Filipinos warned vs travel to Thailand

Thai soldiers spray water on anti-government protesters and supporters of ousted Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra in Bangkok, Thailand last April 13. AP Photo

FILIPINOS planning to travel to Thailand have been advised to postpone their plans because of the ongoing political turmoil in that country.

In a travel advisory, the Department of Foreign Affairs said: "In view of Thailand's declaration of a state of emergency in Bangkok and the surrounding provinces, it is urged that non-essential and non-urgent travels to Thailand be postponed until the current political tensions subside."

the same time, the DFA advised Filipinos already in Thailand to take precautions and to avoid public places where rallies could take place.

According to the DFA, there are an estimated 10,000 Filipinos in Thailand, most of them expatriates or married to Thais.

Thailand has been in turmoil after supporters of ousted prime minister Thaksin Shinawatra, who was booted out in a military coup in 2006, began mounting massive protests to call on Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva to quit his post.

Abhisit declared the state of emergency last April 12, a day after protesters forced the cancellation of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) summit in Pattaya.

ASEAN leaders, including President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, had to be evacuated after protesters broke into the summit venue. *(Inquirer.net)*

PALACE SPOKESPERSON

'RP tourism may gain from Thailand protests'

by CHRISTIAN V. ESGUERRA
Inquirer.net

BANGKOK'S loss may be the Philippines' gain.

A spokesperson of President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo has floated the idea of "vulture tourism" amid the raging political upheaval in neighboring Thailand.

Lorelei Fajardo, deputy presidential spokesperson, said the conflict could provide an "opportunity" for Philippine tourism, noting that tourists originally bound for Bangkok might instead detour to Manila.

"We're deeply concerned with what's happening in Thailand and we're hoping and praying that it will be resolved soon," she said in a press briefing last April 13.

Ex-TV host appointed press assistant secretary

by PAOLO ROMERO
Philstar.com

Cecil Kristin "Baby" O'Brien
Philstar.com Photo

PRESIDENT Arroyo has appointed TV host and former actress Cecil Kristin "Baby" O'Brien as press assistant secretary and former monsignor Crisanto de la Cruz as presidential assistant for Western Mindanao.

O'Brien was a consultant to then Interior Secretary Angelo Reyes in 2005. She also worked as consultant for various anti-drug campaigns of various government offices.

O'Brien co-hosted the television show *Dance-O-Rama* with the late Pete Roa in 1962. She is the daughter of actress Sigrid von Giese, more popularly known as Paraluman. O'Brien is also a former Miss Pink Camay Girl.

O'Brien has been hosting the programs *People's Government Mobile Action or PGMA* and *Serbisyo Muna* at the state-run television channel NBN-4.

De la Cruz, on the other hand, left the priesthood when he ran for mayor of Zamboanga City in 2007 after founding the Nuevo Zamboanga Movement party.

Press Secretary Cerge Remonde also announced the appointment of Chief Government Negotiator for the Moro Islamic Liberation Front Rafael Seguis as concurrent special envoy to the Organization of Islamic Conference.

Filipino comics writer Jose Santos was appointed full-time commissioner and concurrent chairman of the Commission on the Filipino Language, for a term that will expire in January 2013.

Also appointed was Lily Rosales as acting chair of the Board of Guidance and Counseling of the Professional Regulation Commission.

GMA returns home with prospects for new jobs for Filipino workers, big investments

Manila—President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo returned home last April 15 from her two-day successful trip to Dubai, bringing with her a package of employment opportunities for Filipino workers, and commitments by two Middle East business giants to invest up to $1 billion in the Philippines.

The President held meetings with Dubai government officials, employers and businessmen as part of her continuing efforts to champion the interest and welfare of Filipino expatriate workers and attract more investment in the Philippines.

At the first Employment and Business Opportunities: the Middle East Forum, which she attended, the Chief Executive received a commitment from employers, manpower providers, officials of the Philippine and Gulf countries to open more than 200,000 new jobs for overseas Filipino workers (OFWs) this year.

Philippine government officials said the new job openings in the Gulf Region are a strong manifestation that the market for Filipino workers remains open and resilient despite the global economic uncertainties.

Emerging from her meeting with officials of the two Middle East-based investors, the President said that she was very happy that the two firms made specific investment proposals in the country.

In her meeting with the Filipino community at the Fairmont Dubai Hotel here, the President disclosed the government's initiatives and programs aimed at helping the Filipino workers, particularly those who have been affected by the global economic meltdown.

These government initiatives to help distressed OFWs include the payback program that is being carried out to assist OFWs in their host countries that are now being buffeted by economic crisis.

The President also urged representatives of the Filipino community abroad to report to the Philippine Overseas Labor Office (POLO) expatriate workers who are in danger of losing their jobs, those who have been retrenched and those who have already returned to the Philippine so that they could avail themselves of the government's payback program.

For OFWs who want to cross over to other countries or companies that are in need of their skill and talent, the Philippine Overseas Employment Administration (POEA) is implementing a marketing blitz to expand the market for expatriate workers.

RP likely to scale down GDP growth target for 2009

THE country may have to reduce its gross domestic product (GDP) growth forecast again this year as the global recession dampens exports and hurts the inflow of remittances, officials said last April 14.

The National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA) is proposing to reduce the GDP growth forecast this year to a range of 3.1 percent to 4.1 percent. This is slightly lower than the revised 3.7 percent to 4.4 percent GDP growth forecast that Philippine economic managers announced in February.

A key report released by the Asian Development Bank last month projected the Philippine economy to grow by a meager 2.5 percent, though the rate was relatively respectable compared with export-oriented Southeast Asian economies like Thailand, Malaysia and Singapore.

A ranking NEDA official said the government economic planning forecasts a further slowdown this year on expectations of a double-digit contraction in Philippine exports this year, flat growth in inflow of remittances and lower grains production.

Philippine exports have been falling in the past few months, with the February exports sinking to an all time low of 41 percent on waning global demand. *(Philstar.com)*

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