

P5.32B WORTH OF DANGEROUS DRUGS DESTROYED AS PDEA STEPS UP OPS

TRECE MARTIRES CITY, Cavite (PIA) — The Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency (PDEA) reaffirmed its commitment to intensify the government's war against illegal drugs as it destroyed P5.32 billion worth of confiscated dangerous drugs on Tuesday, May 20. A total of 2,227.76 kilograms of solid drugs and 3,447.09 milliliters of liquid narcotics

were incinerated via thermal decomposition or thermolysis during a public destruction ceremony held at the Integrated Waste Management, Inc. (IWMI) facility in Barangay Aguado.

Among the drugs destroyed were 404.95 kilograms of shabu seized during a major interdiction operation at the Port of Manila last January 23, in a joint effort by PDEA, the National Bureau of Investigation (NBI), and the Bureau of Customs (BOC). PDEA Director-General Usec. Isagani R. Nerez, who led the destruction ceremony, emphasized that public drug destruction activities are a cornerstone of the agency's efforts to build trust under the administration's "Bagong Pilipinas" governance agenda.

"These drug consignments, many of which were ordered by the courts to be destroyed, were securely incinerated beyond recovery. This public destruction reinforces the integrity of our justice system and assures the public that seized narcotics are not being recycled," Nerez said.

"We are showing the Filipino people that we act with utmost diligence and integrity. They deserve nothing less," he added. Officials from the Dangerous Drugs Board (DDB), Department of Justice (DOJ), Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG), Philippine National Police (PNP), various local government units, non-government organizations, and media

representatives witnessed the destruction as part of PDEA's commitment to transparency and accountability.

According to PDEA Calabarzon, it has intensified anti-drug enforcement operations in the region, arresting high-value drug personalities through buy-busts, seaport interdictions, and entrapment operations conducted from May 9 to 19.

These efforts led to the arrest of several suspects and the confiscation of illegal drugs. In Bacoor City, Cavite, 15 suspects, including three high-value drug personalities, were apprehended in multiple entrapment operations.

In another operation, PDEA conducted a seaport interdiction at the Port of Batangas City, arresting a suspect during a pre-boarding inspection for a trip bound for Calapan. The suspect was allegedly carrying around five grams of suspected shabu valued at P34,000, along with marked buy-bust money.

Meanwhile, in Antipolo, Rizal, authorities discovered an abandoned clandestine shabu laboratory containing liquid and powdery substances, as well as plastic sachets with traces of white crystalline material suspected to be shabu.

"Though the shabu laboratory was found abandoned, its owners and operators have been identified. It is only a matter of time before they are caught by the long arm of the law," Nerez said.

He added that charges will be filed against the arrested suspects for violating various provisions of Republic Act No. 9165, or the Comprehensive Dangerous Drugs Act of 2002. The suspects are currently in detention.

The operations align with the enhanced Philippine anti-illegal drugs strategy in pursuit of "Bagong Pilipinas" under the administration of President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr., which promotes transparent law enforcement in combating illegal drugs. **(RBF/KAA/PDEA4A) BY RUEL FRANCISCO**

'BENTENG BIGAS MERON NA' PROGRAM GAINS PUBLIC SUPPORT IN CAVITE

DASMARIÑAS CITY, Cavite (PIA) — The initial rollout of the 'Benteng Bigas Meron Na' initiative in Dasmariñas City, Cavite has received public support as members of the vulnerable sectors welcome the government's efforts to ensure rice accessibility and food security.

Vilma Menezes was one of the first senior citizens who waited outside the covered court at Barangay Salitran III. Her breakfast in hand, Vilma did not mind waiting for an hour outside of the covered court. In fact, she was the first to stand up when the caretaker opened the gates that divided her and the other residents from the big sacks of rice to be sold on Friday, May 16.

Vilma was one of the many residents who availed of the P20 Rice Program, purchasing 10 kilos of rice—enough to feed her family of five when combined with the rice her bedridden husband also bought.

"I left my husband at home to buy rice. I am very thankful to the organizers. I hope that there will be more [P20 rice programs] where we can buy [affordable] rice." Dubbed 'Benteng Bigas Meron Na', the P20 rice program is part of the Marcos Jr. administration's bid to make rice more affordable especially to the vulnerable sector, including senior citizens, Persons With Disability (PWD), and pregnant mothers.

Jennifer Ibayan, City Agriculturist, said they were prepared to cater to the senior citizens who needed more assistance.

"Barangay Salitran 3 is just a sample where a lot of residents wanted to avail the P20 rice. We are expecting to make stops at other barangays in the coming weeks, if we have rice to sell."

Raul Valles, barangay captain of Barangay Salitran III, said there are more than 2,500 residents who are part of the vulnerable sector in their community: of which 2,000 are senior citizens, more than 100 solo parents, and more than 400 PWDs.

Valles, over the microphone, announced that they will prioritize their residents and will cater other barangays once they are sure that his kabarangays have bought rice

for their families.

"There are already more than 2,000 senior citizens in our barangay alone. I think we would not be able to cater to everyone if we will also cater to those from other barangays," Valles admitted.

Barangay Salitran III has prepared for the expected influx of residents who will buy the P20 rice, barangay peacekeepers to keep the lines organized. Barangay Health Workers and emergency medical personnel were also on standby in case senior citizens needed their assistance.

"Our lupong tagapamayapa, our medics, BHWs, and tanod are on standby outside to assist in managing the traffic flow around this place."

According to the City Agriculturist Office, Barangay Salitran 3 was the first among the many barangays in the city to host the P20 Rice Program. **(PB/PIA4A) BY PATRICIA BERMUDEZ**



CAVITE PPO JOINS PNP-WIDE ANNUAL INSPECTION OF DISASTER RESPONSE EQUIPMENT

Camp General Pantaleon Garcia, Imus City, Cavite — The Cavite Police Provincial Office, under the leadership of Acting Provincial Director PCOL Dwight E Alegre, actively participated in the PNP-Wide Annual Inspection of Disaster Response Equipment held today, May 21, 2025, via the Zoom platform. The activity was spearheaded by PLTCOL Willy B Salazar, Deputy Provincial Director for Administration (DPDA), Cavite PPO.

This annual inspection marks the official kickoff of the Philippine National Police's preparedness measures for the upcoming rainy season and the potential impacts of the La Niña phenomenon. The initiative is aligned with the overarching mantra of the Chief PNP and Chairperson of the PNP Critical Incident Management Committee — to ensure the safety and welfare of both

police personnel and the communities they serve. The activity was designed to assess the operational readiness, condition, and completeness of disaster response equipment across all units. It emphasizes the importance of proactive disaster response planning to prevent the loss of lives and minimize damage to property during natural calamities.

"As we anticipate the challenges posed by the rainy season and La Niña, we reaffirm our commitment to operational readiness and community safety," said PCOL Alegre. "Our participation in this nationwide inspection reflects Cavite PPO's dedication to timely, efficient, and coordinated disaster response."

The Cavite PPO continues to uphold its mandate to protect the public and maintain peace and order, especially in times of crisis and disaster.

REGIONAL LEVEL MOST WANTED SA BAYAN NG SILANG, ARESTADO

Camp BGen Pantaleon Garcia, Lungsod ng Imus, Cavite — Isang Regional Level Most Wanted Person ang naaresto ng mga tauhan ng Silang Municipal Police Station dakong alas-11:45 ng umaga noong Mayo 20, 2025 sa Barangay Ipil 2, Bayan ng Silang, Cavite.

Kinilala ni PLTCOL LOUIE DC GONZAGA, Chief of Police ng Silang MPS, ang suspek na si alyas RUEL, kasalukuyang naninirahan sa Block 90, Lot 3, Barangay Ipil 2, Silang, Cavite.

Ang operasyon ay naisagawa sa pamamagitan ng pinagsanib na puwersa ng Warrant Personnel ng Silang MPS gamit ang Alternative Recording Device (ARD), na nagresulta sa matagumpay na pag-aresto sa akusado sa bisa ng Alias Warrant of Arrest na inisyu ng Regional

Trial Court, Branch 133, Tagaytay City, Cavite. Ang kaso ay may kinalaman sa paglabag sa R.A. 9165 o Comprehensive Dangerous Drugs Act of 2002 — partikular sa Sale, Trading, Administration, Dispensation, Delivery, Distribution, at Transportation of Dangerous Drugs (Art. II, Section 5, Paragraph 1), sa ilalim ng Criminal Case No. TG-22-1223 (AS) na may petsang Mayo 13, 2025. Ang kaso ay walang inirekomendang piyansa.

Naipabatid sa akusado ang kanyang mga karapatang konstitusyonal na kanyang ganap na naunawaan. Pansamantalan nakakulong ang akusado sa custodial facility ng Silang MPS habang inaayos ang kaukulang proseso ng batas. Ang warrant of arrest ay agad na ibalik sa korte ng pinagmulan.

Camp BGen Pantaleon Garcia, Lungsod ng Imus, Cavite — Isang Regional Level Most Wanted Person ang naaresto ng mga tauhan ng Bacoar Component City Police Station dakong alas- 4:30 ng hapon noong Mayo 21, 2025 sa Barangay Molino 3, Bacoar City, Cavite.

Kinilala ni PLTCOL JOHN PAOLO VIVAS CARRACEDO, Chief of Police ng Bacoar CCPS, ang suspek na si alyas Zenaida, kasalukuyang naninirahan sa Barangay Molino 3, Bacoar City, Cavite.

Ang pinagsanib na puwersa ng Warrant Section ng Bacoar Component City Police Station (Lead Unit) at ng 401st Maneuver Company, Regional Mobile Force Battalion 4A ay nagsagawa ng isang operasyon laban sa isang wanted na personalidad, gamit

Pinuri ni PLTCOL GONZAGA ang matagumpay na operasyon at ang dedikasyon ng kanyang mga tauhan. "Patuloy tayong magiging aktibo sa pagtugis sa mga kriminal upang mapanatili ang kapayapaan at kaayusan sa ating bayan. Saludo ako sa aking mga tauhan sa kanilang hindi matatawarang serbisyo," aniya.

Ayon kay PCOL DWIGHT E. ALEGRE, Acting Provincial Director ng Cavite PPO, "Ang ating kapulisan ay patuloy na kumikilos upang tugisin ang mga kriminal na nagtatago sa batas. Hangad naming maibigay ang hustisya sa mga biktima, kaya't nananawagan kami ng pakikiisa mula sa komunidad sapagkat sa Bagong Pilipinas, ang gusto ng Pulis — Ligtas ka!"

REGIONAL LEVEL MOST WANTED SA BAYAN NG BACOR, ARESTADO

ang Alternative Recording Device (ARD). Ang nasabing operasyon ay nagresulta sa matagumpay na pag-aresto sa akusado para sa kasong paglabag sa Seksyon 5 at 11, Artikulo II ng Republic Act No. 9165 o ang Comprehensive Dangerous Drugs Act of 2002. Ang warrant of arrest ay ipinag-utos ng Regional Trial Court, Branch 19, Bacoar City, Cavite, na may petsang Mayo 14, 2025. Walang piyansa ang inirekomenda para sa kasong nasa ilalim ng Section 5, habang ang Php 200,000.00 ay inirekomendang piyansa para sa Section 11.

Naipabatid sa akusado ang kanyang mga karapatang konstitusyonal na kanyang ganap na naunawaan.

Pansamantalan nakakulong ang akusado sa custodial facility ng Bacoar CCPS habang inaayos ang kaukulang proseso ng batas. Ang warrant of arrest ay agad na ibalik sa korte ng pinagmulan.

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P476K HALAGA NG SHABU, BARIL AT BALA, NAKUMPISKA SA DASMARIÑAS CITY, CAVITE

Camp BGen Pantaleon Garcia, Lungsod ng Imus, Cavite — Sa patuloy na pagpapatupad ng mas pinaigting na kampanya laban sa ilegal na droga, matagumpay na naaresto ng pinagsanib na puwersa ng Provincial Drug Enforcement Unit (PDEU) ng Cavite PPO, RID Special Team, at Dasmariñas Component City Police Station ang tatlong indibidwal na sangkot umano sa ilegal na droga, kabilang ang dalawang High Value Individuals (HVI) at isang Street Level Individual (SLI), sa isinagawang buy-bust operation dakong 8:00 ng gabi ng Mayo 21, 2025 sa Barangay Datu Esmal, Dasmariñas City, Cavite.

Ang mga naarestong suspek ay kinilala ni PLTCOL Chester Noel R Borlongan, Hepe ng Provincial Intelligence Unit (PIU), na sina alyas "Shine", residente ng Brgy. Datu Esmal, Dasmariñas City, Cavite (HVI); alyas "Floyd", residente ng Brgy. Burol 1, Dasmariñas City, Cavite (HVI); at alyas "Julius", residente ng Brgy. San Manuel 1, Dasmariñas City, Cavite (SLI).

Ang operasyon ay isinagawa sa ilalim ng koordinasyon ng Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency (PDEA). Bunga nito, matagumpay na nasamsam mula sa mga suspek ang sumusunod na ebidensya: apat (4) na piraso ng heat-sealed transparent plastic sachets na naglalaman ng hinihinalang shabu na may tinatayang kabuuang bigat na 70 gramo at may standard drug price na humigit-kumulang ₱476,000.00; isang (1) yunit ng Caliber .22 (North America) na walang serial number; dalawang (2)

piraso ng live ammunition ng caliber .22; at isang (1) yunit ng Android cellphone.

Isinagawa ang operasyon alinsunod sa umiiral na PNP Operational Procedures, gamit ang Alternative Recording Devices (ARDs) bilang bahagi ng pagsunod sa mga patakaran ng karapatang pantao. Naipabatid din sa mga suspek ang kanilang mga karapatang konstitusyonal sa paraang malinaw at naiintindihan nila.

Ang mga suspek ay kasalukuyang nasa kustodiya ng Dasmariñas Component City Police Station para sa dokumentasyon at inquest proceeding kaugnay ng paglabag sa Sections 5 (in concert), 11, Article II ng Republic Act 9165 o ang Comprehensive Dangerous Drugs Act of 2002 at Republic Act 10591 o Comprehensive Firearms and Ammunition Regulation Act na may kaugnayan sa Omnibus Election Code (Gun Ban).

Ayon kay PCOL Dwight E Alegre, Acting Provincial Director ng Cavite PPO, "Hindi titigil ang ating mga kapulisan sa pagtugis sa mga salot ng lipunan. Ang bawat tagumpay sa kampanya kontra droga ay isang hakbang patungo sa mas ligtas na pamayanan. Sa Bagong Pilipinas — ang gusto ng Pulis, ligtas ka!"

Ang matagumpay na operasyong ito ay patunay ng epektibong pagpapatupad ng direktiba mula kay PGEN Rommel Francisco D Marbil, Chief of the Philippine National Police, na patuloy na isinusulong ang agresibong kampanya laban sa kriminalidad at ilegal na droga, tungo sa isang mapayapa at disiplinadong bansa.

4PS BENEFICIARIES TAPPED FOR DISASTER-PROOFING PROGRAM

CALAMBA CITY, Laguna (PIA) — The Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) in Calabarzon continues to mobilize members of the Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (4Ps) in its efforts to mitigate the erratic effects of climate change.

One of these initiatives is the Project Local Adaptation to Water Access (LAWA) and Breaking Insufficiency through Nutritious Harvest for the Impoverished (BINHI), which aim to combat hunger and reduce the economic vulnerability of communities by addressing water scarcity and food insecurity worsened by natural disasters, particularly those linked to climate change.

Across various provinces in the Calabarzon region, the DSWD has implemented cash-for-work activities under the Risk Resiliency Program through Projects LAWA and BINHI.

Jasmin Lirio, a parent leader of the 4Ps in Rosario, Batangas, shared that 400 individuals from their community have begun participating in a communal garden project. In a Facebook post, Lirio said the program benefits them by supporting environmental efforts while

also providing financial assistance for daily needs.

"As a member of [4Ps], I am grateful—along with my fellow members—to everyone behind the LAWA and BINHI Projects for including us in this initiative. We will continue to dedicate ourselves and offer our support to the programs of the DSWD," Lirio said.

She emphasized that the project plays a crucial role in building climate- and disaster-resilient communities by promoting local adaptation strategies that improve water access and increase food production through sustainable farming practices.

"The project is a huge help because Project LAWA and BINHI aim to build climate- and disaster-resilient communities by establishing water systems and gardening projects to address the challenges of drought and heavy rains."

In Montalban, Rizal, 100 residents have recently expressed interest in joining the program. Meanwhile, in Batangas, participants will undergo a 20-day training and work on establishing communal gardens and rehabilitating or installing small farm reservoirs. (CO/PIA-4A; with reports from DSWD Region IV-A) **BY CHARMAINE ODONG**

PDLs IN BATANGAS JOIN AIDS CANDLELIGHT MEMORIAL

BATANGAS CITY (PIA) — Persons Deprived of Liberty (PDLs) in Batangas City joined the global observance of the AIDS Candlelight Memorial on May 20, an initiative aimed at raising awareness on HIV and sexually transmitted infections (STIs), as well as honoring the lives lost to these diseases.

The event carried the theme "We Remember, We Rise, We Lead", highlighting solidarity and commitment to ending the stigma around HIV/AIDS.

Participating PDLs formed a ribbon-shaped candle formation, symbolizing support and remembrance for those who have passed due to HIV/AIDS.

Vicky Atienza of the City Health Office (CHO) led an HIV 101 session, discussing strategies for effective implementation of HIV/AIDS programs and ways to reduce new cases and related deaths.

She emphasized the three primary modes of HIV transmission: unprotected sexual contact, exposure to infected blood or blood products, and the sharing of needles.

Participants were also

given updates on Republic Act 11166, also known as the HIV and AIDS Law, as well as STI Prevention and Control Programs to help deepen their understanding of the health issue.

According to Dr. Allen Evangelio-Santos, CHO Medical Program Manager for the HIV-STI Prevention Program, Batangas Province ranks 4th in CALABARZON in terms of confirmed HIV cases.

"From the five provinces of Region IV-A, Batangas is in fourth rank. In Batangas City alone, we have 639 recorded cases as of the moment. We need to continuously inform Batangueños on ways to avoid getting infected," said Santos.

The CHO urged the public to remain vigilant, undergo regular screening and testing, and promptly consult health centers to ensure early detection and treatment.

Health officials emphasized that that HIV awareness and prevention campaigns are for everyone, not just members of the LGBTQIA+ community, but especially for individuals who are sexually active. (MDC, PIA Batangas) **BY MAMERTA DE CASTRO**

EDITORIAL

Mga pasahero, umaaray sa taas-singil ng CAAP

Taas-singil sa passenger service charge sa mahigit 40 na paliparan sa bansa na hawak ng Civil Aviation Authority of the Philippines (CAAP), ikinagulat at inaalmahan ngayon ng mga pasahero.

Ang mga ganitong pagtataas singil ay mahirap para sa mga Pilipino gayong kakarampot lamang ang sweldo ng mga ito at kinakailangan nang pag-iipon bago makamit ang mga ganitong bagay. Sa kabilang banda ay isa rin itong paraan upang magkaroon ng mas magandang serbisyo at pasilidad ang mga paliparan. Ngunit dahil sa pagkagulat ng mga mamamayan sa pagtaas ng singil ay dapat na magkaroon ng mas maayos na pagpapakalat ng impormasyon ang CAAP at mga paliparan upang mas maging handa ang mga mamamayan sa susunod.

Isa pa, dapat na maging epektibo at makita ng mga mamamayan ang higit na pagganda ng serbisyo ng mga ito upang hindi malagay sa wala ang taas-singil.

SSS INTENSIFIES RACE CAMPAIGN VS DELINQUENT EMPLOYERS

CALAMBA CITY, Laguna (PIA) — The Social Security System (SSS) intensified the Run After Contribution Evaders (RACE) campaign in Calabarzon to continuously protect the rights of private-sector employees from delinquent employers who fail to remit mandatory monthly contributions.

Under the Social Security Act, all employers are mandated to register their businesses and remit monthly contributions for their employees' social security protection benefits.

In a round of surprise visits in Santa Rosa City, Laguna, 10 establishments were given show-cause orders. According to the SSS, these non-compliant employers owe up to ₱6.02

million, which includes principal and penalties.

SSS Luzon 1 Division Vice President Edwin Igharas said the RACE campaign is effective in encouraging non-compliant employers to fulfill their legal obligations.

"It is a big help that employers see a team visiting with SSS account officers, officials, media, and sometimes with police assistance, they will not ignore us," he added.

Moreover, delinquent employers were given a 15-day grace period to comply with their legal duties and to explain their reasons for non-remittance.

Igharas explained, "We understand that some employers go through economic and financial difficulties, we are giving

them ways to pay their delinquencies."

He also advised employees to regularly check their monthly contributions online through their MySSS accounts to ensure that these are accurately posted.

"We always tell employees to be vigilant about their contributions. For faster verification, they can check through the SSS website. And if they see discrepancies, they can file a complaint with our office, and we will immediately act on it and make the employers pay the contributions."

Meanwhile, in Bacoor, Cavite, several random businesses were also issued written notices. According to SSS Bacoor City Acting Head Ms.

Lourdes B. Verbo, before the issuance of formal notices, establishments received billing letters and were given ample time to settle their obligations.

She also stressed, "Employers are accountable for the social security protection of their workers."

Meanwhile, the SSS Luzon South 1 Division is targeting to collect ₱135 million in unpaid contributions this year.

Section 22 of the Social Security Act allows the issuance of a Warrant of Distraint, Levy, and Garnishment (WDLG) for the collection of unpaid contributions, including penalties, from delinquent employers. (RBF/CCM/KDA PIA4A) **BY KRISTIANNE ANDRADE**

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NEW 10K NON-TEACHING POSTS TO EASE TEACHERS' WORKLOADS – DBM

MANILA — The Department of Budget and Management (DBM) has approved 10,000 new non-teaching positions across the country to ease the administrative workload of public school teachers and allow them to focus more on quality instruction.

In a statement released Thursday, DBM Secretary Amenah Pangandaman said the initiative fulfills a campaign promise of President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. to support teachers and reduce their administrative burdens.

This development comes soon after the order to create 16,000 additional teaching posts for School Year 2025–2026, part of the government's continuing efforts to strengthen the education sector.

The new positions will be classified as Administrative Officer II with Salary Grade 11 and will be deployed across elementary, junior high, and senior high schools in all regions nationwide.

"Actually, this is a campaign promise fulfilled by our beloved President. Noong una pa lang po, pinangako na ni Pangulong Bongbong Marcos na bibigyan niya ng kinakailangang suporta ang ating mga guro para

padaliin ang kanilang mga trabaho (From the very beginning, President Bongbong Marcos promised to provide the necessary support for our teachers to make their jobs easier)," Pangandaman said.

She said the President wanted teachers to concentrate on delivering quality education rather than being overwhelmed by clerical tasks.

"Gusto n'ya na makapag-focus sila sa pagbibigay ng dekalidad na pagtuturo. Kaya nga po dinadagdagan natin 'yung mga non-teaching personnel para bawasan 'yung load ng trabaho sa kanila — na malaking tulong para sa kanilang mental health at overall well being (He wants them to focus on delivering quality teaching. That's why we're adding more non-teaching personnel to lighten their workload — which is a big help for their mental health and overall well-being)," she added.

The DBM's regional offices are tasked with issuing the corresponding Notice of Organization, Staffing, and Compensation Action directly to the Department of Education's Schools Division Offices based on DepEd's deployment report. **(PNA) BY DARRYL JOHN ESGUERRA**

LGUS URGED TO INTENSIFY ENERGY CONSERVATION

MANILA — The Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG) on Wednesday urged all local government units (LGUs) to intensify energy conservation efforts by implementing the Government Energy Management Program (GEMP) under Republic Act 11285, or the Energy Efficiency and Conservation (EEC) Act.

The DILG made the statement in support of President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr.'s call to promote energy efficiency in the public sector.

Under Memorandum Circular 2025-515, the DILG directed LGUs to craft a Local EEC Plan

that outlines specific conservation strategies, target cost reductions, and motor vehicle inventories.

LGUs, except barangays, are also enjoined to establish an EEC Office within their planning and development units, funded under their general appropriations.

Local chief executives are likewise enjoined to issue an executive order or memorandum formalizing EEC protocols in government buildings and facilities.

GEMP is a government-wide initiative aimed at reducing electricity and fuel consumption in all government agencies through efficient use

TICKET SOLD IN LAGUNA WINS P64.7-M MEGALOTTO JACKPOT

MANILA — A bettor from Laguna bagged the PHP64.7 million jackpot in Wednesday's MegaLotto 6/45 draw.

The Philippine Charity Sweepstakes Office (PCSO) announced Thursday that the winning ticket, purchased in Lucky Circle Corporation in Calamba City, Laguna, had the combination 23-25-28-19-10-18.

The winner has one year to claim the PHP64,712,644.60 prize at the PCSO main office in Mandaluyong City, subject to a 20 percent tax.

The ticket holder must present the winning ticket and two valid IDs to claim

the prize money.

A total of 92 bettors also won PHP32,000 each for correctly guessing five of the six winning numbers, while 3,612 players will receive PHP1,000 each for matching four numbers, and 49,729 players will get PHP30 for hitting three digits.

The 6/45 Mega Lotto is drawn every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday.

The PCSO urges the public to support its gaming products to raise more revenues for health initiatives, medical services, and other national charities. **(PNA) BY CHRISTOPHER LLOYD CALIWAN**

DMW, DOST LAUNCH SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY-BASED PROGRAM FOR RETURNING OFWS

MANILA — The Department of Migrant Workers (DMW) has partnered with the Department of Science and Technology (DOST) to empower returning overseas Filipino workers (OFWs) in their reintegration into the communities, through science and technology (S&T)-based business development and innovation.

In a news release on Wednesday, the DMW said the initiative, in collaboration with Entrepinoy Volunteers Inc. (EVFI), offers access to business development, innovation guidance, and funding support for OFWs and their families.

EVFI, a non-profit organization, guides Filipino entrepreneurs through the involvement of volunteer experts and executives, to make them globally competitive.

The initiative also integrates DOST's Innovations for Filipinos Working Distantly from the Philippines (iFWD PH) program with the DMW's

existing reintegration efforts, ensuring a more holistic and future-ready approach to enterprise development.

DMW's National Reintegration Center for OFWs Director Andrea Luisa Anolin said the program aligns with the directive of President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. to strengthen support mechanisms for returning OFWs, enabling them to transition smoothly and productively into life back home.

"We really want them to come home and maramdaman nila na sila ay ating kinakalinga, sila ay ating pinapahalagahan, at mayroong pag-asa para sa kanila at sa kanilang pamilya kapag sila ay umuwi na sa Pilipinas (make them feel that we care for them, that we value them, and that there is hope for them and their families when they return to the Philippines)," she said.

"By guiding our beneficiaries to business ideation grounded in science, technology, and innovation, we help lay the foundation for resilient, competitive, sustainable, and future-ready enterprises," she added. The first phase of the program was rolled out on Tuesday at the DMW Office

in Makati City, bringing together implementers and focal persons to further orient OFWs on the opportunities available under the initiative.

These include access to technologies developed by DOST's research and development institutions tailored to specific business needs, opportunities, and challenges.

DOST-NCR Regional Director Romelen Tresvalles underscored the importance of collaborating with the DMW to help returning OFWs.

"We are working with DMW kasi nakikita natin (because we see that) when we connect the different programs we have, nakakapagbigay tayo ng holistic assistance sa ating kababayang OFW (we are able to give holistic assistance to our OFW fellowmen)," she said.

Among the sectors targeted for technological enhancement under the program are food processing, beverage manufacturing, crop and animal production, fabricated metal products manufacturing, information and communication, S&T consultancy, furniture manufacturing, and other priority industries identified by the Regional Development Council. **(PNA) BY MARITA MOAJE**

REMOVAL OF GENDER BARRIERS IN MARITIME INDUSTRY PUSHED

MANILA — The Philippine Commission on Women (PCW) said Wednesday there is an urgent need to dismantle gender barriers across all aspects of the maritime industry.

In a statement, PCW Chairperson Ermelita Valdeavilla noted that women have been proving their competence, courage, and leadership in the maritime world as engineers, logisticians, harbor pilots, shipbuilders, and naval officers, to name a few.

However, they still encounter significant barriers, such as unconscious bias, lack of

appropriate mentorship, limited training access, and outdated stereotypes.

"The ocean of opportunities for women in the maritime industry means nothing if gender barriers will remain ingrained in maritime education, training, recruitment, placement, promotion, allocation of benefits and opportunities, and in the language and behavior of people who make up the industry," she said.

A recent survey conducted by the International Maritime Organization and the Women's International Shipping and Trading Association showed that the shipping industry remains "overwhelmingly male-dominated."

Women only make up 19 percent of the total maritime workforce surveyed, with 1 percent of them working at sea.

Meanwhile, a study by the National Maritime Polytechnic (NMP) in 2022 revealed that only 44 percent, or 28 out of 64 surveyed shipping companies, have established formal policies on gender equality.

The NMP said this indicates a significant gap in the institutional support necessary to foster a more inclusive and equitable maritime industry.

The study also showed that women remain underrepresented in shipboard roles, and their participation is primarily seen within the steward or catering departments at 402, or 42 percent of 953 Filipino women seafarers. Moreover, only 100, or 11 percent, of 940 female employees within crewing and shipping companies hold senior management positions.

"Having more women in the industry means nothing if discrimination, harassment, and denial of opportunities will persist," Valdeavilla said.

She urged authorities and advocates in maritime to make "the seas truly inclusive" by providing women, both inside and outside the industry, respect, promotion, and support. **(PNA) BY MA. TERESA MONTEMAYOR**

DSWD BACKS PBBM'S CALL FOR SWIFT, EFFICIENT DELIVERY OF GOV'T SERVICES

MANILA— The Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) is fully supportive of President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr.'s directive on the need to shift away from politics and focus on governance that directly benefits the public. In the first episode of BBM Podcast last Monday, Marcos said the recent May 2025 election results show that Filipinos are "tired of politics" and want more actions from their leaders, acknowledging public disappointment over slow government services in addressing immediate, day-to-day needs.

In a statement on Wednesday, Secretary Rex Gatchalian assured the chief executive that all DSWD officials, personnel and social workers are dedicated and hardworking and they are always ready to respond to the needs of families and individuals in times of personal crisis and natural disasters.

"The whole DSWD supports the call of President Marcos for swift and efficient delivery of government services in order to effectively address the immediate and day-to-day needs of the poor, vulnerable and marginalized groups," Gatchalian said.

The DSWD chief said the agency now has a total of 3,000,658 boxes of family food packs (FFPs) which have been prepositioned across the agency's warehouses nationwide --the highest stockpile recorded so far in the department's history.

"This record reflects the DSWD's untiring dedication to bolster year-round preparation for disasters and calamities. This is in line with the President's directive toward a more 'omnipresent' government response to disasters and calamities."

Based on the report of the DSWD's Disaster Response Management Group (DRMG), 2,207,124 FFPs have already been delivered and prepositioned at various

hubs, spokes, and last-mile facilities across the country.

Under the Assistance to Individuals in Crisis Situation (AICS) program, the DSWD's Central Office and Field Offices nationwide continue to provide cash and guarantee letters to families and individuals who are undergoing crisis and are in need of medical, burial, transportation and food assistance.

The Walang Gutom Program (WGP) provides food-poor families with PHP3,000 monthly food subsidy in the form of Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) cards. Some 750,000 food-poor families have been targeted under the WGP by 2027.

The Walang Gutom Kitchen in Pasay City, meanwhile, continues to address involuntary hunger by providing free, hot meals during breakfast and lunch to all those who want to eat.

The Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (4Ps), the government's flagship program in breaking intergenerational poverty, continues to cater to more than 4 million household-beneficiaries by providing them with cash grants for the education and health of children from 0-18 years old.

For the last 20 years, the Kapit-Bisig Laban sa Kahirapan-Comprehensive and Integrated Delivery of Social Services (KALAHI-CIDSS) has helped poor communities build projects such as school buildings, water systems, foot paths, and improvement of roads.

The Panahon ng Pagkilos modality of KALAHI-CIDSS was recently approved for implementation by the National Economic Development Authority (NEDA) Board and will officially start in 2026 until 2030 in 500 municipalities in 49 provinces nationwide. Based on the program, the municipalities are allocated PHP50 million each for a three-year implementation. **(PNA)**

CAAP REMINDS PUBLIC TO FLY DRONES RESPONSIBLY

MANILA — The Civil Aviation Authority of the Philippines (CAAP) on Wednesday reminded the public to adhere to drone regulations.

"In line with the Bagong Pilipinas initiative of the Marcos administration, President Ferdinand Marcos Jr., together with the Department of Transportation and CAAP, emphasizes the responsible use of Remotely Piloted Aircraft (RPA), commonly known as drones, to avoid serious threats to lives and airspace security," CAAP said in a news release.

Commercial drone operations require an authorization certificate from CAAP, and operators must also coordinate with local government units to

comply with local drone ordinances.

Drones are allowed in areas outside of the 10-km. no-fly zones around airports.

The public is urged to keep the drone within visual line of sight at all times, and to avoid flying drones during strong winds or poor visibility.

They are also encouraged to report any injury or property damage caused by drone use within 48 hours.

The CAAP further advised the public not to fly drones over crowds, ongoing emergencies, and sensitive facilities.

They should also avoid flying drones at night or from moving vehicles, it said. **(PNA) BY MA. CRISTINA ARAYATA**

MORE COPS ON THE GROUND ENHANCE SAFER COMMUNITIES – PNP

MANILA — The Philippine National Police (PNP) on Wednesday reinforced its commitment to community safety through the intensified deployment of personnel nationwide to enhance visibility and accessibility in public spaces.

In a statement, PNP chief Gen. Rommel Francisco Marbil said police presence in communities serves not only as a deterrent to crime but also builds public confidence and trust in law enforcement.

He earlier directed all units nationwide to maximize visibility through sustained foot and mobile patrols, particularly in high-density areas, public transport hubs, commercial zones, and tourist destinations.

Marbil said as of Wednesday, 69,657 police personnel have been deployed in various convergence points nationwide.

"These deployments ensure that police officers are where they are most needed—on the streets and within communities," he said.

To further extend its reach and effectiveness, the PNP has also activated

force multipliers, including members of accredited civic volunteer organizations (CVOs), barangay tanods (village police), and other community support groups. "Crime prevention begins with presence. We want every Filipino to feel the assurance that help is always within reach — that there is always a police officer nearby, ready to respond, ready to serve," he said.

In Metro Manila, the National Capital Region Police Office (NCRPO) recently conducted a two-day surprise inspection across its five police districts to assess operational readiness and ensure all police posts are functioning as intended.

NCRPO Director Maj. Gen. Anthony Aberin ordered the relief of nine commanders and an investigation into 28 personnel for leaving their respective assistance desks unattended during a surprise inspection last weekend.

Aside from the commanders, Aberin said the NCRPO is also investigating lower-ranking personnel for negligence. **(PNA) BY CHRISTOPHER LLOYD CALIWAN**

PHLPOST PREPARES FOR MANILA CENTRAL POST OFFICE'S RETROFITTING

MANILA — The Philippine Postal Corporation (PHLPost) on Wednesday said it is preparing to publish necessary documents to start the official restoration of the Manila Central Post Office (MCPO).

In a news release, PHLPost noted that the Terms of Reference (TOR) for the Detailed Architectural and Engineering Design (DAED) will guide the rebuilding of the MCPO, ensuring it adheres to modern safety, accessibility, and sustainability standards while preserving its historical and cultural integrity as a national heritage site.

The DAED is also the basis for accurate cost estimation and public bidding for transparency and proper resource allocation.

"This project is about honoring our past, preserving our identity, and showing the strength and unity of our people through heritage conservation and nation-building," Postmaster General and Chief Executive Officer Luis Carlos said.

The Department of Tourism, through the Tourism Infrastructure and Enterprise Zone Authority, commissioned a private firm to study the structure of the MCPO.

The study revealed that it

is suitable for retrofitting despite being significantly damaged by a fire.

The PHLPost has partnered with the Metropolitan Manila Development Authority (MMDA) for the repainting of the MCPO's facade.

It also held a series of coordination and succession meetings with cultural agencies to align restoration goals and strategies.

The Office of the First Lady and Office of the Executive Secretary are leading the restoration through a whole-of-government approach with the DOT, TIEZA, MMDA, the Department of Budget and Management, Department of Public Works and Highways, National Commission for Culture and the Arts, City Government of Manila, National Museum of the Philippines, and National Historical Commission of the Philippines.

The MCPO was one of the country's finest examples of neoclassical architecture. It was designed by Filipino architect Juan Arellano and completed in 1926.

It has served as the PHLPost's headquarters as a historical landmark along the Pasig River banks before it was gutted by a fire on May 21, 2023. **(PNA) BY MA. TERESA MONTEMAYOR**

MIAA EXTENDS AID TO FIRE VICTIMS IN CALOOCAN

MANILA — Airport regulator Manila International Airport Authority (MIAA) said Wednesday it extended assistance to victims of a recent fire incident in Barangay 81, Caloocan City.

The MIAA distributed 476 repacked eco-bags and 50 boxes of assorted items, such as clothing, bags, footwear, and toys to more than 1,000 individuals on May 20.

The outreach program was part of MIAA's CSR

initiatives and was also a response to President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr.'s call to help calamity-stricken communities.

MIAA's donation came from unclaimed items at the Ninoy Aquino International Airport's lost and found section.

The Caloocan fire incident left two people dead and five others injured. It razed 70 houses, affecting 90 families. **(PNA) BY MA. CRISTINA ARAYATA**

DOLE RELEASES P10.3-M FOR TUPAD IN QUIRINO

CABARROGUIS, Quirino

— The Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE) in Quirino has released P10.3 million in wages for the Tulong Panghanapbuhay sa Ating Disadvantaged/Displaced Workers (TUPAD) program workers, benefiting 2,158 beneficiaries across the province.

DOLE Quirino Provincial Head Froctoso C. Agustin said the recipients are primarily displaced and vulnerable individuals.

"They performed community-based works such as street cleaning, greening, and facility maintenance for 10 days," he said.

In addition to the TUPAD assistance, DOLE released P2.99 million under its Integrated Livelihood Program to support 119 informal workers and aspiring entrepreneurs. The livelihood assistance aims to help individuals start or expand small businesses.

Of the total amount, P1,996,000 was granted to the municipality of Nagtipunan to establish group livelihood projects, while P998,050 was provided to LGU Aglipay for its local beneficiaries.

"This aid includes tools, raw materials, and training

designed to help recipients build or enhance micro-enterprises in sectors like food processing, agriculture, retail, and services," Agustin said.

To further boost local enterprise, DOLE supported the Kadiwang Pangulo trade fair, which featured 17 micro-enterprises represented by 34 local vendors. The event generated P58,727 sales, allowing farmers and small producers to sell directly to consumers, bypassing middlemen.

Among the standout participants was the Jose Ancheta Home Vegetables and Fruits Farmers Association, which posted the highest sales during the fair with P12,300, showcasing its potential as a community-based agribusiness.

Agustin also emphasized the importance of collaboration among national agencies, local government units, and the private sector to create meaningful opportunities for workers, entrepreneurs, and the youth across Quirino province.

"Our programs reflect our collective commitment to making employment not only accessible but also meaningful," Agustin said. (OTB/TCB/PIA-2, Quirino)

BY THELMA C. BICARME

STUDENTS URGED TO USE DIGITAL TECH IN SERVING COMMUNITIES

VIGAN CITY, Ilocos Sur (PIA)

— As the five-day National Schools Press Conference (NSPC) and National Festival of Talents (NFOT) opened on May 19 in Ilocos Sur, students were urged to use digital technology to serve their communities.

Organized annually by the Department of Education (DepEd), the NSPC and NFOT aim to develop 21st-century communication skills among Filipino youth while addressing social concerns like fake news, red-tagging, and threats to freedom of expression. These efforts align with DepEd's educational agenda.

In a video message, Education Secretary Sonny Angara highlighted how this year's theme—Empowering Filipino Youth: Unleashing Potentials in Journalism and Creative Industries in the Era of Artificial Intelligence—reflects the growing role of AI in shaping the future of media and content creation.

He added that the event aims to nurture the talents of the nation's youth by equipping them with digital skills essential in an AI-driven world.

"That is what President Ferdinand R. Marcos, Jr. wants, that no one is left behind in our education system, which is why we promote these events and competitions to thoroughly hone our youth," Angara said.

Broadcast journalist Jessica Soho, guest speaker during the opening ceremony, shared seven key lessons from her 40-year career: accuracy, impact, content, fairness, reading, balance, and doing good.

"In life, as in journalism, balance is important," she said, adding that privileges must come with responsibility and technology should be used for public good.

Ilocos Sur Governor Jeremias Singson echoed this, reminding students that even in an AI-driven world, it is their voice and vision that give meaning to technology.

"Technology may be the tool, but you are the soul. Your words still hold power. Your talent still carries truth. Your stories have the power to change lives," Singson said.

He called on participants to unite despite differences in language and culture, and be driven by purpose and inspired by a shared future.

Before the opening ceremony, participants showcased local heritage through a Cultural and Kalesa Parade—featuring horse-drawn carriages (kalesas) they decorated to reflect their regions, and traditional attire worn

be completed from Rovira Road to the corner North National Highway, which is a major traffic chokepoint in the city.

Once the project is completed, the city government plans to install a traffic light system in the area for a more efficient flow of vehicles. (JCT/PIA7 Negros Oriental)

BY MARIA JENIFER C. TILOS

PHILHEALTH, DEPED LAUNCH FIRST REGIONAL KONSULTA CLINIC

CITY OF SAN FERNANDO, Pampanga (PIA)

— The Philippine Health Insurance Corporation (PhilHealth), in partnership with the Department of Education (DepEd), has officially launched the Konsulta provider clinic of the DepEd regional office in Central Luzon—the first of its kind among DepEd regional offices nationwide.

PhilHealth Region III Acting Vice President Henry Almanon said the clinic will offer primary care services, including medical check-ups or consultations, diagnostic and laboratory tests, and maintenance medicines to teachers, students, faculty, administrative staff, and their family members.

"Ang battlecry ng PhilHealth ay magbigay ng mga benepisyo at serbisyong mabilis, patas at mapagkakatiwalaan. Layunin ng PhilHealth

proudly.

This year's NSPC and NFOT is hosted by the DepEd Schools Division of Ilocos Sur in partnership with the provincial government, bringing together more than 6,000 delegates from 17 regions nationwide.

Among the participants was Jezreel Ira Buyob of Soccsksargen, who joined the Collaborative Desktop Publishing competition.

He said experiencing a new culture—from Mindanao to northern Luzon—was both exciting and meaningful.

"The best thing to do is keep trying—we lose nothing as long as we do our best to seize the opportunity to become journalists," Buyob added.

They are expected to immerse in the province's rich culture by visiting Calle Crisologo, riding kalesas, watching the dancing fountain, and tasting Ilocano delicacies like Vigan longganisa, bagnet, and empanada. (CCMT/JMCQ, PIA Ilocos Sur)

BY JOYAH MAE C. QUIMOYOG

na paigtingin ang ating mga programang pangkalusugan, katuwang ang DepEd para sa healthy teachers, healthy students, healthy communities. Gamitin po natin ang Konsulta at iba pang pinalawak na benepisyo ng PhilHealth (The battle cry of PhilHealth is to provide benefits and services that are fast, fair, and trustworthy. PhilHealth aims to strengthen our health programs, in partnership with DepEd, for healthy teachers, healthy students, and healthy communities. Let us make use of the Konsulta program and other expanded benefits of PhilHealth)," he emphasized.

Moreover, Almanon noted that PhilHealth aims to cover all provinces in Central Luzon through the accreditation of Konsulta providers and facilities, registration and assignment, and ensuring accessibility and utilization of Konsulta benefit packages to promote happier and healthier members.

Meanwhile, DepEd Assistant Regional Director Jessie Amin underscored the importance of establishing a functional clinic for DepEd personnel and learners.

He also expressed hope for potential financial support from PhilHealth to ensure the sustainability of the Konsulta provider clinic.

Since 2024, the DepEd regional office in Central Luzon has integrated the PhilHealth Learners' Material into its DepEd Portal and engaged teachers and students in discussions to raise awareness about PhilHealth benefit programs and services.

This partnership highlights ongoing health promotion efforts between PhilHealth and DepEd to ensure better health outcomes for the education sector and their families. (CLJD/MAECR, PIA Region 3-Pampanga)

BY MARIA ASUMPTA ESTEFANIE C. REYES

DUMAGUETE CITY, ST. PAUL UNIVERSITY SIGN DEED OF DONATION FOR ROAD WIDENING

DUMAGUETE CITY, Negros Oriental (PIA)

— The St. Paul University-Dumaguete (SPUD) has donated 1,154 square meters of lot to the City Government of Dumaguete to be used for the widening of Rovira Road in Barangay Bantayan.

Dumaguete City Mayor Felipe Antonio Remollo said the city government will now be able to implement the seven-meter setback to be used in the widening of the Rovira Road to help decongest traffic up to Bantayan.

"I thanked the leadership of Sr. Mila Grace Silab who

was open to this and was willing to help the city to decongest the traffic," said Remollo.

According to Silab, the university decided to donate a significant portion of its land to help the city government address traffic congestion and improve the flow of vehicles and pedestrians in the area.

"So kami mga Sisters natu sa St. Paul, very willing sab mi kaayo mohatag sa part sa yuta of the university kay (So we, the Sisters of St. Paul, are very willing to donate part of the lot of the university) we saw the need to improve the

traffic concerns not only for the motorists but for our students," said Silab.

Under the agreement, the city government will reconstruct a new fence along the new property line to preserve the security of the SPUD compound, retrofit the school's guest house, and repair a portion of the Nursery Community Center affected by the relocation of the perimeter fence.

Remollo is hopeful that the owners of the other affected private lots in the area will also agree to donate a portion of their properties so that the setback will

DTI VOWS CONTINUED SUPPORT FOR PH CEMENT INDUSTRY

MANILA – Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) Secretary Cristina Roque recently met with senior executives of Taiheiyō Cement Corporation in Tokyo, Japan, to reaffirm the Philippine government's strong support for the cement industry.

In a statement Thursday, DTI said the meeting was held on May 19, centered on Taiheiyō's ongoing construction of a PHP3.72 billion Luzon Distribution Terminal in Calaca City, Batangas.

The facility scheduled to start operations early next year, can supply up to 700,000 tons of cement annually to Luzon.

Taiheiyō will utilize this terminal to distribute blended cement, a more environmentally friendly alternative that uses industrial by-products like fly ash, slag, or pozzolana to reduce carbon emissions and promote circularity in construction.

The company said the shift to blended cement is not only a response to the rising market demand, but also part of its broader carbon reduction roadmap. Taiheiyō Cement Philippines, Inc. (TCPI), the group's local subsidiary based in Cebu, currently

operates at a production capacity of three million tons annually.

The company aims to increase output to five million tons and reach a 10 percent market share by 2030 and is also investing in sustainability initiatives and community support programs, including local scholarships and health services.

"Investments like these are cornerstones of our Build Better More infrastructure push. They deliver not just materials for nation-building—but livelihoods, innovation, and inclusive progress for our people," Roque said.

During the meeting, Taiheiyō also thanked the Philippine government for the imposition of provisional safeguard duties on cement imports.

The company, in alignment with the Cement Manufacturers Association of the Philippines, welcomed the measure and expressed optimism that continued policy support will sustain a competitive domestic cement sector.

The DTI assured Taiheiyō of continued government support as it works with local stakeholders to create a greener and more competitive cement industry. **(PNA) BY ANNA LEAH GONZALES**

BALISACAN, RECTO THANK PBBM FOR CONTINUED TRUST

MANILA – Department of Economy, Planning, and Development (DEPDev) Secretary Arsenio Balisacan and Finance Secretary Ralph Recto on Friday thanked President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. for his continued trust.

Balisacan and Recto made the statement following Executive Secretary Lucas Bersamin's announcement that Marcos rejected the courtesy resignation of the members of the economic team.

Aside from Balisacan and Recto, Marcos also decided to reject the resignation of Trade Secretary Maria Cristina Roque, Budget Secretary Amenah Pangandaman, and Special Assistant to the President for Investments and Economic Affairs

Frederick Go.

"I thank the President for his continued trust and confidence and assure him of the Department of Economy, Planning, and Development's continued efforts, together with members of the economic team, to steer the economy to a prosperous, inclusive, and resilient future where every Filipino benefits from our nation's progress," Balisacan said.

Recto, for his part, said the President's decision is a "vote of confidence."

"I thank the President for his continued trust. More than a vote of confidence, I take this as a marching order to push harder and deliver results faster, and thus we will also do our own recalibration within the

AIRASIA RECORDS 85% LOAD FACTOR; BOOSTS TAIPEI FLIGHTS IN JULY

MANILA – Low-cost carrier AirAsia Philippines reported strong performance on Wednesday, registering an average of 85 percent load factor for the first months of 2025, and hitting almost three million passengers for the first half, including forward bookings.

Airline spokesperson Steve Dailisan said 80 percent of the load factor comprised domestic travelers, with Puerto Princesa as the top local destination.

"This strong performance signals positive growth for local tourism. We remain focused on supporting this through initiatives like the AirAsia Fiesta Series and promotional campaigns tied to local festivals,

encouraging Filipinos to explore and take part in the cultural festivities across the country," Dailisan said in a statement.

Taipei emerged as the top choice for international travelers.

Starting July 1, AirAsia will increase services to Taipei from 14 to 17 times weekly. The increase seeks to enhance connectivity and offer greater flexibility for both leisure and business travelers.

Meanwhile, to further entice travelers, AirAsia has an ongoing seat sale, enabling passengers to book one-way base fare for as low as PHP185.

The seat sale is until June 1, for travel until October 31, AirAsia said. **(PNA) BY MA. CRISTINA ARAYATA**

CONTACT CENTER SECTOR HAILS EBET LAW AS KEY TO BRIDGING SKILLS GAP

MANILA – The Contact Center Association of the Philippines (CCAP) has expressed strong support for the government's new Enterprise-Based Education and Training (EBET) law, as this will help in addressing the skills gap in the workforce.

In a press conference in Makati City Wednesday, CCAP president Haidee Enriquez lauded the government for recognizing the crucial role of enterprises in ensuring a competitive talent pool, especially for the contact center sector wherein the workforce should be regularly upskilled and reskilled amid fast-paced technologies.

The EBET law allocates an initial PHP500 million for enterprise-driven upskilling, a shift from

department," Recto said. Marcos earlier called on all Cabinet members to tender their courtesy resignations as part of a comprehensive performance review to assess their capabilities and ensure alignment with the administration's agenda. **(PNA) BY ANNA LEAH GONZALES**

traditional models that placed the burden of training solely on academic institutions and technical schools like the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA).

Enriquez said companies are better equipped to identify and deliver the training needed by their talents.

"I think that there's recognition already that as enterprises, we know what we need. And because we know what we need, we are in a better position to provide the trainings to upskill our employees because we're the experts at it," she added.

The CCAP president also pointed out that the EBET law reflects a more collaborative approach among public and private sectors and the academe. "We're very happy that we're seeing tripartite efforts happening," she said.

President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. signed the EBET Framework Act into law in November 2024 to address the persistent jobs-skills mismatch.

The government is directly extending PHP500 million

ISLAMIC BANKS, BANKING UNITS NOW COVERED BY PDIC

MANILA – Islamic banks (IBs) and Islamic banking units (IBUs) are now officially covered by the country's deposit insurance system, the Philippine Deposit Insurance Corporation (PDIC) said.

In a statement Wednesday, PDIC said deposits in these banks are insured in the same manner as conventional deposits up to the maximum deposit insurance coverage (MDIC) of PHP1 million per depositor, per bank.

"The expansion of deposit insurance to include Islamic deposits guarantees that depositors of Islamic banks have the same level of protection as those of conventional banks, thereby fostering confidence in the Islamic banking system," PDIC

President and CEO Roberto Tan said.

"This aligns with the national government's pursuit of promoting financial inclusion and strengthening of the Islamic banking sector in the country as this encourages more individuals and businesses to save in banks."

As of end-December last year, there were 12,514 Islamic deposit accounts in the banking system.

IBs and IBUs offer financial products and services, including deposits, which are compliant with Shari'ah Law focusing on ethical financing, risk-sharing, and socially responsible practices. **(PNA) BY ANNA LEAH GONZALES**

SM TO BUILD MICE VENUE

MANILA — SM Prime Holdings, Inc. is investing PHP1.7 billion to build an 18,000-square-meter trade hall SMX Center for International Trade and Exhibitions (SMXCITE), positioning Metro Manila as a "go-to venue" in Southeast Asia for international trade expositions.

In a statement Wednesday, SM Prime said SMXCITE would rise within the SM Mall of Asia (MOA) Complex by the first quarter of 2027.

The new Meetings, Incentives, Conferences and Exhibitions (MICE) venue will feature two buildings that can

and additional tax perks to companies for enterprise-based training.

Meanwhile, Enriquez said CCAP is projecting the Philippine contact center to grow by 5 to 7 percent in revenues and full-time employees this year.

In 2024, the sector generated USD31.6 billion in revenues and 1.6 million in FTEs. **(PNA) BY KRIS CRISMUNDO**

accommodate international trade shows, product launches, corporate gatherings and large-scale consumer exhibitions.

Once completed, SMXCITE and the existing SMX Convention Center Manila can offer 35,000 square meters of combined space.

"This expansion reflects our confidence in the Philippines' growing stature in the MICE space," SM Hotels and Conventions Corp. executive vice president Peggy Angeles said.

"With world-class infrastructure and a strategic location, we believe Manila can rival regional peers as a go-to venue for international trade events," Angeles added.

Aside from MICE venues within the SM MOA Complex, SM Prime's total convention portfolio also include SMX Aura in Taguig, SMX Bacolod, SMX Davao, SMX Clark, SMX Olongapo, Sky Hall Seaside Cebu and Megatrade Hall in SM Megamall. **(PNA) BY KRIS CRISMUNDO**



BIGGER, BETTER GENSAN BATANG PINOY NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIPS IN OCTOBER

MANILA – The Philippine Sports Commission (PSC) will implement innovations for a better and modern Batang Pinoy National Championships in General Santos City on Oct. 25 to 30.

More than 15,000 athletes aged 17 and below will compete in aquatics, archery, arnis, athletics, badminton, basketball, boxing, chess, cycling, dancesport, futsal, gymnastics, jiu-jitsu, kickboxing, karate, muay, pencak silat, sepak takraw, soft tennis, tennis, table tennis, taekwondo, volleyball, weightlifting,

wrestling and wushu.

“Our main objective for this year’s Batang Pinoy is to provide the delegates an excellent experience as if they are competing in a global level of competition,” PSC Chair Richard Bachmann said at the Philippine Sportswriters Association (PSA) Forum in Manila on Tuesday.

Project director Nino Deo Urquiaga and PSC technical working group heads also attended the weekly session presented by San Miguel Corporation, PSC and Philippine Olympic Committee.

Among the innovations

are the QR (quick response) code system for the schedules and results, adjusting the age limit based on the sport, and better transportation for the delegates by providing electric-jeepneys during their stay in the country’s so-called tuna capital.

The PSC technical working group recently sat down with General Santos City Mayor Lorelie Pacquiao during an ocular inspection of the venues.

“We are so lucky that the government of General Santos City is just as excited,” Urquiaga said. **(PNA) BY JEAN MALANUM**

RIZAL MEMORIAL FOOTBALL FIELD GETS FIFA PRO CERTIFICATION

MANILA – The football field at the Rizal Memorial Sports Complex (RMSC) has been awarded the Quality Pro certificate by the Federation Internationale de Football Association (FIFA).

The Philippine Sports Commission (PSC) and E-Sports International, the leading expert in establishing FIFA-certified fields in the country, jointly made the announcement Tuesday during the Philippine Sportswriters Association (PSA) forum at the RMSC.

FIFA Quality Pro is the topmost quality designation within the FIFA Quality Programme, indicating the strictest standards of performance, accuracy, safety, and durability. It is reserved for artificial turf that may be used for the highest level of football such as professional matches and international tournaments.

“I’m glad to inform you

that Rizal Memorial football stadium is now officially a FIFA Quality Pro certified field. Since we passed it, I want to thank the PSC for the trust, for allowing us to build champions with them,” E-Sports Managing Director Audris Romualdez said.

E-Sports General Manager Pam Romualdez, Joseph Apat from Lanao del Norte’s Office of the Provincial Architect, and Cyril Olis, a Department of Education teacher and football coach, were also present during the weekly public sports program presented by San Miguel Corporation, PSC, Philippine Olympic Committee, MILO, Smart/PLDT, and the country’s 24/7 sports app ArenaPlus. “The ultimate goal for PSC is to make it (football field) alive again. And we want to thank E-Sports for helping us and giving us quality turf which everyone can enjoy,” PSC Chair Richard

Bachmann, who received a huge replica of the field certificate from E-Sports International officials, said.

The football field was refurbished within a month’s time, then tested last April 11, before finally getting the formal certification on May 2.

The FIFA Quality Pro certificate is valid for a year, while the FIFA Quality certificate has a validity of three years. E-Sports will provide one year of free servicing in the upkeep of the field, and has also given maintenance equipment and training to PSC personnel.

“We are actually building a skate park as well, the first and largest in the Philippines. We also do a lot of recreational spaces, obstacle courses, outdoor fitness spaces for developers, and we also do multi-purpose sports, tennis courts, and they’re all FIFA certified, Federation Internationale de Volleyball

PACQUIAO SET FOR BOXING COMEBACK, TO FACE WBC CHAMP BARRIOS

MANILA – Filipino boxing icon Manny Pacquiao has announced his return to the ring almost four years after his last fight.

Pacquiao announced on social media that he will face WBC welterweight champion Mario Barrios on July 19 at the MGM Grand in Las Vegas.

“I’m back,” Pacquiao declared.

At 46 years old, “Pacman” is looking to turn back time and overcome his own feat as boxing’s oldest welterweight world champion. He currently holds the record, when he beat Keith Thurman in 2019 to claim the WBA (Super) world title at age 40.

Pacquiao’s announcement came a week after his failed return bid to the Philippines’ Senate.

In his last bout, Pacquiao lost on points against Yordenis Ugas in August 2021.

Based on his social media updates, he has been training in General Santos City.

He is now in the United States to continue training camp with longtime trainer Freddie Roach and cornerman Buboy Fernandez. **(PNA)**

BY DARRYL JOHN ESGUERRA

(FIVB)-certified, badminton certified, and International Tennis Federation (ITF)-certified,” Romualdez said.

Meanwhile, Lanao Del Norte 1st District Representative-elect Imelda Dimaporo has already tapped the services of E-Sports to help upgrade the Mindanao Civic Center. **(PNA) BY JEAN MALANUM**

BUGNA SECURES 3 TITLES IN CEBU CITY TENNIS

MANILA – Kathlyn Bugna of Negros Occidental came up with another amazing performance this week, bagging three titles to claim the Most Valuable Player award in the girls division of the Villa Aurora Racquet Club (VARAC) National Juniors Tournament in Cebu City.

The 14-year-old member of the La Carlota-Batang Onay Tennis Club clobbered Theriz Zapatos, 6-1, 6-1, in the U14 final on Wednesday.

Bugna annexed the U16 crown after pulling off a 7-5, 2-6, 6-3 victory over Donna Mae Diamante and later collected the U14 doubles title with Zapatos after beating Sabrina Aldeguer and Isobel Alipo-On, 8-1. Bugna also triumphed at the MAC Crankit event in Pasig City and Palawan Pawnshop-PEPP legs in Iloilo, Bacolod, Roxas and Kalibo.

Meanwhile, Diamante of Tuburan, Cebu secured the U18 title over Jannine Dela, 6-0, 6-1. Dela ousted top seed Atila Deocampo, 6-2, 6-2, in the semifinals. Kate Chavez captured the girls’ U12 title over Loren

Nocos, 6-1, 7-6(3) while Enzo Niere downed Dale Diamante, 4-1, 5-4 (5) in the unisex U10 final.

Niere shared MVP honors with Anthony Espinosa, who won the boys’ U16 title after a stunning 6-1, 7-5 win over top seed Rizzjun Labindao.

Other winners were Al Jose Gairanod Jr. over No. 5 Paul Verallo, 6-3, 6-3, in the boys’ U18; Lawrence Villarin over Ian Gairanod, 6-4, 7-6(3), in the boys’ U14; and Pete Niere over Gairanod, 7-5, 7-6(3), in the boys’ U12.

In the doubles, Ian Gairanod and Pete Niere won the U14 title over Gil Niere and Lawrence Villarin, 8-5; Atila Deocampo and Besper Zapata outplayed Mae Diamante and Molly Tan, 8-7(5), to pocket the U18 title; and Al Jose Gairanod and Paul Verallo defeated Patrick Rabaya and Andrian Rodriguez, 8-2, to win boys’ U18 title.

The Mindanao swing will be held in Dipolog City from May 22 to 26, followed by the Pagadian City leg on May 27 to 31. **(PNA) BY JEAN MALANUM**

3 B.LEAGUE TEAMS QUALIFY FOR EASL SEASON 2025-2026

MANILA – Utsunomiya Brex, Ryukyu Golden Kings, and Alvark Tokyo have qualified for the East Asia Super League (EASL) 2025-2026 season.

For the first time in EASL history, the league will feature three teams from Japan’s B.League.

Earlier this month, the winner of the 2025 Emperor’s Cup was introduced as a new qualification pathway for the upcoming season to uplift the quality of play and increase competitiveness. Although Ryukyu won the Emperor’s Cup in March, they qualified through the original B.League Finals route, alongside Utsunomiya.

As a result, the Emperor’s Cup berth went to runners up Alvark Tokyo, who lost 60-49 in the final.

Utsunomiya is returning to the EASL for the first time since 2023. It joined the Terrific 12 in 2019, prior to the league’s shift to its current home-and-away format.

The Brex ruled the 2024-2025 B.League season, finishing with a 48-12

win-loss record to secure the No. 1 overall seed in the East Division. In the postseason, they swept the Mikawa Seahorses with an average winning margin of 13 points, then defeated the Chiba Jets, led by EASL 2023-2024 season MVP Yuki Togashi, 2-1, to reach the Finals.

The Ryukyu Golden Kings qualified after beating the San En Neophoenix in three games.

Ryukyu reached the B.League Finals for the fourth straight time, eyeing a second domestic title in three seasons after winning in 2023.

The Golden Kings debuted in the EASL 2023-2024 season and finished with a 3-3 slate in the group stage. The following year, they had a 5-1 record in the regular season, reached the Final Four in Macau and eventually placed fourth.

The EASL is one of the world’s top professional basketball leagues, aimed at elevating the sport across the Asia-Pacific region. **(PNA) BY JEAN MALANUM**