

Arroyo sees rosy 2008 economy



Manila, Philippines, December 27 President Arroyo said Thursday she expects the Philippines economy to maintain its vibrancy in 2008 after posting growth in excess of seven percent in the first nine months of 2007.

"We are filled with hope as the year ends and a new year begins. Our country is stable, strong and peaceful. Our economy is vibrant, the stock market is on a bull run and investments come pouring in," she said in a statement.

The growth rate of 7.1 percent in the nine months to September is the highest in nearly 20 years.

Economists say Manila needs seven years of at least seven percent gross domestic product growth to improve the lives of the 40 percent of Filipinos who live on two dollars a day or less.

Arroyo said the government

will devote the new year to bringing in investments, improving educational and public infrastructure, and bringing technology to the rural areas where most of the poor live.

Toward this end, students' English proficiency needed to be improved, while skills training would have to be reoriented based on jobs demand, she said.

The government also needs to "redouble revenue efforts" to achieve a balanced budget next year, or two years earlier than target.

Arroyo said she intends to achieve this by pensioning off "poor-performing" tax and customs bureau personnel and beefing up operations against smuggling. She also pledged to devote more resources to improving the environment.

"People need to breathe clean air and swim in clean water while we also

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President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo delivers her speech at a cabinet meeting, December 27, 2007



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Joey Albert concert warmly received

By Zenaida Ferry Kharroubi



Joey Albert's concert entitled "I will be here" attracted quite a big crowd last Friday, December 14, 2007, held at the College Brebeuf theater. In fact, there was still a big line up of people trying to buy tickets at 7:00 p.m. The show finally started around 8:00 P.M. but did not end until 11:30 p.m.

Joey's repertoire covered an extensive variety of melodies from the 60s, 70s and 80s. She seemed to have something for everybody – the young, and the not so young age groups. She sang a good mixture of Tagalog and English songs. Backed by a string quartette and a pianist, Joey's beautiful voice could be heard clearly. The people seemed to be captivated by the natural way she delivered every song and they all felt like singing along and clapping. She was also very entertaining and showed a great sense of humor.

The people clamored for several encores. Joey was very happy to

See Page 17 Joey Albert concert

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EDITORIAL

"The best things are yet to come."

It seems to be a common experience to realize, at the end of the year, that there are many things which were left undone in spite of our good intentions to do them. Then the feeling of regret comes to each one of us in recognizing that time rules us all and that it is beyond our power to change the past. The only thing we can do is to look forward to the future and never to repeat our past mistakes. But this is easier said than done. There are just too many things that happen around us, both good and bad, and it is hard to keep our optimism at all times. Yet, we also know that we can never quit and that we should try and try until we succeed. because giving up never leads to victory but to defeat.

Last December 8, we had tried to raise funds on behalf of the Filipino Solidarity Cooperative for which we celebrated the Silver Jubilee of the North American Star and the 18th anniversary of Gilmore International College. The result of our huge effort was not very encouraging for there were many other parties held on the same day. Our mission to raise enough funds to make a difference did not materialize, and yet, we feel that it was worth the trouble of trying to raise the awareness of the community to support the Cooperative movement. Will many people remember this event? Will they make an effort to see if they can do something to help out? Do they ever read the articles in this newspaper about the Coop? Jerry Estrada has been writing a column entitled "Cooperative movement - bigger than what you think." Has this column made anyone take the step to become a member? Up to this point, no one really knows but we hope that one day, all our efforts to have a successful cooperative will be realized when all the 15 000 Filipinos living in Cote des Neiges area will choose to become members and buy their groceries there. Slowly but surely, we hope to persuade our fellow kababayan to be united and cooperate with one another through the cooperative movement.

- There are signs that there is a potential for Filipinos to work together and accomplish common goals. However, this potential can only be developed fully with a certain type of

leadership at every level - from a personal to the social or group level. As we are living in a democracy, we have the freedom to choose to work alone or with others. But common sense tells us that we can do more when we are united in working towards a common goal. We have seen a good example of achieving a better result when many people participate. The Filipino Catholic Mission just had a very successful fund raising drive through the Queen of Angels contest that raised over \$100,000. If a similar type of support is extended to the Filipino Solidarity Cooperative, it will not take long before it succeeds in overcoming its financial difficulties. It is not owned by one person but by about 600 people, some are fully qualified members, others are partially paid. If all these members will decide to be fully committed to their own Coop, it will become a successful business overnight. For the time being, it is like a lonely soldier fighting a war with no weapons for it does not have enough funds with which to buy all kinds of merchandise that people are buying from the other stores. We hope that this is a temporary situation, or just a question of time. We believe that when the 2006 financial statement is finalized in a month, and after the general assembly is held soon thereafter, we will encourage others to be members and those who are already members to be more actively involved. We also hope to attract people with altruistic motives to help by contributing their time and knowledge to form a strong management team to lead this Cooperative out of its financial black hole.

In spite of the difficult fiscal year just about to be over, we are hoping that 2008 will be better. As it is often said - "the best things are yet to come." We hope that this time will come soon for the sake of all who have sacrificed themselves in working voluntarily for the Coop. We also wish that we all may enjoy a wonderful holiday and have a Happy and Prosperous New Year!

Zenaida Ferry Kharroubi

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Sunday Coffee Club at the Coop to continue

Due to the snowstorms recently, our coffee club has been put on hold, however, we intend to continue with this idea in order to encourage our members to drop in and buy from the Coop. We will resume it

help in terms of appropriate furniture like two or three small round tables, and a good coffee machine that can be used to prepare freshly brewed coffee for everyone's enjoyment. We also need handy people to help us in



Members who attended the first Coffee Club with Magnolia Camat as animator, (2nd from right) last December 9, 2007, are Myrna Penaranda, Anita Lo, Jee May Ojoylan, Joyce Lorica, and Jun Lorica.

on Sunday, January 7, 2008, and every Sunday thereafter.

We are planning on refurbishing the store to make it look more presentable but we need some

re-arranging the shelves to display merchandise properly, and to re-arrange office furniture in order to have

See Page 7 Coop Coffee Club



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Joint Anniversary Celebration of the North American Filipino Star and the Gilmore International College, December 8, 2007 (Photos by Joselito Sarto)



From left: Hilda Veloso, Nemia Bermudez, Annie Miaral, Zenaida Kharroubi, Riza Esmeralda, and Claro Bermudez, posing for a souvenir of the anniversary.



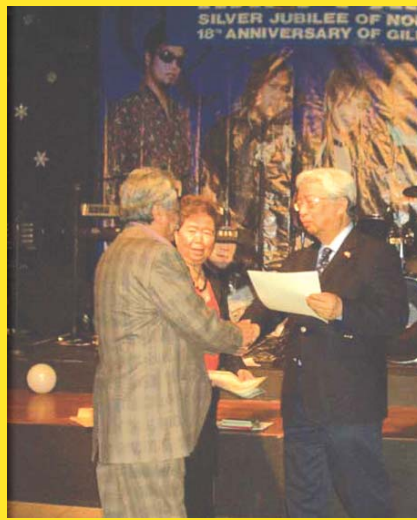
Hilda Veloso poses with Zenaida Kharroubi and Ambassador Brillantes after receiving a certificate of appreciation for her volunteer work for the Star.



Amy Manon-og receiving a certificate of appreciation from Ambassador Brillantes for her work with Gilmore International College.



Ambassador Brillantes receives a certificate of appreciation and a token gift from Zenaida Kharroubi for being the guest speaker during the anniversary.



Alex Robles receiving a certificate of appreciation for being a volunteer for the Filipino Solidarity Cooperative.



Zenaida Kharroubi shakes hands with Ambassador Jose Brillantes to express her personal thanks for all the support she has received. Visible on the background is the QP8 band poster and the anniversary banner.



The Bade brothers, Ben, Carlito and Noli, received certificates of appreciation from Ambassador Brillantes for their volunteer work at the Coop.

From Page 1 2008 Economy

build manufacturing and bridges to span our waters," she added.

Finance Secretary Margarita Teves called for more aggressive spending on public infrastructure as well as tourism investment and promotion to soften the impact of soaring oil prices and a forecast downturn in the global economy next year.

He said the remittances of Filipinos workers overseas must be channeled to infrastructure projects, which will be an outlet for excess dollars to also help temper the peso's strength.

Between January and October, remittances totaled \$11.87 billion, up 15 percent from a year ago and on track to meet the central bank's full-year target of \$14 billion.

University of the Philippines economics professor Benjamin Diokno, a former budget secretary, projected that growth would be slower next year, noting that possible recession in the U.S. will affect the Philippine economy.

MANILA, DECEMBER 27, 2007 Stressing that "knowledge is the

Arroyo holds 4th meeting with education stakeholders

greatest creator of wealth," President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo met today for the fourth time the stakeholders in the education sector to set up the

mechanisms needed to further improve the country's educational system.

Today's meeting was the fourth of a series of meetings with the education sector this month. The first and third meetings were held also in Manila while the second meeting was in Cebu City last Dec. 13.

"We are holding a series of meetings to feel how the stakeholders in the education sector are thinking in improving our education system," the President said as she was greeted by members of the Coordinating Council of Private Education Associations (COCOPEA), Commission on Higher Education Chairman Romulo Neri and Education Secretary Jesli Lapus.

Neri said the President has time and again stressed the importance of quality education in uplifting the lives of the poor and in improving the economy and that she wanted to leave a legacy of better education to the younger generation.

Thus, Lapus said there is a proposal that the government's pre-school program must include children enrolled in Day Care centers.

"We have to start them young," he said.

He said the program targets to cover 1.8 million private and public school pupils nationwide, including the 28,000 pupils in public schools without pre-school.

Another issue to be discussed during the meeting, Lapus said, is the

retraining of teachers, specifically in English, in a move to further improve the English proficiency of students.

Lapus said a lot has yet to be done in the retraining of teachers and one solution he would suggest is rigid college curriculum and training to spare government from spending a large sum in retraining of teachers.

He cited that about 52 percent of teachers in Mathematics and Science need retraining.

The President has listed education as one of her top priorities at the start of her fresh six-year term.

"Our administration has spent more on human capital formation than any other administration in the past," the President has said, adding that "Education is the foundation of economic prosperity and individual liberty, justice and self-worth."

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 27, 2007 | GOVERNMENT MANAGEMENT

PGMA outlines goals of her administration in 2008

An upbeat President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo unveiled today a mini-agenda of the key programs and targets of her administration in 2008 topped by the economy, rural development, education, the environment and the national budget.

Exulting over the peaceful celebration of Christmas, the President said "we are filled with optimism and hope as 2007 comes to an end and a new year begins."

In her opening statement at the yearend meeting of the National Economic and Development Authority-Cabinet Group (NEDA-CG), the President said:

"This Christmas demonstrated the stability and strength of the Philippines and the peace it enjoys. We have a vibrant economy, the stock market is up and investments are pouring in. We are pushing ahead with our infrastructure programs for the betterment and progress of our people."

She added that it is important that the benefits of the country's improving economy and fiscal position seep down to the people nationwide especially the poor.

"Kaya naman sa huling pulong ng Gabinete sa taong ito, ibig natin balangkasin at palakasin ang mga programa para sa kaunlaran at pamumuhunan sa lalawigan, at para sa education sa magandang kabuhayan at kinabukasan ng mamamayan," the President pointed out.

This is the first time in years that the First Family spent Christmas in Metro Manila. In previous years, the President spent the Christmas and New Year holidays in Baguio City.

In her statement, the President said: "Paaabutin natin sa nayon ang capital, kaalaman, imprastraktura at teknolohiya na mabilis magpasagana sa lungsod. At pag-iibayuhin natin ang pagtuturo ng wikang Ingles at mga kasanayan sa mga trabahong agad makukuha ng may sapat na kaalaman."

Another key program of the government, she said, is to balance the national budget next year, two years ahead of the original 2010 goal.

To attain this objective, the President said "we shall redouble revenue efforts that we balance the budget next year while accelerating our infrastructure projects. These include the transfer or attrition of poor-performing Bureau of Internal Revenue (BIR) and Customs personnel, and more intensive anti-smuggling operations."

She said the protection of the environment will not be sacrificed for the sake of development, and "we shall also survey the condition of water, land and air in and around Laguna de Bay."

It was imperative, the President pointed out, that "(we) build our environment as a reflection of our commitment to our quality of life. People need to breath clean air and swim in clean water while we also build manufacturing and bridges to span our waters."

She declared that what her administration will do, the priority programs it will undertake and its goals are clearly defined.

"Maliwanag ang ating mga gagawin sa taong darating. Magdiwang tayo sa gumagandang hinaharap ng bayan, at ating balikating sama-sama ang kaunlaran ng bawat mamamayan, sa lungsod man o bukid, sa bisa ng dunong, imprastraktura at puhunan sa taong bayan," she said.



President Arroyo flanked by Coordinating Council of Private Education Associations (COCOPEA), Commission on Higher Education Chairman Romulo Neri and Education Secretary Jesli Lapus.



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Trillanes petitions to dismiss mutiny case

December 29, 2007

The camp of detained Sen. Antonio Trillanes 4th on Friday asked the government to dismiss rebellion charges against him and 15 others accused of taking over an upscale hotel in Makati City in November and demanding the resignation of President Gloria Arroyo.

In a 60-page motion for reconsideration filed before the Makati Regional Trial Court, Trillanes' lawyer Ernesto Francisco said the siege of the Manila Peninsula did not constitute enough ground for rebellion even when the senator's group demanded that President Arroyo step down.

Citing Supreme Court decisions, he added that the crime of rebellion was not committed by the accused because the takeover did not involve any massive armed uprising, complex plots, or civil war.

Francisco said an earlier resolution of Branch 150 Judge Elmo Alameda that had junked the case against civilians linked to the mutiny acknowledged the same fact. He added that not a single gunshot was fired by the accused, who also did not use force or firearms on anyone during the standoff.

Francisco said the preliminary investigation conducted by government lawyers led by Senior State Prosecutor Emmanuel Velasco was void since complainant and witnesses did not file affidavits and sworn statements. He said the probe had violated a policy of the justice department on rules on inquests.

Trillanes, Army Brig. Gen. Danilo Lim and their Magdaló group of junior military officers and their civilian supporters had holed up at the hotel for nearly six hours before troops assaulted

Philippines' accused mutineers of 2003 freed

December 20, 2007

The 53 Philippine army officers, accused in mutiny attempts against President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo's regime, were freed Thursday as a Christmas reprieve.

They were originally scheduled to be freed Jan. 27 but Macapagal-Arroyo commuted one month of their sentence, news reports said.

The Manila Times reported the rebellious junior officers, who have been in detention since 2003, may even be allowed to return to military service. A military tribunal had earlier decided to discharge the men and give them a lighter sentence under a plea bargain with military prosecutors.

"Effective today, they are released as civilians," military chief Gen. Hermogenes Esperon Jr. said. "They are separated from the service without prejudice to benefits due to them."

The freed officers were part of a much larger group involved in the mutiny in July 2003 but the effort was crushed a day later and all accused were arrested.

Many of them have since been released or given lighter sentences. A group of 29 officers, considered the core group in the mutiny attempt, may still face more serious charges. ■

the building.

Alameda also on Friday granted Lim's motion that he be transferred to Camp Crame, the police headquarters.



Sen. Antonio Trillanes

Early this week, he was moved from Camp Capinpin in Tanay, Rizal, to the headquarters of the Intelligence Service of the Armed Forces of the Philippines in



Brig. General Danilo Lim

Camp Aguinaldo.

The military's chief of staff, Gen. Hermogenes Esperon Jr., said he nee-ded Lim in Camp Aguinaldo so the pro-vost marshal could conduct his own investigation of the hotel standoff.

Lim was held for almost a month at Camp Crame with Trillanes and other junior military officers and men from the Magdaló group for their role in the mutiny.

Esperon ordered Lim's transfer at the request of Col. Arthur Abadilla, the provost marshal, the military's Public Information Office said in a statement.

Another reason cited in Esperon's order was the scheduled January 15 arraignment on rebellion charges against the Trillanes' group before the Alameda sala. ■



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Coop volunteers, Star contributors, and Gilmore faculty members receive certificates of appreciation from Gilmore International College administration

(Photos: Courtesy of Joselito Sarto)



Ambassador Brillantes presents a certificate to Jogie Perez, a volunteer of the Filipino Solidarity Cooperative assisted by Zenaida Kharroubi.



Magnolia Camat receives a certificate of appreciation from Ambassador Brillantes. Ms. Camatos is one of the original founders of the Cooperative.

Celebrating the silver jubilee of the North American Filipino Star on December 8, 2007 in conjunction with the 18th anniversary of Gilmore International College was not planned ahead of time. I decided to hold a party around the third week of October, and had barely two months to promote it in the community. After going through such a rush, I realized it could have been better to postpone such a celebration until the time when there are less parties being held at the same time, but the timeliness of the event would be gone. But the most important and driving force behind my decision is my desire to raise

awareness of the Filipino-Canadian community that there is a Filipino Solidarity Cooperative that needs their support. I also want them to appreciate the fact that the Filipino Solidarity Cooperative is the first one of its kind that is founded by Filipinos in Canada. Moreover, having a cooperative in our midst is a symbol of cooperation, and a worthy cause as it will give us the opportunity to be empowered economically and politically. As there are 600 Coop members, I thought that there will be at least 200 people who will attend this party. . Consequently, I signed a

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Anniversary



Joeel Trinidad, one of the most active volunteers, receives her certificate of appreciation from Ambassador Brillantes.



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Anniversary

contract based on a minimum of 200 tickets. As there were only 135 tickets sold and I had to honor the contract, I did not raise the money that I expected.

Our guest of honor was His Excellency, Ambassador Jose Brillantes who was introduced by Mr. Alex Robles, vice-president of the Coop.. The Ambassador delivered a brief speech in which he underscored the importance of the joint anniversary celebration as a testimony to the success of Gilmore International College and the North American Filipino Star.

After the Ambassador's speech, a presentation of certificates followed.

The first ones called were Filipino Star contributors: namely, Al Abdon, Joyce Alzate, Michael Davantes, Atty. Lito Domingo, Lina Fernandez, Dr. Victor Gavino, Isaac T. Goodine, Chantal Harvey, Julie Parado, Ester Stansfield, Alvin and Hilda Veloso Magdalena Villanueva.

The next group was the Gilmore College Faculty namely, David Bercusson, Edith Fedalizo, Clarice Mackay, Amy Manon-og, Dindo Miras, Nina Schiff, Kadri Shiriffi, Josefina Toledo (Faculty during the current year. Faculty of other years have already been acknowledged)

The third and last group were the Filipino Solidarity Cooperative volunteers: John Aquino, Benjamin Bade, Carlito Bade, Noli Bade, Paz Calope, Magnolia Camat, Erlinda dela Cruz, Leticia de los Santos (paid cashier but works extra hours to help out), Nole Deterio, Jerry Estrada (also a contributor to the Filipino Star), Lourdes Fagsao, Norma Foz (volunteer cashier), Estrella Gascon, Domingo Loricca, Jr., Remedios Monteagudo, Julie Parado (volunteer cashier for 3 months), Jogie Perez, André Proulx, Alex Robles, Edgar Tandugon, Rhoda Tremocha, Joecel Trinidad, and Magdalena Villanueva.

A special certificate of recognition is to be given to Bert Abiera at a later date when he comes back from the Philippines.

The QP8 band played dance music all evening but was only interrupted by the presentation of two songs by two young people from the Musical Tribute concert slated to be held on December 15 at the St. James United Church in Westmount. This entertainment number was contributed by The Filipino Canadian Association of the West Island (FCAWI), sponsors of the concert.

Ms. Amy Manon-og did an excellent job as emcee of the evening. The International Entertainment Mtl-Phil Inc. through its president, Mr. Gaetan Danis, and manager Mr. Raymond Faustino, provided a very good refreshment to all the guests. Everyone seemed to have enjoyed the evening as the dancing lasted until the wee hours of the morning.

Representatives from some community associations attended the celebration, namely, the Philippine Folk Art Society, FCAWI, FAMAS,

Filipino Nurses Association of Quebec, and Filipino-Canadian Alliance of Quebec. Sponsors, patrons and advertisers names appeared in the anniversary souvenir program. To acknowledge their invaluable support, their names are cited hereunder:

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Before midnight, door prizes were raffled off. These prizes were donated by Amy Manon-og, Nina Schiff, Helen Rose Molino, Ben Bade, and Zenaida Kharoubi.

Integration of immigrants in the job market

Montreal, December 20, 2007

Recognizing that the immigrant human resource pool is not being utilized and that it is mainly concentrated in metropolitan Montreal, the Ministre de l'Emploi et de la Solidarité sociale, Mr. Sam Hamad, and the Ministre de l'Immigration et des communautés culturelles, Mme Yolande James, entrusted to their parliamentary assistants respectively, MNA of Viau, M. Emmanuel Dubourg, and MNA of de Robert-Baldwin, M. Pierre Marsan, the mandate to find solutions in coordination with employers and labor syndicates, community organizations, solutions that will neutralize the obstacles to the full employment of immigrants.

From page 2 Coffee Club

no more clutter that makes the place look unattractive. We can also use the services of an electrician to check all the wiring for we would like to rearrange the freezers and make them more accessible but without crowding the aisle.

We also would like to remind you to become a member now. Your membership will contribute to the improvement of the cash flow situation, and eventually help us offer you lower prices by allowing us to buy merchandise in bulk from a supplier. By increasing our membership, we will be able to improve sales and enable us to issue dividends sooner. We can also earn recognition if we achieve the level of membership necessary to earn a reward from CDR which is in charge of all cooperatives in Quebec. The opportunity to be recognized for this type of award exists for cooperatives that are less than 5 years old.

One of the important reasons for having a cooperative is to offer lower prices to members. For this reason, we need to implement an ID card system. Please send us or bring an ID card photo with a \$3.00 fee. However, it is also important to settle the balance of your qualifying shares before this ID card is issued. A member of the Membership Committee will be calling you to let you know your balance. If there is any error in your record, please let us know.

The financial record for 2006 fiscal year is now in the auditors' hands. As soon as the financial statement is completed, we will be calling a general assembly. More information to follow next issue.

Food Safety Information Society: It's Holiday Season-Know Your Limits

'Tis the season for entertaining family and friends, and your food safety knowledge may be put to the test when planning, preparing, cooking and serving holiday foods. "Plan on serving only those amounts of food you can cook and serve safely," says Jill Kartushyn, Food Safety Information Officer with the Food Safety Information Society (FSIS). "Consider how much room you have in your fridge, freezer and oven because food stays fresh and safe for only a limited period of time. Know these limits". If unsure, check the FSIS website www.foodsafetyinfo.org or call the Food Safety Officers at 1-800-892-8333.

When using prepared or partially prepared foods, carefully read the cooking instructions on the label. "Storage and preparation directions may differ for similar products", says Kartushyn. "Some foods may be safely prepared in the microwave, while others must be cooked thoroughly in an oven or on the stove".

Foods served buffet style

must be kept at safe temperatures. Keep hot food hot (60 degrees C/140 degrees F or higher) and cold food cold (4 degrees C/40 degrees F or colder) and don't leave perishable foods out at room temperature for longer than two hours. It is important to keep portions small and refill when necessary to maintain freshness and safety. Chafing dishes and casseroles warmed with tea lights look festive but may not be keeping food at a safe temperature. If you plan to use these, insert an instant read food thermometer into the food to check that the temperature is safe.

Adhere to 'Best Before Dates' and recommended storage times. For instance, your cooked version of homemade eggnog can be refrigerated for three to four days, cooked shrimp one to two days and cheesecake five days.

This season, know your limits and make it a safe holiday when it comes to your food.

We acknowledge the financial support of Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada and Alberta Agriculture and Food under the Agricultural Policy Framework, a federal-provincial-territorial initiative.

CONTACT INFORMATION:

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The Conservative government's ideological opposition to gun control will make our streets more dangerous, Liberal critic says

OTTAWA - Liberal Public Safety

"How can the Conservatives claim to be serious about tackling crime and gang violence, while making it harder for the police to keep guns off the streets?" said Mr. Dosanjh. "In order to appeal to their ideological base the Conservative government is bringing forward legislation to weaken gun control by scrapping the gun registry."

Mr. Dosanjh explained that despite clear evidence that the gun registry works, the Conservative government has re-introduced its bill to kill the registry for rifles and shotguns. "During meetings on Parliament Hill last April, Canadian Police Association (CPA) President Tony Cannavino said that the gun registry is used more than 5,000 times daily, usually to determine whether or not firearms are present when police are called to respond to emergencies," said Mr. Dosanjh.

"The Conservatives are out of step with Canadians on gun control and have allowed themselves to be taken in by the US Republican and National

Rifleman's Association (NRA) ideology that refuses to make the link between the supply of guns and gun crime." Mr. Dosanjh said that registration and licensing introduced by the Liberal government in 1995 have made Canada safer:

Joseph Estrada: 'I could still run for president in 2010!'

December 29, 2007

Former president Joseph Estrada said Friday that he is still eligible to run for the presidency in 2010, but, as of now, he opts not to.



In his speech before resettlers in Tanay town in Rizal, the former president asserted that he could still run for the presidency in 2010 because what he got was an absolute pardon and there was nothing in his release that was conditional, ABS-CBN News correspondent Timi Nubla reported.

However, Estrada said that as of now, he has no plans of running and that his goal is to unite the opposition and field just one candidate for the next presidential elections.

Estrada, who was convicted last September 12 for plunder, also said that his visits to poor areas is not a form of campaign. He said his goal was to bring his case to the people and tell them the truth.

During a gift-giving session in Tanay he said, in his speech, that he could look people in the eye because he is innocent, even taking off his shades to prove his point.

On reports that the Lakas-CMD party is talking to the Liberal and Nacionalista parties, Estrada, in an

ambush interview, said that if they find out that any of the members of the opposition would hold any form of talks with the administration, they will be out of the selection of the opposition's candidates and the opposition won't endorse their candidacy in the 2010 elections.

Meanwhile, former senator Ernesto Maceda, in his speech at the same event, recounted how he bumped into Chief Justice Artemio Panganiban at a dinner where they discussed the justice's column about Estrada's pardon which Maceda said declared that Erap was granted absolute pardon that's why he was able to vote in the recent barangay elections.

Maceda, who introduced the former president in the Tanay event, introduced Estrada as "ang babalik na pangulo ng Pilipinas."

Makati City Mayor Jejomar Binay, who was also at the gathering, said that academically speaking, Estrada can still run. He also asked the presidential aspirants from the opposition who are talking to Malacañang to tell opposition groups their plans early on.

The only thing he is sure of, Binay said, was that he and Estrada are loyal to each other.

'Erap can still be jailed for pardon violations'

Meanwhile The Philippine Star reported that Special Prosecutor Dennis Villa-Ignacio warned Friday ousted President Joseph Estrada that he could be detained again if he fails to comply with the conditions set by the executive clemency granted him by President Arroyo.

The ban on Estrada's running for office is part of the conditions contained in the pardon, he told The STAR.

In response, Estrada said yesterday he would be forced to run in the 2010 presidential elections if Villa-Ignacio and the government would not stop threatening to have his executive clemency revoked.

"He (Villa-Ignacio) is crazy," he said. "I challenge him. Although I have no intention of running right now, I might be forced to run if they will continue with that kind of thinking. I hope they don't try me."

"Villa-Ignacio is supposed to be a good lawyer. But with that statement, he is not competent to be a lawyer. Even a former Justice says that I can still run."

"The dispositive portion of the pardon that I signed says restoring (my) civil and political rights. I did vote in the last barangay elections. If I can vote, I can be voted upon. It means my full civil and political rights were restored."

In a telephone interview, Estrada said he can still run for president because the pardon granted to him by President Arroyo was absolute.

Estrada said Villa-Ignacio does not deserve to be in the government's legal service, and should uphold his word and resign from his post.

"He (Villa-Ignacio) was the one who has no word of honor," he said.

"He said that he will resign should I be granted pardon. He was the one who said that, not me. He has no word of honor."

Estrada said he has not been campaigning and his "Lakbay Pasasalamat" is to bring his case to the people.

Villa-Ignacio said Estrada's executive clemency could be recalled if he fails to comply with the conditions set in the order of Mrs. Arroyo.

"That's (not running) part of the

conditions set by Malacañang that he was supposed to comply with," he said.

"The other one is that he (Estrada) would return the money (he illegally amassed during his term)."

Prosecutors will look into the case of Estrada and work for the recall of his executive clemency if he is found to have failed to comply with its conditions, Villa-Ignacio said.

Estrada and his lawyers had said only about P2,000 is left in the Jose Velarde account in Equitable PCI Bank, which has since merged with Banco de Oro.

However, Villa-Ignacio said there was more than P3 billion deposited in the Jose Velarde account when Estrada was president.

"It is not right (that the P2,000 would only be the amount that should be returned)," he said.

In telephone interview with The STAR, retired Manila fiscal Jose Flaminiano, one of Estrada's lawyers, said they cannot comment on the statement of Solicitor General Agnes Devanadera that Estrada was given a conditional pardon until they have thoroughly studied the issue.

"That is the (Office of the Solicitor General's) opinion," he said.

Flaminiano said that statements about Estrada running for president again are mere speculations.

"He (Estrada) says he will not run anymore," he said.

"He says that he would devote his time to helping the masses. He also says that he would be willing to reconcile with the (Arroyo) administration for the improvement of the country." ■

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(Ingredients:

½ kilo green elongated chilies (julienned)

200 grams shrimp paste (unsalted)

4 cloves garlic (minced)

1 whole onion (chopped)

¼ kilo pork (cut into tiny pieces)

¼ kilo tomatoes (chopped)

4 tbs. vegetable oil

1 cup coconut milk, extracted from 3 coconut fruit If using an instant coco powder which is available in many Asian stores, 1 medium sachet dissolved in 1 cup of water is enough

bicol express - 37.8 kb
bicol express

In a pan or a wok, sauté garlic, onion, and tomatoes in oil. When onion is slightly cooked, add pork. Fry the mixture for 2 minutes until pork turned a little brown, and then add ½ cup of water. Boil until water is almost gone and pork is completely cooked. Then add shrimp paste. After three minutes, add in chilies. Without overcooking the chili, or in a minute, pour in the coconut milk. Simmer until mixture is dry. Season with salt and pepper and serve hot or cold with rice. This dish is best eaten with fried fish or fried meat.

1 package egg roll wrappers (available in any asian store)

Lumpiang Shanghai



250 g minced pork

250 g prawn, finely chopped
1/4 cup finely chopped spring onions
1 beaten egg
oil for deep-frying
1 tsp salt and 1 tsp pepper

Mix all the ingredients except the oil. Season with salt and pepper. Place a tablespoon of mixture on the corner

of each wrapper, fold, seal the sides and roll up sealing it with few drops of water. Continue until filling is finished. Deep fry in hot oil until golden-brown. Drain and serve with catsup or sweet and sour dip (available in most Asian stores).

Rellenong Bangus (Stuffed Milk Fish)

Estimated cooking time: 1 hour

Rellenong Bangus Ingredients:

- * 1 big bangus (milkfish)
- * 3 cloves of garlic, minced
- * 1 onion chopped
- * 2 tomatoes, diced
- * 1 egg
- * 1/4 cup lemon juice

Rellyenong Bangus



- * 1 small carrot, finely chopped
- * 1/4 cup soy sauce
- * 4 tablespoons of cooking oil
- * ham, finely chopped
- * raisins
- * cooked peas
- * salt and pepper to taste

Rellenong Bangus Cooking Instructions:

- * Scale and remove the intestines of the bangus.
- * With a very sharp knife, slowly remove the meat of the fish from the skin through the opening cavity below the head. Remove the spine by snapping off the bone at the base of the tail and head. Use a long spoon to scrape all the meat from the skin.

* Marinate the head and skin in lemon juice, soy sauce and pepper.

* Boil in 1/2 cup of water the bangus meat with some salt for 5 minutes.

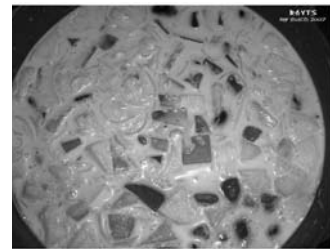
* Sauté the garlic and onions until slightly brown then add the tomatoes and carrots until tender.

* Add the chopped ham, cooked peas, raisins and the bangus meat to the mixture. Cook for an additional 5 minute Add a beaten egg to the sauté and mix well.

* Stuff the mixture inside the bangus skin and head. Sew the cavity if needed.

* Fry in oil until golden brown.

* slice slightly diagonal (1 1/2 inch thick) and serve.



Filipino Fruit Salad

1 1/2 cup Heavy Cream (Nestle Brand) 8 ea Ounce pkg. Cream Cheese 3 ea 14 ounce cans Fruit Cocktail, drained 14 ounce can Pineapple chunks, drained 14 ounce can Lychees, drained 1 cup Coconut 8 Ounce package Chopped almonds, unsalted 1 1/2 cup Cubed apples (optional)

Procedures: Mix heavy cream and cream cheese together to a smooth sauce like consistency. Combine with other ingredients and blend well, chill overnight. Lychees can be skipped, use tropical fruit cocktail instead of the regular fruit cocktail, make it four cans.

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Tinago Falls - As literally implied, it is hidden in a deep ravine, the falls cascading beautifully into a basin-like pool, calm, deep and icy cold. It has an elevation of approximately 420 ft.



Maria Cristina Falls Iligan's greatest heritage, it is the most resplendent among the city's 20 waterfalls.



Dancers (top) and children (bottom) at the Lubi-lubi Festival, Linamon. Also called *Hudyaka sa Lubi*, it celebrates the city's charter day.



Iligan Fiesta, these week-long festivities are held in September in the capital

The province of Lanao is located on the Northern Mindanao district along the northwest coast of Iligan Bay. The lowland peninsula gives way to a realm of hilly terrene which ascends towards the mountains in the southeast and northeast portion. The rivers flows in deep interval as they cascade from the mountains going to the coast, constructing many waterfalls and the Maria Cristina Falls is the most well-known of all.

One of the famous dish in Iligan is the binaki, a grated young corn mixed with milk, then wrapped with fresh corncob and steamed. Other muslim-influenced dishes are utak-utak and lolot.

Being the "Industrial Center of the South", the city of Iligan housed smaller industries like steel, tinplate, pulp and paper and flourmills. Agriculture, fishing and forestry are the province's primary source of livelihood. It is also a major producer of fruits and commercial crops like bananas, coconut, corn and rice.

Blessed with ample water resources, which are the province's tourist attractions, there are 22 waterfalls cascading the rivers of Lanao. The most famous of is the Maria Cristina Falls with a height of 320 ft that plunges into the Agus River. The

Tinago Falls is one of the most beautiful falls hidden within the deep ravine. And in the town of Munai, runs an intriguing Lidpa Subterranean River that flows through the top of the hill in the mountain.

The people of Lanao celebrates **Viva Sr. San Miguel** every last week of September. This is to honor Saint Michael the Archangel. They perform dances similar to the Sinulog celebration. Alongside this merrymaking, they also perform the Pana-ad and Yawa-yawa. Pana-ad refers to the pledges of the loyal devotees of San Miguel for the favors that were granted. And the Yawa-yawa is a miracle play performed in their native dialect, songs and dances.

Other popular spots include: **Mt. Agad-Agad** which served as a major lookout during the Japanese Occupation. **Sandayan Cave**, located in the deep forest of Rorongon. It is a three-chambered cavern with stalactite and stalagmites looking ominous to stangers.

You can visit Iligan City via Philippine Airlines which has a daily flight to Cagayan de Oro and from there several buses travel the Cagayan-Iligan route. By sea, William Lines and Gothong Lines sails from Manila to Iligan City. ■



Dancers performing at the Lubi-Lubi Festival held in January



View from Mt. Agad-Agad overlooking Iligan City

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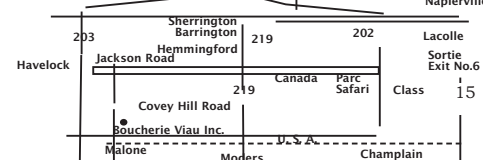
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Star Photo Gallery



Laging Handa Scouts salute during the singing of the national anthems at the FAMAS children's Christmas party held last December 2, 2007 at St. Kevin's Church Hall.



Paskong Pinoy parol winner Cherry poses with the prize donor, Mr. Rene Calfat of Saratoga during the parol contest last Sunday, December 9, sponsored by the Philippine Folk Art Society of Quebec, Inc.



Joey Albert poses for souvenir with the Filipino Star editor, Zenaida Kharroubi who interviewed her during a press conference at FAMAS, December 13, 2007 prior to her benefit concert for the FCMM.



Santa Claus is busy giving gifts to children during the FAMAS Children's Christmas party held at St. Kevin's Church Hall, December 2, 2007, assisted by Miss Nabor, Bb. Pilipinas of Montreal.



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FILIPINO STAR SHOWBIZ GOSSIP

Charice Pempengco amazes Ellen Degeneres



A young diva is born. Charice Pempengco wowed audiences with her performance on the Ellen Degeneres show aired December 19, 2007

Internet singing sensation Charice Pempengco received two standing ovations from the audience of The Ellen DeGeneres Show that happened recently.

The 14-year-old Little Big Star finalist showed off her singing talent that wowed the American audience including the Emmy Award-winning host Ellen DeGeneres.

this, Charice hugged Ellen while in tears.

"You're amazing! You're amazing!" Ellen gushed. She continued, "We just witnessed the beginning of this girl's career that we're gonna go, 'I was there, I saw her.' She is unbelievable."

And then, Charice got a second standing ovation when she performed Whitney Houston's "I Will Always Love



It was late November when Ellen announced on her show that she wanted this teenager singer from the Philippines—who sang in a televised talent contest in Korea titled Star King that hit the video-sharing site YouTube—to guest on Ellen. When she learned about Ellen's wish, Charice said, "Nagulat po ako, parang napaisip ako, 'Wow! Pang-international!'"

Indeed she looked like an international star when she sang Dreamgirls original soundtrack "And I Am Telling You I'm Not Going." After

You." In fact, in YouTube, one user commented, "That's the same voice as Whitney Houston."

As for the bonus surprise, Ellen gave Charice an iPod Touch to replace Charice's iPod, which was lost during her flight to the United States.

With all the warm welcome and praises that she got for her guest appearance in The Ellen DeGeneres Show, Charice was left speechless and could only say, "Oh, my God! Oh, my God! Thank you very much." ■

Marian refuses to talk about her rumored love life

Marian Rivera went home to Cavite yesterday, December 25, to celebrate Christmas with her mother and grandmother.

In connection with her homecoming, the Marimar lead star was asked by "Chika Minute" shown yesterday, December 25, whether Ervic Vijandre—the non-showbiz guy being linked to her and identified in the January 2008 issue of YES! magazine—would be her special guest for Christmas.

But Marian answered evasively, "Si Ervic? Di ko alam kasi, di ba, kapag Christmas, di mo naman mapipigilan ang pumupunta sa bahay mo?"

The young actress also asked GMA News reporter Lhar Santiago not to delve too much on Ervic or her love life. She said, "Basta masaya po ako. Huwag na po nating pag-usapan."

Despite her silence, Marian assured the media that her career would still be her priority over her love life.

Meanwhile, people are already confused about Marian's next project in 2008. Some say she would star in the TV adaptation of Mars Ravelo's Dyesebel while others believe that she would be the next Darna in the



Marian Rivera

soap tentatively titled Captain Barbell Meets Darna.

But Marian herself is still unsure of her next project. She said, "Di ko po alam kung alin sa dalawa, e. Tingnan na lang po natin kung alin ang ibibigay sa akin ng GMA."

Whatever GMA-7 gives her, Marian seems confident in taking on any role. In fact, she said, "Handa akong lumipad nang mataas, handa akong lumangoy nang malalim." ■

No reunion movie for Sharon Cuneta, Gabby Concepcion



Sharon Cuneta

under GMA Films.

Is the possibility of a reunion movie now possible considering that the wounds of the past had long been forgotten?

The Megastar doesn't mind the prospect of teaming up anew with the father of her first daughter, KC Concepcion, but her reservation outweighs the positive—knowing fully well how promotions necessitate noise and gossips to generate public interest.

"Ang worry ko is I don't think I would have the heart to put my husband and my children through that," she said, sounding so concerned. "Kasi parang paglalaruan whether totoo o hindi. Ang masasaktan hindi kami, 'yong kanya-kanyang mga taong importante sa amin like his [Gabby's] wife, my husband, and my children."

She also brushed off the persistent rumors that her husband, Senator Francis "Kiko" Pangilinan has a child outside wedlock.

"Nagtataka nga ako, saan nanggagaling ang mga ganung issue. Hinihintay ko na lang na may dumating sa bahay para magpakilala o sabihin man lang kung saan ba ang bahay para madalaw naman namin, wala naman, e!" laughed Sharon.

Like any other normal couples, Sharon bluntly confessed that her union with Kiko is also marred with imperfections mixed with trials. But the pair, as what Sharon pointed out, approached every problem with objectivity and lots of humor. ■

2008 will be a busy year for Megastar Sharon Cuneta. Sporting a much slimmer frame, Sharon is preparing herself for a movie comeback after a long lull.

She's also gearing up to promote the sequel of her 2006 album, Isn't It Romantic? under Sony/BMG records.

"Now, I do the South Beach [diet] phase 1," revealed Sharon to GMA News reporter Lhar Santiago about her strict diet regimen, "I don't do it straight, apparently you need to go on phase 2."

Sharon's decision to revive her movie career incidentally coincides with ex-husband Gabby Concepcion's anticipated comeback film reportedly

Eula Valdes is a queen in 'Kamandag'



Veteran actress Eula Valdes joins the Kapuso network and takes part in the all-star ensemble of its latest primetime hit, Carlo J. Caparas's *Kamandag*.

With great passion for her job and the eagerness to overcome challenges her character has in store, Eula has made herself all comfortable in her new playground.

"I am very eager to work with GMA" Eula says in an interview with iGMA during her photo shoot for the show. "Para ibang playground naman" she adds.

In *Kamandag*, Eula plays Alicia, a mortal woman from a wealthy family brought by the snake-king Sadan (Gardo Versoza) to the underworld kingdom, Ambograw. She becomes his queen, and eventually bears Sadan a son. Later she is taken by the wolf-king Gulag (Zoren Legazpi) after killing her husband in a duel.

"Alicia's good naman" Eula affirms, and then shares that she familiarizes herself with her new character by chatting with the writers. "Gusto kong malaman kung anong type of person she is" she adds.

The seasoned actress admits her excitement over working in a fantasy-themed television series and says she looks forward to wearing the queen's costumes. "Excited ako sa idea na may costume, kasi mahilig ako maglaro eh" she says.

Eula believes wearing costumes will work to her advantage. "Para din 'yan sa moods ng tao, depende sa kung ano 'yung nafi-feed sa'yo ng environment mo. Big help din 'yung look, automatic 'yun sa tao 'di ba? Kapag nag-dress ka, nagiging prim and proper ka, kapag nag-casual ka, cowboy ka lang" she explains.

Destined to Shine

Growing up watching old films, Eula believes she has been lured into the entertainment world by its "glamour [because] everyone's all made up [at] ang gaganda nila".

As a TV kid who eventually found herself in the business, Eula confesses she could not imagine herself being anything else but an actress. "Ito talaga ang gusto ko" she says. "Pinanganak yata ako na kapag tinanong, 'Anong gusto mo, prinsesa or artista?', 'yun [pag-aartista] ang gusto ko" she shares.

And now that she has successfully made name for herself in showbiz, Eula feels it no longer matters which show genre she works in. "It really doesn't matter kasi this is all play para sa'kin" she replies when made to choose between fantasy-themed shows and the tug-at-heart reality types. "Pine-prefer ko to be given different roles para mas masarap paglaruan...basta gusto ko iba-iba para hindi boring" she states.

"Ngayon ang importante sa'kin 'yung magandang story. Basta magandang character. Hindi naman kailangang sobrang complicated 'yung pagkatao. Ngayon mas na-attract ako sa mas simple [at] mas totoo" she adds.

Overcoming Fears

As she stars in a project as big and grand as *Kamandag*, Eula says she expects to have lots of fun – but hopes to have fewer moments with the snakes.

"Terrified ako dun sa snakes" she says in a small voice, almost in a whisper. "Hindi ako nakakagalaw. I'm afraid of snakes, lizards – reptiles. As in kasehodang breakdown scene" she discloses.

Fortunately for her, she has not dealt with any of the slithering creatures in the duration of the show. But she assures everyone that she will condition herself to deal with her least favorite creatures when the need arises.

"Basta alam ko kaya ko 'yan" she guarantees. "Bahala na, ayokong isipin kasi baka manlata ako. Pag nandyan na, I'll deal with it."

Eula expresses her glee as she works on her first television series with the Kapuso network. "I'm happy kasi pleasant 'yung mga tao. Nervous ako at first pero buti naman very accommodating si Miss Carol (Kamandag's executive producer), tapos in-introduce na rin niya ako sa iba. Very warm [sila] so at ease na ako agad" she says. ■

Lolit Solis now willing to apologize to Piolo, Sam

Talent manager Lolit Solis has reiterated her readiness to make peace and, if needed, apologize to matinee idols Piolo Pascual and Sam Milby, GMA News' 24-Oras reported Tuesday.

"Gusto ko naman talagang makipag-ayos kina Piolo at Sam kasi saan ba pupunta ito, 'di ba? Wala naman. Ano bang mapapala ko? Ano din mapapala nila?" she said in a taped interview.

Solis insisted that she have no personal grudge against Sam and Piolo. She maintained that she does not know the two actors personally.

According to Solis, once the two actors express willingness to settle the matter with her, she will prepare the place where she can meet them.

"Halimbawa kung sasabihin nilang willing silang makipagkita sa akin talagang ako pa ang mag-aano kung saan ko sila pwedeng imbitahin," the host of GMA's *Startalk* said.

She added that one of her Christmas wishes is mending of ties between her and the two actors.

"Christmas wish ko yung totoo? Sana maayos yung sa amin nina Piolo at Sam kasi mabigat din yun e. Mabigat din yun sa loob. Saka abala yun," she said.

The television report said Manila Mayor Alfredo Lim and Senate President Manuel Villar advised Solis to bury the hatchet with the two actors.

Villar, in a separate interview, said he is willing to facilitate the reconciliation.

"Ako naman ay mas gusto ko na mas konti ang problema sa mundo. Tamang tama ito Kapaskuhan e magandang tyempo," he said.

Lawyer Joji Alonso, counsel of the two actors, said it is possible that her clients will heed the request of Solis but their decision will still depend on the talent manager's next move. - ■

Jennylyn Mercado vehemently denies throwing tantrums in public

FHM January 2008 cover girl Jennylyn Mercado reportedly got into an argument with boyfriend Patrick Garcia. The said argument was so intense that Jennylyn, in a fit of temper, rushed to the street and lied down.

This was just another rumor Jennylyn would normally shrug off. But, with news about people actually believing the rumor, she could not help but air her side in frustration.

"Sorry, pero ang cheap talaga ng issue na 'yon," said Jennylyn in an interview with *Chika Minute* aired yesterday, December 26. "Puwede naman kaming mag-away sa loob ng bahay. Pero sa labas? That's sad!"

Jennylyn also explained that she didn't have any major arguments with Patrick, so the rumor about her lying down on the middle of the road was nothing but pure fiction. When asked about what Patrick's reaction was, she said, "Hindi pa niya naririnig, e. Tatawa lang yun, I'm sure."

On a lighter note, Jennylyn excitedly said that she has started taping for her first Sine Novela for



GMA-7 titled *Maging Aking Ka Lamang* with Patrick. However, Jennylyn expressed some worries because it is, after all, her first soap opera with Patrick as leading man. ■

Sexy TV star juggles business, college, career



Chynna Ortaleza, the 24-year old GMA star, is taking up Associate in Arts at the University of the Philippines Open University. "Well, it's actually all general subjects, leading to arts," she explains.

Now on her sophomore year, she says that the Open University is very easy and convenient for busy people like her. "Usually, my classes are a mix of all sorts of people -- working students, young moms, everyone! Or people who just want to continue studying."

She continues, "Masaya naman, kasi di ba, it's UP, there's an opportunity for you to graduate [from] a good school, and it's also convenient because you can take classes via the Internet. And then sometimes, if you want, you can go the University, and then you can take classes with your classmates and your teachers. Pero it's not as demanding as regular school."

Chynna further explains that there are two options for the Open University: a purely Internet-based learning system, and a face-to-face system, which she chose. In the face-to-face system, there is a need to attend classes every now and then -- something that Chynna considers

important.

"It's going to be healthy to discuss things with other people, 'cos it's so hard if it's just Internet based and you're left with your modules," she says.

But for this semester, Chynna took a break because she has to concentrate on her show and her business. "I'm quite busy with La Vendetta and I'm busy with Stellar. So I decided to stop first, until my business has stabilized, and I've trained enough people to take care of it."

Mystery character

Chynna's role in La Vendetta will enter the story by the third week as the personal assistant of Amanda (Jean Garcia). 'Joan [is] a mystery character. She's grey - kung baga parang medyo gitna lang siya. There is a reason why she's angry. I'm [Amanda's] right hand, so she trusts me, but hindi natin alam kung ano pwede kong gawin,' Chynna narrates.

Her last primetime show was last year (Atlantika), and although she's glad to be in the GMA Telebabad slot again, she's proud of the fact that she can be in "different places" when it comes to acting. "I can be in

primetime, and the last project I had was in Dramarama [Pati Ba Pintig ng Puso?], and it was quite successful as well. I trust GMA, e. They know where they can put their stars na hindi naman masusuya yung viewers na lagi silang nakikita."

Chynna says she's delighted to be in La Vendetta, especially since she is surrounded by really good actors. "I'm also happy because it's not fantasy for a change. And I'm proud to be part of this, because it's the first suspense-drama that they have."

She has done fantaseries, teenybopper roles, and heavy dramas, but what does she consider the toughest among the lot?

"I'd have to say my role in Magpakailanman," she answers. "I played Bobby Mercado. The role is so different from me -- I haven't tried drugs, [and] I'm not the type of person that goes around and rebels against my parents. So when they gave me that role, I really had a hard time

getting into it. So I had to prepare for that. And I really had to ask help from my directors, because it's so hard to portray somebody like that!"

Chynna refuses to cite a dream role, saying that as long as it's challenging and it's new, she's game for it. She adds, "I don't really care if they give me bida or support -- it doesn't matter. Just as long as I know there is something I can do with the character; it's the challenge na I can portray different people."

An actress since 2001, Chynna acknowledges her growth in her craft and remains quite thankful for all the opportunities given to her. "It's also because of all the projects that they have given me -- parang, they listen to me when I say I want to be versatile. And they say, 'Sige, sige, we're gonna support you with that decision.' So I'm very, very happy. I have a long way to go -- I still have dreams of becoming an award-winning actress, but it will come when the time is right." ■

Valerie unfazed by rumors

Valerie Concepcion is unfazed by the rumor linking her to Anak ng Kumander lead actor, Manny Pacquiao.

They have a kissing scene in the movie, which said to have deviated Manny's wife, Jinkee's focus of jealousy. In fact, it was rumored that Valerie received a text message from a certain Jinkee, but which was later on denied by Jinkee herself.

"Wala naman po talaga 'yon," the beautiful Wowowee host said during the Coca Cola Christmas Caravan at the Fiesta Carnival in Cubao, Quezon City. "Trabaho lang po."

Meanwhile, the Coke caravan will also bring her to Cebu (December 15) and Davao (December 22) with comedian Bayani Agbayani and rapper-musician Francis M with some bands. Coke executives who were present during the Cubao caravan said the projects aims to bring Filipino families together during Christmas.

They can use Coke caps and crowns as currency in the caravans. There is also an ongoing parol making contest using Coke plastic bottles, caps and crowns. In the caravans, there are also games for families who stand to win big cash prizes. It started



last December 1 at Burnham Park in Baguio City.

When Valerie comes back from the caravan, she will join the Parade of Stars on December 24 where she will join Manny Pacquiao, Ara Mina and the other stars in the Anak ng Kumander float. (MNS) ■

Gretchen laughs off reports of break-up with Tonyboy



Gretchen Barretto left for the United States on December 26 together with her partner, businessman Tonyboy Cojuangco, and their daughter Dominique.

Tonyboy will be having a medical check-up in the US. He had a throat operation in the middle of 2007.

"Ganito ba ang hiwalay?" Gretchen said as she laughed off rumors of her alleged separation from Tonyboy.

"Hindi ko alam kung matutuwa ako or maiinis ako sa mga kuwento. Natutuwa ako na natsitsimis pa rin ako, kasi ibig sabihin, buhay pa rin si Gretchen Barretto sa isip at puso ng bawat Pilipino para intrigahin ako,"

continued from page 16

Gretchen said in an interview with 24 Oras.

Gretchen was involved in so many issues this year. The "kisscandal" involving her and John Estrada was the biggest scandal she got involved in. According to Gretchen, she has already moved on after that incident.

"Andami kong napagdaanan this year. Nagkasakit si Tony. Nagkaroon ako ng iskandalo. I guess it's part of growing up. Gretchen is no longer the 14-year old-Gretchen Going Steady [her first film] noong araw. It just goes to show na tao din ako. Nagkakamali, nadadapa, at marunong tumayo," she said.

She also shared to the reporters gathered at the Centennial airport departure area that she spent this

Christmas with her sisters Marjorie and Claudine. The three had a falling apart for quite some time before they reconciled April this year.

"Ang sarap. Parang na-miss ko 'yon. For me, that was one of the gift na nakuha ko this Christmas," remarked Gretchen.

By 2008, Gretchen expects to release her 12-song album. Though, she admits this was the only concession Tonyboy has given her in any showbiz commitments.

"Hindi naman ako pinapayagan ni Tony ng movies. Ayaw niya pa rin kasi sabi niya maintriga. O sige, mag-CD na lang ako. Maintriga pa rin. Sana payagan niya na ako," she jested.

Gretchen ended, "Basta masaya ako na naiintriga ako. Kasi kapag hindi na ako naiintriga, wala na akong career." ■

showed spontaneity in her reaction to the audience's remarks.

Joey Albert, to some of us who have been living abroad, and who have never had the occasion to listen to her, may

Pimentel slams ethnic slur in 'Sakal, Sakali, Saklolo'

Senate Minority Leader Aquilino Pimentel Jr on Thursday expressed concern that the film *Sakal, Sakali, Saklolo* is conveying a wrong message to Filipinos by denigrating the use of the Visayan language, which is most widely spoken in the Visayas and large parts of Mindanao.

Pimentel, who hails from Mindanao, cited a portion of the film where a grandmother was telling a nanny (yaya) in Pilipino: "Bakit pinapalaki ninyong Bisaya ang apo ko?" (Why are you rearing my grandchild as a Bisaya?)

The mother then butts in and tells the nanny: "Speak to the kid in Tagalog. Parang Pinoy. (So that he grows up like a Pinoy)."

Pimentel said that the scene smacks of an ethnic slur to non-Tagalog speaking Filipinos as he called on the producer of

the film, Star Cinema, to promptly take steps to rectify the error.

"It offends the sensibilities of the Visayans and other non-Tagalog speaking citizens by making them feel as if they are less Filipino than the Tagalogs. It creates useless hatred in the nation," he said.

Pimentel also expressed disappointment at the Movie and Television Review and Classification Board (MTRCB).

He said that the MTRCB had apparently overlooked the flaw in the film which it should not have tolerated.

"Sakal Sakali Saklolo," with Judy Ann Santos and Ryan Agoncillo in the lead roles, is an official entry to the ongoing Metro Manila Film Festival. ■

From Page 1 Joey Albert

oblige. Towards the end of her performance, she completely relaxed and even sat on the step to the stage



At the end of the show, all performers were invited to the stage to sing and to pose for souvenir with Joey Albert and Father Frank Alvarez

as shown in the front page photo. Then all the participants were invited to the stage and they all sang with her including Father Frank Alvarez.

This concert was organized for the benefit of the Filipino Catholic Mission in collaboration with the Premier Management Group. Random sampling of reaction to her show

have some hesitation to go to her concerts. But after talking to her during the press conference prior to the concert, one can appreciate that this lady has her heart in the right place, that she is generous, kind, caring, and humble. I had seen her once during the concert for Gawad Kalinga last year, but it seemed that I did not know her enough

Philippines a better place to live in. She said that she left, like many us, in search of better opportunities and now she has realized that what she left behind are the real treasures. It is only now that she understands how proud she is of being a Filipino, and that no one should die without doing something for the country. She asks: Who else is going to help the poor in our country? Can you turn your back to them? She said she definitely can't. When asked about her plan for the next ten years, she replied that she will be working for the poor.

How does one show love and pride in being a Filipino? According to her, there are many things one could do – being with other Filipinos, sharing ideas

with them, and maintaining the Filipino culture. We should always keep our link with the Philippines in order not to be disconnected from our roots wherever we are. She pointed out one sad experience of hearing an eight-year old child deny her being a Filipino for she was born in America and only wanted to be called an American, although she was of Filipino parentage. She would like to see parents teach their children to value their Filipino culture even though they may be living abroad.

Joey Albert started her formal education in music after she had made a record that people were willing to buy. She then decided to study music at St. Scholastica College for one year and took voice lessons as well. Some surprising things happened to her afterwards. For instance, she did not really join any contest but someone did and she won the title of Miss Dream Girl in 1982, and eventually made her become an ambassadress of goodwill. As a reward, she was given a trip around the world and a car which she wanted to have upon graduation from college.

Her first important concert was a tribute to contemporary Filipino artists in July 1985 at the University of Life. After this concert, she was considered to have made it as a real major artist.

According to Joey Albert, Filipinos succeed when given opportunities. However, she feels quite sad that there are not enough opportunities back home but if there are, she feels sure that our country will rise again.

To sum up her message to us abroad - teach children to love the Philippines even though we have adopted Canada as our second home.

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The whole crew of people working for the Joey Albert concert pose for souvenir after the press conference held at FAMAS, December 13, 2007

revealed that everyone enjoyed the show. It was quite a relaxing evening, as she was not accompanied by a loud orchestra but by a string quartette and a pianist. As a result, the voice of Joey Albert could be heard better and appreciated for its tone, pitch and lyrics. She was also very relaxed and often

to say much about her. But this time around, I learned more about her. She sounded so passionate about being a Filipino. When I asked her what she would like us to do to help our country, she gave quite an extensive reply, pointing out the feeling of being humbled after seeing young people go



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Pakistani opposition leader Bhutto assassinated

Killing throws doubt on regional stability, draws international condemnation



Pakistan's former Prime Minister and opposition leader Benazir Bhutto attends an election rally in Rawalpindi December 27, 2007, shortly before she was killed in a gun and bomb attack.

December 27, 2007

Pakistani opposition leader and former prime minister Benazir Bhutto was assassinated Thursday, throwing the nuclear-armed U.S. ally into crisis and raising the specter of deeper instability in an already volatile region.

World leaders condemned the assassination, which sent shock waves through the Pakistani political system. It immediately raised questions about whether parliamentary elections scheduled for Jan. 8 would be held and whether President Pervez Musharraf would reimpose a recently lifted state of emergency.

Nawaz Sharif, a main opposition leader, said his political party would boycott the election, casting further doubt on its viability.

The death of Bhutto, who was a leading candidate to become prime minister following the election, also cast U.S. policy toward the region into turmoil. U.S. officials had hoped that Bhutto and Musharraf could team up to bring stability to the country and sideline extremist factions.

Pakistan is a key ally in the U.S.-declared war on terror. It borders Afghanistan, where the United States believes Osama bin Laden is hiding and is the recipient of billions of dollars of U.S. aid.

The attack sent ripples through the world's financial markets, where stocks and the dollar fell and gold and oil prices rose. The longer-term impact of the killing was unclear, but could be deep and far-reaching. See First Take commentary. Read more commentary.

Gun and bomb attack

The circumstances of the attack, which took place in Rawalpindi, Pakistan, as Bhutto left a political rally, remained unclear hours after she was pronounced dead by hospital officials. Some reports said Bhutto, 54, was killed by gunshots. Others said shrapnel from a bomb detonated by a

suicide attacker took her life.

Witnesses quoted in news reports said Bhutto raised her head through the sun roof of her armored vehicle as she was leaving the rally and then collapsed after two or three shots were fired. A large explosion followed the gunfire, the reports said. The blast killed at least 20 other people, reports said.

Bhutto's supporters took to the streets following the killing, attacking police in several cities, according to news reports. The Associated Press reported that nine people were killed in the rioting.

Internet statements said Al-Qaida had claimed responsibility for the attack, and officials were said to be investigating the veracity of the claim, according to an Associated Press report. However, some analysts pointed out that Bhutto had many enemies and rivals who could be responsible for the murder.

CNN reported late Thursday that an email message written by Bhutto before her death said that Musharraf should be held responsible if she were to meet a violent death, saying she was made "to feel insecure."

Musharraf condemned the killing and urged calm. He blamed extremists for the attack and declared three days of mourning, but did not say if elections would be postponed or the state of emergency reimposed.

President Bush demanded that the attackers be brought to justice. "The United States strongly condemns this cowardly act by murderous extremists who are trying to undermine Pakistan's democracy," Bush said in a statement from Texas.

Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh said Bhutto's death deprived the subcontinent of "an outstanding leader who worked for democracy and reconciliation in her country," Reuters reported.

British Prime Minister Gordon Brown said it was a "sad day for democracy" and a "tragic hour" for Pakistan, according to cable news channel CNN. The attack also drew condemnation from U.S. candidates for President, who will be facing off in

the key Iowa caucuses next week. See full story.

Violent politics

Pakistan's political system is no stranger to violence. In recent weeks, suicide bombers have repeatedly targeted security forces in Rawalpindi, a city near the capital where Musharraf stays and the Pakistan army has its headquarters. An attack on a Bhutto campaign rally in October killed about 150 people. Earlier on Thursday, several people were killed at a rally held by another election candidate, according to news reports. Musharraf himself has been repeatedly targeted by violent attacks.

Before the rally, Bhutto met with Afghan President Hamid Karzai and told him that if she were elected prime minister she would work with him to fight terrorism, the AP reported.

Bhutto was Pakistan's prime minister twice, once between 1988 and 1990 and again from 1993 to 1996, and had been campaigning before elections next month. Earlier this year she returned to Pakistan from self-imposed exile. Just before her death she had given a speech to thousands of supporters, according to the reports.

The U.S. had been urging Musharraf to reach an accommodation with the opposition, particularly Bhutto, who was seen as having a wide base of support in Pakistan, the AP reported. Her party had been widely expected to do well in parliamentary elections set for next month.

Bhutto, the first female prime minister in the Muslim world when she was elected in 1988, was a member of what many considered to be Pakistan's preeminent political family. Her father was Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, a former prime minister of Pakistan, who was executed in 1979 after being deposed in a military coup. Both of her brothers died in mysterious circumstances. ■

The Filipino Star wishes to extend its condolences to the Pakistani community of Montreal & abroad on this tragic occasion.



Supporters of assassinated Pakistani opposition leader Benazir Bhutto cry during a gathering to mourn her death in Dubai, December 28, 2007

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Arroyo, Panlilio swap peace signs but still don't talk

December 22, 2007

Meeting for the first time after the controversial October 11 cash doles at Malacañang, President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo and Pampanga Governor Eddie Panlilio shook hands and exchanged greetings of peace at the 4 a.m. pre-Christmas Mass here on Saturday.

It was Arroyo who was seen initiating the peace greetings to local officials who joined her at the front pew of the Metropolitan Cathedral here.

She first shook hands with San Fernando Mayor Oscar Rodriguez, then with Panlilio and finally with Pampanga Representative Aurelio Gonzales. She sat beside Buhay Representative Carissa Coscolluela and Pangasinan Representative Rachel Arenas.

"It was mutual," Panlilio said of his and Arroyo's exchange of peace greetings.

Panlilio and Rodriguez later accompanied Arroyo toward the plaza where the giant lanterns of the villages of Telasbagan and San Felipe were displayed.

Arroyo, a native of Lubao town, was heard telling Coscolluela and Arenas how lanterns are made and how these are able to give out patterns of blinking lights.

It was a different scene altogether during breakfast at the Plaza de Arrozal of the City Hall, across the street from the church.

Arroyo and Panlilio, with San Fernando Archbishop Paciano Aniceto seated between them, did not talk in private in the entire 30 minutes that they

were together.

The President appeared to be addressing everyone in that table for 10 people. Panlilio was seen nodding as Arroyo spoke.

By way of courtesy, Panlilio said he did not open a topic or ask a question.

"We were talking as a group," he said, adding that he did not want to judge her attitude toward him that

the Senate's Blue Ribbon Committee, Panlilio told senators that he considered the money to be illegally disbursed because no one had shown strong proof of its source.

Sources in Pampanga said Panlilio had earned the ire of Arroyo. But the governor said he hoped that was not true.

"I deeply appreciate it that she joined

through the power of this world but through the simplicity of life, obedience to the will of God, and humility."

Without referring to anyone, the 70-year-old prelate said: "There is hope and the way to hope is by dialogue. That is our responsibility to Christ's community."

By 10 a.m., Arroyo led inaugural rites for the Nayong Pilipino sa Clark at the Expo Pilipino inside the Clark Freeport.

She was supposed to lead the opening of the park on November 30. The Nayong Pilipino Foundation advised her to cancel the plan due to expected bad weather, not because of the standoff that Senator Antonio Trillanes IV led at the Peninsula Manila a day before her scheduled visit here.

The Nayong Pilipino sa Clark occupies 13 hectares of the 60-hectare Expo Pilipino. It reuses the pre-colonial and colonial plazas of the Expo, which the Ramos administration built for the centennial of Philippine independence in 1998.

The foundation spent P40 million to improve the place and install new attractions.

The rest of the P3-billion Expo Pilipino remained unused, its business viability hobbled by allegations of corruption discovered during the Estrada administration.

Former President Joseph Estrada ordered the park closed in 1999 and Arroyo has tried to help turn it into an economic enterprise through the state-owned Clark Development Corp.

The Nayong Pilipino sa Clark has drawn 100,000 visitors since its opening last June 12. ■



President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo and Pampanga Gov. Eddie Panlilio (back to the camera) shake hands and greet each other "Peace be with you" before communion rites in a Christmas mass at the Metropolitan Cathedral in the City of San Fernando on Saturday, Dec 22, 2007.

morning.

On the still unresolved issue, Panlilio said he had not called the cash gift as bribe money or identified Arroyo as its source.

During the November 14 inquiry of

us, her kabalen (province mates) in the Mass," he said.

Arroyo has regularly attended the Missa de Gallo here since 2001.

In his homily, Aniceto reminded Catholics that the "way to God was not

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Isaac T. Goodine

Global Perspectives



So this is Christmas (War is over)

So this is Christmas
And what have you done
Another year over
And a new one just begun

And so this is Christmas
I hope you have fun
The near and the dear one
The old and the young

A very merry Christmas
And a happy New Year
Let's hope it's a good one
Without any fear

...by John Lennon and Yoko Ono

What a difference a year makes! This time last year I was in Manila for a conference on Ageing and Transition and someone came out with the observation that Life is what happens while we are planning what to do next. Transition is what we encounter as life happens—whether or not we are conscious of anything happening. So, much has happened since John and Yoko wrote and sang the lyrics to the much loved Christmas song that was intended to convey the message that, hopefully, (war is over) the new year would be a good one without any fear. What's that you say? War is not over? Ah yes but Stephen Harper has assured us that Canada's war will be over as soon as we pacify (or kill) the Taliban and win the hearts and minds of the people of Afghanistan. George W. Bush has assured the world that America will prevail—ultimately, and there will be freedom for all, someday. We are comforted to hear from these leaders but, in the meantime we must still concern ourselves with the period of transition that lies ahead.

Sixty percent of the people living in Canada today were not here yet when John and Yoko staged a "lie in" and stayed in bed for a week in

Fredericton, New Brunswick, to promote peace. The majority of today's Canadians were not born or had not yet immigrated here at that time, and it is only at this time of the year that we hear this particular message; So this is Christmas and what have you done? Thanks to modern technology old ideas can be brought forward and this Christmas message can be downloaded from the internet at:
www.youtube.com/watch?v=dBfEGE TyGjs

Since last year some progress has been made in my field of interest in promoting international education. After a rather long waiting period my credentials have been approved to teach in Quebec, specifically at Gilmore International College, and I look forward to that prospect since the College is also under renovation and improvement as the eighteenth anniversary of operations in Montreal approaches in January 2008.

Otherwise in my world, I have become a Board Member-at-Large for the International Educators Association of Canada (IEAC) and a Member of the Board of Directors of the Canada Philippine Business Council (CPBC), with a special portfolio for Business Education.

In a related development I have been able to secure a business arrangement with a company in the Philippines engaged in recruitment and placement of workers abroad and to link up with a firm based in Toronto established to facilitate placement of foreign workers in Canada. Altogether, the past year has afforded me an opportunity to contribute to education and diplomacy from a Global Perspective as I continue to network with colleagues and friends at home and abroad. For 75 year old Retiree — that's a good year.

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False promises for recent immigrants: Study reveals low wage job cycle, workplace rights violations

VANCOUVER, Dec. 10/CNW/ - In spite of high education levels, many recent immigrants to BC find themselves stuck in low wage jobs, with few meaningful protections in the workplace, according to

a new study released by the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives and the Philippine Women Centre.

Workplace Rights for Immigrants in BC: The Case of Filipino Workers reveals that despite a booming BC economy, recent immigrants to the province often find economic security elusive. They frequently work in unsafe conditions with little training or access to information about their rights. The study also finds that enforcement of the

Araw ng Migrante

Western Union and the Philippine Embassy in Ottawa recently welcomed over 200 Ottawa, Kingston and Montreal caregivers as well as migrant workers to Tahanang Rizal, the Philippine Ambassador's residence. It was a memorable day for our caregivers and migrant workers as it was filled with laughter, dancing and delicious Filipino food. It was also a great opportunity to spend time with each other, get to know the members

President for Philippines who came all the way from Manila just to attend this special event.

Two lucky attendees won Money Transfer Gift Certificates worth Php 3000 each courtesy of Western Union, the leader in money transfers in Canada. They both agreed that the process of sending money was really easy and convenient.



Philippine Ambassador Jose Brillantes addressed the crowd during the Araw ng Migrante at the Tahanang Rizal

of the Philippine Embassy and friends from Western Union.

Despite the cold weather, the whole day affair was fun-filled with games, door prizes and entertainment numbers from the Pastoral Care for Migrants, Mutyang Ina ng Migrante 2007 Candidates and Noypi band. Aside from the Philippine Ambassador, the event was greatly supported by the Minister and Consul General Joseph Gerard Angeles, Second Secretary and Consul Rhenita Rodriguez, Labor



Western Union Vice President and General Manager Brian Fox gave a short message to the caregivers and migrant workers

Representative Frank Luna, Settlement Manager Nasir Tarafder and of course the Western Union representatives headed by Brian Fox, Regional VP and General Manager of Western Union Canada, Bill Van Koot, Director of Operations and Patricia Riingen, Vice

Employment Standards Act (ESA) is effectively non-existent. None of the study's interviewees had made use of the English-only "self-help kit" (the only way to report violations to the Ministry of Labour and Citizens' Services), despite experiencing ESA violations.

"The provincial government's rollback of employment standards in 2002 means that many basic employment rights now exist only as 'paper-rights,' particularly for recent immigrants," says Habiba Zaman, SFU professor and co-author of the report.

"If no one has informed you of your rights and no one is actively enforcing them, how can you enjoy the



One of the lucky migrant worker receiving the Php 3000 Money Transfer Gift Certificate from Western Union representatives (left to right), Moises Calo - Director for Retail Marketing, Patricia Riingen - Vice President for Philippines, Brian Fox - Regional Vice President and General Manager and Daniel Fihn - Market Development



Caregivers and Migrant workers participating in one of the Western Union fun games during the Araw ng Migrante at the Tahanang Rizal



Patricia Riingen, Western Union Vice President for Philippines traveled all the way from Manila to thank the caregivers and migrants workers for their constant support.

protections that are supposed to exist for all workers in BC?" continues Zaman.

"Highly educated immigrants are arriving in Canada with the promise of good employment," says Cecilia Diocson, co-author of the report and executive director of the National Alliance of Philippine Women in Canada. "Instead, they are experiencing a severe transition penalty in the form of low-paying jobs, often with inadequate protections. This is a cycle that stretches into unsatisfactory employment for years and can eventually result in long-term economic hardship."



HEALTH & SCIENCE

Dr. Victor C. Gavino, Ph.D.
Professor, Université de Montréal
Dept. De Nutrition, Faculté de médecine

Virgin Coconut Oil

Virgin coconut oil, or VCO, is the current health food hot topic in Manila, alongside new trends such as glutathione injections or moringa oil, otherwise known as malunggay oil. It was therefore timely that the Editor of this paper asked that I write a piece on VCO, and this shortly before my wife and I were to leave for Manila on an invitation from the Philippine government to give a series of lectures on the topic, and to give advice to colleagues at the Ateneo de Manila and at UPDiliman on various options for research.

In June 2006, I had written an article concerning VCO for this column. In that article, I raised some questions concerning the Diet-Heart Hypothesis. For over 30 years, the Diet-Heart Hypothesis has been the guiding principle in public health policy as well as in the manner by which physicians manage heart disease. It is based on the almost unquestioned belief that high blood cholesterol is a primary cause of heart disease and in turn, that cholesterol and saturated fat in food are primary causes of high blood cholesterol. This principle is so ingrained in the thinking of the majority that I rarely meet anyone anymore who is not worried about his/her blood cholesterol and worried about fat calories in his/her diet, particular saturated fat. Coconut oil is about 98% saturated fat and therefore, VCO has an image problem among most if not all health professionals.

Today, you can find VCO in the shelves of just about any supermarket in Manila. VCO has made it to North American and European markets, particularly those that cater to the Filipino expatriate communities. I brought 3 bottles back to Montréal to try. One is unflavoured, manufactured by a process patented by UPLosBanos. The other two are flavoured, one jackfruit and the other sweet corn. I do not have information concerning the production method used for these flavoured varieties. The type of manufacturing is a potentially critical issue in VCO quality which I will explain later.

Although the bottles of VCO sold in the Philippines all carry a printed disclaimer of "no approved therapeutic claims", manufacturers place health claims on the labels anyway. Typical would be: 1) helps reduce the risk of heart disease; 2) boosts energy level and increases metabolism; 3) improves blood circulation; 4) helps control diabetes;

5) helps prevent bacterial, viral and fungal infections; 5) promotes healthy skin and scalp.

The health claims are for the most part based on testimonials. A testimonial is an individual's own description of his/her experience with the product in question. We do not deny the potential value of testimonials, but very often, it is impossible to weed out exaggerations from objective truth in any one's self-account of either a positive or a negative experience. Health claims must be based on well-designed clinical trials where for example, both the patient and the physician are unaware of whether they belong to a test group or a placebo group. Furthermore, the medical histories of the patients are taken into account when sorting out the results of the trial. These clinical trials are to be conducted in such a way that medical results will be as much as possible free from bias, personal opinion or even prejudice. In the case of VCO, such well-designed clinical trials are lacking. This is not to say that there haven't been so far any attempts to verify the health effects of VCO, but that we need a large number of clinical trials involving hundreds even thousands of patients in order to make valid health claims.

For starters, we need to study whether people whose daily diet regularly includes coconut oil exhibit more cases of chronic disease, e.g., heart disease, compared to people whose diet does not include coconut. They say that the Bicolanos, known for their high consumption of coconut do not suffer from a higher incidence of heart disease compared with other population groups in the Philippines. This is still hearsay. What we need is a survey of the food habits of the Bicolanos, their blood chemistries, and medical data on the incidence of heart disease in this region. If it turns out that among the Bicolanos, the amount of coconut one eats is linked to susceptibility to heart disease, this would be the end for VCO and all such products. If on the other hand, Bicolanos who eat the most coconuts exhibit the least susceptibility to heart disease, then this would be indicative of a protective effect of coconut oil against this malady.

I would like to return to the topic of VCO manufacture. I found out that there are 8 distinct methods of preparing VCO. In general, VCO is the oil contained in the white "cream" that rises to the top of "gata", which for the uninitiated, is coconut milk prepared by squeezing the liquid from grated coconut flesh. The big challenge in

VCO production is how to maximize the yield of oil from the "gata" without resorting to extreme treatments. I was told that a traditional method was to let the coconut milk sit out and ferment for about 2 weeks. The oil that separates is collected mechanically. Another method uses a machine called an expeller, which is essentially a "squeezer" able to squeeze the milk out of the coconut flesh. Another method calls for the use of a centrifuge where the "gata" is spun causing the oil to rise and the solids to sediment.

At this stage in VCO marketing where health claims are still based on testimonials, it is entirely possible that the effect of one brand produced by a given method might be different from the effect of another brand produced by a different procedure. In my conversation with the VCO association in Manila, we agreed that something should be done to standardize manufacturing procedures. There is for example a possibility that the fermentation procedure, because it is not standardized, might become tainted with a pathogen. The industry could be ruined if a batch of bottles resulted in many getting sick. Unfortunately, the manufacturers have so far been unwilling to sit together to work through their differences and preferences with respect to the procedures. We hope that for the sake of this fledgling industry, the stakeholders will see beyond their differences and begin to work together to make sure that VCO will not be a flash in the pan.

In a subsequent article, I will dig into the health issues to see if there is merit to some of the claims made for VCO. Later on I will explain the origins of the Diet-Heart Hypothesis and why we need to change our thinking on the subject.

Based on the report's findings and

From page 20 Immigrants

In consultation with immigrant-serving organizations, the study makes extensive policy recommendations, including:

- Eliminate the \$6 first-job wage, and increase the minimum wage to \$10 per

hour.

- Institute proactive monitoring teams who would randomly investigate workplaces for employment standards and Work Safe violations.

- Increase penalties for violations.
- Eliminate the "self-help kit" and allow workers to bring complaints about workplace violations directly to the Employment Standards Branch. Also, fund a community-based, non-profit system, which would provide assistance, including advocacy, to workers who believe their rights have been violated.

- Substantially increase public education of the ESA through information sessions, translation into appropriate languages, and extensive distribution. Restore the requirement that rights be posted at workplaces.

Workplace Rights for Immigrants in BC: The Case of Filipino Workers, by Habiba Zaman, Cecilia Diocson and Rebecca Scott is available at www.policyalternatives.ca

Multilingual versions of this release are available at

www.policyalternatives.ca.

Call Terra Poirier at 604-801-5121 x229 to arrange interviews with the following spokespeople:

- Habiba Zaman, report co-author, Associate Professor of Women's Studies, SFU

- Cecilia Diocson, report co-author, Executive Director of the National Alliance of Philippine Women in Canada

- Leah Diana, Vice-Chairperson, Philippine Women Centre of BC (PWC)

- Charan Gill, CEO, ProgressiveIntercultural Community Services Society (PICS)

- Sherman Chan, Director of Settlement Services, OSAIC

The study was produced as part of the Economic Security Project, a joint research initiative of the CCPA and Simon Fraser University, funded primarily by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC). This study also received a grant from the Vancouver Foundation, which significantly facilitated the research process.

For further information: Call Terra Poirier at (604) 801-5121 x229 to arrange interviews

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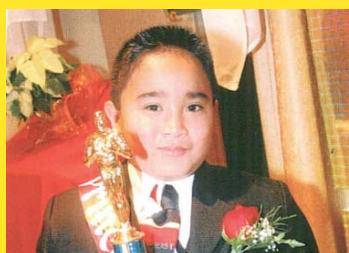
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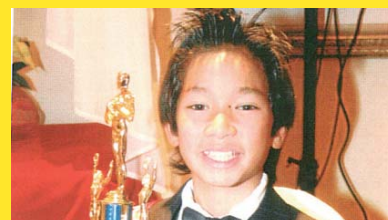
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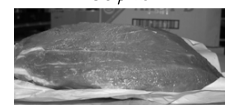
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