

ERLINDA BASILIO

New envoy to China named amid sea row

MANILA- Philippine President Benigno Aquino named a senior diplomat as ambassador to Beijing Dec. 5, saying it showed Manila was serious about resolving a tense standoff over territory in the South China Sea.

Erlinda Basilio, 68, who as a foreign department undersecretary helped draft national diplomatic policy, will take over a post that was effectively vacant as the two neighbors' quarrel over the Scarborough Shoal simmered.

Previous ambassador Sonia Brady suffered a stroke in August, four months after Chinese patrol vessels prevented the Philippine navy from arresting what the Philippine side described as Chinese poachers in Manila's waters.

"This sends a signal of how

important our relations with China are and how serious we are in trying to achieve an understanding with them," Aquino said of Basilio's appointment.

China claims most of the South China Sea, including waters close to the shores of its neighbours. These areas include major sea lanes and are believed to hold vast mineral and oil resources.

China's claim is contested by the Philippines as well as Brunei, Malaysia, Taiwan and Vietnam, which have overlapping claims to some or all of those same areas.

Since the April standoff, the Philippines has repeatedly brought up the dispute with China at international meetings while China has tried to brush it aside, stressing its

preference for rival claims to be settled bilaterally.

Diplomatic sources said Basilio had helped draft the Philippines' hardline stance against China's controversial claims, which have irked Beijing.

The foreign department said in a statement that Basilio was well-versed on the issues, adding: "we are relying on her to enhance the bilateral relations between the Philippines and our very important neighbour and friend, China".

Basilio previously served as ambassador to Sweden and representative to the Philippine mission to the United Nations Office at Geneva. - AFP

TYPHOON from A1

stroyed their house and banana and cocoa farm.

"Everything we had is gone. The only ones left are dead people," Cantilla told AFP as she and her husband, three children and a granddaughter reached the outskirts of the town, which itself had been nearly totally obliterated.

Rescuers said they were looking for 380 missing while seeking help for more than 250,000 others who were sheltered in schools, gyms and other buildings after losing everything.

Shell-shocked survivors scabbled through the rubble of their homes to find anything that could be recovered, as relatives searched for missing family members among mud-caked bodies laid out in rows on tarpaulins.

President Benigno Aquino has sent food and other supplies by ship to 150,000 people on Mindanao's east coast where three towns remain cut off by landslides and wrecked bridges, Interior Secretary Mar Roxas said.

Officials said many of the 477 dead victims were poor migrants who found work at landslide-prone sites such as New Bataan and nearby Monkayo towns, either at unregulated gold mines or at banana plan-

tations.

Bopha, flower in Cambodian, wiped out a fourth of the country's banana crop, according to the local industry association.

Major-General Ariel Bernardo, head of the army division leading the rescue effort, said 36 people had been dug out alive in two days, but the prospects were looking dimmer for the hundreds still missing.

'Everything we had is gone. The only ones left are dead people,' Cantilla told AFP as she and her husband, three children and a granddaughter reached the outskirts of the town, which itself had been nearly totally obliterated.

"I do not think it likely," he told AFP when asked if he thought most of the missing were still alive.

Civil defence chief Benito Ramos refused to give up hope.

"There is no time limit -- as long as it takes," he told reporters when asked how long the search and rescue effort would take.

A man trapped for two days under rocks and debris after flash floods swept away his entire family was among those rescued Thursday.

"It's a miracle that I survived, but I might as well be dead," said Carlos Agang, 54, who suffered a

broken right leg.

Social Welfare Secretary Corazon Soliman said the government asked the Switzerland-based International Organization for Migration to help it build bunkhouses to ease the pressure on evacuation camps.

The United States, Japan and Singapore said they had offered emergency assistance, with the latter sending over a rescue team in Mindanao.

Geneva-based International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies appealed for 4.5 million Swiss francs (3.7 million euros, \$4.9 million) for relief aid, warning the number of people needing help would rise in coming days.

Meanwhile the insurgent Communist Party of the Philippines offered a truce with government forces now leading the rescue in Mindanao, while ordering its guerrillas there to help out.

The army dismissed the offer, with a military spokesman saying the rebels should abandon their armed campaign instead.

Workers were struggling to reach villages due to destroyed roads and wrecked bridges, but finding corpses was not a problem due to the overpowering stench everywhere, said Francisco Macalipay, a soldier involved in the rescue.

DYNASTIES from A1

the late former president Ferdinand Marcos, who began his political career in Ilocos Norte before moving his way up to a three-term presidency.

The lineage began with his grandfather Fabian Marcos, appointed mayor of Batac City during the American occupation. His son, Mariano Marcos served as an assemblyman from 1925 to 1931. Then came Mariano's son Ferdinand, twice elected as representative of Ilocos Norte's second district.

From representative he became a senator, and then became the 10th president of the Philippines. His term as president began in 1965 and ended after the "People Power" uprising in 1986.

With brothers, sisters, a nephew, wife and two children, Ilocos Norte has been governed by the Marcos family long enough to form a well-established political dynasty.

Imee Marcos, Ferdinand and Imelda Marcos' elder daughter, has been governor of Ilocos Norte since 2010. Her brother, Ferdinand "Bong-bong" Marcos Jr. was elected as senator the same year, after serving as governor and representative of the province.

Ilocos Sur

A relatively recent political dynasty is the Singson family. Luis "Chavit" Singson made his name as a "whistle-blower" after testifying against his former friend and then-president Joseph "Erap" Estrada's "illegal gambling activities," which led to Erap's downfall and Gloria Macapagal Arroyo's ascension to the presidency.

Singson began his career as the chief of police of his hometown in Vigan for a year. In 1966, he ventured into business as a tobacco trader then returned to public service in 1972 as councilor in Vigan. He served his first term as governor of Ilocos Sur from 1972 to 1986, and then became congressman of the same province in 1987. Ending his term as representative of Ilocos Sur, he returned to governorship in 1992 until 2001.

He became the presidential adviser for the North Luzon Growth Management Area from 2003 to 2004, and then returned to being

governor of Ilocos Sur for the third time in 2004. After taking part in Erap's ouster from the presidency, he tried running for the senate but lost.

He is the currently serving his fourth term as governor of the province. Everyone expected him to run for another term, but he unexpectedly announced that he was not seeking re-election to give way to his son, Rep. Ryan Luis Singson.

The young Singson replaced his brother, former Rep. Ronald Singson after he was caught and incarcerated for 18 months in Hong Kong for possession of cocaine.

Now that Ryan is running for governor, Ronald filed his certificate of candidacy for the 2013 elections, seeking to reclaim his former position as first district representative.

Another son of Chavit, Randolph Singson, served as Vigan councilor and will also run in the 2013 elections.

Yet another member of the clan, Eric Singson was a former Deputy House Speaker will also reclaim his old position as second district representative now held by his son, Eric "Owen" Singson Jr.

The Singson dynasty established in Ilocos Sur comes with an estate that the Singsons call "Baluarte," where they have their own zoo.

La Union

La Union has a well-established political clan that's 111 years old. Joaquin Ortega, the patriarch, began his political career in 1901 as Governor of La Union appointed by the Taft Commission.

His son, Francisco Ortega, spent his life as a public servant. He became a representative for the 1st, 3rd, 4th and 5th districts of La Union, after serving as councilor and mayor of San Fernando, La Union.

Now, 16 members from the third and fourth generations of the Ortega clan are currently in office or were former public servants.

Fifteen of them belonging to the third and fourth generations are now seeking reelection or vying for other posts.

Manuel Ortega is the current governor of La Union, after serving as representative of the 1st, 11th,

12th, and 13th districts of La Union. His son, Francisco Ortega III, is a representative of party-list ABONO and was former councilor of San Fernando.

Victor Ortega, older brother of Manuel, is the representative of the province's 1st district. He has served as representative in district 8, 9, 10, and 14 and was also governor of the province.

With 16 Ortega names and a lot of government positions to fill, it won't be surprising to see this political clan last another 100 years, at least.

Pangasinan

Former governor Victor Agbayani came from a family of politicians. His grandfather, Aguedo Agbayani, started their political lineage as he became governor of Pangasinan in 1972. His son, Aguedo Agbayani Jr, also served as governor from 1992 to 1995.

Victor was the most recent Agbayani to hold the position of governor of Pangasinan for three terms from 1998-2007. He then served as representative in the second district of the province. He tried to run for governor again in 2009, but lost to the current governor, Amado Espino Jr.

Another big name from Pangasinan is the de Venecia family. Former Speaker Jose de Venecia Jr. began his career in Pangasinan, serving six terms as Representative of the 4th District of Pangasinan. He served as Speaker of the House of Representatives throughout the Ninth, Tenth, Twelfth and Thirteenth Congresses of the Philippines.

His wife, Gina or "Manay Gina" to some, followed her husband's footsteps to become the 4th district representative of their province. Their son, Jose de Venecia III, commonly known as "Joey," ran for senator but lost.

Region 1 may be considered as typical of the country's regions. Politically powerful clans rule, and are challenged by other political clans. "Outsiders" are rarities, and while they may win some posts occasionally, they rarely last because they do not have the support system that dynasties provide.

MAYOR MOM



Colma Mayor Joanne del Rosario's second turn as town chief is already extra-memorable: She swore in before Reginald Sternberg, who happens to be her only son. Photo by M.Z. MORENO

JOANNE from A1

in need. She sits on the board of the Seton Medical Center Community Advisory Council and co-chairs the Rainmaker Committee of ALLICE Alliance for Community Empowerment, of which she was 2010 president.

The mayor began her administration by reading the Code of Ethics as entrusted public servants put forth by the council.

Del Rosario is joined by co-council members Diana Colvin, who also is FilAm, Helen Fiscaro, Rae Gonzales and Joe Silva, who swore in as vice mayor.

The council expressed optimism about the town prospects in 2013, judging from the new businesses established this year.

"Colma has the highest occupancy rate in San Mateo County," immediate past mayor Gonzales declared.

Del Rosario's friend Jim Comstock, former Seton director of Community Relations and Business Development and a board director of the Colma-Daly City Chamber of Commerce, congratulated the council for sustaining economic growth through the recession.

The mayor's former Maryknoll high school classmates Maritess Vargas-Reyes and Marivi Paloma-Go applauded

Well wishers from the new mayor's many circles of co-social advocates, political and consulate allies packed the Colma Community Center for the ceremony followed by a reception at Lucky Chances with Rene Medina personally welcoming guests to his eponymous restaurant.

EMBASSY from A1

Mark Goldman, Chief Investigator of the Lafourche Parish Coroner's Office, after attending the necrological services for Ellroy Corporal and Avelino Tajonera held in Cut Off, Louisiana, on Wednesday morning.

Cuisia then personally informed Malagapo's wife, Joanne, his father Francisco and other members of his family of the positive identification made based on dental records submitted on Tuesday night from the Philippines.

Cuisia said the Embassy was informed of the recovery of Malagapo's body as early as Monday but decided not to release any information until the remains were positively identified by U.S. authorities.

He said Malagapo's body was spotted about 20 miles from the ill-fated platform that he and eight other Filipinos were working on at the time of the incident.

Authorities were initially planning to take DNA samples from his father, also an offshore oil worker here, to identify Malagapo's body but Philippine consular officials recommended that dental records be submitted itself.

The recovery of Malagapo came three days after Tajonera, a 49-year-old welder from Bataan, died as a result of complications from the serious burns he sustained in the incident that also claimed the life of Corporal, a 42-year-old rigger from Iligan City.

Two other workers remain in critical condition at the Regional Burn Unit of the Baton Rouge General Hospital while the condition of another, Wilberto Ilagan, a 50-year-old welder from Batangas, continues to improve.

Cuisia at necrological services conveyed the condolences of the President and Foreign Affairs Sec. Albert F. Del Rosario and then joined the employer and coworkers of the two in expressing their indignation over reports appearing in media that the Filipino workers were responsible for the fire.

The reports, which quoted unnamed sources, said the accident could have been caused by the incompetence of the Filipino workers and their poor English language proficiency.

"I will be doing Ellroy Corpo-

ral, Avelino Tajonera and the other injured Filipinos a great injustice if I do not speak out and express my disappointment and dismay over unfair insinuations in media that our workers are to be blamed for the accident," Cuisia said in his eulogy.

"The nine Filipinos who were on that platform on November 16 would not have been there if they did not pass stringent training, safety and language requirements both here in the United States and back home in the Philippines," he said. "These men also have extensive experience in the oil and gas industry abroad and with such giants as Shell, Chevron and British Petroleum."

Cuisia's sentiments were echoed by Mark Pregeant, President and CEO of Grand Isle Shipyard Inc., the contracting company that deploys the workers.

"Those gentlemen did not cut the wrong line. These gentlemen did not cut that piece of pipe with a torch," said Pregeant in disputing reports that the fire was triggered by the wrong use of a torch by the workers.

Pregeant also paid tribute to Filipino offshore workers by recalling their contribution in the restoration of Louisiana's oil production levels in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina in 2005. "I do not have one customer who has something bad to say about Filipino workers. Let there be no mistake about that," Pregeant said.

A coworker of the victims, Romeo Capili, also expressed his disappointment over the reports. "It broke my heart to see something in the Internet that we Filipinos are incompetent. If that were the case, probably, we Filipinos would not have been asked to come back and work here since 2005," he said.

In their response, Edna Tajonera, widow of Avelino, and Elmer Corporal, elder brother of Ellroy, expressed their appreciation for the support extended to them by the Department of Foreign Affairs and the Overseas Workers Welfare Administration and their employers, D&R Resources and Grand Isle.

According to Deputy Consul General Orontes Castro Jr., Elmer Corporal left with the remains of his brother.

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