

FROM THE FRONT PAGE

Pinay seafarers face triple tides at sea

PAGE A1 ◀ Pinays have to battle exploitation, discrimination and sexual harassment in exchange for the dollars and euros, and the signature shirts and bags that they send to their families," added the former journalist and migrant. The panel of reactors include Alejandro Padaen, director POEA

adjudication division; Connie Regalado, chair, Migrante International; Johnny Oca, vice president Associated Marine Officers and Seafarers Union of the Philippines (AMOSUP); Milton Unso, president, Mariners Association for Regional and International Networking Organization (MARINO); and Elena Sana, executive

director of the Center for Migrants Advocacy. Rising number of Pinay seafarers POEA figures show that the number of Filipina seafarers in 2007 rose by 2.8 percent to 6,619 from 6,436 in 2006. The number of male seafarers on the other hand dropped by 2.6 percent to 216,874 from 222,575 the previous year. The total number of sea-based workers deployed overseas also dropped last year by 1.4 percent to 226,900 from 230,222 in 2006.

are assigned to positions or jobs reflective or related to their reproductive and nurturing roles, they tend to receive lower pay. Jobs assigned to women are also considered "non-professional" and unskilled and the salaries are not covered by the minimum wage set by the International Labor Organization.

The study shows that the opening of the floodgate to shipboard employment also exposed women to various forms of discrimination, exploitation and sexual harassment. At the recruitment stage, women applicants are already judged based on their youthfulness and beauty. First-time applicants should not be over 32 years old and should stand 5 feet and two inches for those who wish to work in the utility department while waitresses and bar tenders should be at least two inches taller. Experience is a plus but not imperative, especially if the applicant has a pleasing personality.

In the last meeting on the Joint Maritime Commission's subcommittee on wages of seafarers on February 2006, the members recommended the basic minimum wage of the able seafarer to be raised to US\$515 as of January 1, 2007, to US\$530 as of January 1, 2008 and to US\$545 as of December 31, 2008.

Since women are assigned non-professional and non-technical jobs, their basic pay tends to be lower than that of male seafarers. Women seafarers manage to augment their income through tips and part-time jobs like doing the laundry and cleaning the cabins of Western crewmembers.

Work hours, load, underemployment

The researcher also discovered that women seafarers work on the average between 10 to 14 hours a day. The length of hours of work often depends on the department and the type of jobs that they perform. Those in utility for instance have to clean 16 to 18 cabins a day, which takes about 9 to 10 hours to complete.

Interviews with 12 women seafarers show the following trend in the types of jobs and pay scale of women on board. Male seafarers are concentrated in professional, technical and labor-intensive jobs on board. Such male jobs are valued more and therefore paid more than "women" jobs at sea. For instance a master or a captain receives from US\$7,000 to \$9,000 a month while a chief officer receives between US\$5,000 to \$7,000. Here are the rest of the figures.

Women seafarers interviewed all claimed that they do not have a day off, only short breaks during the day even when their ship is on port. A crewing manager interviewed also confirmed this. "Everyday is a Monday," he said. Interviewees also claimed that they were not given sick leave either.

The working hours of women seafarers are definitely long compared to the standard set by Philippine authorities. Section 10 of the POEA Standard Terms and Conditions Governing the Employment of Filipino Seafarers on Board Ocean Going Vessels stipulates: "The seafarer shall perform not more than forty-eight (48) hours of regular work a week." It also specifies that a day worker shall "observe eight (8) regular working hour during the period from 0600 hours to 1800 hours."

Research depicts the systemic discrimination of women in the maritime sector. Since women

Just like their land-based counterparts, women seafarers often

More foods getting labeled as US or foreign-grown

by LAURAN NEERGAARD AP Medical Writer

WASHINGTON—No more wondering where your hamburger came from, or where your lettuce and tomatoes were grown: Starting this week, shoppers will see lots more foods labeled with the country of origin.

It's a law years in the making but timely, as China's milk scandal and the recent salmonella-tainted Mexican peppers prompt growing concern over the safety of imported foods.

Still, hold the import-bashing: Numerous outbreaks in recent years have come from US-produced foods, like spinach grown in California.

Until now, shoppers have had little clue where many everyday foods—meats, fresh fruits and vegetables, certain nuts—originate. That's what the so-called COOL law, for country-of-origin labeling, changes.

Those who want to buy local—or who prefer, say, Chilean grapes and New Zealand lamb—can more easily exercise their purchasing power. Those worried about lax safety regulations in certain countries can avoid those imports. And the next time tomatoes are suspected of food poisoning, consumers may be able to tell investigators they bought only ones grown in a certain region, speeding the probe.

"We do see it as an important step on the road to a more comprehensive system for tracing food items" during outbreaks, says Caroline Smith DeWaal of the Center for Science in the Public Interest.

"It will be a very good thing because we'll have a lot more information," adds Jean Halloran of Consumers Union. But, "you can still be fooled by the COOL label."

How? There are bunches of exceptions. Fresh strawberries get a label but not chocolate-covered ones. Raw peanuts? Label. Roasted ones? No label. Those popular pre-washed salad mixes? Sometimes.

Here are some common questions as shoppers navigate the change:

Q: What does the new law require? A: That retailers notify customers of the country of origin—including the US—of raw beef, veal, lamb, pork, chicken, goat, wild and farm-raised fish and shellfish, fresh or frozen fruits and vegetables, peanuts, pecans, macadamia nuts and whole ginseng. (The aim was big agricultural commodities; ginseng was added for fear of imports masquerading as US-grown.)

Q: Where will I see the country of origin? A: Anywhere it fits. The rubber band around asparagus; the plastic wrap on ground beef; the little sticker that says "Gala" on an apple. If a food isn't normally sold in any packaging—such as a bin of fresh green beans or mushrooms—

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