

GIVE US OUR DUE



Over 1,000 helpers staged a protest march on March 9 to press their demands for a considerable wage increase, the scrapping of the levy imposed on employers of foreign helpers, and a just, transparent and scientific formula for the minimum wage review.

The march started in Causeway Bay and snaked all the way to the Government Central Office in Central. The marchers were demanding a return to pre-crisis salaries after the government announced a budget surplus of \$115.6 billion

Migrants press pay demand as economy sees boom times

Foreign workers feel left out after Tsang announces \$115.6b budget surplus

Jose Marcelo in Hong Kong

Finance Secretary John Tsang's (right) budget speech has left domestic helpers feeling betrayed and abandoned while the rest of the territory reaps the benefits of Hong Kong's flourishing economy.

Migrant groups lament that helpers, who endured sizable wage cuts when the SAR was hit by twin crises in past years, were left out in the cold when Tsang announced a \$100 billion package in tax breaks and doleouts last February 27.

"We were the target of pay cuts during the economic slump yet we are now forgotten in times of prosperity," said Eni Lestari, spokesperson of the Asian Migrants Coordinating Body.

Lestari recalled that Hong Kong government officials had implored foreign helpers "to share in the burden of the economic crisis" when they imposed a \$400 wage cut in 2003.

Yet she added that "foreign household workers are completely ignored during better times."

Labor officials, however, see Tsang's financial package as an encouraging sign for workers hoping for a significant pay rise once the annual review of foreign helpers' salaries is completed in May.

All the economic indicators which the Labour Department uses to determine adjustments of the minimum wage for helpers are up, they said.

The current minimum allowable wage for helpers stands at \$3,470 after what migrant groups had criticized

BY THE NUMBERS

Total amount, in Hong Kong dollars, of the levy collected from employers so far

4B



as "piecemeal" increases over the past three years.

They are seeking a return to the 2003 benchmark of \$3,670.

Workers also rue the continued charging of a

\$9,600 annual levy on employers of foreign helpers at a time when the government's surplus have reached a staggering \$115.6 billion.

Since the levy was imposed in 2003, the levy fund is already nearing the \$4 billion mark which the government plans to use for the retraining of local workers.

"It's high time na i-scrap na ang levy," said Dolores Balladares-Pelaez, chairperson of United Filipinos Hong Kong.

"At sana ibalik sa mga foreign helpers 'yung levy, like in the form of better health services."

There are also concerns that a plan to put up more government-run day-care centres, which Tsang backed with a \$45 million outlay, will dent demand for foreign helpers.

Jordan refugee treated in HK

Jose Marcelo in Hong Kong

A Filipina traumatized by her stint as a domestic helper in Jordan has been repatriated after undergoing treatment in a Hong Kong mental institution.

The 30-year-old from Quezon province, on transit in Hong Kong on her way back to the Philippines after escaping from her employers in Jordan, was "acting strangely" when airport officials came to her aid on February 15. "She was having hallucinations and we think it was because of her sad experience in Jordan," said vice-consul Val Roque. "According to authorities, she was seeing things daw, kaya nabigla rin ang mga officials sa airport."

The Filipina, whose name is

being withheld upon the request of relatives, underwent treatment for almost three weeks at the Kwai Chung psychiatric centre and was discharged on March 5.

"Her doctor informed us that she was ready to go home and that her condition has stabilized," said Roque. "We negotiated with Cathay Pacific to give her a discounted ticket because her return ticket had expired."

She was accompanied on her trip home by a relative who works as a domestic helper in the territory.

The Filipina had worked for two years as a domestic helper in Jordan. Philippine officials had banned the deployment of workers in Jordan owing to the rising cases of abuses suffered by domestic helpers in the country.

easymaid.net
online job posting



Register with us to get online with Hong Kong employers and improve your chances of getting hired

Visit us at Filipino Globe Center, Shop 75 B&C, ground floor, City Garden Shopping Arcade, 233 Electric Road, North Point. Call 2982 0221

filipino globe center, city garden, north point