

# Filipinos in HK fear infection, job loss

by COOKIE B. MILLER  
Inquirer.net

WHEN Hong Kong confirmed its first case of H1N1 flu last week, housemaid Chloe Belle Dogeno felt a sense of *déjà vu*, knowing that the days of endless house cleaning, wiping of doorknobs and washing of rugs, towels and bed sheets were here again, like when the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) outbreak struck the bustling territory in 2003.

But her worries, like many of the 130,000 Filipino housemaids in this Chinese territory, go beyond the extra house chores, the expected restrictions by her employer to meet her friends, or her health.

It's the thought of getting fired if she gets infected, a tragedy for the 42-year-old breadwinner and the family she feeds and siblings she sends to school back home in Dumangas, Iloilo.

She has worried about losing her job when the global economic meltdown sparked massive layoffs. Now, a new storm is brewing.

"Now that the swine flu is here, it means more hard work for me—changing the doormats, bed sheets and towels more often. I have to do a lot of wiping again," Dogeno said.

She remembered the things she did when SARS hit a few years ago. "I had to put a pail filled with Chlorox and disinfectant in the door so my wards—a couple and their two children—could wipe their shoes and things before entering. I had to constantly change the doormats and wipe the toilet," she said.

She said she would be very careful now with hygiene because of the repercussions should she lose her job. "If I get terminated, I'm not the only one who will go hungry. It will be a tragedy for my family in the Philippines," Dogeno said.

### Mexican tourist

Hong Kong, where memories of the 2003 deadly SARS outbreak are still fresh, became the first Asian country to have a confirmed case of H1N1 flu when an unidentified Mexican tourist flew into Shanghai then traveled on to Hong Kong via China Eastern Airlines.

He developed fever on arrival on Thursday,

April 30, and is now in stable condition and isolated in the hospital.

Authorities, however, immediately put all the guests and staffers of the 100-room Metropark Hotel in Hong Kong's Wan Chai entertainment and business district under quarantine in a desperate effort to prevent the infection from spreading.

Officials have conducted medical checkups on about 200 of the guests and staff holed up at Metropark. Sixty people who had mild symptoms were taken to hospitals for follow-up checkups, Thomas Tsang, controller of the Center of Health Protection, was quoted as saying on radio RTHK's website on Saturday, May 2.

### Text messages

The troubling news quickly spread among the Filipino community mostly by text messages. Not all of them are allowed by their employers to watch TV. Some were ordered to stay home, barred from even bringing their Chinese wards to nearby community playgrounds, where they meet other Filipino housemaids.

Wan Chai district, a small "Pinoytown" dotted with remittance centers and stores selling Philippine products, became practically a ghost town.

"There is nobody here in Wan Chai. It's like a ghost town. I hope this will not take long. It will kill my business," said Ambo Soabas, 43, owner of Mang Ambo, a popular Filipino restaurant about 500 meters from Metropark.

Some 300 to 500 customers, mostly Filipino domestic helpers, come to his restaurant in normal times, but only a few dozen showed up when news of the flu in the territory spread.

"During the SARS outbreak, our business went down by 80 percent. For three months, we earned only a pittance just enough to pay the rent. I had to secure a loan from the Hong Kong government to pay the salaries of my employees," Soabas said. But he felt confident that Hong Kong was better prepared this time to deal with any outbreak.

"Hong Kong can better deal with this now than any other country because of its

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# Cory surgery successful

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president's youngest daughter, told *The STAR* in a telephone interview yesterday, adding, "But as in other patients, the next 72 hours are going to be very crucial."

Though Mrs. Aquino, 76, remains in the Intensive Care Unit of the hospital, Aquino said the family was "very positive" about their mother's recovery.

Aquino said the first thing her mother asked her when she awoke from general anesthesia was, "Okay na ba? Tapos na ba (Is it okay? Is it over?)" She then asked for mouthwash, but was gently told by her daughter that she was not allowed to take anything or gargle for at least six hours after surgery.

According to a source close to the family, the operation was aided by a state-of-the-art instrument that very clearly "guided the doctor towards the exact spot where the tumor was."

Sen. Benigno Aquino III, for his part, said his mother, who discovered she had colon cancer—the same disease that claimed her mother Demetria Sumulong Cojuangco—exactly a year ago, had at times felt she has led a full life and was "ready to go."

"But she promised all of us she will do everything to get well," Aquino III told *The STAR*.

"She did as her doctors told her and followed the regimen, from chemotherapy and now, surgery," Aquino III, who proceeded to the Senate for a session right after his mother's surgery, said. "She was aware of her options and could have just opted

for palliatives for a better quality of life."

"(But) she is a fighter," added the senator. Courage, says those close to the Aquino clan, is the virtue most valued by the Aquinos, especially the former president's late husband Benigno "Ninoy" Aquino Jr.

Mrs. Aquino told *The Star* in an earlier interview that she is not without pain. "The pain is there. I leave it up to God. It's up to Him. But I'm not dying to live long. I never even expected to live this long. I am 76 years old and I was widowed at 50."

She thinks of God's purpose for her with the gift of every new day. "I wonder, what else is there for me to do, especially with helping the poor through microfinance. What else should I do?"

According to Mrs. Aquino's assistant Margarita Juico, the former president spent her last working day before the surgery at her Makati office doing paperwork from 10am to 5pm. She was in high spirits and even attended a Mass last May 2 for the success of her laparoscopic surgery. Some 200 of her friends and relatives attended the Mass at the Christ the King Church in Quezon City.

According to Wikipedia, laparoscopic surgery, also called minimally invasive surgery (MIS), band aid surgery and keyhole surgery, is a modern surgical technique in which operations in the abdomen are performed through small incisions (usually 0.5-1.5cm) as compared to larger incisions needed in traditional surgical procedures. ■

# Obstruction of justice raps vs Failon, helpers dismissed

by PERSEUS ECHENADADA  
Philstar.com

THE Quezon City prosecutors' office dismissed last May 4 the obstruction of justice charges filed by the Quezon City police district against news anchor Ted Failon, his sister-in-law and members of the household for insufficiency of evidence in the death last April of Failon's wife Trinidad Arceche-Etong.

In a 10-page joint resolution, assistant prosecutors Mary Jane Pamittan and Alfredo Agcaoili ruled that since there was still no crime established the respondents cannot be held liable for obstruction of justice.

Meanwhile, the final report on the investigation on the controversial death of Mrs. Etong will be out soon, the National Bureau of Investigation (NBI) said.

Failon's wife allegedly shot herself in the head inside their Quezon City home last April 15. The report will reveal why she allegedly committed suicide.

Cleared from the obstruction of justice charges aside from Failon are Mario Teodoro Etong, Carlota Morbos, Frida Bollicer, Pacifico Apacible, Glen Polan and Pamela Arceche-Trinchera.

"In this particular case we are inclined to sustain the assertion of the respondents that it must be determined first that a crime had been committed before they cannot be held liable for obstruction of justice," the resolution said.

The resolution also said that since the respondents contended that Trinidad committed suicide, there was no crime and their acts of cleaning blood and other activities after the incident were done in good faith.

"As far as respondent Etong is concerned, there was no evidence that he prevented all the other respondents from reporting the shooting incident," the

resolution said.

The resolution, however, recognized the efforts of the police to ferret out the truth behind Trinidad's death.

Jay Borromeo, lawyer for the Quezon City policemen, said they would first get a copy of the resolution issued by the prosecutor dismissing the charges before they could determine their next move.

Borromeo said filing a motion for reconsideration for the case to be pursued remains an option.

"If it's the lack of evidence (as the basis for the dismissal), we could present more evidence. This would not fall under the danger of double jeopardy since the case is still at the fiscal level," Borromeo added.

In an interview yesterday, lawyer Ricardo Diaz, spokesperson of the NBI and chief of the NBI Anti-Terrorism Division (ATD), reiterated that in their investigation on Trinidad's death, all roads led to the suicide angle. Diaz said this is not yet their official statement "but all the evidence gathered seemed to be leading to this."

"Officially, we have evidence in the NBI based on the investigation. The problem or reason for the death was allegedly due to financial problems, specifically on investment problems (made by Trinidad)," said Diaz.

"Money was lost mostly in these failed investments. She was boxed in (by financial problems)," Diaz said.

"I don't want to jump the gun here. But these will be contained in the report," he said.

Diaz also dismissed rumors that Trinidad was also involved in "casino problems." He said this was never substantiated in their investigation, stressing that

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