

More women joining Marines

by JAMES MANANGHAYA
Philstar.com

men in the field," Sabban said in an interview.

The program to enlist women in the force started in June this year, with six female recruits as pioneers. Today, they are training 33 female recruits at the basic school in Cavite to become marine privates.

Like their male comrades, the women undergo rigid training like backbreaking physical exercises and tedious classroom work for six months before graduating and being deployed to the field.

"There is a little adjustment in the level of difficulty in training, maybe by one percent. They are also required to have their heads shaved," he said, saying the move is gender equality at play in the military organization.

But when it comes to toilets and quarters, the women are separated from the men.

Sabban said that while the entry of women into the corps is not new because there had been officers who volunteered to join, the recruitment of females as enlisted personnel started only this year, under Republic Act 7192 otherwise known as the Women in Development and Nation Building Act.

Once they become full-fledged marines, the women recruits will be deployed to combat assignments just like the males. They would conduct patrols and fight internal security threats, such as the Abu Sayyaf bandit group.

He added that there are several female marine officers who command their armor units, which led to the future deployment of women combatants in their infantry units.

World Bank hikes RP growth forecast to 1.4%

by TED P. TORRES
Philstar.com

THE World Bank has upgraded its growth forecast for the Philippines this year, reversing an earlier estimate of a 0.3-percent contraction to an expansion of 1.4 percent, as it noted that an expected global economic recovery would further lift the inflow of remittances, boost exports and encourage consumer spending.

In its latest East Asia and Pacific update, the World Bank said the anticipated growth falls within the range of the Philippine government's official forecast of a gross domestic product (GDP) growth of between 0.8 percent to 1.8 percent in 2009.

"Remittances are staying strong. Government consumption and public construction will continue to benefit from the National Government's spending in the remaining months of 2009. So, based on new data, we believe the government growth

forecast for 2009 to be entirely feasible," World Bank country director Bert Hofman said yesterday.

Money sent home by overseas Filipino workers are expected to rise by four percent to a record \$17.1 billion this year, the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas (BSP) said.

The World Bank initially projected GDP growth in the Philippines this year at 1.9 percent, scaling it down to -0.3 percent as the economy was teetering into a recession. But a stronger than expected output in the second quarter—boosted by government spending on infrastructure and social services—sparked renewed growth expectations.

The World Bank is the second multilateral agency to revise its growth projections for the Philippines. Last month, the International Monetary Fund said the country will grow by one percent, also reversing an earlier

estimate of a one percent contraction.

Hofman pointed out that had it not been for the damages brought by the recent typhoons, the World Bank would have reverted back its 2009 growth forecast to the original 1.9 percent.

World Bank senior economist for the Philippines Eric Le Borgne said despite the positive outlook, the challenges remain daunting for the Philippines, especially on the fiscal side.

"The Philippine economy is still far from reaching its potential," Le Borgne said, adding that the Philippines must address the long-standing bottlenecks that depress growth and poverty alleviation.

He said the business climate remains one of the major stumbling blocks as both domestic and foreign investors continue to rank the Philippines as among the nations with the worst business climate.

RP embassy negotiating for 89 Pinoy caregivers in Riyadh

by JEROME ANING
Inquirer.net

ers, called on Philippine diplomatic and labor officials to boost their assistance, saying the employer, Annasban Group of Companies, was making it hard for the Overseas Filipino workers to return home.

According to the DFA, the POLO-Riyadh has asked for the early repatriation of those who wish to return to Manila under their employer's expense.

Those who would opt to stay, however, may continue their work under improved working conditions, the DFA said.

Migrante-ME countered, however, that the employer is refusing to allow any one of the 89 to go back home.

Annasban is asking for each OFW 4,000 to 8,000 Saudi riyals as part of the deployment cost incurred by the company, according to Migrante-ME re-

gional coordinator John Leonard Monterona.

Monterona, who is based in Riyadh, said two of the OFWs he spoke with recounted that their agencies in Manila were willing to provide for their airfare back home but the employer was adamant about recovering the cost of deployment.

The two, he said, said they and their colleagues have yet to collect two- to three-months worth of salaries; while those who got their pay complained of illegal deductions.

"It is our demand the DFA, the embassy and the POLO to let the 89 distress OFWs be repatriated as soon as possible without any such payment as required by their employer, so that they could be home during Christmas and start a brand new life with their loved ones," Monterona said in a statement e-mailed to the *Inquirer*.

THE Philippine Overseas Labor Office (POLO) in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, is holding talks with the employers of 89 Filipino caregivers who stopped working after accusing their employer of contract violations, the Department of Foreign Affairs said last Nov. 4.

The 89 Filipinos, who were deployed in several juvenile rehabilitation centers in Saudi Arabia, stopped working beginning Oct. 12 to protest their employer's alleged labor malpractices, which include unauthorized salary reduction, illegal salary deduction and delayed payment of salaries.

However, Migrante-Middle East, an overseas Filipino workers group helping the caregiv-

GPS to be used vs smugglers

THE Bureau of Customs (BOC) may require cargo to be installed with a Global Positioning System (GPS) while in transit to enable the agency to monitor their locations.

It has already come up with a draft Customs Administrative Order (CAO) for deliberation among importers, exporters, brokers, all port and warehouse operators, shipping agents, sea freight/air-

help rescue the 79-year-old missionary.

Mohagher Iqbal, the MILF chief negotiator in the peace talks with the government, took offense at Puno's claim and said Al Ashree was actually trying to have Sinnott freed.

According to Iqbal, the MILF is now thinking of abandoning the search effort for Sinnott.

"We are asking our counterparts in the government to stop all these accusations. If Puno will not stop, then we will also stop helping secure the priest," Iqbal told the *Philippine Daily Inquirer* by phone.

In a separate phone interview with reporters at Camp

freight consolidators/forwarders, haulers transport carriers and truckers before it is implemented.

The order is in compliance with the objective of the Electronic to Mobile (E2M) project to cut back on expenditures.

The draft also seeks to use GPS technology to ensure and facilitate the processing of trans-

shipment of goods.

Aguinaldo, Iqbal said the MILF was considering filing a protest over Puno's "irresponsible" statement with the Coordinating Committee on the Cessation of Hostilities.

Last Nov. 4, however, the government appeared still agreeable to the MILF offer of help.

According to Executive Secretary Eduardo Ermita, the government has been "encouraged" by the MILF statement that it was also taking steps to find Sinnott and help rescue him.

"It's important that we have such a statement coming from

sit cargo while significantly reducing the cost of Customs requirements.

Using this technology, the BOC would be able to locate and account cargo from the port of discharge to its final destination.

It will also facilitate Customs processing of transit cargo.

An accreditation committee for GPS providers would be formed. The provider must be able to propose a system that would allow the BOC real tracking time.

Its system should also alert the BOC of any changes such as in the routes.

Another condition in the draft CAO is that "the GPS provider should provide BOC at no cost with the necessary equipment needed to effectively perform the above tracing and monitoring functions." (*Philstar.com*)

Angry MILF slams Puno

Kidnap rap 'cheap propaganda'

by RYAN ROSAURO, JULIE ALIPALA, TJ BURGONIO
Inquirer.net

PAGADIAN CITY—The claim of Interior Secretary Ronaldo Puno that the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) had a hand in the abduction of Fr. Michael Sinnott is "cheap propaganda" and an affront to the peace process, the separatist group said last Nov. 4.

In a statement posted on its website, the MILF accused

Puno and Defense Secretary Gilbert Teodoro of constantly "stabbing us in the back." It said this was frustrating its effort to recover the Irish missionary "for the sake of justice, humanity, goodwill and friendship."

The MILF said it was paying "very special attention" to the Sinnott kidnapping because of the personal appeal relayed to

it by Irish Ambassador Richard O'Brien during a meeting with its leaders last month in Camp Darapanan, Maguindanao.

"Whoever is subjected to an evil act deserves to be helped in every way possible," the rebel group said.

Puno claimed last Nov. 3 that it was the MILF 113th Base Command led by Aloy Al Ashree that abducted Sinnott in the compound of the Missionary Society of Saint Columban in Pagadian on Oct. 11.

Thus, Puno said, the government would no longer accept the MILF offer to

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