau of Investigation and the Bureau of Customs had filed separate criminal complaints against 13 alleged rice hoarders and 21 alleged smugglers before the Justice department.

"It [the filing of the charges] shows the government's resolve in getting to the bottom of this perceived rice-shortage problem," Justice Secretary Raul Gonzalez told reporters.

The President urged the public not to panic over the price increases, saying the Philippines has enough of

Cheap rice cards only for Metro Manilans

April 21, 2008

The government will focus the distribution of subsidized rice on the cities, where the shortage of the commodity is felt most, while speeding up identifying other depressed areas where it should equally be distributed, officials said yesterday.

Interior Secretary Ronaldo Puno said the access cards allowing indigent families to buy rice at P18.25 a kilo would be released only in critical areas where subsidized rice is in short supply.

"The cards will be released in urban areas only," he said.

"[Metro Manila] is really the focus, but there might be other urban areas in the provinces that also require our assistance."

Presidential Spokesman Ignacio Bunye said the Social Welfare Department should speed up identifying impoverished families within Metro Manila so they could be given the access cards quickly to buy subsidized rice.

Last week, President Arroyo ordered the pullout of cheap rice from commercial outlets after observing that even rich families were buying government-subsidized rice, which is

the staple from local and foreign sources. "The country's rice supply is secure for the foreseeable future," she said.

The 13 suspected rice hoarders, Gonzalez said, have been included in the hold-departure list of the government to prevent them from leaving the country while their cases are being heard.

Among the charges filed were hoarding, illegal price manipulation through the commission of hoarding, unauthorized possession of government rice, unauthorized rebagging of government rice in commercial sacks, and failure to display signboards.

Gonzalez said rice hoarders could suffer up to 40 years of imprisonment or reclusion perpetua if the crime committed falls within the category of economic sabotage.

He instructed Senior State Prosecutor Roberto Lao, the chief of the Anti-Rice Hoarding Task Force, to speed up the prosecution of rice hoarders to prove that the government is serious in running after crooked rice dealers.

Gonzalez reiterated that the government will confiscate the stocks and warehouses of rice dealers who will declare a rice holiday. He cited provisions of the 1987 Constitution that protect the general welfare of the people in times of emergencies, including "artificial" rice shortage. ■

reserved for soldiers and families with a monthly income of P4,500 or less.

Officials scrambled to solve the rice distribution problem even as rice futures rose for a fifth day, recording the biggest weekly advance in at least seven years, on concern export curbs imposed by China and Vietnam will spread as importing nations struggle to meet their needs.

The jump in rice prices had forced some buyers to cut the size of their orders, said Apichat Chansakulporn, managing director of President Agri Trading, Thailand's fourth-largest rice exporter.

"Clients are slowing their purchases because the prices are very high," Apichat said by telephone from Bangkok.

Price gains were "driven more by psychological impact than real demand and supply. The perception is now toward an uptrend."

A global food crisis had reached "emergency proportions," United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon said April 14. The World Bank has forecast that 33 nations from Mexico to Yemen may face social unrest after food and energy costs increased. ■

Hike pay, President asks wage boards Give emergency powers to GMA, says lawmaker

April 15, 2008

President Gloria Arroyo said Monday she wants the regional wage boards to convene and consider a possible wage hike to help workers cope with the increasing prices of oil and rice.

At the same time, a congressman is proposing to give the President emergency powers to deal with the food issue—but that immediately drew flak from the Senate.

President Arroyo, during a visit to the Yazaki-Torres manufacturing plant in Calamba, Laguna province, on Monday, said, "Because of the increasing cost in the price of fuel and rice, we're calling for a meeting of the regional wage boards all over the country so that every region can discuss how we can help the workers cope with the rising world price of oil and rice."

The President also encouraged the provision of "wage and non-wage benefits" to the workers like the putting up of daycare centers in places of employment for working mother.

The law gives the regional wage boards the power to set the minimum wage in different regions depending on the cost of living in those areas. The law also limits to once a year the number of times the wage boards can hike pay—unless there are urgent factors that call for breaking that one-year ban.

The President's Yazaki-Torres visit is in preparation for the upcoming celebration of Labor Day next month. She added that she will be visiting factories all over the country to personally check on the working conditions of employees and their general welfare.

On Sunday, House Speaker Prospero Nograles also called for the regional wage boards to convene and increase workers' basic pay. But he added that this should be done without driving companies out of business.

Private-sector groups have warned again that a wage hike at this time will force firms out of business.

Emergency powers

La Union Rep. Thomas Dumpit on Monday urged his colleagues in the House of Representatives to support his resolution giving President Arroyo emergency powers needed to address the rice crisis.

Dumpit's House Resolution 512 claimed that "the urgency of the situation compels drastic measures on the part of the government in order to address pressing need on the rice crisis, whereby mitigating, if not eliminating, the colossal effects of the crisis."

"In view of the massive proportions of the crisis and in order to effectively address the same, there is a compelling need to treat the rice problem as a calamity and grant Her Excellency President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo emergency powers in a restrictive scope," the resolution said.

The emergency powers should focus only on solving the rice shortage in the country, though, Dumpit said.

"The proportion of the rice crisis in the country is no ordinary crisis, since rice is a basic staple for the Filipino family; hence the large escalation on the staple's price may cause a social and political uprising in the country," according to his resolution.

Roxas not in favor

Sen. Mar Roxas 2nd does not agree that giving emergency powers to the President is the answer to the food problem.

"At this point, such proposals of emergency powers for the President are premature and counter-productive, leading to more confusion and panic," he said in a statement Monday.

"What we need is a clear plan guided by cold facts and clear criteria. What is the real supply and demand situation at present? Does it call for emergency measures, or just more aggressive law enforcement, diplomacy, distribution targeting and logistical management?" he asked.

Earlier, Secretary Peter Favila of the Department of Trade and Industry said government is planning to flood the market with rice and flour to rein in increasing prices of basic goods. He said this is a better alternative to declaring a state of emergency or giving the President special powers.

Sergio Apostol, chief presidential legal counsel, also said Sunday that declaring a state of emergency is premature at this time. ■

Bishops against pardon of Magdalós in Oakwood

April 15, 2008

Religious leaders warned President Gloria Arroyo on Monday against pardoning nine military officers convicted of mounting a failed coup in 2003.

"The government will not win any brownie points here, because the public is not in favor of it," said Rodolfo Diamante, executive secretary of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines' episcopal commission on prison pastoral care.

Last week, a Makati City court sentenced nine junior officers who led some 300 troops in taking over Oakwood, a high-end apartment-hotel in the city, the country's financial center. Captains Gerardo Gambala and Milo Maestrecampo were handed life sentences, while the other seven each got a lighter sentence of up to 12 years in jail.

Earlier, the defense establishment recommended to the President that all nine be pardoned—especially since they have publicly apologized for the rebellion and have been convicted in court.

Defense Secretary Gilbert Teodoro Jr. and the military Chief of Staff, Gen. Hermogenes Esperon Jr., formalized their recommendation to the President on Monday.

The business sector said the government should carefully study the recommendation before granting pardon, although "the business sector is happy we have witnessed that the legal process has been followed," said Donald Dee, president of Philippine Chamber of Commerce and Industry (PCCI) during a weekly media forum.

Justice Secretary Raul Gonzalez said President Arroyo will likely heed the recommendations of the Department of National Defense (DND) and the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) to grant executive clemency to nine junior officers.

"It will carry some weight," Gonzalez added. "The DND and AFP are in good position to make recommendations, as they are presumed to understand the Magda-lós position."

On Sunday, Esperon suggested that the sentenced junior officers could return to active military service if they are pardoned.

But Teodoro said, "They [the Magdalós] will already be disqualified from holding positions in the military."

Press Secretary Ignacio Bunye said Mrs. Arroyo's decision on granting pardon will be in line with the Constitution.

Malacañang, meanwhile, took the opportunity to give unsolicited advice to Sen. Antonio Trillanes 4th to learn from the example set by his former comrades to have a change of heart. He was a former Navy lieutenant who led the Oakwood mutiny, but unlike the nine being recommended for pardon, he did not change his plea from "not guilty" to "guilty."

Deputy Press Secretary Lorelei Fajardo said, "Maybe Senator Trillanes can study the actions of his former comrades and learn from their humble admission leading to their change of heart."

Concerns over pardon

Secretary Gonzalez said the decision to grant pardon is the President's sole right, but he expects the Cabinet to deliberate the issue.

He earlier expressed concern that the proposal to grant pardon might embolden other soldiers to stage a mutiny, because they may get the idea that if their rebellion fails, they can get a pardon and escape punishment.

"I'm not really against it per se," Gonzalez said. "But we have to consider the overall picture. What is the reason of Esperon to suggest it? It might be something whose value is more elevated than what we are thinking here below."

The Defense department dismissed allegations that the recommendation to grant executive clemency to the nine junior officers is part of a government "script" to secure the conviction of Trillanes and the other Magdalós accused of rebellion who are still awaiting sentence.

Teodoro said he already expected such kind of reaction from Trillanes' camp, because if the pardon will be granted to the nine officers, they would have lost their adherence to the group.

Last week, Trillanes' defense counsel Ernesto Francisco said the guilty plea made by the sentenced junior officers is part of the script of the administration to condition the minds of the public that Trillanes and other accused are also guilty of rebellion.

Esperon also denied the allegation, saying there is no "script." ■

Palace on Trillanes

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EARTH TALK

From the Editors of E/The
Environmental Magazine

Dear EarthTalk: As I understand it, coal that is used to fuel power plants and other industrial activity is a key culprit in pollution and climate change. So what is "clean coal" and is it really?
- Matthew Oliver, Minneapolis, MN

The term "clean coal" describes various processes that remove pollutants from coal, our cheapest, most abundant—and dirtiest—energy source. By reducing coal's environmental footprint through technological wizardry, the coal mining industry and the Bush administration hope to keep coal, which currently produces more than half of all U.S. electricity, a big part of our energy picture for many years to come.

Clean coal proponents also want to liquefy coal to turn it into a form of automotive fuel that, according to the industry-sponsored Coal-to-Liquids Coalition, costs less and burns cleaner in some ways than the traditional diesel fuel it could replace. Several members of Congress from coal states are keen on having the government subsidize the production of so-called liquid coal—which can be used anywhere diesel fuel currently goes—as a "homegrown" alternative to foreign oil. Industry analysts say there is enough coal in America to last hundreds of years, saving us untold expense and trouble obtaining regular petroleum from unfriendly foreign governments.

But major environmental groups, from the Sierra Club to the Natural Resources Defense Council, say that "clean coal" is anything but. The process involves heating coal to 1,000 degrees Fahrenheit and mixing it with water to produce a gas, then converting the gas into diesel fuel. Although the Coal-to-Liquids Coalition says that carbon dioxide emissions from the entire production cycle of liquid coal are "equal to, or slightly below, those of conventional petroleum-derived fuels," its claims are based on a single federal study, now six years old, that environmental leaders disagree with profoundly.

Jim Presswood, federal energy advocate of the Natural Resources Defense Council says, "Liquid CO₂ emissions are twice as much as emissions from conventional petroleum-derived fuels." He says that even if CO₂ emissions were captured as part of the process, at best liquid coal would be 12 percent worse than the gasoline equivalent. As some environmentalists have put it, liquid coal can turn any hybrid Prius into a Hummer.

The Washington Post editorialized, "To wean the U.S. off of just one million barrels of the 21 million barrels of crude oil consumed daily, an estimated 120 million tons of coal would need to be mined each year. The process requires vast amounts of water, particularly a concern in the parched West. And the price of a plant is estimated at \$4 billion." Also, in recent years, particularly in

Appalachia, mining companies have gone from simple excavation to blasting off the tops of mountains in an ecologically devastating process known as "mountain top removal."

For their part, greens acknowledge the importance of cleaning up coal and other dirty energy sources, but would rather see more funding devoted to researching, developing and implementing alternative and renewable energy sources that don't come with so much environmental baggage.

CONTACTS: Coal-to-Liquids Coalition, www.futurecoalfuels.org; Sierra Club's "Stopping the Coal Rush," www.sierraclub.org/environmentallaw/coa.

Dear EarthTalk: Everybody says stop using plastic bags, but what about all the plastic, cellophane, cardboard and other materials used for packaging the food itself? What can we do to reduce how much of this unnecessary stuff comes wrapped around our food? -- Sunil Sreedharan, Mumbai, India

Yes, food packaging is a big problem in North America as well as elsewhere around the world, with landfills filling up and recyclers facing a glut of materials to process. It's hard to say just how much of the 130 million tons of paper, plastic and metals that get tossed or sorted for recycling in major U.S. cities is from food packaging, but the percentage is no doubt sizable. The main problem is in the psychology of marketing: Manufacturers know that products in big flashy-looking packages attract more buyers.

A 1994 European Union directive requires companies operating in its 27 member nations to take back and recycle (or otherwise deal with, taking the burden off of local communities) at least 60 percent of their packaging waste, including that used for food items. But no such "producer pays" laws, which provide incentive for manufacturers to cut back on waste to begin with, exist in the United States or Canada. As such, it falls to consumers to patronize stores and manufacturers that minimize packaging.

One way to take a bite out of packaging is to buy as much in bulk as your family can keep up with. It may take longer to get through that gigantic box of cereal you got at Costco, but think of all the cardboard and plastic your bulk purchase saved over buying several small boxes. Similarly, instead of sending the kids off to school every day with a new juice box in the lunch bag, how about a safe metal or plastic reusable, washable container that you can refill each morning from the gallon jug you keep in the fridge?

Another way to forego packaging is to reduce time spent in large supermarkets, where wasteful product packaging rules. Most natural foods stores have large bulk-buying sections so you can haul away in large paper or plastic bags the equivalent of many containers of beans, pastas, rice or other staples. Frequenting local farmers' markets—armed with your reusable shopping tote, of course—is another way to keep food

packaging out of your home. The website Local Harvest offers a free searchable database of farms across the U.S. that run Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) programs and participate in farmers' markets.

It's worth noting that we tend to toss way too much food packaging where a quick rinse would make the same cans, jars and jugs useful storage containers or quality recycling fodder. Soup cans, for example, can easily be recycled into new steel and are collected universally by municipal recycling programs. And while you're buying soup, opt for the family size cans and save leftovers instead of buying single-serving containers. Even when packaging material is recyclable, there's no reason to waste it, as even recycling uses resources

and costs money.

Beyond shopping and sorting more responsibly, individuals also have the power of their voices to pressure food makers to cut back on packaging. You can also try to persuade your elected officials to look into the feasibility of enacting "producer pays" laws in your community, city or state. And you can talk to co-workers, friends, relatives and others about the importance of buying in bulk and reducing waste.

CONTACTS: European Union Packaging and Packaging Waste Directive, <http://europa.eu/scadplus/leg/en/lvb/l21207.htm>; Local Harvest, www.localharvest.org. Box 5098, Westport, CT 06881; submit it at: w.emagazine.com/earthtalk/thisweek/, or e-mail: thtalk@emagazine.com.

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Young Swiss Filipino racing to success

April 8, 2008

In these celebrity-infested times, role models for the young are usually movie and TV stars, rap artists and singers. These guys may command more media attention, but when it comes to masculine appeal, nothing beats the adrenaline rush one gets from seeing a racing champion.

That champ is Marlon Stockinger, 16, whose matinee idol looks, thanks to a Swiss father and Pinay supermodel mom Egin San Pedro, make him a head turner. But he's not settling for looks alone. His list of accomplishments is already formidable for one so young.

This Swiss-Filipino was the first and youngest Filipino driver to represent the Philippines in the Junior Rotax Max World Finals in 2004 in Spain, where he won an impressive 12th place. He emerged champion in the Senior Rotax Max Philippine Shell Super Karting Series in 2005 and in the Philippine Junior Rotax Max Challenge that same year, after which he represented the Philippines in the Junior Rotax Max World Finals 2005 in Malaysia.

His rankings in other racing events are just as impressive: 8th in the Senior Rotax Max World Finals 2007 in Al Ain, Dubai, United Arab Emirates; champion, Philippine Senior Rotax Max Challenge 2007; Asian Karting Champion 2006 (125 Open Category and Senior Rotax Max Class); and one of the three youngest and best Asian driver among 68 participants.



Swiss-Filipino Marlon Stockinger, 16, learned Go-kart racing at 10. At 13, he began winning races in Europe, Dubai, Malaysia and the Philippines.

At the age of 10, Stockinger was introduced to the world of racing by his father, a racing enthusiast himself, who had his fair share of wins at the tracks. "I was just a normal kid who loved to play golf with my uncle and grandfather on my mother's side," he recounts. But he went and watched his dad race a couple of times. "One day, in Carmona, Cavite, he just asked me if I'd like to try it. That got me hooked."

Go-kart racing takes perseverance and lots of practice before one can boast

of even a modicum of success. It took the young Stockinger three years. Quite remarkably, when boy and machine melded into one, a string of wins became inevitable: 3rd in Cadet Class Asian Karting Open Championship 2002; 3rd in Cadet Class Philippine Shell Super Karting; 3rd in Junior Rotax Max Philippine Super Karting Series 2003; 2nd in the Junior Rotax Max Philippine Super Karting Series 2004; and champion in the Junior Rotax Max Challenge 2004.

"Karting is a sport that takes so many years to attain a high level," says Stockinger. "I started to win only after three years. And when I started winning, that's when I turned serious. I thought of racing as something I can actually do. It's the thrill and the effort I put in to win that keep me going," he adds.

But winning entails sacrifices as well, and his schooling has been the first to suffer, the highly articulate Stockinger admits. "It took a lot of sacrifices for me to get to where I want to be," he says. Traveling often meant missing school, something he regrets. "It's weird not being in school," he laments. "Commitment to studies at the British School is a bit difficult because racing requires a lot of days of flying, especially to Europe. Before a race, I have to try the racetracks first." He has to find alternative ways of getting an education outside regular classes, he adds.

In his downtime, he reads Dan Brown books and totally loved the Brad Pitt-Edward Norton cult classic "Fight Club." "I'm really a geek," he admits without a hint of embarrassment. "I have all the modern consoles like Wii, PSP, play all the video and PC games. I love Counterstrike. All my friends like it, too." Having recently joined Eurasia Motorsport for the 2008 Formula BMW Pacific Series, he is set to further improve his speed and consistency. Ordinary he may seem, but this boy is destined for greatness and glory. "Follow your dreams and it will happen," he says.



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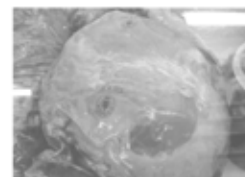
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Souvenir photo of Maridel Balmes (second from left) on her last day of keyboarding class at Gilmore International College, with her classmates: Josie Cacal, Gina Lopez Luzviminda Ladyong and her teacher, Zenaida Kharroubi. Maridel is moving to Gaspé, Quebec to open her own business in the tourist trade. We wish her all the best.

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