

Philippine troops brace for a major protest



Philippine soldiers placed on alert just in case a big protest materializes.

Manila, February 16, 2008
Hundreds of troops backed by tanks braced for a major protest yesterday demanding Philippine President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo's resignation, after officials revealed an alleged plot to assassinate her by militants linked to al-Qaeda.

A rally in Makati, Manila's financial district, by a broad spectrum of anti-Arroyo forces, including left-wing and Roman Catholic Church-backed groups, was triggered by corruption allegations linking top officials and Arroyo's husband in a brewing kickbacks scandal.

"These are telling signs that the people are again roused and are ready to take political action," said Renato Reyes, secretary-general of the left-wing Bayan, one of the organizers of the rally.

The protest comes a day after the military said intelligence

reports indicated communist rebels may infiltrate the rally. The military went on high alert after officials revealed an alleged plot by the al-Qaeda-linked Abu Sayyaf group and its Indonesia-based ally, Jemaah Islamiyah, to assassinate the president and attack embassies.

Captain Carlo Ferrer, spokesman for the military unit in charge of Manila security, said troops were on standby and more were available "depending on the situation."

The opposition dismissed the alleged plot as a means to discourage participation in the rally, and Reyes of Bayan called it part of the government's "scare tactics."

Political tensions heightened after former government consultant Rodolfo Lozada linked a former

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TOURISM

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Ambassador Brillantes visits the newly renovated Gilmore College



Guests who attended the blessing and inauguration of the newly renovated office of Gilmore International College on Saturday, January 26, 2008. His Excellency, Mr. Jose Brillantes, Philippine Ambassador to Canada (7th from left) was the guest of honor. Fr. Frank Alvarez (next to the Ambassador) presided over the blessing.

Montreal, January 26, 2008 - His Excellency, Mr. Jose Brillantes, Philippine Ambassador to Canada, was the guest of honor during the blessing and inauguration of its newly renovated headquarters of Gilmore International College on Queen Mary Road. Father Frank Alvarez presided over the ceremony and delivered a very inspirational invocation. Teachers students, and the Scouts Group Laging Handa were present. Refreshments were served to all the guests. Ms. Neva Nobleza, a Gilmore alumni, sent a bouquet of flowers and party sandwiches specially delivered by Snowdon Deli in time for the party.

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Gilmore College

ERRATUM

Ajennat Coiffure's address is
6210 Decarie
instead of 5210.

We regret the error that appeared in past issues of the N.A. Filipino Star.
The Editor



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EDITORIAL

What has race or gender got to do with leadership?

Which should prevail – “inspiration” or substance? race over gender? These are questions which are evoked by the current presidential nomination race. They are related to the age-old tradition of considering men as the ideal candidate for leadership, and the belief that women are too weak to be given any heavy responsibility to lead a nation. Very few women rose to great heights of power. There have been women leaders or heads of state but they are so rare that they are considered to be unusual. For this matter, women who are quite strong or decisive are given names that are not necessarily nice to hear. For example, Margaret Thatcher, former prime minister of Great Britain was often referred to as the “Iron Lady”. Cleopatra, who rose to power during the ancient times, was not often thought of as a wise ruler but as a beautiful “Queen of the Nile.” The Philippines maybe considered a more enlightened country as it has had two women presidents, Corazon Aquino and Gloria Arroyo but the most powerful nation in the world, the United States of America, has not had any woman president at all. Even Canada, considered to be one of the best places to live, has had a woman prime minister for a short time only in the person of Kim Campbell who did not last long in power. In government or in executive board rooms, it is still undoubtedly a “man’s world.” Therefore, when we have heard of Hilary Clinton as the most likely politician to become the first woman president of the United States, we thought it would be a momentous event in history. But suddenly a newcomer like Senator Obama has taken over the lead and we seem to be torn between two equally powerful personalities – should we opt for “charisma” and “inspiration” rather than “wisdom of experience” and “substance”? Which one is more able to lead a nation? If we base our answer on the polls and the results of the primaries, we may be inclined to say that Senator Obama is indeed the right person to run for the presidency. But how reliable are the polls? What are the qualities of leadership needed to make tough decisions? What has race and gender got to do with it?

It has been pointed out by some writers that both show strengths

and weaknesses. Senator Clinton is more specific, results oriented but Obama offers more inspiration. He has sold the idea of “yes we can” although ambiguous has attracted young voters’ imagination. Senator Clinton is better in debates, answering questions from the public while Senator Obama’s strength is in speech making. Senator Clinton represents experience, and knowledge of issues while Senator Obama has the ability to set young voters on “fire” but how far will this type of leadership go in the nitty-gritty world of economics and politics?

The verdict of who is more likely to win the presidency is not very clear at this point but it is interesting to note how women like Senator Clinton can be adversely affected by comments of people and the media. Right now, almost everyone is predicting an Obama win. Is the United States of America better prepared to accept a black president for the first time than a woman president?

If Senator Obama really wins the nomination, it will have reinforced the idea that leadership is gender-based, and we would have to conclude that it may take many more decades before people’s attitudes change. Regrettably, the progress of society is not advanced enough when it comes to our attitudes towards women leaders.

The current conditions of a lagging economy, endless threats of terrorism, and costly war in Iraq, require a kind of leadership of many dimensions. Any one who replaces George W. Bush will certainly be tested immediately. Perhaps, Senator Clinton is better prepared to take over because of her wide experience. She has lived a life full of challenges and survived. Senator Obama maybe full of enthusiasm for change but does he have enough experience that tested his ability to make tough decisions? His being of the male gender does not necessarily guarantee that he can.

In the final analysis, the United States will certainly be better off if the two candidates join forces to form a formidable team. Perhaps, race and gender are not really the issue but who can best serve the needs of a powerful nation.

Zenaida Ferry Kharroubi

Join the Sunday coffee club at the Filipino Solidarity Cooperative



Coop members meet over a cup of coffee every Sunday afternoon to share latest news and shop at the store.

The Filipino Solidarity Cooperative’s 2006 financial statements are now available and will be presented to the members at the general assembly to be held on Sunday, March 16 at 2:00 P.M. at the Famas Building, 4708 Van Horne Avenue, just opposite the Coop’s store. Your attendance is earnestly

requested. Please call 514-733-8915 to advise us of your attendance. Those who have not yet paid their \$100 qualifying shares are requested to bring their payment so that they can participate as a voting member at the meeting.

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Cooperative



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Lozada connects Palace to cover-up, 'abduction'

February 9, 2008

Senate witness Rodolfo Noel Lozada Jr. yesterday narrated on live national television a fixating tale of abduction and cover-up, whose trail leads, he claimed, all the way to Malacañang.

Lozada, with tears streaming from his eyes, said he sought and was given assistance by Deputy Executive Secretary Manuel Gaité, upon the advice of Environment Secretary Joselito Atienza—whose department supervises Philippine Forest Corp., where Lozada is president—to fabricate official travel documents to London so he could dodge a Senate summons to testify on the controversial national broadband deal.

away, explaining to his armed escorts that family members were also waiting for him at the airport.

"Hindi, hindi, ipinapakuha ka sa amin, (No, no, we are under orders to fetch you)," was what his "abductors" had told him in answer, as he was fetched from the tube to a restricted hallway and elevator that led down to the tarmac. "Basta sir, relax lang, relax lang. Wala kaming gagawin sa iyo (Just relax, sir, we will not harm you)."

A 1984 electronics and communications engineering graduate of the University of Santo Tomas, Lozada said he was whisked away in a Toyota Corolla Altis, with a driver and one officer riding in front, and him on the back seat.

a spell-bound Senate in Tagalog. "So naturally, my family was really, really alarmed."

Lozada said he told his brother to do his best to triangulate his radio signal as the Altis neared Southwoods Golf and Country Club.

"I suddenly remembered [the fate of publicist Salvador "Bubby"] Dacer," Lozada said, referring to the murdered publicist who was found near the area dead along with his driver in November 2000.

The Dacer family later accused then police chief, now Senator Panfilo Lacson of having masterminded the abduction.

After that text message, Lozada said, the armed escorts told him to stop sending text messages because they, too, were being intercepted by them. They continued driving around until they reached Los Baños, Laguna, where his armed guards received another phone call.

"Bring him back, bring him back. The media is too hot'," Lozada recalled the front seat escort ordering the driver in Tagalog.

On their way back, Lozada said their group stopped twice so Lozada could draft a letter, making it appear that he had requested for security assistance at the airport. Having accomplished what Lozada said was asked of him, the escorts then said: "Sir, we're turning you over to the police."

Lozada recalled Atienza having called him twice during the three-hour ride to assure him: "Jun, stop worrying, just relax. The people you're with are our people. Just relax."

Atienza, in a subsequent statement to the press, admitted having asked the police to provide security for Lozada, but denied discouraging Lozada from testifying before the Senate on the controversial national broadband network deal.

Lozada recalled, after having briefed Atienza about the national broadband network agreement between the government and China's ZTE Corp., that Atienza had warned him to keep his lips sealed, lest "the government fall to the opposition."

"There's a lot of distortion of genuine facts," Atienza protested. "There's no kidnapping at all. At this point, I'm really worried that the

public is getting a wrong impression because of the repeated claims that there [was] kidnapping."

Atienza likewise rejected allegations that Lozada's trip to Hong Kong was arranged to evade the Senate hearing on the broadband deal.

"He [Lozada] had requested for that trip. He asked for help before he even came home," Atienza said.

Lozada said his long-time friend and former boss, Commission on Higher Education chairman Romulo Neri, also called him while Lozada was being driven around by the armed men.

"Jun, calm your wife down," Lozada recalled Neri as advising him. "She's panicking in front of media. Call her."

He, in turn, told Neri that his wife Violeta could not do so until she sees him.

Lozada said his armed escorts dropped him around 9 p.m. at the Outback steak house in Libis, Quezon City where he was turned over to Supt. Paul Mascariñas and Neri's lawyer Antonio Bautista.

After dinner, Lozada said he asked Bautista if he could go home, but the lawyer advised against it because reporters may still be waiting. So Lozada asked that he be brought to La Salle Greenhills instead, where, unknown to his escorts, his children and wife had already sought sanctuary.

The following day, Lozada said his armed escorts, who kept vigil in La Salle as well, brought him to Bautista's office where he filled out blanks in an affidavit before signing the document. He said he had some reservations about the affidavit, but was told by Bautista to just sign it "for the comfort of Malacañang."

He was then brought back to Greenhills, where Mascariñas returned later that night with a ready-made letter addressed to the National Police, with Lozada asking for police protection.

Mascariñas returned a second time with another letter, this time asking Lozada's sister Carmen, to sign it, which she refused with much protestation.

"I did not reach the age of 60 just so I could sully my own name," Lozada said, quoting his sister. ■



Rodolfo Lozada Jr., a witness in a Senate corruption inquiry that has implicated President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo's husband, cries as he testifies before the Philippine Senate Friday Feb 8, 2008, in Manila, Philippines.

But Lozada only flew to Hong Kong and, on Atienza's reading of the situation that the controversy had already died down, returned a few days later on Feb. 5, into the arms of trouble.

Atienza, by Lozada's account, had failed to advise him that a group of security men would pick up Lozada at the airport to prevent a waiting Senate team to arrest him.

Lozada, who until that day had refused to appear before the Senate, said he protested at being whisked

He said he was brought around the airport complex and onto the adjacent Villamor Air Base while his abductors listened to communication equipment that, he claimed, allowed them to even eavesdrop on the radio transmissions made by the Senate team.

"They [abductors] told me they were going to bring me to Dasmariñas, Cavite, so I put my cell phone on silent mode and sent my brother a text message saying someone had abducted me," he told



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elections chief and Arroyo's husband to an allegedly overpriced US\$330 million government broadband contract in Senate testimony. Both men denied the allegations.

Arroyo has survived three opposition impeachment bids and four attempted power grabs, mainly because of support from loyal generals and a strong political coalition during her seven years in power.

She has been accused of rigging the 2004 election and implicated by opposition politicians in a series of corruption scandals, along with family members. Arroyo rejected the allegations and vowed to finish the last two years of her term.

Coup rumors have swirled again.

In a statement from detention, army Brigadier General Danilo Lim, former navy Lieutenant Antonio Trillanes and other military officers linked to previous coup attempts voiced support for protesters.

"To all the leaders of the nation and our countrymen, join us in calling for Gloria Macapagal Arroyo to step down. Let us continue the fight for truth and justice," it said.

Military chief of staff General Hermogenes Esperon said on Thursday the assassination plot against Arroyo allegedly involved a sniper ready to attack when an opportunity arises.

Arroyo's planned visit to the Philippine Military Academy this weekend in the northern city of Baguio was canceled, and her remaining schedule was "under assessment," said Brigadier General Romeo Prestoza, head of the Presidential Security Group.

He said police uncovered the assassination plot last week, adding: "It's not only the president who is the target, but also other people ... and embassies."

National police chief Avelino Razon said that the plot to kill the president and to bomb embassies was contained in an Arabic document found in a parking lot by a security guard.

From Page 1	Gilmore
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Gilmore International College is working on its license to offer the Professional Integration Program (PIP) to foreign graduates of nursing. It is negotiating with CDI College for the use of their laboratory facilities. Once they agree and sign an agreement with Gilmore College, the PIP program will be submitted to the Order of Nurses for approval. Then it will be submitted to the Ministry of Education for further processing.

Although it is not yet known how long the whole processing will take, it is hoped that the program will be ready for September 2008 or January 2009.

As soon as the Education permit is approved, Gilmore International College will be working

on the student exchange program with universities in the Philippines. During the 3rd Ambassadors and Consuls General Tour to the Philippines, Mrs. Zenaida Kharroubi started an initial exploratory talks with a number of universities, namely, Tarlac State University, Manila Central University, University of Sto. Tomas, and Far Eastern University. Her idea is to offer nursing graduates an opportunity to practice their profession directly instead of going through the Live-In Caregiver Program to immigrate to Canada. If their purpose is to work in Canada, they can go through the student exchange program instead of working as caregivers for two to three years before going back to nursing. It has been proven that after three years of not practicing one's profession, it is difficult to go back in it. If they want to work in Canada, in particular, in Quebec where there is an additional language requirement, they will have a better rate of success if they come as students, study French for one year in the Philippines and then continue their language training at Gilmore International College while they are in the PIP (Professional Integration Program).

Experts have been issuing warnings that Canada will be facing a critical shortage of professional and skilled people. When baby boomers retire, there will be a big demand for qualified people to replace them. The most vulnerable area is the healthcare system. We are therefore better prepared for the future if schools that are community based like Gilmore International College will be supported by the different government agencies responsible for immigration, accreditation, and licensing.

Undoubtedly, a tremendous amount of work is needed to put everything into place. We need to have a good team. Fortunately, Gilmore International College has a very devoted teaching staff in nursing. With an excellent track record of professional experience in the field, of nursing care, they will serve as the nucleus of Gilmore International College's development as a major player in international education.

We have just received an invitation to participate in a seminar entitled Foreign Credential Recognition: the Ontario Model and the Role of the Fairness Commissioner which will take place on Wednesday, March 5, 2008 from 8:30 AM to 12:30 PM at the Holiday Inn Select, 99 Avenue Viger West, Montreal. The Hon. Jean Augustine, P.C., Fairness Commissioner of Ontario and former federal Minister of Multiculturalism, has accepted the invitation to be the keynote speaker at this seminar. She and three senior representatives of her Office will present the Ontario government's recent measures to improve the recognition of foreign credentials and immigrants' professional

integration. These measures include new legislation to require 34 regulated professions in Ontario to have a licensing process that has fair, open and timely assessment of credentials of foreign trained professionals, loans to help applicants, internship programs, and the creation of the Independent Commissioner position and Fairness Commission to monitor and ensure fair registration and the orders' compliance with the law.

The purpose of the seminar is to explore effective models and strategies necessary in Quebec, especially where monitoring and reporting for greater public accountability and access are concerned. These models can help us develop ways to eliminate systemic barriers to fair foreign credential recognition and promote newcomers; fair access to the professions and, thus, the labor market.

The seminar will also feature a panel discussion on barriers to integration, current and upcoming avenues for improvement, and recommendations for change. Panel members are:

Mr. Silvano Tocchi, Director of the Foreign Credential Recognition Division of Human Resources and Social Development Canada;

Ms. Patricia Rimok, President of the Conseil Interculturel du Québec;

Ms. Marie-Josée Duplessis, Coordonnatrice - volet integration, Table de concertation des organismes au service des personnes réfugiées et immigrantes, and

A senior representative of the Ministère de l'Immigration et des Communautés culturelles du Québec.

CRARR in partnership with RBC, Royal Bank, the Conseil des relations interculturelles du Québec, the Ministère de l'Immigration et des Communautés culturelles and the Ministère de l'Emploi et de la Solidarité sociale du Québec, organized this high level event which is addressed to representatives of community agencies serving newcomers, professional corporations, unions, educational institutions, and government organizations at the provincial and federal levels.

Gilmore International College represented by its director-general and founder, will definitely be attending this important event. Mr. Fo Niemi, Executive Director of CRARR, sent this invitation to the North American Filipino Star.

Seats are limited to 70. Deadline for registration is February 29. Special registration fees are available for foreign-trained immigrants who wish to attend as independent participants.

For information on this seminar, or to request a registration form, you may call 514-939-3342

From Page 2	Cooperative
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In order to have more merchandise for sale, the Coop needs a considerable amount of money to be invested in stock and purchase of equipment such as a meat counter and vegetable counter. The financial statement shows that there is a big deficit in the cash flow. The only immediate solution to this deficit is to increase membership and to issue interest bearing shares to members who can invest in the Coop. If there are 50 members with \$1000 each to invest, a \$50 000 capital can be quickly raised and will be used to buy the most popular fast selling items. With a fast turn over of inventory, profits will be generated and lead to a better cash flow position.

In addition to the interest-bearing preferred shares to be offered to the membership soon, the Coop will also present a prepaid grocery service. But this idea will only be feasible if we have enough members who will be placing a minimum \$10 prepaid order. Considering that it takes about a week to order merchandise from Toronto and that there is an additional transportation cost to be covered, a minimum order of \$7,000 to \$8 000 is needed in order to save on freight charges. For example, one skid of merchandise costs \$185.00 but if two or more skids are ordered, the unit cost goes down, ie., as low as \$65 per skid. Again, we need the participation of more members to make it work.

At the end of December 2006, we have 595 members. During the year 2007, we only received 14 new members. During the first two months of 2008, we have received 15 new members, most of them are students and teachers of Gilmore International College. We are appealing to all Filipinos, whether they live in Cote des Neiges area or not, to become a member. With a small investment of \$100 each, we are actually building a future for our community. Many benefits will be enjoyed by all if we all work together. Let us make the Cooperative a symbol of our unity and let us disprove the common belief that Filipinos are not united, and they do not patronize their fellow citizen's business. We have the power to change such a negative attitude. The only way to do this is to start believing in ourselves. After living abroad for many years, it is about time that we mature as a community. We should now focus on building rather than destroying one another. Through the cooperative movement, we can do this. We Filipinos can also show that we can build a future together, that we can be a good example for other communities to follow.

With a strong commitment from the present management team and with the support of the membership, we believe that we can overcome all the hurdles that have been placed in our way.

Zenaida Ferry Kharroubi
Secretary-Treasurer
Filipino Solidarity Cooperative

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Hyatt 10 resurfaces, urges Arroyo cabinet to resign

February 18, 2008

In a move that could further stir political turbulence, about 60 former government officials on Sunday said the Arroyo administration had "gone wild" and urged Cabinet members who could no longer stomach its supposed greed to resign, declaring: "It's time to cut clean. It's time to go."

The group made its appeal after

protesters, appeared to mark an escalation of the campaign to force President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo to step down following allegations of massive bribery in the now-scuttled \$329-million broadband project in which her husband, Jose Miguel "Mike" Arroyo, was implicated.

The Arroyos have denied any wrongdoing.



Rodolfo Lozada Jr., right, former President Corazon Aquino, center, and La Salle Brother Armin Luistro, clench their fists as a nationalist song is played during a mass to show support for Lozada Sunday Feb. 17, 2008 at De La Salle University, San Juan east of Manila.

thousands at a Mass rallied behind key Senate witness Rodolfo Noel Lozada Jr., and a priest declared that a government that "suppresses the truth ... loses its authority" to govern.

The moves, combined with Friday's rally in Makati City by 10,000

The call for Cabinet officials to resign and the wave of support for Lozada came on the eve of the resumption of Senate hearings into the controversial National Broadband Network (NBN) deal with China's ZTE Corp.

"Today, we can no longer stay silent. We can no longer ignore the reality of a government gone wild, wreaking havoc on our rights and institutions in a climate of impunity," said a statement read by former Ambassador to the United States Albert del Rosario.

The statement was issued in the name of a group that styles itself as the "La Salle 60."

"We call on all government officials -- Cabinet secretaries, undersecretaries, heads of agencies -- who know about these anomalous transactions to join the heroic stand of Jun Lozada, to come forward and speak out," they said in the two-page statement.

"We call on all those who know about the extrajudicial killings and disappearances to go public and tell the truth."

Moral decadence

"We call on all those who can no longer endure this wrongful governance, with its structures of evil and un-moderated greed: It is time to cut clean! It is time to go!"

A mass resignation in 2005 of the so-called "Hyatt 10" -- comprising Cabinet members and other high officials -- in the wake of the "Hello Garci" election fraud scandal shook the Arroyo presidency but failed to bring her down.

The ex-government officials involved in Sunday's action included some former members of Ms Arroyo's political family while the others had been in the three administrations that preceded hers.

"In a sense, all Jun Lozada did was to confirm what we already know: Our country is sliding into moral decadence. He also confirmed the systematic destruction of our democratic institutions and the systematic nature of our problems," the statement said.

"We have seen this in the wanton disregard of checks and balances; abuse of the powers of the President; the cooptation through patronage and outright bribery of the other branches of government; politically sponsored corruption, facilitated, not thwarted, by bureaucratic procedures; the naked use of power and authority through the PNP (Philippine National Police), PSG (Presidential Security Group), NAI (Ninoy Aquino International Airport), among others, to strangle the truth, and the deployment of Cabinet, sub-Cabinet officials, and the military to obstruct justice and cover up illegal orders and act."

The group said the "ephemeral gains" brought by the strength of the peso and an expanding economy had not improved the lives of most Filipinos.

Democracy under attack

The statement followed similarly sharp denunciations of the Arroyo administration recently issued by big business groups, such as the Makati Business Club.

Lozada, a former government consultant, has tagged First Gentleman Mike Arroyo and former Commission on Elections Chair Benjamin Abalos Sr.

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Hyatt 10

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It was originally known as 'Katugasan' coming from tugas, molave trees that covered the hills. The Spanish called it 'Isla de Fuego' due to the bushel of fireflies they found there.

Known for its scenic beauty and archaic churches, Siquijor is also blessed with natural and historical attractions. Its unspoiled environment and the warm hospitality of its people never fail to beckon visitors from all over. The serenity of the whole province makes it ideal for a perfect getaway.

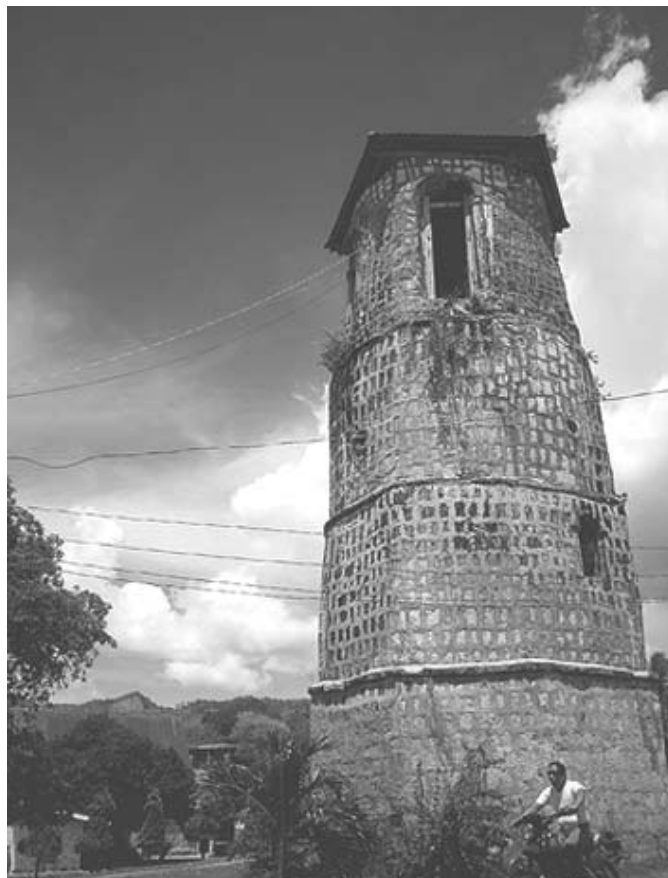
It lures nature lovers and adventurers to explore its numerous caves, springs and rivers, and to climb up Mount Bandilaan, the highest peak at the center of the island. Being a coral island, it also invites diving enthusiasts to explore the reefs



surrounding the island, teeming with marine life which have been remarkably left untouched. For tourists who just want to lay back and relax, the island offers a never-ending stretch of white sand beaches, all 102 kilometers of shorelines surrounding the island. It also provides a trip to the past with the old Cang-Isok house, and **St Isidore Labrador Parish Convent** in Lazi which was constructed by the Spaniards in 1884 and it is reputed to be the biggest and one of the oldest convents in the Philippines. It is believed to have been the vacation house for the Diocese's priests at that time.

Salagdoong Beach Resort which is one of the island's most frequented beaches which boasts of crystal-clear waters, powdery white sand, high rock formations and favorite diving spots.

Capilay Spring is a natural spring converted into a public swimming pool at the heart of **San Juan** town. Its cold water with the nearby shades of trees offers a refreshing delight to picnickers especially during summer.



Old stone bellfry, part of St. Francis of Assisi Church, located in the capital, Siquijor



San Isidro Labrador Church and Convent (Lazi, Siquijor) - Reputed to be the biggest and among the oldest in the country, it has been declared a historical landmark by the Philippine Historical Commission.



The sunlit halls of San Isidro are filled with a rich history

Cambugahay Falls, located near Lazi, is composed of several levels of waterfalls and is considered enchanted by the locals, as it is secluded and relatively unexplored.

With such varied tourist attractions, Siquijor looms as the playground of the Central Visayas region. ■



Solili Festival - Taking after the traditions in Lazi, Siquijor, the Solili Binalaye is a marriage ritual where both parents of the bride and groom prepare a fest and take turns in advising the couple on the realities of married life. The rituals are depicted in a street-dancing competition that serves as the highlights of the week-long Solili Festival and Araw ng Siquijor Charter Day Celebration.



Kambugahay Falls, Siquijor consists of 3 or 4 successive falls like this one where you can swim and dive



Capilay Spring Park (San Juan, Siquijor) - A natural, spring-fed swimming pool situated at the heart of the town plaza where local people converge during weekends for a swim in the cool waters of the lake or simply sit under the shade in the spring park and people-watch



The sky and the sea meet at this beautiful golden sand beach, just a 5 min walk from vacation homes in Lazi, Siquijor.



Siquijor Island, view from the mountains - known for its vast shores, its laid-back & serene lifestyle, the island is a mystical place, a true haven for the weary soul.



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FILIPINO STAR SHOWBIZ GOSSIP

Heath Ledger's pinay maid tells her story

If you thought Heath Ledger's suddenly-famous housekeeper, Teresa Cariño Solomon, is a Filipino, you were right.

Solomon, 56, was the last person to have seen the late *Brokeback Mountain* actor alive on Jan. 22, shortly before he was found dead on the same day in his swank fourth-floor apartment at 421 Broome Street in the SoHo neighborhood in Manhattan.



Heath Ledger

Since that tragic day, Solomon had been hounded by journalists, some of whom followed her even on subway trains all the way to her apartment building here in the Astoria section of Queens, New York, where she's been living for the last 12 years.

Solomon, a native of Mangaldan, Pangasinan, hesitated to talk to *The Filipino Reporter* at first but later agreed to the interview on condition that she wouldn't be asked about the death of Ledger since it is under investigation. There's still no word on the cause of the actor's death. An autopsy report is due anytime now.

"It's hard to talk because you know how the media can twist words," said the petite Filipino-American. "I already told the police everything I know."

Solomon said she was shaking and unable to sleep a day after the death of Ledger, whom she remembered as "a very nice man, very neat and well-organized with his personal things."

She told *The Reporter*, "I cried when the emergency personnel said he's dead because I just couldn't believe that he's gone," she told *The Reporter*. "I even told them to check him thoroughly because they might be wrong." Reports said Solomon had only worked for Ledger for several months doing light cleaning and laundry.

Solomon won't say the exact month she was hired by the actor, but said she was recommended to Ledger by the superintendent of Ledger's

apartment building.

"I was told I'd be working for Heath Ledger," she recalled. "Of course, I was honored. He's famous and a respected actor, and I saw *Brokeback Mountain*." Solomon said she went to Ledger's place once a week, every Tuesday.

"His place was always clean that's why I told him, 'What else am I going to do here?'" she recalled with a smile. "He's also very good-looking. He really looks like a Hollywood leading man." Solomon, who also keeps the homes of a number of wealthy families in New York, came to the US in 1985, after working for three years in Greece at the home of the Saudi Arabian ambassador in Athens. Before that, she worked as a domestic helper in Hong Kong.

She became an American citizen when an employer sponsored her years ago as a nanny for a young boy.

"I've been a housekeeper almost all my life and I'm proud of it," said Solomon, who was a Commerce sophomore when she stopped to work as a domestic. "This is a decent job and I earn a decent living. I have a nice apartment. I have a nice family. And I have a quiet life."

Solomon is married to her townmate Rogelio Solomon who works as a store clerk. She has five children from her first marriage. One of the children works in the US while the rest are in Pangasinan. Solomon said she is planning to visit the Philippines later this year and spend New Year with her children in Pangasinan. She said that her eldest daughter received a kidney transplant two years ago.



Teresa Solomon (left)

According to the police, Solomon had arrived at Ledger's \$24,000-a-month apartment with her own key at approximately 12:30 p.m. of Jan. 22 to do household chores.

On that tragic day, police said Solomon entered the bedroom at around 1 p.m. to change a light bulb in the adjacent bathroom, and saw Ledger face down on the bed, with a sheet pulled to his shoulders, and snoring. Police said she left the room

without thinking anything was wrong. Masseuse Diana Wolozin arrived at approximately 2:45 p.m. to give Ledger a massage.

When Ledger did not emerge by 3 p.m., Wolozin knocked on his door but got no response. When she called his cellphone and also got no answer, Wolozin entered Ledger's bedroom and began to set up the massage table, and tried to awaken the actor who was unresponsive.

Police said Wolozin first called Ledger's close friend, actress Mary-Kate Olsen, whose number was programmed into Ledger's cell phone.

Olsen, who was in California at the time, replied she would call her security men. After again attempting to waken Ledger, Wolozin called Olsen again briefly, and at 3:26 p.m. called 911. Medical workers moved Ledger to the floor, used a defibrillator and CPR, and pronounced Ledger dead at 3:36 p.m.

Police said they found six types of

prescription drugs, including pills to treat insomnia and anxiety in the bathroom and that there were "no obvious signs" of suicide, nor did they suspect foul play.

They also found a rolled-up \$20 bill on the floor near the bed. Rolled-up bills are often used to snort coke or other drugs. A toxicology test found no drugs on the bill. There was no evidence of alcohol use and no illegal drugs were found.

An initial autopsy on Jan. 23 proved inconclusive at determining Ledger's cause of death. The medical examiner's office stated it would take about 10 to 14 days to complete the investigation.

Police said the Australian-born actor probably died sometime between 1 p.m. and 2:45 p.m. of what authorities say may be an accidental drug overdose.

Ledger's body was flown to his native Australia where it was laid to rest.

LJ Reyes' handler implies posing for sexy mag to boost career



After her breakup with Alfred Vargas, the sweet "Starstruck" teen star

LJ Reyes said she's ready to pose for FHM, as suggested by GMA Artist Center to give her career an extra boost, like what happened to Kat-rina Halili and Iwa Moto. But she has since changed her mind and at the thanksgiving party for "Zaido, Pulis Pangkalawakan", she said she won't do the sexy pictorial anymore.

"Ayaw talaga ng family ko," she added. "Even our relatives in the States told me na whatever FHM would pay me, tatapatan na lang daw nila ng gayunding halaga. To begin with, hindi naman talaga ako makakalaban kina Katrina at Iwa dahil wala akong big boobs na gaya ng sa kanila. Happy na rin ako sa takbo ng career ko at' di ko kailangang sumikat sa pagpapa-sexy." ■

Gretchen back in Tonyboy's arms

That's what Gretchen Barretto told those close to her the other day when she decided to stop seeing the "dashing businessman" linked to her by the grapevine, something she admitted only to her confidantes but never to the media.

"I have come to my senses," Gretchen was quoted as explaining why she decided to go back to Tonyboy Cojuangco, her beloved for more than a decade, by whom she has a pre-teen daughter, Dominique.

Not that Gretchen had left her and Tonyboy's Dasmariñas Village (Makati City), even if, according to rumors, she has been "sleeping over" at the condo unit of the "dashing businessman" who is offering her what Tonyboy has been withholding all these years — marriage.

A confidante of Gretchen's said that the couple has an "arrangement," whatever it is, and that Tonyboy "tolerates" what Gretchen has been reported to be doing, until she "went beyond limits" and infuriated Tonyboy who started to be affected by the ugly controversy Gretchen maybe unwittingly (or "deliberately") creating with her indiscretion.

"You see," said the confidante, "Tonyboy is very much in love with her.



Gretchen Barretto

Love can be blind...and deaf."

Will Gretchen's "coming to her senses" derail her ongoing negotiation with ABS-CBN (for a TV show), Star Cinema (for a movie) and Star Records (for the release of her CD)?

Knowing Gretchen's unpredictability (she isn't called La Greta for nothing), only heaven can tell. ■

Vicki Belo & Hayden Kho: Loving under the knife



Medicine and romance has always been a good onscreen mix. From the charming klutziness of "Nurse Betty" to the heart wrenching lives of the Grey's Anatomy cast, people just can't seem to get enough of romance in the ICU—or so they think. Sometimes, taste in film doesn't necessarily reflect taste in life.

Lovers Vicki Belo and Hayden Kho Jr. can both attest to that. Both beauty doctors and both in love, the twosome seemed to be the perfect match. Well, at least before the world got to take a peek into their birth certificates. Eyebrows raised and heads turned the wrong way when they found out that the celebrity doctor was dating a guy 22 years her junior.

Rumors – which include Hayden's alleged attraction towards Vicki's daughter, his interest in her well-established medical empire, and other nasty stories – immediately spread like wildfire. Although most stories made the twosome look like your typical gold digging May-December telenovela couple, Vicki remained unfazed. Her long years in the showbiz spotlight have taught her well enough to ignore stories of malicious intent. Hayden on the other hand seems more affected. "I don't understand people's obsession with numbers. Why can't they believe that people actually fall in love, regardless of their age?" he questions.

Despite the controversies that surround them, Vicki seems content with the haven she found in Hayden. According to her, Hayden is the most

mature, sensible, and talented man she has ever met. Vicki also confessed that he has fulfilled all three things that she has always wished a man would do for her. "First, he already cooked for me. Second, he serenaded me — every week on national TV," she explains. As for the third one, the couple blushingly kept it a secret.

Vicki also admits that Hayden usually returns gifts to her, especially when he deems it too expensive. One of these return-to-sender presents is a luxury SUV. "I told him that if he really didn't want the car, he might as well take it for a drive anyway, thinking that no guy could ever resist this kind of car after sitting behind the wheels," she says. The next morning, the car returned with a sweet little thank-you-but-I'm-still-not-taking-it note.

Vicki also says that Hayden is far more mature when it comes to attitude, perspective, and way of life. Instead of her teaching him valuable life lessons, it's usually the other way around. "He's even conservative when it comes to dressing me up," she adds half-jokingly.

When not busy with work or traveling around the world, Vicki and Hayden spend time like a settled couple. They spend most of their quality moments lounging around in each other's homes, lazily cuddling when time permits. Sometimes, they also share free time with Hayden's family. "We've grown quite close to each other, especially me and his mother," Vicki adds.

No matter how happy they are with their three-year-long relationship, the couple admits that wedding bells won't be ringing anytime soon for them. Vicki, who was once married to businessman Atom Henares, says that marriage has a tendency to complicate things. Hayden has no problem with such hesitation, claiming that he's happy with anything, as long as it's with Vicki.

Hayden gave Vicki a very expensive watch as a present, so expensive that he almost maxed out his savings account. However, this is nothing compared to the gift he promises her every day. "I promised, 'Vicki, I'll never let you grow old,'" says Hayden. As such, he spends much time and effort traversing the globe in search of the best anti-aging knowledge. "The research he does is

far more complicated than cosmetic surgery. It's on a hormonal level," reveals Vicki.

After mastering the art of slowing the aging process internally, the couple will introduce the latest in anti-aging technology through the Belo medical group. "This time, our patients won't just leave the clinic looking young and beautiful. They'll leave feeling young from the inside out," Hayden says.

As far as credit goes, the 28 year-old doctor doesn't seem to have a care in the world. "Vicki has always been my idol. She has inspired me to be a cosmetic surgeon. I don't care if I become tagged as her wingman forever," he says. With this, Vicki finds in Hayden a comrade that will help her fulfill her lifelong legacy of making the Filipino even more beautiful. ■

Alessandra denies going after ex-boyfriend



Alessandra De Rossi

When we last talked to Alessandra de Rossi on the set of "Kamandag," where she plays Elinor, the tormentor of Lily (Maxene Magalona), she said she's happy being loveless as boys only make her life complicated.

So what's this we hear that she's so desperate to kiss and make up with ex-BF Jeremy Marquez when they saw each other at the Davao Pearl Farm over the weekend? She reportedly stayed at Jeremy's side while they were swimming and they were soon kissing and embracing each other. But the following morning, Alex made a scene on the beach and had a big fight with Jeremy who she slapped in front of onlookers. This is said to have been recorded by a TV cameraman and will

be shown in "Startalk" this afternoon.

Alex later got so drunk and had breakdown in the restroom, vomiting, and crying inconsolably. She kept on saying that she still loves Jeremy. As they were leaving the island the next day, Alex made another scene and threw her iPod and cellphone into the sea. "Nagwawala siya kaya iniwan na lang doon sa Pearl Farm to pacify her and she returned to Manila the following day na lang," says our source.

Those who saw her making a fool of herself in Davao don't know whether they'll pity her or hate her for her unwarranted behavior. But Alex insists it's Jeremy who's trying to reconcile with her, calling her up repeatedly even before they went to Davao. "Siyang nangungulit sa akin at araw-araw nagmamakaawa sa text ng 'Hindi ko kayang wala ka. Mahal na mahal kita.' I never wish na we'd reconcile. Siya ang gustong balikan ko siya but I won't kasi he treats me like sh*t. At hindi rin totooong nag-away kami in public. Kung aawayin ko siya, hindi sa harap ng maraming tao."

But those who saw her in Davao don't believe her and they are firm in saying she's the one who kept on approaching Jeremy even when he's already dancing with other girls. "What she needs is therapy as it appears that she's the one who hasn't moved on," says one concerned friend. "Marami na siyang nakakaaway kaya walang maniniwala sa kanya." ■

Women in love: Aiko now happy



Aiko Melendez

Aiko Melendez is on cloud nine these days. The actress was in high spirits when interviewed by The Buzz last Sunday. The reasons are obvious. She is in good terms now with ex-husband Martin Jickain. She is super friends with Jomari Yllana, and if rumors were to be believed, she is playing beautiful music with Bulacan Vice Mayor Patrick Meneses.

"Martin and I are now okay. We text and we are civil with each other. May closure na talaga. And if we did not work out as husband and wife, we are good as friends. At least for

Marthena," says Aiko.

Late last year, Aiko and Martin engaged in a venomous word war while they were in the process of separation. "I have no more bitterness in my heart. I think the reason why I'm happy right now is because I'm no longer mad with Martin. There should be no room for hatred. We are moving on."

Some showbiz observers, however, believe that the reason why Aiko is super happy these days is because of Patrick. "I don't deny that Patrick and I go out together. We enjoy

each other's company." She and Patrick are friends, she says. And she is not in a hurry to fall in love again. "Ayokong madaliin. Pag-ready na ang lahat, why not?," she asks.

Though she is working hard as councilor of Quezon City, Aiko does not discount the possibility of working in front of the cameras again. There are projects that are on the negotiating table. "But my work as a councilor is my top priority. I want to prove more because I know I can do more." ■

Filipino Star Photo Gallery



Exotic flower arrangement given by two Gilmore alumni, Aleli & Neva Nobleza.



Father Frank Alvarez, P.M.E., performs the blessing ceremony and delivers an invocation during the inauguration of Gilmore International College, January 26, 2008.



Souvenir photo of Hilda Veloso, Zeny Kharroubi and Nida Butaran.



Gilmore alumni Juvy Vales with her family: children Marc Alexandre, Jean Patrick, Louis Benjamin, and husband Louis Philippe Durocher



From left: Mary Joy Lizarondo, Riza Esmeralda, Zenaida Kharroubi, Ramon Vicente and Joselito Sarto. Background picture of Sto. Nino calendar sent by Ana Lizarondo from PI.



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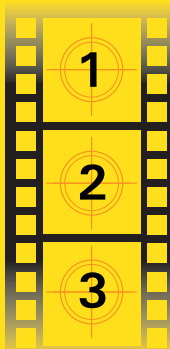


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Chicken Adobo Aloha



3/4 k chicken, cut into serving portions 1 can (234 g) DEL MONTE Fresh Cut Pineapple Chunks, drained (reserve syrup) 12 cloves garlic, crushed and fried 1/2 cup oil MARINADE 6 cloves garlic, crushed 1/4 cup DEL MONTE Red Cane Vinegar 1 Tbsp soy sauce 1 tsp iodized fine salt (or 1 Tbsp iodized rock salt) 1/2 tsp peppercorns, crushed reserved pineapple syrup

Procedures:

1 MARINATE chicken for 30 minutes. Drain and reserve marinade. 2 FRY chicken in oil until golden brown. Combine chicken with marinade, then simmer until tender. 3 ADD DEL MONTE Fresh Cut Pineapple Chunks. Top with fried garlic. Note: For more Filipino Recipe Visit Del Monte Web site <http://www2.kitchenomics.com/>.

Fishball

Sweet and Sour Sauce

Ingredients

1/2 cup vinegar
1/2 cup brown sugar
1 tablespoon catsup
11/2 tablespoon flour
3 cloves garlic
3-4 pcs siling labuyo
1/2 teaspoon ground pepper



Preparation

1. Pour vinegar into pan
2. Dissolve sugar
3. Low-medium heat setting
4. Dissolve catsup in 1/4-cup H2O
5. Mix catsup with vinegar and sugar in pan. Slowly simmer.
6. Dissolve flour in 1/4-cup H2O, then add to mixture, stir.
7. Turn to high heat for 10 seconds or until consistency is just right.
8. Add ground pepper, minced garlic and chopped sili.

Enjoy!!!

Puto Bumbong



Ingredients:

1 Kilogram malagkit (glutinous) rice, mixed with 125 grams ordinary rice
1 pc mature coconut, shredded
butter or margarine violet food coloring, banana leaves, water

salt, sugar

How to cook puto bumbong:

Soak malagkit and ordinary rice mixture in salted water with violet food coloring for 1 hour. Let dry overnight by putting inside a flour sack. Put something heavy on top to squeeze out water. Mixture is ready for cooking the following morning. Heat steamer (lansungan) with enough water. Put a small amount of rice mixture inside bamboo tubes (bumbong). Attached bamboo tubes to lansungan or steamer.

When steam comes out of bamboo tubes, remove and immediately push

out puto bumbong. Top with coconut shred and sugar before serving. Puto bumbong photo Puto bumbong is a dish made from purpled-colored ground rice cooked in bamboo tubes that are placed on a special steamer-cooker. Then, they are removed from the bamboo tubes, spread with butter and sprinkled with sugar and niyog (grated coconut). They are then wrapped in wilted banana leaves which will keep them warm and moist until ready to be eaten.



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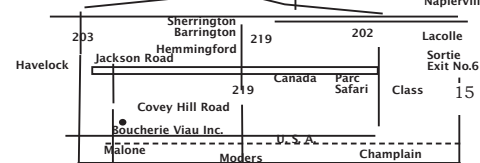
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From my e-mail this month



IF I HAD MY LIFE TO LIVE OVER - by Erma Bombeck The Purple Hat

In honor of women's history month and in memory of Erma Bombeck who lost her fight with cancer (Written after she found out she was dying from cancer).

I would have gone to bed when I was sick instead of pretending the earth would go into a holding pattern if I weren't there for the day.

I would have burned the pink candle sculpted like a rose before it melted in storage.

I would have talked less and listened more.

I would have invited friends over to dinner even if the carpet was stained, or the sofa faded.

I would have eaten the popcorn in the 'good' living room and worried much less about the dirt when someone wanted to light a fire in the fireplace. I would have taken the time to listen to my grandfather ramble about his youth.

I would have shared more of the responsibility carried by my husband.



I would never have insisted the car windows be rolled up on a summer day because my hair had just been teased and sprayed.

I would have sat on the lawn! With my grass stains.

I would have cried and laughed less while watching television and more while watching life.

I would never have bought anything just because it was practical, wouldn't show soil, or was guaranteed to last a lifetime.

Instead of wishing away nine months of pregnancy, I'd have cherished every moment and realized that the wonderment growing inside me was the only chance in life to assist God in a miracle.

When my kids kissed me impetuously, I would never have said, 'Later. Now go get washed up for dinner.' There would have been more 'I love you's'; more 'I'm sorry's.' But mostly, given another shot at life, I would seize every minute...look at it and really see it... live it and never give it back. STOP SWEATING THE SMALL STUFF!!!

Don't worry about who doesn't like you, who has more, or who's doing what

Dedicated to all women in honor of Beautiful Women's Month



Instead, let's cherish the relationships we have with those who do love us. Let's think about what God HAS blessed us with, and what we are doing each day to promote ourselves mentally, physically, and emotionally.

I hope you have a blessed day .If you don't mind, send this on to all the women you are grateful to have as friends. Maybe we should all grab that purple hat earlier. Please send this to five phenomenal women today in celebration of Beautiful Women's Month. If you do, something good will happen - you will boost another woman's self esteem.

Friends are quiet angels who lift us to our feet when our wings have trouble remembering how to fly.

Sent to the Filipino Star Editor by
Salvé and Abel Desprez

Go placidly amid the noise and haste, and remember what peace there can be in silence. As far as possible, without surrender, be on good terms with all persons. Speak your truth quietly and clearly. Listen to others, even the dull and the ignorant, for they too have their story. Avoid loud and aggressive persons for they are vexations to the spirit. If you compare yourself to others you may become vain and bitter, for always there will be greater and lesser persons than yourself.

Filipinos find work faster

TAVIA GRANT

Globe and Mail Update

February 13, 2008 at 9:29 AM EST

Immigrants born in Southeast Asia, particularly those from the Philippines, tend to be best integrated into the Canadian work force while those born in Africa have the most difficulties entering the labour market, a government study suggested Wednesday.

Of adult immigrants, even very recent immigrants from the Philippines had a jobless rate that was close to the Canadian-born population, Statistics Canada said. By contrast, the unemployment rate among very recent African-born immigrants was more than four times higher than the Canadian-born rate.

The study comes as the country is grappling with increasingly acute labour shortages. Canada has the second-highest proportion of immigrants among Western nations, and many provinces are trying to attract newcomers to help fill the gap.

Statscan's study used data from 2006 labour force surveys to determine which groups tend to find work fastest, where they go and the gender differences in the immigrant labour force. It did not give reasons for why there are discrepancies, though the agency will release a study on the link between immigrants' education and labour market outcomes in the spring.

Both men and women born in the Philippines, in particular, had strong results. Filipino-born very recent immigrants had an unemployment rate of 5.4 per cent, only slightly higher than the Canadian-born average of 4.9 per cent.

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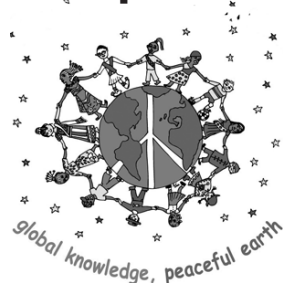
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Isaac T. Goodine

Global Perspectives



***"I must be cruel only to be kind;
Thus bad begins, and worse remains behind."
....William Shakespeare***



President Suharto (left) shaking hands with Isaac T. Goodine.

As Indonesia mourns the recent passing of former President, Suharto, his daughter has asked the public to forgive his mistakes. This is not to justify, but only to forgive; and it is necessary for the country to heal and to move forward. His mistakes include abuse of human rights and corruption in financial dealings, the scale of which, were only fully revealed when the "ballot box" ended his 32-year rule as the Nation's Strongman in 1998. The international press has ensured that his legacy will be that of a tyrant; but he has supporters who accept that he had to be cruel only to be kind.

In 1990, when the above photo was taken, I was in Djakarta to participate in a conference on the internationalization of education. The occasion was the Second International Colloquium organized by the International Vocational Education and Training Association (IVETA) and was a follow-up to the first such conference held in Istanbul, Turkey, two years earlier, in which I also participated. It is interesting to note that Turkey, like Indonesia, is an Islamic-majority country but is also a secular state, whose Army ensures separation of religion from state.

In 1990, most of the IVETA participants were aware that President Suharto was doing some good things for the people of Indonesia, particularly in the arena of education, even though

he was hard pressed by opponents and insurgents including communists on one hand and Islamic fundamentalists on the other. Earlier, liberal democracies strongly supported his anti-communist stance and, in 1990, few of the conference participants were conscious of any inordinate human rights abuse that the Dutch colonizers or the Japanese occupiers had not used previously to try to control an ungovernable polyglot of indigenous people spread over a region comprising 17,508 islands, of which 6000 are inhabited, home to 300 ethnic groups who speak some 365 local dialects. Corruption was well known and Indonesia was known to be one of the countries where bribery and irregular procedures were used as ways of "getting things done". One could conclude that corruption was systemic; but much like it was in the Philippines under President Marcos, one could also conclude that the people were not corrupt but acted as they did to survive in an environment where bribery and nepotism had long been systemic.

We did know that Indonesia was the first country in the world to use revenue from oil to help finance the launch of a Satellite dedicated to bringing education to a large but scattered population. With a population of about 235, of whom 86.1 percent are Muslim, Indonesia ranks as

the fourth most populous country in the world and has the largest Islamic culture outside the Middle East. It remains a secular state with government agencies, law courts, and educational institutions shielded from religious interference.

The country is poor. Development was stunted during colonial times and the Japanese occupation during the Second World War only made matters worse. After independence from the Netherlands in 1959 the country was faced with a high birthrate, low illiteracy, and low productivity. Unity and stability were always tenuous; Even now outer regions resent "imperial rule" from Java. The Army was the guardian of stability under the founding president, General Sukarno, and under his successor General Suharto.

With a country so diverse in culture, language, and religion it has not been easy to keep government agencies and educational institutions secular and that is the role that General Suharto chose to play and it is for that reason that he is called, with some affection, "The Father of Indonesia". No one said it would be easy. He served in the local branch of the Dutch Army, then in the local branch of the Japanese army, and continued his army career after independence. In September 1965, he led the Army unit that crushed a Communist coup attempt. In the shadow of the ongoing war in Vietnam the bloody event caught the attention of western powers and in March 1966, the Army transferred power from founding President General Sukarno to General Suharto; then one year later named him Acting President; the rest is history. In response to nationwide protests, he resigned on May 21, 1998. He died on January 27, 2008, at the 86 years of age. The nation has declared a week of mourning and a book has been provided at each Indonesian Embassy for people around the world to express condolences.

He leaves a mixed legacy. Indonesia now, in spite of uneven development, is generally peaceful, with one of the more difficult insurgencies, seemingly, resolved by cooperation that was undertaken with the central government following the devastation of the Banda Aceh region by the natural disaster caused by the earthquake on December 26, 2004. Some separatist activities continue elsewhere but there is stability generally.

What is in place now is a system of education and training that has many features that deserve recognition as among the most modern and innovative in the developing countries of Asia and the Pacific. Nowhere else has such efforts been made to bring education to people in a fragmented archipelago that just happens to be the largest Islamic-majority country in the World. The country is secular and suffrage, at 17 years of age, is universal and married persons have the right to vote regardless of age. Literacy, measured as the ability to read and write by age 15 and above, stands at 90.4 percent

for the total population, which is made up of 94 percent for males and 86.8 percent for females. These are astoundingly high numbers for a country suffering from deficiencies in infrastructure and with transportation challenges that include operating 652 airports just to link the main centers of population. Recent estimates show that the labour force is about 108 million strong with an unemployment rate estimated at about 9.7 percent in 2007. Gross Domestic Product per capita was \$ 3400, in 2007.

Now consider this. There are just under 235 million people in Indonesia and while the male to female ratio of total population is 1,001 male/female more than half of the adults are women, because the life expectancy at birth is longer for females (72.76 years) than for males (67.69 years). The current fertility rate is 2.38 children born per woman. The annual population growth rate for last year was calculated at 1.213 percent of total population adding about 2.85 million people. Education planners must be aware that this number will increase each year and the system will need to grow accordingly as will the labour market of the future. Fortunately, Indonesia has been at the forefront of planning and development of education and training programs and has taken advantage of both technical and financial assistance available from several international sources including the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank, UNESCO, ILO, and the Colombo Plan Staff College for Technician Education. The Staff College has been very active in Indonesia to help in maintaining international standards in career education and helping to promote the ability to work in English and it was not by accident that IVETA held its conference there in 1990, or that the United Nations held the Education for All conference in Djakarta a year later. Both of these conferences established international norms for participating countries to aspire to achieve and to encourage investments in competency based education. This has helped Indonesians and others to consistently invest in sound educational programs and to call on expertise from sources made available by Official Development Assistance. The Canadian International Development Agency was one such source of help and the Agency provided technical assistance to strengthen university education by sponsoring several Canadians to work in Indonesia in the 1990s. One of those, Wayne Myles, is currently President of the International Educators Association of Canada, and Head of the Queen's University International Centre, Kingston, Ontario.

The fact is that international development is a two-way street and Indonesia has made enormous strides under the most trying conditions and Suharto, for all his mistakes, should also be remembered for some of the positive contributions he made. He has been praised as the "father of development". That may be over the top, so to speak. If that is over the top, so too is the other side of the

argument, that goes so far in one newspaper (Ottawa Citizen) to suggest that "His death, like the death of Uganda's Idi Amin, in 2003, or Chile's Augusto Pinochet, in 2006, is a reminder that justice delayed is justice denied." Surely, Suharto is not in the same category as Idi Amin, who destroyed the best education system in Africa and set back development in every aspect of life for his people. Of course we should all learn from the mistakes of these men and then move on.

One way to do so is to heed the advice handed down through the ages and attributed to Jesus Christ and that is to pray: "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us". To forgive is not the same as excusing or justifying the act but rather it releases the forgiver from the need to seek justice at any cost, particularly if such justice is merely punitive, or a form of a form of revenge, rather than restorative in nature. Hopefully, that is what is meant when we are asked to "forgive Suharto for his mistakes".

Isaac Goodine can be reached at;
itgoodine20@hotmail.com

**DO NOT GO WHERE THE PATH
MAY LEAD BUT GO WHERE
THERE IS NO PATH AND LEAVE
A TRAIL.**
Ralph Waldo Emerson

First Filipino-Canadian woman elected to a provincial legislature

Manitoba Premier Gary Doer appointed Flor Marcelino, the first Filipino-Canadian woman elected to the provincial legislature, as culture, heritage, tourism and sport legislative assistant.

He appointed three new legislative assistants, namely,

- Drew Caldwell (MLA for Brandon East), the premier, with special responsibility for Brandon and western Manitoba;
- Flor Marcelino (MLA for Wellington), culture, heritage, tourism and sport; and
- Marilyn Brick (MLA for St. Norbert), labour and immigration, and justice.

Legislative assistant positions allow MLAs to gain experience associated with cabinet positions and to have input into government decisions while also providing support to ministers and valuable contact with citizens and communities.

In her new assignment, MLA Marcelino will be working with Minister Eric Robinson. "I consider my appointment as an honour to our (Filipino) community," Flor Marcelino said.

Meanwhile, Inkster MLA Kevin Lamoureux (Liberal) criticized Premier Doer for leading to appoint a cabinet that is reflective of Manitoba ethnic diversity.

"I am very disappointed that Gary

Doer has once again snubbed the Pilipino and East Indian communities by refusing to appoint a MLA from those groups to his cabinet," Lamoureux said.

Lamoureux plans to organize a rally in protest which will be held on the grounds of the Legislature later this month.

February 5, 2008

Premier to focus on increasing immigration, investment with the Philippines

A Manitoba mission to the Philippines will promote the province as a prime location for immigration and investment, introduce Manitoba businesses to new opportunities in the Philippines and further diversify Manitoba's export markets, Premier Gary Doer said today.

The mission, which departs tomorrow, is part of regular visits to the Philippines by Manitoba immigration and trade officials. It will feature Doer leading discussions on immigration and investment, and include business, community and other leaders representing a range of companies, organizations and institutions.

"Immigration between Manitoba and the Philippines is an important part of our economy," Doer said. "We

are discussing ways to improve immigration with two key goals in mind – addressing skilled-labour shortages here in Manitoba while also being sensitive to the needs of migrating workers. This means focusing on areas like worker protection, job training and permanent visas which allow individuals to move here with their families."

More immigrants come to Manitoba from the Philippines than any other country, with Filipino newcomers accounting for more than 25 per cent of the province's total immigration. Manitoba's growing Filipino community now has nearly 50,000 residents.

"Manitoba has a strong Filipino community and it makes sense for us to build on the connections that already exist between our province and the Philippines," added Doer, the second Manitoba premier to visit the Philippines since the mid 1990s. Former premier Gary Filmon travelled there in 1997.

Doer said the mission is also part of Manitoba's broader strategy to increase and diversify its export markets. Manitoba's non-United States exports increased eight per cent in 2006 over 2005, according to the latest data. Two-way trade between Manitoba and the Philippines totalled \$29 million in 2006.

"As we have seen recently,

See Page 18

Premier

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Founder & Director-General
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From Page 5

Hyatt 10

with involvement in the NBN project, which was intended to electronically connect government offices down to the barangay (village) level.

Like the others dragged into the scandal, Abalos has said his hands are clean.

Lozada also accused Palace officials and others in the PNP of involvement in an attempt to abduct him to prevent him from appearing at the Senate.

Hanging on to power

The group released its statement at the gate of La Salle Green Hills, in full view of a police surveillance camera installed on Thursday.

The ex-officials were among the estimated 5,000 people, including former President Corazon Aquino, who attended the Mass at the school gym organized by the Ateneo de Manila University and the De La Salle Brothers.

Fr. Manoling Francisco, who officiated the Mass, himself minced no words in his homily lambasting the administration for using "everything in its power to keep itself in power." His homily was interrupted by applause -- including howls of cheering -- at least five times.

Saying an administration "loses its moral authority over its people when it fails ... to uphold the truth," Francisco fired off a series of tough questions centering on several unresolved issues confronting the Arroyo presidency, ranging from the failed automation of the national elections and the fertilizer scam to extrajudicial killings, the "Hello Garci" 2004 vote fraud scandal and Lozada's exposés.

No hard evidence

"Does the abduction of Jun Lozada and the twisting and manipulation of his narrative by Malacañang's minions constitute concealment of the truth?" he asked.

"Does the issuance and implementation of Executive Order No. 464, which prevents government officials from testifying in Senate hearings without Malacañang's permission, constitute suppression of the truth?"

"By conflating one's responses to all these questions, one does not arrive at hard evidence showing culpability on the part of some government officials," Francisco said.

"But proclaiming one's responses to all these questions gives birth to a gestalt, an image which demands our assessment and judgment."

Credible witness

Saying Lozada was a credible witness, Francisco said: "Who in his or her right mind would accuse Malacañang of crimes against our people and implicate the First Family in a sordid tale of greed and corruption, knowing that by doing so, one endangers one's life and the lives of his or her loved ones?"

"But Jun is in his right mind. His story rings true."

Others in the Mass were Senators Benigno "Noy" Aquino III and Manuel Roxas II, ex-Senate President Franklin Drilon, ousted Speaker Jose de Venecia, his wife Gina and their son and original NBN whistle-blower, businessman Jose "Joey" De Venecia III.

Lozada in a gray plaid shirt and brown pants, appeared overwhelmed by the crowd's support.

'I can be the spark'

In his thank-you speech, he shared with congregation the prayer that emboldened him to tell what he knew of the ZTE project.

The prayer runs in part: "Let me be the change I want to see ... Even if I'm not the light, I can be the spark."

He left his audience one question to ponder: "Why is it that those who hold the truth are the ones who are running to hide?"

Palace officials said all the President's men were solidly behind her, and shrugged off calls for them to resign.

Cabinet Secretary Ricardo Saludo expressed hope those calling for resignations "will allow institutions of justice to pass judgment based on hard evidence, not just allegations."

Justice Secretary Raul Gonzalez said: "People who abandon friends are traitors. You agree to be the President's alter ego and then you will leave her?"

Arroyo shrugs off kickbacks, says will finish term

February 15, 2008

President Arroyo yesterday said she is confident she will complete her term in 2010 despite political turmoil over allegations of top-level corruption and a new report by her security chief about an assassination plot against her.

"I will finish my term not because my opponents will allow me. I will finish my term for the simple reason that... the average Filipino wants political stability, wants economic progress, and they are getting that economic progress," Mrs. Arroyo said in a televised interview.

The President said she took allegations of bribery in the canceled ZTE national broadband network deal seriously, and canceled the contract as soon as she could, given the importance of the country's ties with China, one of its largest export markets.



President Arroyo during an interview with Reuters at the Malacañang presidential place in Manila February 14, 2008.

The President said there were "two Philippines"—an economic one that was performing well and a political one that was not.

Security forces were placed on full alert yesterday after officials said they uncovered a plot to assassinate Mrs. Arroyo.

The announcement of the plot came a day before Mrs. Arroyo's political opponents were to stage a major protest to ask her to resign over allegations of corruption linking the first family.

President Arroyo's security chief, Brig. Gen. Romeo Prestoza, said the plot was being hatched by "extremists Jemaah Islamiyah and the Abu Sayyaf Group," referring to Muslim militants with reported links to Al Qaeda.

"It is not just the President, there are other targets," he said, adding Mrs. Arroyo had been informed of the threat that forced her to cancel a scheduled trip to the northern resort city of Baguio Friday.

"If they want to launch it, they can do it anytime," Prestoza told reporters.

He said the plot appeared not to be connected to an opposition rally in Makati planned for today.

Armed Forces Chief Hermogenes Esperon said the plot "had become the basis of our action for putting the Armed Forces of the Philippines in full state of preparedness."

He said militants from the Abu Sayyaf and Jemaah Islamiyah were also planning to hit "high-value targets" around Manila.

National Police Chief Avelino Razon said police last week were given a document in Arabic that they later found to be a list of targets, including the President, other government officials and foreign embassies based in Manila.

National Security Adviser Norberto Gonzales added that a breakaway faction of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front could also be involved in the plot.

Earlier yesterday, Army spokesman Capt. Carlo Ferrer said they had separately received intelligence reports that the communist New People's Army rebel group might infiltrate the ranks of protesters Friday and instigate violence.

He said there were intelligence reports that the rebels might sabotage the rally.

Esperon denied reports that some generals might join the rally.

"The [Armed Forces] is not supposed to solve the political problems of the country," he said.

Mrs. Arroyo's critics have been holding daily protests around Manila calling on her to resign over fresh claims that her husband and a political ally tried to get millions of dollars in kickbacks from a telecoms deal with a Chinese firm.

In the wake of last year's scandal, Mrs. Arroyo canceled the \$329-million deal for a national broadband network with China's state-run ZTE.

Some business groups have warned that the scandal could plunge the country into a new round of political instability and dampen investor confidence.

Leaders of the Catholic Church, business leaders, and even lawyers' groups have expressed support for the protest planned in Makati.

Malacañang has called for calm amid the turmoil and challenged Mrs. Arroyo's opponents to file charges in court.

On Thursday, US envoy to Manila Kristie Kenney said any protest should be put in the "framework of the Constitution and the rule of law."

But she said the "right to public protest to express views and opinions is fundamental to all of us."

"It's important for government and for the private sectors to see that," Kenney said.

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Pacman hit by forgery, loses \$180K to US driver

February 12, 2008

Filipino ring idol Manny Pacquiao, whose kindness and generosity to people around him is well known, has once again paid a price for his trusting ways and forgiving heart.

Standard Today learned that Pia Quijada, the second wife of Pacquiao's driver Joseph Jose, forged the Pacman's signature and gradually and systematically siphoned off some \$180,000 from a Wells Fargo, Sunset Boulevard bank account that the Filipino champ had apparently forgotten about after initially depositing \$200,000 into it in December 2006.

Pacquiao's wife Jinkee, who returned from Los Angeles on Feb. 6 to look after their three children—and to make sure her husband was settled down in LA and focused on his March 15 rematch with Juan Manuel Marquez—confirmed the story in a telephone conversation with Standard Today early yesterday afternoon.

World Boxing Organization bantamweight champion Gerry Peñalosa corroborated the story, telling Standard Today he felt bad for Pacquiao because so many people were taking advantage of his kindness.

It appeared that when Pacquiao opened the account, he was accompanied to the bank by Jose and Pia Quijada and he used their Los Angeles address, which resulted in all

the checks being mailed to the couple's address.

Pia started issuing pay-to-cash checks in small amounts starting with \$300, and then increased the amounts to \$400, \$1,000 and up to over \$4,000, which eventually averaged between \$11,000 and \$12,000 a month.

The signature at the beginning of the fraud was not as sharp as Pacquiao's, but after some practice the couple perfected the forgery.

Pia also transferred some \$40,000 from Pacquiao's Sunset Boulevard account to a newly opened account in Wells Fargo, Burbank.

The caper was discovered on Thursday when Michael Koncz, who continues to be a member of Pacquiao's inner circle with the blessings of Top Rank promoter Bob Arum, received a call from Vilma Rodriguez, assistant vice president of the Wells Fargo branch in Hollywood, asking whether the Filipino champ still remembered he had an account with the bank.

When Koncz called Pacquiao, the boxing icon said he had forgotten about it, but then Pacquiao immediately went to the bank and discovered that only \$19,000 remained of his \$200,000 deposit.

He was so upset that he called it a day after shadow boxing for six rounds at Freddie Roach's Wild Card Gym. He later returned to the bank to finish his testimony for the Anti-Fraud

Unit.

(The case is being investigated by former PBA import Francois "The Hulk" Wise, who played for the UTex and Manila Beer in the professional basketball league here with distinction. Wise now works with the Los Angeles Police Department and is stationed at Venice and Labrea.)

Rodriguez was said to have turned over to Pacquiao some 500 checks that bore his forged signature.

And when the police started investigating the case, the following morning Pia begged for forgiveness from Jinkee and indicated she was willing to be her slave.

Jose also asked for forgiveness through a text message. He said that if Pacquiao could forgive Jose Ramos, his former chief of staff who deprived him of \$150,000 in tax refunds two years ago, perhaps he could also forgive him and his wife Pia.

Jinkee said her husband called her and asked her to decide on what to do. She then told Standard Today she wanted the woman jailed.

"I would get upset with you [Pacquiao] if you forgave them because we had been so good to them," Jinkee reportedly told her husband.

She then asked Pacquiao to be careful because people were "taking advantage of his kindness and his penchant to forgive because of his soft heart." ■

More young Filipinos smoking - study

February 20, 2008

A growing number of young Filipinos are picking up smoking despite new restrictions on tobacco advertising, according to a nationwide study released Wednesday.

Four million youth, aged between 11 and 19, are smokers, said the 2007 survey commissioned by the World Health Organization and the health department.

The youth group made up 23 percent of all Filipino smokers, compared to about 18 percent in 2005.

"This 23 percent could further increase in a matter of three years," said Maricar Limpin, a doctor who leads an anti-smoking lobby, Framework on Tobacco Control of the Philippines Alliance.

Limpin projected a rise, saying few local governments were enforcing a law banning outdoor advertising of tobacco that went into effect in mid-2007.

Eight of 10 Filipino teenagers have seen a tobacco advertisement over the past year, according to the study.

"By preventing our children from starting to smoke, we can reduce the impact of tobacco on our children," said health department epidemiologist Marina Baquilod, who conducted the study.

Government data shows smoking is linked to five of the top 10 leading causes of deaths in the Philippines, where up to 35 percent of the country's 89 million people are tobacco users. ■

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COMMUNITY NEWS

FAMAS Center welcomes the First Filipino NDP Flor Marcelino and MP Thomas Mulcair

As initiated by the Centre for Philippine Concerns, PINAY and IWC, the FAMAS Philippine Community Center welcomes Ms. Flor Marcelino, first Filipino elected NDP Member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA) of Manitoba and Member of Parliament Mr. Thomas Mulcair this Thursday, 21 February at 6 pm.

We invite members of the community to join us in welcoming our distinguished guests. This is the first time Ms. Marcelino will be meeting the Filipino community in Montreal and would like to get to know the community and share her experience of a recent trade mission to the Philippines; a mission that was undertaken with Manitoba's Premier Mr. Gary Doer.

Nominations are now open for the Presidential Awards for Filipino Individuals and Organizations Overseas for 2008.

Philippine Ambassador to Canada Jose S. Brillantes said the Presidential Awards for Filipino Individuals and Organizations Overseas is a biennial global search for Filipino individuals and organizations overseas who are exemplars of Filipino excellence, individuals who have dedicated their work in the service of the Filipino people, leaders of community initiatives that promote the common good, and advocates for the promotion and protection of the rights of others. "Civil society organizations based overseas whose programs have helped improve the lives of others, particularly in the marginalized sectors, will also be honored," Ambassador Brillantes added.

The awards are bestowed by the President of the Philippines in a ceremony during the observance of the "Month of Overseas Filipinos" at the Malacanang Palace in Manila.

Ceremonies and a testimonial dinner for this year's awards will take place in December 2008.

"This distinguished honor is awarded to Filipino individuals and organizations abroad who have demonstrated examples of Filipino excellence and the best of Filipino values, as well as the ideals of civil society organizations that have furthered the well-being and interests of Filipinos, both in the Philippines and overseas," Ambassador Brillantes said.

In 2006, awardees from Canada included the Markham Federation of Filipino Canadians of Markham, Ontario, Banaag Award; Ottawa-based chef and ice sculptor Armando V. Baisas, Lingkod sa Kapwa Pilipino Award; academician Dr. Romulo F. Magsino of Winnipeg, Manitoba, Pamana ng Pilipino Award; and broadcast designer and music TV producer Jeffrey P. Rustia of Toronto, Ontario, Pamana ng Pilipino Award.

According to the Ambassador, the 2008 Presidential Awards will be more than an occasion for the country to extend recognition and gratitude to Filipino individuals and organizations overseas for their work and achievements. "It is also a way of showing the rest of the world that the Philippines is proud of the virtues and qualities of its own citizenry," Ambassador Brillantes added.

Since its establishment in December 1991, the Presidential Award has been conferred on 283 overseas-based individuals and organizations in thirty-seven (37) countries. The awards are open to Filipino individuals, associations (both formal and informal), communities overseas, as well as foreign private individuals and organizations abroad.

There are four categories of awards to be conferred on Filipinos and private organizations overseas, namely, the Lingkod sa Kapwa Pilipino (LINKAPIL) Award, the Banaag Award, the Kaanib ng Bayan Award and the Pamana ng Pilipino Award.

Nominations may be submitted to the Philippine Embassy, 130 Albert St., Suite 606, Ottawa, Ontario, K1P 5G4,



Borough Mayor Michael Applebaum hands over a \$500 cheque to Scout Commissioner Zenaide Kharroubi. Donation came from Councillor Marvin Rotrand and Mayor Applebaum.



Councillor Marvin Rotrand (at left) poses with Claro Bermudez and the Laging Handa Scouts Group during the Family Day at Kent Park recently.

and must received by the Commission on Filipinos Overseas on or before May 30, 2008. For more information or to obtain a nomination form, please contact the Philippine Embassy at tel. no. (613) 233-1121; fax no. (613) 233-4165; e-mail: embassyofphilippines@rogers.com.

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Premier

setbacks in other markets can have an impact here at home. It is important that we keep diversifying and growing the international markets with which we do business in order to cushion us against such setbacks."

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EARTH TALK

From the Editors of E/The Environmental Magazine



Dear EarthTalk: I've been reading about various green festivals going on around the country and I want to attend some and get up to speed on environmental issues and products. What are some good ones and how do I stay on top of all the wheres and whens? -- Alex, Chicago, IL

Whether you're a consumer in search of green products and healthy organic foods, an environmental advocate looking to network, or a businessperson who wants to "green up" operations, there is an environmental event out there for you.

One of the best is the Green Festivals series, which appears in an increasing

number of U.S. cities every year and is growing in leaps and bounds in attendance. Co-sponsored by two leading national nonprofits, Global Exchange and Co-Op America, these so-called "parties with a purpose" bring together businesses, environmental groups and community organizations working toward the collective goal of "forging a just, sustainable, inclusive economy—a green economy."

Hundreds of thousands of people from all walks of life have participated in

these festivals over the last decade to peruse aisles packed with exhibits, hear speakers, make connections with like-minded folks and indulge in green-themed music, art, culture and food. In 2008, events will take place in Seattle (April 12-13), Chicago (May 17-18), Washington, DC (November 8-9) and San Francisco (November 14-16).

Another event geared toward the green-leaning general public is EcoFest, held every September for the last two decades in New York City. This free event also features myriad commercial and nonprofit exhibits and celebrity speakers and performers. Attendees at EcoFest's 2008 event will get to check out prototypes of alternative energy vehicles, watch a green-themed fashion show and participate in environmental education workshops, among other events.

One very educational event is the yearly DC Environmental Film Festival, which takes place March 11 – 22 this year in Washington. The festival features 115 documentary, feature, animated, archival, experimental and children's films, shown at various locations around Washington, including museums, libraries, embassies, universities and theatres. Most are free and many include discussions with the filmmakers and/or scientists and environmental leaders.

Many environmental festivals are broad with regard to topics covered, but several issue-specific and business-to-business events take place throughout the year as well. To key in to these events, go to the Green Fairs and Festivals page at the EcoBusinessLinks Environmental Directory. Examples include Texas's Renewable Energy Roundup, Colorado's Rocky Mountain Sustainable Living Fair, Georgia's GreenBuild Expo, Vermont's SolarFest, and Croton-on-Hudson, New York's Great Hudson River Revival, which has been raising funds to protect New York's Hudson River since the late 1970s.

Green events take place all year long, but a large number happen in the spring to coincide with Earth Day (April 22). Many school and community environmental groups hold Earth Day events every year. To find an Earth Day event near you this coming spring, consult Earth Day Network's free online database.

CONTACTS: Green Festivals, www.greenfestivals.org; EcoFest, www.ecofest.com; EcoBusinessLinks Environmental Directory, www.ecobusinesslinks.com; Earth Day Network, www.earthday.net.



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