

FROM THE FRONT PAGE

API community calls for immigration...

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More than two million are of Asian descent. About 500,000 are believed to be Filipinos.

API leaders said that family reunification is the primary reason APIs come to the US but API families suffer some of the worst immigration backlogs.

"Filipinos must wait up to 22 years for an immigrant visa to join their family members in the US," said Sherwin Shakramy, Program Development Coordinator of the Filipino American Service Group, Inc. "This long separation of families is unacceptable. We want efficient and timely processing of visas that facilitate the reunification of families."

API community leaders and members are hoping to start the immigration debate when they kick off the National API Week of Action this week (August 17-22), to shed light on how the immigration system affects API immigrants and their families.

"We add our voices to the call for comprehensive immigration reform. For this national week of action, we tell our stories as immigrants and as descendants of immigrants to build America's future together," added Titi Liu, Executive Director of the Asian Law Caucus. "Asian American immigrants are an integral part of America – we are workers, neighbors, and small business owners who revitalize communities and contribute to the economy." ■

Civic causes advocate turns...

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made him look like an ordinary man. But, indeed, he is far from being ordinary. This Alternative Nobel Prize Winner had done big steps to contribute to the society. And at the age of 59, the flame of his youthful idealism is still burning.

Nick declared his intentions to run for the presidential elections on 2010. "There are a lot of people who are longing for a real choice and for something different," he said. And with a new party list, Partido ng Marangal na Sambayanan (PANGMASA), he presents a new agenda of eradication of poverty and corruption. "Poverty is not just an economic problem. It is a systemic problem," he added.

With the clear vision to wake up the people, Nick is trying to embody transformation. He knew that once the people learn the vision by heart, they would start doing something. "This is not about my campaign, this is about our situation and what we really believe in as a nation," he said.

It is from the sentiments of the Filipino people that Nick found what this battle is all about. "And this not only a change for me, but a change for all of us," he said.

He told us a story about a group which is called Bisyon Cafe. It is a very informal gathering where young people sit on the floor. A question is asked

and discussed. And at the end, a vision for the country is concluded. "The youth today is looking for the change not only in the Philippines but also globally," Nick said. And he wants to encourage this idealism as he, himself, portrays it. Perhaps change is too big to envision. "It's too much to change the system immediately," Nick said. And he knew that the first step is to set the difference between a good government and a good governance.

There is a need for a reform from within, a need to strengthen the civil society and encourage responsible citizenship and accountability. "I have done enough outside the country. Now, I want to help my country," Nick said. And laughing, he added, "I returned my green card."

This man known also known as the father of organic farming walks his talk even shared his diet with us. "I laughed when I knew Obama's diet is fish and vegetables. That's exactly what my diet is. I drink banana shake and zero fat yogurt."

The journey has just started but Nick is not faced with fear. "Most key historical events are what people thought to be impossible. That's why I'm not scared of all the obstacles," he said. "Traditional politics is the white swan and now the black swan will appear." ■



STRENGTHENING TIES. Visiting Thailand's Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva, left, talks to Sen. Benigno 'Noynoy' Aquino III, the only son of 'People Power' democracy icon, the late former President Corason Aquino, during the latter's courtesy call at a hotel in Manila, Friday Aug. 14. Prime Minister Abhisit is for a one-day visit aimed at strengthening relations between Thailand and the Philippines.

AP Photo by Bullit Marquez

RP economy to rebound in 2010...

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holds, especially those that are dependent on remittances sent home by family members working overseas, reduced spending and saved more amid reports of job cuts abroad.

For the full year, the government expects the Philippines to post growth of between 0.8 and 1.8 percent, slower than last year's 3.9 percent.

McCormack said the Philippines could post only a slightly faster growth by 2010. The consensus is that the worst of the global economic crisis is over, but recovery will happen in a very gradual manner.

Although it has managed to avoid entering into a recession

that gripped most industrialized nations, the Philippines has not been totally spared from the ill-effects of the global turmoil. The crisis affected the country not only in terms of slowdown in domestic consumption, but also through lower exports and capital inflows.

Economic managers said, however, that reports of the global economy's recovery from crisis would soon encourage consumers and businesses to increase spending.

Reports about the world's pending recovery have prompted experts to say that governments, especially those that have engaged in deficit spending and brought down interest rates to

record lows to pump-prime their economies, should already start planning so-called "exit strategies."

An "exit strategy" is the method of reversing the expansionary fiscal and monetary policies once economic recovery begins. Governments are being urged to disclose their exit plans to allay concerns that the delayed reversal of these fiscal and monetary policies could cause a surge in inflation and asset bubbles in the future.

In the case of the Philippines, however, McCormack said there was not much pressure to unveil an exit strategy because the government did not engage in pump-priming efforts as heavily as its regional peers.

"Since the government of the Philippines has in place a fairly modest fiscal support program by international standards, it is not imperative that they communicate an exit strategy well in advance," McCormack said.

Nonetheless, he said it would indeed help create confidence on the Philippines if the government would make sure it would bring down its debt levels over the medium term.

McCormack said the Philippines is expected to post a deficit next year equivalent to 3.5 percent of gross domestic product. This makes Fitch's forecast less optimistic that the government, which has set a goal of bringing down the deficit to only 2.8 percent of GDP by next year from this year's estimated 3.2 percent. ■

P1.2B budget for presidential jet to be used for anti-hunger...

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dies to the poor to boost school attendance and access to health services.

"That may seem overly ambitious but during my recent visit to Brazil, I learned that a similar program there has universal coverage," she said.

In the Philippines, the program is being implemented under the name Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program.

Under the program, conditional cash transfer certificates are handed out to identified poor families.

The program provides cash grant packages to the beneficiaries in the form of a health and nutrition cash grant amounting to P500 a month per household.

An education cash grant amounting to P300 per month is also given for each of the children of the households, up to a

maximum of three children per household.

Overall, a household with three qualified children could receive a subsidy of P1,400 per month or P15,000 annually as long as they comply with the conditions, including:

- Pregnant women must get pre- and post-natal care and child birth must be attended by skilled/trained health professionals;
- Parents must attend responsible parenthood sessions/mother's classes/parent effectiveness seminars;
- Children 0-5 years must get regular health check-up and vaccinations;
- Children 3-5 years old must attend daycare/pre-school at least 85 percent of the time; and
- Children 6-14 years old must attend

school at least 85 percent of the time.

Recently, Pres. Arroyo issued an executive order creating local anti-hunger task forces nationwide to improve the implementation of the national anti-hunger program.

On Thursday, the Union of Local Authorities of the Philippines will launch an anti-poverty intervention program to ensure the educational development of poor children.

Mandaluyong Mayor Benjamin Abalos Jr., ULAP president, said the program will initially support some 8,555 families nationwide.

"With five children per municipality or city and with their families, this will translate into more than 8,000 children and their families to be benefited by the ULAP project," he said.

"That is a huge impact on the lives of these poor families. With the local government units' leadership and genuine support from both government and project donors, these families can eventually become more productive citizens."

More than 4,000 families have benefited from the World Bank-funded poverty alleviation program of the Department of Social Welfare and Development, officials said on August 17.

Secretary Cabral said the DSWD's Kapit-Bisig Laban sa Kahirapan-Comprehensive and Integrated Delivery of Social Services (KALAHI-CIDSS) program has received the highest funding among 12 WB-funded projects in the country based on its 2009 Portfolio Review. ■



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