

## BJMP, DASMARIÑAS CITY TO BUILD 'MODERN' JAIL FACILITY

**MANILA** – The Bureau of Jail Management and Penology (BJMP), in partnership with the Dasmariñas City government, will construct a modernized prison facility designed to significantly reduce the city's jail congestion rate from 3,333 percent to just 46 percent. In a statement on Wednesday, BJMP Chief Jail Director Ruel Rivera said the new Dasmariñas City jail facility is a testament to the bureau's unwavering commitment to jail decongestion and humane treatment of persons deprived of liberty (PDLs).



**NEW JAIL FACILITY.** Bureau of Jail Management and Penology (BJMP) chief Jail Director Ruel Rivera (3rd from right) leads the groundbreaking for the construction of the new Dasmariñas City Jail in Barangay Langkaan II on Tuesday (March 25, 2025). The new facility is expected to reduce the city jail congestion rate from 3,333 percent to 46 percent. *(Photo courtesy of BJMP)*

**MANILA** – The Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) is disappointed over Timor-Leste's decision to deny the Philippine government's request to extradite former Rep. Arnolfo "Arnie" Teves Jr., its spokesperson said Thursday. In a statement, Ma. Teresita Daza indicated that the

## DFA 'DISAPPOINTED' OVER TIMOR-LESTE'S REFUSAL TO EXTRADITE TEVES

department interprets this as Timor-Leste lacking trust in the Philippines' justice system.

"We are disappointed that Timor-Leste has not shown enough trust in the delivery of justice in the Philippines, a founding member of the ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations), which it seeks to join, and among the very first ASEAN member states to convey support for its aspiration to join the association," Daza said.

She said Timor-Leste's application depends on its compliance with the roadmap for full membership in the ASEAN and its accession to the ASEAN Charter.

She added that a country must be "able to demonstrate that it shares the spirit of trust and cooperation that ASEAN member states accord one another, not only within the framework of ASEAN but also in their bilateral relations."

Teves is facing multiple murder charges in connection with the killing of Negros Oriental Governor Roel Degamo and five others in March 2023.

On March 20, Timor-Leste's Court of Appeals issued a decision junking the Philippine government's request to extradite the former congressman, citing concerns over potential risks of torture or inhumane treatment.

In an earlier Palace briefing, Presidential Communications Office Undersecretary Claire Castro emphasized that such practices are prohibited under Philippine law. *(PNA) By Joyce Ann L. Rocamora*

percent.

With the completion of the new facility, Rivera said these figures are expected to decrease dramatically to 31 percent for the male dormitory and 15 percent for the female dormitory.

The new Dasmariñas City Jail will also feature an infirmary, training and livelihood spaces, Alternative Learning System (ALS) and worship areas, and a designated visitation area. *(PNA) By Christopher Lloyd Caliwan*

"Kung malaki na ang epekto sa isang tao na mawalan siya ng kalayaan, ano pa kaya kung madagdagan ito nang masikip na selda, na siyang pinag-uugatan ng maraming pang isyung nakaka-apekto sa pisikal at emosyonal na kalusugan ng ating mga kapatid na nakapiit? (If the loss of freedom has a significant impact on a person, what more can be said about the addition of overcrowded cells, which are the root cause of many other issues affecting the physical and emotional health of our imprisoned brothers and sisters?)," Rivera said.

On Tuesday, Rivera led the groundbreaking ceremony of the new jail facility, which is set to be completed in February 2026.

Under the usufruct agreement signed by the BJMP and Dasmariñas City on Nov. 12, 2021, the facility will be built on a

5,464-square-meter lot in Barangay Langkaan 2.

The agreement is valid for 25 years and renewable upon mutual consent.

"Pagkatapos po ng proyektong ito, makaaasa po tayo na mula sa 3,333 percent na congestion rate ng Dasmariñas City Jail, ay magiging 46 percent na lamang ito (After this project, we can expect that from the 3,333 percent congestion rate of the Dasmariñas City Jail, it will only be 46 percent)," he said. "Our PDLs here will definitely be in a much better place."

At present, the Dasmariñas City Jail in Barangay Burol 2 is one of the most congested facilities under the BJMP with a combined congestion rate of 3,333 percent.

The jail's male dormitory houses 1,270 PDLs with a congestion rate of 1,133 percent, while the female hall holds 248 PDLs, with a congestion rate of 2,200

## FL HOSTS WOMEN'S MONTH DINNER FOR FEMALE DIPLOMATS, ENVOYS' WIVES

**MANILA** – First Lady Liza Araneta-Marcos honored women leaders as she hosted a cocktail reception for female ambassadors and the wives of heads of diplomatic missions at Malacañang on Thursday to celebrate Women's Month.

The First Lady shared photos of the gathering on her social media pages on Saturday. "In celebration of Women's Month, we gathered in sisterhood and solidarity -- honoring the grace and strength of women who lead not only with wisdom but also with purpose," she said on social media.

"To women who lead... To women who lift... And to women who continue to pave the way. May your influence know no boundaries!" she added.

In a separate post, Marcos described the gathering as a tribute to "the grace and the strength of women who lead us not only in wisdom but with purpose."

Addressing guests at the Kalayaan Hall, she said their presence is a powerful statement of female leadership and influence in the international community.

"Excellencies, your presence here is more than symbolic; it's powerful," the First Lady said.

"You carry not only the voices of your nations but also the aspirations of countless women who see in you a reflection of what is possible," she added. *(PNA) By Darryl John Esguerra*

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## MOST WANTED PERSON REGIONAL LEVEL ARRESTED BY TRECE MARTIRES PNP

**Camp BGen Pantaleon Garcia, City of Imus, Cavite**—Warrant personnel of the Trece Martires Component City Police Station successfully apprehended a Most Wanted Person Regional Level, at about 5:47 PM of March 25, 2025 in Greenbelt 5, Basement 2, Makati City.

PLTCOL Orlando A Carag Jr., ACOP, Trece Martires CCPS, identified the accused as alias Alex, 57 years old, Component City Police Station conducted an operation against Most Wanted Person Regional Level which resulted in the arrest of the said accused by virtue of a warrant of arrest dated February 27, 2025 for the crime of rape (Art. 266-A of RPC) with criminal case no. TMCR-216-25 issued by acting presiding judge, Regional Trial Court, Branch 131, Trece Martires City, Cavite, with no bail recommended.

Said operation was recorded with the use of an Alternative Recording Device (ARD) in the absence of a Body Worn Camera (BWC). Furthermore, the accused was apprised of his constitutional rights in a dialect known to and understood by him.

The Cavite PPO commends its officers for their dedication and hard work in enforcing the law and ensuring the safety and security of the community.

We assure the public that the Cavite PNP remains steadfast in its mission to uphold justice and safeguard the well-being of every Caviteño. We always count on your support and active participation in ensuring a safe and secure environment for everyone. Together, let us work hand in hand to build a community rooted in trust and mutual respect.

## DOTR CHIEF: RECENT AIRPORT BULLET INCIDENTS NOT 'TANIM BALA' CASES

**MANILA** — Transportation Secretary Vince Dizon assured the public on Friday that the recent incidents involving passengers allegedly carrying ammunition at airports are not cases of "tanim bala" or bullet-planting schemes.

Dizon was referring to three separate incidents: on March 20 and 24 at Ninoy Aquino International Airport (NAIA), where two passengers were caught with one and four bullets, respectively, and on March 27 at Clark International Airport, where a passenger was found with ammunition sealed in a can of shrimp paste.

At a press conference, Dizon said he would not tolerate wrongdoings among the agency's personnel.

However, he said, initial investigations by the police and the Office for Transportation Security (OTS), along with video footage, confirmed that OTS personnel did not plant the bullets.

"We will not let it pass when passengers, deliberately or not, carry prohibited items like ammunition," Dizon

said in Filipino.

He said videos showed that the ammunitions in the latest incidents were not placed by OTS personnel, as they were detected during the x-ray screening. He added the passengers involved admitted they were either unaware of the bullets in their possession or claimed someone had asked them to carry the items.

While denying the presence of bullet-planting schemes, Dizon vowed to crack down on any wrongdoing by transportation personnel.

"We will not tolerate any form of abuse or misconduct. I won't hesitate to fire anyone involved in such schemes," he said.

He revealed that four OTS personnel were recently terminated for their alleged involvement in a March 6 incident at NAIA, where a woman was wrongly accused of carrying an amulet or bullet.

To express remorse, Dizon and OTS Administrator Arthur Bisnar personally met with the woman over lunch to apologize. (PNA)

**By Ma. Cristina Arayata**

## CALABARZON POLICE NABS 8 HIGH VALUE INDIVIDUALS, 4.3M WORTH OF SHABU AND FIREARMS SEIZED IN SEPARATE DRUG OPS

**Camp BGen Vicente P Lim** — The Drug Enforcement Unit of the Police Regional Office CALABARZON successfully seized Php 4,338,400.00 worth of shabu and arrested eight high-value individuals in separate drug bust operations conducted in Bacoor City, Cavite; San Pedro City, Laguna; and Taytay, Rizal, on March 25-26, 2025.

Based on the report, The Station Drug Enforcement Team of Taytay Municipal Police Station in coordination with PDEA, conducted a successful buy-bust operation against a High Value Individual known as alias Khads" resulting to the arrest of the drug suspect and seizure of illegal drugs amounting to Php204,000.00. and a .38 caliber revolver, and three live ammunition.

Alias "Maki," 38, a high-value individual from San Pedro, Laguna, was arrested at approximately 12:16 AM on March 26, 2025, in Barangay Cuyab, San Pedro City, by the Drug Enforcement Team of San Pedro Component City Police Station.

During the operation, authorities seized three plastic sachets of suspected shabu weighing approximately 108 grams, with a standard drug price value of Php 734,400.00, along with buy-bust money.

Similarly, at around 03:00 AM in Brgy. Molino, Bacoor City, Cavite, the joint operatives from PDEU/PIU CAV PPO and BACOR CCPS arrested six high-value individuals (HVIs) involved in the illegal drug

trade. The suspects—alias "Boy," 48; "Reymart," 30; "Joedel," 20; "Matt," 33; "JP," 42; and "Jerwin," 48—were all listed as HVIs on the Cavite PPO's Drugs Watchlist. Authorities seized over 500 grams of suspected shabu, valued at Php3,400,000.00.

In addition to the drug charges, firearms were found in violation of Republic Act 10591 and the COMELEC Gun Ban. Seized firearms included a 1911 caliber .45, an improvised Thompson .45, a caliber .22 firearm, magazines, and ammunition for both calibers.

PBGEN Paul Kenneth T. Lucas, Regional Director of PRO CALABARZON, assured the public of the police force's commitment to the campaign against illegal drugs and loose firearms. "PRO CALABARZON is fully committed to intensifying our efforts against illegal drugs and loose firearms. We will continue to work tirelessly to dismantle criminal networks, confiscate illegal weapons, and ensure the safety and security of every citizen in CALABARZON, especially during the upcoming National and Local Elections," he stated.

Meanwhile, the arrested suspects will face charges for Violation of Sec. 5 and Sec. 11 of R.A. 9165 also known as the Comprehensive Dangerous Drugs Act of 2002 and RA 10591 in relation to Batas Pambansa blg 881 (Omnibus Election Code of the Philippines) (RPIO4A)

## PHP3.4M WORTH OF SHABU SEIZED AND 6 HVIs ARRESTED IN JOINT OPS IN BACOR CITY

**Camp BGen Pantaleon Garcia, City of Imus, Cavite**—Joint operatives of the Provincial Drug Enforcement Unit and personnel of the Bacoor Component City Police Station, conducted a buy-bust operation that resulted in the apprehension of six (6) High Value Individuals (HVIs) at about 3:00 AM of March 26, 2025 in Barangay Molino 4, Bacoor City, Cavite.

PLTCOL Chester Noel R Borlongan, Chief of the Provincial Intelligence Unit (PIU), identified the suspects as alias Boy, 48 years old, and presently residing in Brgy. Molino 4, Bacoor City, Cavite; alias Joedel, 20 years old, and presently residing in Brgy. Molino, 4, Bacoor City, Cavite; alias Matt, 33 years old, and presently resided in Villa Adella Subd., Imus City, Cavite; alias Reymart, 30 years old, and presently resided in Dona Carmen St., Makati City; alias Johnpaul, 42 years old and presently resided in Brgy. Molino, 4, Bacoor City, Cavite, and alias Jerwin, 48 years old and presently residing in Brgy. Molino 4, Bacoor City, Cavite.

The operation resulted in the arrest of the six (6) High Value Individuals (HVIs) for violating Republic Act 9165 (Comprehensive Dangerous Drugs Act of 2002) and Violation of RA 10591 in Relation to Omnibus Code COMELEC (Gun Ban).

During the operation, authorities seized a significant quantity of illegal substances, further disrupting the local drug trade and enhancing community safety. Evidences recovered during the said operation were the following: four (4) pieces knot-tied transparent ice bags and two (2) pieces heat-sealed transparent

plastic sachets containing a white crystalline substance suspected to be shabu with an estimated weight of more or less 500 grams with a standard drug price value of Php3,400,000; one (1) piece unit of 1911 cal. 45; one (1) piece cal. 45 magazine (inserted to 1911); one (1) piece improvised Thompson cal. 45; one (1) piece cal. 45 magazine (inserted to improvised Thompson); six (6) pieces live ammunition cal. 45; one (1) piece cal. 22; one (1) piece cal. 22 magazine; one (1) piece live ammunition cal. 22.

The entire operation was documented using an Alternative Recording Device (ARD) to ensure transparency and adherence to proper law enforcement procedures.

The arrested suspects and the confiscated evidence were brought to the Bacoor Component City Police Station for proper documentation and the filing of appropriate charges.

This successful operation underscores the police force's dedication to maintaining law and order and reinforces their commitment to the safety and security of the community.

PCOL DWIGHT ALEGRE, Acting Provincial Director of Cavite PPO, expressed his gratitude to the joint operatives for their prompt and rigorous response to illicit drug activities in Cavite. "I commend the unwavering efforts of our operatives to combat illegal drugs in the province. We will intensify our campaign against illegal drugs to ensure that those involved face the charges filed against them in court." He also urged everyone in the community to support the PNP's efforts to stop drug-related crimes in Cavite.

## DOST PUSHES FOR EXPANSION OF SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAMS

**LOS BAÑOS, Laguna (PIA)** — The Department of Science and Technology (DOST) in Calabarzon believes that the department's scholarship programs can be expanded further to provide additional services and benefits for their scholars.

DOST Quezon provincial director Maria Esperanza Jawili acknowledges the wide implementation of the program, but she believes that it can be further expanded to cater to more deserving students.

"The DOST scholarship programs are already wide-ranging. However, they still need to be expanded because we see that there are even greater benefits that our current and future

scholars can receive through this program."

Jawili cites the positive effects of providing educational support to students who come from poor families in further developing their livelihoods.

"[DOST scholarship] is a big help because it supports many children, especially those from poor families, in overcoming poverty. We believe that if at least one child in a family can graduate from college, it will already be a significant help to the family. Especially if the applicants or children are truly intelligent," the director adds.

Some students, however, still find it hard to complete their requirements on time. The science department made note of this and adjusted their processes.

"There are limitations when it comes to the documentary requirements of our students [and] those issues are gradually being addressed."

Students are now allowed to take the exam even if they still lack some requirements. What the DOST-SCI and the DOST system are doing is allowing them to take the exam first, and if they passed, that's when we require them to submit the necessary documents to qualify as awardees."

Data released by DOST Calabarzon said that there are 4,071 scholars under the Republic Act No. 7687 or the Science and Technology Scholarship Act of 1994; 2,755 scholars under the Republic Act No. 2067 or the DOST-SEI Merit Scholarship Program;

and 177 scholars under the Republic Act No. 10612 or the Fast-Tracked S&T Scholarship Act of 2013.

The scholarship programs of DOST aim to encourage Filipino youths to pursue productive careers in science and technology including basic sciences, engineering, other applied sciences, and science and mathematics teaching.

After graduation, scholars are obligated to stay in the Philippines and work in science and technology sectors to ensure a steady, adequate supply of qualified S&T human resources which can steer the country towards improved competency and national progress. (CH/PIA-Laguna) **By Christopher Hedreya**

## DEPED RECOVERS FUNDS AS SHS VOUCHER PROBE WIDENS

**MANILA** — The Department of Education (DepEd) has recovered approximately PHP65 million from 40 of the 54 private schools flagged for irregularities in the Senior High School Voucher Program (SHS-VP) for School Years 2021–2022 and 2022–2023.

In a statement Wednesday, DepEd said that out of the 54 schools removed from the SHS-VP, 38 have fully refunded the government, while two have made partial payments.

It said 14 schools have yet to return the disbursed funds, prompting the issuance of final demand letters.

The agency said it is still determining whether the flagged irregularities amount to fraud, as investigations remain ongoing.

For the current school year, 12 schools are under review by DepEd's Investigation Division.

Additionally, three other institutions have been referred to the National Bureau of Investigation (NBI) following findings by the Government Assistance and Subsidies Service (GASS).

To curb further misuse of public funds, DepEd, in partnership with the Private Education Assistance Committee (PEAC), is implementing this school year stricter monitoring measures that include cross-verification of records, full system audits, and random field visits to participating private schools.

PEAC is set to roll out a second-semester validation next month, while a billing schedule will be introduced in SY 2025–2026 to streamline fund disbursement.

Regional and division offices have been tasked with conducting inspections and submitting detailed reports to the Central Office, and enhanced validation procedures have also been implemented to ensure only qualified learners benefit from the voucher program.

"We are taking decisive steps to strengthen our validation processes, hold erring schools accountable, and restore public trust in the SHS Voucher Program," Education Secretary Sonny Angara said. **(PNA) By Wilnard Bacelonia**

## 8 TOWNS IN CALABARZON TAGGED AS 'AREAS OF CONCERN'

**CALAMBA CITY (PIA)** — The Police Regional Office in Southern Tagalog has identified eight election hotspots or areas of concern for public security ahead of the 2025 National and Local Elections.

During a meeting with the Calabarzon Regional Peace and Order Council (RPOC) on March 20, police identified several municipalities in Laguna, Batangas, and Quezon as Election Areas of Concern (EAC).

Police identified the towns of Sta. Maria in Laguna; Mataas na Kahoy, San Jose, Taal, and Tanauan City in Batangas; and Candelaria and San Francisco in Quezon Province as "yellow" election areas of concern.

Meanwhile, Tagkawayan

is the only municipality placed under the Orange category.

Meanwhile, the remaining 128 areas in the Calabarzon region were classified as green areas, indicating no security concerns and a relatively peaceful and orderly environment for the upcoming elections.

Under Comelec Resolution No. 11067 stated that the Philippine National Police (PNP) and Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) are authorized to classify all areas in the country under four categories: green, yellow, orange, and red.

The areas under the green areas have no security concerns and are relatively peaceful and orderly for conducting elections.

Yellow areas are those that

## RTF-ELCAC: GOV'T TARGETS ARMED REBELLION, NOT LEFTIST GROUPS

**CALAMBA CITY, Laguna (PIA)** — The Regional Task Force to End Local Communist Armed Conflict (RTF-ELCAC) in Calabarzon clarified that the government is not against leftist groups but is focused on countering armed rebellion.

Brig. Gen. Ronald Jess S. Alcudia, Commander of the Philippine Army's 202nd Infantry (Unifier) Brigade, emphasized the need to differentiate between leftist ideologies and armed rebellion, stressing that the issue is not political beliefs but the use of violence to push an agenda.

"We often misuse the term 'leftist.' There's nothing wrong with having leftist views. The real issue is engaging in armed struggle. That's what we need to emphasize in every discussion," Alcudia told the media during the Kapihan sa Bagong Pilipinas media forum on March 18.

Alcudia also pointed out that when the Anti-Subversion Law was repealed, being a communist was no longer a crime, but armed struggle should still be condemned along with the NPA.

The RTF-ELCAC also shared that it has made significant achievements in the fight against insurgency in Calabarzon, with all five provinces in the region now declared under Stable

Internal Peace and Security (SIPS).

Alcudia attributed the improved security situation to the concerted efforts of peace and law enforcement agencies, national government units, and the public.

While the level of armed threats in the region has significantly decreased, Alcudia cautioned the public to remain vigilant, as it does not mean that the threat is completely gone.

Alcudia recounted a recent encounter in Famy, Laguna, on November 28, when a group attempted to return. However, with the help of local communities and officials, security forces successfully prevented their resurgence.

"The Armed Forces of the Philippines, Philippine National Police, National Intelligence Coordinating Agency, and other law enforcement intelligence units remain vigilant against any attempts by the Communist Party of the Philippines – New People's Army to regain a foothold in Calabarzon," Alcudia said during the Kapihan sa Bagong Pilipinas forum on March 18.

He reiterated that achieving sustainable and inclusive security requires a collective effort, aligning with the objectives of Executive Order No. 70, which institutionalized a whole-of-nation approach rather than just a whole-of-government approach.

"It is crucial that we work together to resolve the problem of insurgency. This is not just the responsibility of the government; it is the responsibility of every Filipino," he said.

Alcudia added, "We are focused on our internal security mission, and we remain professional, adhering to our chain of command and all legally constituted authorities."

**(KA-PIA4A) By Kristianne Andrade**

polls.

Around 13, 679 personnel from PRO CALABARZON underwent a series of seminars on election laws and guidelines, as well as seminars on Basic Life Support, and operating generator sets, among others. **(PB/PIA4A) By Patricia Bermudez**

## EDITORIAL SUSPENSYON SA GITNA NG INIT, SOLUSYON NGA BA?

Sa patuloy na pagtaas ng heat index ngayon sa Pilipinas, nararapat nga ba na magsagawa ng class suspensions? Damang dama sa iba't-ibang bahagi ng Pilipinas ngayon ang patuloy na pagtaas ng temperatura kaya naman hirap ang karamihan sa mga Pilipino na lumabas ng kani-kanilang bahay ngayon. Kaya naman, laganap ang isyu ukol sa kabi-kabilang pagsuspinde ng mga klase sa iba't-ibang paaralan dahil sa matinding init ng panahon. Ang matinding init maaaring maging sanhi ng heat stroke at itinatayang nasa danger level. Dahil dito, isyu ngayon ang hirap ng implikasyon ng class suspensions sa ibang panig ng Pilipinas at maaaring maging hati ang opinyon ukol dito. Sinasabing dapat ay hindi pangkalahatan ang suspensyon ng klase at para lamang sa mga lugar na nakakaranas ng sobrang taas na heat index. Marami rin ang umaapela at sinasabing ibalik ang dating academic calendar upang maiwasan ang naturang hirap na nararanasan ng karamihan dulot ng init.

Para sa akin ay ang patuloy na pagsuspinde ng mga klase ay hindi nakakatulong upang maibalik ang dating academic calendar na siyang isa sa mga paraan upang maiwasan ang mga estudyante at mga guro na makipaglaban sa init ng panahon, bagkus, sa pagsuspinde ay matatambak ang gawain sa paaralan na siyang maaaring maging dahilan upang makansela ang patuloy na pagsasaayos ng pagbabalik pasukan sa buwan ng Hunyo.

Hindi lamang ang pagsuspinde ng mga klase ang pwedeng maging paraan upang maisagawa ang mga klase. Sa nakaraang pandemya na naranasan ay may mga makabagong paraan ng paglinang ng kasanayan tayo na natuklasan na maaari rin nating magamit sa kasalukuyang problemang ikinahaharap ng Pilipinas. Gaya ng paghalo muli ng modular at online learning sa paglinang ng kasanayan ng mga kabataan upang maiwasan ang patuloy na pagsuspinde ng mga klase. Sa ganitong paraan ay hindi matatambakan ng mga gawain hindi lamang ang mga estudyante pati na rin ang mga guro.

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## AFP FIRM ON LOYALTY TO CONSTITUTION, MANDATE

**MANILA** — The Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) on Thursday reiterated its loyalty to the Constitution and its mandate of protecting the people and the state even as some groups question its role and responsibilities.

In a statement, the AFP emphasized that it remains steadfast in its sworn duty to protect the Filipino people, defend the Constitution, and uphold democracy.

"In light of recent discussions questioning the AFP's role and responsibilities, we affirm the following: The 1987 Constitution is clear — the Armed Forces is a non-partisan institution. Section 5(3)," it said.

The military also noted that Article XVI of the Constitution explicitly prohibits its personnel from engaging in political activities.

Any deviation from this principle will "undermine the very democracy we are bound to protect," the AFP said.

"The AFP's role is to defend the country and uphold stability, not to interfere in political matters. Any concerns about governance should be resolved through lawful and democratic means," it added.

The AFP pointed out that the strength of democracy lies in respecting institutions, following due process, ensuring justice through established legal channels, and selecting executive and legislative officials through elections.

"The AFP stands firm in its duty — always in service of the Filipino People, with unwavering commitment to the Constitution," it said. **(PNA) By Priam Nepomuceno**

## DA TO CUT FURTHER MSRP ON IMPORTED RICE TO P45 PER KILO

**MANILA** — Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. on Wednesday announced that the maximum suggested retail price (MSRP) for imported rice will be reduced anew on March 31 to PHP45 per kilo, following a continued decline in global rice prices.

"At this level, the retail price of imported rice has now decreased by P19 per kilo compared to its price before we implemented the MSRP on January 20," Tiu Laurel said in a news release.

Before the MSRP was introduced, imported rice was sold for PHP64 per kilo, despite global rice prices softening, tariff reductions, and a stronger peso.

The Philippine Statistics Authority had recognized the MSRP as a key factor in reducing rice prices and helping to tame inflation.

The implementation of the MSRP followed consultations with industry stakeholders to ensure that price reductions would not destabilize the rice industry or compromise food security.

This initiative fully reflects the decision of President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. to approve a reduction in rice tariffs—from 35 percent to 15 percent—effective July 2024.

In September of last year, India lifted its year-long ban on the export of non-Basmati rice, contributing to a global increase in rice supply.

As a result, rice prices have dropped to their lowest levels in over two years, with some varieties now priced below USD380 per metric ton.

Prior to the MSRP reduction to PHP49 per kilo on March 1, the price of good-quality rice from Vietnam—those with 5 percent broken grains—had already decreased to USD490 per metric ton, approximately USD200 cheaper than in December. Vietnam is the Philippines' main source of imported rice.

Data from Food Terminal Inc. revealed that the landed cost of imported rice for March 2025 for DT8 variety is PHP32 to PHP34 per kilo. **(PR)**

## ESCUDERO: 2025 BUDGET CONSTITUTIONAL, SENATE READY FOR SC ARGUMENTS

**MANILA** — Senate President Francis Escudero on Wednesday said the Senate is confident it can defend the 2025 General Appropriations Act (GAA) before the Supreme Court (SC) amid petitions questioning alleged budget irregularities.

During the Kapihan sa Manila Bay briefing, Escudero said he believes the SC is not inclined to interfere with Congress's power in budgeting, pointing out that the Bicameral conference committee acted within its delegated authority.

"Ang layunin ng Korte Suprema ay tiyakin na 'yong proseso ay hindi pinasa sa mga hindi halal ng bayan na clerk lamang o staff lamang sa bicam. 'Yan ay kayang-kayang patunayan ng Kongreso kapag dumating 'yong punto ng oral arguments (The Supreme Court's goal is to ensure that the process was not passed on to unelected people who are just clerks or staff in the bicam. That is something that Congress can prove during the oral arguments)," he said.

Escudero confirmed that the Solicitor General will represent the Senate in the proceedings. He clarified that previous disagreements with SolGen Menardo Guevarra

on unrelated cases would not affect this one.

"Nag-usap na kami ng SolGen tungkol dito. Hahawakan nila 'yong kaso at kumpiyansa sila na kanilang maipapanalo 'yong kaso sa pamamagitan ng pagpresenta ng panig ng Kongreso (The SolGen and I have already talked about this. They will handle the case confident they can win the case by presenting the Congress' side)," he said.

Although a signatory to the questioned bicam report, Escudero said he is not required to attend the oral arguments, currently scheduled for April 1, adding that only Representative Stella Quimbo and several congressional staff have been required to appear, if available.

Escudero maintained that the finance and appropriations committees were granted authority to finalize the budget within the bounds of legislative procedure.

"The bicam report is clear. We authorized the finance committee and appropriations committee to fill in any gaps, to make any correction," he said.

He added that such delegation is not new and has been done in previous budget years. **(PNA) By Wilnard Bacionia**

## MMDA APPREHENDS 15 PUJS FOR BLOCKING MABUHAY LANE DURING PROTEST

**MANILA** — The Metropolitan Manila Development Authority (MMDA) on Wednesday apprehended 15 drivers of traditional public utility jeepneys (PUJs) for blocking Connecticut Street in San Juan City on the third day of Manibela's transport strike.

In a Facebook post, the MMDA said the 15 jeepney drivers were issued with traffic violation tickets for illegal parking and obstruction near a building of the Department of Transportation (DOTr). "Nirerespetng pamahalaan ang karapatan ng bawat mamamayan para sa malayang pagpapahayag ngunit dapat itong isagawa nang mapayapa at hindi nakakaperwisyo sa kapwa (The government respects

the right to free speech of every Filipino but it must be held peacefully and without causing adverse effects to others)," the MMDA said.

Connecticut Street is a part of the Mabuhay Lanes — alternative routes that are meant to ease traffic on EDSA and other major roads.

The protesters have since left the area and the Inter-Agency Task Force for Transport Strike continues to monitor the situation at the MMDA Communications Command Center in Pasig City.

The Philippine National Police also deployed additional law enforcers to prevent protesters from causing traffic congestion. **(PNA) By Raymond Carl Dela Cruz**

## TASK FORCE CREATED TO PROBE COMEDIAN'S KILLING

**MANILA** — The Police Regional Office (PRO) 3 has formed a special investigation team (SIT) and mobilized the national operating support units in Central Luzon to expand the probe into the fatal shooting of stand-up comedian Gold Dagal.

Dagal, 38, a comedian residing in Pasig City, was shot dead on March 15 in a bar in Angeles City, Pampanga by three unidentified assailants, including one who hit him multiple times.

"May tama po siya sa may lower part po ng kanyang mata at tumagos po 'yan sa ulo at base na rin po doon sa mga narecover na CCTV footages ay tatlo ang posibleng may kinalaman po dito insidente na ito (He was hit in the lower part of his eye and it penetrated his head. Based on the recovered CCTV footage, there are three possible suspects involved in this incident)," Police Regional Office Central Luzon chief Brig. Gen. Jean Fajardo

said in online media briefing.

Fajardo said the case is no longer solely under the Angeles City Police Station, as a dedicated SIT has been convened to ensure a more focused and directed investigation.

She said authorities are following leads but cannot disclose specific details to avoid compromising the ongoing probe.

"As to the motives, marami po tayong tinitingnan diyan (we are looking at a lot of things in this case)," Fajardo said.

Dagal was known for his deadpan humor, often weaving socio-political themes and tackling offensive subjects.

In the days leading up to his death, his provocative comedic routines, which included references to a particular religious group, had sparked controversy and drawn the ire of some individuals. **(PNA) By Christopher Lloyd Caliwan**

## LTO SUMMONS BUS OPERATOR FOR SMOKE BELCHING

**MANILA** — The Land Transportation Office (LTO) has summoned the registered owner of a passenger bus following a smoke-belching complaint and ordered a vehicle inspection for the vehicle.

In a statement on Wednesday, LTO chief, Assistant Secretary Vigor Mendoza II, said a show cause order (SCO) has been issued to the bus company that owns the bus with license plate ABG 4240.

The SCO, he said, was issued based on the complaint of a concerned citizen.

"Hindi po tayo tumitigil sa paghuli ng mga violations ng smoke belching. Kaya nga nagpapasalamat tayo sa mga concerned citizens na tinutulungan ang inyong LTO para ma-identify and mapanagot ang mga violators (We are not stopping the apprehension of smoke-belching violators. That's why we're thankful to concerned citizens who help identify and penalize these violators)," Mendoza said.

He encouraged the public to report all abuses on the road.

"We will take care of the

rest. Kailangan lang ay magbigay ng proof gaya ng photo para mapabilis ang investigation (We just need proof, such as a photo, to expedite the investigation)," he said.

According to the SCO issued by the LTO-Intelligence and Investigation Division, the bus company was instructed to explain in writing why it should not be penalized.

The company was also instructed to bring the bus to a Motor Vehicle Inspection Center (MVIC) as stipulated in Section 4 (6), Creation of the Commission of Republic Act 4136 (Land Transportation and Traffic Code).

Under the law, the LTO commissioner or his deputies "may at any time examine and inspect any motor vehicle to determine whether such motor vehicle is registered, or is unsightly, unsafe, overloaded, improperly marked or equipped, or otherwise unfit to be operated because of possible excessive damage to highways, bridges and/or culverts." **(PNA) By Raymond Carl Dela Cruz**

## ALBAY READY FOR INFLUX OF SUMMER VISITORS

**LEGAZPI CITY** – The provincial government, through the Provincial Tourism and Cultural Affairs Office (PTCAO), has prepared local destinations and facilities to ensure that tourists will have a comfortable and enjoyable stay in Albay during the summer months.

In an interview on Wednesday, Albay PTCAO chief Dorothy Colle said they are ready for the arrival of local and foreign tourists as the Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration (PAGASA) welcomes the dry season, but they continue to monitor accommodation facilities to ensure these are fit to give the people a safe and worry-free vacation.

"We encourage them to become Department of Tourism (DOT)-accredited because being DOT-accredited means they comply with the standards set by the Department of Tourism. As such, we can guarantee the safety and services provided to tourists," Colle said.

She added only tourism facilities accredited by the DOT can be promoted or recommended to tourists, as these are the ones that comply with the required standards for a service-oriented facility, and help the public prevent being victimized by online scams. "The services offered by DOT-accredited establishments vary. We have accommodations, resorts, restaurants, hotels, and various other allied services. In terms

of accommodation, there are at least 180 facilities across the provinces," she said.

Colle added that their role is to further increase the number of facilities to accommodate visitors.

"We conducted a survey, and at one time, we found that if all accommodation facilities were fully booked, we could accommodate more than 2,800 people," Colle said.

She said beaches are the top choice this summer, and Albay has plenty of these, with coastal areas on both its western and eastern sides.

"On the western side, this refers to the stretch of the Albay West Coast, which passes through the municipalities of Libon, Oas, Pioduran, and Ligao. There are several coastal beaches in these areas. On the eastern side, which faces the Pacific Ocean, popular destinations include the resorts on Cagraray Island, as well as the black and white sand beaches on the eastern seaboard, covering Tiwi, Malinao, Tabaco, Bacacay, and Santo Domingo," she said.

Colle added Albay has beautiful waterfalls in Malinao, rivers, eco-farms, the Mayon Skyline, Kawa-Kawa Hill and Natural Park for pilgrims, the famous Cagsawa Ruins in Daraga, Quituinan Hills, and Quitinday Hills in Camalig town. *(With reports from Lily Nocomora and Kryelle Perez, OJTs/PNA) By Connie Calipay*

## DOTR: IMMEDIATE REOPENING OF NLEX MARILAO LANES RELIEF FOR MOTORISTS

**MANILA** – The Department of Transportation (DOTr) thanked the North Luzon Expressway (NLEX) Corporation for reopening all four lanes under the Marilao Interchange Bridge one week ahead of schedule.

"This will now allow close to normal travel times, so that commuters and motorists on NLEX can spend more valuable time with their families and reach their destinations promptly," the DOTr said in a statement on Wednesday.

The toll operator said all lanes were passable to vehicles since 1 a.m.

However, supporting steel poles would remain on the lanes to allow concrete curing of the bridge, it added.

NLEX initially said it

expected to finish the repairs by March 31.

The bridge was damaged by an oversized truck on March 19, necessitating repairs that initially closed three northbound lanes of NLEX segment in Marilao.

"This shows the commitment and dedication of both the DOTr and its partners like NLEX Corp. to respond quickly to problems such as this to try and provide a seamless and comfortable travel experience for all Filipinos," the DOTr said.

Transportation Secretary Vince Dizon earlier asked NLEX to speed up the repair works and waive toll fees in the affected section due to significant traffic congestion caused by the repairs. *(PNA) By Raymond Carl Dela Cruz*

## DAVAO CITY LOGS 1.8-M TOURISTS IN 2024, SETS HIGHER 2025 TARGET

**DAVAO CITY** — This city welcomed 1.8 million visitors in 2024, completing a steady recovery from pandemic-era lows and setting ambitious targets for the coming year, city officials announced Wednesday.

The City Information Office reported the figure represents a 50-percent increase from 2022's 850,000 tourists and continues an upward trend that saw 1.2 million arrivals in 2023. Collectively, the three-year period brought 3.7 million visitors to Mindanao's largest city.

City Tourism Operations Office (CTTO) chief Jennifer Romero attributed the growth to several factors including the successful staging of major festivals like the Kadayawan cultural celebration and Pasko Fiesta holiday events.

CTTO's strategic focus on business travel through Meetings, Incentives, Conferences and Exhibitions (MICE) initiatives also contributed significantly, with 23 major

conventions held last year, Romero said.

"These numbers confirm our position as Mindanao's premier destination," she said. "With improved air connectivity and new attractions coming online, we're confident in achieving our 2.5 million visitor goal for 2025."

Romero said the new developments in the scenic Marilog and Paquibato districts have expanded ecotourism options, now accounting for nearly one-fifth of total visits. Three additional nature sites are scheduled to open by September 2025 as part of sustainability efforts.

Regional data from the Department of Tourism showed Davao Region overall attracted 4.1 million visitors in 2024, generating PHP34.7 billion in tourism revenue.

Americans comprised the largest foreign market at 28 percent, followed by Chinese tourists at 19 percent and combined Japanese and Korean visitors at 15 percent. *(PNA) By Che Palicte*

## WARMER DAYS AHEAD AS PAGASA DECLARES START OF DRY SEASON

**MANILA** – The weather bureau announced on Wednesday the official end of the northeast monsoon or amihan and the start of the dry season.

"Warmer days ahead, but occasional thunderstorms may still occur," the Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration (PAGASA) said in an advisory.

The public is urged to take precautionary measures to minimize heat stress and optimize the daily use of water for personal and domestic consumption.

In Tuesday's episode of Bagong Pilipinas Ngayon, PAGASA's Climate Monitoring and Prediction Section chief Ana Liza Solis said a heat index reaching 52°C is possible.

She said PAGASA has so far logged heat indices or what the temperature feels like to the human body when relative humidity is combined with the air, of around 46°C to 47°C in

Tarlac and Pangasinan area.

"We are hoping this won't reach up to 52°C, but there is still a possibility. Hottest temperatures and highest heat indices are usually logged late April and May," Solis said.

Places near coastal areas are likely to experience warm and humid weather because of cloudy skies.

"Warmer temperature results in more humid weather. Parts of Dagupan, Pangasinan, Tarlac, Zambales, Tuguegarao, Cagayan, Aparri are likely to experience high temperatures," Solis added.

Meanwhile, Solis urged the public to always listen to the advice of practitioners from the Department of Health.

She also advised the use of natural environments like the shades of trees instead of air conditioners and fans. *(PNA) By Ma. Cristina Arayata*

## DOT WORKING WITH AUSTRALIA TO SUSTAIN TRAVELER INTEREST

**MANILA** – The Philippine government continues to work with Australia to sustain its citizens' interest in traveling to the archipelago amid its latest travel advisory.

Speaking to reporters Monday, Tourism Secretary Christina Frasco said Australia remains one of the Philippines' highest growth and recovery sectors post-pandemic.

"They are averaging around 22 percent in terms of growth for arrivals month-on-month compared to 2024," she said.

"We continue to work with both the Australian government and stakeholders to ensure this interest of Australians in the Philippines is sustained," she added.

The Philippine government, she said, is doubling efforts to ensure the quality of tourism safety as well as travel convenience and accessibility.

Frasco, meanwhile, encouraged the Australian government to continue partnering with the Philippines to help them "rationalize their travel advisory".

In its March 19 travel advisory update, the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) advised its citizens

to "exercise a high degree of caution in the Philippines overall due to the threat of terrorism and violent crime". It reiterated its warning against traveling to central and western Mindanao, including the Zamboanga Peninsula, Sulu archipelago and the southern Sulu Sea area.

Frasco said the DOT is working closely with the Department of the Interior and Local Government, Department of National Defense, and the Philippine National Police as well as related government agencies "to safeguard and continue to elevate the quality of our tourism destinations".

Australia ranks as the fifth-highest source market for the Philippines in 2024, contributing 299,286 arrivals.

In the first two months of the year, a total of 56,629 Australian travelers visited the country, posting a 19.36 percent growth from the 47,694 recorded in 2024.

On top of ensuring travel safety, Frasco said the DOT is also in talks with international and local carriers to expand connectivity and number of direct flights to the Philippines. *(PNA) By Joyce Ann L. Rocamora*

## PALACE: ADVANCE PASSENGER INFO SYSTEM IMPLEMENTATION TO BE 'MANDATORY'

**MANILA** – Airlines will be required to integrate the Advance Passenger Information System (APIS) into their system once the phased implementation becomes successful, Malacañang said on Friday. The Bureau of Immigration (BI) earlier launched the APIS, in line with President Ferdinand Marcos Jr.'s directive to enhance national security through digital transformation.

"Once everything is smooth, lahat na po ng airlines ay ima-mandatory na po na magsagawa na rin po ng APIS," Presidential Communications Office Undersecretary and Palace Press Officer Claire Castro said in a Palace press briefing. This, as Castro noted that local carrier Cebu Pacific was the first to fully integrate the APIS into its system.

"As part of its phased implementation, the BI has begun pilot testing with major airlines, with Cebu Pacific becoming the first carrier to fully integrate its system with

APIS," she said.

Castro said the APIS is a globally recognized system that allows authorities to conduct advance screening of passengers before their arrival, enabling enhanced risk assessment and streamlined immigration procedures.

Castro said the Philippine Airlines (PAL) and other air carriers are set to follow, as part of the ongoing trials.

The BI earlier said the APIS aims to screen passengers in advance, in an effort to improve risk assessment and expedite the processing of legitimate travelers.

The BI conducted connectivity tests with the International Criminal Police Organization's (Interpol) I-24/7 database, ensuring access to global security watchlists for enhanced monitoring.

The agency is also working closely with the Interpol, airline representatives, and the United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism to ensure seamless integration and operational efficiency. *(PNA) By Ruth Abbey Gita-Carlos*

## CAVITE PNP HOLDS THE 3RD PROVINCIAL JOINT SECURITY CONTROL CENTER (PJSCC) MEETING AND REACTIVATION OF THE PROVINCIAL COMMITTEE ON KONTRA BIGAY

**Camp BGen Pantaleon Garcia, City of Imus, Cavite**—The Cavite Police Provincial Office conducted the 3rd Provincial Joint Security Control Center (PJSCC) Meeting and Reactivation of the Provincial Committee on Kontra Bigay held on March 28, 2025 at Mayo's Hall, Camp BGen Pantaleon Garcia, Imus City, Cavite.

The said meeting was presided over by Chairperson of PJSCC, Atty. Mitzele Veron L Morales-Castro, Cavite Provincial Election Supervisor IV, together with co-chairpersons, COL ERNEST JOHN C JADLOC (GSC) PA, Commander, Task Force Ugnay and PCOL DWIGHT E ALEGRE, Acting Provincial Director, Cavite PPO, in connection with the 2025 National and Local Midterm Elections (NLME).

The activity focused on streamlining efforts to guarantee a credible, safe, and peaceful provincial election process.

FSSUPT GAY F TOLENTINO, Provincial Fire Director, BFP Cavite; CG CAPT CHARITY COPACIO, Station Commander, Coast Guard Cavite; Pros. Vivian M. Rojo, Provincial Prosecutor, Cavite; Ms. Rosemarie D. Tprres, CESO V, Cavite School Division Superintendent; Mr. Mark Anthony Mata, Parish Pastoral Council for Responsible Voting; National Bureau of Investigation Cavite District Office; Provincial Command Group and Quad Staff were among the representatives from various government agencies that attended the meeting. Additionally, the COPs of the City and Municipal Police Stations, the Provincial Staff, Force Commander, CPMFC

were also present in the said activity.

The meeting focused on COMELEC Resolution No. 1114 as discussed by Atty. Mitzele Veron L Morales-Castro, Cavite Provincial Election Supervisor IV; Updates on Threat Assessment and the current situation regarding 2025 NLME as presented by PLTCOL CHESTER NOEL R BORLONGAN, Chief, PIU; and the updates on the Security Preparation and Deployment concerning 2025 NLME, the locations of COMELEC Checkpoints, and Anti-Criminality results from Checkpoints conducted as presented by PMAJ ROMMEL B CARCELLAR, DC, POMU. This collaborative method aims to guarantee orderly elections throughout the province of Cavite.

The Chairperson, conveyed to the committee members that her standard for a successful election is "to finish the race without casualty". PCOL Alegre reaffirmed the police force's commitment to uphold interagency collaboration and public safety throughout this election period, highlighting the importance of behaving with integrity and professionalism. "Through the cooperation of government agencies, LGUs, and the community, we will guarantee that everything is secure during the May elections in Cavite province," he stated.

The Cavite PNP's involvement highlights the significance of collaboration among agencies in attaining a peaceful election process. It also demonstrates our dedication and commitment to backing both local and national efforts and building trust between governmental entities and other local communities.

## DPWH NCR COMPLETES INFRA BUILDINGS FOR PNP

**QUEZON CITY, (PIA)** — Good news! The Department of Public Works and Highways – National Capital Region (DPWH-NCR) and Quezon City 2nd District Engineering Office (QC2nd DEO) inaugurated buildings for the Philippine National Police (PNP).

DPWH-NCR Regional Director Loreta M. Malaluan and PNP Chief Police General Rommel Francisco D. Marbil, and other officials joined in the inauguration at Camp Crame in Quezon City.

In his message, DPWH Secretary Manuel M. Bonoan promised to build more efficient infrastructure facilities responsive to the needs of the police force under the Tatag ng Imprastruktura para sa Kapayapaan at Seguridad or TIKAS program.

First constructed in 1974, the Firearms and Explosives Office (FEO) Building had only undergone minimal repairs to accommodate the growing number of clients, and maintain effective administrative operations.

With the newly renovated building, the FEO will now be able to serve more clients with its modernized work areas, and ultimately help optimize its FEO Data Server that provides firearms and explosive licenses across the Philippines.

The DPWH ensures that the newly constructed five-storey Police Commissioned Officer's building will provide comfortable living quarters for police officers, serving as their home away from home. **(JEG/PIA-NCR) By Jimmyley E. Guzman**

## CANDIDATES URGED TO VOLUNTARILY REMOVE ILLEGAL CAMPAIGN POSTERS

**MANILA**—The Commission on Elections (Comelec) on Saturday urged candidates and their supporters to take the lead in removing illegally mounted campaign materials and not wait for orders to do so.

In a radio interview, Comelec Chairperson George Garcia said those who are running in the May 12 polls may face charges and even disqualification if they violate the rules on common poster areas.

"The candidates are required to remove them immediately even if they have not received the letter yet or if they receive the letter, they must be removed immediately. It is very difficult to have a case with the Comelec. We are not joking with this warning. We have to start filing cases," he said.

The 45-day campaign period for local candidates began Friday. A day before, the Comelec was able to remove truckloads of illegal campaign materials all over the country.

"Our first day of the campaign went well, although of course we removed tons of garbage and materials from various parts of the country," Garcia said.

At the same time, he urged local government units (LGUs) to enact an ordinance that would penalize those violating campaign posters guidelines.

"As for the Comelec, we are limited to what is stated in the law. Maybe in the future, our LGUs will be able to have an ordinance, whether there is an election or not, that will increase the penalties, if not increase the fines that they can impose," Garcia said.

In Manila, reelectionists Mayor Honey Lacuna and Vice Mayor Yul Servo held their proclamation rally in front of Our Lady of Loreto Church in Sampaloc District.

They also went house-to-house, joined by 4th District Edward Maceda whose wife, Dr. Giselle Maceda, will eye to replace him.

In her brief rally speech, Lacuna touted her accomplishments.

"We have accomplished so much and we will not allow anyone to belittle or insult us. Even though it is not perfect, our Manila is not a failure. Our Manila is full of promise and hope," Lacuna said. **(PNA) By Ferdinand Patinio**

## PNR CONFIRMS PROGRESS ON SOUTH LONG HAUL PROJECT

**QUEZON CITY, (PIA)**

Philippine National Railways (PNR) General Manager Engr. Deovanni S. Miranda assured that the South Long Haul Project remains on track, with right-of-way and site acquisitions already underway.

"Mayro'n kasing parte ng project na deliverables ng government of the Philippines at saka 'yong commitment naman ng gobyerno at pag-pu-push ng leadership natin ngayon from the President going to our secretary na tuloy pa rin 'yong project na 'yan,' he said.

He added that some areas, including the planned depot site in San Pablo, Laguna, have already been acquired. Once informal settlers are relocated, the area will be secured to prepare for implementation.

The priority alignment of the project will span 380 kilometers from Laguna to Daraga, Albay, with future extensions to Batangas and Manila.

Regarding the right-of-way for the project, Miranda said that the PNR plans to use a new alignment instead of the old PNR route.

"As of now iyon ang direction na nakita naming talaga na mas magiging benefits para sa project na gamitin 'yong bagong alignment," he said.

The original alignment would have affected around 120,000 informal settlers, whereas the new route reduces this number to approximately 30,000.

However, he acknowledged that purchasing new land for the railway is necessary.

It can be recalled that the PNR South Long Haul project, also known as the Bicol Express, is a proposed 560-kilometer (386 km for the first package) rail line connecting Metro Manila to the Bicol Region, aiming to reduce travel time from 14-18 hours to 4-6 hours.

**(JCO/PIA-NCR) By Marjay Angelo C. Magno / PIA-NCR trainee**

## PSA NCR PSO II ENHANCES NAT'L ID REGISTRATION FOR WOMEN'S MONTH

**QUEZON CITY, (PIA)**

In celebration of National Women's Month, the Philippine Statistics Authority-National Capital Region Provincial Statistical Office II (PSA NCR PSO II) is bringing the Philippine Identification System (PhilSys) registration closer to every Filipina and their households.

The initiative aims to ensure comprehensive access to the National ID for all women, particularly those in vulnerable situations.

As part of its commitment to inclusivity, the PSA NCR PSO II launched a special house-to-house registration initiative, prioritizing individuals with mobility constraints.

A notable success story from this effort includes a 94-year-old bedridden resident from Barangay Payatas, Quezon City, who completed her National ID registration with direct assistance from PSA personnel.

This case highlights the agency's dedication to serving even the most marginalized sectors of society.

"This initiative underscores our commitment to providing accessible and convenient registration services to all Filipinos, regardless of their physical condition or location," a PSA representative said.

The agency remains focused on ensuring that every citizen can benefit from a valid and secure national identification system.

The National ID serves as official proof of identity, facilitating access to government services, financial transactions, and social protection programs.

Through efforts like these, the PSA NCR PSO II aims to empower individuals, particularly women, by providing them with formal identities that enhance their participation in society.

By continuing to prioritize accessibility in the registration process, the PSA NCR PSO II is taking significant strides toward fostering inclusivity and supporting the empowerment of women across the region. **(JEG/PIA-NCR) By Jimmyley E. Guzman**

## PCG PUSHES FOR INCLUSION OF PH MARITIME HERITAGE INTO EDUCATION CURRICULUM

### CALAMBA CITY (PIA)

— The National Task Force for the West Philippine Sea (NTF-WPS) has emphasized the importance of integrating the country's maritime heritage into the education curriculum.

Speaking at the West Philippine Sea symposium in this city last March 19, Commodore Jay Tarriela of the Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) underscored the role of education in addressing the country's ownership over the West Philippine Sea.

Located on the western side of the Philippine archipelago, including the Luzon sea, Kalayaan Island Group, and Bajo de Masinloc, the West Philippine Sea has been a traditional fishing ground among Filipino fisherfolk due to its abundant marine life, including fish and other aquatic products.

"The national government recognizes that education, together with information, are the only ways that we can unite this country in our fight towards the West Philippine Sea."

Tarriela highlighted their ongoing efforts to collaborate with the Department of Education (DepEd) for potential curriculum adjustments aimed at addressing the gaps in the country's historical stance in the

West Philippine Sea.

"National Security Council [Adviser Eduardo] Año and [National Security Council Assistant Director General] Jonathan Malaya have reached out to [Education] Secretary [Sonny] Angara to come up with necessary curriculum adjustments in elementary education."

Addressing students from various colleges and universities, Tarriela highlighted the crucial role of a well-informed public in the government's national security strategy for the West Philippine Sea.

"The most important impact of the transparency initiative is that it allowed the Filipino people to understand why we need to be firm in our fight for the West Philippine Sea."

Recognizing the need to educate the public on the importance and history of the Philippines' rich maritime heritage, the NTF-WPS launched 'Ang mga Kwento ni Teacher Jun', an initiative to combat disinformation on the West Philippine Sea.

The West Philippine Sea symposium drew over 500 students and youth leaders from Laguna Province, attesting to their importance in fighting disinformation and reinforcing the government's efforts in addressing the territorial dispute. **(PB/PIA4A) By Patricia Bermudez**

## CEBU PACIFIC ACQUIRES NEW GROUND EQUIPMENT TO BOOST OPS

**MANILA** — Low-cost carrier Cebu Pacific (CEB) announced Wednesday the acquisition of new ground support equipment to boost operations in Manila and other key hubs.

New high-capacity tow tractors, mobile passenger steps, boarding ramps, deck loaders, catering trucks, and electric baggage tractors would be used at the Ninoy Aquino International Airport (NAIA) Terminals 2 and 3 and other domestic hubs. These equipment will enhance aircraft turnaround times and support overall operational efficiency.

"As we continue to expand our operations, it is important that we also invest in the right

equipment to maintain operational reliability," Lei Apostol, CEB vice president for customer service operations, said in a statement.

The new assets reflect the airline's commitment to providing safe, reliable, and seamless travel experiences, Apostol added.

The latest investment is part of their broader strategy to support long-term network growth while maintaining industry-leading standards in safety and customer service.

Currently, CEB flies to 37 domestic and 26 international destinations across Asia, Australia, and the Middle East. **(PNA) By Ma. Cristina Arayata**

## DTI TO LAUNCH HANDBOOK TO IMPROVE MARKET ACCESS TO UK

**MANILA** — The Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) is planning to launch within the week, a handbook that will help improve access to the United Kingdom (UK) market.

"So we're launching a guidebook on how to access the UK market, leveraging on the DCTS (Developing Countries Trading Scheme)," DTI Export Marketing Bureau Director Bianca Sykimte said during the recent UK-Southeast Asia Tech Week in Manila.

The DCTS reduces tariffs, removes conditions and simplifies trading rules for 65 developing countries.

On June 7, 2023, the UK government launched the DCTS in Manila, allowing Philippine exports to the UK to benefit from significant tariff reductions. Sykimte said the DTI is pushing for improved utilization rate under the UK DCTS.

She said the utilization rate is currently at 68 percent.

This is slightly lower than the over 70 percent utilization rate under the EU Generalized System of Preferences.

"So we're hoping the same for the UK DCTS," she added.

Sykimte said the DTI also recently had discussions with the UK government on relaxing some of the rules for sectors that have underutilized utilization, specifically for garments. "The UK has also had several consultations with

other developing countries, availing of DCTS. And one of the focus sectors is garments, because that's the low utilization," she said.

"Based on our discussions last week, they're cautiously optimistic that they will relax. It's just that they're not yet in liberty to disclose."

Sykimte said these initiatives are part of the efforts under the Joint Economic and Trade Committee (JETCO).

The Philippines and the UK recently held its inaugural JETCO in London on March 17 to increase the current bilateral trade of GBP2.8 billion (around PHP207.87 million).

The UK government earlier disclosed that during the inaugural JETCO, DTI Undersecretary Allan Gepty and UK Minister for Trade Policy and Economic Security Douglas Alexander agreed to push for closer collaboration to boost economic ties, especially in infrastructure, renewable energy, agriculture and technology.

Data from the UK government showed that as of the third quarter of 2024, the Philippines was the UK's 60th largest trading partner accounting for 0.2 percent of total UK trade.

Total trade in goods and services between the UK and the Philippines in the same period was £2.8 billion. **(PNA) By Anna Leah Gonzales**

## LOCAL SHARES SLIGHTLY UP, PESO MOVES SIDEWAYS

**MANILA** — Philippine shares slightly recovered on Wednesday, while the peso moved sideways.

The Philippine Stock Exchange index (PSEi) rose 0.10 percent to 6,166.05 while All Shares also went up to 3,676.71.

"Philippine shares made a modest recovering, as Wall Street also closed higher on Tuesday, extending gains as investors bet on narrower US tariffs," Regina Capital Development Corporation Managing Director Luis Limlingan said.

Most sectors closed in the

green led by Mining and Oil and Services.

Holding Firms and Property, however, closed in the red. Decliners led advancers at 111 to 92.

The peso meanwhile, moved sideways, closing at 57.69 to a dollar from 57.6 the previous day.

It opened at 57.58 and traded between 57.57 to 57.74, bringing the day's weighted average to 57.67. Volume of trade decreased to USD1.33 billion from USD1.54 billion the previous day. **(PNA) By Anna Leah Gonzales**

## COIN DEPOSIT MACHINE COLLECTIONS REACH P1.37-B

**MANILA** — The Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas (BSP) said PHP1.372 billion worth of coins have been deposited through its coin deposit machines (CoDM) as of March 17.

In a social media post on Monday, the BSP said the amount is equivalent to 339.84 million pieces of coins from 311,858 transactions.

The CoDM project, launched in June 2023, allows customers to conveniently deposit their legal tender coins to be credited to their GCash or Maya electronic wallet accounts, or converted into shopping vouchers.

The coin deposit machines support the BSP's Coin Recirculation Program to put idle coins back in circulation to serve the country's currency needs. To date, the BSP has deployed CoDMs in partner retail establishments across the Greater Manila Area.

These are located at Robinsons Place Metro East, Pasig City; Robinsons Place Novaliches, Quezon City (QC); Robinsons Place Antipolo, Rizal; Robinsons Place Magnolia, QC; Robinsons Place Ermita, Manila; Robinsons Place Galleria, Ortigas; Festival Mall, Muntinlupa City; SM Megamall, Mandaluyong City; SM City Grand Central, Caloocan; SM City Marilao, Bulacan; SM City Taytay, Rizal; SM Hypermarket FTI, Taguig City; SM Southmall, Las Piñas City; SM City Sucat, Parañaque; SM City Calamba; SM City Marikina; SM City San Mateo, Rizal; SM City Valenzuela; SM Mall of Asia, Pasay City; SM City North EDSA, QC; SM City Fairview, QC; SM City San Lazaro, Manila; SM City Bicutan, Parañaque; and SM City Bacoor, Cavite. **(PNA) By Anna Leah Gonzales**

## ECONOMIST SEES CONTINUED DECLINE IN UNEMPLOYMENT RATE

**MANILA** — The country's unemployment rate could further improve to around 3 percent as of end-February this year, an economist said Thursday.

"Philippine unemployment rate as of February 2025 could ease/improve to a range of 3.3 to 3.8 percent amid better weather conditions so far in early 2025 that could improve employment in agriculture and many other industries," Rizal Commercial Banking Corporation chief economist Michael Ricafort told the Philippine News Agency.

Unemployment rate went down to 4.3 percent in January this year from 4.5 percent in the same month last year.

The preliminary result of the February labor force survey is scheduled to be released on April 8.

Ricafort is expecting some pick-up in production and inventory-building in

preparation for the Holy Week and the midterm elections.

"The midterm election campaign would also require more jobs for the candidates and for the industries that supply the candidates' election-related spending," he said. Ricafort said increased government spending on infrastructure and other projects especially before the election ban would also benefit their respective supply chains.

He noted that this would all entail more jobs.

"Philippine employment data [which is] among the best in nearly 20 years or since revised records started in 2005, would remain a bright spot and a major source of growth for the Philippine economy amid the country's favorable demographics," Ricafort said. **(PNA) By Anna Leah Gonzales**



## FIFA ANNOUNCES BUMPER PRIZE MONEY FOR CLUB WORLD CUP

**GENEVA – FIFA**, world football's governing body, announced details of the 2025 Club World Cup's USD1 billion prize money on Wednesday, with the tournament champion set to receive up to USD 125 million.

The inaugural 32-team FIFA Club World Cup will take place in the United States from June to July 2025.

FIFA stated its new flagship tournament is projected to generate USD2 billion in revenue, with USD 1 billion allocated to participating clubs and an additional USD250 million going to a global solidarity fund for club football.

"The distribution model of the FIFA Club World Cup reflects the pinnacle of club football and represents the biggest-ever prize money for a football tournament comprising a seven-match

group stage and playoff format with a potential payout of 125 million U.S. dollars foreseen for the winners," said FIFA President Gianni Infantino.

A USD525-million share will be divided among all participating teams, while the remaining USD475 million will be distributed based on tournament performance.

The 32 clubs will receive varying participation fees determined by a ranking system incorporating sporting and commercial criteria. Top European clubs could earn up to USD38.19 million just for participating, while Oceania's Auckland City would receive a minimum of USD3.58 million.

Infantino also claimed that all event proceeds would be reinvested in club football worldwide. *(Xinhua)*

## UP, ADAMSON TRIUMPH IN UAAP BASEBALL

**MANILA –** University of the Philippines tightened up on its defense to prevail over University of Santo Tomas, 7-2, Wednesday in the UAAP Season 87 baseball tournament at the Rizal Memorial Baseball Stadium in Malate.

With Kobe Torres at the helm, the Fighting Maroons secured the final three outs to claim victory and join Adamson in third place at 2-2.

"Every time we talk to these guys, it's all about motivation. Like what happened before when we had a big lead, they became too confident that we had already won. That shouldn't be the team's mindset. The right approach is to start strong and finish strong; and I saw that from start to finish, they stepped up," UP head coach Iking Jimenez said.

"I hope this continues — that until the game is over, until the final three outs are recorded, there's no complacency, no matter how big the lead is," he added.

UP had 11 hits, including three each from last season's Rookie of the Year Aaron Nicha and reigning MVP Mercado, and two from Torres.

UST closed the first round at 1-4 record for fifth place, in

a tie with Ateneo de Manila University, which bowed to Adamson University, 0-10, in the other game.

"I told them that they should treat every game like a championship game. So, what they did against UP, it's good that they carried it over here against Ateneo. It also helped that in the first three innings, Ateneo couldn't score even with runners on base; that's why in the later innings, they gained even more confidence," Adamson head coach Lando Binarao said.

Joao Severino scored two hits in four at-bats during the fourth and fifth innings. Ivan Jonson added two hits while John Matanguihan and John Mark Tupig had two hits each. The Soaring Falcons had a solid defense, anchored by rookie pitcher James Nisnisan of Baguio City.

Binarao noted the team's offense and defense in what he considered the Soaring Falcons' best performance in the season.

"It's a good thing that happened because if they had played like this in our past games, we might not have any losses. So, I hope they bring the same attitude in the next games and into the second round," he said. *(PNA) By Jean Malanum*

## EALA BRINGS DOWN SWIATEK FOR SPOT IN MIAMI OPEN SEMIS

**MANILA –** Some analysts predicted Alexandra Eala's impressive run in the Miami Open would not go beyond the quarterfinals, especially against world No. 2 and five-time Grand Slam champion Iga Swiatek.

Look again, the Filipino wild card stunned the Polish, 6-2, 7-5, early Thursday (PH time) at Hard Rock Stadium.

Eala, 19, froze for a few seconds after Swiatek's return landed wide, right in front of her. The disbelief hit her hard as no tears flowed in an instant, unlike in her previous matches.

"I'm on cloud nine. Thank you, everybody, who came to watch, and thanks to everyone who's watching from home," Eala said during the on-court interview.

Eala averted a third set when she rallied from 4-5 down, breaking Swiatek's serve in the final game.

"I'm trusting my shots and I have a team that tells me I can do it," she said at the Tennis Channel interview.

Toni Nadal, the uncle and coach of retired 22-time Grand Slam champion Rafael Nadal, was in Eala's box. She enrolled at the Rafa Nadal Tennis Academy in Mallorca, Spain when she was 13 and graduated in 2023.

On her way to the final four, she beat unseeded American Katie Volynets, then ousted three Grand Slam champions -- 2017 French Open champion Jelena Ostapenko of Latvia, reigning Australian Open champion Madison Keys of the US and Swiatek.

She advanced against Swiatek when Spaniard Paula Badosa withdrew before their fourth round duel because of a bad back.

Eala will meet either British Emma Raducanu or American Jessica Pegula in the semifinals -- her first in a WTA (Women's Tennis Association) 1000 tournament.

The other women's semi pits world No. 1 Aryna Sabalenka of Belarus and sixth-seeded Jasmine Paolini of Italy. *(Maria Romina Austria/PNA)*

## SIGNAL, CRISS CROSS PUSH FOR 3RD TITLE DUEL

**MANILA –** Signal and Criss Cross seek another title duel when they face separate rivals in the Spikers' Turf Open Conference semifinals at the Rizal Memorial Coliseum on Wednesday.

The HD Spikers and the King Crunchers need one more win to reach the finals for the third time.

Signal faces Savouge at 6 p.m. while Criss Cross and VNS-Laticrete square off at 3:30 p.m.

Louie Ramirez, Wendel Miguel, Steven Rotter, John Mark Ronquillo and skipper John Paul Bugaoan are expected to lead the HD Spikers, who pulled off a 25-13, 25-16, 25-16 victory over the VNS Laticrete Griffins last Sunday.

The Spin Doctors, on the other hand, will try to rebound from their 22-25, 18-25, 18-25 loss to the King Crunchers.

"I know they're feeling down after losing in straight sets to Criss Cross, but for us, we're coming into this game with great confidence. I hope we can maintain our morale and carry that momentum from the very start," Signal head coach Dexter Clamor said. "The good thing is we get to rest before facing Savouge. We've had back-to-back training and matches, so we'll take a break, then return to training to prepare," he added.

The Spin Doctors will rely on Mark Calado, Shawie Caritativo and Madz Gampong to keep their finals hopes alive.

Meanwhile, Criss Cross will bank on reigning MVP Jude Garcia, Jaron Requinton, Nico Almendras and Marck Espejo to extend its 12-game winning run.

"We're not underestimating them at all. They worked hard to get to the semifinals, and we know they will give everything they have. That means we have to match their effort and give our 100 percent," said Garcia, who scored 12 points, including three blocks, last Sunday.

Leading VNS are skipper Charles Jordan Segui, Kenneth Culabat and Rash Nursiddik. *(PNA) By Jean Malanum*

## NU BEATS UP TO KEEP SOLO SECOND IN UAAP MEN'S VOLLEYBALL

**MANILA –** Defending champion National University defeated University of the Philippines, 23-25, 25-14, 25-20, 25-23, Wednesday at the Filoil EcoOil Centre in San Juan.

Jade Alex Disquitado scored 22 points on 21 attacks and one block as the Bulldogs kept solo second place at 7-2.

"We just focused on our blocking and passing. We talked among ourselves and reminded each other not to rush the game because when we do, we tend to make more mistakes and errors come out. We just stayed composed," said Disquitado, who also had 20 receptions and six digs in the one hour and 51-minute match.

Leo Aringo chipped in 19 points, while Michaelo Buddin had 17 points, 11 receptions and nine digs for NU, which fell to De La Salle University, 22-25, 27-25, 21-25, 17-25, on March 23.

Congolese middle blocker Obed Mukaba contributed 10 points on five attacks, four blocks, and one ace, while Peng Taguibolos added seven points on five attacks, one block, and one ace for the Bulldogs, who registered their 13th straight win over the Fighting Maroons dating back in 2016.

"Based on our performance in past games, we've always been playing catch-up in every match. We haven't had a clean victory yet—my players really have to work hard to establish our game," said NU head coach Dante Alinsunurin.

"As I always say, no matter the situation, at least we're still winning. Whatever challenges we face each game, at least we're being tested," he added.

NU will face unbeaten Far Eastern University on March 30 at the Smart Araneta Coliseum.

Olayemi Raheem finished with 26 points on 24 attacks, one block and one ace for the Fighting Maroons, who took their seventh loss in nine outings.

Angelo Lipata and Daniel Nicolas had seven points each, Louise Aballe had 17 sets and four points, while Nino Bersano had 14 digs and 10 receptions for UP, which will meet winless University of the East on Sunday. *(PNA) By Jean Malanum*

## CHINA'S ZHENG FALLS TO SABALENKA AT MIAMI OPEN QUARTERFINALS

**MIAMI –** Top seed Aryna Sabalenka of Belarus secured her spot in the Miami Open semifinals for the first time in her career, defeating China's ninth-seeded Zheng Qinwen in straight sets in the quarterfinals on Tuesday.

Sabalenka cruised through the opening set, breaking Zheng twice to take it 6-2.

However, the second set turned into a tense battle, with both players struggling on serve.

The duo exchanged six consecutive breaks before Sabalenka managed to hold in a marathon eighth game, fending off three break points.

Zheng responded with a hold of her own to edge ahead 5-4, but Sabalenka found her rhythm again, winning three straight games to seal the set 7-5.

The victory extended Sabalenka's dominant head-to-head record against Zheng to 6-0.

"Honestly, every match against her is a tough one," Sabalenka said in her post-match interview.

"I always have to work really hard to get the win, and today was an incredible match and great level from both of us. I'm super happy to get this win."

Reflecting on the tense second set, the Belarusian admitted to the challenges both players faced on serve.

"Definitely, the way I handled the pressure in the second set, serve didn't work for both of us. I'm super proud of myself for the way I handled all the emotions."

Sabalenka will next face sixth-seeded Jasmine Paolini of Italy for a place in the final.

Also on Tuesday, China's Zhang Shuai and Elise Mertens of Belgium suffered a 4-6, 7-5, 10-8 defeat by Japan's Miyu Kato and Cristina Bucsa of Spain in the women's doubles quarterfinals. *(Xinhua)*