

FROM THE FRONT PAGE

RP gov't looks into reversing country's 'brain drain'

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Businesses thriving

The survey would also determine how many of these "brain gain" businesses are thriving, so the government could lend them a hand, Manzala said.

Manzala, also executive director of the National Reintegration Center for Overseas Filipino Workers (NRCO), said she was convinced that a "brain gain is the silver lining [in] the global recession."

She said the skills being introduced by these returning OFWs could

help shape new industries that could weather the financial and trade slowdown, which has impaired export-oriented industries in the Philippines and in most developing nations.

The retrenched OFWs contribute by developing more micro enterprises or small-scale businesses that would sustain local community employment and trade should the crisis worsen, she said.

Manzala said the government had been strengthening domestic markets and had high hopes for small and medium scale enterprises which make up 98 percent of domestic trade.

OWWA loans for former OFWs

This conviction, she said, is supported by reports of engineers who used to work abroad forming consultancy firms in Cagayan province, as well as a retrenched oil driller who took out a P50,000 loan from the government to finance a gold milling service in Benguet province.

John Gallong, who lost his job at an Australian oil rig, received his loan check from Manzala, who has been touring the provinces to hand out loans offered by OWWA's Filipino Expatriate Livelihood Support Fund.

Gallong said he and 23 other drillers had a four-year contract but the firm terminated the deal after only seven months as part of cost-cutting measures

in Australia.

Manzala said the government was prepared for two types of displaced workers—the veterans and the junior OFWs who were sent home prematurely.

Both types of OFWs share one basic problem, she said.

Global recession alters behavior

"It's either they were not able to save [money] because they were not given enough time when their contracts were terminated or they never saved even if they had spent long years working abroad," she said.

She said the global recession had provided enough shock to alter people's behavior "so everyone can finally start saving [money] in case the crisis worsens."

Most of the displaced workers are not likely to stay in the country because jobs abroad have not declined despite the global crisis, she said.

"We still see 3,000 OFWs leaving the country each day... It's guaranteed that nine out of 10 OFWs who return home would strive to [go] abroad again," she said.

But even when they do, the government has been asking these workers to leave something behind—whether it's the skills or the investments they pour into new businesses. ■

Census officials urge Filipino community...

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identify every living quarter where people live or could potentially live, and verify more than 145 million addresses."

Census officials are making sure that all residents will take part in the 2010 census.

In Los Angeles, Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa has teamed up with community groups, faith-based organizations, labor unions, and business to ensure that every resident is counted.

"The Census is too important to leave anything to chance," Mayor Villaraigosa said.

However, many people in the community, especially in the Filipino community, have a misperception about giving their information to the Census Bureau, said Plata.

Plata said that Filipinos (especially Filipinos living illegally in the US) believe that any information they give the census bureau will be used against them or the information will be given to other government agencies like the Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE).

"But that's not true," said Plata. "The census is completely safe and confidential. We do not divulge any information out there to anybody and we don't share our information to any federal government agencies."

According to the 2000 census, there were only 2.3 million Filipinos living in the US. Almost half (1.3 million) lived in California and about 300,00 lived within the Greater Los Angeles County.

Plata said that there should have been more Filipinos counted in the last Census.

Plata said that it is important to have an accurate count of Filipinos.

"For example, suppose a disaster comes along (affecting Filipinos) and only 58 percent of Filipinos turned in their census information," questioned Plata. "What's going to happen to the other 42 percent? The government only gives money to what it sees on the census."

Plata added that filling out the census information is easy.

The census form asks 10 questions and takes 10 minutes to finish. ■

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