

DATELINE PHILIPPINES

Sailing around RP in an ancient...

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to research on the boats recovered from Butuan City in the 1970s, Valdez says.

Construction of the 15-meter boat began April 19. The boat was launched on June 27, Saturday in Manila Bay.

The boat and the Badjaos
Jubail Muyong is the team leader of Badjao *pandays* or carpenters who are building the *balangay*. He says the boat is made of natural materials and constructed by ancient methods passed from generation to generation.

"Ancient *talaga dahil ang ginamit namin lahat puro mga yung sinaunang kagamitan ng mga ninuno namin na transferred sa mga tatay namin* (This is truly ancient because we use the tools which our forefathers passed on to our fathers)," Muyong explains.

Instinct and stock knowledge guide the construction team because no blueprint or instructions on building such a ship are in existence.

"*Sinabi lang sa amin na gani-to itsura at ang haba ng kilya ay ganito, alam na namin* (We were told about how it should look like and we already know)," Muyong says.

Unlike modern shipbuilding methods where the ship is built on a skeletal frame, *balangays* are built the other way around.

The shell of the *balangay*, made of planks of hardwood attached together with wooden pegs and tree sap, is built first upon the keel or the spinal column of the ship. Once the hull of the boat is finished, the frame will be constructed inside the boat and secured to the vessel using woven rattan.

In the past, *Sama de Laot* people (water dwellers) used *balangays* as their residence on water, Muyong says.

Historians also believe that the Tagalog term *barangay*, which means village, came from the word *balangay*.

The sailing team
The 20-man sailing team is composed of members of the

Mount Everest Team, the Philippine Navy, the Philippine Coast Guard, and some Badjaos. They are set to set sail in mid-July, says Valdez. They would only sail during the day and dock on various ports or islands that they will pass by during the night.

But the trip is not for leisure alone. Janet Belarmino-Sardena, a member of the crew and the Coast Guard, says the team would also conduct medical missions and promote educational and cultural awareness in the communities they visit.

Sardena says the team, together with experts from the National Museum, will also have symposiums and educational lectures for students in the towns and villages they will visit.

"*Kasi nga educational ito, education ito sa mga people na marami nga tayong history na kailangan malaman at marami pa tayong madi-discover na hindi natin alam ngayon* (This is educational, as we don't know a lot about our history and we still need to discover more)," she says.

The thrust of the boat project is to rekindle the maritime consciousness among the Filipinos, she says, at the same re-connect us to our past.

Practical trip too
Aside from medical missions and educational lessons, the team also aims to teach communities disaster-response methods, says Dr. Tred Esguerra, expedition and wilderness emergency doctor.

People should know how to administer community-level disaster-management methods in case of calamities like flooding, tidal surges, and earthquakes, he says.

"I want this community to survive on the first blow. They themselves should also know how to step up," he says.

"We will use this vessel to serve as a bridge, especially the coastal communities," says Esguerra, also a dive medical officer and flight surgeon.

'*Kaya ng Pinoy*'

The project is set to last until 2013, traveling next around Southeast Asia and hopefully all the way to South Africa by 2010.

"Just like in a course, you want to take up higher and advanced learning but you have

to start from the beginning. So our first year is learning how to sail in the Philippines, learning how the boat performs," Valdez says.

As in the Mount Everest project, this is a five-year process, "with no short cuts," he says.

Taking the team's *Kaya ng Pinoy* (The Filipino can do it) slogan to heart, Valdez says this project aims to reawaken the Filipino's sense of patriotism and pride in its rich culture.

"Filipinos could have done so much if they put focus on them-

selves as a people and bring it to move forward but since we are also a little bit confused exactly where we are going, it's better to look back into the past to anchor ourselves to something we can really be proud of," Valdez says. ■

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