

Meet MAC, RP's first anti-terror robot

by MICHAEL PUNONGBAYAN
Philstar.com

AFTER months of fine-tuning, the country's very first Filipino-made bomb disposal robot was presented to the public October 15 as the latest member of the Makati City police force.

Made of aluminum, fiberglass, and engineering plastic, the two-foot tall machine was officially named MAC (Mechanical Anti-terrorist Concept) and conferred the rank of Police Inspector, equivalent to captain in the military.

With the *Mission Impossible* theme song playing in the background and despite unfavorable weather conditions, MAC was made to examine and retrieve an explosive device that was brought to a bomb disruptor and safely detonated.

MAC's ability to approach any-

thing or anyone was also showcased when it was made to bring a cellular phone to a supposed hostage-taker in order to give the police and the suspect a way to communicate.

And just like any modern-day hero with the reputation of being a super agent like Ian Fleming's James Bond, Makati City's mechanical friend charmed his way into the hearts of women, who gave him red roses which allowed him to demonstrate how his mechanical hands can grip and hold almost anything.

MAC was developed by engineering professors and students of the Mapua Institute of Technology as the country's first and so far most reliable bomb disposal robot.

Makati City Police chief Senior Superintendent Gilbert Cruz told *The Star* how the robot was conceptualized, and revealed that it might just earn the Philippines a prize in an international robotics competition.

"Inspector MAC and eight Mapua professors and students will be going to China for the contest scheduled October 16 to 21," Cruz told *The Star* in an in-

terview.

According to him, the competition will feature various computer-developed machines and the Philippines will be in it, hopefully to win.

Cruz said Mapua's brightest minds headed by engineer John Judilla created the bomb disposal robot which will keep policemen out of harm's way each time they respond to a bomb emergency.

Inspector MAC can be controlled either by attached wires or by remote control, depending on the situation.

"Now, should there be bomb threats, we can conduct bomb disposal operations from a safe distance. We can send MAC instead of sending officers to manually do the job," Cruz said.

The machine's current features include gripper, drive, field vision, and back vision cameras with night vision capability and the ability to move at a maximum speed of 15 kilometers per hour.

Cruz said Inspector MAC can also test air toxicity levels in case of a chemical explosion.

He took pride in the fact that the robot, which runs on motorcycle batteries, was assembled

using locally available materials.

Considering how Makati City receives an average of one bomb threat a week, Inspector MAC is being considered as the Makati City Police's pride and humble contribution to the continuing

fight against terrorism.

Mayor Jejomar Binay commended Cruz for the department's innovativeness and constant enhancement of its capabilities to maintain peace and order in the city.

"The city government lauds the Makati Police for using advancements in technology in deterring crime. The introduction of the MAC Robot will surely boost the city's preparedness in keeping the populace safe," Binay said. ■

'Survivor' boosts Bicol tourism

by EPHRAIM AGUILAR
Inquirer.net

LEGAZPI CITY – French tourist arrivals in the Bicol region grew more than 20 times, from 912 in the first two quarters of 2007 to 21,247 during the same period this year, thanks to the filming there of the *Survivor* reality TV show, the Department of Tourism (DoT) here said.

Ravanilla said the breakthrough in tourist arrivals is expected to secure a spot for Bicol as one of the country's top tourist destinations.

In 2007, she said the Bicol region ranked sixth among other regions with total tourist arrivals of 897,680. Bicol was seventh in 2006 and ninth in 2004 and 2005.

Top tourist attractions in Bicol are Donsol town's whaleshark interaction in Sorsogon, Albay's Mayon Volcano, and the Camarines Sur's Water Sports Complex in Pili town.

Ravanilla added that for the first two quarters of 2008, the tourism industry earned a gross

Caramoan Peninsula, which was known to only to backpackers before it was used as a location for *Survivor* France, boasts powdery white sand beaches and crystal blue waters, rock formations and rich flora and fauna. ■



"This is an astounding leap," said Maria Ong-Ravanilla, Bicol tourism regional director, attributing this to the filming of the French edition of the popular reality game show early this year in Caramoan town in Camarines Sur.

France was fifth in terms of tourist arrivals in Bicol in 2007 but suddenly climbed to the top spot, placing the United States second with 11,847, Japan with 5,032, Germany with 2,844, and Australia with 2,385.

income of around P305 million and generated a total of 198,539 jobs.

"Our gross receipts amounted to around P443 million for the whole of 2007, but now, for only the first two quarters of 2008, we have already earned 69 percent of that," Ravanilla said.

The French *Survivor* started airing in the first week of July and has been viewed by some 10 million viewers from French-speaking countries in Europe and Canada.

BoC to continue tighter food monitoring

by ALCUIN PAPA
Inquirer.net

MANILA – The Bureau of Customs (BoC) assured the public on October 15 of tighter monitoring of imported food products towards the Christmas season to prevent the entry of contaminated food in the country.

Customs Commissioner Napoleon Morales made the assurance as the National Meat Inspection Service (NMIS) said it has been conducting tests on food products from China, including several brands of canned meat, for the presence of toxic materials.

Four infants died while thousands others were hospitalized in China after they were given milk with melamine, an industrial chemical that was used by some milk dealers to mask the protein deficiency of their milk. Four Chinese brands have been banned in the Philippines after testing positive for traces of melamine.

"We will not allow the release of any contaminated goods," Morales said on Wednesday.

On the goods now undergoing testing by the NMIS, Morales said they were waiting for the results from the agency. "So far, we have not received any transmission calling for a ban or any-

thing."

Morales explained that all imported food items, like canned goods and meat products should undergo a series of safety checks.

"They need to be covered by certificates of registration as well as certification from the Bureau of Animal Industry (BAI). The NMIS would not issue a certificate of product registration if they are not sure that it is safe and fit for human consumption," he said.

Other food imports will have to be checked by agencies such as the Bureau of Food and Drugs.

Since the entry of the goods needs to be covered by clearances from the concerned government agencies upon arrival into the country before Customs can release them, the BoC can hold the release of the items from the ports until it is proven that the products do not pose a danger to consumers.

Earlier, Morales ordered all Customs enforcement units to closely monitor all shipments of luncheon meat, chocolates, frozen meat, lychees and other canned goods to ensure the safety of the general public as the Christmas season nears.

"We're monitoring the importation of these goods not only those coming from China but also from various countries exporting food products to the Philippines," said Ma. Lourdes Mangaoang, chief of the BoC's X-ray Scanning team. "This is to ensure the safety of the consuming public in times of the holiday." ■

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