

FILIPINO BALITA

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Eleven Pinoy fishermen stranded in Ireland arrive in RP

(Source: ABS-CBN NEWS)

Eleven Filipino fishermen who escaped from their foreign employer in Northern Ireland due to alleged maltreatment and breach of contract arrived in Manila Sunday noon.

The fishermen arrived at the Ninoy Aquino International Airport via Cathay Pacific CX-907, ABS-CBN reported.

The Filipino fishermen had fled to Kilkeel, three hours from Belfast, after running away from employer John Anderson last month.

Three of the 11 fishermen - Rando Oto, Basilio Castro and Joselito Alcain - had already filed a complaint with Irish authorities against Anderson's son, Mark, for alleged maltreatment and physical abuse.

The other runaway fishermen are Paul Aranda, Mario Yumol, Jonathan Lachica, Filomar Orquillano, Melvin Balvis, Rogelio Pichon, Rolando Pichon, and Nicky Monacillo.

The first three charged that Mark hit them whenever he was drunk and was under the influence of illegal drugs. Aside from maltreatment, the 11 also accused Anderson of breach of contract.

The fishermen are also demanding P40,000 each from Anderson as payment as their wages for two-weeks work. **With reports from Gretchen**

Malalad(Full story: <http://uw.abs-cbnnews.com>)

Farmers face climate challenge in quest for more food

(Source: Philippine Daily Inquirer)

By David Fogarty

Reuters

SINGAPORE--If farmers think they have a tough time producing enough rice, wheat and other grain crops, global warming is going to present a whole new world of challenges in the race to produce more food, scientists say.

In a warmer world beset by greater extremes of droughts and floods, farmers will have to change crop management practices, grow tougher plant varieties and be prepared for constant change in the way they operate, scientists say.

"There certainly are going to be lots of

challenges in the future. Temperature is one of them, water is another," said Lisa Ainsworth, a molecular biologist with the United States Department of Agriculture.

Spiralling grain prices in recent months have startled governments long used to affordable rice, wheat, soy and maize. But rising demand and likely greater climate variability and more fluctuations in crop output could mean even more uncertainty for prices.

Current estimates suggest demand for cereals will jump by more than 50 percent by 2050 as the world's population rises from 6.6 billion to about 9 billion.

The world has already warmed by about 0.7 degrees Celsius on average since the 1800s and studies show higher temperatures can cut yields, particularly in the tropics where a lot of rice is grown.

"In Northeastern China, low temperatures, a short growing season and lack of water limit production, so rising temperatures in the future may have beneficial impacts there," said Ainsworth.

"However, in the southern parts of the country, higher temperatures will likely cause yield losses," she told Reuters. Pollution is another threat. Ozone, which is produced at ground-level by sunlight interacting with pollution from burning fossil fuels, can cut plant productivity. The higher the ozone levels, the worse the damage.

In the northern hemisphere, ozone is a growing problem and is estimated to cost farmers billions of dollars in lost production.

"In the major rice-growing regions, which are India and China, ground-level ozone concentrations even today are very high and certainly exceed the threshold for damage. Ozone is already decreasing yield potential in many areas," Ainsworth said.

Rice is grown in more than 100 countries. More than half the world's population rely on it as their main food source.

Heat stress

A major UN climate panel report last year said in low-latitude regions, even moderate temperature rises of between one and two degrees Celsius could trim crop yields.

In cooler mid to high-latitude regions, localized increases up to three degrees Celsius plus higher amounts of carbon dioxide in the air could be beneficial to yields, provided there was enough

water.

But anything beyond three degrees locally would be bad for crop yields, said the panel's Fourth Assessment Report on the impacts of climate change, which drew on the expertise of hundreds of scientists from around the world.

Studies show that higher carbon dioxide levels, on their own, can boost rice and wheat production but any benefit is negated by the stress caused by higher temperatures, lack of water from changes in rainfall patterns and pollution.

Plants breathe in CO2 to make sugars and other complex compounds grow. Carbon dioxide levels from burning fossil fuels are rising rapidly and are now the highest than at any time in the past 650,000 years.

Last year, they reached near 390 parts per million from about 280 ppm at the start of the Industrial Revolution. Unless nations drastically rein in their carbon emissions, the level could reach 550 ppm by 2050, the climate panel says, leading to sharp increases in temperatures, particularly at higher latitudes. The trick for farmers is to adapt, and scientists say the crops of the coming decades will have to be very different.

"We will see a suite of new traits that are integrated into the varieties that are planted in the future," said Ainsworth.

"This is something we do need to start soon because anything that we hope to develop today probably won't be in the field until 2018 and the climate then will be very different."

In the Philippines, the International Rice Research Institute has a long history of developing rice varieties. But the pace of climate change in the future is a big worry. (Full story: <http://www.inquirer.net>)

SPECIAL REPORT STALLED GRP-MILF PEACE TALKS

MILF: We stand firm on self-determination

(Source: THE MANILA TIMES)

By Al Jacinto, *Correspondent*

ZAMBOANGA CITY: "We are firm with our demands for self-determination. We cannot compromise our independence and our freedom," Eid Kabalu, a spokesman for the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), told The Manila Times Saturday.

The Muslim rebels' vow to fight for independence came up in an interview about the withdrawal of Malaysia from

the International Monitoring Team (IMT) which has been watching over the ceasefire between Philippine military and the MILF since peace negotiations began in 2004.

The peace talks have been stalled since December over the issue of the scope of the Moros' ancestral domain, which is the single most important issue in the peace negotiations.

The MILF said the government peace negotiators led by Rodolfo Garcia last year agreed on the scope of the ancestral domain, but later reneged on it. The Philippine government-MILF agreement as MILF wants it should constitute a separate homeland for over four million Muslims in Mindanao, also home to about 17 million mostly Christian Filipinos. There are also Lumads (indigenous tribal Filipinos). The MILF said Garcia completely disregarded the agreement on the ancestral domain and insisted again that the granting of a homeland to Muslims in Mindanao would solely be done through constitutional processes which the rebel group previously opposed. But the Philippine Constitution prohibits the dismembering of the country.

The MILF said the stance of the government peace panel virtually jeopardized the integrity of the peace process, and to continue with the talks would turn it into a circus.

"Under the agreement, the Muslim autonomous region (Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao or ARMM) will be part of the independent Bangsamoro homeland and those areas outside the region would vote on an independence referendum," Kabalu said.

He said the ancestral domain covers the whole of the ARMM and other areas in Zamboanga del Norte, Zamboanga del Sur, Zamboanga Sibugay, North Cotabato, Sultan Kudarat and Sarangani provinces where there are large communities of Muslims and indigenous tribes, as well as Palawan island in central Philippines and the Sulu archipelago.

Malaysia, which is brokering the peace talks held in Kuala Lumpur, has announced it will no longer renew its participation in the IMT when its current mandate ends in September.

The Malaysians actually lead the IMT and has the most peacekeepers in the team that includes Brunei, Canada, Japan and Libya.

Malaysian officials have said they are pulling out their soldiers because there seems to be no progress in the negotiations.

Kabalu told The Times that the government is now building up its military firepower in Mindanao and is causing apprehension in areas where the MILF is active. "The truce and the peace talks are shaky right now and there is apprehension because of this buildup of military firepower in Mindanao and the withdrawal of the

truce observers," he said.

"The MILF will remain vigilant. We are not sure how the ceasefire will hold without the Malaysian-led international truce observers," Kabalu said, adding, the MILF respects Malaysia's decision to withdraw all its observers unless there is a significant progress in the stalled peace talks.

Murad Ebrahim, the secluded leader of the MILF, said Manila is to be blamed should the peace talks collapse. "If the peace process fails as a result of the GRP's dilly-dallying and spoiling, we are left with no choice, but to seek other means of achieving our objective.

Should that happen, the government is to blame for failing to settle the conflict through diplomatic means," he said. The MILF previously appealed to rebels and supporters for patience as the talks stalled over demands for a separate Muslim homeland.

"The Philippine government bears the responsibility to comply with its commitment to adhere to the consensus points and agreed Memorandum of Agreement draft proposal on ancestral domain. Such moves will avert the peace process from falling apart," Ebrahim said.

"Let me reiterate to all, including the international community, that the MILF leadership is very serious and fully committed to resolve the conflict between the Bangsamoro people in Mindanao and the government of the Republic of the Philippines through the current peace process," he said. Malaysian Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak said Kuala Lumpur wanted progress in the peace process. Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Dr Rais Yatim also said Kuala Lumpur will not be sending any more truce observers to Mindanao after the mandate of its current team ends in September. Members of the Malaysian Defense Forces had been in Mindanao since 2004 as part of the IMT.

The monitoring team is composed of 41 officers from the Malaysian Defense Forces, the Royal Malaysia Police and the Prime Minister's Department, and is also supported by 10 military officers from Brunei Darussalam and five from Libya. Canada and Japan have also members on the team.

Since the IMT arrived, fighting between security and rebel forces drastically decreased from 698 armed clashes in 2004 to just seven incidents last year.

Lt. Col. Julieto Ando, a regional Philippine army spokesman, tried to allay the apprehensions of the MILF by saying the military is committed to the peace process and would further strengthen the mechanism of the ceasefire agreement in Mindanao.

"Like the MILF, we are also for peace and we wanted to see an end to the conflict in Mindanao. We respect the decision of the Malaysian government to pull out its truce observers and we appreciate Malaysia's commitment to peace in Mindanao," Ando said.

Mohammad Ameen, a ranking MILF rebel leader, said the group will only sign a peace deal with the Arroyo government if it establishes genuine governance for Muslims either in the form of a "state" or "sub-state". (Full story: <http://www.manilatimes.net>)

Joker warns vs Napocor rate cut

(Source: The Philippine Star)
By Aurea Calica

Sen. Joker Arroyo warned the government yesterday against cutting the rates charged by the National Power Corp. (Napocor) to the Manila Electric Co. (Meralco), saying it might again leave the state-owned power firm in deep financial trouble.

President Arroyo earlier ordered Napocor to cut by half its charges to Meralco, apparently to pressure the latter into lowering electricity rates. She also directed the Department of Trade and Industry to file four petitions with the Energy Regulatory Commission (ERC), all aimed at pulling down Meralco rates.

The four petitions are as follows: to enjoin Meralco from buying electricity from the Wholesale Electricity Spot Market during peak hours; ensure preferential treatment for households and power-intensive industries in the distribution of TransCo (National Transmission Corp.) charges; to prohibit Meralco from charging its system loss as a separate item; and to require Meralco to charge the same rates as the Visayan Electric Co. (VECO), Cebu Electric Co. (CEBECO) or Davao Light. Senator Arroyo said he finds the President's order to Napocor disturbing. "This was done in 2003 and was corrected in 2005 because Napocor lost big time and the public in the end had to shoulder the cost," he said over dwlZ. He said there could be other ways to make Meralco lower its rates. "I think this can be done through dialogues," he said.

He also expressed support for amendments to the Electric Power Industry Reform Act as proposed by Sen. Juan Ponce Enrile. The EPIRA has not been successful in lowering power rates.

Enrile seeks to bring down the cost of electricity by removing certain charges that the EPIRA allows to be passed on to consumers.

Under Senate Bill 2121, Enrile said the law failed to check market abuse or to make the review process for power contracts transparent.

He said consumers should only be required to pay for actual consumption, while industry players should shoulder the risk costs in every business venture. Two of the extraneous charges Enrile wants power-generating companies to assume and not pass on to end users are: the cost of unused power, brought about by "stranded debts and contract costs" (debts and other liabilities) of Napocor and the "stranded contract

costs" (fixed contract price regardless of actual consumption) of distribution utilities through the so-called universal charge; and the cost of royalty on energy from indigenous or renewable sources also through the universal charge.

To further lower the cost of electricity, Enrile also wants franchise taxes imposed by local government units to "be limited only to the distribution and wheeling charges earned by the distribution utilities, and not on... gross receipts."

The bill also provides for public hearings – not public consultations where resource persons and witnesses are not bound by oath and have limited accountability – on applications for rate increases.

To ensure real competition, Enrile also proposes lower requirements for the privatization of generation assets from 70 percent to 50 percent as well as lower requirements for transfer of management and control of total energy output of power plants under contract with Napocor to independent power producers, also from 70 percent to 50 percent.

Enrile said his was the only negative vote for EPIRA when it was passed into law in 2001. He said that while he believed in restructuring the industry, encouraging competition, privatization, and effective regulation, he said he did not think the EPIRA would be able to accomplish these.

"It was my firm belief that the EPIRA's promised benefit of ensuring the quality and reliability of the supply of electricity that would translate to lower consumption costs could not be achieved, thus making this promise illusory," he said. (Full story: <http://www.philstar.com>)

Durano named PTA manager

(Source: The Philippine Star)

By Marvin Sy

President Arroyo has designated Tourism Secretary Joseph Durano as general manager of the Philippine Tourism Authority (PTA) following the end of the six-year term of Robert Dean Barbers.

Press Secretary Ignacio Bunye, in an interview over government-run dzRB, said Durano would hold the PTA general manager position in a concurrent capacity.

Under Presidential Decree No. 564, which amended the charter of the PTA, the President is allowed to appoint the chairman of the board of the PTA as general manager.

The tourism secretary serves as chairman of the board of the PTA, the general manager as vice chairman and three part-time individuals as board members.

Various criticisms have been thrown against the PTA, particularly by Sen. Richard Gordon, a former tourism secretary, because of the supposed losses it incurred.

Under a proposed bill defining the tourism policy of the country, the PTA would be abolished and a tourism super-body would be created to oversee the programs related to this sector.

The bill has been certified by the President as urgent and is among the measures identified by Congress as priorities.

Bunye's announcement on the PTA leadership came at a time when the President is undertaking a revamp of the heads of government offices. Mrs. Arroyo confirmed the forthcoming revamp to reporters earlier this week but did not say who would be affected. Members of the opposition have stated that any changes in the members of the Arroyo administration would not have an impact on her overall image, which they said is already tarnished. Bunye said the President would make her decisions on the Cabinet revamp based on the best interests of the country "regardless of what others may say."

"In the end it's the call of the President. The buck stops here. The President will be responsible for the end results of the administration so let's give her the prerogative to shake up her Cabinet," Bunye said.

Talks of a Cabinet revamp are now stronger than ever as the one-year prohibition on candidates of last year's elections from being appointed is about to expire.

Speculations about who among the administration's Team Unity ticket, most of whom lost to the opposition, would be recruited to the government started as early as the conclusion of the May 2007 elections.

Even before the actual appointments have been made, the President has already been criticized for giving in to political accommodations by tapping the Team Unity candidates.

Bunye said it was unfair to characterize appointments of Team Unity members considering that they each have their own managerial capabilities.

So far, the President has ruled out the removal of only two of her Cabinet members, namely Defense Secretary Gilbert Teodoro and Justice Secretary Raul Gonzalez. (Full story: <http://www.philstar.com>)

Southeast Asian rice cartel 'anti-poor'

(Source: THE MANILA TIMES)

MANILA: Senior Philippine officials on Saturday expressed concern about the plan for a Southeast Asian rice cartel, saying it would cause greater problems than it would solve amid a global food crisis.

The so-called Organization of Rice-Exporting Countries (OREC) is "anti-poor and will only exacerbate hunger and poverty rather than ease it," Senate Majority Leader Francis Pangilinan said in a statement. "They have to think

twice for humanitarian reasons."

Modelled on the oil cartel of the Organization of Petroleum-Exporting Countries (OPEC), OREC would comprise Mekong countries and rice-producing countries Vietnam, Thailand, Myanmar, Laos, and Cambodia. The proposed OREC members are also members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), along with the Philippine — one of the world's biggest rice importers. Sen. Manuel Roxas 2nd, chairman of the trade and commerce committee, called on the Department of Foreign Affairs to formally propose an ASEAN Leaders' Summit on Rice and Food Security in light of the OREC proposal. Roxas said in a statement that failure by ASEAN members to unite in efforts to build food security would "raise doubts in the minds of other world leaders on ASEAN's determination to pursue economic integration."

"Before OREC is institutionalized, the ASEAN community must weigh in as a regional bloc to obtain trade privileges with its fellow members in keeping with the ASEAN spirit," he added.

Surge rice prices in the Philippines has prompted the government to impose tighter control on the provision of state-subsidized rice to make sure the country's poor do not go hungry, Social Welfare Secretary Esperanza Cabral said also on Saturday.

"The government will pull out subsidized rice from public markets in the middle of May with the full implementation of the family access card system," Cabral added.

She told local radio the supply of National Food Authority (NFA) rice, which sells for P18.25 per kilo, would only be available in NFA distribution outlets and parishes. The food agency would also set up 1,000 rolling stores in slum communities, where millions of poor people live.

Cabral said at least 700,000 poor families, or some 3.5 million people, in the premier region Metro Manila are expected to be given the family access cards.

Agriculture Secretary Arthur Yap said the P18.25 per kilo rice will be replaced by P25 (\$0.6 dollar) per kilo rice in the market once the government-subsidized rice has been fully withdrawn from public markets.

A survey covering more than 12 million people living in Metro Manila is being conducted to determine who are qualified to receive the rice access cards.

Growing concerns over soaring food prices which threaten to push millions deeper into poverty overshadowed the start of the Asian Development Bank annual meeting in Madrid also on Saturday.-- **AFP and Xinhua**(Full story: <http://www.manilatimes.net>)

Sport

Tugade lords it over former team

(Source: The Philippine Star)

By Joey Villar

Magnolia clamped down on Red Bull with its zone defense to score a 102-95 victory yesterday and move up to fourth place in the Smart PBA Fiesta Conference at the De La Salle-Lipa Gym in Lipa City, Batangas.

The Beverage Masters silenced the Bulls in a seven-minute span bridging the third and fourth quarters and then made some big shots in the stretch to seal their fourth win in seven outings. Lordy Tugade, formerly of Red Bull, led his new team with 22 points while Olsen Racela and Dondon Hontiveros scattered 19 points apiece to make up for the absence of the two injured Dannys – Seigle (left foot) and Ildefonso (ankle).

Magnolia's win erased the stigma of a 101-108 loss to Welcoat Paints Wednesday.

Going into this game with the league's best record, Red Bull appeared headed to its fourth straight win when it led by 10 points twice in the third quarter behind hardworking Mexican import Adam Parada.

Its last 10-point upperhand came early in the period, 61-51, but a 9-2 exchange built on a five-point splurge by Tugade kept the game close at 63-60.

A foul shot by Mick Pennisi and a basket each by Leo Najorda and Topex Robinson stretched it back to 68-60 for

Red Bull midway in the quarter.

But the Beverage Masters shut down the Bulls with their zone defense for the next seven minutes while scoring 15 points for a 75-68 lead early in the final canto.

A Jojo Duncil triple ended Red Bull's drought but it couldn't halt Magnolia's juggernaut as it led by 11 points thrice, the last at 91-80 with less than four minutes remaining.

Pennisi, Robinson and Parada conspired for one last rally but Hontiveros doused it with cold water with his clutch shooting to ice the game.

Parada, a mainstay of the Mexican National team, was a monster with 22 points, 20 rebounds and three blocks. But he tired out in the stretch as the Bulls absorbed their second loss against five wins and fell into a tie with the Coca-Cola Tigers.

Meanwhile, Welcoat Paints tries to stretch its surprising run to three wins when it meets reigning Philippine Cup champion Sta. Lucia Realty at the Big Dome today. (Full story: <http://www.philistar.com>)

So assured of title in Battle of GMs

(Source: THE MANILA TIMES)

GRANDMASTER Wesley So clinched the title in Philippine Battle of the GMs with one round to spare Saturday night at the 11th floor of City State Hotel.

The 14-year-old prodigy, currently the youngest GM in the world, halved the point with National Master Oliver Barbosa after 52 moves of Queen's Indian Defense in the 10th round to

notch his eighth point in the FIDE rated event organized by the National Chess Federation of the Philippines (NCFP). Asia's first GM Eugene Torre cut the deficit to just a full point after taking the measure of International Master Julio Catalino Sadorra in 44 moves of King's Indian Defense.

But So's tiebreak points in case of a tie would prevail over Torre's.

Aside from the top prize of P200,000, So is also expected to gain some more rating points and inch closer to his bid of reaching the 2600 mark.

So is the top Filipino in the latest release of FIDE rating chart with an ELO of 2540. His unofficial rating before the event is 2567 after adding 15 points from his Dubai Open triumph and 12 more from his 4-2 victory over GM Susanto Megaranto of Indonesia in their recent one-on-one duel.

GM Mark Paragua is the lone Filipino to gain super GM status, a feat he accomplished two years ago.

So will meet IM John Paul Gomez in the final round while Torre will face GM Joey Antonio.

Gomez and fellow IM Richard Bitoon shared third place with 6.5 points after beating separate rivals in the 10th.

Gomez, a two-time national junior champion, scalped NM Hamed Nouri after 68 moves of Philidor's Defense while Bitoon disposed of NM Rolando Noite after 50 moves of Sicilian Defense.

Antonio, who shared second place with Torre overnight, fell to GM Jayson Gonzales and into solo fifth spot. --**Noli Cruz** (Full story: <http://www.manilatimes.net>)

The Daily Bread

2008 May 4 SUN: Acts 1: 1-11/ Ps 47: 2-3. 6-7. 8-9 (6)/ Eph 1: 17-23/ Mt 28: 16-20

Today's Gospel

The commissioning of the disciples

Matthew 28:16-20

THE eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had ordered them. When they saw Him, they worshiped, but they doubted. Then Jesus approached and said to them, "All power in heaven and on earth has been given to Me. Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age."

Christ still present with us

We come together on this feast of our Lord's Ascension not to commemorate a departure, but to celebrate the living and lasting presence of Him who at His birth was called "Emmanuel" – "God with us." Jesus, the living head of His body the Church, remains always with us as He promised – now in a new way. In fact, by this celebration we proclaim that the risen Jesus enters into the fullness of the glory given Him by His Father. For those who follow Him, His presence with us can make our earth, our daily life, a heaven.

Where did the Ascension take place? Matthew tells us that it was on the mountain to which Jesus had ordered them (v. 16). The mountain, however, is as yet geographically undeterminable. It possibly belongs to the same theological category as the mountain of temptation, the mountain of the sermon, and the mountain of the transfiguration.

Today's celebration doesn't have to do with speculations about the universe, and with whether heaven is "up there" and we "down here;" our celebration deals with two other matters. One is God's involvement with human life, and the conflict of human wills – personal, social, national, and even cosmic – which threaten to overwhelm God's involvement. We must realize that heaven isn't up and out and away, and the Lord is with us. The other is our confidence in the ultimate triumph of the new human life which God is bringing into existence through the death and resurrection of Jesus.

No matter where, when, or how Jesus ascended, before He left He commissioned His followers to go and make disciples of all the nations (v. 19). Brief as this commission is, it's a communication of the authority that Jesus mentions as being His, both in heaven and on earth (v. 18). And it contains the conditions of membership in Christ's Church: Faith in Him, baptism, and observance of His commandments (v. 20). The Chinese proverb says that a picture is worth a thousand words. But the one word that's worth a thousand pictures is that word "go." It brings to our mind's eye ardent missionaries in kayaks, on donkeys, in primitive carts, in worn automobiles, and on foot to bring Jesus to hidden corners of this planet earth.

This amazing command is possible of fulfillment because of Jesus' concluding words: "I am with you always." Matthew had begun his Gospel with the promise of "God-with-us" (1:23); now he concludes with this strengthening assurance of Jesus. A more magnificent conclusion couldn't be found.