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INDONESIA: THOUSANDS JOIN CULTURAL CARNIVAL TO PROTEST PORNOGRAPHY BILL

More than 6,000 people took part in a cultural carnival in Jakarta April 22 to protest an anti-pornography bill that they saw will make Indonesia's diverse cultures and traditions disappear. The protestors united under the banner of Bhinneka Tunggal Ika (unity in diversity) Alliance and paraded in downtown Jakarta singing and performing traditional dances. In a bid to control pornography, the Anti-Pornography Bill bans all sensual displays of the body, including the traditional attire of many cultures in the archipelago. The protestors said the bill, if passed, would gradually destroy the cultures of Aceh, Bali, Java and Papua as well as the Batak, Betawi, Dayak and Minahasa peoples. They say that although they agree with the goal of clamping down on pornography, the bill does not clearly differentiate between pornography, obscenity and eroticism on the one hand, and cultural, artistic and creative expressions on the other. The alliance instead urges legislators and the government "to stop porn programs usually shown on almost all TV stations after 22.00 hours." (THE HERALD)

KOREA: NATION'S OLDEST MAGAZINE CELEBRATES 'PASTORAL' CENTENARY

The Catholic Bishops' Conference of Korea (CBCCK) organized a seminar in Seoul May 12 to celebrate 100 years of its monthly pastoral "Kyeonghyang" Magazine. Bishop Paul Choi Deog-ki of Suwon, president of CBCCK Committee for Social Communications, spoke to some 40 clergy, religious and lay people gathered for the event. He said the magazine had formed lay leaders by offering them knowledge of the Church and catechism during the Japanese colonial people (1910-1945). The major changes in the universal Church after the Second Vatican Council were also explained to readers. Auxiliary Bishop Basil Cho Kyu-man of Seoul, a former editor of the monthly, said there are now many Catholic publications in Korea but the magazine's identity of helping in renewal and evangelization remains clear. In 1996, the Korean Guinness Book of Records recognized the monthly as the oldest magazine in Korea. From 4,200 readers in 1907, the magazine now has 20,000 readers says a history professor at Korea University. (UCANEWS)

THEME SONG FOR ASIAN MISSION CONGRESS

A theme song for the Asian Mission Congress was composed by Seminarian Booncharat from the Lux Mundi National Major Seminary in Thailand. The lyric is mainly based on scriptural texts from The Magnificat (Lk 1:47) and the call of the apostles (Jn 1:43-49). "My Heart fills with joy" the song starts and "I will tell my friends" it continues. "Go and tell the world, Asia's people, that God is always here. Share his love, everyone in unity with Jesus Christ our Lord." This Thai song was selected by the Congress' executive committee from several songs submitted from other Asian countries. Listen to the song online at <www.fabc.org>

PHILIPPINES: FILIPINOS HONOR FATHER REUTER AS TEACHER, PRIEST AND COMMUNICATOR ON 90TH BIRTHDAY

More than 300 people led by Manila Archbishop Cardinal Gaudencio Rosales gathered at the chapel of St Paul University in Quezon City for a Mass honoring Jesuit Father James Reuter on his 90th birthday May 21. In his homily Cardinal Rosales reflected on how Fr Reuter has influenced generations of Filipinos as a teacher, communicator and priest. The prelate recalled that in media training programs Fr Reuter gave for bishops, he taught valuable lessons such as "Whenever you speak in media, take the opportunity to mention Christ or the values he represents." Fr Reuter came to Manila as a 21-year old seminarian studying theology in 1938. He was ordained in the United States in 1946 and came back to the Philippines after studying broadcasting at Fordham University, New York. In 1964, he became the director of the bishops' National Office of Mass Media, a position he holds to this day. Concelebrating the thanksgiving birthday Mass with Cardinal Rosales were Fr Reuter, Auxiliary Bishop Bernardino Cortez of Manila, who is chairman of the Episcopal Commission on Social Communications, and the commission's former Chairman, Bishop Jesus Cabrera of Alaminos. (UCANEWS)

HONG KONG: ON AIR CREATIVITY A BOON FOR BOSS AND WORKER

A Catholic radio host started airing a two-hour English and Cantonese program titled "Beautiful Sunday" over Radio Hong Kong (RTHK Radio 2) for foreign domestic workers and their employers. The 6-8am program aired on FM94.8-96.9 frequency features Filipino, Indonesian and Thai songs, amusing dramas as well as legal and housekeeping information. Employers can also discuss a few topics with their workers giving them the chance to have better communication, program host Shirley Tsang Suk-yi said. (SE)

PHILIPPINES: 'CBCP MONITOR' RE-LAUNCHED

The new format of "CBCP Monitor," fortnightly Catholic newspaper, was re-launched in its June 19, 2006 issue with news from around the country, editorial page, features section, cinema reviews and episcopology. The newspaper is published by the Communications Development Foundation of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines and can be accessed at <www.cbcpworld.net/cbcpmonitor>.

INDIA: JESUIT SEMINARIANS LEARN ART OF WRITING, REPORTING

Fifteen Jesuit seminarians from 11 provinces from South Asia attended a "Journalism and Effective Writing" workshop from April 20 to May 1 at Jeevan Darshan, Vadodara. "We are now equipped with skills to articulate and write our ideas and opinions on current topics affecting society," a participant said. (SAR NEWS)

CATHOLICS REACT TO 'THE DA VINCI CODE'

Across Asia, Catholics made efforts to debunk the controversial movie "The Da Vinci Code."

In the southeast, Singapore parishes and Catholic organizations listened to Opus Dei Father Jose Lopez and a member of the Apostolate for Catholic Truth straighten out erroneous claims made by author Dan Brown. The Order of Malta and another Christian group distributed thousands of a booklet and DVD titled "The Da Vinci Code: Separating Fact from Fiction." The government's Board of Film Censors, meanwhile, gave the film an NC16 rating a consumer advisory of "mature content."

The Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines, issued a pastoral statement and a question-and-answer guide amid appeals of Catholics to the government to ban the showing of the film. Others, like El Shaddai Catholic charismatic ground, cautioned against contributing to the hype. The bishops' statement urges "the Catholic faithful to serenely affirm the fundamental truths of our faith" through "a systematic study of the Word of God and the teaching of the Church." SM Group, owner of the largest cinema chain in the country, banned the film in all their establishments.

In East Asia, the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association (CCPA) and the Bishops' Conference of Catholic Church in China (BCCCC) called on all Catholics to boycott the movie in a May 18 statement, which reads: "Don't watch and don't talk about its content. Be conscious of preserving the sacred authority of the Bible and the Church's deposit of faith, following Church teachings, and resisting temptation and attacks of any kind through your words and deeds." The Chinese government approved showing of the film without censorship.

In Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan the release of the film was met with discussion, perplexity and curiosity. The diocese of Hong Kong had two seminars to discuss the film with the faithful to dispel confusion and doubts which may arise. The statement of the Bishops of Taiwan reads: "We pray the Holy Spirit may enlighten us to return always to the source of our faith, Sacred Scripture, to seek the truth and the answer. We encourage parishes and communities to take this event as an opportunity to reach a deeper understanding of the faith and so doing, consolidate it."

In South Asia, the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India demanded a ban on the release of "The Da Vinci Code" and another local movie. The bishops issued a statement on May 11 saying Dan Brown's film is "false and an irreverent portrayal of Jesus Christ" ... "belittling what is at the heart of Christian Faith" ... they hurt the religious sentiments of the Christian community." The bishops also urged the Censor Board of Film Certification to ban the two movies. The story line of "The Da Vinci Code" is false and if it is to be released, it should carry a disclaimer stating it is a work of fiction, the statement says.

Cardinal Ivan Dias of Bombay and two prominent lay organizations in western India protested the film. Cardinal Dias also launched a prayer campaign to implore God's forgiveness on the people behind the films. Governments of Sri Lanka and Pakistan meanwhile, heeded noisy protests mounted by Christian groups and banned the film.

This display of fidelity to faith are not mere "emotional outbursts," observes a known Catholic columnist from South Asia, but is "part of the cultural diversity of a pluralist Church" in Asia. (SAR NEWS/ UCANEWS/ FIDES)

NEW BOOK ON FABC PUBLISHED

"The Churches in Asia" is the title of a new book related to FABC. It is the English edition of a German book published by the former director (1979-2001) of the Missiological Institute of Missio Aachen, Dr Georg Evers. Over the years, he has been at many FABC conferences especially cooperating with the FABC Office of Theological Concerns. Evers' book presents reports on all member countries of the FABC and refers, after a short historical overview especially to developments in the last 50 years. The new book published by Indian Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge (Delhi).

SINGAPORE: CANDLE-LIGHT LENTEN VIGIL FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

Catholic Junior College (CJC) hosted a candle-light Lenten vigil organized by the Church of St Ignatius on March 17 to bring young people to prayer and reflection. The event included a seven-minute scriptural video based on the parable of the "Good Samaritan" produced by Daughter of St Paul, Sr Wendy Ooi. The vigil also had a Taize meditation. (CN)

MALAYSIA: 'BIKES FOR BIBLES' KICKS OFF IN SABAH

"Bikes for Bible," interdenominational cycling project of the Bible Society of Singapore, was held for the first time in Sabah January 2. Some 32 male bikers aged 8 to 49 cycled their way passing through different Christian Churches and received there with simple prayer service led by the leader of the Church. At Sacred Heart Cathedral, Msgr Primus Jouil received the bikers and sent them off to the next stop at the Anglican All Saints Cathedral. Participants of the project come from member-churches of the Sabah Council of Churches. The aim was to raise funds to support the work and program of the Bible Society of Malaysia. (CATHOLIC SABAH)
HONG KONG: MUSICAL WAY OF THE CROSS ON PASSION SUNDAY

As part of its 60th anniversary celebrations, the English choir from the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception led a small gathering of some 50 people through a melodic and reflective 90-minute Way of the Cross on Passion Sunday April 9. The 50-strong choir, half of them Filipinos, showed professionalism in the 19 classical hymns chosen as responses to the meditation at each station of the Cross as well as short scriptural reflections at the start and end of the musical liturgy. This is the first major recital of the choir. (SE)

SINGAPORE: PAULINES' COMMUNICATIONS DAY OUTREACH

The Association of Pauline Cooperators (APC) conducted an outreach at the Church of the Holy Trinity May 27-28 with a display of spiritual and formation books, CDs, VCDs and DVDs. On May 27, a Story Telling session for primary school students was held and on May 28, a Film Forum for teens. APC belongs to the Pauline Family founded by Blessed James Alberione. Their mission is to serve the Gospel and culture through evangelizing media. (CN)

Modern technologies ... above all do not favor that delicate exchange which takes place between mind and mind, between heart and heart, and which should characterize any communication at the service of solidarity and love.

- John Paul II, "The Rapid Development" (2005) no. 13

