

FROM THE FRONT PAGE

Still Pacquiao's Day

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Not worried
 "I am not afraid of that," the 58-year-old Lucena City resident told the *Philippine Daily Inquirer* Friday, May 8, as she and hundreds and hundreds of other Filipinos came to catch even a glimpse—from a distance of 20 feet—of one

of the world's greatest boxers.
 Neither did Pacquiao seem worried that he might be carrying the virus, scientifically called A(H1N1).
 "I have no swine flu," Pacquiao told reporters shortly after he, his wife Jinky and his 15-member

Team Pacquiao delegation blew into town from Los Angeles, California, at 6:15 in the morning.
 Pacquiao had swept aside a World Health Organization (WHO) recommendation and a Malacañang appeal for him to delay his return and go on a self-imposed quarantine for five days—when signs of swine flu should emerge, if he had the virus.
 "My [family] warned me that Pacquiao might have the virus," Piñera, who travelled for five hours by bus to get to Quiapo, said with a laugh. "They did not come because of it and told me that it was up to me if I really wanted to catch the swine flu virus."

Not even the swine flu scare or threats of heavy rains from Typhoon "Emong" (international codename: Chan Hom) could keep them away from the people's champ. No one was seen wearing surgical masks.
More risky in LA
 Pacquiao, looking stylish in his off white coat and hat, defended his decision to return so soon after destroying Britain's Ricky Hatton in Las Vegas last weekend.
 "That's a wrong advice. It's as

if they are not really concerned about me," he said in a mix of English and Filipino, referring to the government appeal for him to stay in the US awhile.
 Noting that Los Angeles was itself an infected area, Pacquiao said it might have been more risky if he had stayed in Los Angeles.

Airport reporters were disappointed they were not able to talk to Pacquiao's mother, Aling Dionesia, who also created a stir in the US with her makeup, jewelry and her own brand of showmanship.
 Dionesia, it turned out, had immediately boarded a connecting flight to her hometown in Gen. Santos City shortly after the group arrived.

Palace sings a different tune
 By mingling with the public, Pacquiao and his party may have seemingly breached a WHO protocol on the swine flu, but Malacañang looked the other way.
 Press Secretary Cerge Remonde welcomed Pacquiao's return while scoffing at observations that he had placed other people's health at risk.

Undersecretary Anthony Golez on May 7 warned it would be a "nightmare" if anybody from Pacquiao's team later showed signs of being infected with the virus.

Remonde saw nothing wrong with Pacquiao mixing it up with supporters and even praised him for submitting himself to screening, including thermal scanning, at the airport to check if he had the flu.

Soon after arriving, Pacquiao hugged, kissed and lifted his children, who were among the welcomers.

Remonde argued that since they did not show any signs of flu during the airport screening, it was safe for Pacquiao and his party to go out in public.

Remonde disagreed with claims that Pacquiao violated the WHO protocol on self-quarantine and "social distancing"—keeping himself one meter away from the public—and, in effect, undermined government efforts at keeping the virus at bay.
 "I think not," Remonde said. ■

Fil-Ams crave for good news about RP

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floods, stalled hundreds of vehicles, and even cut off electricity in the area.

In a statement, Pamintuan said the threat of the swine flu also did not deter Filipino-American leaders from turning up in their briefings in affected states such as New York, Texas, and California. The team met with the Filipino community in San Diego, just a few miles from the US border with Mexico where the outbreak was first reported.

"Many of the Filipinos we talked to who have not been to the Philippines for decades are contemplating of coming home after we corrected the negative impressions they have on the country resulting largely from the tendency of media to give more prominence to bad news," said Pamintuan.

In their meetings with Filipino-Americans in New Jersey, Maryland, Illinois, Texas, and California, the team discussed the efforts of the Philippine government to cushion the impact of the global economic crisis and present the various mega-infrastructure projects that are not only changing the Philippine landscape but are also expected to bring more development to the countryside.

Pamintuan, who is also the development champion of the Luzon Urban Beltway (LUB), presented some P188-billion worth of infrastructure projects that are now being implemented in the LUB "special region" made up of Metro Manila and the provinces of Central and Southern Luzon.

"These projects have not only helped mitigate the impact of the global economic crisis but have also opened up new opportunities for development and investments," said Pamintuan, who also sits as chair of the North Rail Corporation.

Aside from Pamintuan, the other members of the team were Undersecretary Danilo De Austria Consumido of the Office of External Affairs (OEA); Alexander Caguiran, executive vice president and chief operating officer of the Clark International Airport Corporation (CIAC); Armand Arreza, Administrator of the Subic Bay Metropolitan Authority (SBMA); and director Kirk Galanza of OEA.

Consumido expounded on the various measures undertaken by government to strengthen the economy against the crisis. He said the Philippines registered record economic growths and is expected to be one of only three countries in Asia that will register positive growth this year despite the crisis.

"Our economic stimulus plan differs with that of the United States, which is focused mainly in rescuing faltering giant companies," Consumido said. "The Philippine economic stimulus plan is intended to benefit the poorer sectors through more investments in social services, as well as direct and indirect subsidies."

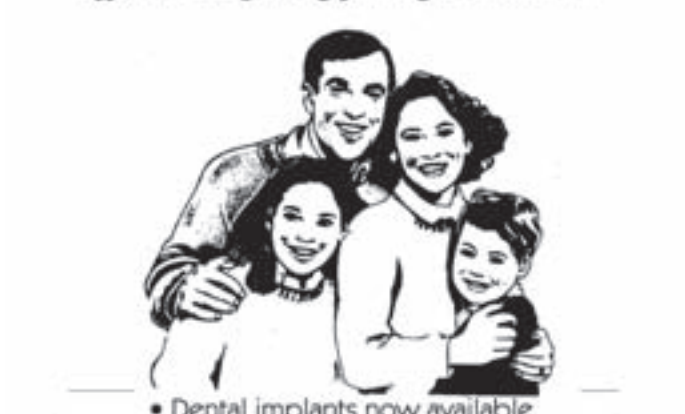
Consumido said that despite the crisis, recent surveys indicated a high level of confidence among Filipinos, adding that not only have none of the big companies in the Philippines closed down but that a number of them are even expanding and venturing into other industries.

Both Caguiran and Arreza presented how the former American military bases in Clark and Subic have been transformed into sprawling free port zones that host many big international companies. (*Inquirer.net*)

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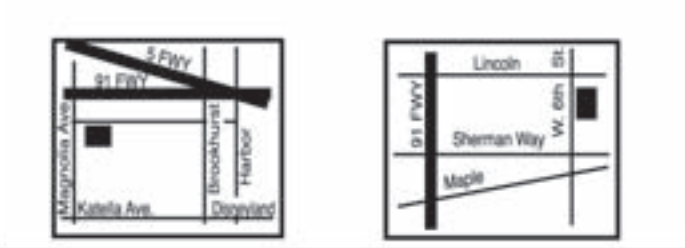


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