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President Hu hails RP-China trade



Ambassador Willy C. Gaa presenting his credentials to Chinese President Hu Jintao at the Great Hall of the People on 16 February 2004.

Chinese President Hu Jintao hailed the exceptional expansion of Philippines-China trade in 2003 and expressed hope that bilateral relations could be brought to higher levels when the two countries mark the 30th anniversary of diplomatic relations next year. The President made the remarks when Ambassador Willy C. Gaa presented his credentials to President Hu on 16 February at the Great Hall of the People.

Referring to the 79 per cent growth rate of RP-China trade volume in 2003, the leader of the world's fourth largest trading nation said that this level of growth was rarely seen in China's trade relations with other countries.

According to statistics from the General Administration of Customs of China, Philippines-China bilateral trade reached US\$9.4 billion in 2003. This exceeds the US\$8 billion projection set by both governments early last year. Philippine exports to China amounted to US\$6.3 billion while Philippine imports from China reached US\$3.1 billion, up 96 and 51.5 per cent, respectively. The Philippines posted a trade surplus of US\$3.2 billion.

Top Philippine exports to China included electronic and semi-conductor products, copper cathodes, fuel oils, petroleum naphtha, fresh bananas and crude coconut oil. Major import items from China included semi-conductors, electronic parts and accessories, motor spirit (gasoline), wheat, coal, fertilizer, crude liquefied butane and cellular phones.

RP, China hold trade meeting

The 23rd Session of the Philippines-China Joint Trade Committee was held in Beijing on 15-16 March, during which both sides exchanged views on enhancing bilateral cooperation in trade, investments, agriculture, industry, resources development, railway systems, and regional and multilateral issues.

The Philippine side was headed by Trade and Industry Undersecretary Thomas G. Aquino while the Chinese side was headed by Commerce Vice Minister An Min. The JTC is held annually and alternately in Manila and Beijing.

Following the meeting, Undersecretary Aquino called on Chinese Minister of Commerce Bo Xilai during which both expressed hope for even better bilateral economic relations.



Philippine Trade Undersecretary Thomas G. Aquino calls on new Chinese Minister of Commerce Bo Xilai on 16 March.

After Beijing, Undersecretary Aquino visited Shijiazhuang in Hebei and met with Governor Ji Yunshi. He also gave a briefing on business and investment opportunities in the Philippines before Hebei businessmen.

North Rail loan package signed

The Philippines' Department of Finance and China's Export-Import Bank (Eximbank) signed on 26 February a US\$400 million loan package to implement Phase 1, Section 1 of the Philippines' North Rail project.

Under the agreement, China's Eximbank will provide the US\$400 million contract supply loan, at concession rates, for the construction by the China National Machinery and Equipment Corp Group (CNMEG) of a 32-kilometer double-tract railway system from Caloocan City to Malolos, Bulacan. When completed, the rail system is projected to serve at least 50,000 commuters between these points on a daily basis.

The project is one of the "landmark projects" of Philippine President Arroyo and her administration. When Ambassador Gaa presented his credentials to Chinese President Hu Jintao, the latter hailed the project of as an enduring symbol of the friendship between the Philippines and China.

The agreement was signed by Finance Secretary Juanita Amatong on behalf of the Philippine government and Yang Zilin, president and chairman of China Eximbank, at the Malacañang Palace.



Executive Secretary Alberto Romulo witnesses the signing of a loan agreement for the North Rail project Phase I, Section I in ceremonies held on 26 February at the Malacañang Palace.

Ambassador Gaa meets FM Li



Ambassador Willy C. Gaa called on Chinese Foreign Minister Li Zhaoxing on 19 March 2004, during which both expressed satisfaction over the healthy state of bilateral relations.

Foreign Minister Li noted that the Ambassador, who was a former Assistant Secretary for Asian and Pacific Affairs at the Philippine Foreign Affairs Department, had long been a friend of China and expressed the hope that the Ambassador could make greater contributions to promote the friendship between the two countries.

Foreign Minister Li also expressed his appreciation for the Philippine government's adherence to the one-China policy.

Ambassador Gaa thanked the Chinese Government for the US\$400 million loan it provided for the Philippines' North Rail project. He also noted that the Philippines and China will be celebrating the 30th anniversary of diplomatic relations next year. He said that this important milestone should be marked with appropriate activities to which the Minister agreed.

DIPLOMATIC NOTES

RP-China hold air services talks

Increased bilateral trade volumes and tourist arrivals are expected between the Philippines and China with the signing on 3 March 2004 of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) on air services. Undersecretary Edward Harun Pagunsan of the Department of Transportation and Communications (DOTC) and Vice Minister Yang Guoqing of the General Administration of Civil Aviation of China (CAAC) signed the MOU which replaces an earlier MOU and amends the bilateral Air Services Agreement signed on 8 July 1979.

On 2-3 March, the Philippine delegation, represented by the Departments of Transportation and Communications, Foreign Affairs, Tourism, Trade and Industry, the Civil Aeronautics Board, and airline and cargo representatives from Clark Development Corporation, Asia Overnight Express, Cebu Pacific, Philippine Airlines and Pacific East Asia Cargo, were

in Beijing for the Philippines-China Air Service Consultations. The Philippine delegation held talks with its counterparts from the CAAC, and airline observers from Air China, China Cargo Airlines, China Eastern Airlines, China Southern Airlines, Hainan Airlines, Shanghai Airlines and Xiamen Airlines.

At the end of the consultations, the two sides agreed to allow more cargo and passenger traffic between the Philippines and China. Designated airlines of the two countries are allowed a maximum of 6,000 seats per week in 2004, increasing to 10,000 seats weekly in 2008. Freighter services are allowed a maximum of 300 tons per week from 50 tons in the 1997 MOU.

The new MOU also provides for stop-over rights for carriers of both countries flying to three cities in the Philippines and China. It would allow Philippine carriers to package tours to three cities in China, and vice versa.

RP solon calls for harmonization of counter-terrorism laws

Congressman Ablan (center), together with Ambassador Gaa (L) and Congressman Real (R), during the Asia Pacific Parliamentary Forum on 12 January 2004 in Beijing.

Philippine Congressman Roque R. Ablan called on 12 January for Asia-Pacific legislatures to create a committee on international cooperation on counter-terrorism. The purpose of this committee is mainly to harmonize the various counter-terrorism laws of different nations so that the fight against terrorism would be more effective.

In a statement delivered at the ongoing 12th Annual meeting of the Asia Pacific Parliamentary Forum (APPF) in Beijing, the Ilocos Norte Congressman said that terrorism knows no boundaries, and national legislations should be compatible with international conventions as well as laws of other nations to be effective.

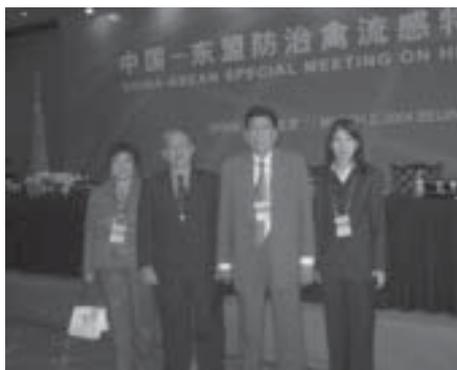
Congressman Ablan was the head of the Philippine delegation to the APPF meeting in Beijing. Also in the Philippine delegation was Congressman Isidro E. Real, Jr. from Zamboanga del Sur.

ASEAN-China Bird Flu Meeting

The Philippines participated in the ASEAN-China Special Meeting on Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) Control, which was hosted by China on 2 March 2004 in Beijing.

The Philippine delegation was headed by Health Undersecretary Dr. Antonio S. Lopez and included Dr. Jose Q. Molina, Director of the Bureau of Animal Industry of the Agriculture Department, Dr. Luningning Villa, Program Manager of the Emerging and Re-emerging Disease Control Program of the DOH, and Embassy Third Secretary Marie-Charlotte Tang.

After a review of the bird flu situation and discussions on measures to prevent and control bird flu, a joint press statement was issued in which ASEAN and China agreed that collective efforts in the region are needed to control the disease. Measures include information exchange, cooperation among inspection and quarantine agencies for border management in China and ASEAN, and operationalization of the China-ASEAN Fund for Public Health to finance relevant cooperation between China and ASEAN in addressing regional public health crises.



DOH Undersecretary Dr. Antonio Lopez (2nd from right) with other members of the Philippine delegation to the China-ASEAN Special Meeting on HPAI Control.

ASEAN Defense Attachés' Corps potluck dinner

The Office of the Philippine Defense Attaché in Beijing headed by Col. Samuel L. Narbuada hosted an ASEAN Defense Attaches' Corps potluck dinner on 19 March 2004 at the Philippine Embassy.

Defense attachés from Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand, Vietnam, Myanmar, Cambodia and Laos, together with their families, attended the event. Each family brought a native dish to be shared with ASEAN counterparts.

Col. and Mrs. Samuel Narbuada served a sumptuous buffet of Filipino dishes such as chicken adobo, beef caldereta, seafood pancit and biko. After the dinner, Mrs. Tet Narbuada invited the ladies to participate in a question and answer game about the Philippines. Winners were awarded handicraft items from the Philippines. Videoke followed with participants taking turns singing popular music from their respective countries.

In his concluding remarks, Col. Narbuada thanked the participants and wished for mutual understanding and harmonious military collaboration among ASEAN Defense attachés.



Mrs. Tet Narbuada (seated, 3rd from left) together with the wives of ASEAN Defense Attachés of Vietnam, Indonesia, Singapore, Cambodia, Thailand and Myanmar during the ASEAN Defense Attaches Corps potluck dinner.

ACB UPDATES

Under the able chairmanship of the Cambodian Ambassador, the ASEAN Committee Beijing (ACB) held several significant meetings and activities with Chinese officials during the January-March period, as follows:

- Farewell dinner of ACB for MFA Asian Affairs Director-General Madame Fu Ying, 9 January 2004.
- Dinner hosted by ACB for Foreign Minister Li Zhaoxing, 20 January 2004.
- Lunch hosted by ACB for Vice Foreign Minister Lu Xinhua, 17 February 2004.
- Dinner hosted by Dalian Mayor Xia Daren for ACB, 5 March 2004.
- Lunch hosted by ACB for new MFA Asian Affairs Director-General Cui Tiankai and the Ambassadors of Japan and Republic of Korea, 30 March 2004.

COMMUNITY BRIEFS

Embassy ready for 2004 elections

The Philippine Embassy is ready to conduct overseas absentee voting for land-based workers in its consular jurisdiction starting Easter Sunday, 11 April.

On 3-7 February, Ms. Rizarem Apolonio and Mr. Jose Magaso, attachés of the Embassy, attended the Training on Overseas Absentee Voting and Counting conducted jointly by the Department of Foreign Affairs and the Commission on Elections (Comelec). They then conducted an echo seminar for Embassy personnel on 13 February to familiarize the members of the Embassy's Special Board of Election Inspectors (SBEI) and Special Ballot, Reception and Custody Group (SBRCG) with the mechanics and procedures in the conduct of overseas absentee voting. On 25 February and 2 March, members of the Embassy's SBRCG and SBEI took their respective oaths before Ambassador Willy C. Gaa.

In separate packages in February and March, the Embassy received from Comelec the ballot boxes, official ballots, and other election paraphernalia for the holding of overseas absentee voting. The Embassy's Acacia Hall will serve as its polling precinct.

The Embassy has informed the Filipino community within its consular jurisdiction of updates regarding overseas absentee voting, by e-mail and by word of mouth. It has also linked its website (www.philembassy-china.org), with the Comelec website (www.comelec.gov.ph), to enable the Filipino community to check their names on the list of Certified List of Overseas Absentee Voters and to view the Certified List of Official Candidates running for President, Vice President, Senators, and Party-List Representatives.

NOTICE OF ELECTIONS

The Embassy wishes to inform the Filipino community that for the purpose of the 10 May 2004 elections, overseas absentee voting will be held at the Acacia Hall of the Embassy from 11 April to 10 May 2004, Mondays to Sundays, following the schedule below:

11 April - 07 May 2004	: 9:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m.
08-09 May 2004	: 9:00 a.m. - 6:00 p.m.
10 May 2004	: 8:30 a.m. - 3:00 p.m.

Voting will have to be done personally.

PROFILE

JIM TITO B. SAN AGUSTIN
Third Secretary and Vice Consul
Philippine Embassy, Beijing

(This is the 17th of a series of features on Philippine diplomats currently serving in China.)



The Embassy welcomes Third Secretary and Vice Consul Jim Tito B. San Agustin to its corps of officers.

Jim, who hails from Roxas City, Capiz, arrived in Beijing on 25 March 2004

and is handling consular, science and technology issues at the Embassy.

He holds a Bachelor of Science degree in Agricultural Economics from UP Los Baños, and a Master's degree in Business Administration from the Asian Institute of Management. He passed the Foreign Service Officer's Examinations in 2001. Prior to Beijing, he served as Special Assistant at the Office of the Undersecretary for International Economic Relations of the Philippine Department of Foreign Affairs and the Philippine APEC National Secretariat, where he handled agriculture, environment, and sustainable development issues.

Jim, 31, is married to Yvette Yotingco, with whom he has three sons, Diego, Joaquin and Gabriel.

Consul General departs Beijing

The Embassy recently bid farewell to Minister and Consul General Ruth Morales Prado who finished her term in China on 25 February 2004 to take up new duties in the Department of Foreign Affairs.



Madame Erlinda Gaa (seated, 3rd from left), Ambassador Gaa (standing, 2nd from right) together with some members of the Filipino community, on 21 March 2004 at the Philippine Embassy.

LEGAL CORNER

Jerry Chua was born on 10 October 1950 in Binondo, Manila. His parents are Chua Ya Man and Liu Gan Da, both Chinese immigrants from Xiamen. Jerry completed his basic education at the No. 3 Chinese-Filipino Foundation located in Caloocan. He pursued a degree in accounting from the University of Marangal in Makati. Wishing to become a certified public accountant, Jerry obtained the services of a lawyer who successfully obtained a naturalization order from the trial court of Manila. Jerry took his oath of allegiance as a Filipino and thereafter successfully hurdled the CPA board examination administered by the Professional Regulatory Commission (PRC). After working as an auditor with a leading Filipino conglomerate, Jerry decided to return to Xiamen, the hometown of his parents, where he was told that many multinational companies were in need of CPAs. He was hired by a leading American computer company and paid a monthly salary of US\$8,500. Jerry decided to stay permanently in Xiamen and was able to reacquire his Chinese citizenship which granted him greater flexibility during his stay in China. In early 2004, Jerry suddenly found himself out of work when the American computer company he was working with decided to transfer its operations to India. Unemployed, Jerry returned to Manila, hoping to look for another job as a CPA. He was told, however, by his colleagues that only Filipinos are allowed to work as CPAs and since he has reacquired his Chinese citizenship, he is no longer permitted to practice his profession. Jerry knew the difficulty in filing a naturalization petition before the courts and remembered how expensive it was the first time he was naturalized as a Filipino. His friend informed him that the Philippine Congress has just passed a dual-citizenship law (R.A. No. 9225) making the reacquisition of Filipino citizenship easier.

Q: Can Jerry avail himself of the benefits of R.A. No. 9225 and reacquire his Filipino citizenship through this law?

A: No, Jerry cannot avail himself of the simpler procedure for reacquiring Filipino citizenship under R.A. No. 9225. This law, known as the "Citizenship Retention and Re-acquisition Act of 2003," benefits only natural-born Filipinos who later on obtained foreign citizenship but who now wishes to reacquire their Filipino citizenship without necessarily surrendering their foreign citizenship. Jerry is not a natural-born citizen but was only a naturalized Filipino. Therefore, he has to go through the normal naturalization proceedings in court if he wishes to acquire Filipino citizenship and practice his profession as a certified public accountant.

Philippine Tourism Day in Beijing

Philippine Tourism Undersecretary Oscar P. Palabyab led a delegation of officials and private sector representatives to Beijing on 22-25 February 2004 to promote the Philippines as a tourist destination for Chinese travelers.

In a promotional activity dubbed "Philippine Tourism Day" held at the Marco Polo Hotel in Beijing on 23 February and attended by some 200 Chinese travel and tour operators and Chinese media representatives, Undersecretary Palabyab said China is an important market for the Philippines. He noted that there is a lack of information on Philippine tourism possibilities in China. This year, however, the Philippine Department of Tourism will work hard to improve information and promotional efforts in China.

Measures include the opening of a Philippine tourism office in Beijing; introduction of ten (10) destination tour packages for the Chinese traveler; production and reprinting of Philippine promotional materials in Chinese; setting up of an international counter manned by Chinese-speaking receptionists at the international airport in Manila to assist Chinese tourists arriving in Manila; continuation of the program to invite tour operators and journalists on familiarization trips to the Philippines; and increase in flights between the Philippines and China.

The delegation also called on CNTA Vice Chairman Sun Gang and met with officials of CITS and CTS.

Ambassador Wang Chungui conferred Order of Sikatuna



President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo confers the Order of Sikatuna (Grand Cross), with the rank of Datu, on Chinese Ambassador to the Philippines Wang Chungui during his farewell call on the President on 24 February at the Malacanang Palace. Also in photo is Ambassador Wang's wife. Ambassador Wang is succeeded by Ambassador Wu Hongbo.

Travel agencies to promote tourism

Three Philippine-based travel agencies recently entered into agreements with ten more Chinese travel agencies to promote the Philippines as a tourist destination and organize individual and group tours from China to the Philippines.

They are as follows:

- Philippine Straits Travel Agency with China Ocean International Travel Service, China Travel Service, China Swan International Tours, Beijing China Travel Service Co., Ltd and the China Merchants International Travel Co., Ltd.
- Jeron Travel and Tours Corporation with the Beijing Youth Travel Service.
- Yoyo Holidays Travel Services Philippines, Inc with BTG International Travel and Tours, Co.,



Tourism Undersecretary Palabyab singing with members of the Fortissimo band at the Philippine Tourism Day on 23 February at the Marco Polo Hotel in Beijing.

China Women Travel Service, China Ocean Travel Service and Beijing China Travel Service Co., Ltd.

Under Philippine guidelines, before China National Tourism Administration-accredited Chinese tour operators could organize tour groups to the Philippines, they should first enter into written agreements with Philippine travel agencies that are accredited by the Philippine Department of Tourism and the Philippine Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA).

The agreements, together with other required documents, are then brought to the DOT for certification. Once certified, DOT will inform DFA, and the DFA will inform the Embassy.

At present, four Philippine travel agencies with their 33 counterpart Chinese travel agencies are accredited to the Embassy to handle inbound tours.



DOT Undersecretary Palabyab, Ambassador & Madame Gaa, posing with members of the Bayanihan, the Philippine National Folk Dance Company.

RP, China cooperate on drugs

Philippine and Chinese police authorities, through intelligence sharing and coordination, achieved major victories in the war against illegal drugs by making simultaneous arrests and seizures on 12 February.

This cooperation realizes the bilateral Memorandum of Understanding on Cooperation against the Illicit Traffic and Abuse of Narcotic Drugs, Psychotropic Substances and Precursor Chemicals signed by President Arroyo during her visit to China in 2001.

Elements of the Philippine Drug Enforcement Authority (PDEA) and the Philippine National Police (PNP) raided a shabu laboratory in a compound in Meycauayan Bulacan, seizing some 300 kilos of "shabu" or "ice" (crystal methamphetamine) worth 600 million pesos. They also arrested one suspect.

While the raid was being conducted in Bulacan, Chinese authorities were conducting

simultaneous raids in China which led to the arrest of four people suspected of smuggling these drugs into the Philippines and the seizure of RMB1.97 million worth of "ice."

Philippine Foreign Secretary Delia D. Albert, in her congratulations to the police authorities of both nations, said that the Philippines is committed to continue working with China "in fighting this blight that has victimized so many of our citizens."

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Contributions and comments are welcome.

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