

LEGAL RIGHTS



By Atty. Johnson Lazaro

Amnesty in 2008?

LET'S resolve to forget about last year's immigration disappointments. When Congress failed to pass a comprehensive immigration reform bill, the hopes of millions came crashing down. Suffice it to say that the government failed in solving one of our country's most troubling issues - immigration. However 2008 ushers a fresh perspective and lessons learned from the past can help in creating a solution.

If you can recall, last year, despite that relentless effort of thousands of immigrant groups and activists; we witnessed the slow and agonizing death of a comprehensive immigration reform bill on the floor of Congress. Despite criticism that the bill did not go far enough, it would've given some respite to the 12 million undocumented residents in this country.

But the shifting political winds may bring some needed solution this year. Immigration experts including law professors and veteran immigration lawyers agree that

the immigration bill may be revived after this year's elections. In an interview with AILA (American Immigration Lawyer's Association) immigration judge and former high ranking government official Bruce J. Einhorn stated, "A comprehensive bill that emphasizes the legalization of undocumented, non-criminal aliens already present in the US and an increase in the number of visas available for both nonimmigrant workers and applicants for permanent residence, would be the best means of reforming our system for the years to come."

We called the offices of Congressmen Tom Lantos of San Mateo and Pete Stark of Fremont for comments about the immigration bill; however the aides would only say that they are optimistic that something would be finalized this year. For those who have been waiting for years, this is certainly welcomed news.

If democrats win this election, the bill may be kinder and gentler than past proposals. If one can recall, the Republican immigration bill called for more enforcement and raids and greater militarization of the border and erosion of some basic due-process rights. Critics pointed out that the bill abandoned long-standing US

policy favoring the reunification of families and failed to protect workers' most basic rights. This year the issues may be similar: Should US immigration policy turn into a labor supply system for corporations, or should it support families and communities? But the bottom line is something must be done.

There is guarded optimism in the air as we enter 2008. The millions of families, workers, students, and parents who have been waiting for years for the government to legalize their status are again hopeful. It's not too early to again prepare for what can be the next immigration amnesty. Let's keep our fingers crossed.

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(Advertising Supplement)

BIR Turns to PLDT, Meralco to Hunt Down Tax Evaders

MANILA — The Bureau of Internal Revenue said it would ask the help of Manila Electric Co. (Meralco) and Philippine Long Distance Co. (PLDT) in catching tax evaders among their customers.

The BIR said in a statement that the move was in line with its anti-tax evasion program, which was being intensified to shore up tax collection.

Meralco and PLDT are

expected to be a big help to the BIR's anti-tax evasion program because of their extensive client database.

The BIR has been using information provided by third parties, such as other government agencies, to detect tax delinquency.

"The BIR reiterates its warning to recalcitrant taxpayers that it could now easily detect discrepancies on

taxes paid," the BIR said.

Internal Revenue Commissioner Lilian Hefti said the BIR had also adopted the program called "Tax Reconciliation System-Letter Notices" (TRS-LNs), which is a computerized matching system to detect tax deficiencies.

Under the system, the BIR compares the income declared by a corporate tax-

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'Banig' Gets to be More Than a Mat to Sleep On

BASEY, SAMAR — The traditional art of mat weaving continues to flourish in this old town whose name has become synonymous with woven sleeping mat, or "banig."

And the practice of this ancient art, which has been handed down from one generation to the next, recently took a new turn as demand for the product increases.

This is because use of the banig has expanded. Where once the age-old mat was used solely for sleeping, it now adorns modern walls or ceiling panels. It has been turned into bags, throw pillows, framed decors, as well as place mats and furniture matting.

"Our biggest break was when the banig was used as upholstery material for furniture," says Lilio Adona, the 57-year-old owner of Basey Handicraft and a recipient of this year's Ramon Magsaysay Outstanding Workers Award.

Lilio is into furniture and handicraft business. His citation reads in part: "His product became famous when he introduced the use of the banig, a locally made handcrafted mat, as alternative material for furniture."

But Lilio reveals that they have looked at other uses of the woven mat as early as 20 years ago. In fact, he said, they started using banig in making welcome arches, banners and floats late in the Marcos regime.

Late in the 1990s, they were commissioned by the tourism department to provide embroidered banig as wall covering of the Philippine Pavilion in Lisbon in 1997, and in Canada in 1998.

Solid, jointless reed

The people in Basey had been weaving mats long before the Spaniards came, it was said. The tradition went on with almost all, if not all, of the womenfolk here learning the art of weaving at an early age. The weavers are locally known as "paraglara."

The raw material used in mat weaving in Basey comes from a reed plant locally known

as *tikog* (*Fimbristylis utilis*), which belongs to the family *Cyperaceae* and has solid, jointless and usually triangular stems.

Lilio reveals that they have 34 barangay coordinators who are ready to help them procure woven mats in the town's more than 50 villages whenever there is a big order for the *tikog* mat from exporters and other buyers.

A tradition lives on

Mat weaving is an old cottage industry of Basey, with many of its villages engaged in the craft. In Barangay Bacubac, some three kilometers northwest of the town proper, old women spend the day weaving *banig* inside their *nipa* huts, while their husbands prepare the *tikog* materials they will use.

Elsewhere in Basey, many women are busy weaving mats that they would later sell in town to augment the income of their spouses. Others sell their mats to entrepreneurs who would bring the product to be sold in Tacloban City, which is about 30 kilometers away.

The usual designs of the *banig* of Basey are *yano* (plain), *sinamay* (checkered) and *bordado* or *pinahunan* (embroidered). The sizes also vary.

Love of art in his veins

The Adona couple reveal that they started their *banig* business sometime in the 1980s, about a decade after they got married.

Running the business, it seems, was not a problem for the couple. The couple admits that their maternal parents, grandparents up to their great great grandparents all know how to weave *banig*. And even when they were young they already knew, among others, where to procure the materials to be used and how long it would take to weave a mat of a particular size.

Eva, a daughter of a former congressman of Samar (during the time when Samar Island was still one province), was able to make good use of her being a Commerce graduate

of the Far Eastern University. She handled the finance and marketing aspects of their business.

Lilio had taken up architecture in one of the colleges in Cebu City but failed to finish the course. The love of art, however, is in his veins and he is the one making the different designs for the embroidered mats as well as for the furniture and other functional items that use *banig*.

The couple is blessed with a son and two daughters. They are residing in their two-story house in the poblacion or town plaza of Basey.

Entering the place, one can already see the different furniture and *banig* items that adorn the receiving room. In a room in another part of the ground floor, one could see a group of women busy weaving *tikog* mats or sewing *banig* bags.

The couple's showroom is located on the second floor, where one can see several woven items—sleeping mats, floor mats, place mats, prayer mats, throw pillows, embossed wall decors, slippers and bags of different sizes and colors.

There are also other *banig*-based products like lampshades, wine holders, penholders, *banig*-covered chests and collapsible trays.

Eva reveals that some of these items end up in the United States, Italy, Japan and other countries, where their Manila buyer export the products. She says they have to diversify the use of *banig* "because we know there is a market for other uses (of the mat)."

Lilio reveals that, in his designs, he follows the norm that "form follows function."

What started as a small-time business with a meager capital that they registered with the then National Cottage Industry Administration (Nacida), has now grown into a million-peso full grown endeavor that is being assisted by the Department of Trade and Industry and other related agencies. (Inquirer.net)