

DATELINE PHILIPPINES

OFW inflows up 2.6% to \$5.5 billion in January-April

by DES FERRIOLS
Philstar.com

MANILA – Remittances from overseas Filipino workers (OFWs) reached \$1.4 billion in April, bringing the four-month total so far to \$5.5 billion – an expansion of 2.6 percent compared with levels recorded over the same period in 2008, the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas (BSP) reported on June 15.

BSP data indicated that remittance inflow is still expanding but only slowly, with growth rates dropping down to single-digit levels for the first time in over

two decades.

But the April growth rate – although lower than usual – still defied expectations that remittances would actually start declining this year as Filipinos overseas begin to lose jobs in the wake of the global recession.

The BSP said that remittances from overseas Filipinos coursed through banks reached \$1.4 billion in April 2009, registering a year-on-year growth of 2.2 percent, bringing the cumulative remittances during the four-month period to \$5.5 billion.

The BSP said the 2.6-percent growth registered in the first four months of 2009 was supported by higher remittances from both sea-based and land-based workers of 2.5 percent and 2.6 percent, respectively.

“Steady remittance flows – av-

eraging \$1.4 billion in 2008 and in January-April 2009 – continued to be driven mainly by sustained demand by host countries for Filipino skills and competence,” said BSP Governor Amando M. Tetangco Jr.

Tetangco cited a report from the Philippine Overseas Employment Administration (POEA) that said demand for Filipino workers abroad remained broadly strong.

As of May this year, Tetangco said a total of 758,412 active job orders have been reported, of which 37 percent have been processed while 63 percent are still to be filled up. The bulk of the job orders was in the production, services, and professional skill categories.

Tetangco said the government expected the demand for Filipino workers abroad to be sustained

by employment opportunities gained from hiring agreements forged between the Philippines and host countries.

Thus far, the Arroyo administration’s aggressive labor export campaign has led to a number of such agreements with countries like Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Canada and Australia, among others.

The Philippines has also resumed exporting workers to Japan under the Japan-Philippines Economic Partnership Agreement (JPEPA) with an initial deployment of 273 health workers.

Remittances are generally expected to decline by at least four percent this year but the BSP has consistently countered market expectations and said its zero-growth remittance projection for 2009 was now considered conservative. ■

Over 1,000 OFWs stranded in Middle East

MANILA – More than a thousand distressed overseas Filipino workers remain stranded in the Middle East despite the mass repatriation undertaken by the government on Friday, a migrant workers group said on Sunday.

Migrante-Middle East said the 150 repatriated OFWs accounted only for less than 20 percent of the number of OFWs longing to go home. They have sought shelter in embassies and Philippine labor offices or are still with their abusive and unjust employers.

The 150, who arrived at the Ninoy Aquino International Airport (NAIA), were sent home through contributions from corporate and anonymous donors.

“We welcome the mass repatriation last Friday, but it is long overdue. There are more than a thousand remaining distressed OFWs who are also longing to be back home and reunited with their loved ones,” Migrante-ME regional coordinator John Leonard Monterona said.

Monterona said recruitment agencies should take primary responsibility for the repatriation of distressed OFWs. (*Inquirer.net*)



The Gold Line heads East.

Metro Briefs

Metro Rail Returning to East LA

Some 46 years after the last trolley crossed the First Street Bridge, rail is returning to East LA with the opening of a new branch of the Metro Gold Line. The soon-to-open extension will span six miles from Union Station in downtown LA via the Little Tokyo/Arts District and Boyle Heights to Atlantic/Pomona Boulevards.

Metro Bus Team Nation's Best

Teams from more than 50 public transit agencies recently competed to see who was best and Metro came out on top. Mechanics Frank Forde, Rommel Vargas and Andrew Warren Jr. along with operator Juan Navarro formed the Metro team which won the overall championship at the 2009 International Bus Rodeo.

Metro Service Changes Set for June 28

The expansion of Metro Rail to East LA is prompting several bus route changes beginning June 28. In addition, service in the Northeast San Fernando Valley is being restructured on that date. For complete details and timetables, visit metro.net.

Metro Budget Adds \$636 Million in New Programs

Federal stimulus funds and the Measure R transit sales tax resulted in \$636 million for new highway and transit building projects in Metro's recently adopted budget. Unlike other major transit agencies, the Metro budget does not include fare increases or impose major service cuts in the coming year.

Kaiser Wins Rideshare Corporate Award

Kaiser Permanente, headquartered in Pasadena, took top honors at this year's Diamond Awards for its ridesharing efforts. Kaiser was cited for promoting an array of rideshare options to its 30,000 employees at 18 work locations throughout Southern California.



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