

# Fe Ucab wins compensation

## Accident victim gets maximum payout from government as recovery continues

**Jose Marcelo** in Hong Kong

Fe Ucab and her family have received a substantial one-time compensation grant from the Hong Kong government, a major boost in the domestic helper's recovery from a near-fatal road accident last year.

The Employees Compensation Division of the Labour Department awarded Ucab the maximum compensation allowed by Hong Kong's laws on the grounds that the helper's injuries have left her with a permanent incapacity.

Vice-consul Val Roque declined to

reveal the exact amount of the compensation upon the request of Ucab's common-law husband Rowell.

"It's welcome news," said Roque. "Unfortunately her condition may not enable her to work again, but I'm sure the amount will be a lot of help to her and her family."

Although Ucab's employers are given by Hong Kong's labour laws 21 days to contest the ruling, consulate officials do not expect an appeal to be lodged.

There has been also pleasant news on the recovery of the 30-year-old helper, who was left in a coma af-

ter she was hit by a car while crossing Wylie Road near her employers' house in Ho Man Tin, Kowloon last September.

Since undergoing brain surgery at Queen Mary Hospital, Ucab, a former security guard back home, has regained most of her faculties and has started to recognize not only Rowell but other regular visitors as well.

"She'd doing well, much better than how she was last year. Ngayon, nakakapagsalita na siya, and she can recognize her children when shown their pictures. She can even tell their names," said Roque.

The six-figure compensation has also given her family the option to bring Ucab home where she can be taken care of by relatives.

Since the accident Rowell has been the only family member that has been by Ucab's side.

The couple's three children, aged six, four and one, have been left under the care of relatives back home.

However, if she stays in Hong Kong, her medical expenses will continue to be covered by the insurance policy her employer had taken out for her as mandated by Hong Kong's labor laws.

# Teacher hopefuls get back to basics

**Jose Marcelo** in Hong Kong

They started arriving in droves at the Bayanihan Centre well before noon, armed with nothing more than a pen, some notes and a desire to take care of unfinished business.

At half past 12, their everyday chores as domestic helpers farthest from their minds, they began digging into sheet after sheet of questionnaires, bent on pursuing a dream shelved when economic realities forced them to work in a foreign land.

"They are all education graduates back home," explained vice consul Alnee Arugay, head of the consulate's Cultural Affairs section.

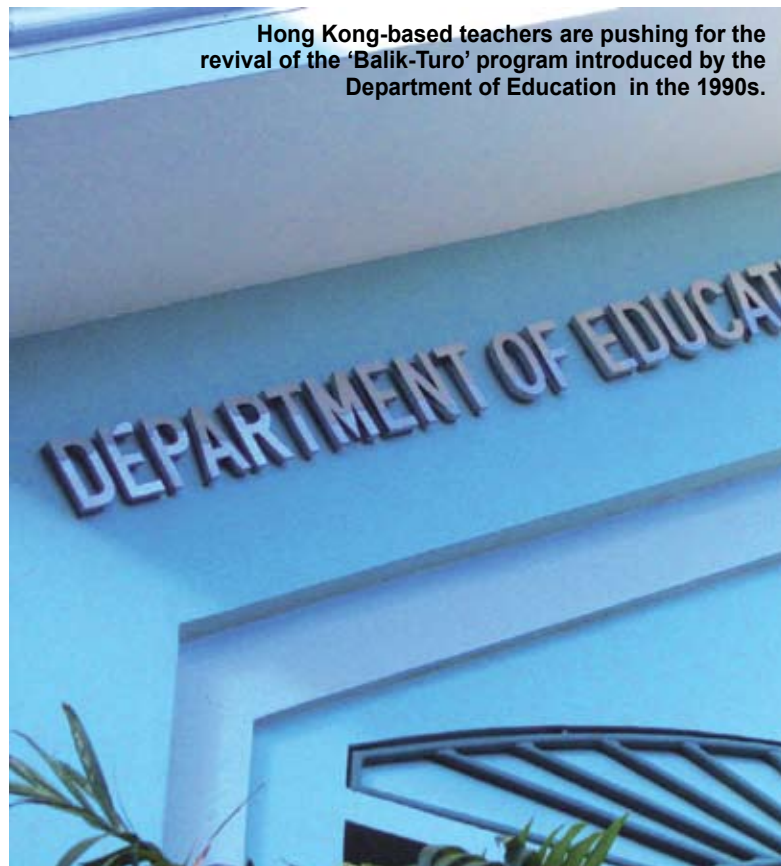
"All of them either hindi pa nakakapasa or hindi pa nakaka-take ng licensure exams."

Thanks to the initiative of the Hong Kong chapter of the National Association of Professional Teachers, these workers need not go back to the Philippines to pass the final hurdle that would make them licensed teachers.

On April 6, officials from the Professional Regulation Commission will administer the Licensure Examination for Teachers at the Bayanihan Centre – the third time, and the first since the late nineties, that the test will be offered to SAR-based workers.

No less than 400 workers have signed up for the test, and over 300 of them, including 28 walk-in participants, took part in a mock

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exam on March 9 where for an entire afternoon they were offered advice, tips and a quick refresher course.

"Marami kasi sa kanila matagal nang nag-graduate," said Nopti vice-president Susie Calaycay. "So tinulungan lang namin silang mag-prepare."

"At kahit hindi pa totohanan na-check rin namin 'yung mga test

papers nila, para malaman kung saan sila nagkamali at kung ano ang tamang mga sagot."

Most of the examinees are hoping that a teaching license can open new doors for them, especially now that Filipino teachers are in great demand in the United States and other foreign destinations.

Others hope the teaching

profession can be a fallback once they decide to return home, Calaycay said.

"Mababa pa kasi ang mga suweldo ng mga guro noon kaya kami nangibang bansa," said Calaycay, 57, a former elementary school teacher in Ilocos Norte who has worked as a domestic helper in Hong Kong since 1987.

"But I think nag-improve na rin ngayon."

Calaycay said Nopti is also pushing for the revival of the "Balik-Turo" program carried out by the Department of Education in the late nineties.

Over 200 Hong Kong-based workers were able to land teaching opportunities back home under the education department's reintegration program, Calaycay said.

But for some reason the project was shelved at the end of the late senator Raul Roco's term as education secretary.

"Maganda 'yon dahil iyong mga domestic helpers na nagbabalak nang umuwi, mayroon na kaagad teaching items na naghahintay sa kanila, lalo na iyong mga taga-probinsiya."

"So sana gawin uli 'yon,'" Calaycay said.

Still some helpers plan to take the test seeking nothing more than personal fulfillment.

"Siyempre iba pa rin iyong feeling na pumasa ka sa board," said Nopti official Minerva Corpuz.

"At least ngayon kahit nandito ka sa Hong Kong puwede mo nang makamit iyon."

## Hotel probed over 'Filipino nationality surcharge'

A Hong Kong hotel and travel agency have come under fire from migrant groups for charging Filipino guests an extra \$80 a night for a room.

The surcharge for Filipinos on bookings at the Guangdong Hotel in Tsim Tsa Tsui was flagged by Edmond Travel agency in its website.

No explanations were given for the surcharge.

"This is a discriminatory business practice because I see no reason why they had to charge Filipino guests extra," said Dolores Balladares-Pelaez of the United Filipinos Hong Kong.

Consulate officials have also

started looking into the practice before taking action.

Sought for comment, a member of the Edmond Travel sales staff said it was Guangdong Hotel's policy to impose an extra charge on Filipino guests while a hotel employee pinned the blame on the travel agency.

Ken Tsang, the hotel's duty manager, told the *South China Morning Post* the hotel charges the same rates regardless of nationalities.

"I am not sure why the agents mark up \$80 more for the Filipinos," he said.

A hotel staffer added the additional charge for Filipinos

only applied to bookings through certain travel agencies, but not to individuals walking in or booking over the phone.

However, when a reporter posing as a guest made inquiries for a booking, a staffer admitted that the discrepancy was because of a "nationality difference" and had been set in an internal arrangement between hotel and agency.

The government's Race Relations unit has started a probe into the issue and urged hotel guests who may have been unfairly charged to come forward.

The Travel Industry Council has also launched an inquiry.

ANGBANSA

## Pangasinan

Dagupan will put up telephone hotline 3-2-4 at its emergency action center where residents can seek assistance during emergencies.

Dagupan City administrator Alvin Fernandez said the hotline can be accessed by facilities of any telecommunications company operating in the city.

He said the hotline will be manned by persons with disabilities, who are now being trained by a call center company to make them more effective in their work.

Similar to 9-1-1 in the United States, he said hotline 3-2-4 will be manned on a 24-hour basis to accommodate more calls for assistance, particularly during emergencies.

The emergency action center will be located at the Dagupan City Museum.

## Baguio

Baguio's chief of barangay affairs, Lawrence Genove, said village tourism councils will soon be working to further help in developing tourism as the city's premier industry.

He said the young people in Salud Mitra barangay in the famous Aginaldo Park have been helping establish a mini-tree park to complement the greeneries in the area.

Aginaldo Park is one of the fully reforested areas in the city, thanks to youth leaders and barangay officials.



Genove said once the barangays have their respective tourism councils, "our clean and green program will have further support at the village level, while our waste management program would have a mass base for its success".

"During Holy Week when hundreds of visitors come up, the barangays will extend help to our city officials and the police in welcoming them," he said.

## Isabela

Corazon Cortel-Balweg, widow of the late rebel priest Conrado Balweg, died of cardiac arrest at a military hospital, a military source said.

Balweg, 49, was on her way to the headquarters of the 5th Infantry Division to follow up on livelihood projects for her group when she suffered chest pains and later collapsed, according to camp commander, Maj. Gen. Melchor Dilodilo.

She died on arrival at the 5th ID station hospital.

Dilodillo said Balweg "was instrumental in the integration of former members of Cordillera People's Liberation Army into the regular force of the Armed Forces."

Balweg was the liaison officer of former CPLA rebels who returned to the fold of the law and became army soldiers.



Guangdong Hotel ... under probe.