

Will there be a spring election?



Liberal Party convention sign

To force an election or not to force an election. That is the question Liberal MPs are pondering as they prepare for next week's resumption of Parliament. And the answer thus far appears to be: Maybe. Even Leader Stéphane Dion, who was decidedly hawkish only a month ago about toppling the minority Conservative government early in the new year, has toned down the sabre rattling.

Federal Liberal caucus chairman Anthony Rota says "we haven't picked a time to overthrow the government," but the official Opposition is ready for an election campaign, if and when the time is right to defeat the minority Conservatives after Parliament resumes next week. Rota, MP for the Northern Ontario riding of Nipissing-Timiskaming, made the comment in an interview on the eve of the Liberals' two-day caucus session in Kitchener, Ont.

Mounting fears of an impending economic meltdown are reducing the chances that Liberals will decide to force an early federal election. Even the most hawkish Liberal MPs were suddenly pulling back from the election brink Monday as stock markets worldwide continued their nosedive. "I think the economy is the No. 1 thing right now, rather than an election, I really do," said Toronto-area MP Garth Turner.

Prime Minister Stephen Harper will pay a heavy political price in the next election for his right-wing "fanaticism" and his betrayal of Quebec, predicts Bloc Québécois Leader Gilles Duceppe. Mr. Duceppe outlined a two-fold election strategy attacking the Conservatives' economic record as the defender of the French language and the Quebec identity. Bloc Québécois Leader Gilles

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Hillary or Obama? FilAms weigh in

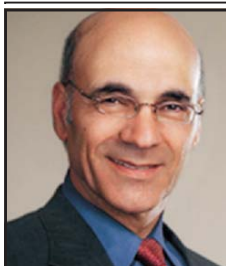


Senator Barack Obama (Illinois) and Senator Hillary Clinton (New York)

Which one will make history – a first black president or first woman president? The community is weighing in, with the Democratic race for presidential nominee in the Nov. 4 general elections shaping into a two-way contest between New York Sen. Hillary Clinton and Illinois Sen. Barack Obama. Said Irene Bueno, who worked in the White House during President Bill Clinton's two terms: "Hillary's win in New Hampshire shows that momentum is clearly in our side. Voters across the country will see as voters in New Hampshire saw that Hillary Clinton doesn't just talk about change—she will be a president who actually brings change."

Bueno served as special presidential assistant on domestic policy at the White House, and also as special assistant in the chief of staff's office. Currently, she's a principal at Nueva Vista Group LLC based here. For Baldwin Domingo, three-term Democratic member of the State House in New Hampshire, it doesn't matter

See Page 16 Hillary or Obama



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RAFAEL TZOUBARI
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EDITORIAL

Politics and change

The concept of change is an interesting subject for it can be viewed from both a philosophical and practical point of view. Lately, it has become the word of the day as it is the slogan of the main contenders to the US presidential nomination particularly among the Democrats. Senator Barack Obama is even dubbed as Mr. Change, while Senator Hillary Clinton has passionately declared her commitment to change. In fact, she emphasized that her 35 years of experience has been devoted to change.

It seems easy to say that one is in favor of change but it is not clear how one can implement it without the cooperation of everyone concerned. As everyone agrees, change is inevitable in the natural world but it seems impossible to do in man-made institutions or systems. Mr. Clive Doucet who wrote a book titled "Urban Meltdown" provides an interesting point of view of why change is hard to do. As poet, city councilor and urban activist, he provides a "razor-sharp insider's perspective into how explosive urban growth is accelerating global warming, and why political action seems paralyzed." He believes that politicians seem to be paralyzed by the pressures of lobby groups; hence, they have pushed environmental issues on the back burner. He said "It's not about planning. It's about politics." Doucet asserts that climate change is proceeding so quickly not for lack of knowledge, but because politicians who deviate from the car-based sprawl model cannot get elected.

During elections, it seems as if all candidates become idealists, philosophers, and visionaries but after elections, the ideas that they espoused either get postponed or forgotten unless they are reminded by a diligent electorate. But the problem seems to lie in the general attitude of apathy. Moreover, we are simply too busy to notice that the promises these politicians made have not been followed through. We all generally become embroiled with our own busy life and we tend to let things go by. Unless we are real activists, we wait for the political leaders to do their jobs. It is a wonder how long it takes before the changes promised get

implemented. Do we ever keep track of them?

The media is probably responsible for this lack of follow up. When the issues are current topics, newspapers and radio talk shows do a good job of keeping them in people's minds but after a short period of time, even if they do not get resolved, they are not reported again. It would seem that it is only during elections that the same topics will be discussed and debated again.

We agree that change is good when it is meant to improve or to correct injustices and wrongs committed against people who are deprived of their fair share of economic opportunities. But how often have we seen that it takes several years before changes are adopted by the majority or the mainstream society. For example, the question of professional accreditation of foreign graduates has not been resolved until now. The changes proposed to the Live-In Caregiver program are still not realized although there have been many representations made by advocacy groups. Even changes to the immigration refugee act passed by Parliament are not yet acted upon for some unknown reasons. If only these changes have been adopted, Mr. Danis Sabadao could have had his refugee appeal heard and he could have avoided years of agony. Until now, he is still waiting for his fate to be decided.

The idea of change, or making changes to the government always attracts people. A new political candidate can get a lot of mileage by simply declaring he or she will work for change. But how much change really happens? Often times, the status quo is maintained because most politicians prefer to keep the peace. Perhaps, the only way changes will occur is when a strong political leader is able to mobilize his peers not only to pass laws but also to act upon them expeditiously or promptly. We also need political leaders like Nelson Mandela and Mahatma Gandhi who showed such strong commitment to change that they were willing to sacrifice their own lives. But they are a rare breed thus change remains an elusive dream most of the time.

Zenaida Ferry Kharroubi

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Why all Filipinos should join the Cooperative

The auditors, Gosselin & Associates, are now completing the 2006 financial statements after a long delay because we only submitted all the accounting records last December. This was unavoidable because of the huge amount of paper that our accounting clerk had to go through in order to understand what happened with the cash which were not properly accounted for. There were no accounting procedures in place at the beginning of the Coop. This was compounded by the problem of the "Paluagan" or members' saving plan, a scheme introduced by the former president of the Coop to entice people to become members for a \$10 or \$20 membership fee.

Although we do not yet have an exact date when the general assembly will be held, we are hoping to hold it soon after the financial statements have been finalized by the auditors. We will call all members to a general assembly in order to discuss the financial status of the Coop and to show exact figures about the missing or wasted funds spent.. If there are at

least 100 members who will commit themselves to be available and attend this meeting, we will find an appropriate place. Members who are interested in attending the general assembly should call 514-733-8915 to indicate their willingness to attend, or they can come to the store at 4711 Van Horne Avenue to sign a survey sheet to indicate their choice of a meeting date. At the time of writing this article, we have not yet received any specific date when the auditors can give us the 2006 financial statement but as soon as this information is available, we will post the notice at the Coop and also announce it in the next issue of the Filipino Star.

Many people may wonder why it is a good idea to be a member of the Filipino Solidarity Cooperative. The auditors, Gosselin & Associates, gave us a very interesting information that most people may not be aware of. According to them, cooperative members usually get discounts and rebates called "ristourne" in French.

See Page 4 Why be a member?



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RP government drafts constitutional amendment to create muslim homeland

January 9, 2008

President Gloria Arroyo is to call for changes to the Philippines constitution to resolve a major obstacle that has threatened to derail peace talks with Muslim separatists, a senior aide said Wednesday.

The Filipino leader is to ask Congress and the electorate to approve a shift from a centralised form of government in favour of a "federal" system to accommodate Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) calls for a regional government in parts of the south, Jesus Dureza said.

Dureza, Arroyo's chief adviser on peace negotiations with the country's communist as well as Muslim separatist rebel groups, said her cabinet agreed on December 18 "that this is the way forward" after talks with the MILF broke down.

He told the Foreign Correspondents Association here that the initiative would allow the setting up of a MILF-proposed "Bangsa Moro (Muslim Nation) Juridical Entity" to exercise key powers over the area excluding defence and foreign relations.

The electorate of the mainly Roman Catholic Philippines in 1987 ratified a new constitution that set up limited Muslim self-rule in several provinces of the southern region of Mindanao.

Nine years later the government signed a peace treaty with another Muslim rebel faction, the Moro National Liberation Front, that went on to run the so-called Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM).

However the MILF has rejected the ARMM and demanded wider powers

over a larger area.

Decades of fighting has left tens of thousands dead as well as large parts of Mindanao mired in poverty.

Christian migrants that now comprise the majority in Mindanao are wary of Muslim rule and have rejected proposals to expand the ARMM.

Previous government efforts to change the constitution have proved unpopular in the past due to suspicion that the sitting president would use it to change a provision that limits the presidency to a single six-year term.

Dureza said the idea of a federal set-up was popular in Mindanao, where there is a perception by many that the national government has neglected the region.

He said the Arroyo government was hopeful that if the electorate were convinced a federal set-up would solve the Muslim insurgency, "they will give it to us."

He said the government has yet to decide whether to ask the Senate and the House of Representatives to convene a constituent assembly to amend the constitution, or to call on Filipinos to elect delegates to a constitutional convention. He also declined to discuss a timetable.

The peace talks, hosted by Kuala Lumpur, broke down last month with the MILF aborting a planned December 15 meeting to draft a peace accord for signing in early 2008.

The rebels want greater Muslim control over the economic resources of the proposed Muslim homeland in the Philippines, a former Spanish and US colony.

Under the constitution, the exploration, utilisation and development of natural resources shall be "under the full control" of the state.

Both sides reached a breakthrough in November when they agreed to the

Thousands hail religious statue in Manila

January 9, 2008

Tens of thousands of devotees, many of them barefoot, thronged Manila on Wednesday to snatch a glimpse of a centuries old black statue of Jesus Christ during its annual parade.

The wooden Black Nazarene, carved in Mexico and brought to the Philippine capital in the early 17th century, is cherished by Catholics, who believe it performs miracles.

"Before I wash the shirt I wore in the procession, I wipe my children's faces with it first so they will not get sick," Arnel Gadia, who has been coming to the festival for 11 years, told Reuters Television.

The police estimated up to 100,000 people gathered in the oldest part of Manila to see the icon, dressed in maroon robes and paraded in a carriage.

The religious spectacle has been carried out for more than 200 hundred years.

Police were checking reports two people collapsed and later died in the procession.

Many onlookers twirled handkerchiefs and threw them at devotees on the carriage to wipe the statue in the hope of carrying away

scope and boundaries of the MILF's demand for "ancestral domain" or communal land that Muslims lost when the colonial government introduced a system of land titles. ■



A statue of the Black Nazarene makes its way as thousands of devotees joined the procession in Manila January 9, 2008.

some of its power.

"Because of the Black Nazarene, my son recovered from a car accident. He almost died," said Marcelina Eusebio, 59, who came from the central island of Cebu to join the choked procession. ■



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From Page 2 Why be a member?

They will also receive more dividends if they do more business with their own cooperative as they get more share of the profits in proportion to their participation or patronage. We therefore advise all members to keep their receipts so that they can claim these rebates when the time comes. However, dividends will only be distributed to members when a cooperative can afford such a distribution without putting it into a precarious financial position. It is all up to members to make the Coop attain its profit objective.

As everyone knows, the grocery stores which are very successful are patronized by many Filipinos. But these stores do not give them anything in return. If they patronize their own cooperative, they will get something back in the form of discounts and dividends. However, they have to start by becoming members in order to build up the

capital required to buy merchandise in bulk, to cover overhead costs, and to pay its worker-members. So far, only a few people are sacrificing their time and effort in working many hours as volunteers. After more than two years, these volunteers should be given a break, including the writer of this article. It will be a big shame if no one cares about their sacrifices for the Coop. After all, it is not owned by one person but by approximately 600 people who have put down between \$10 to \$100 each. Those who have not completely paid their qualifying shares of \$100 should also be made aware that they must pay their balances which total approximately \$30 000. This will greatly help the Coop in purchasing more merchandise and paying some of its creditors. In particular, we have some directors who loaned money to the Coop and have not yet been paid until now.

We are going to call those members who have outstanding

balances but some of them have changed their telephone numbers after signing their membership application forms. We are therefore asking them to help us by giving their new address and telephone number. At the same time, we are asking all members to submit ID size photos for their ID cards plus \$3.00 to cover the cost of lamination and printing. This ID card will be used in the implementation of lower prices for members soon.

The Coop is stepping on its third year. We would like to achieve 5000 level of membership before our fifth year of existence in order to win a financial award given to new cooperatives that overcame big challenges. At present, we have about 600 members. We need approximately 20% of the Filipino population in Cote des Neiges to become members to achieve our goal.

What does it take to be a member? It only involves investing \$100 which can be paid in 2 or 3

installments. This amount covers the qualifying shares of \$50 for common stock, and \$50 for preferred shares. We will also issue additional preferred shares that will have a better interest rate than guaranteed savings certificates. If there are 50 members who will be willing to invest a minimum of \$1 000 in preferred shares each, we will have enough operating capital for the next 6 months.

We are also embarking on the revision of the Coop's first business plan in order to apply for a second subsidy from the government but one of the crucial factors of being approved is to show improvement in its sales. We can only fulfill this requirement with your help and support. Needless to say, our Cooperative will only succeed if we all believe in the economic empowerment that a cooperative can give. Will you all answer this call to help your own community?

Zenaida Ferry Kharroubi

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Palace downplays Erap plan for 2010 Estrada plans to name 'plotters' in new book

January 14, 2008

Malacañang reminded ousted President Joseph Estrada Sunday that the Constitution bars him from running again for the presidency in 2010.

Executive Secretary Eduardo Ermita said the 70-year-old Estrada does not seem to be serious in his statements that he will make a comeback since he is fully aware of the legal and constitutional impediments.

"Former President Estrada is his own man, and we cannot fault him for making such statements," Ermita said in a telephone interview.

"Let's give it to him. He has his own plans, however, the way I see it, he is just trying to regain his support from the masses."

Ermita said Estrada's moving around, giving gifts and speeches, was not exactly early campaigning, but rather he wants to "return to the masses that had placed him where he is now."

"He has been detained for six years, he might be wanting to regain his former popular status," he said.

However, Estrada said the constitutional ban on presidential reelection does not apply to him because the people power revolt in January 2001 prevented him from completing his six-year term as

president.

During the People Asia magazine's "People of the Year" awards at the Hotel InterContinental in Makati Thursday night, Estrada said he would rather pick himself to lead the country than entrust the task to any of Monday's presidential aspirants.

None of them were winnable so he would run for office himself, he added.

Other special guests were Vice President Noli de Castro, Senators Manuel Roxas II, Loren Legarda and Jinggoy Estrada, and Batangas Gov. Vilma Santos-Recto.

Legarda and Santos were among the awardees.

Earlier, Estrada said he would run for president in 2010 if the opposition fails to unite behind a single standard-bearer.

He is qualified to run in 2010 despite his conviction for plunder by the Sandiganbayan, he added.

Estrada said the executive clemency granted him by President Arroyo has already restored his political rights, among them his right to vote or to run for public office.

He was able to vote in the last barangay elections, he added. ■

January 6, 2008

Disgraced former Philippine president Joseph Estrada said Monday he is writing a book about his life and plans to name prominent officials he claims conspired against him.

Estrada, 70, was released two months ago from prison where he had been serving a life sentence for corruption, after being granted a pardon by his arch enemy and successor, President Gloria Arroyo.

Estrada told ABS-CBN television that the nation's powerbrokers had conspired to bring original corruption charges against him because they could not accept an outsider was running the country.

"I will reveal how big business, politicians and military officials conspired against me," said Estrada, a former action movie star, who cultivated an image of the everyday man and remains hugely popular.

"They conspired with personalities from other sectors when they failed to obtain government favours for their businesses," he said, refusing to name the alleged conspirators.

"The book will describe how they ganged up against me."

He said the book should be in print "before the end of the year."

Estrada, who has said he is finished with politics, told AFP last week that he was planning a return to the silver screen, this time starring in a comedy.

In 1998 he won the presidency by the biggest margin in Philippine history. Allegations of incompetence and massive corruption however led to

his impeachment 30 months into office, and subsequently to his ouster in a military-backed bloodless popular revolt.

In April 2000 he became the first president to be booked and detained like a common criminal.

His six-year trial ended last September,



File Photo: Ousted Philippine president Joseph Estrada addresses supporters during a visit to Navotas City, north of Manila, in November 2007.

when he was convicted and sentenced for illegally amassing about 80 million dollars through embezzlement, kickbacks and payoffs from operators of an illegal lottery. ■

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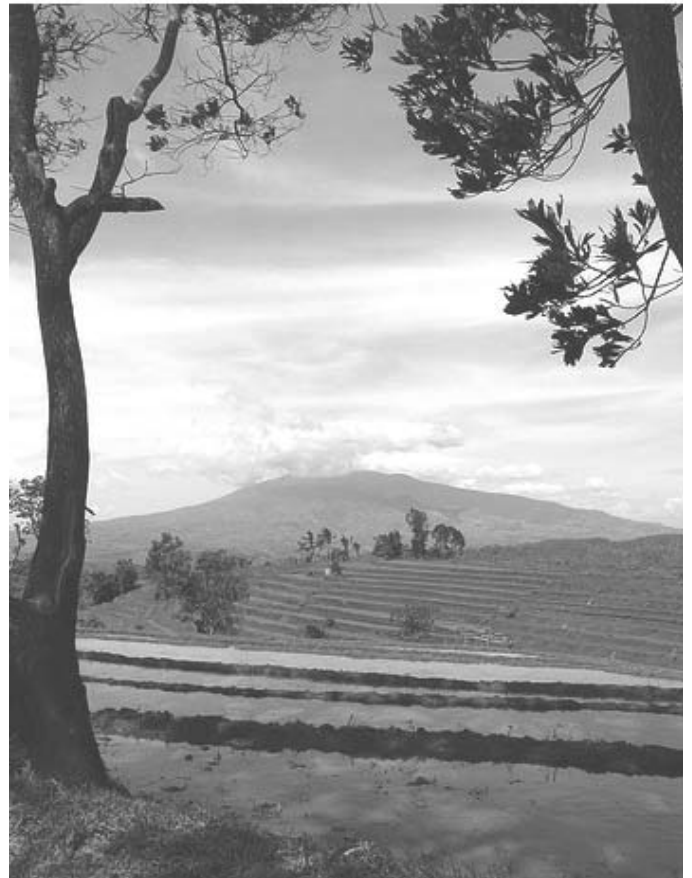
Strategically located as part of the Western Visayas Region, the province of Occidental Negros occupies the western portion of Negros Island. It is bounded to the north by the Visayan Sea; to the east by the province of Oriental Negros and partly by Tañon Strait; to the west by the Strait of Guimaras; and to the south by Sulu Sea. The province is composed of 13 cities and 19 municipalities. About 85% of the Negrenses speak "*Ilonggo*"

while the rest speak "*Cebuano*". Residents of its capital, Bacolod, are known as "*Bacoleños*".

Negros Occidental is the "Sugarbowl of the Philippines." Sugar was introduced to the Negrense during the Spanish period and has been the main industry of the province since then, producing more than half of the country's sugar. Other industries include aqua culture, agribusiness, steel fabrication, and beer breweries.

The province is also widely known for its unique cuisine. *Inasal*, one of its known dishes, is a barbecued style chicken marinated in coconut vinegar, ginger, soy sauce, garlic and other spices.

The sugar capital of the country is also rich in natural and man-made attractions. There's *Enchanted Isle*, (Isla Puti), reputed for its white sand beaches and brimming vegetation, is an ideal place for all water sports



Mount Kanlaon - An active volcano, it has two craters at the summit. It is home to more than a hundred birds species found only here, including the Negros fruit dove.



An Iron Dinosaur (Steam Locomotive) at the entrance of the Lopez Sugar Plant. Some sugar mills still maintain these turn of the century machines in good working condition.



Masskara Festival, October 2007, Bacolod City

activities. **Mt. Kanlaon**, highest mountain range in the Visayan region, has a National Park with a variety of beautiful orchids and a boundless carpet of ferns and ligneous forest.

Historical sites also abound the area like **Palacio Episcopal**, which served as a home for Spanish military and officials. Remnants of the past include several churches built during the Spanish era such as the **San Sebastian Cathedral**, Chapel of Santa Clara and Chapel of Cartwheels. **Silay City**, one of the top 25 destinations in the country, brings you back in time as you pass by stately mansions where sugar barons used to live.

Bacolod City is noted for its annual celebration of the **Masskara Festival** (festival of smiling faces). Held during the month of October, the Bacoleños dramatize the Negrense virtue and indomitable soul wearing colorful costumes and smiling masks. This festivity has earned Bacolod the title "City of Smiles".

Among things to do and see around the province:

- **Mambukal Resort** - Located 31 km. east of Bacolod City. This resort is surrounded by therapeutic sulfur springs, seven waterfalls, mountain streams, lush valleys, and hiking trails leading to Mt. Kanlaon.

- **Festivals** - Negros Occidental is

known to be the most numbered in festivals depicting certain cultures in each of its 19 towns and 13 cities. The most famous is the **Masskara Festival**. - **Sugar Mills and Plantations** - The Sugar Industry itself - the mono-crop economy that made Negros the "Sugar Bowl" of the Philippines.

- **Beaches** - Negros Occidental is also endowed with popular beaches and island destinations located up north and down south of the province.

- **Steam Locomotives** (San Carlos Milling Inc., *San Carlos City*). Dates back to 1911. Still used today to bring sugar planters from the Hacienda to the Sugar Mills.

- **San Sebastian Cathedral** - More than a century-old cathedral made of corals taken from nearby Guimaras Island.

- **Danjugan Island** - Three hectares of reserved marine sanctuary, a virtual marine paradise to lovers of the underwater world.

- **Enchanted Isle** (Isla Puti) - A lush tropical islet noted for its fine, white sand beaches and abundant vegetation. Rich in marine life, Isla Puti as it is known in the dialect, is excellent for all types of water sports.

- **Mt. Kanlaon Natl. Park** - A tropical hideaway beneath a canopy of forest. Has springs, waterfalls, giant trees, ferns, among others. ■



San Sebastian Cathedral, Bacolod City, Negros Occidental, built during the spanish era



A pair of local residents of San Carlos City, Negros Occidental, getting around town



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Approximately
15 lbs

1.99 lb

Half or Whole
pork
Cut & Wrapped

1.00 lb

Home smoked
meat
8.29 lb

Fresh Belly
with skin
2.69 lb

Beef
Blade steak

2.99 lb

Front quarter of beef
Approximately 200 lbs

1.99 lb

Pork Spare Ribs

2.39 lb

Beef
short ribs
2.99 lb

Picnic ham
(with bone)

0.99 lb

Boneless leg
of ham

3.79 lb

1 litre of fresh
blood with purchase
1/2 pork

Regular smoked
bacon

4.79 lb

10 lbs & over

4.69 lb



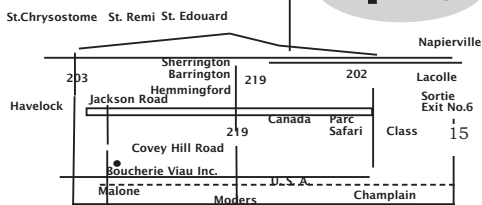
A little piece of paradise - Sipalay is about 150kms south of Bacolod City in the island of Negros. It used to be known only for its copper and gold mines, now temporarily shut down, but a few Europeans found their way here and started some dive resorts as little as 6 years ago. Now, the strip of beach you see in the picture is home to Artistic Diving, Easy Diving, and Nataasan.

Beyond this cove is Campomanes Bay (seen below), an area rich in marine life, lush vegetation, and WWII history.



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FILIPINO STAR SHOWBIZ GOSSIP

Isabel Oli off the beaten track



Playing the scheming Rosita Monteverde on GMA 7's latest sine novela titled *Maging Akin Ka Lamang* is Isabel Oli's most off-beat role to date on both small and big screen. For inspiration, Isabel has Glenn Close of *Fatal Attraction*, Demi Moore of *Indecent Proposal* and Lorna Tolentino, who played Rosita in the Lino Brocka movie version and won a Famas Best Actress award for her portrayal. The sine novela, which premieres today after *Daisy Siete*, also stars Nadine Samonte as Elsa Paruel and Polo Ravales as Andy Abrigo, Rosita's object of fantasy.

"I watched the movie," shares Isabel on the preparation she made for the role. "I also checked out movies like *Fatal Attraction* with obsession as theme. It is fun playing kontrabida for a change. When the idea of playing Rosita was broached to me, I was surprised and had apprehensions. I started to like the character when they (the executives) explained to me everything. They told me I have the look and poise of Rosita. Besides, the project is a welcome change since I've been playing goody-goody roles for quite sometime. My being maldita is not the typical screaming and confrontational type. Rosita disguises her nastiness with sweetness and kindness." This is the real deal of becoming Rosita on TV, adds Isabel.

Learning to fall for the man who will never reciprocate her love and to do

everything to win him, however, is just half the battle to get into the psyche of Rosita. Isabel has to do some makeover with her looks to play the part well.

The GMA Artist Center talent hires her own stylist to make sure she looks glamorous and fabulous all the time just like Lorna did in the movie. Isabel even provides her own wardrobe to make her every appearance grand.

Isabel says she considers this a career move and that she wants to become a character actor and essay juicy, meaty roles in the future. After all, she has played many an endearing, lovely role on cam as she does off cam. It is time Isabel to spread her wings.

But no matter how aggressively she tries to be in the shoes of Rosita, Isabel falters in scenes that require her to be edgy or a vamp.

"I had a hard time doing and preparing for the rape scene which my character initiated with Andy (Polo)," recalls Isabel. "I made Andy drunk to make love with me. That was really tough for someone who is not that really aggressive in that aspect. But I had to do it because Rosita wanted to have a real connection with Andy. I thank director Gil Tejada who is supportive and patient with me. We just shot the scene once."

If Rosita lacks and craves for attention and love, Isabel has more than enough with boyfriend Paolo Contis, who gave a sterling performance as a good cop in the Metro Manila Film Festival entry *Banal*.

Isabel says things are getting better between her and Paolo after their five-month breakup. Isabel also adds that their fans won't hear wedding bells ringing anytime soon. She and Paolo are focused on their careers. Besides, marriage can wait.

Asked if there's a possibility that she might get obsessed with someone, Isabel answers, "It's not my personality. If ever I veer toward that direction, I will pray hard not to become obsessed. What I know is that I'm aggressive with my work. I'm willing to give more." ■

Ai-Ai files charges against a convenience store

It was not funny at all. Comedienne Ai-Ai de las Alas is filing a case of child abuse against a convenience store on P. Noval St., Sampaloc, Manila, right across UST where her 16-year-old son Sancho is studying.

Ai-Ai told reporters that the cashier of Mini Stop punched her son twice in the stomach and then detained him in the stock room for 10 minutes after accusing him of shop-lifting two packs of Mentos candy last Dec. 4.

"My son told me about it only now maybe because he was afraid," said Ai-Ai in tears. "Sancho told me that after he got the Mentos, he was trying to call a friend who was leaving the store and that's when the cashier grabbed him by the collar and accused him of trying to run away with the Mentos. After he was punched, he said that the cashier challenged him to a fight before pushing him into the stock room. Sancho said that he wasn't shop-lifting and even showed the cashier his wallet. Then, he said, 'I'm the son of Ai-Ai de las Alas and I won't



do anything to destroy her name,' and showed his ID. Diyos ko naman, dalawang packet ng Mentos, nanakawin ng anak ko" ■

Aiko guards public image

Aiko Melendez is wondering where all the stories linking her to other men are coming from. "Nagugulat talaga ako dahil may bago na raw akong boyfriend. Nakita pa raw akong nakikipaghalikan sa isang bar. It's so degrading. Para bang napaka-cheap ko naman," she gushes. "I'm a public official and I have a reputation to protect. I'm not stupid naman to behave like that in public at baka isipin ng constituents kong nagwawala ako."

She says she's not ready yet to commit to another relationship. "My second marriage just ended in separation. Natural lang na mas maging maingat ako ngayon. Dapat dahan-dahan lang as I don't want to make another mistake. Kaya lahat ng tsismis na nagli-link sa akin sa ganito o gan'ong lalaki, all I can say is hindi totoo 'yun. My priorities now are only my kids and my constituents."

In the hit game show, "1 Vs. 100," Aiko will be the main player tonight. "The moment I got their invitation to play in the show, kinabahan na talaga ako. Nakakanerbiyos naman talaga sumali sa gano'ng klase ng show, 'di ba? But I'm glad very supportive sa'kin ang host na si Edu Manzano. Nagpapatawa siya so nababawasan ang tension ko," says the councilor-



actress. "Nag-browse talaga ako tungkol sa iba't-ibang fields kasi general information naman ang tinatanong sa show."

Is she hoping to take home the jackpot prize of P2 million like Pooh and Jay Contreras? "Sana. I'm praying na makuha ko nga as I'll give most of it to charity, lalo na sa needy constituents ko. Basta I will do my best para hindi naman ako mapahiya." ■

Charice's 'snow white' holiday in New York



After she guested on Ellen DeGeneres' show in December last year, Charice Pempengco and her mom, Raquel, flew back home in the morning of Dec. 23 and rushed that same afternoon to Seoul to guest on the talent-search show *Star King* and to spend Christmas there. Before New Year, mother and daughter came back. Charice guested on *ASAP*, *Boy & Kris* and other shows of ABS-CBN.

Mother and daughter left last Jan. 9 and they flew back last night euphoric with memories of their first

trip to New York, also made possible by immigration lawyer and STAR columnist Michael Gurfinkel who processed their visas during their trip to L.A. on Dec. 13 last year for Ellen's show. He accompanied Charice to Ellen's show, and he and his wife Millie welcomed Charice and Raquel as their guests in their Beverly Hills home for two weeks. Charice and Raquel had a grand time at the Big Apple.

"At last," Charice was quoted as saying, "I touched my first snow. I even tasted it! Parang marshmallow!"

They rode the ferry to the Liberty Island and saw the Statue of Liberty up close, strolled around Central Park, marveled at the dazzling lights in Times Square, and watched a play on Broadway.

By coincidence, Raquel celebrated her birthday on Jan. 10, a day after their arrival in New York.

"It was my mom's best birthday ever," gasped Charice, "and I'll never forget my first visit to New York. Next time, I hope to bring along my brother Carl." ■

Sunshine Dizon: There's life after La Vendetta



It would have been easy for Sunshine Dizon to point an accusing finger on Paolo Contis to iron out the problems she finds herself in, even if she is later proven wrong. She, too, easily gets into trouble with Jean Garcia.

Is Sunshine going crazy? Don't get any wild ideas. She's just playing Eloisa when she put Paolo as Junjun in hot water and got Jean, as her sister Amanda, some bruises on GMA 7's *La Vendetta*, now on its final week.

The Eloisa role somehow subjects Sunshine's acting talent to another acid test. It is her first time to be on a TV soap with a twist of suspense and horror. She must also pretend to seeing a ghost where there's none. And convincing shrieks and screams while crying are musts in most scenes.

Eloisa and Sunshine may be complete opposites. But Sunshine still manages to make viewers feel the dilemma Eloisa is in night after night.

"Acting is my passion, my craft. I wouldn't deny that it's my bread and butter, that is why I give my all in every performance," Sunshine shares. "Immersing yourself into the character that is not you is tough."

That is why she feels happy every time people vividly see her as the many different characters she portrays. She, too, is on *Cloud Nine* whenever judges behind the award-giving bodies notice her performance. Her Star Awards' Best Actress trophy for her *Bakekang* role has added

another feather on Sunshine's colorful cap.

But Sunshine is not about to rest on her laurels. She will continuously harness her skills for another project coming her way as *La Vendetta* wraps up on Jan. 11. Another teleseries is in the drawing board, but Sunshine is not about to reveal it yet, until GMA heads cast her in it.

"Let's just wait and see because it's hard to presume something I'm not sure of. What I know is that there is another soap but nothing is concrete yet," she says.

Sunshine's plan of enrolling in a 12-session culinary class when she gets a month-long break from TV is more definite.

"It will be a good opportunity for me to hone that gift (cooking) and get to relax at the same time," Sunshine states.

This will also give her the chance to get her hands on the kiosk her mom Dorothy Laforteza put up and named *Sunshine Express* at Victory Mall in Caloocan City.

"I could have handled a business hadn't acting come along. I took up Business Management in La Salle College of St. Benilde. But I wasn't able to continue because TV projects started to pour in. I still plan to continue my studies but right now if given a break, I'd like to attend a culinary class," Sunshine says.

Indeed, Sunshine focuses on things worthwhile. She never delves on issues that doesn't concern her unless being asked to comment on the latest showbiz buzz like Jennylyn Mercado's present state. What does she think of *La Vendetta* co-star Jennylyn's pregnancy?

"I was surprised when I learned about it because we seldom get the chance to talk on the set. I just wish Jennylyn luck. She has nothing to feel sorry for. A baby is a blessing," Sunshine says.

Will she also have the guts to let people know if ever she gets pregnant?

"If it happens to me, I'll be a proud mom. It's not an easy task to be a mother," Sunshine replies. ■



A young actress will get pregnant out of wedlock but she won't marry the "culprit" (her actor-boyfriend) yet.

Barely three days after that item came out in this corner's annual, *Mga Halu-Halong* *Hula-Hula* last Jan. 1, word has reached *Funfare Update* that Jennylyn Mercado is pregnant and Patrick Garcia, her boyfriend of more than one year, is the "culprit."

"Yes, Jen is six weeks pregnant," Jennylyn's manager Becky Aguila confirmed to *Funfare Update* yesterday afternoon an hour after Jennylyn underwent an ultrasound at the St. Luke's Medical Center. But no, Jennylyn, 20, and Patrick, 26, are not getting married just because of her delicate condition.

"I asked Jen if she's ready to get married and she said she is not," added Becky whose other talent, Valerie Concepcion (Willie Revillame's co-host on the ABS-CBN noontime show *Wowowee*), gave birth at age 16 also out of wedlock. "I also asked Patrick if he's ready to get married and he said he is not."

Besides, Patrick's older sister

Cheska Garcia is getting married to Douglas Kramer, her basketball player-boyfriend, this year. Filipino superstition has it that sukob (weddings of siblings in the same year) is bad luck.

But from St. Luke's, Becky accompanied the young couple to the Makati City Hall, she said, "for counseling."

Informed about Jennylyn's condition, Wilma Galvante, SVP for Entertainment TV GMA with which Jennylyn and Patrick are under contract, said, "We might have to drop them from the new soap *Maging Akin Ka Lamang*."

Jennylyn is in the cast of *La Vendetta*, another GMA soap now airing.

Until Jennylyn gives birth in September, according to Becky, "She won't disappear from the scene all together; she will continue working until such time when her doctor tells her to rest na. But definitely, she will resume full-time work after she gives birth. She has to because she's the breadwinner in the family." ■

The Gutierrez twins to celebrate birthday January 21



Twins Raymond & Richard Gutierrez

Richard and Raymond Gutierrez are turning a year older on Monday, January 21, and the twins have a special birthday celebration in "SOP". Raymond will also be feted in "Showbiz Central."

Richard is now busy promoting his Valentine movie with Marian Rivera, "My Best Friend's Girlfriend" (or "BFGF"), but rumors have it that he's now really playing beautiful music with Jewel Mische, one of his leading ladies in the hit telefantasya, "Kamandag."

It's said even their co-stars have

noticed how close they are to each other when they're taping "Kamandag." "Pag hindi sila ang kinukunan, laging sila ang magkatabi at nag-uusap nang masinsinan," says our informer. "When Richard had a kissing scene with Maxene Magalona, nando'n si Jewel sa gilid ng set at nagbantay. Nagselos yata. After the taping, usually, sila rin ang magkasamang umaalis to eat out. Mukhang sila na nga talaga."

"Friendly naman ako to all my leading ladies," says Richard. "In the same way that Marian and I became

close friends while shooting 'BFGF' I want to have a good working relationship with everyone."

Richard as Vergel finally gets to face his nemesis, Mark Anthony Fernandez who's now known as the villainous Talim, in "Kamandag." They figure an intense fight with each other and when Mark is about to defeat Richard, guess who comes along to defend him. Who else but Jewel who plays the role of Jenny? In all fairness, it's easy to see that Richard and Jewel have great on-screen chemistry. ■

Filipino Star Photo Gallery



Ajennat Beauty Salon celebrated its first anniversary last October 21, 2007. Alicia Atayde Lee (6th from left, rear row) with her guests that included Dr. Gene Santander, Lita Sideco, Cora Eriza, Sylvia Lemaire, Nena Cordero, Esmeralda Roldan, Maryanne Solidarios, Hesil Barigues.



Accounting 1 students at Gilmore International College contributed \$20 each to the souvenir program commemorating the Silver Jubilee of the North American Filipino Star and the 18th anniversary of the College, the proceeds of which are designated to be donated to the Filipino Solidarity Cooperative. Standing from left: Magdalena Villanueva, Jackie Padua, Mae de Guzman, Sheila Gonzales, (seated) Nora Sacdalan, Zenaída Kharroubi (accounting teacher), and Vilma Kelly.



Laging Handa Scouts standing at attention before the playing of the national anthem. Scout Leader Romeo Valenzuela, in charge of the troop can be seen on the right behind them.



A good example of children's intercultural communication at play.



24th year of Sinulog celebration in Montreal organized by Marlene Birao Schacter and company at St. Kevin's Church Hall, January 20, 2008. There were many people, lots of food and many participants in the Sinulog contest.



One of the participating groups, Canadian Association of People Helping People from the Philippines.

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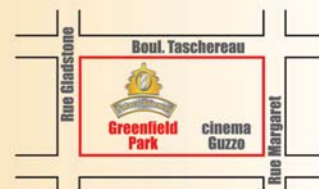
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Philippine Cuisine

Ginisang Munggo



Ingredients

- 1 lb Large shrimp
- 2 cups Dry mung beans
- 1 Yellow onion, peeled and sliced
- 2 tbsps Peanut oil
- 2 cloves Sliced garlic
- 4 1/2 cups Chicken soup stock
- 1 Thin slice of fresh ginger
- 1 tsp Salt
- 1 tsp Freshly ground pepper

Preparation

Soak beans overnight, then hull them by rubbing them in your hands, scoop out the hulls from the container, then rinse the beans.

Add peanut oil into a large preheated saucepan, and stir fry your yellow onion and garlic, then add your chicken soup stock and your slice of ginger. Bring the lot to a boil, reduce heat, cover, simmer for 20 minutes, remove your ginger, then continue cooking for about 10 minutes.

Add shrimp, salt and pepper, and cook for another 6 or 7 minutes, allowing the shrimp to absorb the flavor.

Servings: 4

Pork Empanadas



Ingredients

- 1 1/4 oz Pkg of double crust pastry
- 3 cups Finely minced pork
- 1 tbsp Olive oil
- 2 tbsp Minced garlic
- 1/4 cup Very finely minced onions
- 1/4 cup Minced tomatoes
- 1 cup Chopped hard-boiled eggs
- 1 cup Finely chopped sweet pickles
- 1 tsp Salt
- 1 tsp Freshly ground pepper

Preparation

Flatten the pastry dough and cut into 4-inch squares.

Saute the ingredients in a skillet, minus the pickles and eggs, and cook for about 30 minutes, until the pork is completely cooked. Drop in your eggs and pickles, blend them in thoroughly. Add salt and freshly ground pepper to taste. You may also want to include some hot peppers such as chipotle, or jalapenos.

Leave your mixture to cool for 1/2 hour, then drop large spoonfuls onto the pastry squares, fold into a triangle, wet edges with water, and use a fork to seal them.

bake the empanadas on a cookie sheet for 30 minutes in an oven preheated at 400°

Servings: 14

Ginataang Talong



Ingredients

- 2 Talong
- 1 Minced onion
- 1 cup Coconut cream
- 2 tbsp Vegetable oil
- 4 tsp Salt
- 12 tsp Freshly ground black pepper

Preparation

Roast whole eggplants in oven, then peel and chop them into small cubes. Mince the onion, then fry in oil in a medium saucepan, or deep skillet, until they become translucent, then drop in your diced eggplant. Stir fry,

adding the salt and pepper, then set aside and cover with coconut cream, let sit for 10 minutes, then serve.

Servings: 4

Adobong Gulay



Ingredients

- 1/2 lb Talong
- 1/2 lb Potatoes
- 1 Chopped onion
- 2 cloves Minced garlic
- Vegetable oil (as needed)
- Peppercorn (as needed)
- 2 Bay leaves
- Soy sauce (as needed)
- 1/2 tsp Sugar
- 1 tsp Freshly ground pepper

Preparation

Heat the oil in a large skillet, add peppercorn and bay leaves. Add garlic and saute until brown, add the onion, then add sugar, freshly ground pepper vinegar and soy sauce. Stir, cover and let simmer for 40 minutes. You may want to add a little water if too much evaporate during cooking.

Servings: 4

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What's inside those Balikbayan boxes?

January 15, 2008

Making his way to hundreds of Filipino homes every month, burly Ramon Ungco has a schedule more hectic than Santa Claus, delivering the much anticipated balikbayan boxes that herald another season of cheer and plenty.

Ungco's sleigh and reindeer are the ten-wheeler cargo trucks and closed utility vans that negotiate rough roads across the country to deposit the precious boxes safely at the doorstep of expectant families. His elves are the muscled men, hired truck helpers, who hoist and carry the heavy boxes and packages.

"I've been all over the country, from Aparri to Jolo, to deliver balikbayan boxes," says Ungco, who owns the Port Jersey Shipping International Inc. "And I've seen countless faces light up when they see the gifts from their loved ones in the US."

Ungco has been providing door-to-door balikbayan box service to the Philippines for the past 25 years, and is just one of the many "Santa Clauses" in the country who deliver loads of goodies specially picked out by Filipinos living abroad, for their loved ones back home. The local yellow pages reveal more than 50 firms engaged in shipping balikbayan boxes from the US, Middle East, Canada, Europe and Asia.

"After two decades of running this business, I've realized that Filipinos abroad always have this desire to share the good things they have with their families here," says Ungco, who maintains an office in New Jersey, and in Estrella Avenue, Makati City.

Among the lucky recipients of such generous tidings is Albert Emas, 24, for whom Christmas comes almost five times a year, with the arrival of large sweet-scented boxes from his aunt Ida, who migrated to New Jersey in 2004, and cousin Mon, a doctor in South Hampton, United Kingdom.

The boxes his family receives from his aunt, says Emas, are a treasure trove of canned goods, with the staples being corned beef and Spam; an assortment of chocolates and chocolate drinks; toys for the children and clothes for the grown-ups.

From his cousin, the goodies are usually bags, clothes and toys. "When

malls abroad launch their yearly sales, you can be sure that another box will soon be on its way to our doorstep," he says.

Like Emas, most Filipinos receive balikbayan boxes loaded with canned goods, the favorite item sent home by overseas Filipino workers, reveals Ungco, whose clients are mostly nurses, doctors, engineers and accountants.

Last year his company shipped about 10,000 balikbayan boxes, sized 28 by 18 inches. Thirty-five percent of the goods inside the boxes were canned goods, he says, with clothes and shoes accounting for 25 percent; candies, 15 percent, and chocolates, 10 percent. Second-hand home appliances, electronic gadgets, old furniture, perfumes and toiletries such as soap, body wash and tissue paper account for the remaining 15 percent.

"Filipinos abroad have this penchant for grocery shopping for the folks back home, especially when there's a sale in supermarkets," says Ungco, who once made the rounds of New York City as a limousine driver before he started his shipping company in 1982. "Besides, canned goods are really cheaper abroad," he explains.

Around November and December—the holiday season—balikbayan boxes are packed with motley confections and chocolates, particularly those that are not available in the country, observes Ungco. "It's a habit among Filipinos abroad—buying stuff not usually found in the Philippines," he says from his own past experiences of sending home similar gift boxes to his mother. He recalls shipping back even used home fixtures, and old clothing with the canned goods.

The UMAC Forwarders Express Inc., with offices in Quezon City and Marikina, shares the same experiences and observations on the contents of balikbayan boxes. The company, named after Teodoro Carino Jr., the late chair of the Forex Family of Companies, maintains offices in the United States, Europe, Middle East, Asia and Canada.

Canned goods, usually by the dozen, are the staple of the 23- x 20-inch balikbayan boxes, roughly 150,000 of which UMAC routed from the US, Europe and Canada last year. Other grocery items, including sacks of rice, are the

next products of choice in the boxes that come from those countries, says Nette Baguisa of UMAC-Toronto. Used clothing and appliances come in third on their packing list. "Sometimes Filipino migrants even send packs of garlic and onions because they get them cheap abroad," she adds.

The boxes often contain food items because the general perception abroad is that "people are going hungry in our country," says Rene Pinzon, who oversees UMAC's international units. Sending imported food rations is almost tantamount to giving their loved ones back home a taste of their lives abroad, he adds.

There is a marked difference, however, in the packages from the Middle East, Pinzon points out. Rather than foodstuff, the boxes are filled with appliances and second-hand clothing. "The variety of food available there is limited. Being a Muslim country, (Saudi Arabia) doesn't allow pork, and that narrows down the choices of food to sheep and chicken, which are more expensive," he says.

Items such as towels, bed sheets, soaps and other toiletries are often used as "fillers," to make sure that every inch of space inside the box is utilized, observes Baguisa.

While balikbayan boxes are often sent as gifts to loved ones, some people see them as a means to earn extra cash.

Take office worker Ann, 24, of Cabanatuan, Nueva Ecija, whose aunt in Chicago sends boxes of imported beauty products, toiletries and perfumes about twice a year.

"Sometimes there are just too many for the family, so we sell them to our officemates," admits Ann. The excess usually comes in handy during the Christmas season, she says, adding that she would make the rounds in her office to ask for orders.

"Victoria's Secret body sprays are our bestsellers," says Ann. "We sell them for P550, P50 lower than the price at the malls, on installment basis at that." Bath and Body Works soap products rank second. The informal business gives them extra cash for the holidays, she adds.

For Ungco, such enterprising moves are proof that balikbayan boxes bring not only delight to families back home, but also help boost the country's economy. His own business has gained from it, he adds. "When (the forwarding) business boomed in the 1990s, it started bringing in billions of pesos in taxes to our economy," he adds. ■

Abaca stages a comeback

January 15, 2008

Interest in abaca, a favorite crop long ago, is regaining with the new surge in demand abroad.

Councilor Leo Avila said the city is helping farmers in planting abaca in 5,000 hectares of land, especially in the highlands.

Among the companies reportedly interested in the fiber, which was the more popular crop before Davao shifted to banana decades ago, is the German automobile maker BMW, which prefers abaca fibers instead of fiber glass. Other car manufacturers have reportedly followed suit.

Before World War II, American entrepreneurs reportedly managed vast abaca plantations in Davao totalling 45,000 hectares.

Abaca is indigenous in the Philippines and can easily grow in between trees. Avila noted that it is suitable in the highlands, and could help preserve watershed areas. Davao City alone has nine watershed areas covering 80,000 hectares, he said.

He said Davao farmers better grab the opportunity because of the high demand for abaca, which now sells for P52 per kilo. Avila noted, though, that the price could shoot up to as much as P200 a kilo.

The problem is, abaca plants in Davao now reportedly have diseases and thus need to be replaced.

Avila said the Fiber Industry Development Authority (FIDA) is now helping out, putting up a laboratory here where tissues for disease-free abacas are being cultured. But he said the city government is also planning to put up its own laboratory.

For this project, the city has allotted P1 million from its annual development fund. Rep. Sid Ungab of the city's third district, also vowed to add more money for the project. But Avila said more money is needed because a good laboratory costs P10 million.

Avila said there are plans by players in the abaca industry to put up an abaca council that will guide in the propagation of abaca.

Indigenous people living in Sibulan have also expressed interest they would plant abaca in their ancestral lands. Avila said at least 8,000 hectares of ancestral lands are available for abaca farms. ■

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Strong peso hurting overseas workers' families

January 11, 2008

Jasmine Cordero, whose husband works in New Zealand, feels bad that the value of the US dollar against the peso is declining.

"Before, I could receive between 10,000 pesos (US\$246.39) and 15,000 pesos (\$369.59) a month from him. Now, it's less than that," Cordero of Tacloban City said. Her husband, Gerry, left the country in March 2007.

The peso gained nearly 19% against the dollar in 2007, making it Asia's best performing currency. The Philippine currency further strengthened against the dollar at the start of 2008.

Francis Allan Angelo of Iloilo City, a son of an overseas Filipino worker (OFW), said the strong peso adversely affected his family's income.

Angelo's mother Esther has been working in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, for 12 years.

"Before the dollar went down to 40 pesos, we received a monthly allotment of 25,000 pesos to 30,000 pesos. Now, we receive only around 20,000 pesos to 22,000 pesos," he said.

He said the strengthening of the peso came at a bad time because the family was still paying debts incurred when his father got sick.

"Before, we used to buy two sacks of rice and budget for groceries around 6,000 to 7,000 pesos per month. Now, we have a monthly budget of 4,000 to 5,000 pesos per month," he said.

Semi-skilled OFWs, or those earning between \$200 and \$399 a month, were the ones experiencing tougher times, a Malacañang deputy spokesperson said.

Evangelina Filamor, director of the Overseas Workers Welfare Administration (OWWA) for Eastern Visayas, said several OFWs visited her

office to express disappointment over the strong peso.

"They even told us that they feel like not going back abroad again because of the weak dollar. But then again, they realised that they have to leave the country and work outside for the sake of their family," Filamor said.

Help in the form of training, loans and financial literacy and scholarship programs are being extended by government agencies like OWWA to OFW families.

As early as 2007, President Gloria Arroyo directed the Department of Labour and Employment (Dole) and the Central Bank of the Philippines to help OFWs, said Anthony Golez, deputy presidential spokesperson.

Dole has focused its efforts on provinces where the semi-skilled OFWs come from. They include Samar, Leyte, North Cotabato, Zamboanga, Iloilo, Aklan, Capiz, Maguindanao, South Cotabato, Agusan, La Union, Isabela and Pangasinan.

"The families of the semi-skilled workers are provided with livelihood assistance, skills for employment, scholarship program, commissaries selling goods at discounted prices, and many others in coordination with (Department of Trade and Industry) and (Department of Agriculture)," Golez said in Davao City.

He said the BSP also came up with the Financial Literacy Programme (FLC) for overseas Filipino workers (OFWs) and their beneficiaries.

Under the FLC, OFWs and their beneficiaries are being urged to save and invest in financial products. "There are also alternative uses for their remittances such as business ventures," Golez said.

The BSP also helps OFWs become familiar with consumer laws and BSP issuances relating to customer protection.

OWWA has been conducting seminars and training for OFWs and their families to teach them how to run a business, said James Mendiola, regional director-in-charge of OWWA.

After the seminars, the families would form groups or circles, which could put up retail businesses, such as convenience and grocery stores, Mendiola said. ■

Weaker dollar to stop OFWs from leaving

January 14, 2008

The weakened dollar against the peso will discourage Filipinos, especially professionals and highly skilled workers, from leaving the country, an official of a recruiters' group said Friday.

Jackson Gan, vice president of the Federated Association of Manpower Exporters (FAME), said this phenomenon would reduce the number of overseas Filipino workers, making it unlikely for the government to hit its one-million target in OFW deployment for 2008.

The labor department has an OFW deployment annual target of one million until 2010.

"Workers are not attracted to overseas job opportunities because of the strong peso; they would rather seek work in the country since the peso is predicted to hit P38 to a dollar by end of 2008," he said.

This is unfortunate because there is a huge demand for experienced and skilled construction workers in the Middle East, Gan said.

Gan called on the government to organize a new manpower summit for all the stakeholders, including the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (Tesda) and the Department of Education. In this summit, he said, everyone would participate in finding solutions to the lack of qualified manpower.

Gan said that in 2007, almost half (some 480,000) of the 1,012,054 OFWs who were deployed were re-hires. He said this meant that no new jobs were created.

Another industry leader, Lito Soriano, said that the industry should emphasize the importance of technical-vocational training vis-a-vis traditional courses.

"Educational institutions should shift to vocational training as the demand is now for workers like welders, pipe-fitters, machinists, mechanics, electricians including tailors and engineers," he said.

A new policy of the Philippine Overseas Employment Administration, which among other things raises the minimum wage of Filipino domestic helpers working abroad, has caused the drop in the number of deployment for this type of work from 140,000 in 2006 to less than 40,000 in 2007, he said. ■

Making a home like no other in Philippines' first island lots

January 14, 2008

Eton Properties Philippines, Inc., the real-estate arm of the Lucio Tan Group, launches the first residential island lots in the Philippines—the South Lake Village at Eton City in Sta. Rosa, Laguna. The flagship project is worth billions of pesos and occupies almost 1,000 hectares of prime land.

It is situated near both sides of the South Luzon Expressway adjacent to the entrance of the existing Eton-City Greenfield interchange. Explaining the objective of the move, Danilo Ignacio, president and COO of Eton, says: "We wanted to build the first ever island lots in the Philippines to be a residential place for the people to live and enjoy. Our company is proud to present this because we know that this is a breakthrough not just for our company but also for the country."

This "out of the box" concept of a village boasts 18 residential islands surrounded by a 35-hectare man-made lake. Each island is approximately one hectare in size and will have eight to 10 residential lots of about 1,000 square meters each.

The project derives inspiration from the Foster City in San Francisco, Dubai's Jumeirah, The Palm and The World. South Lake Village is classified as "luxurious residence" with exquisite flora and fauna, iconic architecture evident in its linear parks along the river and lake-view corridors and bridges. Exclusivity, security and natural environment are the salient features of South Lake Village.

Expectedly, the South Lake Sports and Country Club offers the required recreational amenities—an outdoor Jacuzzi and infinity pool in the Swimming Pool Zone; Kid's Zone where children can exercise and play; Adult Zone for various sports and entertainment; F&B Zone for party and gatherings; Health and Spa Zone, which is a combined gym, aerobics area, clinic and salon, and Outdoor zone for family barbeques and lake activities. ■



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DUMANDAN ENTERPRISES

Government vows beauty over building in tourism drive

January 14, 2008

The Philippines' drive to attract more tourists must be balanced against environmental concerns after sewage spills and flooding triggered a construction halt on its most famous beach resort, a senior official said on Thursday.

Lito Atienza, the environment secretary, ordered all building on Boracay, a tiny island south of Manila renowned for its powdery white sands, to stop for six months after rapid development overwhelmed facilities and threatened to destroy the island's pristine reputation. Sewage was released into the sea and, with most beachfront areas already gobbled up, even the island's forests were being cut down to make way for more hotels.

"If we don't control development on Boracay island and in fact on all the other islands we may lose the very essence of attraction," said Atienza. "The uncontrolled development that has poured into the island has overloaded it."

Nearly 600,000 tourists visited Boracay last year, nearly four times the number of 10 years ago, and the Philippines has a goal of raising arrivals there by 10 percent each year.

Atienza said after July construction may be banned in some parts of the island, where a Shangri-La resort is being built, and

authorities will be scrutinising building permits.

Last year was a record for Philippine tourism with over 3 million arrivals, many of them overseas Filipinos but also hundreds of thousands of Koreans, Americans and Japanese. Tourism expenditure was tagged at nearly US\$5 billion.

year and fierce competition over prized lots in Boracay resulted in a deadly shootout on the island this week. A former soldier was killed and a teenager wounded.

Long-time visitors to Boracay have complained about overcrowding but large numbers of people do not bother Atienza, a

"It's not the number of people who destroy the environment, it's the abuse of some and the government allowing it," said the father of eight.

Environmentalists who argue that the Earth cannot cope with rapid population growth get short shrift from the 66 year old, who says illegal logging rather than human settlement is the main reason for landslides.

"They are telling them (poor people), don't have children any more because look at what happened, landslides happened because of your numbers. No, no, no it's not the number of the poor it's the super rich who have committed these landslides and calamities."

Activists were aghast when Atienza, formerly the mayor of Manila, was appointed environment chief last year. He was dubbed the "butcher of Arroceros" when he ordered the closure of Arroceros Park in Manila in 2003 to make way for new buildings.

Atienza said the trees were replanted elsewhere and insists that while his brief also includes promoting the mining sector his priority is always the environment.

"We have to always primarily consider the environment, the natural beauty of an area. All else will have to come in second." ■



Environment and Natural Resources Secretary Joselito Atienza said all construction permits would be withheld in Boracay until the end of June 2008.

The Philippines wants to attract US\$5.8 billion in visitor spending this

devout Catholic and the chairman of the Philippines' pro-life movement.

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Community News



Tri-City Softball Team Champion 2004, 2005, 2006 and 2007 2007

FCAWI poses with Ambassador Jose Brillantes and FCAWI president Ramon Vicente after retaining the Championship Trophy held at Long Sault. Seated left to right: Alvin Trinidad, Leslie Tejada and Ron Ylagan. Standing left to right: Nards Alberto, Romy Ilagan (Team Captain and MVP), Noel Tejada, Ambassador Jose Brillantes, Eddie Aguila, Mke, Romy Ilagan (Team Captain and MVP) Noel Tejada, Ambassador Jose Brillantes, Eddie Aguila, Mike, Ricky Aguino, Ramon Vicente and Sonny Macalanda. Standing at the back row: Rodel Tejada. Not in photo was Ador Bulosan.

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CANADIAN-MADE, METH-LACED ECSTASY BEING DUMPED INTO U.S. ILLEGAL DRUG MARKETS IS A ONCE-WANING FAD MAKING A COMEBACK IN A DANGEROUS NEW FORM?

(Washington, DC) – The White House Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP) is warning public health and safety leaders across the country about a dangerous new drug threat coming from Canada. Ecstasy laced with methamphetamine (meth) has been entering the United States illegal drug markets, particularly in northern border states. Intelligence reports indicate that once smuggled into the U.S., the meth-laced Ecstasy is then being distributed throughout the country.

The dangerous poly-drug combination of methamphetamine and Ecstasy can have severe health consequences, especially as both drugs have toxic effects on the brain. They both can interfere with the body's ability to regulate temperature, leading to sharp increases in body temperature (hyperthermia), which can result in liver, kidney, and cardiovascular system failure and death. The potential for a life-threatening or fatal overdose is also increased when meth-laced Ecstasy is combined with alcohol. Recent laboratory research suggests that Ecstasy and meth combinations may produce greater adverse neurochemical and behavioral effects than either drug alone.

John Walters, the Nation's "Drug Czar," said, "This 'Extreme Ecstasy' is a disturbing development in what has been one of the most significant international achievements against the illicit drug trade. Historic progress against Ecstasy availability and use is in jeopardy of being rolled back by Canadian criminal organizations. Desperate to develop their client base, they are dangerously altering a

product for which demand by youth and young adults has plummeted, and are exploiting vulnerabilities along our shared border. This is alarming for the youth of both Canada and the United States."

Ecstasy use in the United States rose in the late 1990s with the rise of the 'Rave' culture, however due to the well-coordinated national and international response - Ecstasy use in the U.S. diminished in the early 2000s. In fact, the U.S. witnessed a 54 percent reduction since 2001 in the number of United States teens using Ecstasy in the past month, however recent data show progress against the drug has ebbed. The number of people in the U.S. who reported that they tried Ecstasy for the first time during the past year increased 40 percent between 2005 and 2006 – from 615,000 to 860,000. One-third of these new users in 2006 were under age 18 when they started using Ecstasy.

And while still lower than its peak in 2002, past-month Ecstasy use has been increasing over the last two years among young adults aged 18-25. An estimated 326,000 young adults reported past-month Ecstasy use in 2006, compared to 231,000 in 2004. These increases coincide with increased trafficking of Ecstasy from Canada. Additionally, the latest Monitoring the Future Study, which tracks teen attitudes and behavior with respect to drug use, found decreases in the perception of risk of taking Ecstasy occasionally among 8th and 10th graders (-7% and -4%, respectively). After years of increased perception of risk for Ecstasy use, today's young people are not getting the message that Ecstasy use is dangerous and potentially deadly.

Prior to 2003, Europe (primarily The Netherlands and Belgium) was the predominant source of Ecstasy consumed in the United States. Increased cooperation among U.S. and European governments, combined with improved law

From Page 1 Spring elections

Duceppe is gearing up for a dogfight with the Conservatives in the next federal election. Duceppe delivered the message to about 300 supporters at a Bloc conference in Montreal, where the party is shifting into election mode.

Bloc Québécois Leader Gilles Duceppe said Tuesday he expects a federal election will be called in about a month. Speaking in Quebec City, Duceppe said he believes the country will be plunged into an election campaign after MPs vote on the government's plan to help the forestry and manufacturing sectors.

FA spokesman for the Prime Minister's Office strongly denies a claim by the Newfoundland premier that Stephen Harper said the federal Conservatives don't need Newfoundland seats to win an election. Danny Williams made the comment Monday in St. John's, telling reporters Harper told him at a meeting between the two in November that: "I don't need Newfoundland and Labrador to win." Premiers want aid money now, not after uncertain budget vote

The premiers of Ontario and Quebec ganged up on Prime Minister

enforcement operations and mass media reports, effectively dismantled the European – U.S. Ecstasy trade. However, U.S. and Canadian intelligence reports indicate that Canada-based drug trafficking organizations are attempting to fill the supply void, and have drastically increased their Ecstasy production and trafficking.

The Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) estimates that the current combined production capacity of Canadian Ecstasy laboratories exceeds 2 million tablets per week. Federal, State, and local law enforcement agencies along the U.S. – Canada border report large increases in the flow of Ecstasy from Canada into the United States. In 2003, 568,220 dosage units of Ecstasy were seized federally in the ten Northern border states; in 2006, 5,485,619 dosage units were seized.

Alarming, more than 55 percent of the Ecstasy samples seized in the United States last year contained methamphetamine. Cutting their product with less-expensive methamphetamine boosts profits for Canadian Ecstasy producers, likely increases the addictive potential of their product, and effectively gives a dangerous "face lift" to a designer drug that had fallen out of fashion with young American drug users.

Federal law enforcement officers are working with the RCMP to put greater pressure on Canadian Ecstasy producers through increased intelligence sharing and coordinated enforcement operations, and RCMP officials are focusing their efforts on the importation of precursor chemicals used in drug production. In the meantime, Director Walters is urging State and local public health officials to reinvigorate their prevention efforts, to enhance educational outreach to

Stephen Harper on Thursday and demanded a newly announced, \$1-billion relief package aimed at cushioning the impact of the soaring dollar on Canadian industries and workers not be held hostage to a minority Parliament and possible election.

New Democratic Party Leader Jack Layton is hoping to inspire an orange wave across Canada during a general election in 2008 to change the country's direction on fighting global warming, the war in Afghanistan and reducing the gap between Canadians who make the most money and those who make the least. "We had some exciting growth [for the NDP] in 2007, and would certainly hope to see that continue," Mr. Layton said in an end-of-year interview with CanWest News Service on Monday.

'Twas the year of the Non-Election. You remember . . . the vote that was a certainty going to be last spring as a new and confident Liberal Leader Stephane Dion piggybacked on his political honeymoon to return the party to its natural governing state. Fortunately for the hapless, honeymoonless official Opposition leader, Prime Minister Stephen Harper didn't give him a decent non-confiden

youth, parents, school systems, emergency departments, medical examiners, poison control centers, and law enforcement agencies regarding the hazards of Ecstasy and methamphetamine, to shore up treatment systems to look for and address the unique and well known challenges of meth addiction.

"We cannot allow our young people to once again be victimized by the 'Rave' culture, 'designer' drugs, or the myth that drug use is safe," said Director Walters. "We cannot afford to be complacent with the progress made against Ecstasy since 2001. Just as we must teach new generations of children to read, we must continue to educate new generations of young people on the harms of drug use."
iving Beyond the Holiday Season
Gifts of Oxen, Safe Motherhood Kits and Clean Water Will Make a Difference All Year Round

From page 1 Hillary or Obama

who wins in November, as long as it's a Democrat.

In a phone interview on Jan. 9, Baldwin, 81, said, "We were all surprised that Hillary won. After he won in Iowa, I thought that Obama would win (in New Hampshire)." He voted for Obama because he's a "fresh face, he has no baggage," but expressed concerns whether Obama would win "in the long run." People looking for change favor Obama, he added.

He said he also liked John Edwards, 2004 vice presidential candidate and former North Carolina senator. "I've met him and his wife several times," he said. But time is running out on cash-strapped Edwards, who is hanging on. New Mexico Gov. Bill Richardson dropped from the race Jan. 10, after poor finishes in Iowa and New
See Page 17 Hillary or Obama



Isaac T. Goodine

Global Perspectives



All about Migration in 2008

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have made this crying sound.
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Anyone pulled from Source and
center And taken far from house and
home Longs to return to where the
roots are, Longs to rest, no more to
roam.

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from a poem by RUMI, a 13th century
Persian; put to song by Michael
Green, a 21st century American. The
CD is available from
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The Society for International
Development, celebrating 50 years,
devoted the December 2007 issue of
its Quarterly to the issues of migration
and development.

While no one knows for sure
how many human migrants there are
in the world today it has been
estimated that there are about
100,000,000 people who have been
taken far from house and home; for
whatever reason. Whatever the
reason all share a common humanity
and are motivated to move away from
something they don't like or toward
something that they do like.

The extremes of these
motivating emotions are hate and
love, manifested in society as war and
peace. Between these extremes there
are numerous reasons for migration
with economic concerns among the
leading causes. We are a mobile
species and travel for a host of
reasons so we require a whole lexicon
to categorize who we are when we
migrate. War and conflict create
refugees, terrorists, and grows the
ranks of the poor who migrate to find
a better life; while peace creates
pilgrims, tourists, traders, and
transnational workers of many stripes.
The absence of war and access to the
ballot box are not enough to meet
expectations as people also need
access to the marketplace through
education and jobs.

Who we are depends on lot of
things. It also depends on who is
asking and why. It also depends on
who we think we are. In the tale of
Alice in Wonderland, the heroine

responds to the question this way:
"Well, I don't rightly know who I am.
When I got up this morning I thought I
knew, but as the day progressed, I
became unsure."

Canadian society is
multicultural and probably the most
accommodating of diversity in the
world today but that does not make it
as good as it can be, or as good as we
intend it to be. One of the things we
must be aware of and address soon is
a tendency to fear strangers,
especially if newcomers, such as
migrants are feared simply because
they are different.

In her book, *Working in a
Cross-cultural Environment*, Violeta A.
Laraya, kindly mentioned yours truly
and wrote: "Mr. Goodine is the
epitome of a person who is able to live
in another culture and practically
become like one of the natives, the
color of his skin and eyes not
withstanding."

May I say it took a long time
and much experience in many
cultures before I became the
particular Mr. Goodine that Mrs.
Laraya met? What that means is that
working across-cultures is a learning
experience, both challenging and
rewarding. Of course I am white and
my eyes are blue so that makes me a
visible minority in many of the
countries where I have worked. I am
aware that stereotyping can be
devastating when it is encountered as
discrimination, and that is especially
true for someone who has been taken
far from house and home in order to
earn a livelihood.

No country has ever had so
many people leaving home to earn a
decent livelihood as has the
Philippines. They work in many
countries doing many jobs, and for
the most part, perform service of high
quality for reasonable wages. Of the
many things that Filipinos do well,
care-giving is an art form. This
includes specially trained Registered
Nurses who work abroad, often on a
contract for a fixed term. While living
in the Philippines the early 1990's, I
learned that the Philippine Nurses
Association had 181,000 Registered
Nurses on their nominal rolls (of which
95 percent were female) and of that
number 120,000 (over 66 percent)
were working abroad. Those working
abroad include Canada, but in most
cases those in Canada came, not
under work-permits but, by

immigration. A couple of years ago, I
had the distinct pleasure to address
the annual meeting of the Filipino
Nurses Association of Montreal during
which we discussed the aims and
objectives of the Nightingale Initiative
for Global Health that includes a
recommendation(# 3): Collaborate--
across disciplines and across
cultures--for promoting health in
community settings. The discussion
was based on the writings of Dr. Deva-
Marie Beck, who is now based in
Ottawa, as International Director of
NIGH. For more on the NIGH
movement please visit the Website at:
www.nighcommunities.org

Currently, the Canadian
Nurses Association is celebrating their
Centennial Anniversary Year in 2008
and we honor every one in this
extraordinary group as each of the
250,000 registered nurses have
touched every aspect of Canadian life.
Even as we celebrate this
achievement we must recognize that
this professional group is under
pressure due to heavy workloads and
emerging staff shortages due to
recent and impending retirements.
They are not alone as Canada's baby-
boomer generation reaches
retirement age, but nurses require
special preparation and the schools of
nursing do not have sufficient student
nurses in line to fill projected
vacancies and in some cases there
will be a shortage of teaching staff.
Current and emerging vacancies

create a demand for Foreign Trained
nurses and the Philippines can offer
one of the best options. Education is
in English, schools are amenable to
curriculum changes, if necessary, to
meet required standards for foreign
employment, and many have
experience in the home country as
well as outside.

If we work together
synergistically to share our
knowledge and resources, we can
quickly establish procedures to
improve the efficiency and
effectiveness of recruiting and
deploying professional and technical
staff from abroad. What we know for
sure is that if we can clearly identify
the requirements for the jobs on offer,
training institutions in the Philippines
will meet those requirements.
Blockages and delays from the
Canadian side can be overcome as
the Canadian Government and some
provinces have already taken
concrete steps to remove barriers and
speed up integration. The main
impediments to be overcome relate to
recognition of credentials; evaluation
and accreditation of work experience
gained at home and abroad; and
language constraints associated with
cross-cultural communications. WE
CAN DO THE REQUIRED.

Isaac's Email is:
itgoodine20@hotmail.com

From page 16 Hillary or Obama

Hampshire.

Having run her own grueling
campaign in this area, a realistic Vellie
Sando Dietrich Hall said Jan. 8, when
it looked like Hillary would again lose
big in New Hampshire, "It's too early to
determine Hillary's chances. There are
still more primaries coming up." She
said she herself was leaning towards
former Republican Massachusetts Gov.
Mitt Romney.

Republican Ms. Hall, a successful
businesswoman, ran last November for
Fairfax supervisor in the nearby state of
Virginia, losing but capturing 37
percent of the vote in her first foray in
politics. Gautam Dutta, executive
director of Asian American Action Fund
based in this U.S. capital, a political
action committee supporting
Democrats, said with her unexpected
victory in New Hampshire primary,
"Hillary has stormed back into the

presidential race."

But he added: "Although Senator
Clinton won New Hampshire, the
presidential race is far from over. At this
point, both Senator Clinton and
Senator Obama have an even chance
of winning the Democratic nomination."
Dutta noted the race for the Democratic
presidential nomination "will not be
decided before February 5, when
voters in major states like California
and New York will be voting." Hillary is
banking on winning on Feb. 5, when
over 20 states will be voting for the
nominee from both parties.

The New York Times reported Hillary
won 39 percent to 37 percent over
Obama in New Hampshire. Hillary was
shown on TV, exulting, "Now together,
let's give America the kind of
comeback that New Hampshire has
just given me."



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Palace readies move against the 'godfather of smuggling'

January 14, 2008

The quarrel between Malacañang and Customs worsened yesterday after the Palace blamed a Customs official for the continuing smuggling at the agency.

The head of the Presidential Anti-Smuggling Group called a ranking Customs official the "godfather of smuggling" in the country, blaming him for the continuing operation of 37 people who allegedly smuggle luxury cars from Metro Manila and Cebu alone.

Group head Antonio Villar said the official was making millions of pesos out of each luxury car smuggled in, but did not name him.

"It goes all the way up to this official," he said.

"He is the godfather of smuggling in the Philippines. Smuggling has become so centralized and he has become a multi-millionaire because of this."

Villar made the statement even as President Arroyo appointed Nicasio Radovan Jr., formerly chief of the Southern Tagalog police, as director of the Customs Enforcement and Security Service—a critical unit in the government's anti-smuggling campaign.

Radovan replaces retired Gen. Nestor Gualberto, who will now head up the agency's Financial Services Division replacing acting chief Edna Barrida.

Customs Commissioner Napoleon Morales welcomed Radovan, saying his experience as a police officer would be a big help to his agency.

Villar said his team was now collecting evidence against the Customs official he accuses of smuggling, "so as to nail not only the small players but the biggest of them all."



Who did it? Presidential Anti-Smuggling Group head Antonio Villar points to one of 24 smuggled cars seized in Makati last year.

He said his group was now running after the 37 top smugglers,

and of whom seven operated in Cebu while the rest were scattered all over Metro Manila.

He named a Romy Ronquillo in particular, who is accused of operating car centers in Xavierville, Quezon City, and in Ortigas, Pasig City, that allegedly offer smuggled luxury vehicles.

"We have been trying to get a warrant for seizure and detention for

are taking their sweet time," he said, adding Ronquillo had already moved out some of the smuggled cars as a result.

Villar said Ronquillo had even dropped the name of presidential son and Pampanga Rep. Juan Miguel Arroyo, Villar's godson, to warn his group to leave him alone.

"But when I called up Mikey [Arroyo], he told me, 'Ninong, go after that guy. Put that guy behind bars', so it is now up to Customs."

Villar said Ronquillo paid only P600,000 in taxes for four Hummers, which cost between P6 million and 10 million each.

Last month, Villar's group seized 81 luxury cars from an automobile firm in Makati City, of which three reportedly were owned by San Juan Mayor Jose Victor Ejercito.

Albay Rep. Al Francis Bichara reportedly owned four of the smuggled vehicles, while comedian Willie Revillame admitted owning a 2006 Ferrari, which was declared as being worth only P1 million.

The cars were seized from Auto sports 24 Corp. in Pasong Tamo, Makati, along with a Lamborghini, 21 BMWs, 16 Mercedes Benzes, 11 Porsche sports cars, four Jaguars, three Volvos, Ferraris, Carera, Boxter, Land Cruisers, Range Rovers, Cherokee and a Mini Cooper. ■

Arroyo calls on Congress anew to pass P1.2-Trillion budget

January 15, 2008

President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo called on Congress on Tuesday to pass the P1.2 trillion national budget for 2008, which lawmakers failed to do before going on recess last year.

Speaking at the start of a Cabinet meeting in Malacañang, Arroyo said the passage of the budget was necessary for the government to respond to rising prices of oil and basic commodities.



The President said the budget was also needed to finance the construction of farm to market roads and irrigation projects.

"Upang di maantala ang mahahalagang proyekto at programa,

nananawagan tayo sa Kongreso na agad makabuo ng kasunduan sa pagitan ng Senado at Kamara, at ipasa ang budget sa lalong madaling panahon [So that important projects and programs will not be delayed, I am calling on the Senate and the House of Representatives to immediately agree to pass the budget at the soonest possible time]," Arroyo said.

"Ito ang pondong makakalawak ng tulong sa maralitang nahihirapan kapag tumataas ang presyo ng pangunahing bilihin dahil sa pagtaas ng presyo ng langis sa buong mundo [These are the funds that will greatly help poverty-stricken Filipinos everytime the prices of basic goods will rise as a result of an increase in the cost of oil]," she added.

At the same time, the President said the Presidential Anti-Graft Commission (PAGC), and the Departments of Finance and Budget would review its programs to ensure transparency in government.

The President also vowed more thorough investigations on government officials accused of corruption, with the help of civil society.

Arroyo said these moves were meant to ensure that "the people would benefit from the gains of the growing economy." ■

Cleanup of Boracay Mansion finally begins

January 15, 2008

Swarms of mosquitoes in an overgrown garden met teams of the Quezon City government that were finally able to conduct clearing operations at the Boracay Mansion in New Manila, Quezon City.

A mistress of deposed President Joseph Estrada, who was convicted of plunder and later pardoned, allegedly lived in the house.

The teams completed 80 percent of the task yesterday morning.

City treasurer Victor Endriga said Friday's debate on who should clean up the property was the result of miscommunication between city officials and the Sandiganbayan sheriff and security services office.

"In fairness to Sheriff Edgardo Urieta, he called me up late Friday and apologized for the actions of his men. He said his men had the mistaken notion that city personnel were at the site to build a structure," Endriga told the Inquirer.

On Friday, personnel from the sheriff's office reportedly drove away teams from the Quezon City Engineering Department, the Department of Public Order and Safety and the Environment Protection and Waste Management Department that were going to conduct clearing operations on the property at 100 10th and 11th Streets in New Manila.



Endriga said he assured the Sandiganbayan sheriff the city government would await the decision of the Sandiganbayan and the Supreme Courts on the matter of ownership and disposition of the property.

The team that started the cleanup at 8 a.m. yesterday collected five truckloads of weeds, cut grass and waste. Neighbors, Endriga said, had expressed fear that snakes and dengue-carrying mosquitoes could be breeding in the property.

"The sheriff and I agreed to siphon off the stagnant water from the pool and fill it up with land to prevent the spread of disease in the neighborhood," the city treasurer said, adding the city engineering department would do the job. ■



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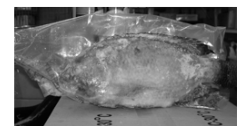
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