

SENATOR PUSHES FOR WAGE HIKE AS MEANINGFUL LABOR DAY GIFT



WAGE HIKE. Workers of a road project along General Luna Street in Intramuros, Manila on Feb. 20, 2024. Senator Joel Villanueva on Thursday (April 23, 2025) called on members of the House of Representatives to take on the proposed Minimum Wage Increase Act to help increase by PHP100 the pay in the private sector. (PNA photo by Yancy Lim)

PROMISE FULFILLED: GOV'T TO RAISE FUNDS FOR P20/KG. RICE NATIONWIDE

MANILA – The Marcos administration will look for funding sources to bankroll the nationwide implementation of its PHP20-per-kg. rice initiative, Malacañang said on Thursday.

Speaking to Palace reporters, Presidential Communications Office Undersecretary and Palace Press Officer Claire Castro said the government is addressing the logistics

issues to make the PHP20 per kg. of rice available throughout the country.

Castro said the national government aims to implement the program until the end of Marcos' term in 2028, even without the help of the local government units (LGUs).

"Sa susunod pong taon, nanaisin po natin na mabigyan po ng sapat na pondo nang hindi na rin po kakailanganin ang anumang tulong mula sa LGUs. So, iyan po ay bibigyan po ng pondo para po maibsan po talaga ang kahirapan sa pagbili po ng napakamahal na bigas (Next year, we want to get enough funds without any

help from the LGUs. So, we will allot funds for that to really ease the plight in buying the very expensive rice)," she said.

"Mabibigyan po ito ng tamang pag-aaral at tamang budget po. Iyan po ay talagang nanaisin ng Pangulo na maipatupad (It will be given the appropriate study and the right budget. That is what the President really wants to implement)."

The pilot rollout of the PHP20-per-kg. rice program will start in the Visayas, following Marcos' closed-door meeting with the 12 governors of the region at the Cebu Provincial Capitol on Wednesday.

As part of the initial phase, the purchase of cheaper rice will be limited to 10 kg. of rice per household per week or a total of 40 kg. every month.

Castro clarified that the rice that will be sold at a cheaper price is the variety that is currently being sold in the markets at PHP33 per kg.

She said local farmers will be the suppliers of the PHP20-per-kg. rice.

Castro said there will be guidelines on the sale of the cheaper rice in Visayas, adding that indigent Filipinos would be given priority.

"Sinasaabi nila ito ay ma-avail ninuman. Pero magkakaroon din po ng sariling guidelines ang LGUs kung kanino po ito maibebenta. Mas malamang po, sa aking hinuha, sa aking pagtantiya, mas mabibigyan nila ng priority 'yung mga sinasabing nasa laylayan ng lipunan (They say it can be availed by anyone. But the LGUs will also have their own guidelines on who it can be sold to. It is more likely, in my opinion, in my estimation, that they will give priority to those who are said to be on the fringes of society)," she said.

The National Food Authority currently has 358,000 metric tons of rice stocks, which will last for over nine days, more than halfway to its target national rice buffer stock of 15 days.

In a Facebook post on Wednesday, Marcos said his goal to bring down the price of rice to PHP20 per kg. is now a fulfilled promise. (PNA) BY RUTH ABBEY GITA-CARLOS

MANILA – Senator Joel Villanueva on Thursday encouraged members of the House of Representatives to immediately tackle the proposed Minimum Wage Increase Act once session resumes on June 2, calling the measure a timely and meaningful gift for Filipino workers.

He expressed optimism that President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. could sign it into law before the end of the 19th Congress on June 13, 2025.

"Magandang regalo po para sa ating mga manggagawa ang pagsasabatas ng Minimum Wage Increase Act (The passage of the Minimum Wage Act would be a wonderful gift for our labor sector)," Villanueva said in a news release.

The Senate approved on the third and final reading Senate Bill 2534, also known as the PHP100 Daily Minimum Wage Increase Act of 2023, last Feb. 19.

If the House of Representatives adopts the Senate version, the measure could be sent to the Office of the President for signature.

If enacted into law, the measure would raise the daily minimum wage by PHP100 to provide a balanced and sustainable solution to wage disparities.

"Sa gitna ng nagtataasang presyo ng mga bilihin, mahalaga at napapanahon po ang minimum wage increase upang kahit papaano ay mabigyan ng kaunting ginhawa ang ating mga kababayan (Amid the rising prices of goods, the minimum wage increase is important and timely to at least provide some relief to our countrymen)," Villanueva said. (PNA) BY WILNARD BACELONIA

DASMARIÑAS PNP ARRESTS CITY LEVEL MOST WANTED PERSON IN DASMARIÑAS CITY

Camp BGen Pantaleon Garcia, City of Imus, Cavite — In a steadfast effort to ensure the swift delivery of justice and maintain public safety, personnel from the Dasmariñas City Police Station successfully apprehended a City Level Most Wanted Person during a warrant-based police operation conducted at around 12:50 PM on April 24, 2025, at Block 49, Lot 27, Barangay San Miguel 2, Dasmariñas City, Cavite.

PLTCOL REGINO L OÑATE, Officer-in-Charge of Dasmariñas CCPS, identified the arrested suspect as alias "JHUNE", currently residing at Barangay San Miguel 2, Dasmariñas City, Cavite.

The operation, executed by the Warrant Section of Dasmariñas CCPS, was carried out by virtue of a warrant of arrest for Violation of Republic Act 8353 (The Anti-Rape Law of 1997), under Criminal Case Number TG-22-090 (AS). The warrant was issued by the Regional Trial Court, Branch 18, Fourth Judicial Region, Tagaytay City, Cavite, on February 26, 2025, with a recommended bail of Php 120,000.00.

During the arrest, police

operatives made use of Alternative Recording Devices (ARDs) in strict adherence to Philippine National Police protocols and human rights guidelines. The accused was properly informed of his constitutional rights in a language and manner he fully understood.

This recent accomplishment highlights the continuing intensified campaign of the Philippine National Police in bringing fugitives to justice and reinforcing peace and order throughout the province. The Cavite Police Provincial Office remains fully committed to its mandate in protecting the community and ensuring the rule of law prevails.

PCOL DWIGHT E. ALEGRE, Acting Provincial Director of Cavite PPO, called on the public for continued support. "Patuloy na pinaigting ng ating mga kapulisan ang kanilang pagtugis sa mga taong nagtatago sa batas. Nararapat lamang na makamit ng mga biktima ang nararapat na hustisya. Kaya't kami ay patuloy na humihingi ng tulong at suporta mula sa ating komunidad sapagkat sa Bagong Pilipinas, ang gusto ng pulis ligtas ka!"

PIU CAVITE LEADS SUCCESSFUL BUY-BUST OPERATION, SEIZES PHP360,400 WORTH OF ILLEGAL DRUGS

Camp BGen Pantaleon Garcia, City of Imus, Cavite—In a major breakthrough in the fight against illegal drugs, joint operatives of the Provincial Drug Enforcement Unit (PDEU) of the Cavite Police Provincial Office (CAVITE PPO) and the Dasmariñas Component City Police Station (DASMARIÑAS CCPS) successfully conducted a buy-bust operation on April 23, 2025, at Barangay Datu Esmael, Dasmariñas City, Cavite, leading to the arrest of 2 (two) High-Value Individuals (HVI) and a Street-Level Individual (SLI).

PLTCOL CHESTER NOEL BORLONGAN, C, PIU, identified the suspects as alias Gar, a resident of Barangay Burilol 1, Dasmariñas City, while Jalil and Jabar, were residents of Brgy. Datu Esmael, Dasmariñas City. The operation was carried out at about 10:20 PM of April 23, 2025, with proper coordination with the Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency (PDEA).

During the operation, authorities seized a significant quantity of illegal substances, further disrupting the local drug trade and enhancing community safety.

Evidence recovered during the said operation were six (6) pieces of heat-sealed transparent plastic sachets containing a white crystalline substance of suspected shabu with an estimated weight of more or less 53 grams with a standard drug price value of Php360,400.00.

The operation was conducted in the presence of a media representative and an elected official to ensure transparency. Furthermore, the entire procedure was recorded using an alternative recording device in compliance with standard operating procedures.

The successful apprehension of the suspects underscores the unwavering commitment of the Cavite Police in combating illegal drugs and ensuring the safety of communities. The suspects are now in police custody and will face charges for violating Republic Act 9165 (Comprehensive Dangerous Drugs Act of 2002).

The Cavite Police Provincial Office remains steadfast in its anti-drug campaign and urges the public to report any suspicious activities to help maintain peace and order in the province.

ROSARIO PNP ARRESTS REGIONAL LEVEL MOST WANTED PERSON IN GEN. TRIAS CITY

Camp BGen Pantaleon Garcia, City of Imus, Cavite — In a resolute demonstration of law enforcement's commitment to upholding justice, the Rosario Municipal Police Station, successfully arrested a Regional Level Most Wanted Person during a warrant-based police operation at around 7:15 PM of April 21, 2025, in Barangay San Juan 1, General Trias City, Cavite. PLTCOL ARDIE O BAGAMAN, Officer-in-Charge of Rosario MPS, identified the arrested suspect as alias ALONICA, a resident of Barangay Wawa 1, Rosario, Cavite. The arrest was conducted by the Warrant Section of Rosario MPS by virtue of a warrant of arrest for Violation of Section 12, Article II of Republic Act 9165 (Comprehensive Dangerous Drugs Act of 2002), with Criminal Case No. 1308-2022, issued by the 4th Judicial Region, RTC Branch 88, Cavite City, dated February 21, 2025. The warrant was served with no bail recommended (Service of Sentence).

The police team utilized Alternative Recording Devices (ARDs) during the operation in strict compliance with established PNP operational guidelines and human rights protocols. The suspect was informed of her constitutional rights in a language and manner she fully understood.

This latest success underscores the Philippine National Police's intensified efforts to pursue fugitives and deliver justice. The Cavite PPO remains steadfast in its mandate to maintain peace and order across the province.

PCOL DWIGHT E. ALEGRE, Acting Provincial Director of Cavite PPO, called on the public for continued support. "Patuloy na pinaigting ng ating mga kapulisan ang kanilang pagtugis sa mga taong nagtatago sa batas. Nararapat lamang na makamit ng mga biktima ang nararapat na hustisya. Kaya't kami ay patuloy na humihingi ng tulong at suporta mula sa ating komunidad sapagkat sa Bagong Pilipinas, ang gusto ng pulis ligtas ka!"

PHP1.2M WORTH OF SHABU SEIZED, HIGH-VALUE DRUG PERSONALITY NABBED IN BACOR CITY

Camp BGen Pantaleon Garcia, City of Imus, Cavite- Personnel of Drug Enforcement Unit of Bacoor Component City Police Station apprehended a High Value Individual (HVI) during a buy-bust operation conducted at around 8:45PM on April 24, 2025, in Barangay Zapote 1, Bacoor City, Cavite.

PLTCOL JOHN PAOLO V CARRACEDO, Chief of Police of Bacoor CCPS, identified the suspect as alias "KUYA" and a resident of Barangay Zapote 1, Bacoor City.

The anti-drug operation was conducted at Barangay Zapote 1, Bacoor City, Cavite. Alias Kuya was arrested after selling a suspected shabu to an undercover

operative. Confiscated from the suspect, one (1) knot-tied transparent plastic bag containing suspected shabu weighing approximately 100 grams and three (3) heat-sealed transparent plastic sachets with an estimated total weight of 80 grams with a standard drug price amounting to Php1,224,000.00.

PLTCOL JOHN PAOLO V CARRACEDO, Chief of Police of Bacoor CCPS, commended the operating team for their vigilance and firm resolve in the fight against illegal drugs.

PCOL DWIGHT E. ALEGRE, Acting Provincial Director expressed his strong support for the sustained anti-drug campaign of Bacoor

CCPS, stating:

"This successful operation is a testament to the unwavering commitment of our police force to protect our communities from the harmful effects of illegal drugs. The arrest of this high-value individual sends a clear message to all drug personalities that Cavite is not a haven for illegal activities. We remain steadfast in our pursuit of a drug-free province and call on the public to continue supporting our efforts by reporting suspicious activities to authorities."

The arrested suspect is now under the custody of Bacoor CCPS and will face charges for violation of RA 9165 or the Comprehensive Dangerous Drugs Act of 2002.

CAVITE POLICE NAB TWO HIGH VALUE DRUG PERSONALITIES IN TANZA BUY-BUST OPERATION

Camp BGen Pantaleon Garcia, City of Imus, Cavite - Two High Value Individuals (HVIs) were arrested by the personnel of Tanza Municipal Police Station during a buy-bust operation at around 10:15 PM on April 24, 2025, in Barangay Bucal, Tanza, Cavite.

PLTCOL AL-RIEZA S KINANG, Acting, Chief of Police of Tanza Municipal Police Station, identified the suspects as alias Cairo, and alias Ommar both residents of Barangay Datu Esmael, Dasmariñas City, Cavite.

The operation was conducted by the Drug

Enforcement Team of Tanza MPS that led to the arrest of the suspects and confiscation of more or less 80.02 grams of suspected shabu with a standard drug price of P544,136.00. The entire operation was properly documented using an alternative recording device.

The suspects will be facing charges for violation of Sections 5, 11, and 26, Article II of Republic Act 9165 or the Comprehensive Dangerous Drugs Act of 2002.

PCOL DWIGHT E. ALEGRE, Acting Provincial Director expressed his commendation for the

successful operation, stating, "The arrest of two identified High Value Individuals is a clear testament to our relentless campaign against illegal drugs. We will continue to work tirelessly to keep our communities safe and drug-free. Let this serve as a stern warning to those who still dare to engage in such unlawful activities the full force of the law will catch up with you."

Cavite Police remains steadfast in its mission to eradicate illegal drugs and uphold peace and order in the province.

THE HUMAN POPE: A JOURNALIST'S SHARED HUMANITY WITH POPE FRANCIS

QUEZON CITY, (PIA) – For renowned journalist Jose A. Torres, Jr., covering activities of Pope Francis was not just an assignment but a deep personal journey.

In 2015, Torres was among the fourteen (14) Filipino media representatives who were given the opportunity to accompany the pontiff during his pastoral visits across Asia witnessing firsthand his remarkable ability to effortlessly blend the sacred with the secular, breaking the wall and creating a bridge between faith and everyday life.

Torres shared personal anecdotes about his interactions with Pope Francis, offering a glimpse into his remarkably human and approachable nature who openly engaged with people on a personal level.

“He was very friendly, very human. Walang ere, kumbaga, na tao. What I learned from him is ‘yung pagiging humble niya, pagiging normal niya na tao. He was also fun to be with, funny at ma-kwento,” Torres narrated, reflecting on one of his lifeworks with the Union of Catholic Asian News.

Torres recalled that Pope Francis’ key moment in his apostolic journey was when he visited the Philippines in January 2015 to offer comfort and spiritual support to communities affected by the onslaught of Super Typhoon Yolanda and celebrate the unwavering faith of the Filipino people. Torres was also able to join the pope when he met with Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh and remembered how the pontiff chose to reach out to the communities and foster open dialogues than to engage in purely symbolic gestures.

“He went straight to the refugees,” Torres said, “telling the officials on stage, ‘I came here to meet with the refugees, not you.’”

“Noong una, akala ko strikto siya. Kala ko masyado siyang academician, pero kapag

nakausap mo siya, tao siya na nakikipag-usap. Kinukumusta ka niya kung kumain ka ba, how’s your family, do you live in Manila, mga ganun na kwentuhan,” said Torres.

Sharing a personal connection with Pope Francis not only allowed Torres to report on the pontiff’s journey with greater insight but also to be deeply inspired by his example.

“I covered a lot of international figures—Dalai Lama, Jimmy Carter, mga presidente natin, pero yung kay Pope Francis ‘yung parang hindi coverage, para siyang pilgrimage. Hindi mo siya iniisip na trabaho because you long to see him everyday,” he said.

Torres also cited instances of conversions, recalling how the meaningful encounter with Pope Francis led a fellow journalist to return to the Catholic faith.

These encounters and the lessons learned left a lasting impression on him, ultimately shaping his understanding of leadership and service.

“Since I was in school, I have always been a writer. Then one day, I prayed for a different path,” he said, “and to my surprise, I received a call to work with the government.”

Following decades of dedicated service as a journalist, Torres took on a leadership role as the 21st Director-General of the Philippine Information Agency (PIA) in 2023 which enabled him to bring the principles he learned from Pope Francis, especially in terms of serving the people with humility.

To date, Torres is now serving as the Executive Director of the Presidential Task Force on Media Security (PTFoMS), prioritizing initiatives that will cater to the welfare of Filipino journalists.

Beyond a change in title or position, he perceives this redirection as a significant challenge to make use of his power and influence for the greater good.

HITTING TAX COLLECTION TARGET A SHARED DUTY AMONG FILIPINOS –BIR

CALAMBA CITY, Laguna (PIA) — The Bureau of Internal Revenue (BIR) Region 9B which covers Laguna-Quezon-Marinduque (LaQueMar) has emphasized that meeting the country’s tax collection target is not solely the responsibility of the bureau, but a shared duty of every Filipino.

“The tax collection target this year is not just BIR’s goal, it’s every Filipino’s goal because we are all the ones paying the tax, and we in BIR are just making sure that the tax paid is correct, and we believe that we can get that target by all of us working together,” BIR LaQueMar director lawyer Michael Remir Macatangay said

“I believe that we are challenged every day to test ourselves, to see if power or wealth will change who we are,” he stressed, noting that people should remain consistent with their true selves right to the end—just like Pope Francis.

Torres, along with countless Filipinos and people from other nations across the world, felt profound loss by the news of the Pope’s death.

“I prayed silently but I know in my heart and in my experience being with him that whatever happens, he would want us to go on in life,” he added.

The Vatican announced the passing of Pope Francis on April 21, 2025, a day after he delivered his final blessing on Easter Sunday.

As the world mourns the death of His Holiness, people continue to honor the memory of the pope for his transformative pontificate marked by humility, mercy, and commitment to global unity.

Before he was elected pope in 2013, Pope Francis was known to many as Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio from Buenos Aires, Argentina. He led the Catholic Church for 12 years. **(JMP/PIA-NCR) By Janna Marie Pineda**

during the Usapang PIA radio program.

For 2025, BIR has been tasked with collecting ₱3.23 trillion in revenue, a significant goal aimed at supporting the government’s ongoing economic efforts.

The target is critical to funding a wide range of programs designed to drive national development, including essential infrastructure projects, social services, and key sectors like healthcare, education, and social welfare.

To make tax filing more accessible and efficient for taxpayers, the bureau has rolled out several digitization efforts under Revenue Memorandum Circular (RMC) No. 034-2025 which provides updated guidelines on the filing of annual income tax returns and payment of taxes for Calendar Year 2024, and reinforces the shift towards digital services.

In the same interview, BIR Revenue District Office 56 Calamba City Central Laguna head Kay Templonuevo said taxpayers are encouraged to use platforms such as the Electronic Filing and Payment System (eFPS), eBIRForms, and other accredited online payment channels, which allow for more convenient, contactless transactions.

“The most important thing to note here in the revenue memorandum is that the income tax return shall be filed electronically to ensure timely compliance, accurate reporting, and improved efficiency in processing,” Templonuevo explained.

She added: “And the e-Lounge facility in our offices is also open for electronic filing by our taxpayers, as an added option to help ease their transactions.”

As the April 15 income tax deadline approaches, BIR reminds taxpayers to avoid last-minute filing to make sure that their returns are submitted on time, technical issues are minimized, and penalties for late filing are avoided. **(AM/PIA-4A) By Anna Mole**

EDITORIAL

Pamimigay ng smartphones, nakakabuti nga ba?

Ilan sa mga benepisyaryo ng 4Ps sa Navotas at Malabon ay pinamahagian ng libreng smartphone upang umano ay mapabilis ang proseso ng pagkuha ng ayuda kung saan maaaring magamit ang mga e-wallet at ipasok ang mga cash grants nito. Sinasabi na mas makakatulong ito upang maging mas madali ang pagpapamigay ng mga cash grants sapagkat mula sa atm na umano’y mahirap para sa ibang benepisyaryo ang makapag withdraw sa kadahilanang malayo pa ang mga machines mula sa kanilang mga lugar ay maaaring isend na lamang ang mga ito sa kani-kanilang mga smartphones sa tulong ng mga e-wallets.

Bagamat ang pamimigay ng cash grants online ay madali at makikitang makakatulong sa mga benepisyaryo ay hindi pa rin mawawala ang mga negatibong opinyon mula rito. Kung maisagawa man ang pamimigay ng cash grants online ay maaaring maging problema ang dagdag na gastusin sa load na gagamitin upang makuha ang pera ng mga benepisyaryo.

Para sa aking opinyon ay dapat na itinuon na lamang ang badyet sa ibang bagay na maaaring pagkakitaan ng mga benepisyaryo. Ang cash grants na nakukuha ng mga ito ay maaaring may pinaglaanan na o kaya naman ay maaaring magastos sa ibang mga bagay kaya naman panandalian lamang ang perang nakukuha ng mga ito. Upang masolusyunan ang ganitong mga suliranin ay marapat na bigyang pansin ang paglalaan na lamang ng badyet upang maging simula ng negosyo para sa mga benepisyaryo, magkaroon ng pagkukuhanan sa pang araw-araw na gastusin at nang maging pangmatagalan.

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DFA: 'COUPLE OF DEALS' EYED FOR SIGNING DURING JAPAN PM VISIT

MANILA – Foreign Affairs Secretary Enrique Manalo on Thursday said Japan and the Philippines are set to sign a number of bilateral agreements during the visit of Japanese Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba to Manila next week.

"I can't say right now how many but we will have a couple of agreements. The discussions will be on a broad range of issues —political, economic, and cultural," he said on the sidelines of the Maritime Security Forum in Manila.

The Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) has yet to disclose what specific agreements are up for signing.

The Filipino top diplomat highlighted the significance of this visit at a time when

the two governments are working to further strengthen strategic partnership between Manila and Tokyo.

"We have very close relations with Japan in so many areas so it is a symbol of the strength and growing cooperation between our two countries," he added.

Malacañang said Ishiba will undertake an official visit to the Philippines on April 29 to 30, and will hold a meeting with President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. to discuss economic and development cooperation, political and defense engagements, and people-to-people exchanges. **(WITH REPORT FROM PRIAM NEPOMUCENO/PNA) BY JOYCE ANN L. ROCAMORA**

PH, UAE INK SECURITY COOPERATION DEAL VS. TRANSNATIONAL CRIME

MANILA – The Philippines and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) are set to increase cooperation in combating transnational and organized crime with the signing of a new security agreement, the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) said.

In a statement late Wednesday, the department said the two governments signed the Agreement on Security Cooperation in Abu Dhabi during the official visit of Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG) Secretary Jonvic Remulla to the UAE capital on April 21.

The bilateral agreement will facilitate the exchange of information and implementation of joint initiatives to prevent, detect, and combat various forms of transnational and organized crime.

Areas of focus include, but are not limited to, cybercrime, drug trafficking, human trafficking, and other forms of serious criminal activity, the DFA said.

"While over the years, the security sectors of the UAE and the Philippines have cooperated in various capacities, the signing of this agreement

institutionalizes that collaboration," Philippine Ambassador to the UAE Alfonso Ver said.

The Philippine Embassy in the UAE called the signing a milestone in Philippine-UAE relations, saying it underscores the two states' "shared commitment to the rule of law, peace, and regional stability".

The deal, signed by Remulla and UAE Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Interior, His Highness Sheikh (Lt. Gen.) Saif bin Zayed Al Nahyan, will provide a strategic framework to guide future Philippine-UAE engagements "in a more structured, sustainable, and effective manner."

It also reinforces the broader vision of both governments to promote good governance, uphold international law, and advance mutual prosperity through strong and effective partnerships.

The DFA also expects this new deal to open more avenues for dialogue, training, and technical collaboration between the two countries' law enforcement and public safety institutions. **(PNA) BY JOYCE ANN L. ROCAMORA**

PNP COMMITTEE RAMPS UP CRACKDOWN ON DISINFORMATION

MANILA – The Philippine National Police (PNP), through its Joint Anti-Fake News Action Committee (JAFNAC), has launched an investigation into the alleged disinformation on the purported kidnapping of several high-profile Chinese business personalities.

This complies with President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr.'s directive to combat the spread of disinformation under his governance agenda.

In a statement on Thursday, PNP Chief Gen. Rommel Francisco Marbil said the JAFNAC, led by

deputy for operations Lt. Gen. Robert Rodriguez, is working with the PNP Anti-Cybercrime Group (ACG) for a focused and thorough probe to identify and hold accountable those responsible for spreading this baseless and malicious information.

Marbil said the creation of JAFNAC is a proactive measure of the PNP to institutionalize coordination, monitoring, and rapid response strategies to counter disinformation across all platforms.

"We will not rest until we uncover the individuals

PBBM ORDERS COMMUTERS' PROTECTION FROM 'ABUSIVE' DRIVERS

MANILA – President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. has directed the Department of Transportation (DOTr) to protect commuters from "abusive" drivers, Malacañang said on Thursday.

This was after the Land Transportation Office (LTO) issued show cause orders to owners of 1,165 vehicles that failed roadworthiness inspections.

"There is a directive coming from the President that there should be more protection to the commuters, to everyone, from abusive drivers," Presidential Communications Office Undersecretary and Palace Press Officer Claire Castro said in a press briefing.

The LTO also disclosed that about 671 drivers were suspended for various reasons.

Of the 671 drivers, 574 were suspended because of "road crash incidents resulting in slight physical injuries or death," while 97 tested positive for drugs.

DOTr Secretary Vince Dizon earlier ordered the creation of a special task force that will review road safety policies and procedures to reduce road accidents.

The World Health Organization's Global Status Report on Road

Safety 2018 showed an increasing trend in road traffic deaths in the Philippines, with a fatality rate of 12.3 per 100,000 population, compared to a fatality rate of 9.3 per 100,000 population in Europe.

Castro said the government, with the help of the special task force, is committed to promoting road safety.

"So, ito po ay napakaganda po dahil ipinapakita po natin sa taumbayan na sila ay dapat na safe sa daan. At hindi po dapat abusuhin ang anumang pribilehiyo na ikaw ay maging driver sa kalye (So, this is very good because we are showing the people that they should be safe on the road. And the privilege of being a driver should not be abused)," she said.

Castro also expressed support for the proposed measure preventing the detention of motor vehicle drivers who can provide sufficient proof of "defense driving" in a traffic incident.

"Siguro kapag ang imbestigador po ay nakita na ang isa ay siyang nabiktima o 'yung sasakyan ang mismong nadanyusan, hindi po naman dapat na makulong ang mismong nabiktima (Maybe when the investigator sees that someone is the victim or that the vehicle itself is the one that was hit, the victim should not be imprisoned)," she said.

"Pero may mga pagkakataon po na sa pagi-imbestiga, hindi naman agad nakikita kung sino iyong may sala. So, karapatan din po ng mga otoridad natin na huwag muna palayain o magkaroon ng agarang imbestigasyon.

Kasama na rin po sa due process (But there are times when during the investigation, it cannot be easily determined who is at fault. So, our authorities also have the right not to release someone or to have an immediate investigation. That's part of the due process)." **(PNA) BY RUTH ABBEY GITA-CARLOS**

COMELEC CANCELS REGISTRATION OF PILIPINAS BABANGON MULI PARTY-LIST

MANILA – The Commission on Elections (Comelec) canceled the registration of the Pilipinas Babangon Muli as a party-list organization over alleged misrepresentation.

In its 10-page ruling, the Comelec Second Division said it found out that none of the party-list's 10 nominees are from Region 4-A (Calabarzon), which it supposedly represents.

"Eight of its nominees are residents of the province of Abra, one of the province of Cagayan and one of Quezon City. None of the 10 nominees are residents of Calabarzon Region," the Second Division said in its ruling promulgated on Wednesday.

"Accordingly, all 10 nominees cannot be considered bona fide members of a regional political party purporting to represent Calabarzon. In turn, they cannot be qualified as nominees. This results in the absence of even a single qualified nominee as required by law," it added.

The decision said the party-list made "untruthful

statements" that warrant the cancellation of its registration.

"Respondent's previous assertion in its Petition for Registration -- that it possesses a regional constituency within Calabarzon -- has now been conclusively contradicted by its own subsequent admission in the instant Petition," the ruling said.

The decision was in response to the petition of lawyer Jess Christian Ramirez, who accused the group of misrepresenting itself as a regional political party representing Calabarzon while exclusively fielding nominees outside the region.

Ramirez also accused the group of falsely suggesting an association with President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr.

Since the ruling is on the division level, the group may still appeal the decision by filing a motion for reconsideration before the Comelec en banc. **(PNA) BY FERDINAND PATINIO**

GATCHALIAN SEEKS CRACKDOWN ON ONLINE LENDERS' HARASSMENT, THREATS

MANILA— Senator Sherwin Gatchalian on Wednesday renewed his call to regulate abusive practices of online lending companies, decrying the harassment and intimidation tactics borrowers continue to face. "Some of these lenders make borrowing easy, but miss one payment and they resort to threats -- public shaming, (and) even sending bullets or funeral wreaths," Gatchalian said in a statement, citing multiple complaints received by his office. The senator underscored the urgency of passing Senate Bill No. 818, or the Fair Debt Collection Practices Act, which seeks to ban harassment, intimidation, and other abusive behavior in collecting debt and prohibits threats of violence, profane language, and public

disclosure of borrowers' identities. "Lenders have the right to collect debts, but it must be done fairly and legally -- not through threats or endangering lives," he emphasized. Gatchalian also encouraged the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) to impose stricter regulations on online lending platforms, citing that the current minimum capital requirement for lending companies is only PHP1 million, regardless of how many online lending apps they operate. Currently, there are 117 registered lending and financing firms and 181 online lending applications (OLAs), SEC data showed. **(PNA) BY WILNARD BACELONIA**

NBI LINKS CHINA TO ESPIONAGE TARGETING PH SHIPS IN WPS

MANILA — Surveillance of Philippine vessels en route to the West Philippine Sea may be part of a wider and coordinated espionage operation tied to Chinese maritime forces, the National Bureau of Investigation (NBI) told a Senate panel on Wednesday.

Senate Majority Leader Francis Tolentino, who chairs the Special Committee on Maritime and Admiralty Zones, raised the alarm over intelligence reports that Chinese vessels were aware of Philippine resupply missions even before the ships departed from Palawan, suggesting possible coordination with foreign nationals recently arrested for suspected spying.

"There is a possibility, Mr. Chair, kasi 'yung Palawan 5 po ang sinu-surveillance niyan (ay) yung mga vessels po natin na papuntang (because the so-called Palawan 5 are doing surveillance to our vessels going to) WPS," lawyer Van Homer Angluben, executive officer

of the NBI Cybercrime Division, said during the hearing.

"Meron po kaming mga nakuhang information from the military na bago pa makaalis 'yung barko natin sa Palawan, alam na po ng mga vessel ng China na parating na 'yung resupply mission natin (We were able to get information from the military the before our vessels can leave Palawan, Chinese vessels already know that our resupply mission is coming)," he said.

The "Palawan 5" refers to the five Chinese nationals arrested separately in January for suspected spying on Philippine Navy and Philippine Coast Guard assets in Palawan.

Angluben said the NBI, in cooperation with military intelligence units, is actively verifying intelligence packets linked to possible foreign surveillance.

The Senate inquiry, through Resolutions No. 1267 and PS No. 1328, also focused on the March 19 arrest of six Chinese nationals and one Filipino in Subic, suspected of

DMW URGES OFWS TO STAY VIGILANT VS. LOAN SCAMS

MANILA — The Department of Migrant Workers (DMW) has urged overseas Filipino workers (OFWs) to stay vigilant against loan scams.

In a Facebook post on Wednesday, the DMW said it has ramped up efforts to protect OFWs from falling victim to lending financing companies proliferating online, in partnership with the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC).

"Mga OFWs, mag-ingat sa mga pekeng pautang sa Facebook! Nanghihingi ng bayad bago magpautang? Scam yan! (To our OFWs, beware of fake loans on Facebook! Asking for payment before granting a loan? That's a scam!)," the post read.

The DMW said these bogus lending schemes are rapidly increasing on social media, particularly

Facebook.

These scams typically involve fake financing companies that promise quick loans but demand upfront payments, only to disappear without releasing any funds.

The DMW stressed that legitimate lending companies do not require fees before releasing loans.

The SEC, meanwhile, urges the public to verify financial entities through the SEC Check App, downloadable online.

Migrant Workers Secretary Hans Leo Cacdac assured that the DMW remains steadfast in its commitment to safeguarding the rights and welfare of OFWs and their families left behind, as directed by President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. **(PNA) BY MARITA MOAJE**

PALACE ORDERS PROBE INTO CHINA'S ALLEGED INTERFERENCE IN MIDTERM POLLS

MANILA — Malacañang on Friday ordered the immediate and deeper investigation into China's alleged interference with the Philippines' midterm elections.

In a press briefing, Presidential Communications Office Undersecretary and Palace Press Officer Claire Castro expressed alarm over the National Security Council (NSC) revelation that there are indicators that China is interfering in the May 12 elections.

Castro said President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. is already aware of the supposed foreign interference.

"Ito po ay talagang nakakaalarma (This is truly alarming)," Castro said.

"Nakarating na po ito sa Pangulo. Kaya po kailangan po talaga ng maagaran, mas malalim na pag-iimbestiga (It has already reached the President. So, there

'BALIKATAN' GIVING AFP CHANCE TO TRAIN ON MODERN PLATFORMS

MANILA — The ongoing "Balikatan" exercise provides the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) a chance to train on the use of its newly acquired weapons systems or capabilities similar to the platforms used by its US counterparts.

This was stressed by Col. Doug Krugman of the US 1st Marine Expeditionary Force when asked why the NMESIS (short for Navy-Marine Expeditionary Ship Interdiction System) would be used for this iteration of the "Balikatan" exercise.

"I think it's in the exercise because the purpose of the exercise is to ensure we are advancing capabilities. The AFP has recently acquired BrahMos, a

coastal defense cruise missile system and the NMESIS is (of) similar capability.

So, as we are working (to) ensure interoperability, I think it's natural that we will bring a (similar) capability to exercise alongside AFP," Krugman said in an interview with PTV's Bagong Pilipinas Ngayon Wednesday.

The NMESIS was earlier described as a mobile anti-ship missile system with a range of 100 nautical miles. Krugman's views were shared by Brig. Gen. Michael Logico, assistant exercise director of the "Balikatan" for the Philippines.

"I agree because we are also looking at the capabilities that we did not have before. So, with the presence of the NMESIS and we are also intending to train that in conjunction with our BrahMos system -- these are capabilities that will expand our reach beyond our territorial waters," said Logico, also the "Balikatan" exercises spokesperson.

The BrahMos is a cruise missile that is capable of being launched from a ship, aircraft, submarine, or land; has a top speed of about Mach 2.8 (about 3,400 km. per hour); and is capable of carrying warheads weighing 200 kg. to 300 kg. It has a range of 290 km. to 300 km.

Logico also stated that the joint training between Filipino and US forces are part of ongoing efforts to enhance the interoperability and combat readiness of the two services.

The "Balikatan" drills began on April 21 and end on May 9.

This is the 40th iteration of the annual military exercise between the Philippines and the United States. **(PNA) BY PRIAM NEPOMUCENO**

GITA-CARLOS

SURIGAO SUR TOWN OPENS P33-M EVACUATION CENTER

BUTUAN CITY – The Municipal Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Office (MDRRMO) of Carmen, Surigao del Sur, has officially welcomed the completion of a PHP33-million evacuation center, aimed at providing shelter during calamities.

In a statement Wednesday, Carmen MDRRMO chief June Jaramillo said the new facility will serve as a safe haven for families — particularly those in vulnerable sectors — during natural disasters such as floods and landslides.

“With an area of 1,250 square meters, the center includes spacious sleeping quarters, gender-segregated restrooms, a dining area, and sinks with running water,” Jaramillo said.

The Department of Public Works and Highways

in the Caraga Region (DPWH-13) formally turned over the facility to the local government last week.

Designed to be more than just a shelter, the center also features a fully equipped kitchen, a laundry area, relief goods storage, a clinic, a breastfeeding station, a prayer room, and a playroom for children.

Jaramillo said the center is expected to serve over 2,600 families across eight barangays in the municipality, many of whom have previously relied on makeshift shelters such as schools and barangay halls during emergencies.

“With this facility, evacuees will no longer have to endure cramped and inadequate conditions. We now have a proper, safe, and dignified place for families displaced by disasters,” he added.

(PNA) BY ALEXANDER LOPEZ

ONLINE PRECINCT FINDER PROVIDES CONVENIENCE TO VOTERS: COMELEC

DUMAGUETE CITY – Registered voters now have different options to determine their assigned voting precincts during the May 12 elections, a Commission on Elections (Comelec) official said Wednesday.

Lawyer Lionel Marco Castillano, Comelec-Negros Island Region director, told the Philippine News Agency that with the activation of the online precinct finder, voters have better chances of easily locating their assigned polling centers ahead of the midterm polls.

“This (online precinct finder) is one of the efforts of the Comelec so that the people will directly know their voting center and precinct number,” Castillano said.

The poll body has made the online precinct finder available to the public earlier than usual this time, he added.

The Department of Information and Communications Technology (DICT) is now hosting the Comelec’s website and online precinct finder after these were hacked and compromised sometime in

2016, Castillano said.

He noted that one of the usual problems on election day is people having “a hard time finding their precincts but Comelec has different stages” to determine a voter’s precinct number.

Voters’ ways of determining their poll precinct include visiting the Comelec offices in the town or city where they are registered or through the Voter’s Information Sheet (VIS) which is currently being distributed house-to-house by people hired by the poll body.

The VIS contains not just the personal information of a voter, including a person’s assigned precinct number, but also the names of candidates, steps on how to vote, and even a sample ballot, Castillano said.

Other options also include hard copies of the registered voters’ lists, which can be obtained at assistance desks with the help of the Parish Pastoral Council for Responsible Voting on election day.

At the precinct level, a computerized voters’ list with their pictures would be posted, Castillano said. **(PNA) BY MARY JUDALINE PARTLOW**

ILOILO CITY EXEC ALARMED OVER PROLIFERATION OF MISLEADING INFO

ILOILO CITY – A member of the Sangguniang Panlungsod (SP) here on Wednesday expressed alarm over the proliferation of fake information, especially this election season, as well as online scams and digital fraud.

In his privilege speech titled “Cybercrimes and False Information: An Urgent Call to combat Cybercrimes and Spread of False Information” delivered during the SP regular session on Wednesday, Councilor Romel Duron said he is hoping that the council could come up with a resolution urging Congress to pass a law addressing the proliferation of false information.

“We live in very fast-moving lifestyles. The digital platforms make things easy and highly efficient, but criminals have become sophisticated in deceiving the public,” he said.

Duron said no less than

Mayor Jerry Treñas has complained of fake news several times.

“What he says in the media is being spliced, and the message is different. It appears that the mayor says one thing, but the news comes out differently. There are people who make fun of this social media because they remain free to do what they are doing, spreading disinformation,” he said.

Duron said his Facebook account has also been hacked several times.

He urged social media users to verify information “if it is genuine or not because there is a lot of misinformation [and] disinformation. I was alarmed because it is no less than the mayor already is complaining.”

Duron also cited the need for concerned government agencies to come up with a common stand on the issue. **(PNA) BY PERLA LENA**

P54-M FARM ROAD TO BOOST IP COCONUT PRODUCTION IN AGUSAN SUR

BUTUAN CITY – Some 15,000 Indigenous Peoples (IPs) in Barangay Sta. Cruz, Rosario, Agusan del Sur will directly benefit from the approved PHP54.5 million farm-to-market road (FMR) project, officials said Tuesday.

This development follows the signing of the implementation of the management agreement (IMA) on Monday between the Department of Agriculture in the Caraga Region (DA-13) and the local government unit.

“The signing of the IMA marks the commencement of the procurement, bidding and subsequent implementation phases of this vital project,” Vernon Jio Viajar, head of the Media Production Office for the Mindanao Inclusive Agriculture Development Project (MIADP) of DA-13, explained in an interview on Tuesday.

Viajar said the improved road infrastructure is expected to reduce post-harvest losses, streamline

the transportation of agricultural products, and enhance overall efficiency in reaching destination markets.

The MIADP program, supported by funding from the World Bank, is dedicated to enhancing agricultural productivity and improving market access for organized farmer and fisherfolk groups within selected ancestral domains across Mindanao.

The Certificate of Ancestral Domain Title (CADT) No. 078 of the IPs makes up roughly 60 percent of Rosario town, covering approximately 21,000 hectares, with 373 hectares specifically dedicated to coconut production.

“These coconut production areas are primarily located within IP communities belonging to the Manobo tribe, serving as their main source of livelihood in Rosario,” Viajar said.

He said the construction of the 2.7-kilometer FMR will directly support the primary

BUDGET-FRIENDLY ILOCOS DESTINATIONS EYED TO LURE MORE VISITORS

LAOAG CITY – Tourism stakeholders in Ilocos Norte are looking forward to developing more budget-friendly destinations to attract more visitors, particularly those who want to enrich their travel experience without spending too much.

The Ilocos Norte Tourism Office (INTO) saw this emerging trend as the province welcomed almost 350,000 day visitors during the Holy Week.

Reslyn Salud, who owns a lodging house in the coastal village of Saud in Pagudpud town, told the Philippine News Agency on Thursday that they were fully booked for the whole week.

“Business is good. We have so many visitors during the weekend,” Salud said.

Latest accommodation data showed high average occupancy rates across the province during the

Holy Week, with Pagudpud leading at 97 percent, followed by Currimao at 75 percent, and Laoag at 60 percent.

These establishments reported being fully booked from Holy Thursday to Black Saturday, showing a growing preference for nature-based vacations, particularly during the peak days of the holiday period. Aside from Ilocos Norte’s popular destinations — such as the UNESCO world heritage site St. Augustine Church in Paoay, Saud Beach in Pagudpud, and the Kapurpurawan Rock Formation in Burgos town — there is also a growing preference among tourists, including locals, toward the Coastal Boulevard in Currimao, Sentinella Hill in Bangui, and the upland towns of Adams and Dimalneg, according to INTO.

“We haven’t gotten the chance to sit down and study the statistics (visitors’ arrival) but I’m pretty confident there was an increase because we ran out of tour guides,” Dimalneg Vice Mayor Fraincess Kwyn Espiritu told PNA on Thursday.

With the influx of visitors to Dimalneg town, which is known for its refreshing Darna waterfalls, clean Bolo river and indigenous Isnag cuisine, Espiritu said talks are now underway for the provision of capacity-building training and seminar to address the need for more manpower in the tourism sector.

“We are set to convene this May to strategize how we can better manage the influx of tourists,” Espiritu said, adding the town’s tourism plan and code are also being finalized to attract more tourists and support local communities.

The Ilocos Norte government, meanwhile, is focusing on improving services in high-growth areas and assisting small businesses to cater to the emerging tourism trends. **(PNA) BY LEILANIE ADRIANO**

NEDA BOARD OKS ENHANCED E-VOUCHER FOOD STAMP PROGRAM

MANILA — The National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA) Board, chaired by President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr., has approved a three-year program to improve food insecurity and malnutrition measures.

The NEDA Board approved the Reducing Food Insecurity and Undernutrition with Electronic Vouchers (REFUEL) Project during its final meeting on Wednesday before its transition to become the Economy and Development (ED) Council as mandated by Republic Act (RA) 12145.

RA 12145 also gave the NEDA greater authority as the Department of Economy, Planning, and Development (DEPDev). The REFUEL project, set to be implemented from July 2025 to July 2028, is an enhancement of the Philippine Food Strategic Transfer and Alternative Measures Program (STAMP) of the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD), one of the strategies under the government's flagship Walang Gutom (Zero Hunger) 2027 Food Stamp Program.

It targets to benefit about 750,000 food-insecure households included under DSWD's Listahanan 3 database through an estimated PHP74.6 billion funding from the Asian

Development Bank, Agence Française de Développement, and the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries Fund for International Development.

"By approving the REFUEL project, the government demonstrates its unwavering commitment to fight food insecurity and undernutrition. The program reflects a renewed focus toward ending involuntary hunger, uplifting vulnerable communities, and promoting resilience through smart, nutrition-sensitive social protection," NEDA Secretary Arsenio Balisacan said in a statement Thursday. According to the 2023 National Nutrition Survey of the Department of Science and Technology's Food and Nutrition Research Institute, three in every 10 Filipino households experience moderate to severe food insecurity, and three out of every 100 households face severe food insecurity.

"The project's goal is to strengthen our shock-responsive social protection systems by ensuring the timely delivery of food vouchers to Filipinos in need, particularly those facing hunger and nutritional challenges in the face of increasing climate and disaster risks," Balisacan said. (PNA) BY JOANN VILLANUEVA

PH, US TO MEET FOR TARIFF NEGOTIATION NEXT WEEK

MANILA — Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) Secretary Ma. Cristina Roque and Special Assistant to the President for Investments and Economic Affairs (SAPIEA) Secretary Frederick Go will travel to the United States next week to negotiate the country's tariff rate under President Donald Trump's executive order.

Roque told reporters on the sidelines of the International Franchise Expo 2025 at the SMX Convention Center in Pasay City Friday that their official trip to the US will be from April 29 to May 2.

The Philippine officials will be meeting the US Trade Representative (USTR) and the Secretary of Commerce in Washington,

D.C.

"Our goal in the meeting is to bring down [the tariff rate], and of course, to get what's best for our country," Roque said.

She said the Philippines may offer increasing the volume of its imports from the US like soybeans and other agricultural products, while also balancing with the local agriculture sector. On Tuesday, Roque and Go met with various industries for a stakeholders' consultation as preparation for the upcoming meeting with US officials.

Go said he is confident that both countries would arrive at "mutually advantageous" tariff arrangements. (PNA) BY KRIS CRISMUNDO

DOE OPTIMISTIC TO MEET 50% CLEAN ENERGY SHARE BY 2040

MANILA — The Department of Energy (DOE) is optimistic the Philippines will hit its target to increase to 50 percent the share of clean energy in the power generation mix by 2040.

The share of renewable energy (RE) in the country's total power mix will exceed the 2040 target and even reach 56.9 percent, based on the DOE's simulation, Electric Power Industry Management Bureau (EPIMB) Supervising Science Research Specialist Mark Christian Marollano said Tuesday during the Power 101 media seminar organized by Aboitiz Power Corp., in coordination with the DOE. Marollano said the country's generation capacity by 2040 is seen at about 279.19 terawatt-hours (TWh), a 150 percent increase from the 111.52 TWh capacity in 2022.

The Marcos administration eyes RE to contribute 35 percent to the energy mix by 2030 and 50 percent by 2040.

Marollano said the DOE has received 14,624.84 megawatts (MW) of committed power projects until mid-2028 or until the

end of the term of President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr.

Of the total committed power capacity from 2025 to 2028, about 11,063.56 MW use RE technologies, he said.

Committed power projects have already secured firm financial closing, in the construction stage, or Green Energy Auction-awarded projects.

For 2025 alone, there are about 6,180.50 MW of committed power capacity, and about 4,339.76 MW is from RE, Marollano said.

On top of this, battery energy storage system projects have a committed capacity of about 480 MW across the country to date.

"The Department of Energy is responsible for checking the development of these projects to ensure that they will enter on time; they will not have delays. And if there is a delay, there is a time that the DOE will intervene and somehow provide measures to address the delay of these power projects to ensure that they will enter on time based on their scheduled time," he added. (PNA) BY KRIS CRISMUNDO

TRUCK MAP' IN GREATER MANILA AREA AIMS FOR 'NO TRUCK BAN' POLICY

MANILA — Stakeholders in the logistics sector target to release a freight map for the Greater Manila Area (GMA) this year, showing the routes of trucks and other vehicles used for moving goods.

This was shared by Professional Regulatory Board for Customs Brokers chairperson Samuel Bautista, who was the Logistics Lead at the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) Strengthening Private Enterprise for the Digital Economy (SPEED), on the sidelines of the 1st Stakeholders' Summit of United Portusers Confederation of the Philippines, Inc. in Parañaque City Wednesday.

Bautista said mapping the truck routes in GMA — Metro Manila, Calabarzon, and Central Luzon — is a project supported by the USAID SPEED and is aligned with Executive Order 41 issued by President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. in 2023 that prohibits the collection of pass-through fees on national roads and urging the local government units (LGUs) to suspend the collection of any form of fees for all vehicles transporting goods.

The EO led stakeholders in the logistics sector to map out national roads to identify and distinguish them from local roads.

"The goal is to understand cargo movement and identify areas where trucks

TANDUAY RETAINS MARKET LEADERSHIP AS PROFITS SURGE BY 37%

MANILA — Tanduay Distillers, Inc. (TDI) posted a record net income of PHP2.15 billion in 2024, a remarkable 37 percent increase from PHP1.57 billion in the previous year. The growth was driven by a combination of higher sales volumes in both liquor and bioethanol, which rose by 2 percent and 1 percent, respectively, along with strategic price increases that boosted segment revenues by 13 percent to PHP33.85 billion.

Despite economic headwinds, including inflationary pressures and weather-related disruptions that impacted consumer spending, TDI reinforced its leadership in the Visayas and Mindanao regions, where it maintains commanding market shares of 70.6 percent and 79.6 percent, respectively. On a national scale, TDI's market share for distilled spirits slightly dipped to 32.2 percent from 32.9 percent in 2023 due to heightened competition.

For the seventh straight year in 2023, Tanduay was the top-selling rum around the world with 23.4 million case liters sold, according to Drink International Magazine's The Millionaire's Club.

come and go," Bautista said.

"The project's ultimate goal is to standardize truck routes and possibly implement a 'no truck ban' policy on designated routes," he said in Filipino, adding that this move would help reduce logistics costs in the country.

Data from the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) showed that logistics costs in the Philippines account for about 25.5 percent of the gross domestic product (GDP), higher than Indonesia's 21 percent, Vietnam's 18 percent, Thailand's 13.8 percent, and Singapore's 7.4 percent. Higher logistics costs mean a less efficient economy. (PNA) BY KRIS CRISMUNDO

Tanduay also ranked seventh overall among the largest-selling spirits in the world.

In a strategic move to streamline its portfolio and focus on core operations, TDI divested from Asian Alcohol Corporation in October 2024.

The sale, valued at PHP1.8 billion, is structured with a four-year payment term and includes an upfront cash payment of PHP480 million. The transaction aligns with TDI's long-term vision of optimizing its business and enhancing economic viability.

TDI's stellar performance significantly contributed to the record-breaking earnings of its parent company, LT Group, Inc. (LTG). The conglomerate's attributable net income surged by 14 percent to PHP28.92 billion in 2024 from PHP25.42 billion in the previous year, with TDI accounting for PHP2.14 billion or 7 percent of the total.

Beyond Tanduay, other LTG subsidiaries also posted robust financial results.

Philippine National Bank recorded an 11 percent uptick in net income, reaching PHP21.18 billion; Asia Brewery, Inc. delivered a 46 percent increase in net income to PHP841 million, buoyed by a 5 percent rise in sales across its major product lines; and Victorias Milling Company contributed PHP492 million to LTG's earnings.

Reaffirming its commitment to delivering value to shareholders, LTG declared a special cash dividend of 35 centavos per share in November, amounting to PHP3.79 billion. This brought the total year-to-date dividend payout to PHP1.25 per share or PHP13.53 billion, representing a 53.2 percent payout rate.

With its robust financial performance, strategic initiatives, and continued market leadership, Tanduay Distillers remains a key pillar of LTG's success, reinforcing the conglomerate's position as a dominant force in the Philippine business landscape. (PR)



UST SHOOT FOR WMPBL TITLE

MANILA – University of Santo Tomas seeks to claim the title when it battles Pilipinas Aguilaas meet in the winner-take-all Game 3 of the Women's Maharlika Pilipinas Basketball League (WMPBL) Invitational Finals at the Ninoy Aquino Stadium on Wednesday. Game time is 6 p.m.

The Tigresses relied on Nigerian center Oma Onianwa and Rachelle Ambos to beat Pilipinas Aguilaas, 69-64, in Game 2 last Sunday to force the rubber match.

Onianwa had 30 points, eight rebounds, three blocks and two steals. Ambos chipped in 13 points as UST bounced back from an 86-95 double overtime loss in Game 1 last April 16 at the Rizal Memorial Coliseum.

Both are expected to perform well again with support coming from Kent Pastrana and Eka Soriano. UST head coach Ged Austria said the team has to limit its mistakes and maintain discipline on both ends of the floor.

"We need to correct our mistakes, that's part of the game plan," Austria said. "I already told the players what else is wrong and what needs to be improved."

Meanwhile, Fil-American guard Alexis Pana will banner Pilipinas Aguilaas in their bid for glory.

"I just want to play our game and just focus on the things that we need to correct and all that stuff," said Pana, who finished with 17 points, eight rebounds, five assists, four steals, and a block in Game 2. Backing her up are Mar Prado, Elaine Etang, and Chack Cabinbin. **(PNA) BY JEAN MALANUM**

MADIS HURDLES FIRST MATCH IN ITF J300 KUCHING

MANILA – Philippine Tennis Academy player Tennielle Madis defeated Chinese Zhang-Qian Wei, 6-1, 6-3, Wednesday in the International Tennis Federation (ITF) J300 Kuching at the Sarawak Lawn Tennis Association court in Malaysia.

She will next face No. 9 Russian Anastasia Lizunova, who took a first-round bye along with No. 1 Reina Goto and No. 2 Kanon Sawashiro of Japan, No. 3 Maaya Rajeshwaran Revathi of India, No. 4 Kamonwan Yodpetch of Thailand, No. 5 Polina Kuharenko of Belarus, No. 6 Renee Alame of Australia, No. 7 Yuyao Li of China and No. 8 Ada Kumru of Turkey.

In the doubles, Madis and Australian partner Jizelle Sibai will be up against Japanese pair Yusuha Negishi and Riyo Yoshida. The 17-year-old Madis, who hails from M'lang, North Cotabato, is currently No. 212 in the ITF Juniors

singles rankings.

Last week, she and Russian Alexandra Malova lost to Australian siblings Renee and Rianna Alame, 1-6, 2-6, in the doubles final of the J200 event in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

"I hope Tenny performs well, she's a fighter, I know she'll give her best in every match," former Davis Cupper and SEA Games medalist Robert Angelo said in an online interview.

After Kuching, Madis will join the J300 Nonthaburi Closed Regional Championships scheduled on April 28 to May 3 in Thailand.

Madis kicked off 2025 with two doubles titles in United Arab Emirates last January.

Last year, she bagged five doubles titles, including four with PTA teammate Stefi Marithe Aludo in Manila, China, Thailand and Sri Lanka, all J60 events. **(PNA) BY JEAN MALANUM**

VTV BINH DIEN LONG AN, ZHETYSU ADVANCE IN AVC CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

MANILA – Vietnam's VTV Binh Dien Long An recovered from a first-set loss to conquer Saipa Tehran, 22-25, 25-15, 25-20, 25-15, on Tuesday in the Asian Volleyball Confederation (AVC) Women's Champions League at the Philsports Arena in Pasig.

Vi Thi Nhu Quynh finished with 21 points off, 16 spikes, three blocks, and two aces as the Vietnamese club took the No. 2 seed in Pool C to join Baic Motor of China in the next round.

Baic Motor Club advanced one last Monday after prevailing over VTV Binh Dien Long An, 22-25, 21-25, 25-19,

25-13, 15-10.

VTV Binh Dien Long An will face Pool B leader Kaohsiung Taipower in the knockout quarterfinals on Thursday.

"After the first set, I switched T4 (Tran Thi Thanh Thuy) to opposite and moved Quynh to outside hitter. I also brought in Lu Thi Phuong, and that changed our fortunes," commented Binh Dien Long An head coach Thai Quang Lai through an interpreter.

Polish import Natalia Lijewska chipped in 15 points, while Thuy had 14 points on 12 attacks, one block, and one ace, along with 13 excellent digs in the one hour and 50-minute

FILIPINO GM ANTONIO 4TH IN CANBERRA TOURNEY

MANILA – Filipino Grandmaster Rogelio "Joey" Antonio Jr. settled for fourth place in the Premier division of the O2C Doeberl Cup Chess Championships held on April 17 to 21 this year in Canberra, Australia.

The 63-year-old Antonio placed third with 6.5 points, in a tie with Australian GM Zhao Zong-Yuan and Polish GM Jacek Stopa of Poland, but he ended up fourth after the tiebreak.

Indian GM Guha Mitrabha secured 7.5 points to win the tournament followed by compatriot Das Sayantan with the 7.0 points.

"I would like to dedicate my victory to my family, my friends and to God," Antonio said in an interview on Wednesday.

He finished second in the rapid event of the Melbourne International Open Chess Championships last April 11.

Meanwhile, compatriot Jose Efren Bagamasbad ranked 35th with 4.0 points in the FIDE Standard chess event. Antonio and Bagamasbad will join the Sydney International Open on April 23 to 27.

They will also compete in the FIDE (World Chess Federation) World Seniors Chess Championships scheduled from Oct. 20 to Nov. 2 in Puglia, Italy. **(PNA) BY JEAN MALANUM**

match.

Outside hitters Mahsa Saberi and Mahsa Kadkhoda scored 11 points apiece for Saipa Tehran, which ended its campaign at 0-2.

Meanwhile, Zhetysu VC of Kazakhstan downed Al Naser of Jordan, 25-10, 25-15, 25-11, to sweep Pool A and advance to the quarterfinal along with Creamline, which has a 1-1 slate.

Karyna Denysova and Yuliia Dymar scored 11 and nine points, respectively, for Zhetysu while Isabela Paquiardi led Al Naser with 11 points and five digs. **(PNA) BY JEAN MALANUM**

PILIPINAS AGUILAS RULE WMPBL INVITATIONAL

MANILA – The Pilipinas Aguilaas defeated the University of Santo Tomas, 54-45, in Game 3 Wednesday night to secure the Women's Maharlika Pilipinas Basketball League (WMPBL) Invitational title at the Ninoy Aquino Stadium.

Mar Prado scored 16 points on 7-of-13 shooting and had 12 rebounds, three steals, and three blocks as the Aguilaas held a 10-2 run to take a 51-43 lead with 4:16 remaining. The Aguilaas, who won Game 1 in double overtime, 95-86, trailed 3-14 in the first quarter before staging a rally to tie the score, 41-41, at halftime.

"For me, it's really about the players. I was telling the players before the game, what is the story of the Aguilaas? And you have players from all sorts of backgrounds. Some were students, some were in the army, some are coming back from bad injuries, one player, Lexi (Pana), is reconnecting with her roots, so the story behind

each and every player is something very special," said Pilipinas Aguilaas head coach Paulo Layug.

"The makeup of the team, the character of the team, you rarely get to coach a team like this. That's why I'm very grateful. It was really an honor to be their coach this season."

Alexis Pana contributed 13 points, eight rebounds, two assists, and five steals. She was named Finals MVP after averaging 16.3 points, 8.0 rebounds, 4.3 assists, and 3.6 steals throughout the series.

Cheska Apag chipped in 13 points, including three triples, to go with four rebounds, five assists, and four steals.

Kent Pastrana finished with eight points, five rebounds, and three assists for the Tigresses, who registered a 69-64 win in Game 2 to force the rubber match.

Agatha Bron, Rachelle Ambos and Karylle Sierba also delivered eight points, while Oma Onianwa chipped in six points on top of 17 rebounds. **(PNA) BY JEAN MALANUM**

CHINA'S BAIC MOTOR ADVANCES TO AVC WOMEN'S CHAMPIONS LEAGUE QF

MANILA – Baic Motor Club of China survived VTV Binh Dien Long An of Vietnam, 22-25, 21-25, 25-19, 25-13, 15-10, Monday to sweep Pool C in the Asian Volleyball Confederation (AVC) Women's Champions League at Philsports Arena in Pasig.

Jin Ye scored 30 points on 24 attacks, four aces and two blocks, and made 10 excellent digs as the Chinese squad, which pulled off a 28-26, 25-22, 25-19 win over Saipa Tehran the day before, advanced to the quarterfinal round.

As the No. 1 seed in Pool C, Baic Motor will face the No. 2 seed in Pool B, which is composed of Premier Volleyball League All-Filipino champion Petro Gazz, Chinese Taipei's Taipower, and Hong Kong's Hip Hing.

"I am familiar with the local teams here. I have been here before. But we have a younger team this year and all we want to do is bring more experience back to China so that we don't have any pressure on us," Baic Motor coach Kuang Qi said through an interpreter. Tran Thi Thanh Thuy and

Vi Thi Nhu Quynh powered Vietnam in the first two sets but the Chinese spikers got their act together and successfully took the next two sets to force the decider.

Baic Motor relied on Lu Yufei, Shan Lanfeng, Shen Hongyi and Ye in the fifth set to seal the win.

"Ye is playing well. I'm happy not just with her performance today but also with the leadership she brings to the team. She's one of our veterans and she did exactly what we needed from her," Qi said. Lanfeng contributed 20 points on 14 attacks, four blocks, and two aces, while Yufei had 14 points. Shen Hongyi and Tian Yue chipped in nine and seven points, respectively.

Quynh led Binh Dien Long An with 22 points on 20 attacks followed by Thuy with 20 points, including 18 attacks.

Russian import Lijewska Natalia scored 12 points and middle blocker Nguyen Thi Ngoc Hoa had seven points for Binh Dien Long An, which must prevail over Saipa Tehran on Tuesday to advance. **(PNA) BY JEAN MALANUM**