

# The Houston Star

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## Filipino among U.N. workers kidnapped in Afghanistan

KABUL (Reuters)—Militants holding three foreign U.N. workers in Afghanistan have threatened to kill them unless all Taliban and al Qaeda prisoners are released from U.S. custody by noon (0730 GMT) on Wednesday, Nov. 3.

The leader of Jaish-e-Muslimeen (Army of Muslims) told Reuters the United Nations must also cease operations in Afghanistan, or the hostages would be killed "in such a way by which Muslims will be happy."

The group also released a video of the hostages which the Arabic TV channel Al Jazeera broadcast on Sunday showing them in apparent good health, although a group spokesman said later one of the hos-

tages had been treated by a doctor after falling ill.

The three—Filipino Angelito Nayan, Annetta Flanigan from Northern Ireland and Shqiye Hebibi from Kosovo—were snatched from their U.N. vehicle in rush hour traffic on Oct. 28.

The kidnappings, coming five days after a suicide bomber killed two people, including an American woman, on a busy commercial street, raised fears that Kabul could face a new round of violence aimed at Westerners.

U.N. and Afghan officials said the kidnappers, who drove a black jeep and brandished AK-47 assault rifles, forced a clearly marked U.N. four-

wheel-drive vehicle off the road in the Karte Parwan district, not far from a regional office of the Joint Electoral Management Body, which supervised the country's Oct. 9 presidential election. The assailants beat up the vehicle's Afghan driver, then kidnapped the three U.N. workers.

Mullah Sayed Mohammed Akbar Agha, leader of the kidnap group, told Reuters by telephone the group had four demands.

"The U.N. should leave Afghanistan and it should call Britain and America's meddling in Afghanistan illegal," he said.

"Those who have no military involvement in Afghanistan, such as Philippines, must call Britain and

America's meddling in Afghanistan illegal and must stop its contributions through the U.N. for America and Britain's activities."

He demanded that Kosovo and Britain withdraw their forces from Afghanistan and called for the release of all Muslim prisoners in Afghanistan and Cuba, "be they Taliban or Al Qaeda."



ANGELITO NAYAN

Kosovo, which is under U.N. administration, has no troops in Afghanistan.

The kidnappings have stoked fears among the 2,000-strong foreign community that militants in Afghanistan may be copying tactics used by insurgents in Iraq.

But a spokesman for the Taliban—the hardline Islamic regime ousted by a U.S.-led coalition in late 2001 and now the main group fighting the government and more than 28,000 U.S. and NATO troops in the country—distanced it from the kidnappings.

See AFGHANISTAN, page 2

## \$35-M park to rise in downtown Houston

HOUSTON—Mayor Bill White announced that he has completed negotiations with Crescent Real Estate Equities Ltd. Partnership to acquire 5.29 acres of land for a major new central park in downtown Houston.

The new central park would entail over \$35 million in private contributions, and amount to more than 13 acres. This acquisition will consolidate the City of Houston's ownership of the "Superblock" in front of the George R. Brown Convention Center and a block immediately to the west, all of which will be opened into an urban park to be made as soon as late 2007.

"Great cities preserve land for public plazas, parks and gathering places for the future," said Mayor White. "We now have an opportunity to create a place like that for us in Houston's central core. A new major park will be an enduring legacy for our efforts to improve Houston's quality of life."

Eighty percent or more of incremental funds required to complete acquisition and development of the park will be raised from private sources. Design and development will be accomplished through a private/public partnership.

Mayor White currently is working with a number of interested individuals and organizations to secure the private funding required.

## 80-20 bares endorsements for local elective posts

THE 80-20 Initiative, a national, nonpartisan political action committee dedicated to winning equal opportunity and justice for all Asian Pacific Americans through a swing bloc vote—ideally directing 80 percent of the APA community's votes and support to the candidates—has endorsed the following local candidates:

- Al Green for Federal Congressional District 9.
- Richard Morrison for Federal Congressional District 22.
- Martha Wong for State Representative District 134.
- Scott Hochberg for State Representative District 137.
- Hubert Vo for State Representative District 149.



THE Filipino American Council of South Texas (FACOST) team, headed by lawyer Ernest Frederick Mendoza (third from left, left row) prepares to row the boat to the starting line during Round 2 of the preliminary races of the Gulf Coast International Dragon Boat Regatta on Oct. 23. Texas Chiropractic College went on to win the Community Cup Award in the division. The other winners are the City of Nasasu Bay, which bagged the International, and Municipal Texas cups; CenterPoint Energy, Energy Cup; Dulles High School Dragon Team, Youth Cup; "Dragon Behind," sponsored by Tara Energy, Cancer Survivors & Friends; and Pink Ribbons Project/The Rose, Breast Cancer Survivor Award.

—Photo by Ave Basa

## More than 40 teams compete in Gulf Coast Dragon Boat Regatta

HOUSTON TO BID FOR 2005 REGIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP

By AVE BASA  
Editor-in-Chief

CLEAR LAKE, Texas—More than 40 teams from Houston, across the United States and around the world competed in the Inaugural Gulf Coast International Dragon Boat Regatta on the beautiful waters of Pasadena Lake on Oct. 23 and 24.

The City of Nassau Bay dominated the races, winning the International, Texas and Municipal cups. The other winners are the Texas Chiropractic College, which bagged the Community Cup; CenterPoint Energy, Energy Cup; Dulles High School Dragon Team, Youth Cup; "Dragon Behind," sponsored by Tara Energy, Cancer Survivors & Friends; and Pink Ribbons Project/The Rose, Breast Cancer Survivor Award.

The regatta also featured food, music, and entertainment from various Asian cultures. The event was an energizing team building activity for people of all skill levels.

This year's event was organized by the Texas Dragon Boat Association (TDBA), headed by Eugene Lee (chairman) and Caroline Quan Long (president and executive director), in collaboration with the Houston Economic Partnership; Bay Area Houston Convention & Visitors Bureau; Greater Houston Convention & Visitors Bureau; Harris County-Houston Sports Authority; Youth Leadership Council; and Sylvia R. Garcia, Harris County Commissioner Precinct Two.

Meanwhile, the TDBA announced that it

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## BP company to locate in Houston

HOUSTON—Mayor Bill White on Nov. 1 hailed the news that BP's new olefins and derivatives subsidiary, which will be set up as a stand-alone unit in 2005, has selected the Houston area to be the base for its North American Olefins and Polymers Operating Unit.

"This is very significant. These are much-welcomed jobs and yet another clear sign that Houston is maintaining its momentum as the capital of the nation's energy sector," said Mayor White. "We're playing to one of our great strengths, and BP has reaffirmed that for us. We're happy to welcome them here."

BP had previously indicated its plans to establish the new company as an independent U.S.-listed concern. As such, it would rank in the Fortune 200.

The new firm, whose name has yet to be decided, announced Oct. 29 that its headquarters staff would be based in downtown Chicago. The operating unit to be located in the Houston area will include offices for approximately 150 commercial and office support employees.

"Houston offers attractive attributes, including a strong

See BP SUBSIDIARY, page 3

## 4 more Fil-Am soldiers die in Iraq, Afghanistan

FOUR more Filipino-American soldiers have died in Iraq and Afghanistan from August to October 2004, bringing to over a dozen the number of U.S. soldiers of Filipino descent who perished in the ongoing U.S.-led war against terrorism.

One of the victims' fathers, mourning the loss of his son, called for a "leadership change" in America, saying "the President rushed our troops into battle."

As of the week ending Oct. 28, over 1,100 American soldiers have lost their lives since the war against Iraq be-



PINTOR

VILLANUEVA

gan in March 2003, and more than 7,700 wounded in action, according to the Pentagon.

The Fil-Am soldiers killed were Army Capt. Dennis L. Pintor, 30, of Lima, Ohio; Spc.

See WAR CASUALTIES, p. 3



UH-D PRESIDENT Dr. Max Castillo makes his report to the community. —Craig Hartley

## UH-Downtown marks 30<sup>th</sup> year

HOUSTON—THE University of Houston-Downtown (UH-D) marked its 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary on Oct. 28, 2004.

Dr. Castillo addressed business and community leaders at UH-Downtown's annual President's Report to the Community. The university is celebrating thirty years of excellence and opportunity as Houston's Downtown University.

Dr. Castillo reviewed UH-D's growth since 1974 when the university had only one academic major. Today UH-D has 42 undergraduate and graduate degree programs. While primarily concentrating on undergraduate education, graduate programs fill community needs in urban teacher education, criminal justice and profession-

al writing and technical communications and security management.

Completion of the Commerce Street Building across Buffalo Bayou from UH-D headquarters at One Main is the crowning achievement for the anniversary year. The structure adds 94,000 square feet of classrooms, state-of-the-art computer lab space and much-needed office space for the College of Public Service. The latest addition to UH-D's family of colleges, the newest college includes the urban teacher education and criminal justice departments. The three additional academic colleges include sciences and technology, humanities and social sciences and business.

Steeped in history, UH-D's One Main

Building is also celebrating 75 years at the confluence of the Buffalo and White Oak Bayous. Originally called the Merchants and Manufacturers Building, it was an architectural marvel at the time, using water, rail and road to transport goods from the Houston Ship Channel to points in Houston and beyond. Also, UH-D's campus now includes the redeveloped Willow Street Pump Station, across White Oak Bayou from the main building. Built in 1902, it was the city's earliest response to environmental infrastructure and was added to the National Register of Historic Places in Washington, D.C.

See UH-DOWNTOWN, page 5

## PASA PAGE



APAHA team members, led by executive director Jerome Veilman and president Munir Ibrahim (second and third from left, respectively), limber up before their schedule race. —Photo by Ave Basa

## REGATTA

From page 1

is hosting the 2004 annual meeting of the United States Dragon Boat Federation this month, and is bidding to host the 2005 American Dragon Boat Association International Festival/Central Region Championships.

The TDBA plans to acquire a fleet of six boats and build two boathouses to begin a year-round corporate and recreational program, youth boating education program, and breast cancer survivor program.

Corporate, community, municipal, police, and fire department teams competed on Sat-

urday, Oct. 23. Youth teams and breast cancer survivor teams competed on Oct. 24.

Combining tradition with modern day teamwork, enthusiasm, and strategy, dragon boat racing is the world's fastest growing water sport.

Dragon boats are elaborately decorated 40-foot boats in which teams of 20 paddlers from all over the world furiously race towards glory in Pasadena Lake.

In addition to racing, food vendors were on hand to sell delectable Asian food. Also, entertainment groups such as martial arts, Polynesian dancing, and live bands performed.

Dragon boat racing began in China around 277 B.C. Qu

(pronounced *chew*) Yuan, a famous scholar during the Ch'u dynasty, suddenly found himself disfavored by the king. Shamed and devastated, he threw himself into the Mi Lo River. The Ch'u people grieved upon hearing of his death and spent many days rowing their colorful fishing boats in the river while loudly beating drums to scare fish away. Unable to find him, they wrapped glutinous rice dumplings in bamboo leaves and tossed them into the water to distract the fish. Many of these boats were colorfully decorated with dragon heads to keep spirits away.

Thus began the custom of dragon boat racing.

## HUTCHISON

From page 4

ues, they should look at our men and women in uniform.

And speaking of values, it is good to know that the courage that burned in the soldiers of the Alamo still shines brightly. Sgt. Pamela Osbourne used to call her husband Rohan almost every day from her supply depot in Baghdad. Her last conversation with her husband is poignant. "Hold your head up,

baby," she said. "I'm coming home. Even if I come home in a box, you should know that I did it for you. Take care of the kids. Stay strong. And remember that I love you."

Unfortunately, she and a fellow soldier were killed the next day in a mortar attack. Sgt. Osbourne joined the ranks of those veterans who have died so we may remain free. An immigrant who came to our country at age 14, she had two goals: to become a citizen and to serve in the Army.

In fulfilling her dream, she made that ultimate sacrifice.

Her devotion to her adopted country reflects the fierce loyalty which makes America the greatest nation on earth. This Veterans Day, Americans pay tribute to those extraordinary men and women who in every war have unfailingly answered the call to duty. Their memories will remain part of the fabric of our nation forever. To our veterans and their families: Thank you and God bless you.

## SMOKE-FREE HOUSTON

From page 4

Houstonians and citizens of other cities are turning to Houston's political, health and business leaders to see how we will work to make our city healthier. A surefire way to improve Houston's image is to take the lead in the fight against the dangers of second-hand smoke.

Currently, Houston is behind the times on this issue, with one of the weakest smoking ordinances in the state,

trailing Dallas, San Antonio, Austin and El Paso. El Paso workplaces, including restaurants and bars, are smoke-free. Dallas has smoke-free restaurants. And nationally, more and more major cities are becoming smoke-free. New York City and Los Angeles have strong workplace smoking laws that include smoking bans in both restaurants and bars.

Like many Houstonians, I support a full ban on smoking in all workplaces, including restaurants and bars. These

past months, my office has been flooded with calls, e-mails and letters from citizens who want the same. If New York City, Los Angeles and El Paso can do it, so can we.

The mayor is not yet ready for a full ban but will accept a partial one. However, if his partial ban passes the City Council, it will be a step in the right direction. It is important to remember that council members can amend this ordinance. Incremental progress is better than inaction.

## POWELL

From page 4

But it was Powell's subsequent remarks that left Taiwan in a state of shock. "We want to see both sides not take unilateral action that would prejudice an eventual outcome, a reunification that all parties are seeking," Powell told CNN.

The problem here is twofold. While it might have been true at the time the Three Communiques were negotiated that both governments sought unification, the people of Taiwan were never asked if unification was something they wanted. And in fact they overwhelmingly don't want it. The most recent poll by Taiwan's Mainland Affairs Council—the government ministry that deals with China policy—indicates that fewer than 2 percent of Taiwanese want unification now and only about 11 percent want it at all. Forty percent of all Taiwanese prefer the status quo now/decision later option, while 18 percent want the status quo to last forever.

So, apropos of Powell, one simple fact is that not all parties are seeking unification. Forty-three percent of Taiwanese (pro-independence plus pro-status quo forever) don't want it at any price and another 40 percent don't even want to consider it until China has changed into a democracy—the essence of the status quo now/decision later po-

sition.

But there is another problem on top of this, which is that it is a long-held US position that it does not take sides on any particular outcome in negotiations between Taiwan and China, nor does it act as a mediator; it only insists that the issues between them be solved peacefully. And yet Powell's remarks suggest that the United States does in fact favor one particular outcome—reunification—and, of course, that just happens to be the outcome least favored by most Taiwanese.

Opinion in Taiwan on Oct. 26 after Powell's remarks was running red-hot. Foreign Minister Mark Chen told legislators, "The U.S. has told us not to give them surprises, but this time it is the U.S. giving us a surprise. This is unfair. Taiwan and the U.S. share the same interests and we should build mutual trust. But Powell's talk has breached mutual trust."

Not only that, but it has damaged U.S. interests. Washington, concerned that Taiwan is falling behind as China's military budget soars, has been trying to persuade Taiwan to purchase an \$18-billion arms package for almost three years. A bill for the budget is currently in the legislature, where it has been held up by the opposition, which claims that the weapons are outrageously expensive and not what Taiwan needs.

Oct. 26 was the last chance to send the bill to committee. No sooner had Taipei received the news of Powell's interview than the opposition simply refused to deal with the bill, which means it is suspended at least until January and, unless the pro-government parties win the majority in the legislature they now lack, it may simply be dead.

The opposition is widely portrayed by the pro-government side as not wanting the weapons because it simply does China's bidding, and naturally China is against the package. But Powell's remarks might have turned the opinion of a dangerously large number of pro-government supporters against the bill.

Since Oct. 26, in fact almost since the CNN broadcast, the U.S. has been trying to put things right. The State Department said the same day that Powell had not meant "reunification"—that was a slip of the tongue. What he had meant was "resolution."

The Taiwan Foreign Ministry summoned U.S. representative to Taipei Douglas Paal, a man before whom it usually quails, to "clarify the U.S. position." Paal said the U.S. position hadn't changed but he could not say why Powell had used the word "reunification". A clearly still very angry Foreign Minister Mark Chen later said that Powell's remarks had damaged Taiwan's democracy and hurt its status.

## TELLTALE SIGNS

From page 4

misconduct and conduct prejudicial to the interests of the service" and issued an order suspending Gen. Garcia for six months without pay.

Philippine senators are conducting an investigation of the AFP probably to find out tips on how to safely smuggle money into the U.S. without getting caught by U.S. Customs.

So far, they have already learned from Clarita Garcia that money obtained from "Philippine companies that are awarded military contracts to build roads, bridges and military housing" should be properly referred to as "gratitude money."

Among the Philippine senators probing Gen. Garcia is Sen. Panfilo M. Lacson, who previously served as Chief of the Philippine National Police (PNP) under former president

Joseph Estrada.

Readers may recall that I had obtained a \$3-million judgment against Gen. Lacson in January of 2003 from a civil case I had filed against him in Alameda County. I then conducted discovery on what assets Lacson has in the US.

Through the Philippine National Bureau of Investigation, I obtained documents from the FBI showing that Lacson had remitted over \$500,000 in cash to his wife, Alice dePerio Lacson, in the U.S. in a two-month period in 1999 when he was PNP chief. I also obtained photocopies of bank checks issued by Lacson's wife totaling over \$500,000 including two that were used for the purchase of Toyota Sequoia SUVs.

Sen. Lacson explained that his wife purchased the two SUVs for a friend who did not have a California driver's license and who could not purchase the SUVs for himself.

Surprisingly or not surprisingly, the Lacson explanation was accepted by his fellow senators, who may want to use the excuse for themselves in the future. Gen. Garcia should have taken lessons from a fellow general.

Corruption is so deeply embedded in the civil and military institutions of the Philippines that it is virtually impossible for the corrupt to police the corrupt.

With the money brought to the U.S. by the Garcias, the Gawad Kalinga project could have built 1,400 homes for the wretched poor in the Philippines.

Filipinos in the U.S. should find out about other Garcias who have remitted for themselves or their "friends." Send the information to me and I will forward them to Philippine authorities.

Send comments to Rodel50@aol.com.

## HOSTAGE CRISIS

From page 4

ing a distraught-looking Koda. Wearing a white T-shirt, long disheveled hair hanging around his limp shoulders, he nervously knelt in front of three masked men. The dark-clad trio stood motionless behind a black flag bearing the menacing name "al-Qaeda Organization of the Holy War in Iraq". The banner is similar to those that have appeared in earlier hostage-beheading videos.

Speaking in a mixture of English and Japanese, the youth begged, "Mr Koizumi, they are demanding withdrawal of Japan's Self-Defense Forces. They are saying they will cut off my head otherwise. I am so sorry. I want to return to Japan." Parts of the distressing video were aired on Japanese TV.

One of the masked militants then read a statement, demanding the Japanese government withdraw its troops from Iraq within 48 hours or Koda would meet the same fate as "his infidel predecessors [Nick] Berg and [Kenneth] Bigley." Both Berg, an American, and Bigley, a Briton, were beheaded by the group.

Dr. Maha Azzam, a leading authority and researcher on al-Qaeda, told Asia Times Online, "From the evidence we

have, it is almost certain that this al-Qaeda-related group has him and this is a cause for very deep concern. Regrettably, the past actions of this particular group clearly indicate that the chances of a hostage being released alive are not very high."

Dr. Mohamed Ali Hussein, a Middle East analyst, said Koda's chances of being released alive are very slim. He commented, "There are many of these kidnap-groups and it is almost impossible to contact them. It is extremely doubtful that Japan will be able to establish a line of communication." He added, "The situation looks extremely grim. I am gravely concerned for the safety of this young Japanese man and Margaret Hassan [the abducted Irish aid worker, married to an Iraqi and holding dual citizenship]."

The Japanese government also appears to have come to the same dark conclusion. A grim-faced Foreign Ministry spokesman, Hatsuhsa Takashima, frankly acknowledged the dire situation. He said, "It's an extremely dangerous group and most cases [linked to it] end tragically." Since the discovery of a corpse in Tikrit, the ministry has been tight-lipped.

While strongly ruling out any concessions to the terrorists, Koizumi has also emphasized that he is doing his ut-

most to secure the release of the young hostage. He commented, "I hope they don't do anything brutal or cruel to him. At the same time, we're set to take every possible measure to save him without putting his life at risk."

The main opposition Democratic Party of Japan, which opposes the presence of Japanese troops in Iraq, has backed Koizumi's stance. The Japanese media is also largely supporting Koizumi, with the conservative press adopting a harder line than the prime minister.

Japan's largest circulation daily, Yomiuri Shimbun, said in an Oct. 28 editorial, "If the nation conveys to terrorists its determination not to give in to their threats, they will realize it is useless to target Japanese. A stern and uncompromising attitude is important in preventing terrorism."

As the deadline slipped away, and with the discovery of another corpse, Japan is learning that standing firm against terrorism is not a painless option, and playing a more active global role comes at a price. How the country copes with these growing pains will probably help determine its future status on the world stage.

J. Sean Curtin is a GLOCOM fellow at the Tokyo-based Japanese Institute of Global Communications.

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