

## Australia helps RP upgrade aviation safety

THE Australian government has provided Manila with modern aviation training equipment to restore the international community's confidence in Philippine carriers.

Australian Ambassador to the Philippines Rod Smith said the training facility equipment is part of Australia's security capacity building support that will enable the Philippine Office for Transportation Security (OTS) to standardize training and application of aviation security measures in airports across the country.

The Philippines was listed by Washington's Federal Aviation Authority (FAA) as one of the 21 countries under the category of "unsafe port of origin."

The classification restricts flights to the US, thus deferring expansion plans of Philippine domestic air carriers.

Over the years, Australia and the Philippines share a strong bilateral defense and security relationship to counter global and regional threats.

Since 2006, Australia has committed up to P10.9 million pesos (\$225,206) for the implementation of a broader range of aviation security assistance measures to safeguard the long-term security of Philippine aviation and the traveling public. ■

## 'Catching' clouds tour package soon

by DELMAR CARIÑO  
Inquirer.net

LA TRINIDAD, Benguet—Those who want to escape the heat this summer can try a new thrill when they decide to visit the Cordillera: Cloud catching.

This new experience, according to the Department of Tourism, will be offered to visitors as part of its tours to the region's mountain trails.

Purificacion Molintas, DOT regional director, said the Cordillera's distinct advantage of being high up in the north would make it the ideal place for cloud catching.

### Among clouds

"It's an adventure (that we hope will) boost local tourism," she said. "We expect a surge in domestic visits due to the global crisis that has slowed down international travel."

But can one really catch clouds?

Molintas said this does not mean the clouds would be held by the tourist. "It's more of the experience of being in the midst of clouds and feeling their cool and refreshing presence."

"Imagine being surrounded or passed through by clouds. The clouds would just be within your grasp. That's something else," she said.

Molintas said Mt. Pulag in Kabayan town, Mt. Data in the boundary of Benguet and Mt. Province and some areas along the stretch of Halsema Highway from Atok to Buguias towns are good places for cloud catching.

Claire Prudencio, provincial tourism officer, said Mt. Cabuyao in Tuba town would also be good for the new adventure.

So with Barangay Paoay in Atok and Barangay Madaymen in Kibungan, she said.

### New idea

"At 3pm, the clouds just descend there at Mt. Cabuyao," Prudencio said.

The Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration (Pagasa)

welcomed DOT's latest package.

"That's a new idea," Efrén Danipog, Pagasa's weather observer in Baguio City, said.

But Danipog said no one could actually hold clouds since they are not solid objects.

"They are condensed water vapor. That's why you would feel them cold and watery," he said.

He said the Cordillera was really more vulnerable to cloud formation on normal weather conditions than the lowlands.

"The presence of mountains makes possible what we call orographic lifting, which occurs when the wind's direction goes up or the air is forced upward by a barrier of mountains or hills," he said.

### 4 cloud types

Danipog said there are four basic kinds of clouds: Cirrus (white feathery clouds that are formed when the temperature below is foggy), cumulus (white cotton balls), cumulonimbus (they occur during bad weather) and stratus (thin white sheets).

The cumulus clouds are the most beautiful since they come in various sizes and make sunsets attractive, he said.

Molintas said visitors could enjoy being with these clouds. She said the DOT is preparing brochures and tour packages that would identify areas in the region ideal for cloud catching.

She said the Cordillera hoped to cash in on cloud catching as more tourists visit the region every year.

DOT records showed that the region had 1.07 million foreign and local visitors last year, an increase of 4.56 percent from the 1.02 million visitors in 2007.

"Baguio and Ifugao are the most visited places but we expect the other provinces to be visited more often when we launch the cloud catching attraction," Molintas said. ■

## TEST CASE

## Libel suit filed over blog

MANILA—Bloggers beware!

The provincial prosecutor of Lanao del Sur has elevated to court libel charges against Marie Dhel "Bambee" de la Paz on the complaint of Agrarian Reform Secretary Nasser Pangandaman Sr. and his two sons arising from her blog over an incident at a golf course in Antipolo City last Dec. 26.

Paca-Ambung Macabando, provincial prosecutor of Lanao del Sur, issued his nine-page resolution dated March 12 elevating the libel charges against De la Paz before the Regional Trial Court (RTC) after she failed to submit her counter-affidavit before the deadline two days earlier.

Macabando said a careful analysis of De la Paz's blog titled *The World had Gone Crazy* reveals that there was an intention to "impute a discreditable act or condition."

"It was a genuine plea of De la Paz to all persons that may have been reading her blog to support her in portraying Mayor (Nasser) Pangandaman and Secretary Pangandaman as cruel, incompetent government officials, without delicadeza and cannot lead to peace," said Macabando.

Pangandaman and his sons Nasser Jr., mayor of Masiu town, Lanao del Sur, and Hussein Muhammed are locked in a court battle with the family of De la Paz, because of a scuffle over a simple misunderstanding at the Valley Golf and Country Club in Antipolo City.

The Pangandamans and De la

Paz and her father, Delfin, and brother Bino filed charges and counter-charges against each other before the Antipolo City prosecutor's office.

Because of the incident, the Valley Golf management banned the elder De la Paz from playing in the golf course, while Secretary Pangandaman was meted a two-year suspension.

The children of Pangandaman and De la Paz were also barred for life from playing in Valley Golf.

Macabando claimed that the blog is "obviously libelous for they are malicious imputations of criminal acts tending to dishonor, discredit and contempt Mayor Pangandaman Jr."

Macabando set a P10,000 bail bond for Bambee de la Paz.

Bambee wrote her narration of the incident on her blog a day after the incident.

Macabando said the blog of De la Paz elicited an angry reaction from fellow bloggers who wrote their personal reactions to the incident, which placed the Pangandamans in a bad light.

Pangandaman's lawyer Ted Pastrana welcomed Macabando's decision.

"This case involves libel in cyberspace," Pastrana pointed out. "I'm sure this is not a pleasant topic for bloggers."

The STAR tried but failed to reach De la Paz's lawyer Raymond Fortun for comment.

The elder De la Paz and his son filed charges of physical injuries and child abuse charges against the sons of Secretary Pangandaman. ■

## Isn't it strange? Why recant now, Nicole?

PAGE A16 ◀

reasons, we don't divulge details about them or their applications," she said.

### Palace to the defense

Malacañang defended Nicole against criticisms over her decision to all but clear her convicted rapist.

Anthony Golez, deputy spokesperson of Ms Arroyo, said Ursua should respect her former client's decision.

"The lawyers know that they cannot be very emotional on a case. They should be objective. They must also respect the client's right to reach her decision. The reason is very personal to Nicole, whatever that is," Golez told reporters in a chance interview.

"We should all respect [the decision] and we should move on," he said, adding:

Golez said the government would continue negotiating with US authorities on the Philippine-run facility that should hold Smith. "The process still continues," he said.

But US Ambassador Kristie Kenney has yet to sit with Foreign Secretary Albert Romulo for a formal negotiation.

Smith has been detained at the US Embassy since his midnight transfer there from the Makati City Jail in December 2006.

In a ruling issued last month, the Supreme Court said Smith should be held in a Philippine-run facility while he awaits the resolution of his appeal.

The ruling also upheld the constitutionality of the VFA.

Golez said Malacañang was also awaiting the high court's word on its motion for clarification regarding Smith's custody.

Asked if Malacañang was open to the review of the VFA, he said: "Anything for the betterment of anything in our government, the Palace is for it."

But he said the government could not just rush into the review of the agreement: "There is a process in reviewing the VFA. It must not be unilaterally done." ■

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