

President Arroyo pardons Estrada



Ousted Philippine President Joseph Estrada, right, waves beside his wife, former Senator Lol, as he arrives at their house in San Juan city, Philippines, on Friday Oct. 26, 2007.

Thursday, October 25, 2007
7:21 AM MANILA, Philippines -- President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo pardoned her ousted predecessor Thursday, paving the way for Joseph Estrada's release a month after he was sentenced to life in prison for corruption.

Acting Executive Secretary Ignacio Bunye said the pardon would restore Estrada's civil and political rights and would take effect upon his acceptance.

There was no immediate reaction from the 70-year-old Estrada, who has been allowed by the anti-graft Sandiganbayan court to be detained in his sprawling villa near Manila while appealing his Sept. 12 conviction for plunder.

Estrada's lawyers withdrew his appeal Monday, removing a key obstacle to the grant of pardon.

Arroyo cited her government's policy of releasing convicts who have

reached 70, Estrada's 6 1/2 years' detention and his public pledge not to seek any public office in deciding to pardon her political nemesis.

A court order forfeiting a mansion and more than \$15.5 million in bank accounts believed to be owned by Estrada would remain in place, according to Arroyo's decision, which was read by Bunye in a nationally televised announcement.

"Arroyo is fully convinced that this pardon is in order," Bunye told reporters.

A Sandiganbayan court spokesman, Renato Bocar, said it would order Estrada's release after receiving a copy of Arroyo's grant of pardon.

Estrada was ousted by a nonviolent "people power" revolt that was co-led by Arroyo, then his vice president, in 2001 over allegations of

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PARDON



Palawan

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Critics denounce PQ citizenship bill

By Zenaida Kharroubi



Asmahan (Azy) Manzour has the support of her team, the Nepean Hotspurs in Ottawa. A referee judged that her headgear posed a risk to herself and others.

From time to time, we have controversies arising from the right of immigrants to practice their culture. We also hear about the question of whether or not there is still systemic racism that is deeply embedded in many places, be it in public or private domains but no one seems to admit openly they exist. Lately, we have had a series of stories or news about what has been happening in different quarters. One can recall about the school boy who was punished by his teacher for using a spoon that caused a furor in the Filipino community, the law suit to demand the right of a boy to carry a "kirpan" for it is part of his culture, and the case of a soccer player who was ejected from a game for wearing a hijab. The latest furor has been created by the introduction of Bill 195 by Madame Pauline Marois. This Bill practically limits the democratic rights of a person to run for public office if he is unable to speak French.

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CITIZEN BILL

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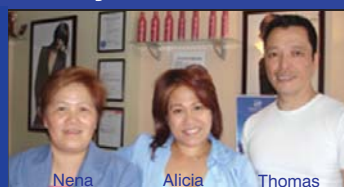
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EDITORIAL

What is the controversy behind "reasonable accommodation"?

Reasonable accommodation is a legal term used in Canada, which is the legal obligation to modify a law or a norm when it is contrary to fundamental rights stipulated in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. This concept is, according to the Supreme Court of Canada, a logical consequence of the Charter itself. The term is currently used in the public debate in various meanings involving minority rights. (The origin of the term "reasonable accommodation" is found in labour-market jurisprudence, and refers to the obligation of employers to change some general rules for certain employees, under the condition that there is no "excessive constraint".)

The term itself does not seem to be offensive or negative, however, it has become a controversial issue politically. In an open letter to the Quebecois people on Jan. 16, 2007, Mario Dumont, the leader of Quebec's third party, the ADQ, applied this phrase to what some others in Quebec, Jean Charest among them, prefer to call "reasonable accommodation". After the town of Herouville enacted a code of conduct earlier this year for immigrants, Premier Jean Charest, citing several instances of "unreasonable" accommodation, appointed a two-man commission in February 2007 to investigate the issue and report back by 31 March 2008. Its formal title is the Consultation Commission on Accommodation Practices Related to Cultural Differences. It is sometimes called the Bouchard-Taylor Commission. The town's "Code of Life" gained international notoriety after councillors stated that anyone wanting to live in the town - located between Quebec City and Montreal -- had to live by certain rules. Among the rules are the prohibition of stoning of women, wearing of the hijab, and mutilation of women's genitalia. As there are not even any visible minorities in the town, one wonders why they bother to pass these rules. Some critics alleged that this may be due to the town's intolerant attitude towards those who are different from them.

The controversy about immigrants and their acceptance in Quebec

society even became more complicated and controversial, to say the least, when Madame Pauline Marois introduced Bill 195 in the National Legislature. Without the knowledge of French, a person, old or new immigrant, even though possessing Canadian citizenship will not be able to run for any public office. Premier Charest wrote an open letter in the Montreal Gazette, criticizing the Bill and asking Mme Marois to withdraw it. However, she refused to budge in her position and only slightly softened her stand by saying that she will be willing to submit the bill to scrutiny by the Human Rights Commission to see if any of the provisions could be declared unconstitutional.

Constitutional or not, the fact that Madame Marois has introduced a bill which focuses on the definition of Quebec citizenship is quite disheartening or as Premier Charest calls it, a "backward" move in a democratic country like Canada. Such a bill actually reinforces the idea of a government being able to dictate everything that an English speaking immigrant must do in order to participate in civil society. Needless to say, it is easier to participate in the debate when one can speak the language of the majority, but this should not be a reason to deprive anyone of the right to run in a democratic election. Why not leave it to the person's common sense to seek knowledge of the language that is required to be a competent legislator? Another important question is about the motivation of Mme Marois. Is she saying that Quebec is a separate country and therefore can impose the requirements of citizenship?

It appears that Madame Marois is also contradicting the idea behind "reasonable accommodation." By introducing the Quebec citizenship bill, she seems to be saying that English speaking immigrants are not good enough until they can speak French. She completely ignores other qualifications like having the intelligence to think through a problem and find solutions. In her mind, the only thing that counts is one's ability to speak French.

"We're slipping into possibly a kind

of unthinkable style of governance that will basically jeopardize minority rights in a liberal democracy like ours," race relations advocate Fo Niemi told CTV in Montreal.

Just like any other idea that can be taken to the extreme, "reasonable accommodation" will blur the view of people who are self-centered and selfish but if it is applied properly under the right conditions, it is conducive to the development of a harmonious relationship in a multi-cultural society such as ours.

We will be interested to know what the commission will find out about how people view immigrants and if they understand the value of immigration.

How well can the idea of "reasonable accommodation" resolve the conflicting attitudes towards immigrants? Will the recommendations be actually used to overcome the inherent prejudices against immigrants? Will there be funds available to help accommodate the needs of immigrants in their struggle for equality in the social, political, and economic fields?

Zenaida Ferry Kharroubi

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Canada to accept up to 265,000 new immigrants in 2008

Ottawa, October 31, 2007 - The Honourable Diane Finley, Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, announced today that Canada expects to welcome between 240,000 and 265,000 newcomers in 2008.

The target is set out in the 2007 Annual Report to Parliament on Immigration tabled today in the House of Commons. The report provides information on immigration activities in 2006 and outlines the immigration plan for 2008.

"Our government believes that immigration plays an important role in building our communities and growing our economy," said Minister Finley. "The immigration targets tabled today will help ensure that Canada continues to grow and benefit from all that newcomers and their families bring to our country."

The Canadian Experience Class, first announced in the 2007 budget and a key element of the government's long-term immigration plan, will be implemented in 2008 for certain skilled temporary workers and international students with Canadian degrees and Canadian work experience. Once the class is established and for the first time, individuals meeting specific criteria will be able to apply for permanent resident status from within Canada.

The Canadian Experience Class adds to other initiatives to

address labour market needs and to help in the successful integration of newcomers. These include

establishing the Foreign Credentials Referral Office (FCRO), improving the Temporary Foreign Worker program and expanding the Provincial Nominee Program.

The FCRO is working with the provinces and territories to help internationally trained individuals get their skills assessed and recognized.

The Provincial Nominee Program allows provinces and territories to identify and nominate immigrants who will address their labour market needs.

Canada is continuing its humanitarian tradition by, for example, resettling 800 Karen refugees from Thailand and committing to welcoming 2,000

more. Canada also played an important role in negotiations on the protracted situation of Bhutanese refugees in Nepal, agreeing to resettle 5,000 of them over the next few years. The federal government has also committed an additional \$1.3 billion in settlement funding over five years, and \$342 million per year ongoing, to help newcomers succeed.

The Annual Report to Parliament on Immigration, which must be tabled by November 1 each year, is a requirement under the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act.

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Government of Canada Announces New Call for Proposals for Women's Projects

OTTAWA, Nov. 1 /CNW Telbec/ - The Honourable Josée Verner, Minister of Canadian Heritage, Status of Women and Official Languages, today announced a second call for proposals to solicit funding from the Women's Community Fund of Status of Women Canada.

The new call invites eligible organizations to access funding from the overall \$15.3 million Women's Program budget of Status of Women Canada.

"Our Government is working to advance women's participation in the economic, social and cultural life of Canada and we are doing so at record levels of funding," Minister Verner said. "We are eager to work with groups that will have a direct, positive impact on women in their communities."

Status of Women Canada will focus its support on projects that promote women's economic security and prosperity, health, safety and those

aimed at ending all forms of discrimination and violence against women. As a condition of eligibility for funding, projects must support the advancement of all women in Canada. The first call for proposals was issued on June 4, 2007. On October 11, 2007, Minister Verner announced that 60 projects will receive funding totalling \$8 million through the Women's Program of Status of Women Canada.

The Women's Community Fund makes \$12.3 million available per year for grants and contributions to support eligible projects at the local, regional and national level. To qualify, a project must advance the economic, social and cultural situation of women through initiatives that directly support women in their communities. The deadline for submissions to the Women's Community Fund, under the second call for proposals, is December 17, 2007.

Applications and Funding Guidelines for the Women's Community Fund are available on the SWC website (<http://www.swc-cfc.gc.ca>). Status of Women Canada is a federal government department.

For more information on Status of Women Canada, visit <http://www.swc-cfc.gc.ca/>. For further information: Richard Walker, Press Secretary, Office of the Minister of Canadian Heritage, Status of Women and Official Languages, (819)997-7788; Nanci-Jean Waugh, Director of Communications, Status of Women Canada, (613) 995-7839



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From Page 1

Pardon

massive corruption and misrule. He was arrested and detained a few months later, angering his legions of followers.

Estrada was convicted last September after a landmark six-year trial on charges that he took bribes and kickbacks while in office. He was sentenced to life in prison.

Estrada has denied the charges and accused Arroyo of masterminding his removal in a conspiracy with leaders of the Roman Catholic church and senior military officers.

A former action film star who once pulled off the biggest election victory in Philippine history, Estrada remains popular among impoverished Filipinos who adored his B-movies, where he often portrayed roles as a champion of the poor.

He served as an opposition icon, often criticizing Arroyo from behind bars.

Estrada told The Associated Press earlier this week that he would not seek public office even if that right were restored by presidential pardon. He said, however, he would continue to criticize Arroyo.

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Citizen Bill

With a new poll showing Quebecers divided in their views of the Parti Québécois's proposal for Quebec citizenship, two human right groups yesterday blasted the plan as xenophobic, intolerant and an infringement of constitutional rights.

B'nai Brith Canada and the Centre for Research-Action on Race Relations urged the PQ to immediately withdraw Bill 195, which proposes to make a working knowledge of French a requirement for Quebec citizenship for new arrivals from outside and within Canada.

The rules would apply even while Quebec is part of Canada.

Bill 195 would be a serious infringement of democratic rights and the rights of immigrants in general, the groups said.

The PQ, the third party in the provincial legislature, also has submitted Bill 196, which calls for a Quebec constitution.

"These bills, which remind us of measures advocated by extreme right-wing parties in Europe, are dangerous because they institutionalize xenophobia and intolerance," said Fo Niemi, the centre's executive director.

"Our reaction is one of shame," said Steven Slimovitch, national legal counsel for B'nai Brith Canada. "We are ashamed to live in a province in which a draft law is tabled in the National Assembly that ensures the creation of two types of citizens. It's time the PQ stopped saying 'us' and 'them.'"

At a joint Montreal news conference, the groups said the measures would not only violate the Canadian constitution because citizenship is a federal matter, they would violate the Canadian and Quebec charters of rights and freedoms by creating two classes of citizens, some without the same rights as others.

Bill 195's proposal to eliminate for certain citizens the right to petition the National Assembly with a grievance is an attempt to take away a right acquired by peasants in the Magna Carta in 1215, the groups said.

They said they plan to bring the bill to the attention of the United Nations special human rights investigator, Doudou Diène, as soon as possible.

But the PQ stood by Bill 195, dismissing the numerous complaints as similar to those expressed when the party brought in the French Language Charter 30 years ago.

In the meantime, a new poll shows Quebecers divided along linguistic lines in their opinion of the bill. Overall, 44 per cent favour it and 46 per cent oppose it. But while 52 per cent of franco-phones back the bill, 79 per cent of non-francophones oppose it.

Produced by Léger Marketing for the Journal de Montréal, the poll of 513 people was conducted Wednesday.

Pollster Jean-Marc Léger says PQ leader Pauline Marois scored points with some voters.

"She managed to strike people's identity chord, an area the PQ had been shut out of since 1995 to the benefit of the Action démocratique du Québec," Léger said. "Now she is bringing those people back."

Quebec citizenship draws political fire

Quebec's ruling Liberals and the Parti Québécois traded claims Monday that the other party was creating two classes of citizens.

The Liberals charged that Bill 195, a PQ bill to establish Quebec citizenship, would create two types of Quebecers.

The PQ, citing Liberal plans to reduce the Immigration Department

payroll, said the government is creating two kinds of newcomers.

PQ members have been on the defensive over Bill 195 which states that Quebec citizenship would be required to run for school board, municipal or national assembly elections.

Canadian citizenship alone, however, would still be sufficient to vote in those same elections.

Monday the PQ seized on a report that the Immigration Department is cutting its staff by 11 per cent, at the same time that it has proposed welcoming an additional 10,000 immigrants a year.

"By reducing the budget of the department destined to better integrate and francize immigrants, the Charest government is creating two classes of citizens, those who speak French and those who don't," said PQ immigration critic Martin Lemay.

Bill 195 would make all Canadian citizens now living in the province Quebec citizens, independent of their ability to speak French. Newcomers from another country or another province could only become Quebec citizens by demonstrating three years after arriving their capacity to get by in French.

The PQ, with 35 members of legislature, is the third party in the assembly and Bill 195 has no chance of becoming law. But Bill 195 has shifted the spotlight away from Action démocratique du Québec Leader Mario Dumont and on to newly crowned PQ Leader Pauline Marois.

"We don't take it seriously," said Catherine Morissette, the ADQ immigration critic.

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Peso hits 7-year high in choppy Asia

October 30, 2007

The Philippine peso hit a seven-year high on Tuesday, as investors piled into the high-yielding currency in anticipation of a Federal Reserve rate cut this week and further cuts in the coming months.

The peso rose as far as 43.95 per dollar, up a quarter of a percent from Monday's close to its strongest level since July 2000, despite choppy trading in most other Asian currencies.

That brought its cumulative gains since Sept. 18, when the Fed cut its key interest rate by 0.5 percentage points, to nearly 5.0 percent.

"I think it's due to expectations of further flows -- remittance inflows and equity flows," said a trader in Manila.

"Dollar/peso looks heavy around 44.00," said Markus Ammann of HVB in Hong Kong. "They are back from a long weekend, and I would expect BSP (central bank) to slow down peso demand."

The Philippine markets were closed on Monday for regional elections.

The peso has gained about 11.5 percent against the dollar so far this year, making it Asia's second-best performer after the Indian rupee which has risen about 12.3 percent.

But the Indonesian rupiah another high-yielder, fell as far as 9,115 per dollar, down almost a third of a percent from late Asian trade on Monday.

The Malaysian ringgit fell as far as 3.3493 per dollar, also down 0.3 percent.

The Thai baht attempted to test the 34-per-dollar level, but was kept away from the psychologically important level by suspected dollar-buying by the central bank, traders said.



A man counts peso bills at a money changer in Manila October 30, 2007. The Philippine peso hit a seven-year high on Tuesday, as investors piled into a high-yielding currency in anticipation of a Federal Reserve rate cut this week and further cuts in the coming months.

A trader in Bangkok said he expected, however, the baht to pierce the 34 barrier soon because demand for the Thai currency remained strong.

"A lot of exporters are selling the dollar," he said.

A bigger US rate cut than the quarter-point priced in by markets would give the whole region a boost by knocking the dollar lower, another trader said.

"Now we will wait and see if the Fed will cut interest rates by more than 0.25 percentage points to surprise markets and push the dollar lower across the board." ■

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Over 68% voter turnout in village elections, says Comelec

October 30, 2007

At least three people were killed in isolated outbursts of violence and a schoolhouse went up in flames as millions of Filipinos voted in what officials said were largely peaceful barangay (village) and Sangguniang Kabataan (youth council, SK) elections across the country.

More than a million candidates took part in the country's latest rambunctious exercise in democracy amid tight security.

Acting Commission on Elections Chair Resurreccion Borra said that based on reports from the field, voter turnout would likely surpass the 68-percent turnout registered in the 2002 village elections.

The three deaths Monday brought to at least 23 the number of candidates and their followers killed since the election campaign began last month, Philippine National Police Director General Avelino Razon Jr. said.

Voting in some areas was also marred by flooding and landslides.

The candidates were vying for nearly 672,000 posts in about 42,000 barangays.

Elected to three-year terms, the winning candidates will fill grass-roots posts in the country of 89 million people, and their work will range from settling family quarrels to overseeing garbage collection and weeding out suspected insurgents in their neighborhoods.

President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo lined up to vote in her hometown of Lubao in Pampanga province, waving and smiling to a small crowd.

His political rights fully restored after Ms Arroyo pardoned him last week following his plunder conviction, deposed President Joseph Estrada voted in a school in San Juan City.

Midway through the voting, Comelec Commissioner Rene Sarmiento reported no major violence or disruptions.

"We hear of vote-buying here and there, but it's not a major trend," Sarmiento said.

Despite three deaths and a failure of election in some areas in Mindanao, the PNP said the elections were "very peaceful."

Razon told reporters that a total of 48 election-related violent incidents (ERVIs) had been recorded since the election period began on Sept. 29.

Of this number, the PNP recorded 25 deaths as of 4 p.m. Monday. Of this figure, six were candidates for barangay captain, two candidates for kagawad (councilor), seven incumbent barangay officials, three government officials and seven civilians.

A total of 22 people were also reported wounded.

Thanks to PNP, AFP

Razon based his "peaceful" assessment after comparing figures from the 2002 elections.

According to the PNP's records, 144 people died while 69 were wounded in 159 incidents in the 2002 elections.

Razon credited the low number of casualties to the deputization by the Comelec of the PNP and units of the Armed Forces of the Philippines for security operations, the work of nongovernment organizations and other stakeholders and the "vigilance and alertness of the public."

500,000 teachers

"Overall, the turnout of voters is comparatively higher than in 2002. The situation was under control by the AFP

and PNP," Borra said.

The Department of Education set aside a P30-million emergency fund for the country's 500,000 public school teachers who served in Monday's polls. The fund was intended for poll duty-related deaths or injuries involving teachers and other education personnel.

The DepEd also requested for the allocation of an additional P2 billion for the salary of teachers who manned the polling precincts. Only P930 million had been set aside by the Comelec for the purpose.

Teachers were entitled to a P1,000 compensation for each day of poll duty. Teachers handling additional SK

polling precincts will get an additional P500.

A failure of election was reported in some villages in Sulu, Cotabato City and Eastern Visayas because of the presence of armed men that prevented election officials from reporting in these areas.

Incidents of harassment, insufficient official ballots, missing names, flying voters and vote-buying were also reported in some precincts.

A reelectionist village chair, Basher Maharam, was shot and killed inside a polling precinct in Isabela City in Basilan province, police said.

Continued on Page 19 - 'Elections'



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COMMUNITY NEWS

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PBAM LEAGUE SET TO OPEN NOVEMBER 17

By: Joy Lizarondo

The Philippine Basketball Association of Montreal (PBAM), Montreal Filipino basketball's finest, will open its 32nd League season Saturday, November 17, 2007 from 9:00am-5:00pm at the CDN Sports Centre, 4880 Van Horne Avenue.

Competing clubs are the Kids Club, Pinoy Hoops, FCAWI, Palaboyz, Sea-Oilers, PAAWIS and independents LaSalle, Shoremen, Philbecan, Candonians, Kapampangan, All-City and Shaun's Rebs.

A novelty will be the addition of the ABC (Asian Basketball Conference) featuring a Cambodian-Laotian combine, Kaitas, a finesse Chinese team and a myriad of elite Filipino teams bannered by James Bulchand, Gil Manon-og, Jon Bustamante, Rowell Solmerano, Aron Poonin, Mig Sorensen, Cholo and Jody Maguigad, Keith Sotero, John Reyes and a host of others.

La Pêche designated Québec's first Fair Trade Town

October 30, 2007 - For immediate distribution
Wakefield's Black Sheep Inn to Host Official launch

The municipality of La Pêche is

set to become Quebec's first official Fair Trade Town and the second in Canada on November 9th. Due to the hard work of a dedicated group of Wakefield (LaPêche) residents, the municipality has joined the growing movement of communities within Canada and abroad that have taken up the challenge to support the principles of Fair Trade and increase availability of Fair Trade Certified products at the local level.

"La Pêche's Fair Trade Town designation is good news for our community. It means our residents care about making a difference," says Robert Bussière, Mayor of La Pêche, "I am very proud that our community has come together at the grassroots and political levels to become a Fair Trade Town."

To become a Fair Trade Town, a community must meet six goals; these goals encourage access to Fair Trade Certified products in the community and increase education and public awareness about Fair Trade and sustainable consumption. The international Fair Trade Towns Campaign was launched in Canada in April 2007 with the designation of Wolfville, Nova Scotia. The campaign is coordinated by TransFair Canada, the independent certification body for Fair Trade Certified products in Canada. "The international Fair Trade Towns campaign empowers local communities to send a strong signal in favour of Fair Trade. We congratulate La Pêche for supporting sustainable consumption and the livelihoods of farmers and workers in the developing world," says TransFair Canada's

Executive Director Rob Clarke.

La Pêche's Fair Trade Steering Group, made up of local business owners, church and school representatives, and a member of municipal council, is coordinating a week-long celebration from November 3rd-9th. Events include:

- Official launch party on Friday, November 9th at 8:00 pm at the Black Sheep Inn, featuring the world music band People's Project, a capoeira performance, and official "Fair Trade Town designation" ceremony with Mayor of La Pêche, Robert Bussière and TransFair Canada

- Screening of the acclaimed film Black Gold on Tuesday, November 6th at 7:30 pm at the Black Sheep Inn

- A week-long draw of Fair Trade and local goods

La Pêche's municipal council has now passed a formal resolution to purchase only Fair Trade Certified coffee, tea and sugar for its meetings and offices; a dozen stores and restaurants are selling Fair Trade Certified products; a number of community groups, churches, and schools have committed to purchase and raise awareness about Fair Trade; and a certification scheme is being developed to recognize and promote local producers.

Anne Winship, owner of Bean Fair Coffee and the coordinator of Fair Trade efforts over the past number of years in Wakefield, enthuses: "What could be better than all of us in our municipality coming together to help producers far away and close by - the best of both worlds!"

- 30 -



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Group Commissioner, Scouts
Canada, Quebec Council

For more information:

Anne Winship, Chair, La Pêche Fair Trade Steering Group: Reykia Fick, TransFair Canada (819) 459-4452; info@beanfair.ca (613) 563-3351, ext. 27; www.fairtrade-wakefield-equitable.info reykia.fick@transfair.ca

A) The six goals of the Fair Trade Town Campaign in Canada are:

1) Support from the local city council for Fair Trade and the campaign

Trade Certified products made available in stores & restaurants

3) Fair Trade Certified products used and promoted in workplaces, faith groups, & schools

4) Public awareness raised and media coverage on Fair Trade and the campaign

5) A steering group created to ensure continued commitment

6) Other ethical and sustainable initiatives are promoted within the community

(Please visit www.transfair.ca for a more detailed description of these goals.)

B) Fair Trade is an international system of doing business based on dialogue, transparency and respect. It contributes to sustainable development by offering better trading conditions for producers and workers in developing countries, including:

- Fair compensation for their products and labour

- Sustainable environmental practices
- Improved social services and investment in local economic infrastructure

- Access to credit and direct trading relationships

- Democratic organization and empowerment

Behind the principles and goals of Fair Trade is a rigorous international system of monitoring, auditing and certification. TransFair Canada (www.transfair.ca) is the only independent, non-profit, third-party certification organization for Fair Trade Certified products in Canada, and the Canadian affiliate of the Fairtrade Labelling Organizations International (FLO).

C) The Fair Trade Towns campaign was born in the United Kingdom in 1999, when a local Oxfam group in the town of Garstang decided to work towards becoming 'the world's first Fair Trade Town.' Since this time, the campaign has taken off in the UK, where they have already celebrated their 250th Fair Trade Town. The campaign is now being adopted in countries across Europe and North America.

Wakefield / La Pêche:

La Pêche is a municipality made up of 8 villages, including Wakefield. 30 km north of Ottawa, Wakefield is a well-known tourist destination on the Gatineau River.

E) Press photo available

Reykia Fick

Communications & Outreach

Communications & sensibilisation

TransFair Canada

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Nominations for the "Outstanding Filipino Award (TOFIL) Now Open

Philippine Ambassador Jose Brillantes said: The Outstanding Filipino Award (TOFIL) is "accorded to outstanding Filipinos, natural born or naturalized citizens, 41 years or older who, in the practice of their profession, vocation or calling, business or other services, have greatly contributed to the advancement or improvement of the Philippine economy, arts, culture and promotion of Filipino heritage, as well as Filipinos who have made tremendous impact on poverty alleviation or improvement of public or social welfare.

Since the inception by the JCI Senate Philippines, an organization of Jacee International members, in 1988 to publicly recognize men and women whose exemplary achievements deserve recognition, the TOFIL Award has been bestowed on ninety (90) distinguished Filipino individuals. Among past TOFIL awardees are Jaime Cardinal Sin for spiritual leadership (1988), Marcelo Feman for the judiciary (1989), Diosdado Macapagal for government service (1990), Leonardo Sarao for entrepreneurship (1991), Jose L. Guevara for journalism (1993), Hilario G. Davide, Jr. for law (1999) and Francisco Manosa for architecture (2004).

The award categories for which candidates may be nominated include agriculture/architecture, business/entrepreneurship/industry, community/humanitarian service, ecclesiastical/religious work, ecological/environmental conservation, economics/finance, education, government/public service, justice/law, labor, literature/journalism/media, medicine, military/police work, science/technology, sports, peace advocacy, technopreneurship and others. Nominees should be nominated under one category only.

A Screening Committee shall perform an extensive preliminary screening of the nominees. A Board of Judges composed of eminent personalities from various fields will make the final selection.

For more information on the TOFIL Award, please visit the TOFIL website at www.tofil.ph or call the JCI Senate Philippines Secretariat at (632) 374-4390 and (632) 412-5662 or the Public Relations Department of the Insular Life Assurance Co., its project sponsor.

Massive Black Hole Smashes Record

Using two NASA satellites, astronomers have discovered the heaviest known black hole to orbit a star. The new black hole, with a mass 24 to 33 times that of our Sun, is more massive than scientists expected for a black hole that formed from a dying star.

The newly discovered object belongs to the category of "stellar-mass" black holes. Formed in the death throes of massive stars, they are smaller than the monster black holes found in galactic cores. The previous record holder for largest stellar-mass black hole is a 16-solar-mass black hole in the galaxy M33, announced on October 17.

"We weren't expecting to find a stellar-mass black hole this massive," says Andrea Prestwich of the Harvard-Smithsonian Center for Astrophysics in Cambridge, Mass., lead author of the discovery paper in the November 1 Astrophysical Journal Letters. "It seems likely that black holes that form from dying stars can be much larger than we had realized."

The black hole is located in the nearby dwarf galaxy IC 10, 1.8 million light-years from Earth in the constellation Cassiopeia. Prestwich's team could measure the black hole's mass because it has an orbiting companion: a hot, highly evolved star. The star is ejecting gas in the form of a wind. Some of this material spirals toward the black hole, heats up, and gives off powerful X-rays before crossing the point of no return.

In November 2006, Prestwich and her colleagues observed the dwarf galaxy with NASA's Chandra X-ray Observatory. The group discovered that the galaxy's brightest X-ray source, IC 10 X-1, exhibits sharp changes in X-ray brightness. Such behavior suggests a star periodically passing in front of a companion black hole and blocking the X-rays, creating an eclipse. In late November, NASA's Swift satellite confirmed the eclipses and revealed details about the star's orbit. The star in IC 10 X-1 appears to orbit in a plane that lies nearly edge-on to Earth's line of sight. The Swift observations, as well as observations

from the Gemini Telescope in Hawaii, told Prestwich and her group how fast the two stars go around each other. Calculations showed that the companion black hole has a mass of at least 24 Suns.

There are still some uncertainties in the black hole's mass estimate, but as Prestwich notes, "Future optical observations will provide a final check. Any refinements in the IC 10 X-1 measurement are likely to increase the black hole's mass rather than reduce it."

The black hole's large mass is surprising because massive stars generate powerful winds that blow off a large fraction of the star's mass before it explodes. Calculations suggest massive stars in our galaxy leave behind black holes no heavier than about 15 to 20 Suns.

The IC 10 X-1 black hole has gained mass since its birth by gobbling up gas from its companion star, but the rate is so slow that the black hole would have gained no more than 1 or 2 solar masses. "This black hole was born fat; it didn't grow fat," says astrophysicist Richard Mushotzky of NASA Goddard Space Flight Center in Greenbelt, Md., who is not a member of the discovery team.

The progenitor star probably started its life with 60 or more solar masses. Like its host galaxy, it was probably deficient in elements heavier than hydrogen and helium. In massive, luminous stars with a high fraction of heavy elements, the extra electrons of elements such as carbon and oxygen "feel" the outward pressure of light and are thus more susceptible to being swept away in stellar winds. But with its low fraction of heavy elements, the IC 10 X-1 progenitor shed comparatively little mass before it exploded, so it could leave behind a heavier black hole.

"Massive stars in our galaxy today are probably not producing very heavy stellar-mass black holes like this one," says coauthor Roy Kilgard of Wesleyan University in Middletown, Conn. "But there could be millions of heavy stellar-mass black holes lurking out there that were produced early in the Milky Way's history, before it had a chance to build up heavy elements."

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EARTH TALK

Questions & Answers
About Our Environment

From the Editors of E/The
Environmental Magazine

Dear EarthTalk: Are the rumors true that refilling and reusing some types of plastic bottles can cause health problems?

Regina Fujan, Lincoln, NE

Most types of plastic bottles are safe to reuse at least a few times if properly washed with hot soapy water. But recent revelations about chemicals in Lexan (plastic #7) bottles are enough to scare even the most committed environmentalists from reusing them (or buying them in the first place). Studies have indicated that food and drinks stored in such containers—including those ubiquitous clear Nalgene water bottles hanging from just about every hiker's backpack—can contain trace amount of Bisphenol A (BPA), a synthetic chemical that interferes with the body's natural hormonal messaging system.

The same studies found that repeated re-use of such bottles—which get dinged up through normal wear and tear and while being washed—increases the chance that chemicals will leak out of the tiny cracks and crevices that develop over time. According to the Environment California Research & Policy Center, which reviewed 130 studies on the topic, BPA has been linked to breast and uterine cancer, an increased risk of miscarriage, and decreased testosterone levels. BPA can also wreak havoc on children's developing systems. (Parents beware: Most baby bottles and sippy cups are made with plastics containing BPA.) Most experts agree that the amount of BPA that could leach into food and drinks through normal handling is probably very small, but there are concerns about the cumulative effect of small doses.

Health advocates also recommend not reusing bottles made from plastic #1 (polyethylene terephthalate, also known as PET or PETE), including most disposable water, soda and juice bottles. According to The Green Guide, such bottles may be safe for one-time use, but reuse should be avoided because studies indicate they may leach DEHP—another probable human carcinogen—when they are in less than perfect condition. The good news is that such bottles are easy to recycle; just about every municipal recycling system will take them back. But using them is nonetheless far from environmentally responsible: The nonprofit Berkeley Ecology Center found that the manufacture of plastic #1 uses large amounts of energy and resources and generates toxic emissions and pollutants that contribute to global warming. And even though PET bottles can be recycled, millions find their way into landfills every day in the U.S. alone.

Another bad choice for water bottles, reusable or otherwise, is plastic #3 (polyvinyl chloride/PVC), which can leach hormone-disrupting chemicals into the liquids they are storing and will release synthetic carcinogens into the environment when incinerated. Plastic #6 (polystyrene/PS), has been shown to leach styrene, a probable human carcinogen,

into food and drinks as well.

Safer choices include bottles crafted from safer HDPE (plastic #2), low-density polyethylene (LDPE, AKA plastic #4) or polypropylene (PP, or plastic #5). Consumers may have a hard time finding water bottles made out of #4 or #5, however. Aluminum bottles, such as those made by SIGG and sold in many natural food and product markets, and stainless steel water bottles are also safe choices and can be reused repeatedly and eventually recycled.

CONTACTS: The Green Guide, www.thegreenguide.com; Environment California, www.environmentcalifornia.org/reports-environmental-health/environmental-health-talpipe

and smokestacks, we are unwittingly also causing more allergy-aggravating pollen to be produced. According to Kim Knowlton of NRDC, the group's analysis shows that "there is a clear interplay" between the onslaught of global warming and increasingly higher levels of ragweed pollen, especially in warmer urban areas already plagued with allergens.

"People living in some of the most populated regions of this country may be feeling the effects of global warming every allergy season," says Knowlton. The NRDC report concludes that an increasing number of the 110 million Americans who live in areas with existing ragweed

problems will suffer the consequences of global warming as their noses begin to run and their eyes begin to water. Major metropolitan areas in the U.S. likely to be most affected include Atlanta, Philadelphia, Milwaukee, Los Angeles and Chicago, among other locales.

Public health statistics show that about 36 million Americans suffer from some form of seasonal allergy. While allergies can be annoying in their own right, they are also a main contributor to asthma and other serious respiratory problems, making them a serious health threat in their own right. Some 17 million Americans suffer from asthma, with well over half of them also sensitive to the allergens that can spark an asthma attack. Meanwhile, CO2 emissions also contribute to smog, another trigger for asthma. Thus global warming represents a double whammy for asthmatics with pre-existing allergies.

"Global warming—through both its components and by-products—is creating a perfect storm of sneezing and wheezing for allergy and asthma sufferers in the U.S.," says Gina Solomon, a senior scientist in NRDC's health program. She adds that her group's recent analysis "shows us that people throughout the U.S.—in the North, South, East and West—will be very personally affected by global warming, and we need pollution controls throughout the country to help offset this problem."

According to NRDC, industrial and personal actions can help reduce increases in allergens and combat their effects. Federal, state and local governments can protect communities by reducing the sources of global warming pollution and by creating better resources for citizens in need of information about pollen levels in their areas. Individuals can reduce their own exposure to ragweed and other allergens by checking news outlets for daily pollen counts before venturing outside for long periods of time.

CONTACT: NRDC, "Sneezing and Wheezing," www.nrdc.org/globalwarming/sneezing/contents.asp.

GOT AN ENVIRONMENTAL QUESTION? Send it to: EarthTalk, c/o E/The Environmental Magazine, P.O. Box 5098, Westport, CT 06881; submit it at: www.emagazine.com/earthtalk/thisweek/, or e-mail: earthtalk@emagazine.com. Read past columns at: www.emagazine.com/earthtalk/archives.php



"Some health advocates recommend not re-using bottles made from plastic #1 (polyethylene terephthalate), including most disposable water, soda and juice bottles. Studies indicate they may leach DEHP -- a probable human carcinogen -- when they are in less than perfect condition." (Getty Images)

reports/toxic-baby-bottles; SIGG, www.mysigg.com.

Dear EarthTalk: Is it true that global warming can exacerbate allergies? -- Alex Tibbetts, Seattle, WA

Global warming can make allergies worse simply because the major pollen producers that trigger allergic reactions thrive and flourish in warmer air. A recent report from the nonprofit Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC) entitled "Sneezing and Wheezing: How Global Warming Could Increase Ragweed Allergies, Air Pollution and Asthma" details how ragweed, one of the most common allergens in the U.S., grows faster and for longer periods as air temperatures rise due to climate change.

Ragweed also thrives on direct exposure to carbon dioxide (CO2), so as we emit more of this chief greenhouse gas from our

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AMPALAYA CON CARNE



Ingredients:

4 cloves garlic, crushed 1 medium (50 g) onion, sliced 200 g beef round, cut into strips 3/4 cup water 1-1/2 Tbsp tausi (salted black beans) 1 can (140 g) DEL MONTE Tomato Sauce 1 bunch (200 g) sitaw (string beans), cut into 1-1/2" long pcs 1 Tbsp oyster sauce 1/4 tsp pepper 1 large (300 g) ampalaya (bitter melon), seeded and thinly sliced

Procedures:

1 SAUT? garlic, onion and beef. Add water, DEL MONTE Tomato Sauce and tausi. Simmer for 20 minutes. 2 ADD sitaw, oyster sauce and pepper. Simmer for 7 minutes. Add ampalaya. Cook for another 3 minutes. Serve hot. Ingredients:

DINUGUAN



INGREDIENTS

250 grams beef tenderloin (cut into chunk cubes) # 2 tablespoons garlic (minced) # Pinch of salt & pepper # Pinch of paprika # 2 tablespoons oyster sauce # 2 tablespoons liquid seasoning # 1 tablespoon butter # 2 tablespoons olive oil

Procedures:

In a bowl marinate beef in salt & pepper, garlic, paprika and olive oil for a few minutes. # In a saute pan, heat oil in very high heat. # Put in beef and all marinade ingredients and toss very swiftly keeping the heat very high. # Add in the oyster sauce and liquid seasoning while tossing. # Finish with butter. # Serve with garlic rice



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The North American Filipino Star Photo Gallery



Laging Handa Cubs and Scouts are busy carving their pumpkins while Romy Valenzuela, Claro Bermudez, and Joselito Sarto stand by. Photo taken at Tamaracout Camp, October 26, 2007.



Laging Handa Scouts pose for souvenir with a veteran during the Huntingdon Rural Race, October 20, 2007.






Taken before the Huntingdon Rural Race began, October 20, 2007, members of the Laging Handa Scout group pose for souvenir.



Just before leaving Camp Tamaracouta, October 28, 2007, campers pose in front of the caboose, October 28, 2007



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The island province of Palawan has been declared as a nature sanctuary of the world, and for good reason. It is wrapped in a mantle of rainforests, outstanding dive sites, majestic mountains, primeval caves, and pristine beaches. It is surrounded by a coral shelf that abounds with varied and colorful marine life. It boasts of exotic flora and fauna, like the mousedeer and the scaly anteater, that are found nowhere else. Palawan is truly a paradise, a cluster of beautiful islands that lies southwest of Luzon. It is also the largest province in the Philippines, with its 1,768 islands and islets that cover about 1.5 million hectares

Palawan waters are among the best in the world, not only for diving but also for fishing. A diver's paradise, it has miles of sub-surface coral and rainbow reef walls which surround the coasts and coves teeming with rich marine life.

The **El Nido Marine Reserve** in Miniloc, El Nido, occupying an area of 96,000 hectares, is a popular nature spot in the province. It boasts of diverse ecosystems, such as rainforests, mangroves, white sand



beaches, coral reefs, and limestone reefs as well as a variety of fishes, like manta ray and the sea cow or "dugong," known as the world's rarest marine mammal. It is now one of the country's premier destinations, blessed with amazing natural scenery, and considered as a sanctuary for various forms of wildlife.

Sta. Lourdes Tagbanua, Puerto Princesa City is where the Honda Bay can be seen. The bay consists of several islets with shallow reefs, bordering fabulous beaches and small resorts which have become the favorite water sports destination of local and foreign tourists alike.

The province boasts of extraordinary scenic wonders. African animals from Kenya in Africa - giraffes and elands, zebras and gazelles - co-exist with endemic Philippine animals, like the Palawan bearcat, mousedeer and peacock (pheasant), in the **Calauit Island Wildlife Sanctuary** in Busuanga, considered one of the province's most amazing sites. Another sanctuary found in Rio Tuba Village, Bataraza is the **Ursula Island Game Refuge and Bird Sanctuary**. This island is a haven for birds that rest



Arial view of the Coron islands, northern Palawan



One of the many 'secret beaches' found all throughout Palawan. See if you can find your own private paradise...



A cliff climber on top of a limestone cliff looks down the charming coastal town of El Nido in northern Palawan

and converge two hours before sunset, after a day's flight.

Puerto Princesa, the capital, is the province's main gateway. The **St. Paul's Subterranean National Park** is an 8-kilometer long underground river, the longest underground river in the world. Known as one of the world's wonders, this river stretches eight kilometers deep into an underground lagoon with crystalline waters. Within the hallowed recesses, one winds through the tunnel aboard a paddle boat with outriggers to be enthralled at every turn which reveals stalactite pillars, rock formations, and domed amphitheatres, all of which will fill the tourists with awe.

The **Tabon Caves** in Southern Palawan are acknowledged as the "Cradle of Civilization" of the Filipino people. Nestled in the mountainous cape of Lipuon Point, the 29-cave complex is a treasure trove of archaeological artifacts and the fossilized bones of the Tabon man. A skull of the Tabon Man was carbon-dated to be 22,000 years old.

Dive spots in Palawan are plentiful, with each site offering a unique array of marine life. The **Tubbataha Reefs** are among the world's best dive spots. Its deep blue lagoon is bordered by emerald green waters. There are seagulls and giant turtles. It is 10 to 12

hours by boat from Puerto Princesa.

The **Coron Reefs**, located in northern Palawan, near the town of Coron, include seven enchanting lakes surrounded by craggy limestone cliffs which attract hundreds of nature lovers to this island.

Palawan has become a favorite destination among adventure seekers and nature lovers, with its white sand beaches and crystal blue waters that abound in colorful fishes and corals. The rich marine life include extraordinary species like the Palawan Giant Clam called "Let-Let", the Whale Shark called "Butanding", and the SeaCows called "Dugong".

The province is also blessed with awe-inspiring rainforests teeming with rare collection of exotic animals and various tropical flora and fauna. It is the habitat of unique species like the metallic-colored peacock pheasant, the shy mouse deer, the cuddly bearcat, and the reclusive scaly anteater. In the thick forests are more than 200 kinds of birds, over 600 species of butterflies and some 1,500 flowering plants. These natural wonders earned Palawan the titles "The Last Frontier" and "Haven of the Philippine Wildlife". In fact, the entire province was proclaimed as Fish and Wildlife Sanctuary in 1967. ■



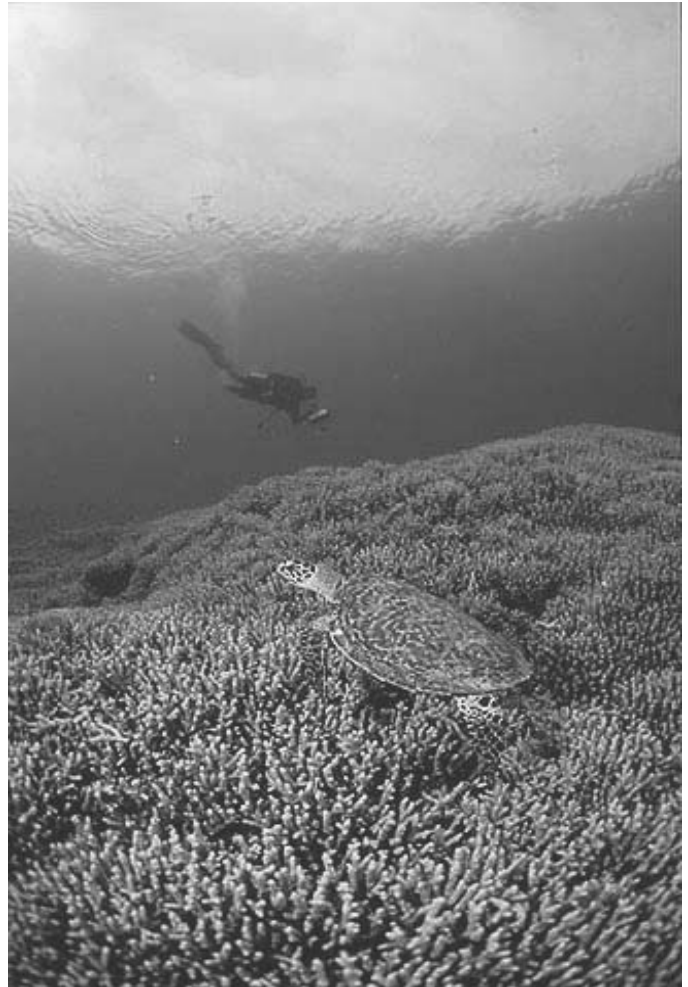
Snake island, Honda Bay



Twin Lagoon in Coron



St. Paul Subterranean River, Palawan - It is the longest subterranean river in the world, 8.2 km are navigable but tourists are only allowed up to the 4km mark. You have to get a special permit if you want to go beyond that.



Tubbataha Reef, Puerto Princesa - Said to be the most beautiful dive site in this part of the world. Its deep blue lagoon is bordered by emerald green waters. There are seagulls and giant turtles (seen bottom right).

FILIPINO STAR SHOWBIZ GOSSIP

Sam: I Will sue you! Lolit: So sue me!



The plot is getting thicker and thicker. The subplots are getting murkier and murkier, the public is getting more curious and the supporting characters are getting so much funnier that you don't know anymore whether to laugh or to cry, or to laugh and cry over what was basically a non-issue that was blown out of proportion and shamelessly turned into a national dramedy. Lolit Solis recalled in her Pilipino Star Ngayon column that on Oct. 12, 2007, between 3 and 4 p.m., she was going to attend an event at the Sofitel Philippine Plaza but she lost her way and found herself in the poolside coffee shop where she said she saw Piolo Pascual and Sam Milby, presumably having snacks, and apparently "whispering" (the PSN headline said, "Sam at Piolo huling-huling naglalampungan," although the word "lampungan" was not in the text, but only the word "nagbubulungan") to each other. When the waiter blurted out her name — "Si Lolit Solis!!!" — Lolit said that Piolo and Sam "scampered" away, leaving the chairs around their table in disarray.

As simple as that. It would have been an incident that could have been brushed away with a shrug and a "So what?" Yes, so what? As I was saying, what's wrong with having coffee and even whispering to each other's ears, unless of course the two guys have "something" to hide, in which case I'm sure they are intelligent enough not to do it in such a public place within earshot of everybody.

Soon, everybody wants to have a piece of the tina-pie.

Timex guys said that Piolo couldn't have been at the Plaza at that time because he was shooting a new commercial with Angel Locsin somewhere else. Sam's defenders said that Sam, too, couldn't have been at The Plaza at that time because he, too, was somewhere else.

Even The Plaza issued a statement saying that Piolo and Sam were not at The Plaza at that time and presumed that the guy whom Lolit said she saw with Sam could be somebody, a hotel guest, who looked like Piolo.

Not to be outdone, Angel's manager also wanted to be heard —



you know, ayaw din paawat! — and seconded the "defense" that Piolo and Angel were somewhere else shooting a Timex commercial. Last Sunday, a grim-faced Sam showed up in The Buzz, saying "I will sue!" if Lolit wouldn't retract and apologize. Sam was accompanied by a woman lawyer who had to have her own eksena, too, and gave a "legal" angle to the dramedy.

Lolit stood pat on her story and shot back, "So sue me!"

The molehill has been turned into a mountain, and things are getting out of hand, with everybody seemingly going out of their minds! In a country like ours where everybody wants to put a finger into everything that attracts attention, I wouldn't be surprised if the whole mess would get our honorable congressmen and senators involved enough to make them initiate a probe. I wouldn't be surprised if the Commission on Human Rights would join in the fray and, horrors, elevate the matter to the United Nations Commission on Human Rights. If not contained, it could start a war of genders, with the militant gays rallying behind Piolo and Sam and the international press corps defending Lolit's right to freedom of the press/expression.

Could you imagine that!

Said the Regal Matriarch Mother Lily in jest, "Ako, sinasabi ko tomboy ako. Bakit hindi sinusulat? Bakit walang naniniwala?"

Oh well. If you are, then you are, even if one million Lolit Solises and the whole world say you are not; if you are not, then you are not, even if one million Lolit Solises and the whole world say that you are.

Years ago when Phillip Salvador and Christopher de Leon were rumored to have been caught "kissing" at the pool of a five-star hotel, the two guys, secure with themselves and their sexuality, simply laughed it off and teased each other when they were in public, "Uy, lumayo ka sa akin baka matisimis na naman tayo!"

Neither Phillip nor Christopher said, "I will sue you!" to the writer who, like Lolit, would have confidently shot back, "So sue me!" ■

Mrs Philippines wants elusive crown



Enough with the bashing!"

Filipino-Scottish Margaret "Maggie" Wilson, the Philippine bet to the 57th Miss World pageant, made the appeal to her kababayans during her send-off party last week at the Araneta Coliseum Gazebo in Quezon City.

The 18-year-old actress and MTV VJ said she needs all the support she can get as she prepares to fly to Sanya, China tomorrow to compete in the prestigious beauty pageant.

Unfavorable comments

Maggie was reacting to unfavorable comments hurled against her by pageant fanatics on numerous media, including the Internet. Maggie, who was also adjudged Miss Photogenic in Binibining Pilipinas-World last March, has been enduring scathing comments about her supposedly imperfect looks. "It's such a bad habit that we Filipinos have," Maggie said, referring to the insults.

Up to the last minute, Maggie had to dismiss rumors about her being stripped of her title after questions were raised on her eligibility to participate in the prestigious competition.

She reportedly failed to comply with a pageant requirement: That contestants should at least be a high school graduate during the competition. She was just about to graduate from high school when she was crowned Binibining Pilipinas-World.

"I only heard about it from my friends who asked if what was said on the radio was true," she recalled. "I just came from the Araneta offices for my training and fitting. I told the Binibining Pilipinas Charities about it, so they released an official statement saying I'm still the girl."

Maggie chose to brush off rumors, concentrating on her preparations for the finals instead. She said she got valuable tips on how to win the judges' approval from Miss World finalists Mafae Yunon and Karla Bautista, her predecessor Anna Maris Igpit and 1993 Miss World princess and second runner-up Ruffa Gutierrez.

Maggie will face competition from more than 100 delegates around the world. She finds Angola's Micaela Reis and the Dominican Republic's Ada

Aimee de la Cruz as among the most beautiful.

In Asia, she believes her strongest competitors are Malaysia's Deborah Priya Henry and India's Sarah-Jane Dias. "India always sends strong competitors," Maggie noted.

Semifinal slot

But she believes her being multi-racial and well-traveled will give her an edge in the competition. She has also prepared for "fast-track" events where the winners automatically earn a semifinal slot.

"I'm doing the sports challenge because I'm athletic. I've been hitting the gym a lot-training," she revealed. "If I do the talent event, I'll sing a local song by artist Julianne. Her songs are feel-good."

The 5'9 1/2" beauty also hopes there would still be SMS voting this year, as in the last five editions. "I'm not sure. There's still no feedback from the Miss World organization," she said.

But before she leaves for the Dec. 1 pageant, Maggie begged her fellow Pinoyos to "pray for me."

"I need you to believe in me and what I can do," she said. "I'm going to give it my all!" ■

Vina Morales on love life: Wait and see



Asked about the status of her relationship with Chinese businessman Cedric Lee, Vina Morales says she is adopting a wait-and-see attitude.

"There are still a lot of questions that I want answered," she tells Inquirer Entertainment at the launch of Star Records' latest dance album, "Supahdance." But, she adds, "If you're asking if we're happy and in love, the answer is yes—sobra, sobra."

In March, Vina announced she was breaking up with Cedric on the show biz talk program "The Buzz." She said the relationship had become "very complicated."

To this date, Cedric's marriage has yet to be annulled. He and his wife Judy have two kids, aged 11 and 8.

Now, Vina says, she's awaiting the outcome of the annulment procedure.

She is confident about where she stands. "I don't look at it as a big problem. I'd rather concentrate on my career—and it's been going well lately,"

she insists.

Vina recently won the Asean Ikon music competition held in Kuala Lumpur. She brought home the Best Solo Performer trophy, plus \$25,000 in cash, a recording contract and concert bookings all over the region.

"I'm thankful that my fans care more about my career than my love life. Maski magulo ang personal life ko, okay lang sa kanila," said Vina.

"Supahdance" is a various-artists album co-produced by ASAP Music and Star Records, and features 14 dance mixes performed by Kapamilya talents. Apart from Vina, the other artists are Gerald Anderson, Gabriel Valenciano, Iya Villania, Vhong Navarro, Saicy Aguila and Mickey Perz, Kitty Girls, Full Circle Teens, "Wowowee" ASF Girls, Ultimate Dance Four and Kokey. ■

Aiko Melendez says heart no longer beats for husband



Sa pamamagitan ng palitan ng text messages kahapon ng umaga, October 26, tinanong ng PEP (Philippine Entertainment Portal) kay Aiko Melendez kung totoo bang sumailalim siya sa isang breast reduction operation. Napabalita kasi kamakailan na nakita ang actress-politician sa isang clinic para sumailalim ng breast reduction procedure.

"No, kasi ganito 'yun. I went to see my doctor, si Dr. Samonte, kasi I was considering to have one. Pero nagkaroon na ng initial check-up kung kaya ko."

Pero ayon kay Aiko ay wala pang operasyon na nangyayari. "I'm considering it, I have gone thru some tests already, time ko na lang ang inaayos," text pa sa amin ni Aiko kahapon.

Ang pagpapapayat ni Aiko ay dahil sa Marie France na kung saan isa siya sa mga endorsers.

On Patrick Meneses

Muli na namang nili-link si Aiko kay Patrick Meneses, Bulacan vice-mayor, dahil nakita silang magkasama sa

Cebu recently.

"Lagi na lang, kapag may kasama ako, laging sinasabi, kahit hindi si Vice-Mayor Patrick Meneses ang kasama ko, lagi nilang sinasabi, na 'yun ang kasama ko,'" wika ni Aiko.

"Kung nakita man ako sa Cebu, totoo na pumunta ako dun, at hindi ko po idinidenay na pumunta ako sa Cebu.

"Pero marami kaming pulitiko na present du'n at that time. If they want, 'yung mga taong nagdududa at nag-iisip ng kung ano, siguro they can check the manifesto naman sa tiket kung sinu-sino kaming nandun.

"Hindi ko dinidenay na nasa Cebu kami, pero it's an official function," paglilinaw ng actress-politician.

Ang naturang vice-mayor ang inilink ngayon kay Aiko. Nakilala ni Aiko si Patrick dahil naging kaklase niya ito sa University of the Philippines when Aiko took up a crash course on governance.

Ayon sa kanya, wala talagang namamagitan sa kanila ni Patrick. Magkaibigan or magkabarkada lamang sila, bukod nga sa pareho silang nasa public service since naninilbihan si Aiko ngayon bilang councilor ng District 2 ng Quezon City.

Sa ngayon, ayaw muna ni Aiko na magkaroon ng any romantic involvement kahit na kanino. "Magulo pa kasi ang buhay ko, eh! Slowly, naaayos ko na," sabi niya.

Nang tanungin naman namin si Aiko kung may naramdaman pa siyang tibok ng puso nang magkita sila ng dati niyang asawang si Martin Jickain sa Quezon City Regional Trial Court kahapon para sa chamber hearing nila ng Permanent Protection Order request ni Aiko, ang sagot ng actress-politician, "Wala na, wala na talaga! Wala na akong nararamdaman. Malabo na talaga na magkabalikan kami. Ni kabog o anumang kaba, wala na." ■

Sexy star Jeni Hernandez admits she's pregnant



Umamin na ang sinasabing sexy star na nagdadalang-tao na tinutukoy ng blind items sa mga pahayagan kamakailan. Ito ay si Jeni Hernandez na huling napanood bilang Armana sa

ABS-CBN fantaserye na Rounin.

Buong tapang na lumantad ang apat na buwang buntis na si Jeni na nagdadalang-tao sa anak nila ng boyfriend niyang F3 car racer na si Renan Morales.

Sinabi ni Jeni sa October 28 episode ng The Buzz, "The baby is normal. Everything is normal. Baby na talaga siya. Fetus na talaga siya. May ulo, may kamay, may mga legs. Nung una ko'ng nakita, parang mommy na talaga! I'm positive, I'm pregnant. I'm very, very happy!"

More than seven months nang boyfriend ni Jeni si Renan, ang ama ng dinadala niyang sanggol sa kanyang sinapupunan. "Nice guy naman, he makes me happy. [He] makes me content with life. When we found out that I'm pregnant, we were both happy.

"Before I got pregnant, he talked to my Mom. He asked my Mom if we can get married na. We were planning na talaga to get married kaso nga lang nauna talaga yung pagbubuntis ko."

Ano ang reaction ng Mommy niya nu'ng malaman na buntis siya? "Maluha-luha na parang speechless talaga. Siyempre, kung ikaw Mom tapos sabihin sa 'yo ng daughter mo 'I'm pregnant.' Siyempre you want to be happy. If you're not ready talagang you'll get shocked. But what can we do?"

Nagsabi na rin daw si Renan sa pamilya niya para sa plano nila na magpakasal. "Yeah," pag-ayon ni Jeni. "He actually talked to my Mom and for him to do that sobrang marespeto. Sobrang gutsy talaga kasi you know my Mom? My Mom is ano, sobrang ano, masungit 'yun. Pero natanggap niya kasi sipsip si Renan. Sobrang sipsip ng boyfriend ko. Mabigay ng regalo, mabola. Binobola niya ang Mom ko."

Nagsalita rin si Jeni tungkol sa kalagayan nila ngayon ng dating karelasyon at PBA [Philippine Basketball Association] player na si Eugene Tejada.

"Well, kasi, siguro hindi lang kami nagkaka.....parati kaming nag-aaway. Parang the love wasn't strong enough for me to stay."

Naging maganda ba ang pakikitungo ng pamilya ni Eugene noon? "Sobrang bait ng family niya sa akin. That's why every time I think of him 'pag nare-remember ko siya, parang, you know, I feel bad pa rin. Siyempre kahit paano, why did that [have to] happen?"

"Sometimes life doesn't make sense, e. I get confused pero, you know, life must go on."

Payag ba si Renan na nag-uusap pa rin sila ni Eugene ngayon?

"Uhm, siyempre, hindi naman...we don't really talk. Uhm, nagme-message sa akin si Eugene and then, update lang. 'Yun nga raw, kung buntis nga raw ako. Tinanong niya ako, 'Are you really pregnant?' Sabi ko, 'Yeah, I'm pregnant.' Tapos sabi niya, 'Are you getting married,' ganun lang. And then, I asked him, 'Are you ok? Are you walking na ba,' ganu'n lang, very casual," lahad ni Jeni ukol sa kanyang dating kasintahan. ■

Celebs recount scariest experiences

In honor of Halloween we asked some celebs about their most frightening experience ever.

Que horror! May the ghosts of your past stop haunting you and the monsters in your head stop taunting you.

Dingdong Dantes: "When I was moving to my new home, I had a box that had paintings in it. When it was time to take the box out of the old house, the contents fell down the stairs and I saw the woman in the painting literally coming out of the frame and swiftly passing through my vision. I ran out and locked the gates. Those items were never recovered."

Gina Alajar: "The 1994 earthquake in LA scared me the most. The place where we were staying was the epicenter. I thought it was the end of the world already!"

Ogie Alcasid: "In high school, I once stayed overnight on campus for a leadership training. We had a bonfire and there was an old woman in the middle of the football field, her gray hair glowing in the dark. It was about 200 meters away, and we all got spooked. But we went closer and found it was a security guard with a towel on his head. We all ended up laughing!"

Tintin Bersola-Babao: "I was 8 when we lived in a house on a haunted property. My sis and I saw a shadow pass outside our window. We were told that someone had died there. Creepy? it was Nov. 1 then!"

Michael V: "I was about 15. We were looking for a pair of scissors but couldn't find one. I woke up at 3 a.m. and the scissors were in my hands."



Former Miss Philippines & TV host Miriam Quiambao

Miriam Quiambao: "The hotel where I was staying in Bicol caught fire. The whole room and corridor were up in smoke. At first I couldn't find my dad. Then I saw him climbing out of the balcony, using sheets. He jumped at the mezzanine level and broke his back."

Nyoy Volante: "I was driving on Ayala by myself and made a U-turn on one of the side streets. Naturally, I glanced at the rear view mirror to watch for cars behind me. As I did, I saw a man in the back seat, looking at the back of my head. I tried to ignore him, and just completed my U-turn. When I looked again, he was gone." ■

How well do you know your favorite stars?

How well do you know our local celebrities? Geomancer and clairvoyant Paulie Caoili can tell you a lot about TV-movie personalities just by watching them on the screen and reading their aura. In honor of Halloween we asked Paulie to do a reading on some of our best known celebrities. And so here's how he reads them:



Actress Marian Rivera

Marian Rivera — She has a very high emotional quotient. She has the ability to comprehend a particular situation and how to respond to it. The star of *Marimar* is basically very nice and easy to get along with. She is also the type who is very sure of herself — very confident. Marian will become an even bigger star — that is if she manages to survive this tumultuous business called show business. We'll see her breaking point after *Marimar*.

Angel Locsin — Very intelligent. She knows the value of self-preservation. Oh, and she also has a dark side — so you don't fool around with her. Angel actually goes through a cycle. And these are dizzying cycles. For instance, after the devastating experience of losing her boyfriend (Miko Sotto), her career shot up to spectacular heights. Now, that she's at an all-time low, it's going to be an up-and-down swing for her next.

Snooky Serna — Highly-emotional.

She needs somebody to accept her. When she is in a relationship, she loses herself. Why? Because she gives so much of herself. At this point, she has given so much. In the words of Paulie Caoili: "Ubos na ubos na." Will she ever be happy? It's her choice. The problem is, she has nothing more to give and has to sacrifice. In the end she will become resentful. According to Paulie, when you start to love somebody more than you love yourself, you eventually lose yourself — and so this is something you should never allow to happen.

KC Concepcion — Paulie Caoili feels that KC will not completely join show business and will always have this hesitation to do so. However, the fact that she is elusive is her attraction. But fans need not worry. She knows where she is and has the right footing. She may do just one film, but after this, she will stop and study the next project carefully. Because the media loves her, Paulie wants to liken KC to Princess Diana — but minus the tragedy. In fact, KC is bound to find contentment, inner peace and will be very happy.



Actress Sharon Cuneta

Sharon Cuneta — Deeply intelligent and has depth. Very contemplative — like she contemplates on every move she makes. While she gives good pieces of advice to people, she never shares her problems with others. If she has problems, she will solve these herself. Sharon is also very patient, knows how to read between the lines, very tolerant and will never waste her time keeping grudges on people.

Dennis Trillo — He has a side that he shows and is seen only in show business, but has another that he keeps to himself. Very bright, he has a lot more to offer and knows how to deal with the business. ■

Sunshine Dizon remains tight-lipped on love life



Sunshine Dizon was asked repeatedly about her love life at the presscon of "La Vendetta" last Tuesday but the versatile and award-winning actress wouldn't want to say anything. "Hayaan na lang natin na tahimik ang love life ko," was Sunshine's quick reply to the inquisitive members of the media. The press took note of Sunshine's beauty, saying that the actress is blooming so her love life must be the thing that makes her look even more beautiful.

"Kailangan na parati tayong maganda," said Sunshine, brushing aside the pangungulit of the press who wanted her to say more about the state of her love life. She says still wants to lose weight although she hasn't

stepped on a weighing scale since she started on her South Beach Diet. "Sometimes it's so frustrating when you don't get the weight that you desired. Pero basta kasya ang damit, payat ka."

The character she plays in "La Vendetta" is not that fashionable so she doesn't get to wear fabulous costumes. "She (the role she plays) will be cloistered in an asylum for eight years. Hindi siya baduy kasi marami silang pera pero hindi siya fashionable compared to the characters played by Jean Garcia and Jennylyn Mercado," said Sunshine.

Do you find your role in "La Vendetta" difficult to portray? "Yeah, mahirap ang role na ito. But I didn't pattern my character with anyone. Our writer RJ Nuevas and our directors Lore Reyes and Gil Tejada told me not to pattern my character with anyone so it would be original. But they guide me with my role and they make sure that I am able to do it right, the way they envisioned the role to be. The role is very emotionally and mentally taxing," she explained.

Since she's working with former boyfriend Polo Ravales in "La Vendetta," she was asked if there's a chance to rekindle her romance with Polo who said that if there's a girlfriend whom he'd liked to reconcile with, it's her.

"Wala naman kaming ganoon. In this series, he's paired off with Jennylyn and eventually he will become the husband of Jean (Garcia) so wala talagang ganun," she said. "Besides, wala naman sinasabi si Polo sa akin na gusto niya akong balikan. It's starting to irritate me. Everyone and all of you are telling me na he's telling this to all of you. He's not telling me naman anything so I am confused. Is this a gimmick or what? He says that to you but not to me."

"When I appeared in *Showbiz Central*, I said that I really hope that he does respect our friendship. Sana respetohin din ninyo ang pagkakaibigan namin. Itigil ninyo na ito. Itigil na natin ito kasi ayokong masira ang pagkakaibigan namin," Sunshine bristles.

"La Vendetta," the first ever suspense drama on Philippine TV, premiered on GMA 7's teleabad block last Monday, October 29. ■

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Isaac T. Goodine

Global Perspectives



It was the best of times...It was the worst of times.

In Quebec, a debate over "reasonable accommodation"----as a phrase for how far the francophone majority should bend to accommodate religious and cultural minorities, appears to be fuelling an exodus. Out-migration has reached 40,000 since mid 2006, and over 12, 500 of those left the province between April and June of this year.

In Ontario, where much of the economy depends on manufacturing, the strong Canadian dollar is a negative factor that compounds a problem in the labour market where there is a critical shortage of human capital.

So while Quebec debates, Ontario has decided. Immigration is being promoted to fill a growing need. In both provinces the cost of education is high and rising and its cost-effectiveness is, to say the least, questionable. Last year, an unreasonably high proportion of university graduates entered the work force at minimum wages in the service sector such as retail sales and in jobs that require no more than a high school education; and 60 percent started working life owing an average of over \$25,000 in student loans. This year tuition fees have increased again. Yet, productivity in terms of the economic value of what Canadian workers contribute is well below that of some 17 countries involved in the international market place, and that in turn is attributable to severe shortages of skilled workers in a wide, and widening, range of professions and trades.

There is every indication that there is a disconnection between the education system and the society it is intended, and paid, to serve. What happened? That is the subject for another column, but in the meantime it is a reminder that Canada used Immigration to maintain industrialization following the Second World War and when that source dried up, because of reconstruction of the war torn countries, there was a coordinated strategic plan to institute a comprehensive and integrated system of competency based education and training. After making great strides for some time and establishing the most cost effective as well as the most

efficient education and training system in the world, Canada became rich. The experience is well documented. Subsequently, in the late 1970s rich Canadians simply abandoned the philosophy that students' career aspirations and employers' productivity expectations are of paramount importance and the system changed with an inward focus on the institutions rather than the labour market and has been turning out an army of generalists. Now the choice is clear; let the economy stagnate, or turn again to an effective and efficient immigration regime to sustain economic viability and remain competitive in the international marketplace, including the global labor market. It is against this background that the province has negotiated an arrangement to actively participate in immigration of persons who intend to settle in Ontario.

The Province has undertaken a special Pilot Provincial Nominee Program designed to match skilled immigrants to business needs. The Pilot PNP is designed to contribute to job creation, job retention and economic development by attracting new investment and by helping employers in target sectors attract and keep qualified employees. The program reflects the fact that the labour market in Ontario is changing: The Canadian-born workforce is shrinking and the labour demand is growing. Newcomers bring international experience and expertise that can help Canadian companies compete internationally. There are two significant features of this scheme as it is to allow employers to attract skilled immigrants to meet their business needs; and, for the first time, gives Ontario, a role in selecting immigrants who wish to make the province their home. Immigration is a cornerstone of Ontario's economic prosperity and social fabric. Annually, more than half of all newcomers to Canada settle in Ontario.

So what is new? There are twenty occupations that have been declared as targeted occupations where shortages exist and where the Labour Market Opinion (LMO) has been waived, meaning that process is employer-driven. This means that employers apply to the program and

recruit qualified employees to fill their labor market needs. The eligible occupations include eight categories in the health sector; two in the education sector; five in the manufacturing sector; and five in the construction sector. Ten percent of PNP nominations are reserved for multinational firms making a significant investment in Ontario and, if they wish, to bring key executives, managers or skilled employees from outside Canada to work in their Ontario operations.

The process is simplified as the employer in a target occupation applies to have the position approved by the program. If the position is approved, the employer forwards a nominee application to the selected candidate. The candidate submits the nominee application, along with the application fee to the program. If the application is approved, the provincial government will nominate the candidate and their family to Citizenship and Immigration Canada for fast-tracked permanent residency and support their application for an interim work permit. Recruits may be from abroad or already here in Canada (as temporary foreign workers, international students or visitors).

International students are eligible to become provincial nominees if they are close to graduating, or are recent graduates from a recognized Ontario college or university in a field of study related to one of the targeted occupations. Students have up to two years from the time they graduate to be considered under the program. The new initiative in regard to foreign students is noteworthy and, hopefully other provinces will follow Ontario's lead in this regard. The Canadian Bureau for International Education has released comments on a recent study that shows Canada is falling back in retaining its foreign graduates as barriers drive obviously skilled potential immigrants to home countries and the U.S. This particular brain drain is happening as the U.S., Britain and Australia move swiftly to attract and retain more foreign students. Once ranked as a top-five destination for international students, Canada has dropped to 14th place among the world's richest nations and receives only three percent of all international students. The Bureau, which represents 200 post-secondary institutions, urges officials to drop barriers that drive away many foreign graduates and stop squandering a valuable talent pool that could add as many as 30,000 skilled immigrants annually.

Some institutions have tended to neglect inter-cultural requirements until recently. However, a very positive development has evolved and I am pleased to introduce the International Educator Association of Canada, as a relatively new legal entity, whose purpose is to foster professional development in support of international education. For further information please visit IEAC at: www.ieac.ca

Isaac Goodine may be reached at: itgoodine20@hotmail.com

Rendez-vous Montreal to be held at Palais de Congrès November 12-13, 2007

Rendez-vous November 2007—a joint effort of the Government of Canada, the Government of Quebec, the City of Montréal, the Board of Trade of Metropolitan Montréal, and Culture Montréal—seeks to make the vision of Montréal as a cultural metropolis of the 21st century a reality, based first and foremost on the city's creativity, originality, and diversity.

* For more information

News

* Montréal, cultural metropolis – November 2007 Rendez-vous – 2007-17 Action Plan released to the public.

* The Board of Trade of Metropolitan Montreal and the Conseil des arts de Montréal unveil the finalists of the 2007 Prix Arts-Affaires de Montréal {in French}

* The Canada Council for the Arts has released its 2008-2011 Strategic Plan, the result of what the council believes to be the largest and most extensive consultation in its history.

* The mayor of Montréal is now responsible for culture, heritage and design within the city administration {in French}

* The Conseil québécois du théâtre (CQT) will hold its Second General Assembly of Professional Theatre in Québec on October 17-20. {in French}

* The Ninth Annual Public Libraries Week will be held from October 20 to 27. This year's theme is "In Action for You!" {in French}

Steering Committee

The Steering Committee for the Rendez-vous November 2007 consists of:

Gérald Tremblay, Mayor of Montréal, Chair of the Rendez-vous November 2007

Hon. Michael M Fortier, Minister of Public Works and Government Services Canada and Minister responsible for the region of Montréal

Hon. Josée Verner, Minister of Canadian Heritage, Status of Women and Official Languages

Raymond Bachand, Quebec Minister of Economic Development, Innovation and Export Trade, Minister of Tourism and Minister responsible for the region of Montréal

Christine St-Pierre, Quebec Minister of Culture, Communications and Status of Women

Isabelle Hudon, President and CEO, Board of Trade of Metropolitan Montréal

Simon Brault, President of Culture Montréal and Chair of the Steering Committee

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continued from page 5 'Elections'

Ms Arroyo No. 8 voter

Another reelectionist village chair, Hadji Alih Salasin, was shot and wounded by armed men believed to be followers of his opponent near a school in Lamitan town, also in Basilan.



President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo casts her vote at the San Nicolas elementary school in Lubao town of Pampanga province, north of Manila, October 29, 2007, during the nationwide elections for village chair and the youth legislature.

An Army soldier was shot and killed allegedly by a policeman after a quarrel inside a precinct in Talipao town, Sulu province.

Arson was suspected in the burning of a school building in Pantabangan town in Nueva Ecija province at 4 a.m. Monday, three hours before precincts opened.

Instead of declaring a failure of election, the board of election inspectors held the balloting in other school buildings in the town.

Police said supporters of a candidate for barangay chair in the area could have started the fire.

In Pampanga, Ms Arroyo cast her vote at Precinct No. 1 at the Lubao East Elementary School.

She was accompanied by her godson, Mayor Dennis Pineda, president of the Pampanga Mayors League (PML).

Ms Arroyo, who arrived in a black Mercedes Benz at 9:25 a.m., waited for 15 minutes for her turn because she was the eighth voter in line.

Violence, harassment

Writing behind a secrecy folder, she referred to a codigo (prepared lineup) of her favored candidates, spending two minutes to fill up the official ballots.

She left at 9:50 a.m. and did not give any statement to reporters.

Police arrested six men caught putting up campaign materials at the Dau Central Elementary School in Pampanga's Mabalacat town.

In Cagayan province, a policeman was killed after passengers of a van that drove past a police checkpoint in Alcala town shot him on Sunday night.

Police said Police Officer 1 Jackson Casil was hit in the chest. Three suspects were arrested, one of

them a candidate for village chair in Barangay Afusing Daga.

In Nueva Ecija, a resident was shot and wounded by a candidate in Laur town on Monday morning.

Police said Leonardo Bitor, a reelectionist council member of Pinagbayan, allegedly shot Benigno Fronda.

In Abra province, a candidate for village chief in the capital Bangued town was shot and wounded by a group of men on Sunday night.

Vote-buying

In Bulacan province, police were investigating a certain Colonel Salem who entered a polling precinct in Barangay Lawa in Meycauayan town with four police escorts at past 3 p.m.

Incidents of alleged harassment of voters were also reported in Malolos City and in the towns of Meycauayan, Bustos and Marilao.

While vote-buying remained rampant in the Visayas, a town in Bohol province succeeded in implementing a covenant against vote-buying.

Some 560 candidates for barangay and Sangguniang Kabataan in Maribojoc town signed a covenant to eliminate vote-buying.

In contrast, vote-buying was reported across the Visayas, with voters reportedly getting from as low as P10 and as high as P1,500.

An election official in Bacolod City said vote-buying, which started on Sunday, was reported in almost all villages.

In the Eastern Visayas region, reports of sequestering of voters also marred the SK elections.

Some parents in Tacloban City and in other parts of Leyte and Samar provinces complained that persons identified with politicians brought their children in "holding areas" on the eve of the elections without parental consent.

Failure of election

In Eastern Visayas, election officials declared a failure of election in eight villages due to the presence of

armed men.

In Sulu, a failure of election was declared in 14 villages in the towns of Luuk, Indanan and Talipao and in the whole town of Panglima Estino because some barangay election officials did not show up for fear of being caught in the crossfire between armed supporters of candidates.

Officials said at least 10,000 registered voters failed to cast their ballots in Sulu.

In Midsayap town in North Cotabato province, voting in the village of Mudsing was briefly interrupted at around 8 a.m. when supporters of a candidate fired their rifles.

Police said no one was reported hurt but the gunfire sent voters to different areas to seek cover.

The gunmen fled. Voting resumed shortly after police and military personnel arrived in the village.



Dusted former Philippine President Joseph Estrada, who was pardoned by Arroyo after his plunder conviction, votes at a school in his hometown of San Juan city, east of Manila, on Oct. 29, 2007.

In Davao Oriental province, fighting between communist rebels and government troops broke out in the town of Lupon on Monday afternoon.

Police said New People's Army rebels were campaigning for their candidates in Barangay New Visayas in Lupon town.

In Cotabato City, a failure of election was declared in nine polling precincts after members of the board of election teller did not show up. ■

Arroyo Rejects Calls for Snap Elections

October 31, 2007

President Gloria Macapagal



Arroyo yesterday said she is not resigning and told those calling for a "snap election" to wait for the next presidential election in 2010.

"The constitution clearly sets our next elections in 2010," said Arroyo, who has been called the "Teflon president" for managing to survive coup attempts and scandal after

scandal facing her administration.

She warned groups opposed to her administration that the public will not support unconstitutional means to change government before the scheduled presidential election.

"Let us not be distracted by the impatient few who believe they are above the rule of law," she said, pointing to the "successful outcome" of the Oct. 29 village and youth council elections that she said "underscores the people's firm commitment to democracy and strong political institutions."

"That message should not be ignored by groups who are out to destroy the gains of a strong economy through extra-constitutional means," she added.

Fresh calls for Arroyo's resignation came in the wake of allegations that the government bribed local officials

and lawmakers to ensure their loyalty to the president amid a new bid to impeach her.

The impeachment bid stems from charges that Arroyo condoned alleged bribery and corruption involving a canceled \$329-million National Broadband Network (NBN) contract awarded to a Chinese firm.

Arroyo and her officials have denied the accusations. She urged the public to ignore the noise of her detractors.

Arroyo has also sparked an outrage last week after she pardoned former President Joseph Estrada even before he could start serving his life sentence for the crime of massive plunder.

Plunder is punishable by death under a Philippine law, but Arroyo said Estrada has suffered under house arrest while undergoing trial.

The Kilusang Makabansang Ekonomiya (KME, Movement for a Nationalist Economy) had broached the idea of making Chief Justice Reynato Puno head of a caretaker government, saying Arroyo was no longer fit to run the government, especially after her pardon to convicted former president Joseph Estrada.

Puno had turned down the proposal, saying he would rather remain in the judiciary.

The KME, which counts Catholic bishops as among its members, called for Arroyo's resignation and the setting up of a transition junta headed by the chief justice.

Former Vice President Teofisto Guingona also joined the KME's call for the Arroyo's resignation, saying the president has lost her moral ascendancy to lead the country. ■



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