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MANILA -- A suspected courier for a human trafficking syndicate was apprehended by Bureau of Immigration (BI) officers at the Clark International Airport (CIA) in Angeles City, Pampanga.

In his report to Immigration Commissioner Jaime Morente Thursday, BI-CIA Chief Joseph Quizon said the passenger, a Filipino-Taiwanese woman, who was about to board a flight to Taipei, when intercepted after airport security officers discovered that she had 22 Philippine passports in her possession, on Monday.

"The passports were found inside her luggage and she admitted during questioning that these belong to people who were recruited by her bosses to work in Malta without appropriate permits and proper documents," he said in a statement.

Quizon said the identity of the woman was not divulged due to a prohibition in the anti-trafficking law.

He added that the victims already paid the syndicate PHP150,000 in return for processing their working visas in Malta, which would be done in Taiwan.

On the other hand, immigration officers Virgilio Notario Jr. and Maria Rocio Theresa Ayson of the Bureau's Travel Control and Enforcement Unit said the suspect identified two Maltese nationals as her contacts who would arrange the job placement for the victims.

"We have learned that some of the recruits were already demanding the return of their money as they had waited too long and given up on their overseas job prospects," they reported.

The suspect, who alleged she is a former Filipino from Pampanga, was turned over to the Inter-Agency Council Against Trafficking (IACAT) for investigation and filing of charges.

Meanwhile, Morente reiterated his warning to those seeking to work abroad not to deal with illegal recruiters or

they might end up losing their life's savings.

"Deal only with licensed recruiters to ensure that your rights and welfare are guaranteed and protected," he said. (PNA)

Malacañang directs gov't agencies to control ASF spread

MANILA -- Malacañang directed all government agencies, bureaus, agencies and the like to control the spread of African swine fever (ASF) in the country.

This directive came following reports that samples taken from hotdog, longganisa, and tocino imported by a Manila-based company tested positive for ASF virus.

"The Office of the President, through the initiative of the Executive Secretary, is hereby directing all executive departments, bureaus, agencies, government-owned and controlled corporations, government financial institutions and other instrumentalities of the government to coordinate, as well as to adopt policies and institute measures to manage, contain and control the transmission of African Swine Fever (ASF) in the country," Presidential Spokesperson Salvador Panelo said in a statement on Thursday night.

Panelo said all concerned and responsible government offices are also directed to provide assistance, alternative livelihood and skills training to those affected by ASF.

Panelo also urged the public to cooperate with government authorities to prevent the spread of ASF.

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Comelec suspends Oct. 26 congressional polls in Southern Leyte

MANILA -- The Commission on Elections (Comelec) has postponed the congressional polls for the first and second legislative districts of Southern Leyte set on Saturday in anticipation of a possible Supreme Court (SC) ruling to stop the polls.

Comelec spokesperson James Jimenez said on Thursday that the elections in the two districts of Southern Leyte will not push through as scheduled, just like what happened in the first and third legislative districts of South Cotabato, also slated this month.

"The Commission resolved to suspend the elections in view of the possibility that the Resolution of the SC in the Banas-Nogralas case will be applied in the Mercado case, as both cases are similarly situated," Jimenez said in a press conference.

The poll body official added that all activities related to the Southern Leyte polls have consequently been suspended.

Jimenez, however, noted that they were looking to hold the congressional polls in Southern Leyte on November 30, in case the SC has yet to decide on the matter.

"(This is) to avoid any prolonged vacuum in the Office of the Representatives for the first and second districts of Southern Leyte," he said.

Southern Leyte Rep. Roger Mercado ran for re-election in the May 2019 polls and received the most votes.

Republic Act 11198 has reapportioned Southern Leyte from one to two legislative districts.

The poll body was referring to the decision of the High Court declaring as null and void the Comelec resolution setting the congressional elections in the first and third legislative districts of South Cotabato.

The SC also ordered to proclaim Shirlyn Banas-Nogralas as the duly elected representative of the first district of South Cotabato, including General Santos City.

On September 25, the poll body decided to comply with the SC decision and cancel the October 26 polls in the first and third legislative districts of South Cotabato. (PNA)

“Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and He will flee from you.” – James 4:7