

## ATHENS PE CELEBRATES 113<sup>TH</sup> INDEPENDENCE DAY WITH TWO EVENTS



**Chargé d'Affaires Constancio R. Vingno, Jr. and Mrs. Yoko Vingno with embassy personnel in a flag raising ceremony on 12 June 2011 at the Philippine Embassy (left photo). Athens PE's embassy officers and staff during the Diplomatic Reception held at the Philippine Embassy on 14 June 2011 (center photo). CDA and Mrs. Vingno lead the embassy officials and the Filipino community in a parade at the Independence Day celebration at the embassy grounds on 19 June 2011 (right photo).**

The Philippine Embassy in Athens celebrated the 113<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the declaration of Philippine independence with a series of activities which included a flag-raising ceremony, an exhibit of Philippine arts and crafts, a diplomatic reception and celebration with the Filipino community.

The celebration began with a simple flag-raising ceremony on Sunday, 12 June 2011 at the Philippine Embassy grounds. Led by Charge d' Affaires Constancio R. Vingno, Jr., Athens PE personnel renewed their commitment to the ideals of the nation and pledged anew their allegiance to the flag with the singing of "Lupang Hinirang" and the recitation of the "Panunumpa sa Watawat."

CDA Vingno Jr. and First Secretary and Consul Charmaine Rowena C. Aviquivil read excerpts from the Independence Day messages of the President and the Secretary of Foreign Affairs respectively. The messages, which center on the theme, "Kalayaan: Paninindigan ng Bayan," cite the nation's resolve and commitment to free itself from the bondage of poverty, and the call for genuine transformation among Filipinos all over the world.

On the evening of Tuesday, 14 June 2011, around 200 guests from the Greek Ministry of Foreign Affairs and other government agencies, the diplomatic corps, Greek shipping companies and manning agencies, the academe,

*(Continued on page 4)*



For more information please see page 3.

### PHL TEAM GARNERS 49-MEDAL HAUL IN THE SPECIAL OLYMPICS 2011

The Philippines successfully participated in the Special Olympics World Summer Games held in Athens from 25 June to 04 July 2011. More than 7,000 Special Olympics athletes from nearly 180 countries around the world competed in what is considered as the largest international multi-sport event of the year.

The 47-member PHL delegation, composed of 38 intellectually-challenged athletes and their coaches and trainers, participated in seven of the 22 sports events, bringing

home a total of 49 medals (21 gold, 13 silver and 15 bronze medals).

The Philippine team was led by Mrs. Ma. Theresa J. Macapagal, President of Special Olympics Philippines.

Team Philippines won gold medals in athletics, powerlifting, swimming, bocce,

*(Continued on page 9)*



Commemoration of the 150th Birth Anniversary of Dr. Jose P. Rizal. Athens PE commemorates the 150th Birth Anniversary of Dr. Rizal by displaying an exhibit featuring a chronology on the life and times of Dr. Rizal as well as photos of his family and important milestones in his life.

## SPECIAL FEATURE

## Filipino Hairstylist in Greek Setting

*The following article was featured in the Number 5 issue of "Roots and Wings."*

*By: Major Yoko Ramos-Vingno*

Hair & Scissors beauty salon is owned and managed by a Filipino hairstylist, Draude 'Dojie' Garcia. Located in Athens hoi polloi district of Ambelokipi, Dojie's shop sits just right in the middle where thousands of Filipinos working in Greece live. Ambelokipi is about 10 minutes away from the center of Athens at Syntagma Square where the Greek parliament is located. The number of Filipinos in Greece is estimated to be about 15,000, of which 10,000 are believed to be residing in Athens and half of that figure, the Filipinos themselves say they reside at Ambelokipi.

Athens is the Greek capital and Athena is its virgin goddess. In Greek mythology, it is written that the Athenians built the Parthenon atop the Acropolis to honor and please her. Athena is the Greek goddess of wisdom, strength, civilization, war, strategy, crafts, justice and skill. The Greeks, particularly the Athenians, pray to Athena to give them not only wisdom but also ask her for almost everything.

Our Filipino expat, like the Athenians, is an ardent believer of sorts. Dojie is a religious man and is a devotee of Our Lady of Perpetual Help. When he learned in one of his voyages as a seaman that his patron saint is nestled in Tinos, an island of Greece, he literally took it as a sign from heaven that he should permanently settle in Greece. All his life Dojie had been pondering where he would permanently set anchor to start a life in a place where his spiritual needs would also be served. Setting foot on Greek soil he found the answer to his prayers. He felt Greece is the place where his Mother of Perpetual Help wanted him to be. Greece is now Dojie's home. He never looked back.

Starting a new life in Athens is of course another story, which for Dojie proved to be practically a



struggle for existence. Faced with an entirely new culture and a language that he could not speak and understand, Dojie somehow started from somewhere in order to survive. These early struggles made him stronger. His belief and devotion to Our Lady of Perpetual Help and his unrelenting determination to succeed in life in order to be able to provide for the family he left behind in the Philippines kept him going.

An experienced waiter, Dojie took all the waiting jobs he could get hold of. He saved what he earned and could even send some of it to his mother in the Philippines. But for Dojie, life in Greece was not all about waiting. For him it was much more about the realization of a dream than plain survival. He knew what he wanted in life and so he pursued it. He enrolled in a cosmetology class which he passed and got himself a Greek certificate to practice the profession. He bade waiting goodbye and was now off in haste to pursue his new vocation as a hair stylist. He went from house to house doing home service from blow drying of hair to haircuts and hairstyling.

It was in 2007 that Dojie founded his Hair & Scissors salon (where I first met him) when he was only a couple of months' new to the business. My husband Constancio, who is the current Philippine Consul General in the embassy needed a haircut then so we were brought to Hair & Scissors Place. Then, he told us of his plans to expand and to offer other services such as massage. He said he needed to be very hands on with this business so that his clientele will be assured that they are getting their money's worth through hundred percent personal service. Dojie

proudly tells me of his loyal patrons who are satisfied with his work that meets the Greeks' high standards in hair styling.

Three years later, I met Dojie again during the Independence Day festivities with fellow Filipinos at the Zappeio Park. He was in the company of former celebrity star Tina Paner. Enthusiastically he told me about his new 'sideline' with Globe Asiatique (GA). He was manning Globe Asiatique's booth which was teeming with Filipinos lining up to have their photos taken with Tina Paner. There he proudly told me about the realization of his plan to expand his business, a plan that he told me about three years earlier. Dojie has built another shop at the district of Pangrati in Athens.

And more good news he gave me. He sold houses for Globe Asiatique worth 12M despite being with the company for 9 months only. He has 10 sales coordinators in Greece. He has 2 in Thessaloniki and another 2 in Crete and the rest are in Athens. GA, he says, trained him to be more focused on work. Over a short span of time with GA, Dojie became computer literate. He devised his program for the whole year for Globe Asiatique in Greece to increase further his sales.

**GA's compensation is not as rewarding compared to what he is getting from his salon but he likes though the travel perks that goes with being an agent for GA.** Dojie, a tall guy sporting long hair, is still single. He is well informed and likes to talk politics. He has no time for the affairs of the heart at the moment, he tells me. He has not forgotten that he has a family back home in the Philippines. The hard work that he puts into his work is not only for himself and his mother but also for his nieces and nephews who are still studying in Manila to whom he sends monthly allowances.

**Dojie's life in Greece indeed has undergone a transformation that has enhanced his self-esteem.** In Greece he is his own boss who lives a good Athenian life. ■



*Major Yoko Ramos-Vingno, wife of Athens PE CDA and Consul General Constancio Vingno Jr., is a reserve officer of the Philippine Army. She is a free lance writer.*





The Puerto Princessa Subterranean River National Park is located about 50 km north of the city of Puerto Princessa, Palawan, Philippines. It features a limestone karst mountain landscape with an 8.2 km. navigable underground river. A distinguishing feature of the river is that it winds through a cave before flowing directly into the South China Sea. It includes major formations of stalactites and stalagmites, and several large chambers. The lower portion of the river is subject to tidal influences. The underground river is reputed to be the world's longest. At the mouth of the cave, a clear lagoon is framed by ancient trees growing right to the water's edge. Monkeys, large monitor lizards, and squirrels find their niche on the beach near the cave.

Three ways to vote for PPUR:

1. Vote via the N7WN Website: [www.new7wonders.com](http://www.new7wonders.com)  
Internet voting is allowed per email address.
  - a. Click on the PPUR as your NSWN candidate
  - b. Register your email account
  - c. Send your vote
2. Vote via Text Message:  
Each SMS sent counts as one vote for the PP Underground River in the Official New7Wonders of Nature. Simply text PPUR to 2861.
3. Vote by Telephone:  
You can now vote using the new international telephone voting line, available 24 hours a day, for you to call and vote at any time, from any international telephone line anywhere in the world.
  - a. Dial one of these international telephone numbers:  
+23 92201055  
+1 869 760 5990  
+ 1 6 49 339 8080  
+ 44 758 900 1290
  - b. **At the end of the message, after the tone, dial PPUR's 4 digit code 7723**
  - c. When you hear the thank you message, you are all done – you have voted by telephone.

Voting will be until midnight of 10 November 2011. The announcement of the N7WN is on 11 November 2011.

(Continued from page 1).... Athens PE celebrates

the medical profession, civic organizations, and the Filipino community in Greece attended the reception.

The guests were treated to generous servings of Filipino dishes such as chicken adobo, longganiza, vegetable spring rolls, puto and buchi that they got to sample during the reception.

The guests also viewed the exhibit of Filipino arts and crafts, home décor, traditional clothing, jewelry and accessories made from indigenous materials such as narra, kamagong, rattan, raffia, buri, abaca, coconut, capiz and other

shellcraft, buri, anahaw, jusi, pina and banana fiber textiles, inabel, among others. In separate celebration held on 19 June 2011, the Philippine Embassy in cooperation with the Filipino community organizations in Athens, held day long festivities for the Filipino community at the embassy grounds. The day-long event started with the parade of various Filipino community associations in Greece led by embassy personnel. Prior to the singing of the national anthem, selected students from Filipino Community Academy Institute (FCAI) presented a biorama entitled "Balik-Tanaw".

Officials of the Philippine Embassy led

by CDA Vingno, Jr., read the Independence Day messages of President Beningno Simeon C. Aquino, III and other Philippine officials.

The students of different schools and representatives of various Filipino organizations performed cultural numbers consisting of songs and dances.

The occasion was highlighted by an OPM Singing Contest and Kawanggawa Raffle Draw.

Various kinds of Filipino food like siopao, dinuguan, pancit, barbecue, halo-halo were available and sold from selected food stalls set up by the ACP members. ■

### *Diplomatic Reception*

Chargé d'Affaires, Constancio R. Vingno Jr. and Mrs. Yoko Ramos-Vingno, Consul Charmaine Rowena Aviquivil, Welfare Officer Venus Bravo and Labor Attaché George Eduvala welcome distinguished guests at the Philippine National Day reception held on 14 June 2011 at the Embassy premises in Paleo Psychico, Athens.



Ministry of Foreign Affairs Deputy Chief of Protocol Elias Eliadis.



Ambassador of Thailand Preudtipong Kulthanan.



Ambassador of Indonesia and Mrs. Ahmad Rusdi.



Deputy head of Mission of the Vatican, Reverend Fr. Marco Ganci.





(left to right) Ambassador of Vietnam Vu Binh, Ambassador of Iran Mehdi Honardoost, Ambassador of Switzerland and Mrs. Lorenzo Amberg



(left to right) Ambassador of Belgium Marc Van Den Reeck, PHL Consul a.h. in Thessaloniki Nicolaos Margaropoulos, and PHL Consul a.h. in Patras Anastacia Manalopoulou



Dr. Marcos Fojas, Filipino ophthalmologist based in Greece. Members of the Filipino community



Philippine exhibit of art and crafts items and the chronology of life of Dr. Jose Rizal; Guests enjoying an evening of good food, music and Filipino hospitality at the Philippine Independence Day reception held at the embassy grounds.





(left to right) FCAI students reenact significant events in history culminating in the proclamation of Philippine Independence on 12 June 1898 in Kawit, Cavite. **Chargé d'Affaires Constancio R. Vingno, Jr.** reads the National Day message of President **Benigno Simeon C. Aquino III**. Consul **Charmaine Rowena Aviquivil** reads the National Day message of Foreign Secretary **Albert F. Del Rosario**. Labor Attache **George Eduvala** reads the National Day message of Labor Secretary **Rosalinda Baldoz**.



(First row) **Chargé d'Affaires Constancio R. Vingno, Jr.** and **Mrs. Yoko Vingno** and Consul **Charmaine Rowena C. Aviquivil** with Accredited Community Partners (ACP), Bagong Kapwa Ko Pilipino Athens, Greece (BKKPAO), Benguet, Ifugao, Mt. Province, Apayao, Kalinga (BIMAK Hellas), Candonians In Greece. (Second row) Catholic Union of Filipinos in Athens (CUFA), Cordillera Cultural Minorities (CCM), CFC Couples for Christ and its Family Ministries, Determined Independent Women in Action for Total Advancement (DIWATA). (Third row) El Shaddai Group, Filipino Bowlers in Athens, Greece (FILBAG), Filipino Christian Fellowship of Athens (FCFA), Filipino Club Heraklion Crete (FCIC). (Fourth row) Filipino Community Academy Institute (FCAI), KASAPI Hellas, Katipunan Philippine Cultural Academy-Philippine School in Greece (KAPHILCA-PSG), Munting Nasyon Cultural School.





Embassy officials with Pinoy Tenpin Bowlers Athens (PTBA), Philippine Guardians Brotherhood, Inc. (PGBI), Philippine Overseas Society (POS), St. Denis Catholic Charismatic Renewal Prayer Group (SDCCRPG), Timpuyog Ti Daya.



(left to right) BIMAK HELLAS members performed an Adivay dance number, members of CCM presented a Chantum dance, FCAI students rendered a pantomime number, and CUFA members rendered a medley of patriotic songs.



(left to right) KAPHILCA-PSG students showcasing La Jota Moncadeña and Maria Clara , members of DIWATA performed Habanera de Jovencita, students of ECLC presented Itik-Itik , Pupils of Munting Nayon performed a Bulaklak dance number and members of the Filipino Martial Arts in Greece demonstrated Arnis de Mano.



(left to right) ACP members performed a choral presentation, intermission numbers were performed by the D'Sisters, Jas & JC Gapate. Mrs. Vingno with some Filcom members. Booths selling Filipino delicacies like dinuguan, puto, halo-halo,barbecue, and chicharon, etc.



(left to right) Some of the audience participating in the adult parlor games. CDA and Mrs. Vingno with the Singing Contest finalists. OPM Singing Contest grand prize winner Ms. Judy Meg Alcantara. CDA Vingno, Jr. drawing the grand prize winner for the Kawanggawa Raffle. CDA Vingno, Jr. with the Grand prize winner, Mr. Conrado Garcia winning a round trip ticket to the Philippines via Etihad Airways.

**Athens PE expresses its gratitude for the support and cooperation of the different Committee Heads and members, Filipino Community Leaders and its members and for the generous donations of the sponsors during the Filipino Community celebration of the Independence Day held on 19 June 2011 in Athens.**



## Community News

**We welcome Pinoy news!**

**Send us your letters, news stories, press or photo releases for publication in the newsletter via regular mail, e-mail.**



**River of Grace's 9th Church Anniversary.** Consul Charmaine Aviquivil delivering a message during the anniversary of River of Grace which was held on 08 May 2011 at Oscar Hotel.



**Filipino Christian Women Association in Greece's Dinner Get Together.** CDA Constanancio R. Vingno Jr. at the FWAG event held on 05 June 2011 at Full Gospel Church in Athens.



CDA Vingno, Jr., hosts dinner for DepEd-NETRC Representative Mr. Francisco Benito who conducted National Achievement and Philippine Validating Tests for the students of KAPHILCA-PSG on 08 June 2011.



**KAPHILCA-PSG's 9th Commencement & 14th Closing Exercises.** CDA and Mrs. Vingno, Jr. together with Consul Aviquivil at the graduation ceremony of KAPHILCA-PSG held on 26 June 2011 in Danaos Theater, where CDA Vingno, Jr. delivered the keynote address.



**Filipino Immigrant's Early Childhood Learning Center (FIECLC) First commencement & Closing Exercises SY 2010-2011.** CDA Vingno, Jr. delivers his speech during the graduation of the students of FIECLC which was held on 02 July 2011 in Evramos Theater.



The officials of Tau Gamma Phi/Sigma Trikelion International call on CDA Vingno, Jr., on 13 July 2011 at the embassy.



**Athens PE Consular Outreach in Cyprus.** A team from Athens PE led by Ma. Clorinda Bonabon-Dankers rendered consular services at the office of Cyprus Philippine honorary consul Shemaine Kyriakides-Bushnell on 23-24 July 2011. The team, assisted by some members of the Overseas Filipino Volunteers Cyprus (OFVC), catered to 240 E-passport applicants, and rendered other consular services.



**Induction of the Accredited Community Partner (ACP).** CDA Vingno, Jr. inducts the new members of the ACP on 30 July 2011 at the Filipino Workers Resource Center.



**Munitng Nayon Cultural School Graduation Ceremony.** CDA Vingno, Jr. speaks at the graduation ceremony SY 2010-2011 of MNCS on 23 July 2011 in Athens.

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Minister and Consul General Constanancio R. Vingno Jr.  
Adviser

First Secretary and Consul Charmaine Rowena C. Aviquivil  
Editor-in-Chief

Joanne M. David Cielo L. Gamayon  
Managing Editor Editorial Staff

Byron Villanueva  
Photographer

Address: 26 Antheon St., Paleo Psychico 15452  
Athens, GREECE

Tel. Nos.: +30 210 6721837 or 883 /2106722 011  
Fax No.: +30 210 6721 872

Email: philippineembassy@philembathens.gr

Website: www.philembathens.gr



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and rhythmic gymnastics, while the silver and bronze medals were also won in these five sports events, in addition to bowling and badminton.

The Embassy extended full support to the athletes during the during the 10-day Special Olympics, providing port courtesies and assistance for them on their arrival on 19 June. The Embassy had the chance to interact closely with the athletes during a simple *merienda* of cookies

and ice cream at the embassy premises on 21 June, where swimming gold medalist Raymond Macasaet and bowling silver medalist Roxanne Ng rendered heartfelt song numbers to the delight of the staff.

Embassy staff and Filipino community members cheered the Philippine athletes on during the various competitions as well as during the Opening Ceremonies on 25 June at the historic Kallimarmaron Panathinaikon Olympic Stadium, the site of the first Olympic Games of the modern era, where international celebrities such

as Stevie Wonder, Vanessa Williams, and Zhang Ziyi, and sports icons Yao Ming, Nadia Comaneci and Michelle Kwan were among the special guests.

Team Philippines also enjoyed a hearty dinner of *adobo*, spare ribs *sinigang*, *lumpiang shanghai*, fried fish, salmon, chicken, *puto*, *pichi pichi* and fresh fruits during the dinner hosted by Charge d' Affaires Constancio R. Vingno, Jr. on 03 July at the embassy to celebrate the victory of the Philippine team during the sports event. ■



CDA Vingno, Jr. and Consul Charmaine Rowena Aviquivil together with PHL head of delegation Mrs. Maria Therese Macapagal and some members of the Philippine delegation.



PHL athletes parading during the 2011 Special Olympics World Summer Games Opening Ceremony which was held 25 June 2011 at Kallimarmaron Panathinaiko Stadium in Athens.



Charge d'Affaires Constancio R. Vingno, Jr. and Mrs. Vingno together with Athens PE personnel at the 2011 Special Olympics World Summer Games Opening Ceremony.



Athens PE staff with the athletes' family and Filcom members after the powerlifting competition.



Athens PE staff with Mr. Macasaet after the aquatics competition.



PHL Bocce team with Mrs. Macapagal and embassy staff during the awarding ceremony of the bocce competition.



Athens PE staff with the PHL athletics team.



PHL Gymnastics team together with some embassy personnel during the dinner hosted by the Philippine embassy.



The PHL bowling team with the embassy staff during a *salu-salo* held at the Embassy on 03 July 2011.



The PHL badminton team.



Philippine athletes enjoying the dinner hosted by the embassy.



CDA and Mrs. Vingno, Jr. with Phildel Head Mrs. Ma. Therese Macapagal during the dinner hosted by Athens PE.

## Consular Updates

## Frequently Asked Questions on E-Passport

The Philippine Department of Foreign Affairs began the issuance of the Philippine ePassport (electronic passport) on 11 Aug 2009.

Q: What is an electronic Passport?

A: An Electronic Passport or ePassport is a passport with an added integrated circuit or chip embedded in one of the passport pages. Such chip contains the data essential in verifying the identity of the passport which include the personal data found on the data page of the passport, the biometrics of the passport holder, the unique chip identification number, and a digital signature to verify the authenticity of the data stored on the chip. This chip is highly interoperable; meaning, it can be read by any standard border control machine worldwide. It is integrated with high security mechanisms in order to prevent any forceful scheming of data it contains, any cloning, and any remote reading.

Q: What is a Biometric?

A: A biometric is a unique and measurable physical characteristic of an individual that includes face recognition, fingerprints, and iris scan. The Philippine ePassport utilizes the digital image of the passport photograph that can be used with face recognition technology to verify the identity of the passport holder. It also makes use of the fingerprints of the passport holder for identification using the Automated Fingerprint Verification System (AFIS).

Q: What are the special features of the Philippine ePassport?

A: The Philippine ePassport allows information stored on the chip to be verified with the information visually displayed on the passport. It also uses contactless microchip technology.

The Philippine ePassport also contains an integrated photograph of the holder, a digitized secondary photo, and an electronic print of the holder's signature. It also features overt and hidden security features such as Invisible Personal Information (IPI), letterscreen, microprinting, and UV reactive ink, among others.

Q: What is the difference between the existing maroon machine readable passport (MRP) and the ePassport?

An MRP is a passport which has a machine readable zone (MRZ) printed in accordance with International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) standards. It can be read manually and with the use of a machine. An ePassport, on the other hand, has an embedded Integrated Circuit (IC) chip where the photograph and personal information of the bearer are stored in accordance with ICAO specifications. These information can be read by chip readers at a close distance. The ePassport also has an MRZ.

Q: What are the advantages of having ePassport?

A: The e-passport is highly secure, hence avoids passport reproduction and tampering. The ePassport database is enhanced with Automated Fingerprint Verification System (AFIS) that guards against multiple passport issuances to

the same person and enhances imposter detection. It facilitates fast clearance of travellers at immigration checks. ePassports provide travelers benefits such as use of automated border clearance or "e-gates," automated issuance of boarding passes, and faster travel arrangement with airlines. For countries, the use of electronic passport also provides better border protection and security.

Q: Why do we have to use ePassports now?

A: The MRP is only the minimum ICAO standard in travel documents. The ePassport is the world standard in travel documents. As a member of ICAO, the Philippines has an international obligation to enhance the security of its travel documents. The issuance of ePassports will allow the Philippines to offer world-class consular services to its nationals. Countries have greater confidence and acceptance of the ePassport since it is enhanced with biometric technology.

Q: How much does an ePassport cost?

A: The ePassport is available for Php 950.00 to be issued within 25 working days. Expedited processing of ePassports meanwhile costs Php 1,200.00, with an issuance of 15 working days. Machine readable passports are no longer issued except during emergency purposes. The ePassport is relatively more expensive than MRPs because of the added security features. Comparative prices of ePassports from different countries, however, show that the cost of the Philippine passport is among the lowest in the world.

Q: Who can avail of the Philippine ePassport?

The ePassport is issued to Filipino citizens, by birth or naturalization, who can comply with the documentary requirements for application.

Q: Can an existing holder of the maroon MRP simply surrender their passport and have them converted to an ePassport?

As soon as the production of the ePassport comes into full swing, holders of MRPs can have their passport canceled and apply for an ePassport if they so wish.

Q: Where can I apply for an ePassport?

A: The Department of Foreign Affairs follows an appointment system for the ePassport. To secure an appointment online, simply log on to [www.epassport.com.ph](http://www.epassport.com.ph) or [www.passport.com.ph](http://www.passport.com.ph). This service is free of charge. The DFA advises public to file their passport applications at least 12 weeks before their intended date of travel. Filipino citizens can also apply for passports in the nearest Regional Consular Offices. There are also mobile passport services scheduled by the DFA-OCA with local government units.

Q: What other countries use ePassports?

A: ePassports are already being used in more than 60 countries worldwide. In ASEAN, five countries have already issued ePassports (Singapore, Brunei, Malaysia, Thailand and

Cambodia). In the future, all countries are seen to switch to the ePassport due to the increasing need for efficient and better border security.

Q: What is the ePassport logo and what does it mean?

A: The ePassport logo which appears on the cover of the ePassport is the international symbol for the electronic passport. This means that the passport has an integrated circuit or chip on which data on passport and passport holder is stored. The logo will alert border inspection lanes at all airports and transit ports with special data readers for ePassports that the passport is an ePassport.

Q: I have a previously issued passport. Can I use it for travel as long as it is still valid?

A: Yes. Previously issued passports (MRP and non-MRP) are valid until their expiry. We advise clients though to check their passports are still valid at least six months before intended date of travel to avoid any inconvenience.

Q: Will there be additional requirements needed for the processing of ePassports?

A: None. Essentially, the requirements for ePassport processing will remain the same as that for the MRP, although personal appearance is required for the taking of the biometrics (i.e., fingerprints, photo, and signature).

#### STATUS UPDATE ON THE EPASSPORTS:

##### Appointments and Passport Extension

Q: What are the recent updates in the passport appointment system?

A: To respond to the recent unprecedented increase in passport applications, the Department of Foreign Affairs-Office of Consular Affairs (DFA-OCA) has added 1,600 new appointment slots to the regular 5,600 appointments available each working day for passport applications. This was started last May 4. Similarly, the DFA-OCA also allotted 1,500 appointment slots on Saturdays. This was started last May 7. The passport office is open from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. on Saturdays. This measure adds 18,000 new appointment slots per month, which brings the total appointment slots from 88,000 to 106,000 per month.

Applicants who already have an existing appointment and would like to have an earlier slot are advised to go through the appointments procedure again ([www.epassport.com.ph](http://www.epassport.com.ph) / [www.passport.com.ph](http://www.passport.com.ph) or call 731-1000), and may try to rebook an earlier slot given the increase in appointments. Applicants are likewise reminded that the later appointment date will automatically be cancelled upon rebooking of an appointment.

Q: If a person has an urgent travel abroad but has not secured an earlier appointment, can he still apply for a passport without an appointment?

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## Cyprus Corner



**Sinulog, a street dance , performed by the OFW group.**

The POLO in coordination with the Philippine Honorary Consulate in Cyprus mounted a whole day event entitled *Araw Ng Pasasalamat sa Pinaninindigang Kalayaan* (Great Freedom) to jointly celebrate the 113<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Declaration of Philippine Independence Day and Migrant Workers Day at the Cultural Center of the European University Cyprus on 12 June.

To jumpstart the celebrations, a Sinulog dance was performed by 30 members of the Divine Mercy Prayer Group and the St. Joseph Social Center followed by a ribbon cutting by POLO OIC and Welfare Officer Josephine Sanchez-Tobia.

Honorary Consul Shemaine Kyriakides, together with OIC Sanchez-Tobia welcomed the audience by reading the messages from President Benigno S. Aquino III, Foreign Affairs Secretary Albert F. del Rosario and Labor Secretary Rosalinda Baldoz.

In cooperation with the Filipino organizations in Cyprus, competitions on best in booth, native attire and Alkansyang Bayan were held, which aimed to showcase Filipino ingenuity in the festival of food and crafts.

Various regional organizations showcased their food such as OFW Family Club with their **katagalugan kakanin**, OFVC's Ilonggo booths prepared their arroz valenciana dish, Business Club Bicol booth sold out their exotic Bicolandia cuisine while Ilocos region booths enticed the public's palette with their pakbet and bagnet among others. Pastries and balot were available everywhere.

Business Club and BIBAK or Benguet-Ifugao-Baguio-Apayao-Kalinga came all the way from Limassol to showcase their native accessories, bags and clothing to the

## HonCon and POLO Cyprus celebrate Philippine Independence Day and Migrant Workers Day

delight of the public. Independent business OFW enthusiasts also joined in selling their handmade items giving more local flavor to the affair. Religious items were not missed in the festive booths.

The OFW organizations were given a free hand to design their own booths which depicted the traditional Pinoy designs.

Of 14 participating OFW organizations, BIBAK was chosen as the best booth that represented the local color of the region. The best in native attire was won by an OFW from Kalinga Apayao. A contest on the most creative and environment friendly *Alkansya* was participated in by 10 OFWs who improvised on available materials and religiously put their euro coins to represent the very essence of savings. Winners got cash prizes from the Landbank, Pagibig and Coinstar. Landbank presented a brief video to encourage OFWS in savings and investments.

A cultural show featured colorful traditional dance performances from the Philippines by Cyprus OFW organizations such as Itik itik by the Larnaca, Carinosa by the Holy Cross Catholic Charismatic Community, Bulaklakan by the First Aiders. The rendition of Halina, a pop song number on Philippine tourism by the New Movers and the Kundiman medley by the Larnaca choir were well applauded.

Highlight of the event was the recognition awards of the trainees who finished the four week Basic Caregiver and Business Counseling Courses for the first semester of 2011. Consul Kyriakides and OIC Tobia along with the facilitators Capt. John Thomson and Mr. Manuel Tobia and respective mentors awarded the certificates to the 298 OFWS.

OFW Volunteers in Cyprus turned over their 500 euros donation for the Tuloy Aral Project to POLO as their contribution in the ongoing campaign for the educational assistance of children of former OFWS who are needy.

The working committee of this event is composed of the most active OFW organization in Cyprus, namely, OFW Family Club, OFW Volunteers in Cyprus, Business Club in Nicosia and Limassol, First Aiders,



Recognition awards to the 298 OFWs who finished the four-week Basic Caregiver and Business Counseling Courses for the first semester of 2011.



OFW Volunteers in Cyprus turn over the 500 euros donation for the Tuloy Aral Project as their contribution to the ongoing campaign at the Post.



Regional booth showcasing the Filipino Festival of Food and Crafts liven the National Day for Filipinos in Cyprus.



Filcom celebration of Independence Day in Limassol City on 27 June 2011.

Holy Cross Catholic Charismatic Community, Divine Mercy Prayer group, St Joseph Social Center, Larnaca Group, BIBAK and the Filipino Overseas Contract Workers in Cyprus (FOCWA).

## LABOR PAGE

Barely a month ago, Filipino crewmembers, consisting of a total of twenty-eight (28) officers and seamen of three ships owned by Naftotrade Cement sought the assistance of the Embassy.

They have been stranded in different ports in Greece for at least six months and had inadequate food and water supply plus unpaid salaries. Their families back home were likewise suffering; children had to quit school, loan amortizations long in arrears, indebtedness mounting and like problems.

Food and water supplies had to be delivered by Embassy personnel to their respec-

### 28 STRANDED SEAFARERS SENT BACK HOME



Embassy officials with the some of the stranded crewmembers of the three ships owned by Naftotrade Cement.

tive ships in the meantime that efforts to claim their salaries and immediate repatriation were being done by the ship owner and manning agents.

On July 22, 2011, the last remaining seafarers are flying back to Manila. All those earlier repatriated were paid all their salaries and other emoluments ranging from U.S.\$5,000 to U.S.\$10,000. ■



Seafarers partaking in the lunch prepared by embassy staff during their meeting at the embassy.

(Continued from page 10)... FAQ

A: As long as applicants have documentary proof of the urgency of their travel, they may proceed to the Passport Director's Office, G/F Office of Consular Affairs, for assistance in processing their passport without an appointment. Emergency travel is defined as having an imminent or actual death in the immediate family or for health reasons.

Q: What is the earliest appointment one can get through an online application?

A: Earliest appointment time varies from day-to-day as this depends on several factors: number of applicants, processing capacity, etc. DFA-OCA continues to put measures to ensure that earliest appointment date is within an acceptable time frame.

Q: If the applicant only needs a passport extension, does he/she need to secure an appointment online? How long does it take to process a passport for extension?

A: The DFA now extends passports that are about to expire (6 months or less from date of expiration). Applicants are advised to mention to the processing staff that they would like to avail of this service. If the passport has been expired for more than one year, applicants are to proceed to the Passport Director's Office, G/F Office of Consular Affairs, for assistance. Applicants in Foreign Service Posts and Regional Consular Offices may also avail of this extension.

Q: Who can avail of the OCA special lane?

A: OFWs, Senior Citizens, differently-abled people and infants (0-1 year old) do not need appointments. These applicants may proceed without appointments at Processing Area II, 2/F, Office of Consular Affairs.

Passport Processing

Q: What are the measures taken against fixers?

A: The public is strongly advised against seeking the help of fixers. OCA in coordination with the Office of Intelligence and Security Services and local police authorities are exerting all efforts so



### Pag-IBIG Membership Mandatory for OFWs, Required for OEC Issuance

The signing of Republic Act 9679 or the Home Development Mutual Fund Law of 2009 expands the mandatory coverage of Pag-IBIG Fund. Now, overseas Filipino workers and other individuals employed by foreign-based companies are required to register with the Fund as members.

With the expansion of membership coverage, all OFWs are now being extended the same opportunities granted only to Pag-IBIG members – to save for their family's needs in the future and to acquire their own homes in the country. Pag-IBIG benefits include housing, provident savings and multi-purpose and calamity loans.

This development necessitated the signing of a collection agreement between the Fund and the Philippine Overseas Employment Agency (POEA), which provides OFWs departing from the Philippines a more convenient registration system, and an accessible and affordable remittance facility.

Under the agreement, the POEA shall collect Pag-IBIG membership contributions from OFWs leaving for abroad as provided for under the 2010 Collection Servicing Agreement between the agency and the Pag-IBIG Fund. Based on the latest arrangement, the POEA shall accept the minimum contribution of P100 from departing OFWs. No service

fees shall be collected.

Still provided in the agreement is the requirement of mandatory Pag-IBIG registration for OFWs prior to the issuance of the Overseas Employment Certification.

The Pag-IBIG Fund is a convenient savings system for the ordinary Filipino workers. Their monthly contributions earn annual dividends which are credited to the member's account. These savings are tax-free and government guaranteed and shall remain in the member's name even if the member transfers employment or gets unemployed.

Just recently, Pag-IBIG provided economic relief to OFW-members who were repatriated from conflict areas in the Middle East and North Africa like Libya in the form of early withdrawal of their total accumulated savings or a six-month moratorium on Multi-Purpose Loan and housing loan payments. Similarly, members who fled Japan at the height of the tsunami tragedy and radiation leak may avail of the Multi-Purpose Loans from the Fund.

Several banks/agents and remittance companies located in key cities abroad have been accredited by the Pag-IBIG Fund to give OFW-members easier access to remittance facilities. ■

that fixers are apprehended. Everyone is encouraged to report any activities related to fixing to the Office of Consular Affairs.

Q: What is the current status of passport processing?

A: Majority of technical problems have now been solved. The Office of Consular Affairs, in coordination with the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas (BSP), is helping to resolve all major setbacks in production and processing at the soonest possible time, particularly on repair of equipment and assumption of passport supplies.

DFA-OCA Contact Information

•New trunk line number: 556-000. The number is

available for all passport and consular-related inquiries. The trunk line number is available from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. from Monday to Friday.

•The public may also call phone number (632) 737-1000.

•DFA-OCA also has fax numbers available for passport and consular-related inquiries. Inquiries can be sent via fax to 836-7746, 836-7749, and 836-7759, attention to Passport Division. A return call from the DFA-OCA is expected within 24 hours of receipt of the faxed inquiry.

•Inquiries may also be sent through e-mail at [oca@dfa.gov.ph](mailto:oca@dfa.gov.ph) or at [passport.oca@yahoo.com](mailto:passport.oca@yahoo.com). ■