ACROSS THE ISLANDS

Happy Christmas for Mindanao child refugees

TWO-THIRD of the 611, 753 people caught in the armed conflict in Mindanao are children.

Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) secretary Ezperanza Cabral led officials to launch a gift-giving activity for the children who are suffering from the struggle in Mindanao. The project *Tulong Para sa Batang MindaNOW (Help for the Child of MindaNOW)*, is joined by Metro Manila Mayors Spouses Foundation and Ricky Reyes Foundation Inc. The project is aimed to collect books, clothes, schools supplies, and toys not promoting violence for the children in Mindanao.

Tulong Para sa Batang MindaNOW already started last Monday, November 03, 2008 and will end on November 30, 2008. The dropboxes were placed on public elementary schools all over Metro Manila and will then be collected to be distributed for the Mindanao children, all in time for Christmas season. *(Billy dela Cruz/AJPress)*

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Canadian filmmaker features Philippines' 'Aswang'

ROXAS CITY—Jordan Clark, a filmmaker from High Banks Entertainment Ltd. in Canada took interest in a Philippine folklore character, the *Aswang*. He is on his fifth trip to Capiz and is already conducting interviews and researches for the straight feature length documentary about the aswang myth, which is centered on the central islands of the Philippines.

Clark also created the documovie *Aswang: A Journey Into Myth* which he described as an origin and artictic exploration of Philippine folklore. The film starred Janice Valdez, a newcomer, with the special appearance of the Diamond Star Maricel Soriano. The documovie will be a supplementary on the DVD that will soon come out on Clark's feature documentary. *(Billy dela Cruz/AJPress)*

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Subic continues to rise

SUBIC BAY FREEPORT—Last Wednesday, October 29, Subic Bay Metropolitan Authority (SBMA) administrator Armand Arreza addressed that, "Subic has come a long way," in the last ten years. In his address, Arreza also mentioned that Subic now houses 1,100 investor-firms that created more than 85,000 job opportunities.

Arreza discussed in his address the existence of nine other piers and cargo terminals in Subic, key infrastructures, and the rapid expansion of tourism facilities balanced by the Eco-tourism.

In the last decade Subic has a rising number of domestic and international guests growing every year. SBMA stated in their website that Subic now can be compared to Honolulu, Hawaii, "Subic caters to all sorts of activities, it is a combination of a city and a tourist haven." *(Billy dela Cruz/AJPress)*

Melo envious of US electoral process

by KRISTINE L. ALAVE
Inquirer.net

Commission on Elections Chairman Jose Melo views the recent US presidential election wistfully because of its sharp contrast with Philippine elections.

Jose Melo

Melo said he was impressed by how the campaign period unfolded and how smoothly the voting and counting process went, even if different voting machines were used.

With less than two years before the 2010 Philippine presidential election, Melo said he hopes that Filipino politicians and voters would take note of how the US campaign focused not so much on personal attacks but on issues.

"On the behavior of the candidates, they talked about issues and not personalities. Maybe we should be like that," Melo told the Philippine Daily Inquirer in an interview.

Melo said it was refreshing to see a campaign where there were spirited discussions on the problems and issues facing the candidates.

He chided local politicians for putting gimmicks and attacks at the forefront of their election campaign, instead of their political platforms.

In 2010, the election chairman urged candidates to "put the campaign on a higher level."

The US presidential election was of immense interest to the Comelec in light of plans to automate the 2010 Philippine elections.

The Comelec is pushing for the automation of the elections, saying it would minimize large-scale vote tampering.

Based on the complaints of voters, Melo admitted that automated voting would not be problem-free.

He cited the "terrible mess" in Florida, where some ballots were not read by the machines. There were also complaints that some machines misread the voter's choices.

Melo said the problems voters faced in the US elections could be magnified and multiplied in the Philippines.

"They have more money and more machines, but the lines were still long," he said. "Here in our country, we have fewer machines, so the lines will probably longer."

Melo said the Comelec was also thinking of introducing an early voting system to lessen the lines on Election Day, "but that would take an amendment of the laws."

If that is not possible, Melo said, the Comelec could cluster precincts into bigger polling places.

Villar wants 2010 to be like US polls

by MAILA AGER
Inquirer.net

Manny Villar

SENATE President Manny Villar sees a stronger republic and democracy if the country will emulate the recently concluded presidential race in the United States.

"Sana yung sa 2010 ay maging kagaya ng election sa Amerika [I wish the 2010 elections will be like the one in America]," Villar told reporters on November 7.

"And what we saw was okay because we saw that an orderly election was possible—heated but orderly. [Republican John] McCain conceded immediately and I hope that is what will happen in 2010]," he said in Filipino, referring to President-elect Barack Obama's rival and Republican John McCain.

"If that is what will happen in 2010, then our country and democracy will be stronger," he said.

Villar has declared his intention to run for president in 2010.

"Getting my H1B visa was not easy, but Nelson & Associates was with me every step of the way. Because of a status gap I had to go back to the Philippines for consular processing. Attorney Nelson walked me through what I would have to do at the embassy. The embassy denied my visa application so I contacted Nelson and Associates right away. They contacted the embassy and the Department of State and a few months later, I am back in the United States and legally employed in H-1B status."

Mark Chester Carlos, Systems Analyst
Approved H1B Visa
U.S. Consulate, Manila, Philippines

"I am a national champion in the sport of Taekwondo in the Philippines. Attorney Nelson explained the complicated requirements of O1 visa in a manner that was easy to understand. Attorney Nelson and his staff were diligent in obtaining the required advisory opinions and ensured that all the requirements were satisfied before filing my petition. I was approved right away!

Robert L. Vargas, Senior Instructor of Taekwondo
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