

FROM THE FRONT PAGE

# FVR flays Palace...

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 "This probably is not going to reach even the P1-billion mark," Gary Olivar, deputy presidential spokesperson, said of the travel expenses in a media briefing. Olivar said Arroyo's visit to South Korea and Japan reaped a total of \$2.2 billion and \$5.5 billion in investment commitments, respectively. A separate travel to Egypt generated another \$1.2 billion.

Senate President Juan Ponce Enrile said people had every right to demand from Malacañang an explanation of the numerous foreign trips being taken by the President and Palace officials should explain. He said people paying taxes were "entitled to know these trips, their purposes, what benefits had the country derived from them, and costs" to government. ■

# Pres. Arroyo lauds overseas Pinoys for RP's...

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 taken steps to safeguard its long-term priorities. "We took the necessary steps in the past," Arroyo said. "We are also working toward a balanced budget, and we believe that our government should live within its means." Arroyo said that her government could have balanced the budget last year, "but the recession in America - where you live - the biggest market in the world, had impacted our budget," she said. "The government must live within its means, as the normal Filipino does," Arroyo stressed. "Now more than ever, you and the overseas Filipino workers are keeping our country resilient. Through your unwavering dedication and your care, you are our far-flung heroes and the greatest contributors towards our nation's resiliency."

"From Asia to North America to Europe, you are great patriots and great family men and women, and we envy all of you," Arroyo added. The President said that everyone has a part to play to see the country through these difficult economic times. "It is important that the next generation will

have all the opportunities. "Let us all remain hopeful and optimistic that the global economy will recover." She said that her government would remain vigilant in keeping recession away from its shores. "What I would like to ask FIL-USA and the all the Filipinos here is to continue to be patriots so that we - I and the members of Congress who are here today - can keep working to keep the economy steady," Arroyo said. She said that this optimism about the future is indicated in surveys after surveys. "So I will ask FIL-USA to empower the Filipinos here to keep the fire of optimism of our people. The Philippines has the biggest numbers of overseas workers in the world. Let us not forget that there are 8 million Filipinos liv-

ing abroad, but you send two-thirds of our revenues, and that 5 million of you are in the United States. *Tuloy pa rin ang tulong ninyo sa Pilipinas* (You continue to help the Philippines). So with Filipinos in the United States, especially here in the Los Angeles; with your continuing support us, we can say that our country is in good hands." FIL-USA was organized in about a month, according to Secretary Edgardo Pamintuan. It has chapters in San Francisco, San Diego, Los Angeles, Houston, Chicago, New York, and Washington DC "We established this organization to show to the Filipino people - that aside from the negative views that we are getting - we made our own presentations of the infrastructure projects and the social services

that the President's administration provided for the first time in 30 years," Secretary Pamintuan told *Asian Journal*. "The World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and other financial institutions attested that the Philippines generated a positive GDP during the last 30 years for the first time," Pamintuan said. "We had economic growth. It is not negative, unlike other countries. All the (other Asian countries) had negative growth, except China and Vietnam (and the Philippines)."

Pamintuan is in charge of the office of the adviser on internal affairs. He championed the Luzon urban beltway, and maintains all infrastructure projects that link major roads from the Calabarzon region to Metro Manila. ■

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# RP on verge of First World in 20 years...

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 cluding the pro-poor agenda so that we can have more people in the middle class and a massive reduction in poverty," the President said. "We also need to reform the political system," she added. The President said the Philippines is looking beyond its dynamic partnership with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and other development partners towards a Pan-Asian economic community that would cover not only the East Asia Summit but other parts of the world like the Middle East, Central Asia, South Asia and Oceania. "Because Asia is the most populous region, the largest reserves of foreign exchange, it is the most resilient as a continent

in this world crisis and it has the prospect of coming out the best in surviving this crisis and even be stronger," she said. The President said the Philippines should maximize the benefits of the strength of Asian economies and one way to do that would be a Pan-Asian economic community. The President said these are the things that she would like see in the future "whoever the leader may be." Looking back over the last nine years, the President said vital reforms, such as huge investments in human and physical infrastructure, have made the Philippines stronger economically, thus enabling it to withstand the global financial turmoil better than most world economies.

"We have a lot of modern and new infrastructure that will benefit generations to come in the form of a more competitive national economy," the President said. She said the National Economic Development Authority (NEDA) reported that year-on-year unemployment rate had gone down in spite of the world economic crisis. "We have created more than a million jobs over this past year, also provided access to education and healthcare to millions all the while taking focus on fiscal responsibility, paying our debts and working to balance the budget in the long term," the President said. She pointed out that her administration is also working hard to finally establish lasting peace in Mindanao. "But of course work is never done, nation-building is never finished and I believe we should continue to invest in education, economy and environment, and to translate our fiscal and economic achievements into real benefits for the poor and the rest of the people," the President said. ■

# Asians reject gov's plan...

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 abandon its residents at a time when families are struggling simply to make ends meet." "By slashing critical services, California would lose billions of dollars in federal funding," explains Hala Masri, State Policy

Advocate with the Asian Pacific American Legal Center. "Lawmakers must fully utilize federal dollars and raise revenues to resolve our budget crisis, care for our children and seniors, and preserve our values as a state." ■

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