

INCLUSIVE LEADERSHIP BRIDGES GAP FOR WOMEN

Gender-responsive budgeting practices have paved the way for more inclusive programs and services in the City of General Trias, Cavite. Ann Ferrer, head of the General Trias City Women's Development Council and founding chairperson of the Cavite Council of Women, highlighted the role of local government units in creating programs to address women's issues such as health services and economic opportunities.

"It became my priority to focus on women's [welfare] because, as a woman and a wife, I am aware of their concerns. Part of our advocacy in working on behalf of our spouses is helping our kababayans and forwarding their concerns to the local government," Ferrer shared. According to the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women), empowering women and girls to participate in policymaking and decision-making provides an avenue for women's groups and civil society actors to participate in governance and perform gender-responsive budgeting and monitoring the outcomes of such budgets.

Since its establishment in 2011, the Cavite Council of Women has become a platform for women to deliver gender-responsive government programs, ranging from livelihood training to health caravans.

Its primary goal is to provide health services for women in the province's eight cities and 16 municipalities, providing their expertise in advising local government units in utilizing their funds for creating gender-responsive programs and services.

The Cavite Council of Women also launched the Buntis



Congress in General Trias City, which provides health check-ups to expectant mothers with no financial capacity to seek pre-natal consultations.

"Most of them are young girls who are not yet ready to become mothers. So we give them seminars and free health services, like ultrasound and free medicines and vitamins for the mummies."

Through the Council, Caviteño women are lobbying for the provincial government to allocate funds for gender-responsive livelihood programs.

The Women's Budget, a Gender and Development (GAD) policy introduced through the General Appropriations Act (GAA) in 1995, aimed to support gender-focused programs and projects by directing government agencies and local government units to allocate a minimum of five percent (5%) of its annual budget for GAD programs, projects, and activities.

"We get our allocation as part of the Gender and Development [fund]. Not all five percent, but we are included. When our proposed projects which are part of the Programs, Projects, and Activities under the GAD fund are approved by the city government, we can create more programs for women."

A homemaker herself, Ferrer understood women's dedication to becoming nurturing mothers and wives for their families.

"We do so much that we neglect ourselves. We come last in our own priorities that we neglect ourselves because we want to provide everything to our family, to our husband. Those are our priorities as women."

As the basic unit of governance, the Women's Development Council mobilized the barangays to extend their services to the grassroots communities by designating coordinators for each barangay to represent their communities in meetings and discussions on the city's much-needed GAD programs.

"We also conduct monthly meetings to discuss the projects we can share with our neighbors [cities and municipalities] that they can replicate. Those that brought positive changes in their municipalities can be replicated in other areas."

Local government units are instrumental in providing women with access to economic opportunities, regardless if they are careerwomen or homemakers. With ample legislation and support from civil society groups, women can make their voices heard, opening doors to opportunities and services they need. **(PB/RBF/PIA4A)**

By Patricia Bermudez

PARAÑAQUE'S NATIONAL SHRINE OF MARY HELP OF CHRISTIANS GETS MINOR BASILICA

MANILA, (PIA) — The National Shrine of Mary Help of Christians in Parañaque City was recently elevated to the rank of minor basilica by His Holiness Pope Francis.

The parish community was delighted with the elevation of the National Shrine of Mary Help of Christians Parish to a

Minor Basilica, the first in the Parañaque diocese.

"Receiving this honor is truly a grace from God and a profound blessing for our National Shrine and Parish," in a statement made by the parish.

In the document *Domus Dei*, issued by the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, the Church affirms her enduring mission to uphold the beauty and sacredness of the House of God. For this reason, she continues to grant the title of Minor Basilica to select churches, a designation that signifies a special bond with the Chair of St. Peter and an invitation to become a center of liturgical and pastoral life for God's people.

According to Vatican News, minor basilicas are distinguished by their special connection to the pope and the Church of Rome, serving as a sign of the Church's universality.

Basilicas are granted the privilege of an "ombrellino" — a red and yellow, cone-shaped canopy — and a "tintinnabulum," a bell mounted on a pole that can be carried in processions. They are also permitted to use the crossed "papal keys" on banners and signs.

The National Shrine of Mary Help of Christians is the first minor basilica in the 22-year-old Diocese of Parañaque. When the pope designates a basilica, the parish said, "it's an invitation to become a center of liturgical and pastoral life for God's people."

The new basilica, located in Better Living Subdivision, is also home to a century-old image of Mary, Help of Christians, which received canonical coronation in 2022. According to the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines (CBCP), the widespread propagation of the devotion to Mary, Help of Christians in the Philippines began with the appointment of Salesian Archbishop Guglielmo Piani as Apostolic Delegate to the Philippines in 1922.

On his journey to the Philippines, he brought with him the statue of Mary, Help of Christians which was first enthroned at the Manila Cathedral.

In 1942, during the Japanese occupation, the image was brought to Our Lady of Loreto Church in Manila's Sampaloc district for safekeeping.

It was only in 1994 that the image was transferred to her national shrine in Parañaque.

The statue is the second canonically crowned image in the diocese aside from the 400-year-old image of Nuestra Señora del Buen Suceso, venerated at St. Andrew's Cathedral. **(JEG/PIA-NCR) By Jimmyley E. Guzman**



CREATIVE INDUSTRY NEW PRIORITY PROGRAM OF DTI

CALAMBA CITY, Laguna (PIA) — The Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) promotes and showcases the creative industry as one of the priority programs. Christian “Ted” Tungohan, Provincial Director of DTI Laguna, discussed in the program Kapihan sa PIA: Ugnayan at Talakayan sa Laguna on March 20.

“DTI is in charge not only of micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) development but also of business development and consumer protection,” Tungohan said.

He pointed out that DTI has two mandates — business development and consumer empowerment protection.

“Business development aims to continue to provide technical assistance to MSMEs and to boost the industry, and its main functions are MSMEs development, industry development, and investment promotion,” he added.

Under the Industry Cluster Enhancement Program, DTI identified several priorities, including coffee, cacao, wearables and home style, bamboo, processed fruits and nuts, coconut, Coconut Farmers Industry Development Plan (CFIDP), and creatives.

“There are key things we consider before it becomes part of the priority under the industry clustering program. First, the market demands locally and internationally. Second, the high supply of raw materials and market potential. We make sure that it aligns with the National Industry Cluster Enhancement Program, and it,” he explained.

Creatives became part of the program because it encompassed all the key components under the industry clustering.

“We have nine domains under the creative industry. In the province of Laguna we have cultural performances; we also want to promote the creation of movies,” he said.

In Laguna, the majority of the creative industry falls in the design domain, and it includes fashion and accessories.

“We have a lot of talented fashion designers, and we want to help them showcase their creativity

not only in Laguna but also outside the province through a fashion designer competition,” he added.

Laguna is known in the creative industry. Liliw, Laguna, is the footwear capital and is well-known in wearables; Lumban is known when it comes to embroidery, Paete for wood carving, and Pakil for papier-mâché. Additionally, Mabitan is known for its furniture design and Biñan for upcycled and high-end furniture.

One of the initiatives under the PCI was the “Fiesta Haraya: Likha at Husay ng Calabarzon,” where Laguna generated Php 298,027 in sales.

Laguna also represented Calabarzon at the Philippine Creative Industries Festival (PCIF) in One Ayala, Makati City. The event was celebrated with the theme “Filipino creativity: Disenyo at Kultura, Sining ng Kalinangan, and Meet the Makers.”

In addition, he shared that three local government units (LGUs) in Laguna, including Calamba, Biñan, and San Pedro, benefitted from the launching of Lungsod Lunsad Projects (LLP). LGUs receive Php 5 million worth of projects for the implementation of LLP in their town. The LLP projects are Lunsod Lunsad Calambago Fiesta: Taste, Style, and Creativity Fair; San Pedro Lunsod Lunsad Showcase of Different Creative Industries; and Likhain and Biñan Packaging and Design Center.

Tungohan emphasized, “The LLP projects not only showcase different creativity but also highlight sustainability and focus on conservation of our natural resources.”

Other DTI programs under business development include the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program (CARP), Cities and Municipalities Competitiveness Index, Kapatid Mentor Me Program, Youth Entrepreneurship Program (YEP), Shared Service Facilities (SSF), Negosyo Serbisyo sa Barangay, One Town One Product (OTOP), and Kadiwa ng Pangulo.

(KA-PIA4A) By Kristianne Andrade

MAGALLANES PNP EXECUTES SUCCESSFUL ARREST OF ROBBERY SUSPECT

Camp BGen Pantaleon Garcia, City of Imus, Cavite—The relentless campaign of the Cavite Police against wanted persons has led to the successful arrest of Wanted Person, at about 04:45 PM of April 3, 2025, in Barangay Taywanak, Alfonso, Cavite.

PMaj RAYMOND T BALBUENA Chief of Police, Magallanes Municipal Police Station, identified the suspect as alias Paul and presently residing in Brgy. Taywanak Ibaba, Alfonso, Cavite.

Personnel from the warrant section of Magallanes Municipal Police Station, conducted a law enforcement operation targeting Wanted Person, that resulted in the arrest of the accused for the Violation of ROBBERY UNDER ART. 299 PAR. (A) (2) BOF THE REVISED PENAL CODE, AS AMENDED BY SEC. 79 OF REPUBLIC ACT NO. 10951 with Criminal Case

NO.NC-522-23, issued by Regional Trial Court, Fourth Judicial Region, Branch 132, Naic, Cavite, dated June 15, 2023 with Php 72, 000.00 bail recommended.

The police operation was executed in adherence to standard protocols, including the use of an Alternative Recording Device (ARD) in the absence of a Body-Worn Camera (BWC). Furthermore, the accused was informed of his constitutional rights in a language he understands. The accused was temporarily detained at the Magallanes Municipal Police Station custodial facility.

This arrest highlights the unwavering commitment of the Cavite Police to ensuring justice and security in the province. We reaffirm our dedication to tracking down and arresting fugitives to uphold the rule of law.

P26.3-M ILLEGAL DRUGS SEIZED IN CAVITE, PAMPANGA, PASAY

MANILA — Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency (PDEA) operatives have confiscated PHP26.3 million worth of illegal drugs in separate operations in the provinces of Cavite and Pampanga, and in Pasay City.

In a statement on Friday, the PDEA said a suspect, identified as alias Sian, 30, was arrested in the buy-bust operation in Dasmariñas, Cavite, and seized from him around 1.5 kilos of shabu worth PHP10.2 million.

In Clark, Pampanga, the PDEA Clark Interdiction unit confiscated 4,491 pieces of party drug tablets, known as ecstasy, worth PHP7.6 million in an operation on April 2.

The illegal drugs were found in a shipment that arrived at the Port of Clark on March 29 from Belgium.

“PDEA International Cooperation and Foreign Affairs Service (ICFAS) received information that a certain parcel from Belgium will arrive at Port of Clark. The said information

was relayed by PDEA Intelligence Service to PDEA Regional Office 3, which led to the successful interdiction operation,” the PDEA said.

In Pasay City, the PDEA and the NAIA Inter-Agency Drug Interdiction Task Group (NAIA-IADITG) seized abandoned inbound parcels containing dried leaves suspected to be marijuana kush weighing 7,703 grams with standard price of PHP8.55 million at Central Mail Exchange Center in Domestic Road, Pasay City on April 2.

The PDEA said the abandoned parcels were declared as rice TH, pillows, dried fruits, tea, and toys. The shipper and receiver involved are subject to investigation and the filing of appropriate charges in violation of Republic Act 9165.

Drug evidence will be submitted to the PDEA Laboratory Service for further laboratory examination. **(PNA) By Christopher Lloyd Caliwan**

BACOR POLICE NAB SUSPECT FOR THEFT, VIOLATIONS OF ILLEGAL POSSESSION OF FIREARM, AND OMNIBUS ELECTION CODE

BACOR CITY— On April 1, 2025, authorities successfully apprehended a suspect involved in theft and illegal possession of a firearm following a swift response by barangay officials in Brgy. Zapote 3, Bacoor City, Cavite.

At about 2:00 AM on April 1, 2025, the complainant, identified as alias “LURI,” a resident of Brgy. Molino 3, Bacoor City, Cavite, reported the loss of his body bag from his issued vehicle at Brgy. Zapote 3. Later that morning, at around 5:00 AM, barangay officials of Brgy. Zapote 3 received information regarding an unidentified individual allegedly carrying a short firearm within their vicinity.

Upon verification, Barangay Tanods approached the suspect, identified as alias “Cardo,” a laborer residing in Brgy. Zapote 3. Instead of cooperating, the suspect reacted aggressively, shouting, “Ano ang ginagawa nyo dito, mga istorbo kayo mga Tanod kayo!” before attempting to flee. A brief chase ensued, leading to his apprehension.

MOST WANTED PERSON REGIONAL LEVEL ARRESTED BY CAVITE PNP

Camp BGen Pantaleon Garcia, City of Imus, Cavite—Warrant personnel of Cavite Component City Police Station, together with the personnel of 401st A Maneuver Company RMFB4A, successfully apprehended a most wanted person regional level at 1:30 PM of April 2, 2025, in Barangay 36, Cavite City, Cavite.

PLTCOL Jesus Erickson S Polinag, Chief of Police, Cavite CCPS, identified the accused as alias Rina, 43 years old and presently residing in Brgy. 36, Cavite City, Cavite.

The warrant personnel of Cavite Component City Police Station, together with the personnel of 401st Maneuver Company RMFB4A, equipped with a Body Worn Camera (BWC) and Alternative Recording Device (ARD), conducted a joint operation against a most wanted person at Barangay 36, Cavite City,

During the arrest, authorities recovered a 9mm caliber pistol and a body bag containing the complainant's belongings.

At about 5:00 PM on the same day, the Barangay Tanods turned over the suspect to the Bacoor Component City Police Station - Investigation Section for further investigation. An appropriate complaint is now being prepared for filing before the Office of the City Prosecutor of Bacoor, Cavite, through inquest proceedings for the crime of theft and violation of RA 10591 (Comprehensive Firearms and Ammunition Regulation Act) and the Omnibus Election Code.

Bacoor Police commend the vigilance and swift action of the barangay officials, which led to the successful apprehension of the suspect and the recovery of stolen items. This incident highlights the importance of community cooperation in ensuring public safety and maintaining peace and order in Bacoor City.

which resulted in the arrest of the accused for violation of Sections 5 and 11, Article II of Republic Act 9165, with criminal case number 744-2024 and 745-2024, by virtue of a warrant of arrest issued by the presiding judge of Regional Trial Court, Fourth Judicial Region, Branch 16, Cavite City, Cavite, dated March 26, 2025, with service of sentence.

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.

PALACE LAUDS RUDE RUSSIAN VLOGGER'S ARREST; PERSONA NON GRATA LOOMS

MANILA — Malacañang on Friday lauded law enforcement agencies for their swift action in arresting Russian-American vlogger Vitaly Zdorovetskiy, who was accused of harassing Filipinos in viral videos.

In a Bagong Pilipinas Ngayon interview, Palace Press Officer and Presidential Communications Office Undersecretary Claire Castro said President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. was made aware of the incident and swiftly ordered authorities to take action.

"Yes, opo, nakarating po ito sa ating Pangulo kaya po mabilis niya po itong pinakilos itong ating mga awtoridad (Yes, the President was informed about this, which is why he quickly ordered authorities to act)," Castro said.

Castro credited the Philippine National Police (PNP), the Criminal Investigation and Detection Group (CIDG), and the Bureau of Immigration (BI) for their joint efforts in

apprehending the vlogger.

"Kaya po sa joint efforts po ng PNP, CIDG at ang Bureau of Immigration ay nahuli po itong agad si Vitaly Zdorovetskiy dahil nga nakita nga po kung papaano bastusin ang ating mga kababayan at hindi igalang kung anong batas natin dito (Through the joint efforts of the PNP, CIDG, and the Bureau of Immigration, Zdorovetskiy was immediately arrested after he was seen disrespecting our fellow Filipinos and disregarding our laws)," she said.

Castro confirmed that Zdorovetskiy is now detained at the BI facility at Camp Bagong Diwa in Bicutan and is undergoing inquest proceedings.

Castro said Zdorovetskiy is expected to be deported and could be declared persona non grata.

"Opo. Eh unang una po ay ipapa-deport na yan eh so doon pa lang po talagang persona non grata na ang maituturing sa kanya (Yes. First of all, he will be

deported, so he can already be considered persona non grata)," she said.

The Filipino cameraman working with Zdorovetskiy may also face charges, Castro said.

"Opo. Kasi po kung tutuusin po natin in conspiracy po yan (Yes, because technically, that constitutes conspiracy)," she said, adding that he could be charged with unjust vexation, depending on the nature of his participation. Castro stressed that foreign vloggers are welcome in the Philippines, but they must respect local laws and customs.

"Ang mga turista naman po, ang mga foreign nationals, ay welcome naman po sa Pilipinas. Pero hindi po ibig sabihin nito na eh kung welcome sila ay handa na rin po nila na bastusin ang mga Filipino, ang kostumbre po natin, ang batas natin" (Tourists and foreign nationals are welcome in the Philippines, but that does not mean they can disrespect Filipinos, our customs, and our laws), Castro said.

She further explained that freedom of expression must be balanced with responsibility.

"Ang bawat freedom, ang

bawat karapatan ay may kaakibat na obligasyon. Hindi puro karapatan ang dapat isigaw" (Every freedom, every right comes with obligations. One should not only demand rights)," she said.

Zdorovetskiy, 34, was arrested Wednesday at Seaside Boulevard in Pasay City after the BI declared him an undesirable alien.

CIDG Director Maj. Gen. Nicolas Torre III said the arrest followed an online uproar over Zdorovetskiy's content, which included pretending to rob a woman and mocking a security guard.

"We have read the online outrage and we coordinated with other authorities for proper actions against the subject. We cannot just let this incident pass," Torre said.

BI Commissioner Joel Viado stressed that visitors must follow Philippine laws. "The Philippines welcomes visitors from all over the world but those who abuse our hospitality and abuse our laws will be held accountable," Viado said. "Harassment and disruptive behavior have no place in our society and we will take swift action against offenders." (PNA) By

Filane Mikee Cervantes

LTO TOUTS EXPANDED SERVICES APPROVED BY PBBM

MANILA — The Land Transportation Office (LTO) on Friday thanked President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. for approving seven legislations that seek to improve and expand the LTO's services.

In a statement, LTO Chief Assistant Secretary Vigor Mendoza II said presidential issuances were made to establish an LTO district office in Liloy, Zamboanga del Norte, a district office in the towns of Cordova and Consolacion in Cebu, and a district office in Pandan, Antique.

Marcos also signed into law the conversion of the Las Piñas City Licensing Center into a regular LTO Licensing Center, the conversion of Rosales, Pangasinan district office into a Class A LTO office, and conversion of the LTO Extension Office in Burgos, Ilocos Norte into a district

office.

"On behalf of the men and women of the LTO, I extend our sincerest gratitude to the magnanimity of our President Bongbong Marcos by further improving our services to the Filipino people. This is a big boost to the goal of bringing government services closer to the Filipino people under Bagong Pilipinas," Mendoza said.

He said Marcos' approval comes with a budget for the improvement of facilities and operational expenses.

Mendoza said the expansion and construction of more LTO offices improve accessibility and ensure more efficient service delivery.

He added the digitalization efforts of the LTO also makes transactions faster and more comfortable. (PNA) By **Raymond Carl Dela Cruz**

EDITORIAL

Petisyon sa Pagtaas ng Pasahe: Mga Komyuters, umaaray

Pagkatapos ng panawagang pagtaas ng pasahe ng mga drayber ng jeep ay siya namang petisyon ngayon ng mga bus operators ng taas pasahe. Dahil sa kabi-kabilang pagtaas ng gasolina at mga bayarin sa pang araw-araw na operasyon ng mga bus ay umaaray ang mga ito at ang nakikitang solusyon lamang dito ay ang pagtaas ng pamasaha ng dalawang piso upang makabawi na kanilang mga gastusin.

Ayon naman sa Land Transportation Franchising and Regulatory Board (LTFRB) ay pag-aaralan nilang mabuti ang naturang petisyon. Dahil sa petisyon ay maaaring magbigay ito ng komosyon lalo pa at hindi lahat ng opinyon ng bawat Pilipino ay naaayon sa naturang petisyon. Maaring maging mahirap din ito sa mga Pilipinong kaunti lamang ang kinikita sa pang araw-araw at maging dahilan upang ilaan ang ilan pa sa kanilang mga sinesweldo para sa kanilang pamasaha.

Ang pagtaas ng pasahe ng mga bus operators ay marapat lamang kung ito ay sa aking palagay. Dahil sa kabi-kabilang pagtaas ng mga kinakailangan ng operasyon ng bus dahil sa patuloy na pagtaas ng inflation rate ay talagang mahihirapan ang mga ito. Ang petisyong ito ay isang resulta lamang ng patuloy na pagtaas ng mga bilihin at wala sa hawak ng mga ordinaryong mamamayan ang pagbaba ng mga ito. Patuloy lamang tayong natatangay sa pagragasa ng pagtaas ng mga bayarin at bilihin kaya naman ang mga pampublikong sasakyan ay ninanais din na magkaroon ng kaunting kita kagaya ng iba.

DASMA POLICE ARREST 2 DRUG SUSPECTS, SEIZES 1.6 MILLION WORTH OF SHABU

Camp BGen Vicente P Lim — The Drug Enforcement Team of the Dasmariñas Component City Police Station successfully confiscated Php 1,666,000.00 worth of illegal drugs and arrested two high-value individuals in separate drug bust operations in Dasmariñas City, Cavite, on April 2-3, 2025.

According to the report, on April 2, 2025, the Drug Enforcement Team of Dasmariñas CCPS, in coordination with PDEA 4A, carried out a successful buy-bust operation in Brgy. San Agustin 2, Dasmariñas City, targeting a High Value Individual identified as alias "Alvin." This operation led to the suspect's arrest and the seizure of illegal drugs valued at Php 1,020,000.00, along with drug bust money.

On April 3, 2025, at approximately 02:45 AM, another operation was conducted in Brgy. Burol Main, Dasmariñas City. The Drug Enforcement Team of

Dasmariñas CCPS arrested alias "Barok" and seized Php 646,000.00 worth of suspected shabu.

PBGEN Paul Kenneth T. Lucas, Regional Director of PRO CALABARZON, commended the dedication and hard work of the Dasmariñas Police Drug Enforcement Team. He also highlighted the crucial role of strong community collaboration in the ongoing success of the campaign against illegal drugs. "Our consecutive major accomplishments in the fight against illegal drugs are the result of the hard work and excellence of our operatives, with the continued support of our community, always ready to assist in our campaign against illegal drugs." RD Lucas stated.

The arrested suspects will face charges for violations of Sec. 5 and Sec. 11 of R.A. 9165, also known as the Comprehensive Dangerous Drugs Act of 2002. (RPIO4A)

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COMELEC AFFIRMS PERPETUAL DQ OF EX-SENATOR SERGE OSMEÑA

MANILA—The Commission on Elections (Comelec) en banc upheld the perpetual disqualification of former senator Sergio "Serge" Osmeña III from seeking public office due to non-submission of his Statements of Contributions and Expenditures (SOCs) for the 2010 and 2016 polls.

In a 16-page decision dated April 3 and made public Friday, the seven-member en banc denied Osmeña's motion for reconsideration for lack of merit and affirmed the Jan. 24, 2020 decision of the poll body's Second Division which imposed an administrative fine and perpetual disqualification from holding public office.

"Prudence and fairness dictate that Respondent cannot evade liability

for his own delay and/or inaction. Compliance with SOCE requirements is mandated for all candidates regardless of the magnitude of their expenditure. Respondent cannot be exempted from this duty," it said.

It noted that the respondent failed to present more evidence that would warrant the reversal of the earlier ruling.

The Comelec en banc added that it has given multiple opportunities for Osmeña to file to his SOCs for the two polls.

The poll body, meanwhile, noted that the SOCE submission requirement for candidates aims to "protect the sanctity of the electoral process and ultimately the will of the electorate."

(PNA) By Ferdinand Patinó

TIGHTEN LAW ENFORCEMENT AMID ROAD RAGE SURGE – ADMIN BETS

MANILA — Alarmed by a spate of road rage incidents, Alyansa Para sa Bagong Pilipinas senatorial candidates are calling for stricter law enforcement, heightened police visibility, and legislative action to address violence and strengthen gun control.

During a press conference Friday in Antipolo City, the candidates were asked about legislative solutions in response to recent high-profile altercations, including an incident involving a sport utility vehicle using a congressional plate.

"Sorry, kung mayroong panahon napaka-istrikto na gun control, (gaya) itong panahon ng kampanya, kasi may Comelec (Commission on Elections) ban nga. So anong ma-ipapayo? Wala tayong mai-papayo kung sira ulo, di ba? Pag enforce ng batas specially sa gun control... na respondehan naman nila 'di ba? Nahuli. At bahala na siya sa buhay niya (Sorry, if there is a time when gun control is very strict, it is this campaign period, because there is a Comelec ban. So what can we advise? We can't advise anyone who is crazy, right?... Re the enforcement of law especially on gun

control... they were able to respond, right? He got caught. And he's on his own)," former senator Panfilo Lacson said.

Former Interior secretary Benhur Abalos said the rise in violent confrontations is symptomatic of deeper social issues, including lack of discipline and respect for the law.

"Parang sunod-sunod na 'tong road rage na ito at para sa akin ito (ay) sumisimbolo ng kaayusan na dapat ayusin talaga. So, ang pinaka solusyon simple lang -- marami na tayong batas dapat talaga strict implementation. Tingnan lahat ng lugar na nagkakagulo... Doon damihan ang tao (It seems like this road rage incidents are happening one after another and for me it symbolizes the need to really fix peace and order. So, the best solution is simple -- we already have a lot of laws that really need strict implementation. Look at all the places where there is chaos. Put more personnel there)," Abalos said.

Former Senate president Tito Sotto echoed the need for enforcement over new laws and cited the

DEPED TO INTENSIFY LITERACY EFFORTS AMID HIGH 2024 FLEMMS RESULT

MANILA — The Department of Education (DepEd) on Friday vowed to intensify its efforts to advance foundational and high-level literacy among learners in the country.

This came as the 2024 Functional Literacy, Education, and Mass Media Survey (FLEMMS) showed a 93.1 percent "strong basic literacy rate" among Filipinos aged 10 to 64, according to the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA).

Strong basic literacy refers to individuals' ability to read, write, and compute.

Meanwhile, the survey showed that seven out of 10 or at least 70.8 percent of Filipinos, have functional literacy or the "high-level comprehension skills to process and apply information" and "critical thinking."

The Cordillera Administrative Region (CAR) led the functional literacy rating at 81.2 percent; while Central Luzon secured the top spot for the highest basic literacy rate at 92.8 percent.

In a statement, Education Secretary Sonny Angara said the survey's result highlighted the effects of DepEd's efforts and vowed to intensify strategies moving forward.

"With a strong literacy base in place, we are poised to expand our programs to ensure that every Filipino gains the ability to think critically and engage meaningfully in society," he said.

"We are continuously innovating our approaches to ensure that literacy education remains dynamic, engaging, and accessible to all."

To date, the DepEd is working on improving the Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) and National Reading Programs to achieve functional literacy among learners, he added.

Other efforts include refining the curriculum, targeted teaching strategies, and interventions considering different learners' needs and regional disparities.

Angara urged other stakeholders to collaborate with the DepEd to help improve both basic and high literacy.

"We celebrate these literacy milestones while also committing to continuous improvement. Functional literacy is a powerful tool for national development, and we invite all sectors to join us in this mission," he said.

Possible partners include other government agencies, local government units (LGUs), and other private entities, he added. **(PNA) By Stephanie Sevellano**

The proposed legislation aims to impose criminal liability on individuals who engage in aggressive behavior on the road, including property damage, physical harm and use of deadly weapons. **(PNA) By Wilnard Bacelonia**

MMDA ANNOUNCES HOLY WEEK TRAFFIC PLANS

MANILA — The Metropolitan Manila Development Authority (MMDA) on Friday announced its traffic plans for the upcoming "Semana Santa" or Holy Week to ensure the safety and convenience of both motorists and commuters. In a press conference at the MMDA headquarters in Pasig City, MMDA Chair Romando Artes said there will be a "full deployment" of 2,542 field personnel and 468 assets in major roads and transport hubs in the National Capital Region.

"Oplan Semana Santa", he said, will be activated beginning April 16 -- with the MMDA to enforce a "no day-off, no absent" policy for field traffic personnel.

"Our MMDA Communications and Command Center will remain operational 24/7 -- there is a team tasked to monitor real-time updates through closed-circuit television cameras on different critical areas across Metro Manila and other activities and situations on the ground," Artes said.

"Skeletal deployment will be enforced on April 18, 19, and 20 to focus on the usual Visita Iglesia sites including the 'panata' route going to Antipolo and Grotto."

The MMDA Road Emergency Group will also be on standby to provide basic roadside emergency services while ambulances and tow trucks will also be deployed in strategic locations.

On the other hand, Inter-agency support desks will be placed near transport terminals to assist travelers.

Road emergency personnel will also be on standby to provide medical assistance and first aid.

The MMDA will also conduct cleaning and road clearing operations in various NCR roads to ensure unimpeded vehicular and pedestrian movement.

Meanwhile, Artes said

provincial buses will be temporarily allowed on EDSA on April 9 and from April 16 to 20 for the expected influx of travelers during the Holy Week.

He said buses are allowed on EDSA from 10 p.m. to 5 a.m. on April 9, and will be allowed 24 hours on the major thoroughfare from April 16 - 20.

"Provincial buses coming from North Luzon shall end their trips at the bus terminals in Cubao, Quezon City, while provincial buses from South Luzon shall stop their trips at the bus terminals in Pasay City," he said.

For motorists, he said the Unified Vehicular Volume Reduction Program (UVVRP) or the number coding scheme will be suspended on April 17 and 18 -- Maundy Thursday and Good Friday.

He also announced road reblocking and repair works will be undertaken in various areas in NCR from 11 p.m. on April 16 until 5 a.m. on April 21.

"The affected roads will be fully passable by 5 a.m. on Monday, April 21. Announcement as to the areas will be made thru the MMDA official social media accounts," he said.

He called on the public to reach out to the MMDA for traffic updates, road assistance, and other inquiries through its Metrobase Hotline 136.

No more vlogging during MMDA ops

Meanwhile, he announced the prohibition of vlogging, recording, posting, and other forms of documentation of MMDA operations by its employees during official work hours and by private vloggers as well.

The prohibition is in response to an incident involving MMDA Special Operations Group Strike Force Head Gabriel Go who was slapped with a criminal case after he shamed a Quezon City police officer while vlogging during a clearing operation.

(PNA) By Raymond Carl Dela Cruz

DEPED CHIEF SEEKS POLICE AID IN PROBE OF QC SCHOOL BULLYING

MANILA — Education Secretary Sonny Angara on Friday sought the assistance of the Quezon City Police District (QCPD) on the alleged bullying reported at Bagong Silangan High School.

A video uploaded on social media showed a girl being attacked by several classmates inside a classroom.

In a letter addressed to QCPD Director Brig. Gen. Melecio Buslig Jr. and shared with the Philippine News Agency, Angara said the incident involved minors and need to be handled with expertise and sensitivity.

"The Department of Education (DepEd) has initiated internal protocols to ensure that the matter is addressed with urgency and care," he said.

"While we have instructed the school to expedite its investigation and extend support to the affected learners, we also recognize that certain aspects of the incident may require your office's expertise -- particularly in maintaining the safety of the school community," the letter read. In particular, Angara sought collaboration between DepEd's Learner Rights and Protection Office (LRPO) and the Philippine National Police (PNP) Women and Children Protection Desk.

"Your specialized training, experience, and established protocols in handling such cases are instrumental in ensuring that all parties, especially the children involved, are treated with

compassion, dignity, and due process," he said.

Earlier, the DepEd ordered the conduct of a swift probe and vowed to continue upholding learners' safe spaces and protection against bullying.

"We have instructed the school to expedite the investigation and provide the necessary support to the involved learners," DepEd Media Relations chief Dennis Legaspi said in a separate statement.

"We emphasize that addressing bullying requires a unified and comprehensive approach. It is imperative that learners, teachers, parents, and school leaders work together to establish a safe and supportive environment for all members of the school community."

In terms of the probe's timeline, Legaspi told the PNA that the DepEd central office commits to accomplish the investigation "as soon as possible."

A meeting with the Child Protection Committee of the school will also be conducted.

Assistance both to the victim learner and other involved students throughout the process will be provided, he added.

Moreover, the LRPO will review the school's compliance with the anti-bullying policy, provide technical aid to the school for preventive measures and proper responses, and train staff if needed. **(PNA) By Stephanie Sevillano**

PBBM VOWS CONTINUED ASSISTANCE FOR JOB SEEKERS, NANO ENTERPRISES

MANILA — The government would continue assisting Filipino job hunters and nano-entrepreneurs, President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. said Friday. The President issued the assurance when he visited the Trabaho at Serbisong Pangkalusugan sa Bagong Pilipinas job fair at Antipolo Sports Hub in Antipolo City, Rizal.

"Binibigyan pati ng suporta sa equipment, sa training, at kahit mabigyan ng kaunting puhunan para makapag-start po ng kanilang mga bagong negosyo kahit na maliliit lamang. Eh pinag-uusapan po natin dati lagi natin sinasabi ang medium- and small-scale enterprises. Ngayon napunta na po tayo sa micro enterprise, nano enterprise ang tawag din (They are also given support for equipment, training, and even a little capital to start their new businesses, even if they are small. When we were talking about it, we used to always say medium- and small-scale enterprises. Now we have gone to micro enterprises, also called nano enterprises)," Marcos said.

"At magpapasalamat din ako sa mga employer. At dahil 'yung mga employer po ay kinausap namin na makapunta rito upang 'yung mga nag-a-apply sa iba't ibang klaseng trabaho ay mabigyan naman ng pagkakataon (And I would also like to thank the employers because we talked to the employers to come here so that those

who are applying for various types of jobs can be given an opportunity)," he added.

Marcos said his administration is taking a whole-of-government approach to make sure that Filipinos from the marginalized sector would get the necessary support. At least 766 job vacancies were offered by 10 participating employers in the job fair.

Job vacancies are available to some 300 job seekers who are beneficiaries of the Assistance to Individuals in Crisis Situation (AICS) program of the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD).

Around 1,800 graduating beneficiaries of the DSWD's Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (4Ps) also received PHP3,000 each under the AICS.

The Department of Labor and Employment distributed various Integrated Livelihood Program packages to several beneficiaries and conducted an orientation for 122 beneficiaries of the Tulong Panghanapbuhay Para sa Ating Disadvantaged or Displaced Workers program.

The Department of Health turned over anti-dengue commodities and offered free medicines; medical services such as screening laboratories, X-rays and electrocardiograms; vaccination for pneumonia; and medical consultations. **(PNA) By Ruth Abbey Gita-Carlos**

GOV'T, PRIVATE SECTOR COLLAB KEY TO SUSTAINABLE, INCLUSIVE GROWTH

MANILA — Speaker Ferdinand Martin Romualdez has pledged that the House of Representatives would continue working with the private sector to make the country's economic growth sustainable and inclusive. Romualdez made the commitment in his remarks at the 34th Biennial Convention of the Federation of Filipino-Chinese Chambers of Commerce and Industry, Inc. (FFCCCII) at the Marriott Hotel in Pasay City on Friday night.

"As Speaker of the House, I assure you of our continued support. Together with President Marcos, we will continue to work hand-in-hand with the private sector to create the conditions for inclusive, sustainable, and innovation-led growth," he told FFCCCII members led by the group's president, Cecilio Pedro.

He said the country, under the leadership of President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr., has posted solid economic gains despite global uncertainties.

"In 2024, we recorded one of the highest GDP growth rates in ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations), coupled with improved credit ratings and rising investor confidence. Inflation has been tamed, the peso remains stable, and employment is growing," he said.

"These gains are not abstract figures. They translate into more jobs, better wages, expanded micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs), improved infrastructure, and more opportunities for Filipino families to rise from poverty."

He pointed out that much of the progress has been driven by the government's proactive and collaborative approach with the private sector, particularly organizations like the FFCCCII.

Romualdez commended the federation for its contributions to national development and its enduring commitment to nation-building through entrepreneurship, civic involvement, and cultural

solidarity.

"From supporting government compliance campaigns to your flagship Operation: Barrio Schools, your federation proves that businesses thrive best when they give back to society. You have built schools, organized medical missions, conducted relief efforts, and mobilized resources during national emergencies. You have done all these quietly and consistently -- and for that, you have our admiration and gratitude," Romualdez told the FFCCCII.

He said the House would continue to push for reforms that would empower entrepreneurs, big and small.

From passing laws to cut red tape and digitalize public services to modernizing the country's tax system to make it fairer and more business-friendly, the House continues to support legislation that boosts the MSME sector, protects local manufacturers, and promotes foreign direct investments, he said.

He also noted that the Marcos administration is investing heavily in digital infrastructure and alternative energy to reduce power costs and ensure connectivity in every corner of the country, as well as reviving key sectors like tourism, agriculture, and logistics to make sure that no region is left behind.

"We believe that prosperity must be shared and that our progress as a nation depends on the success of our entrepreneurs," he said. The House leader said he was inspired by FFCCCII's convention theme, "Technology, Innovation, Entrepreneurship -- Key to Prosperity."

"Indeed, these are the very foundations upon which we must build a Bagong Pilipinas -- one that is resilient, competitive, and inclusive," he said.

He also commended the FFCCCII members for their "boldness in innovation, discipline in business, and deep sense of civic duty."

"Your hard work is helping build a better, stronger, and more united Philippines," he said. **(PNA) By Jose Cielito Reganit**

PAG-IBIG FUND BOOSTS PARTNERSHIP WITH COAST GUARD

MANILA — The Home Development Mutual (Pag-IBIG) Fund has collaborated with the Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) to bring benefits closer to the uniformed personnel.

In a news release on Friday, the Pag-IBIG Fund said its Marketing, Product Development, and Sales Cluster discussed with the PCG senior officers better ways to help their personnel.

Pag-IBIG Fund Chief Executive Officer Marilene Acosta shared with PCG Admiral Ronnie Gil Gavan programs that will benefit

more than 34,000 personnel of the agency nationwide. These include the Pag-IBIG Housing Loan Program, the Modified Pag-IBIG 2 (MP2) Savings Program, the 4PH (Pambansang Pabahay Para sa Pilipino Program), Acquired Assets Group Sale, and the Pag-IBIG Loyalty Card Plus.

"Pag-IBIG Fund is always ready to bring our programs and services closer to our fellow public servants," Acosta said.

"We look forward to helping the gallant men and women of the Philippine Coast Guard in accessing their Pag-IBIG Fund Benefits to

help them with their housing needs and gain better financial literacy through our savings programs," she added.

Meanwhile, Gavan emphasized that PCG is "ready to support such partnership".

"We are willing to allocate an office space for Pag-IBIG within our compound so that our personnel can easily access their services," he said.

Earlier, the Pag-IBIG Fund extended its low interest rates for home loans until the end of June amid its improved financial standing. Its housing loan interest

is still at 6.25 percent per year under the three-year repricing period.

The loan rate under Pag-IBIG's one-year repricing period remains at 5.75 percent per year.

For home loans of minimum-wage earners, its special interest rate remains at 3 percent per year -- the lowest in the market.

Home lending rates in the market range from 6.82 percent to as high as 8.78 percent to date.

This is the second consecutive year of Pag-IBIG Fund's reduced rates. **(PNA) By Ma. Teresa Montemayor**

NTF-ELCAC EXEC SLAMS CPP FOR CONTINUED CALLS FOR REVOLUTION

MANILA — The National Task Force to End Local Communist Armed Conflict (NTF-ELCAC) on Friday scored the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) over its continued call for a revolutionary struggle, which has been rejected by the Filipino people.

In a statement, NTF-ELCAC Executive Director Undersecretary Ernesto Torres Jr. said this call revealed the CPP as a despotically desperate bureaucratic clique—out of touch with reality, as it continues to chase "the mirage of an armed revolution despite the Filipino people's resounding rejection."

The group made this call as its armed wing, the New People's Army (NPA), observed its 56th founding anniversary on March 29.

"As the nation strides forward, leaving behind decades of communist armed violence, the CPP insists on dragging its few followers back, especially the tired and hungry remnants of the NPA, into a dark, discredited past," Torres said.

He also lamented the fact that the CPP is unable to accept its decline along with the NPA.

"As the self-ascribed vanguard of the insurgency, the CPP still attempts to breathe life into a struggle that has lost all relevance. The NPA has now become nothing more than a fragmented and depleted force—isolated, stripped of political credibility, and militarily inconsequential.

Like all desperate despots, the CPP continues beating a dead horse, unable to accept the finality of its decline," the NTF-ELCAC official added.

"Laughably, the CPP scapegoats this isolation as the result of the so-called 'fascist militarization' of state forces. The truth is, the people no longer welcome them—not out of fear, but out of a deep resolve to preserve the peace and development they have fought hard to achieve. Communities now see government institutions, especially security forces, not as adversaries but as partners in progress and stability," he added.

With these developments, Torres told remaining NPA members to reject orders and commands from their CPP leaders and to instead rejoin mainstream society.

Torres also clarified that the government is not asking these communist insurgents to surrender their pro-people principles but offering them an invitation to redirect their purpose and become advocates of development.

"The government's unity, peace and reconciliation programs remain open. Enhanced Comprehensive Local Integration and Amnesty programs are geared towards helping former rebels rebuild their lives, (and be) empowered through livelihood and reintegration support that contributes to stronger, safer, and more resilient communities," he added.

(PNA) By Priam Nepomuceno

DA: MSRP ON RICE, PORK HELPED TAME INFLATION

MANILA — The Department of Agriculture (DA) on Friday said the imposition of a maximum suggested retail price (MSRP) on agricultural commodities such as rice and pork helped in taming the overall inflation in the country.

Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. made the statement after the Philippine Statistics Authority reported that inflation slowed to 1.8 percent in March -- the lowest level in five years -- with food inflation easing to 2.3 percent from 2.6 percent in February as one of the main drivers.

He said the MSRP helped ensure a downward trend in food prices.

"While some sectors doubted the effectiveness of our MSRP implementation, the inflation numbers clearly show that we are on the right path in protecting the welfare of millions of Filipino consumers, while also ensuring that agricultural workers and others in the value chain receive a fair return for their hard work," Tiu Laurel said.

As of March 31, the MSRP for 5 percent broken imported rice is at PHP45 per kg., down from the initial PHP58/kg. MSRP in January.

The DA said the lower MSRP will remain for two months to "protect" farmers and help them secure "reasonable" buying price of palay (unhusked rice) from rice traders amid the harvest season.

From more than PHP60 per kg.-price levels of 5

percent broken imported rice in local markets before MSRP implementation, the prevailing price in Metro Manila as of April 3 ranges from PHP44 per kg. to PHP55 per kg., with the prevailing price at PHP49 per kg., according to the DA-Bantay Presyo.

On the other hand, well-milled imported rice ranges from PHP43 per kg. to PHP46 per kg.; and PHP35 per kg. to PHP45 per kg. for imported regular milled rice.

The local regular, well-milled, and premium rice, meanwhile, ranges from PHP33 per kg. to PHP62 per kg.

Meanwhile, the MSRP for pork is set at PHP380 per kg. for liempo (belly); PHP350 per kg. for kasim (ham) and pigue; and PHP300 per kg. for sabit-ulo.

According to the DA, compliance among retailers is at almost 40 percent, and 88 percent among pork producers. It vowed to impose more stringent measures in case low compliance to pork MSRP remains.

To date, the price of pork liempo (belly) ranges from PHP370 per kg. to PHP470 per kg.; while pork kasim (ham) ranges from PHP340 per kg. to PHP400 per kg.

To further help tame inflation, Tiu Laurel also vowed to sustain efforts in boosting local production, close monitoring, and ensuring consumers' access to cheaper agricultural products. **(PNA) By Stephanie Sevillano**

PH, US TROOPS ENGAGE IN CONSTRUCTION WORK AHEAD OF 'BALIKATAN'

MANILA — Engineering units of the Philippine and US militaries are constructing a multi-purpose facility for residents of Barangay Dagupan, Lal-lo, Cagayan as part of this year's "Balikatan" exercises, the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) said on Friday.

Taking part are the Philippine Air Force's 355th Aviation Engineer Wing and the US Marine Corps' Marine Wing Support Squadron 174, AFP public affairs office chief Col. Xerxes Trinidad said in a statement.

"The construction started

on March 24 and is expected to be completed on May 7. The 'multi-purpose facility' is one of the engineering civic action program sites for Exercise Balikatan 40-2025," he added.

Balikatan 2025 is scheduled to begin in late April and end in mid-May.

"This initiative underscores the AFP's commitment to strengthening its capabilities and fostering stronger partnerships with allied forces in support of regional security and community development," Trinidad said. **(PNA) By Priam Nepomuceno**

DFA CONFIRMS ARREST OF 3 FILIPINOS IN CHINA; SAYS LEGAL AID CONTINUOUS

MANILA — The Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) on Friday said it has been formally informed of the allegation against three Filipinos arrested in Beijing for suspected espionage. In a statement, the DFA said the three Filipinos are currently detained in China and are receiving legal assistance from the Philippine government.

"Protecting the rights and interests of the said Filipinos remains the prime priority for the Philippine Government," it said.

"The Philippine Consulate General in Guangzhou is providing all necessary assistance, including appropriate legal support, for the said Filipinos."

The DFA, meanwhile, urged the Chinese government to ensure that the allegations against the three "are tried with due process and with full respect to the rights of the said Filipinos in accordance with domestic law and the Philippines-China Consular Agreement".

An Inquirer report dated March 13 citing the Palawan provincial government said two Palawan residents, who were former scholars under the Hainan Government Scholarship Program in China, were taken into custody by Chinese authorities under allegations of espionage last year.

The third Filipino was also reportedly another local from Palawan.

Earlier asked for specific information, DFA Undersecretary Eduardo Jose de Vega said all details are "confidential for now" and that the DFA is handling the case. **(PNA) By Joyce Ann L. Rocamora**

COMELEC CALLS OUT PASIG BET OVER LEWD JOKE ON SINGLE MOM

MANILA — The Commission on Elections (Comelec) on Friday ordered Pasig congressional candidate, lawyer Christian Sia, to explain why he used single mothers as butts of his joke during a campaign sortie.

Sia told his audience on Thursday he is willing to sleep with single mothers, who are still menstruating and are lonely, once a year if he is elected.

He proceeded to instruct those who are interested to register for his offer.

"In view of the foregoing,

you are hereby ordered to SHOW CAUSE in writing within a non-extendible period of three (3) days from receipt hereof and to explain why a complaint for election offense and/ or a petition for disqualification should not be filed against you," Comelec Task Force on Safeguarding Fear and Exclusion in Elections Director Sonia Bea Lozada said in the order addressed to Sia.

Lozada said Sia's act can be constituted as a possible violation of Comelec

Resolution No. 11116 or the Anti-Discrimination and Fair Campaign Guidelines for the May 12 midterm elections.

Section 3 of the resolution says any person who, directly or indirectly, commits acts of bullying on the basis of human immunodeficiency virus status, coercion, discrimination against women, discrimination against persons with disabilities (PWD) on the use of public accommodations, gender-based harassment, labeling, public ridicule

against PWD, vilification of PWD, violation of an anti-discrimination ordinance, and/or violation of rights to religious, cultural sites and ceremonies shall be liable for an election offense pursuant to Section 13 of Republic Act 9006 and Section 261 (e) of the Omnibus Election Code and other pertinent laws, rules and regulations.

"Kindly submit your Answer or Explanation via electronic mail at taskforcesafe@comelec.gov.ph and immediately thereafter,

kindly send, through the fastest means available, including registered mail or any courier service, its original copy, to the following address: Task Force Safe, Office of the Director, Internal Audit Department Chairman's Hall, Palacio Del Gobernador Intramuros, 1002 Manila," the order stated.

Lozada warned that Sia's failure to submit a reply will be considered as waiver for him to be heard.

The poll body stressed that laws such as Republic Act

7277 or the Magna Carta of Women and Republic Act 11313 or the Safe Spaces Act penalize acts of discrimination against women and gender-based harassment. **(PNA) By Ferdinand Patinio**

PSEI MIRRORS DROP IN ASIAN SHARES; PESO STRENGTHENS TO 56-LEVEL

MANILA – The Philippine Stock Exchange index (PSEi) and other Asian peers dropped shares on Friday, a day after the United States announced a worldwide reciprocal tariffs.

The bellwether PSEi declined by 1 percent to 6,084.19 points, despite the government reported lower inflation data in March 2025.

Philstocks Financial research manager Japhet Tantiangco said investors continued to digest Trump's announcement and how these reciprocal tariffs would affect the global economy.

"Worries over the impact of the tariffs on global supply chain, international trade, and overall global economic performance caused investors to sell positions," Tantiangco said.

All Shares also declined by 0.57 percent to 3,643.44 points.

All counters closed in the red territory, with the biggest losses from Mining and Oil, which plummeted

by 2.89 percent. This was followed by Services, down by 2.72 percent; Property, 0.97 percent; Financials, 0.55 percent; Industrial, 0.40 percent; and Holding Firms, 0.23 percent.

Decliners outpaced advancers at 102 to 74, with 56 counters unchanged.

Meanwhile, the Philippine peso closed stronger than the US dollar to 56.82 from a 57.06-finish on Thursday. Rizal Commercial Banking Corp. chief economist Michael Ricafort said Friday's closing was the local currency's best rate against the dollar in more than six months, or since Oct. 4, 2024.

The peso started the day at 56.95, still stronger than its last day's kick-off at 57.25 to the dollar.

It traded only at 56-level, with a low of 56.74 and a high of 56.95, bringing the average level for the day at 56.85 to the greenback.

Volume of trade also increased to USD2 billion from USD1.26 billion on Thursday. **(PNA) By Kris Crismundo**

BSP: MARCH INFLATION KEEPS OUTLOOK WITHIN TARGET RANGE

MANILA – The Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas (BSP) sees inflation to remain within its target range following the 1.8 percent rate for March 2025.

"The latest inflation outturn is consistent with the BSP's assessment that inflation will remain within the target range over the policy horizon. This is seen to be aided by the impact of lower rice tariffs and easing global commodity prices," the central bank said in a statement Friday.

BSP's target inflation rate this year is between 2 to 4 percent.

For 2025 and 2026, the BSP said outlook continues to be "broadly balanced", with upside risk coming from the utilities sector while downside risk is the impact of lower tariffs on imported rice.

While the Monetary Board maintains its outlook on gross domestic product growth to be firm, the uncertainty over global

economic policies and their implications on the domestic economy has increased significantly.

"Looking ahead, the BSP will maintain a measured approach to monetary policy easing to ensure price stability conducive to sustainable economic growth and employment. On balance, uncertainty in the outlook for inflation and growth continues to be a key factor in the setting of monetary policy," the central bank added.

It added that its Monetary Board will consider the latest inflation data along with the latest domestic and global development in its policy meeting on April 10.

This would include the announcement of US President Donald Trump for reciprocal tariffs worldwide, wherein the Philippines will be imposed with 17 percent tariffs for its exports to the US. **(PNA)**

By Kris Crismundo

PH FREE TRADE DEALS SEEN TO MITIGATE IMPACTS OF HIGHER US TARIFFS

MANILA — The country's free trade agreements (FTAs) and other preferential trade schemes are expected to mitigate the impacts of the Trump administration's reciprocal tariff on Philippine exporters, a government official said.

Philippine Economic Zone Authority (PEZA) Director General Tereso Panga said in a statement Friday that the country's participation in the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), and the impending renewal of the European Union Generalized Scheme of Preferences Plus (EU GSP+) will help exporters to navigate the possible impacts of the 17-percent reciprocal tariff on Philippine goods entering the United States.

Aside from RCEP and ASEAN, the Philippines has FTAs with Japan, South Korea, and European Free Trade Association countries such as Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway, and Switzerland.

The country is also a beneficiary of United Kingdom's Developing Countries Trading Scheme, which is like the EU GSP+ that provides zero tariff on a number of goods entering the UK market.

Panga said the Corporate Recovery and Tax Incentives for Enterprises to Maximize Opportunities for Reinventing the Economy (CREATE MORE) will also facilitate investments into the country.

"PEZA believes these measures will mitigate the tariff impact and make the Philippines an even more attractive investment destination," he said.

Panga acknowledged that Trump's order for reciprocal tariffs worldwide presents challenges to its locators, particularly manufacturers of electronics and semiconductors and those in the information technology and business process management (ITBPM), with exports

shares in PEZA at 44.5 percent and 28.5 percent, respectively.

These sectors' top export market is also the US.

While the 17 percent tariff will make PEZA-made exports to the US more expensive for the American market, Panga said the investment promotion agency remains committed to support its locators.

He added the Marcos administration continues to implement measures that will enhance the Philippines' competitiveness as a hub for smart and sustainable manufacturing and services.

"Given the strategic importance of our ITBPM and EMS-SMS (electronics manufacturing services and semiconductor manufacturing services) sectors as they account for our biggest exports to the US and are the major generators of quality jobs in the country, the government may lobby for a reduced tariff (sectoral) for our exports of electronics-semiconductor products and ITBPM services," Panga said.

"This proposal is worth considering by the US since a big number of our EMS-SMS and ITBPM investors are American companies that provide critical support to their principals and major clients in the US — and whose products and services benefit most of the American consumers. As a sign of goodwill, the government may also offer to reduce the current duties on critical goods/services that we import from the US following the true spirit of reciprocal tariff."

Since the Philippines has the second lowest US reciprocal tariff in the ASEAN, Panga said the country has solidified its position under a "China+1+1" strategy.

"This encourages businesses to maintain operations in China while diversifying their supply chains by expanding into the Philippines," he said.

"By leveraging the Philippines' strategic advantages and fostering a conducive business

GOV'T MEASURES VS. INFLATIONARY PRESSURES EFFECTIVE — NEDA

MANILA – Government efforts to control inflation are showing results as the country's inflation rate continued to ease, the National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA) said.

In a statement Friday following the 1.8 percent inflation rate in March 2025 reported by the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA), NEDA Secretary Arsenio Balisacan said the lower inflation shows that the government's efforts to keep prices stable are working.

Inflation in March 2025 eased from a 2.1 percent rate in February mainly due to substantial decrease in rice prices since the Marcos administration implemented the tariff reduction on imported rice in July 2024.

PSA Undersecretary Claire Dennis Mapa, in a press briefing, said rice prices have decreased by around PHP3 to PHP5 per kg. between July 2024 and March 2025.

"The continued decline in inflation indicates the effectiveness of the government's proactive measures to stabilize prices and protect the purchasing power of Filipino households," Balisacan said.

"While the inflation rate continues to ease and remain within the target range, we commit to monitoring risks and shocks, particularly on anticipated electricity rate hikes and higher prices of fish and meat, and addressing them through timely and targeted interventions," he added. The NEDA chief cited government proactive measures to reduce the impact of risks and rising food prices, which include the partnership between

the Insurance Commission and the Philippine Crop Insurance Corp. to give better insurance to farmers in case of disasters, pests, or plant diseases as well as the Department of Science and Technology's supporting research to detect African swine fever quickly to protect local livestock.

The Department of Agriculture (DA) alone has partnered with Thailand's Charoen Pokphand Foods PLC through its state-owned corporation Food Terminals, Inc. to help stabilize pork prices in Metro Manila and DA's partnership with the National Housing Authority to open Kadiwa Stores in housing areas to give residents access to affordable goods.

"Banking on the positive results of our short- and long-term initiatives to address inflationary pressures, the government will continue focusing on implementing policies to ensure that every Filipino benefits from a stable and resilient economy," Balisacan said.

Meanwhile, the country's top economist said the government would remain vigilant regarding the potential implications to the economy of the reciprocal tariffs to be imposed by the United States on their imports starting April 9, 2025.

The new executive order will levy Philippine goods entering the US market with 17 percent tariff.

"With or without the trade policy changes in the US, maintaining sound macroeconomic fundamentals, improving the ease of doing business, maximizing existing trade agreements, and forging new partnerships are still the most important strategies we can pursue to ensure that we protect the purchasing power of Filipinos and promote rapid, sustained, and inclusive growth," Balisacan said. **(PNA) By Kris Crismundo**

environment, PEZA aims to navigate the challenges posed by the new tariffs and sustain economic growth." **(PNA) By Kris Crismundo**

CAVITE GAZETTE P U B L I S H I N G

SIGNAL EYES SWEEP OF SPIKERS' TURF OPEN CONFERENCE FINALS

MANILA – Signal will try to close out the Spikers' Turf Open Conference title series against Criss Cross in Game Two on Friday at the Philsports Arena in Pasig City.

The HD Spikers displayed their championship experience to prevail in Game One, 22-25, 25-19, 22-25, 25-21, 15-12, last Wednesday, and moved to within a win of claiming their ninth title.

Signal, which had previously swept Criss Cross in the 2024 Invitational and Open finals, will try to sustain its form to achieve the same in their 6 p.m. showdown.

Signal head coach Dexter Clamor noted the contribution of reserve players Jau Umandal and reliever setter Cian Silang to their Game 1 victory.

Umandal topscored with 19 points, including 17 attacks in the third set, while Kris Cian Silang had 23 sets after replacing Owa Retamar.

"Everyone stepped up, especially Umandal. That's the Jau we've been looking for. The support from each and every one, Cian (Silang)'s support for Owa (Retamar) – everything. It was truly a collective effort from everyone. That's probably what led us to victory," said Clamor.

Criss Cross, which defeated Signal thrice in the elimination and semifinal rounds, is expected to rebound in Game Two with the help of Jude Garcia, Nico Almendras, Marck Espejo and Ish Polvorosa.

The King Crunchers

ALAS PILIPINAS OFF TO ROUSING START IN AVC BEACH TOUR

MANILA – The Philippines got off to an auspicious start in the Rebisco Asian Volleyball Confederation (AVC) Beach Tour Nuvali Open with the Alas Pilipinas Men and Women teams scoring big wins on Wednesday in the City of Santa Rosa, Laguna.

Philippine National Volleyball Federation (PPNVF) Invitionals champions Khylem Progella and Sofia Pagara had a solid performance in the morning with a 21-8, 21-18 victory over Ee Ling Pua and Rachael Go of Malaysia at the world-class Nuvali Sand Courts By Ayala Land.

Rancel Varga and James Buytrago came up with an electrifying match just before the noon break, defeating Uzbekistan's Mustafoev Golibjon and Nodirjon Alekseev, 21-13, 21-6.

Progella and Pagara, who secured the win in 28 minutes, vowed to do better.

"We may have relaxed a little bit in the second set, but we realized quickly that straight-sets wins are crucial in pool play," Progella said.

entered the Finals with an unblemished 13-0 record.

Meanwhile, Savouge seeks to annex a second consecutive bronze medal when it battles VNS-Laticrete at 3 p.m. in Game 2 of their best-of-three series for third place.

Mark Calado scored 30 points in the Spin Doctors' 21-25, 25-16, 26-24, 25-22 triumph in Game 1.

The Griffins, on the other hand, will rely on Bryan Jaleco, CJ Segui and Kenneth Culabat in a bid to extend the series. **(PNA)**

By Jean Malanum

Pagara added that they approached the tournament with a different mindset after competing last year in the Asian Seniors Beach Volleyball Championships.

"We feel a lot more confident this time, although the preparation is shorter," Pagara said.

University Athletic Association of the Philippines champions Kat Epa and Honey Grace Cordero, meanwhile, had an encouraging AVC debut but fell just short against Japan's Saki Maruyama and Miki Ishii, 12-21, 21-19, 9-15, in a thrilling opening match at center court.

The National University stars went toe-to-toe against the Japanese in a 47-minute showdown in the tournament organized by the PNVF under its president Ramon "Tats" Suzara, who is also chief of the AVC.

Lerry John Francisco and Edwin Tolentino put up a strong stand against Asian Senior Beach Volleyball Champions D'Artagnan Potts and Jack Pearse of Australia before bowing, 17-21, 18-21.

Another Australian pair dealt the Philippines a big opening-day blow, with Paul Burnett and Luke Ryan dispatching Ronniel Rosales and Alexander Jhon Iraya, 21-13, 21-18.

Nuvali Open 2024 runners-up Pithak Tipjan and Poravid Taovato of Thailand recovered from a rough start to beat China's Song Jinyang and Zhang Tai, 16-21, 21-9, 15-10, while Indonesia's Bintang Sofyan and Akbar Efendi beat China's Yuan Mao and Yuan Liu, 21-18, 21-16.

New Zealand's Bradley Fuller and Ben O'Dea romped past Hong Kong's Lee Cheukhei and Lee Litfung, 21-11, 21-11. **(PR)**

BAGAMASBAD EYES GRANDMASTER TITLE IN AUSTRALIAN CHESS CIRCUIT

MANILA – International Master Jose Efren Bagamasbad hopes to earn a Grandmaster title in the Australian chess circuit this month.

The two-time Asian Seniors (65 over category) champion will join the Melbourne International Open (April 7-14, 2025), O2C Doeberl Cup in Canberra (April 17-21) and the Sydney International Open (April 23-27).

"I hope to do well in the Australian Chess Circuit this month. Hoping to get my third and final GM norm," the 68-year-old player from Talisay, Camarines Norte said on Thursday.

Bagamasbad won the Asian Seniors Chess

Championships (65 over category) in Auckland, New Zealand (2022) and Tagaytay City (2023) to earn two of three required norms to get a Grandmaster title.

He thanked the Quezon City government headed by Mayor Joy Belmonte and Philippine Amusement and Gaming Corp. chairperson and chief executive officer Alejandro "Al" Tengco for supporting his trip to Australia.

Daniel Quizon, 20, secured his Grandmaster title after beating Grandmaster Igor Efimov of Georgia at the 2024 World Chess Olympiad in Budapest, Hungary. **(PNA)**

By Jean Malanum

ALL SYSTEMS GO FOR NATIONAL PRISAA GAMES IN TUGUEGARAO

TUGUEGARAO – It's all systems go for the 2025 Private Schools Athletic Association (PRISAA) National Games which kicks off Saturday at the Cagayan Sports Complex here.

More than 8,000 athletes, coaches and officials from 17 regions are taking part in the tournament whose mission and vision is to sustain the country's inclusive grassroots sports program as a pathway to the Olympics.

The Games features 22 sports namely, archery, athletics, badminton, baseball, basketball (3x3), basketball (5x5), beach volleyball, boxing, chess, dancesport, football, gymnastics, karatedo, sepak takraw, softball, swimming, table tennis, taekwondo, lawn tennis, indoor volleyball and weightlifting.

"This is the best-ever edition of the National Games, very well-organized," said PRISAA Board of Trustees chairman, Rev. Fr. Vicente Uy, SVD, during Friday's press conference at the Cagayan State University Hostel in Tuguegarao City. Also present were PRISAA National vice chairman Rev. Fr. Jessie Pasquin (Central Mindanao),

secretary Fe Rabanal-Medina (Calabarzon) and executive director Elbert Atilano Sr. (Zamboanga Peninsula), Region 2 Executive Director Perfecto Garcia Jr. and Philippine Sports Commission (PSC) Commissioner Edward Hayco.

Tuguegarao City has coordinated with all stakeholders to ensure the smooth running of the tournament it is hosting for the first time.

Senator Christopher Lawrence "Bong" Go, PSC chairperson Richard Bachmann and Commission on Higher Education chairperson J. Prospero de Vera have been invited as guests of honor during the opening ceremony.

Meanwhile, Cagayan pride Lerma Elmira Bulautan-Gabito, who saw action in long jump at the 2000 (Sydney) and 2004 (Athens) Summer Olympics, will lead the torch relay. She will be joined by one medalist per region.

Aside from sports, the National Games will hold an oratorical contest, PRISAAYAWAN, vocal solo and duet, and Mutya ng PRISAA. **(PNA)**

By Jean Malanum

UST, NU TRY TO CAPITALIZE ON UAAP TENNIS SEMIS INCENTIVE

MANILA – Defending champion University of Santo Tomas (UST) and National University (NU) hope to capitalize on their twice-to-beat seminal incentives on Saturday in the UAAP Season 87 men's tennis tournament at the Felicisimo Ampon Tennis Center in Malate, Manila.

Led by Season 86 MVP Nilo Ledama, the top-seeded UST is determined to beat third-seed University of the East in their best-of-three duel.

The Growling Tigers hold a record 16 titles — the most in UAAP history.

"With the experience we've had over the past two years, we've somewhat learned how to handle the pressure, how to manage the lineups and the changes. So every time there's a crucial situation where we need to adjust the lineup, we're more confident and more familiar with what we need to do," said UST coach Alexander Diego.

UST beat UE, 4-1, and 3-2, in the elimination round.

UE, bannered by JB Aguilar and Marc Suson, made it to the semis for the fourth consecutive season and is eager to secure the title for the first time since winning back-to-back titles in Seasons 79 and 80.

Meanwhile, NU will bank on EJ Tugade and rookie Andrei Padoa in a bid to reach the final and reclaim the championship it last won in Season 81.

"I think it's really about coordination with each other, especially in our doubles. We need to communicate, boost our partner because doubles isn't an easy game... the pair really needs to coordinate and push each other. We need to support one another, especially whenever we score points," said Tugade, the Bulldogs team captain.

UP, seeking to end its 24-year title drought, will rely on Loucas Fernandez and rookie Miguel Iglupas.

The Fighting Maroons defeated the Bulldogs, 3-2, in the first round while the Bulldogs won the second round, 4-1. **(PNA)**

By Jean Malanum