

# DHSUD, DOLE PARTNER FOR CREATION OF WORKERS REHAB CENTER



**PARTNERSHIP.** Department of Human Settlements and Urban Development Secretary Jose Rizalino Acuzar (left) and Department of Labor and Employment Secretary Bienvenido Laguesma shake hands after signing a memorandum of agreement in Quezon City on Monday (April 14, 2025). The agreement will help Filipino workers who have endured work-related injuries and disabilities through the establishment of a Workers Rehabilitation Center Complex in Tanay, Rizal. (Photo courtesy of DHSUD)

## PAF SAYS COPE THUNDER DRILLS GROUNDWORK FOR MULTILATERAL COOPERATION

**MANILA** – The Philippine Air Force (PAF) said the just-concluded Cope Thunder Philippines 25-1 (CT PH 25-1) with the United States Pacific Air Forces (PACAF) has laid the groundwork for multilateral cooperation.

The air exercises formally ended with a closing ceremony and hotwash session at Clark Air Base, Mabalacat City, Pampanga on Wednesday.

"The hotwash session served as a post-exercise review, enabling participants to analyze operational

outcomes, share key lessons learned, and refine strategies for future joint exercises," PAF spokesperson Col. Ma. Consuelo Castillo said in a news release Wednesday night.

She also said CT PH 25-1, a preparatory exercise for the upcoming large-scale "Balikatan" Exercise, "laid a strong foundation for sustained multinational cooperation and enhanced operational synergy."

These closing activities, Castillo said, were spearheaded by PAF 5th Fighter Wing commander Brig. Gen. Leo Fontanilla.

CT PH 25-1 started on April 8 and involved 700 PAF personnel and a diverse fleet of aircraft, including FA-50PH fighter jets, A-29B "Super Tucano" close air support aircraft, and S-76A and S-70i "Black Hawk" helicopters.

Meanwhile, the PACAF contingent comprised 750 personnel and 12 F-16 fighter jets. CT PH 25-1 featured a comprehensive program of subject matter expert exchanges, as well as flight and field training exercises.

The drills marked the PAF's inaugural hosting of an International Observer Program, which was joined by representatives from Malaysia, Thailand, Australia, Japan, and Indonesia.

CT PH 25-1 serves as a key milestone in enhancing joint operational readiness and deepening defense ties between the Philippines and the United States, contributing to the Armed Forces of the Philippines' ongoing modernization and capability development efforts. (PNA) By Priam Nepomuceno

**MANILA** – The Department of Human Settlements and Urban Development (DHSUD) and the Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE) have joined forces to uplift the lives of Filipino workers who have endured work-related injuries and disabilities.

Under a memorandum of agreement, a Workers Rehabilitation Center Complex (WRCC) would be established in Tanay, Rizal to serve as hub for medical rehabilitation and livelihood support while offering worker-friendly housing opportunities to Filipino workers.

"More than a formal partnership, this agreement is a tangible move toward a society that upholds compassion and inclusion, especially for workers injured in the line of duty. It's a message that they are not forgotten and never will be," DHSUD Secretary Jose Rizalino Acuzar said in a news release on Tuesday.

Labor Secretary Bienvenido Laguesma described the WRCC as a living embodiment of the agencies' shared vision.

"[It] is the creation of a society that values human dignity, prioritizes healing and integration, and builds systems that give those workers who suffered work-related injuries and disabilities the second chance they rightfully deserve," he said.

The Employees' Compensation Commission, an attached agency of the DOLE, will fund the project through the state insurance fund.

The DHSUD will assist in drafting project specifications, bidding documents and procurement requirements.

The WRCC will rise on a 500,000-square-meter land in Barangay Cuyambay, to be developed using the design and build scheme under national procurement laws.

The Department of Public Works and Highways, Department of Environment and Natural Resources, Department of the Interior and Local Government, and the local government unit of Tanay would help ensure the completion of the project. (PNA) By Ma. Teresa Montemayor

## STREET LEVEL INDIVIDUAL ARRESTED BY MAGALLANES PNP

**Camp BGen Pantaleon Garcia, City of Imus, Cavite** — Drug Enforcement Unit of Magallanes Municipal Police Station successfully conducted a buy-bust operation that resulted in the arrest of the Street Level Individual involved in illegal drug activities in Brgy. Poblacion 5, Magallanes, Cavite.

PMaj RAYMOND T BALBUENA, Chief of Police, Magallanes MPS identified the suspect as alias Jowie, resident of Brgy. Bucal 2, Maragondon, Cavite and listed as Street Level Individual.

Throughout the process, an Alternative Recording Device (ARD) was utilized to ensure transparency and proper documentation. Two (2) pieces of heat-sealed transparent plastic sachets containing suspected shabu—estimated to weigh approximately 0.06 grams and standard drug price of Php 500.00 seized in the suspect's possession as a

result of the operation, which was conducted at about 1:45 PM of April 18, 2025.

The arrested suspect was charged for Violation of Sec.5 and Sec. 11, Article II of RA 9165 and was informed of the charges against him under Republic Act No. 9165, the Comprehensive Dangerous Drugs Act of 2002' and apprised of his constitutional rights in accordance with Republic Act No. 7438 and the Anti-Torture Act of 2009.

PCOL DWIGHT E ALEGRE, Acting Provincial Director of Cavite PPO, commends the units' commitment and hard work. The Cavite PNP remains steadfast in its commitment to combat illegal drug activities and ensure the safety of our communities. We urge the public to continue cooperating with law enforcement to make the province a safer place for all. "By working together, we can significantly impact our province's fight against illegal drugs," he added.

## "TECHNICAL CARNAPPING"; HPG LAUNCHES INFOMERCIAL TO BOOST AWARENESS

The Philippine National Police (PNP) has issued a public warning regarding the occurrence of

"Technical Carnapping," a scheme that has evolved from traditional carjacking and carnapping methods. This development highlights the gradual shift in criminal tactics, particularly in fraudulent motor vehicle transactions.

In traditional carnapping, vehicles were stolen either while parked unattended (Stolen While Unattended or SWU) or forcibly taken (Forcibly Taken or FT). However, technical carnapping introduces a range of deceptive schemes, including the "Rent-Tangay," "Benta-Sangla," "Assume Balance," "Pasalo-Benta-Bawi," "Loan Accommodator," and "Labas Casa" schemes.

These methods involve taking vehicles under the pretense of legitimate agreements, but ultimately, the vehicles are sold or disposed of for profit, causing significant damage and loss to victims.

To protect the public, the Highway Patrol Group (HPG) has launched an infomercial video, educating citizens on how to avoid falling victim to these schemes. The PNP also encourages individuals to be vigilant and report any suspicious transactions immediately to the PNP HPG Hotline at 0998-598-8171 or 0906-374-5375, or visit the nearest HPG office.

In a statement, PNP Chief PGEn Rommel Francisco D. Marbil expressed, "The Philippine National Police remains steadfast in our commitment to ensuring the safety and security of our citizens. We urge the public to remain vigilant and report any suspicious activities to prevent the spread of technical carnapping schemes. Together, we can achieve safer streets for all."

The PNP's efforts align with the governance of President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. under the vision of "Bagong Pilipinas," where modern law enforcement practices contribute to a safer and

## HIGH-VALUED DRUG SUSPECT NABBED IN TRECE MARTIRES BUY-BUST; PHP170K WORTH OF SHABU SEIZED

**Camp BGen Pantaleon Garcia, City of Imus, Cavite** — In a continuing effort to eradicate the proliferation of illegal drugs in the province, operatives of the Station Drug Enforcement Team (SDet) of Trece Martires Component City Police Station, successfully conducted a buy-bust operation at around 8:27 PM on April 17, 2025, in Sunshine Ville Package 1, Brgy. Cabuco, Trece Martires City, Cavite. The operation led to the arrest of a High-Valued Individual (HVI) and the seizure of PHP170,612.00 worth of illegal drugs.

PLTCOL ORLANDO A. CARAG JR, ACOP, identified the suspect as alias "Taptap", a resident of B101 L31, Sunshine Ville Package 1, Brgy. Cabuco, Trece Martires City. With proper coordination with the Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency (PDEA), and the use of a Body Worn Camera and Alternative Recording Device, the operation was carried out in accordance with existing protocols and operational procedures. Recovered from the scene were the following pieces of evidence: Two (2) pieces heat-sealed transparent plastic sachets containing

suspected shabu, weighing more or less 25.09 grams with a Standard Drug Price of PHP170,612.00. All seized items were properly marked, inventoried, and photographed at the place of arrest in the presence of the suspect, Barangay Councilor, and media representative, ensuring transparency and adherence to due process. The suspect was apprised of his constitutional rights under the Miranda Doctrine and given an Anti-Torture Warning in a language he understood. The arrest of alias "Taptap" reflects the unwavering

dedication of the Cavite police in intensifying their campaign against illegal drugs and protecting the public from the harms of drug-related activities. Pertinent documents are now being prepared for the filing of appropriate charges for violation of Sections 5 and 11, Article II of Republic Act 9165 (Comprehensive Dangerous Drugs Act of 2002).

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

## REGIONAL-LEVEL MOST WANTED PERSON ARRESTED BY BACOR PNP

**Camp BGen Pantaleon Garcia, City of Imus, Cavite** — The personnel of the Bacoor Component City Police Station (Lead Unit) and 401st Maneuver Company Regional Mobile Force Battalion 4A conducted a joint police operation against the most wanted person at about 10:50 AM of April 15, 2025, at Barangay Molino 3, Bacoor City, Cavite.

PLTCOL John Paolo Vivas Carracedo, COP, BACOR CCPS, identified the arrested suspect as alias Jonathan, a resident of Barangay Molino 3, Bacoor City, Cavite.

The personnel of the warrant section of the Bacoor Component City Police Station (Lead Unit) and the 401st Maneuver Company Regional Mobile Force Battalion 4A conducted a joint police operation against a most wanted person, which resulted in the arrest of the accused for the crime of violation of sections 5

& 11, article 2 of RA 9165, with criminal case number 20305 and criminal case number 20308-19 issued by the presiding judge, Regional Trial Court Branch 20 - Imus City, Cavite, dated March 4, 2025, for service of sentence.

The accused was properly informed of his constitutional rights and the nature of his offense in a language known and understood by him. The use of an Alternative Recording Device (ARD) during the operation ensured proper documentation in lieu of a Body-Worn Camera (BWC).

This successful operation reflects the Cavite Police's resolute commitment to public safety and justice. The apprehension of a Regional-Level Most Wanted Person underscores the PNP's dedication to holding fugitives accountable and ensuring the rule of law prevails.

PCOL DWIGHT E ALEGRE, Acting Provincial Director, Cavite PPO, urges the community, "Patuloy na pinaigting ng ating mga kapulisan ang kanilang pagtugis sa mga taong nagtatago sa batas. Nararapat lamang na makamit ng mga biktima ang nararapat na hustisya. Kaya't kami ay

## PIU CAVITE LEADS SUCCESSFUL BUY-BUST OPERATION, SEIZES PHP204,000 WORTH

**Camp BGen Pantaleon Garcia, City of Imus, Cavite**—In a major breakthrough in the fight against illegal drugs, joint operatives of the Provincial Drug Enforcement Unit (PDEU) of Cavite Police Provincial Office (CAV PPO) and Dasmariñas Component City Police Station (DASMA CCPS) successfully conducted a buy-bust operation on April 16, 2025, at Brgy. Buro 1, Dasmariñas, City, Cavite, leading to the arrest of a Street-Level Individual (SLI).

PLTCOL CHESTER NOEL BORLONGAN, C.PIU, identified the suspect as alias "Manok", and a resident of Brgy. Datu Esmal, Dasmariñas, City. The operation, carried out at about 5:30 PM, with proper coordination with the Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency (PDEA).

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

patuloy na humihingi ng tulong at suporta mula sa ating komunidad sapagkat sa Bagong Pilipinas, ang gusto ng pulis ligtas ka!"

community safety. Evidences recovered during the said operation were Two (2) pieces heat-sealed transparent plastic sachets containing suspected shabu, weighing approximately 30 grams, with a standard drug price of Php 204,000.00.

The operation was conducted in the presence of Media Representative and Elected Official to ensure transparency. Furthermore, the entire procedure was recorded using an Alternative Recording Device in compliance with standard operating procedures.

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

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

## RIZALEÑOS FIND HOPE IN PBBM'S TRABAHONG AT SERBISYONG PANGKALUSUGAN

Beneficiaries of the Trabaho at Serbisyong Pangkalusugan sa Bagong Pilipinas (Jobs and Health Services for a New Philippines) have expressed gratitude to the national government for bringing employment opportunities, medical services and other forms of assistance within reach of ordinary citizens.

These stories illustrate how accessible government initiatives can transform lives, especially for those who have long been marginalized or overlooked. For Perla Magbato, a 43-year-old resident of Barangay San Luis, her journey from part-time housekeeper to landing a job through the government initiative serves as an inspiration and a testament to her resilience.

Magbato, a member of the Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (4Ps), was hired on the spot at the Trabaho, Serbisyo, at Pangkalusugan sa Bagong Pilipinas event in Antipolo City, Rizal.

The program serves as a one-stop shop for various government agencies and services, aimed at providing assistance such as job matching, medical consultations and free medicine, as well as financial aid for beneficiaries.

Magbato emphasized the importance of participating in government programs, believing that they truly help people. She also expressed her gratitude to President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. for the opportunity and is hopeful for success in her new job. "I am thankful for the opportunity and for the continuous support of the government in meeting our needs. People should not be shy to go to government programs and agencies; they are here to help people like me," she said. As a first-time job seeker, her dream gave her strength not to give up. She trusted the process and was hired as a massage

therapist at a clinic in Antipolo City. In addition to the job opportunity, she also received 5,000 pesos in financial aid as pre-employment assistance for her job requirements.

Melinda Sosoryo Bloece, 56, from Upang, Antipolo, Rizal, also thanked the government for bringing financial, medical and other services directly to residents.

Like many Filipino mothers, she has faced financial struggles in supporting her family's daily needs and her children's education. That is why she is very thankful for being part of the 4Ps program, which has helped her make ends meet.

"I'm very thankful to President Marcos because he's able to help us. As a 4Ps member, the aid we receive is a big relief. I usually use my payout as capital for selling vegetables in our area," she said.

As a recipient of government programs, she feels a sense of relief when her husband is out of work. With three children still in school, Bloece is also grateful that she can support their education without constantly worrying about tuition fees and daily expenses.

"When my husband doesn't have a job, we can still buy rice and food because of the payout. Because of the financial assistance I get from 4Ps, I can pay for my children's tuition and give them money or food to bring to school."

Bloece expressed immense gratitude to the government for making a difference in her family's life and for the continued support she receives. She also encourages her fellow beneficiaries to spend their aid wisely.

"As a 4Ps member, we receive financial assistance. I hope others will not use it for other purposes. They should use it for their children's future and for food."

She hopes government assistance continues, as it greatly helps fellow citizens

## WHOLE OF GOV'T APPROACH KEY TO EFFICIENT DISASTER RESPONSE – OCD

**MANILA** — The Office of Civil Defense (OCD) attributed the high approval rating of the Marcos administration on disaster response and management to the implementation of a holistic approach to the issue.

A recent Pulse Asia survey, conducted from March 23 to 29 this year, showed the Marcos administration's efforts to respond to the needs of calamity-affected areas received a 51 percent approval rating.

"We welcome this high approval rating and are grateful to the Filipino people for recognizing the efforts of the government. It is the directive of President Ferdinand R. Marcos, Jr. to exemplify the whole-of-government approach in responding to all disasters and calamities, ensuring that the needs of those affected are addressed immediately," OCD administrator Undersecretary Ariel Nepomuceno said in a statement Thursday.

Aside from this, the OCD chief said the President also directed that the flow of assistance should operate like a "conveyor belt of aid", ensuring seamless coordination with local government units and the swift deployment of all assistance programs across affected regions.

meet their needs and improve their quality of life. The stories of Magbato and Bloece demonstrate the impact of government support and serve as an inspiration, showing that there is always hope to rise from poverty.

During an engagement in Cavite, President Marcos reaffirmed the government's commitment to extending services and assistance to the people, especially those who need them most.

"Rest assured that your government is always here, always supporting all of you. Rest assured, we will not leave as long as you need help from the government," the President said. **(KA/PIA-4A) By Kristianne Andrade**

"We have proven how the whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach works efficiently and effectively, with civil society and private sectors actively involved in disaster management and resilience efforts," Nepomuceno said, citing the recent calamities that hit the country, including six consecutive typhoons last year and the ongoing threats of an explosive eruption of Mount Kanlaon.

He said this significant acknowledgment by the Filipino people was due to the dedicated and relentless efforts of the 46 member agencies of the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council (NDRRMC) under the leadership of its chair, Defense Secretary Gilberto Teodoro Jr.

The NDRRMC operates under four key pillars, with the following lead agencies: Prevention and Mitigation: Department of Science and Technology; Preparedness: Department of the Interior and Local Government; Response: Department of Social Welfare and Development; Recovery and Rehabilitation: Department of Economy, Planning and Development.

As the secretariat of the council, the OCD has been at the forefront of effective coordination among agencies, ensuring proper logistics and timely delivery of aid to all affected communities, along with strategic risk communications to all stakeholders.

The OCD chief emphasized that the results of the recent survey serve not only as inspiration but also as a reminder and challenge to work harder and do better, especially given the increasing severity of disasters brought about by climate change.

"This recognition reminds us not to be complacent and to continually advance and strengthen our efforts in disaster preparedness to mitigate risks and prevent loss of lives and livelihoods," Nepomuceno said. **(PNA) By Priam Nepomuceno**

## EDITORIAL

### Patuloy na pag-init ng panahon, nararapat na paghandaan

Dahil sa patuloy na pagtaas ng heat index sa Pilipinas ay naglabas ng panuntunan ang Department of Health para sa kahandaan ng mga ospital at health centers sa bansa. Mababa man ang naitalang init ng panahon sa mga nagdaang araw ay masasabing nasa extreme caution category pa rin ito kaya naman isa sa mga isyung kinakaharap ng ilan sa mga ospital sa metro manila ay ang pagsasaayos ng mga bentilasyon sa mga emergency room upang maibigay pa rin ang nararapat na kaghinawaan ng mga pasyente rito. Sa ganitong panahon ay nararapat lamang na maayos at komportable ang lagay ng mga pasyente sa iba't-ibang ospital lalo pa't maaring maging sanhi ang init ng panahon ng heat stroke.

Marapat lamang na magbigay ng panuntunan ang Department of Health kung saan magbigay ito ng mga dapat na gawin ng bawat ospital lalo pa't kabi-kabila ang pagkawala ng kuryente at tubig sa iba't-ibang lugar dulot ng matinding init. Sa lagay na ito ay dapat na maging handa ang bawat ospital dahil marami ang nakasalalay ang buhay sa lugar na ito.

Ang tamang pagbibigay ng paalala ng nakatataas sa bawat ospital mapa pribado man o pampubliko ay dapat isaalang-alang at maging lugar ito upang mabigyan ng lunas ang mga Pilipinong magpapakonsulta rito.

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## OVERHAUL OF BUILDING RULES SOUGHT AFTER MRT-7 PILLAR COLLAPSE

**MANILA** — A House of Representatives leader on Tuesday called for the replacement of the country's decades-old National Building Code following the collapse of a concrete pillar at the Metro Rail Transit (MRT-7) construction site along West Avenue in Quezon City.

Manila 2nd District Rep. Rolando Valeriano, who chairs the Committee on Metro Manila Development, stressed the need to replace the outdated building code with a new National Construction Code that includes tighter enforcement and updated safety provisions.

"The last straw. That disastrous MRT-7 construction site collapse should be the real wake-up call for Congress so that finally the National Building Code must be replaced soon by a National Construction Code with strict administrative enforcement measures and mechanisms to ensure successful prosecution of all violators," Valeriano said in a statement.

The April 13 incident involved the collapse of a bored pile intended to support the elevated turnaround section of the MRT-7. No injuries were reported but nearby utility cables were affected.

Valeriano said the new code should include provisions on green and

biophilic architecture, disaster adaptation, containment of airborne diseases, and climate-resilient technologies.

Valeriano said despite repeated violations, administrative and criminal penalties are rarely implemented.

"Violators are evading and avoiding prosecution," he said. "Administrative proceedings must be strengthened and disciplinary sanctions must be more forceful."

In a separate move, Bagong Henerasyon Party-list Rep. Bernadette Herrera filed House Resolution No. 2262 seeking a congressional inquiry into the collapse.

Herrera said the inquiry is necessary "to determine the cause of structural failure, identify lapses in oversight, if any, and recommend measures to prevent similar incidents in future government infrastructure projects."

"There is an urgent need to revisit and possibly strengthen regulations governing construction safety, structural audits, third-party assessments, and community hazard notifications in the vicinity of ongoing public works," she said.

The Department of Transportation said the incident would not affect the structural integrity of the entire MRT-7 line.

**(PNA) By Filane Mikee Cervantes**

## DBM DEBUNKS 2025 BUDGET 'DEPLETION' CLAIMS, SAYS FUND RELEASES PROPER

**MANILA** — The Department of Budget and Management (DBM) denied circulating claims on social media that the 2025 national budget has already been "depleted," clarifying that early fund releases are standard practice and do not mean public funds have been spent.

"Huwag po sana tayong agad maniwala sa mga taong naglalagay ng kulay o bahid sa mga bagay na wala namang anomalya (Let us not immediately believe those who put color or taint on things that have no anomalies)," DBM Undersecretary and Spokesperson Goddess Hope Libiran said in a video statement Wednesday, urging the public to rely on verified information.

According to the agency, over 80 percent of the national budget has indeed been released as of the first quarter of 2025—but this is neither unusual nor improper.

The DBM released the following historical data on budget releases during the first quarter of every year:

2016: 82.3%  
2017: 79.9%  
2018: 84.0%  
2019: 13.7% (Reenacted budget)  
2020: 78.4%  
2021: 78.0%  
2022: 69.4%  
2023: 81.9%  
2024: 83.2%  
2025: 80.7%

The DBM explained that the timely release of funds

is crucial for uninterrupted delivery of public services and to support economic growth.

"Ang anumang pagkaantala sa pagpapalabas ng pambansang budget ay nangangahulugang pagpigil rin sa mga serbisong dapat sana'y natatanggap ng mga tao sa lalong madaling panahon (Any delay in the release of the national budget also means a delay in the services that people should be receiving as soon as possible)," Libiran said.

Since its establishment, the DBM has practiced the "comprehensive release" of funds once the General Appropriations Act (GAA) is signed into law.

These releases cover essential government functions, including salaries, ongoing projects, and calamity funds. However, comprehensive release does not mean automatic spending.

The agency noted that released funds still undergo procurement processes and are subject to existing rules and regulations before they can be disbursed.

Additionally, over P797 billion in congressional amendments to the 2025 budget fall under the "For Issuance of SARO" (FISARO) category, meaning these are not automatically released. Agencies must comply with documentation and approval requirements set by the DBM and the Office of the President, in line with the President's veto message and prevailing budget rules.

The DBM reiterated its commitment to a fair, transparent, and responsible use of public funds and said historical data confirms that the pace of fund releases this year is within normal range.

"Ang timely na pagpapalabas ng budget ng DBM ay alinsunod rin sa mandato ng ahensya na siguruhin ang makatarungan, masinop, bukas at responsableng alokasyon at paggamit ng pondo ng bayan (The timely release of the DBM

## EU DEPLOYS 72 LONG-TERM OBSERVERS FOR PH MIDTERM POLLS

**MANILA** — The European Union (EU) on Wednesday deployed a 72-member mission to observe the conduct of the upcoming midterm elections in May, following an invitation from the Philippine government.

The mission's members, representing experts from all 27 EU member states, will observe the polls in pairs and cover all regions in the country, including the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM).

Deputy Chief Observer Manuel Sánchez de Nogués said the mission is the first in the Philippines and one of the largest the bloc has deployed to date.

In an interview in Makati City, the executive said the EU sees this invitation as a "sign" of the Philippine government's openness to cooperate with the bloc.

"We're independent—we assess elections (based) on the laws of the country and the international principles for democratic elections and political participation that was signed by the host country," he said.

"We are here with open eyes and we would listen to everybody," he added.

When the EU deploys an election mission to a foreign state, its experts observe all aspects of the electoral process—listening to all stakeholders from the government, political parties, candidates, civil society groups, and voters—and afterward, come up with a comprehensive report.

The report, made available to the public, assesses the election's compliance with domestic laws and the Philippines' international commitments related to democratic elections.

"We don't interfere in the process, it means we don't assess the process until the process is finished. We will not make any assessment until two days after the

budget is also in line with the agency's mandate to ensure the fair, prudent, open and accountable allocation and use of public funds," Libiran said. **(PNA) By Darryl John Esguerra**

elections," said Sánchez de Nogués.

The full final report with recommendations, he said, would be released two months after the polls.

Sánchez de Nogués said another 104 "short-term" observers would be deployed to augment the mission, specifically during the tallying of votes.

One of the observers, Lithuanian national Ricardas Ramoska, said inviting a diverse set of observers into the country is "very important" as it can help provide a comprehensive picture of the election, which the host country could use as a tool for its future polls.

Ramoska together with another observer would be assigned in the Cordillera Administrative Region to cover Benguet and Mt. Province.

The EU Delegation in Manila said the mission would maintain "strict neutrality and impartiality" and would not offer any advice or assistance during the course of their work.

Chief Observer Marta Temido, a member of the European Parliament from Portugal, will arrive in Manila next week for high-level meetings with different stakeholders in the country.

On top of observing the campaign rallies and activities, the mission will assess the performance of the Commission on Elections; the participation of marginalized groups; the respect for civil and political rights; the work of the media; and the accuracy of the automated election system, among others.

On election day, the mission will visit hundreds of polling stations across the country, in both rural and urban areas, to observe the opening, voting, counting, and tabulation results and the election dispute resolution.

Diplomats from EU member states, Canada, Norway, and Switzerland as well as a delegation of European Parliament members will also join the mission to observe the conduct of polls on May 12. **(PNA) By Joyce Ann L. Rocamora**

## CTA AFFIRMS P15-M TAX REFUND TO PANAY POWER CORP.

**MANILA** — The Court of Tax Appeals (CTA) has affirmed its earlier ruling in favor of the Panay Power Corporation's claim for a refund of PHP15 million in unutilized and excess withholding tax for 2019.

On June 1, 2020, Panay Power filed its annual income tax return (AITR) for the year 2019, which reflected an overpayment of some PHP26.25 million. On Feb. 22, 2022, it filed a petition before the Bureau of Internal Revenue (BIR) requesting for PHP 16,279,531.00 refund.

Panay Power then filed a petition for review before the CTA on May 30, 2022.

During the trial, the BIR contended that Panay Power is not entitled to the claim for refund of creditable withholding tax (CWT) since it did not provide supporting documents to show that income from which CWT being claimed was declared in the AITR; it failed to comply with the prescribed checklist of requirements to be submitted involving claims for unutilized CWT pursuant to Revenue

Memorandum Order (RMO) No. 53-98 and failed to prove compliance with Revenue Regulations (RR) No. 2-2006; and it failed to present evidence to prove actual remittance of the alleged taxes to the BIR.

The CTA rejected the respondent's arguments. In its decision dated April 15, 2025, the CTA said the Panay Power "sufficiently proved that it is entitled to a refund or issuance of tax credit certificate in the amount of PHP14,997,644." **(PNA) By Benjamin Pulta**

## PDEA CHEMIST NAMED MEMBER OF INT'L FORENSIC TOXICOLOGY BODY

**MANILA** – A forensic chemist of the Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency (PDEA) has been chosen as a member of the International Association of Forensic Toxicologists (TIAFT) Task Force created to evaluate the possible boon and bane of integrating Artificial Intelligence (AI) into forensic toxicology.

In a statement on Wednesday, PDEA Director General Undersecretary Isagani Nerez said Nieves Manuela Barbo was named to the task force along with other forensic toxicologists coming from different parts of the globe, as announced during the recent TIAFT General Assembly in St. Gallen, Switzerland.

Barbo, with the rank of Chemist II, is a member of the PDEA Laboratory Service, the country's premier drug forensic center which specializes in drug analysis and profiling. "Her (Barbo) inclusion in an international pioneering scientific initiative proves that the Agency's workforce has what it takes to be globally competent," Nerez said.

The TIAFT AI Task Force was commissioned to

investigate the current AI applications in analyzing toxicological samples, and their potential benefits and drawbacks in terms of accuracy, efficiency, ethical concerns, and skills gap. The TIAFT, a global organization with about 1,800 members who are actively engaged in analytical toxicology from all over the world, plays a crucial role in promoting cooperation, coordination of efforts and research in forensic toxicology — a multidisciplinary field that analyzes biological samples to identify and quantify drugs, alcohol, poisons and other toxic substances.

"While PDEA stays committed towards the advancement of forensic science through innovation and international collaboration, we also strive to contribute to the nation's transformative journey anchored on the 'Bagong Pilipinas' agenda under the administration of President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. by reinforcing global competence among our ranks," Nerez said. **(PNA) By Christopher Lloyd Caliwan**

## CAAP, BCDA INK PACT FOR BETTER AIR TRAFFIC OPS IN CLARK AIRPORT

**MANILA** – The Civil Aviation Authority of the Philippines (CAAP) on Wednesday said it has signed an agreement with the Bases Conversion and Development Authority (BCDA) for the operation and maintenance of Clark International Airport's (CRK) Communications, Navigation, and Surveillance/Air Traffic Management (CNS/ATM) facilities.

The memorandum of agreement was signed on Tuesday. CAAP will be responsible for the operation and maintenance of the CNS/ATM facilities, ensuring safe and efficient management of air traffic

in and out of CRK.

The CNS/ATM enables aircraft to transmit accurate locations for takeoffs, landings, and air traffic control.

The BCDA, as the owner of the facilities, will shoulder the costs related to the procurement of parts and upkeep of ancillary equipment, CAAP said. "With a more efficient CNS/ATM, passengers can look forward to smoother journeys and fewer flight delays—small but meaningful changes that add up to more time spent on things that matter most," CAAP said in a social media post.

**(PNA) By Ma. Cristina Arayat**

## PHLPOST RELEASES STAMPS FEATURING JELLYFISH SPECIES

**MANILA** – The Philippine Postal Corporation (PHLPost) has issued stamps featuring different species of jellyfish found in the Indo-Pacific and the Philippines, the epicenter of marine biodiversity.

"The Philippines is the home of diverse jellyfish species, which are a part of the country's natural heritage, with some species potentially being unique in the country," the PHLPost said in a news release on Wednesday.

Four species — box jellyfish, upside-down jellyfish, lion's mane jellyfish, and Pacific sea nettle — were presented in the "16 on sheet" containing 16 individual stamps.

The box jellyfish or Cubozoa is the most dangerous of this kind found near the coasts of northern Australia and the Indo-Pacific region. Its box-like body with lots of tentacles covered in venom-filled stingers.

The upside-down jellyfish or Cassiopea mayeri scyphozoans is notable for their unusual benthic habit of lying upside-down with tentacles facing upwards.

The lion's mane jellyfish or Cyanea capitata is one of the largest jelly species in the world, growing to an

average length of 1.5 feet (40 cm), but can reach lengths of 6.5 feet (200 cm).

Meanwhile, the Pacific Sea nettle or Chrysaora fuscescens is a vibrant red, gold, and brown bell that may grow up to 3 ft (1 m) in diameter as well as white oral arms and 24 tentacles that may be as long as 15 ft (4.6 m).

The PHLPost also released a special souvenir stamp featuring the spotted jellyfish or mastigas papua.

It is one of seven lagoon jelly species in the genus Mastigias that also have the species name Papua. It is sometimes called the Papua jelly.

Moreover, the official first-day cover design featured the jellyfish Cassiopea culionensis discovered by an international team of scientists including Filipino marine biologists and taxonomists.

The new endemic species of jellyfish was named after Culion Bay, Palawan where it was originally found.

About 10,000 copies of the "16 on sheet" containing 16 individual stamps, and 2,000 pieces of the souvenir sheet were printed by the PHLPost. **(PNA) By Ma. Teresa Montemayor**

## CIDG BUSTS JAIL PERKS OF EX-SWAT MEMBER

**MANILA** – The Criminal Investigation and Detection Group (CIDG) on Wednesday said it busted the privileges of a jailed Special Weapons and Tactics (SWAT) member who has been lording it in a Bulacan provincial jail. For a long time, CIDG director Maj. Gen. Nicolas Torre III said the former elite cop, identified as Abdua, enjoys certain privileges that include going out of the detention facility even without a court order.

He said Abdua heads the inmates as "mayor" after he was dismissed from the

service and detained for a case of murder.

Also arrested were a certain Mario, a member of a prison gang tagged as the "Chairman of Barangay. 11" of the prison facility; a certain Tee-Jay, jail guard of Bulacan Provincial Jail; and Sarah, wife of Abdua. On Sunday, the CIDG operatives monitored the four leaving the Bulacan Provincial Jail on board a red Toyota-Hi-Lux pick-up. They were later collared going to the house of Sarah in Malolos City, at least five kilometers away from the provincial jail facility.

The operatives seized from

## DICT CRACKS DOWN ON ELECTION TROLL ARMIES, FAKE NEWS ONLINE

**MANILA** – The Department of Information and Communications Technology (DICT) has started a crackdown against fake news and organized 'troll armies' on social media to safeguard the integrity of the electoral process.

In a news release on Wednesday, DICT Secretary Henry Aguda announced the agency's collaboration with the Commission on Elections (Comelec) on several key initiatives to enhance the technological infrastructure of the elections.

"These initiatives include the establishment of Configuration Hubs, where DICT personnel will assist in managing the hubs during the election process, as well as the development of online services such as the Precinct Results Finder, Registration Status Verifier, and Election Results Website, all aimed at ensuring transparency and providing real-time access to election data," Aguda said.

The DICT's Cybersecurity Bureau is also rolling out critical initiatives such as vulnerability assessment and penetration testing (VAPT) to identify and mitigate security risks, and ensure the security for digital infrastructures throughout the election process.

them a caliber 45 pistol, a Glock 17 9mm pistol, magazines, rounds of live ammunition, and the Toyota Hilux pick-up.

"This is a remarkable intelligence-driven operation. With this arrest, we significantly removed from the streets two dangerous prisoners with firearms, a rogue jail guard, and an accomplice," Torre said.

Torre said the investigation is underway to identify the people behind the special treatment and if all of them are involved in illegal activities. **(PNA) By Christopher Lloyd Caliwan**

"A key technological advancement in securing the election is the deployment of (Philippine National) Public Key Infrastructure (PNPKI) digital certificates, which will be used by teachers serving as electoral board members. These certificates will ensure the integrity, confidentiality, and authentication of election data," he said.

Aguda also recognized the growing influence of social media platforms in the elections and welcomed the stance of technology giants -- Tiktok, Google, and Meta -- who pledged to ban paid political ads on their platforms.

"We must be proactive, not reactive. The threats are evolving. From fake news to deepfakes and organized troll armies—our election system must be ready to face them head-on," he said.

Google, in particular, has implemented the ban on election advertisements since the start of the official campaign period.

"[It is] a move that supports the shared goal of a clean, fair, and credible election," he said.

On Tuesday, Aguda convened the Comelec Advisory Council (CAC) in Taguig City as part of its mission to safeguard the integrity of the electoral process ahead of the 2025 polls.

The CAC, composed of representatives from government, academe, information and communications technology professional organizations, and non-government electoral reform organizations, convened to discuss issues concerning the elections.

"Key topics tackled during the meeting include updates on the recent Comelec briefing, recommendations for the use of digital and automated election systems, and proposed timeline for submitting inputs to Comelec, among others," he said. **(PNA) By Raymond Carl Dela Cruz**

## PNP-HPG SEIZES P102-M SHABU IN SAMAR CHECKPOINT

**MANILA** – The Philippine National Police – Highway Patrol Group (PNP-HPG) on Wednesday seized about 15 kg. of suspected shabu with an estimated street value of PHP102 million loaded into an Asia utility vehicle (AUV) in Catbalogan City, Samar. In a press briefing held at Camp Crame, PNP-HPG spokesperson, Lt. Nadame Malang, said the AUV driver, identified as Topher, became uneasy when directed to pull over at a checkpoint along Maharlika Highway in Barangay Mahayag at 11:55 a.m. He said the police noticed the packed items in the back seat, which turned out to be at least 15 kg. of suspected shabu. "Talagang mavi-visualize na nakapack ang 15 kilos na hinihinalang shabu. Nang tinanong na ng mga tropa, doon sila umamin na sila ay may dala-dalang ilegal na kontrabando (The packs can be visualized as having 15 kg. of suspected shabu. When questioned by the troops, they

admitted that they were carrying contraband)," Malang said. He added that the police are still investigating the background and intended destination of the contraband. "We are still seeking the advice and certification from the forensic group at ito ay ituturnover na para mapag-alaman natin kung ito ba talaga ay shabu (and these will be turned over to determine if these are indeed shabu)," he said. HPG Chief Brig. Gen. Eleazar P. Matta commended the operating team for their vigilance and dedication. "This interdiction highlights how proactive and intelligence-led road safety enforcement can disrupt the movement of illegal drugs across our highways," Matta said. The driver is currently detained at the local PNP facility and would face charges for violating the Comprehensive Dangerous Drugs Act. **(PNA) By Christopher Lloyd Caliwan**

## US HELPS PH STRENGTHEN TRACKING METHODS VS. HAZARDOUS MATERIALS

**MANILA** – The United States, through the Defense Threat Reduction Agency (DTRA), is providing training support to strengthen the Philippines' response against the maritime trafficking of hazardous chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear (CBRN) materials at sea and ports. The US Embassy in Manila on Wednesday said the program included "train-the-trainer" activities to sustain the agencies' efforts in identifying maritime security operational and doctrinal gaps. Experts from the DTRA International Counterproliferation Program (ICP) held a targeting and risk

management workshop in Manila from March 24-28, 2025 and trained 35 Filipino personnel in identifying, targeting, and interdicting illicit vessels and cargoes that traffic hazardous components of weapons of mass destruction (WMD). Anti-Terrorism Council Program Management Center Director Jose Embang thanked the DTRA for its continuing support, saying these joint efforts contribute to both national and global security. DTRA Chief at the US Embassy in Manila Nicholas DeDominici, for his part, said the agency would sustain its initiatives in the Philippines to "reinforce the ironclad commitment" between the two

## DOH REMINDS PUBLIC TO STAY ALERT AGAINST HEAT-RELATED ILLNESSES

**CALAPAN CITY**, Oriental Mindoro (PIA) — The Department of Health (DOH) reminds the public to take extra precautions against heat-related illnesses that may arise from prolonged exposure to high temperatures. In an interview, Provincial DOH Officer Dr. Ramon C. Bombais emphasized the importance of preventing unnecessary exposure to the sun, especially during peak heat hours. He advised the public to avoid going outdoors between 9:00 a.m. and 4:00 p.m. when the sun's rays are at their strongest. Bombais said "Kasamaniyo po kami ang Department of Health, gayundin ang Provincial Health Office at Municipal Health Office na nagpapaalala. Okay ang pagkakaroon ng recreational outing, ngunit palagi po natin iwasan, hanggat maaari, ang dumirekta sa sikat ng araw lalo na po sa sinasabi natin na oras, alas nuebe

countries.

Participants included representatives from the Department of Trade and Industry's Strategic Trade Management Office, Department of Transportation's Office for Transportation Security, Bureau of Customs, Philippine Ports Authority, Maritime Industry Authority, Presidential Office for Maritime Concerns, Philippine Nuclear Research Institute, Philippine Coast Guard, Philippine Navy, and Philippine National Police Maritime Group. The DTRA is an attached agency of the US Department of Defense tasked to counter the proliferation and threats of weapons of mass destruction or nuclear, radiological, chemical, biological weapons that could harm a large number of people. **(PNA) By Joyce Ann L. Rocamora**

ng umaga hanggang alas kwatro ng hapon." He also reminded the public to wear light and breathable clothing and avoid tight or dark-colored outfits that can trap heat and cause discomfort. "Ang paggamit at pagsuot ng preskong damit, hanggat maaari ay iwasan ang pagsusuot ng dark colors o kaya mga fit na mga damit para hindi tayo na-susuffocate at ang atin pong balat ay nakakapagpahinga. Uminom po ng tubig, napakahalaga, hindi na po natin kailangang makaramdam pa ng uhaw para uminom," he added, stressing the need to stay hydrated at all times.

The DOH noted that common heat-related illnesses in the country during the summer and Lenten period include heat stroke, heat exhaustion, heat cramps, and heat rash or prickly heat. Heat stroke, the most severe among these, is characterized by hot and dry skin, confusion, rapid pulse, and potential loss of consciousness.

To avoid these illnesses, the DOH continues to encourage the public to take preventive measures by staying in well-ventilated or air-conditioned areas, limiting strenuous physical activities during the hottest parts of the day, and using protective gear such as hats or umbrellas when outside. Drinking plenty of water, even before feeling thirsty, is also highly encouraged. Bombais assured the public that the DOH, along with the Provincial Health Office and Municipal Health Offices across Oriental Mindoro, are prepared to respond to any emergencies related to heat exposure. He added that their offices are actively disseminating information to communities to prevent the occurrence of such illnesses and to educate the public on early warning signs and proper responses. **(JGS/PIA MIMAROPA-Oriental Mindoro) By Juanito Joshua G. Sugay III**

## PAF SAYS COPE THUNDER DRILLS GROUNDWORK FOR MULTILATERAL COOPERATION

**MANILA** – The Philippine Air Force (PAF) said the just-concluded Cope Thunder Philippines 25-1 (CT PH 25-1) with the United States Pacific Air Forces (PACAF) has laid the groundwork for multilateral cooperation.

The air exercises formally ended with a closing ceremony and hotwash session at Clark Air Base, Mabalacat City, Pampanga on Wednesday.

"The hotwash session served as a post-exercise review, enabling participants to analyze operational outcomes, share key lessons learned, and refine strategies for future joint exercises," PAF spokesperson Col. Ma. Consuelo Castillo said in a news release Wednesday night.

She also said CT PH 25-1, a preparatory exercise for the upcoming large-scale "Balikatan" Exercise, "laid a strong foundation for sustained multinational cooperation and enhanced operational synergy."

These closing activities, Castillo said, were spearheaded by PAF 5th Fighter Wing commander Brig. Gen. Leo Fontanilla.

CT PH 25-1 started on April 8 and involved 700 PAF personnel and a diverse fleet of aircraft, including FA-50PH fighter jets, A-29B "Super Tucano" close air support aircraft, and S-76A and S-70i "Black Hawk" helicopters.

Meanwhile, the PACAF contingent comprised 750 personnel and 12 F-16 fighter jets. CT PH 25-1 featured a comprehensive program of subject matter expert exchanges, as well as flight and field training exercises.

The drills marked the PAF's inaugural hosting of an International Observer Program, which was joined by representatives from Malaysia, Thailand, Australia, Japan, and Indonesia.

CT PH 25-1 serves as a key milestone in enhancing joint operational readiness and deepening defense ties between the Philippines and the United States, contributing to the Armed Forces of the Philippines' ongoing modernization and capability development efforts. **(PNA) By Priam Nepomuceno**

## MAGNITUDE 5.8 QUAKE JOLTS SARANGANI

**MANILA** – A magnitude 5.8 earthquake rocked Sarangani province at 5:42 a.m. Wednesday, the Philippine Institute of Volcanology and Seismology (Phivolcs) said. In its bulletin, Phivolcs said the quake's epicenter was traced some 43 km. southwest of Maitum town. The quake was tectonic in origin and had a depth of focus of 10 km., it added. Intensity IV was felt in Kiamba, Sarangani; T'Boli, Banga, Suralla and Tupi in South Cotabato; Kalamansig, Sultan Kudarat. Intensity III was felt Maitum, Glan, Alabel in

Sarangani; City of General Santos, Norala, City of Koronadal, Lake Sebu, Santo Niño in South Cotabato; and Columbio, Isulan, Esperanza in Sultan Kudarat.

Intensity II was felt in Maasim, Sarangani; Bagumbayan, President Quirino, Sultan Kudarat. Intensity I was felt in Kalilangan, Bukidnon; Kidapawan City and M'lang in Cotabato; Magsaysay, Davao City, and Matanao and Davao del Sur; and Kapatagan in Lanao del Norte. Phivolcs said aftershocks and damage are expected. **(PNA)**

## BIR CONFIDENT OF HITTING P3.2-T 2025 COLLECTION GOAL

**MANILA** – Bureau of Internal Revenue (BIR) Commissioner Romeo Lumagui on Tuesday expressed confidence that the agency would reach its PHP3.23-trillion collection target this year amid the strengthened drive to encourage taxpayers to pay their dues.

Citing preliminary figures for the first quarter of the year, Lumagui said revenues as of end-March reached PHP668.79 billion, or PHP3.2 million short of the PHP671.99-billion goal for the quarter.

Collections in the first three months of this year are higher than the PHP593-billion revenue from a year ago.

"For 2025, our target is PHP3.23 trillion. And we think that, again, based on the progress of our programs that we have already laid out, and also based on the progress of the first months from January to March, our collection is running well," Lumagui told reporters in

an interview during the last day of the tax filing for the year.

The BIR chief said income tax collections will play a major part in helping the bureau achieve its collection target.

BIR's April 2025 collection target is PHP208 billion, and Lumagui said they expect around 1.4 million filers, both individuals and businesses, to fulfill their tax obligations.

He said digitalization of their processes and the introduction of online payment options are plus factors for the BIR.

Lumagui also said although there are those who still file manually, more taxpayers are now opting to use technology to make their tasks easier.

Those who failed to meet the deadline will be slapped with penalties such as the 12-percent interest, the corresponding surcharge of 25 percent, as well as compromise charge. **(PNA)By Joann Villanueva**

## PCG AWARDS PURCHASE DEAL FOR 40 PATROL BOATS TO FRENCH FIRM

**MANILA** – The Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) has granted the Notice of Award to French firm OCEA for the purchase of 40 units of 35-meter patrol boats.

In November 2024, President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. approved the purchase of fast patrol crafts (FPCs) as part of the Bagong Pilipinas initiative to strengthen maritime security by upgrading PCG's capabilities.

During the meeting between Transportation Secretary Vince Dizon and PCG Commandant Admiral Ronnie Gavan with Minister Delegate for Foreign Trade and French Nationals Abroad Laurent Saint-Martin last Friday, the visiting French minister invited the Philippine officials to visit OCEA shipyard for the ceremonial first cutting of sheet

metal, marking the start of construction for PCG's ordered vessels.

Earlier, Gavan said this is the largest single-purchase in PCG modernization to date, worth PHP25.8 billion, that will be backed by official development assistance (ODA) from the French government.

In his visit here, Saint-Martin reassured the French government's financing for the naval and air fleet modernization of the PCG.

Negotiations are also rolling for the three new sister ships to the BRP Gabriela Silang, which was also built and delivered by OCEA in 2020.

On top of this deal, PCG and OCEA signed on April 11 two maintenance contracts, with the latter servicing the former's vessels. **(PNA) By Kris Crismundo**

## BSP, IFC TIE UP FOR MOVABLE ASSET FINANCE

**MANILA** – Credit access for micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) has been boosted by the partnership between the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas (BSP) and the International Finance Corporation (IFC), to develop the movable asset finance (MAF).

MAF allows borrowers to secure loans using movable assets like inventories, receivables, and equipment as collateral.

Citing a 2002 IFC study, the BSP on Wednesday said MAF in the Philippines remains under 5 percent, a far cry from the

that formal information-sharing and coordination arrangements should be in place among DIAs in relevant jurisdictions," it said.

PDIC said the MOU may be extended for another five years upon joint and written agreement by both DIAs. **(PNA) By Joann Villanueva**

opportunities that MSMEs can tap to boost their businesses and despite the existence of the Personal Property Security Act.

On March 17, BSP and IFC officials signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) that would be in effect until 2027, aimed at focusing on regulatory reform, sector capacity building, and supporting services development.

"The BSP looks forward to working with IFC to build a dynamic MAF ecosystem. With this, MSMEs and agri-enterprises can use their available assets to access financing for their working capital and other needs," BSP Governor Eli Remolona Jr. said.

For her part, BSP Deputy Governor Bernadette Romulo-Puyat said the team-up is aligned with the inclusive growth and financial resilience bid of the National Strategy for Financial Inclusion 2022-2028. **(PNA) By Joann Villanueva**

## LOCAL INDEX TAKES DIP, PESO FLAT BEFORE HOLY WEEK BREAK

**MANILA** – The local index's five-day rally comes to an end, while peso closed flat on Wednesday, the last trading day before the long Holy Week break.

The Philippine Stock Exchange index (PSEi) fell 0.83 percent to 6,134.62, while All Shares increased by 0.28 percent to 3,656.99 points.

Sectoral indices were mixed, with those in the green include Mining and Oil rising by 0.71 percent and Industrial increasing by 0.17 percent.

Wednesday's losers include Services, down by 1.86 percent; Holding Firms, down by 1.41 percent; Property, down by 0.26 percent; and

Financials, down by 0.11 percent.

Advancers led decliners at 110 to 79, with 51 counters left unchanged.

Meanwhile, the Philippine peso ended the day flat after closing at 56.80 to the US dollar from previous day's 56.77 finish.

Peso opened the day stronger at 56.80 versus last day's kick-off at 57.03 to the greenback.

The currency pair traded between 56.50 and 56.80, bringing the average level for the day at 56.64.

Trade volume for the day went up to USD2.3 billion from USD2.13 billion on Tuesday. **(PNA) By Kris Crismundo**

## PH SECURES \$1.45-B ADB FUNDING FOR MALOLOS -CLARK RAILWAY PROJECT

**MANILA** – The Philippine government has secured financing from the Asian Development Bank (ADB) worth USD1.45 billion for the Malolos-Clark Railway Project (MCRP), the multilateral institution announced Wednesday.

ADB Philippines Country Director Pavit Ramachandran said the MCRP is one of ADB's biggest financing projects in the Asia and Pacific region.

"We are proud to partner with the government in making the vision of a world-class mass transportation system in the country a reality. This major transformative project will spur more investments, create jobs, and contribute to sustaining the country's growth momentum," Ramachandran said in a statement.

The 53.1-km. MCRP is part of the 163-km. North-South Commuter Railway (NSCR), a major infrastructure project of the government to provide safe, reliable, and eco-friendly transport connecting Luzon provinces to Metro Manila. The newly approved loan is the second and final tranche of its MCRP financing facility.

In 2019, ADB approved the

first tranche of financing for the project amounting to USD1.3 billion.

In a chance interview on April 9, Ramachandran told reporters that ADB is eyeing to finance some USD4 billion for Philippine projects this year, which include the MCRP.

These funds, in a form of loan, would be invested in the sectors of infrastructure, healthcare, food security, and the blue economy.

He said pipeline projects for ADB financing this year include the USD400-million Walang Gutom (Zero Hunger) Program under the Reducing Food Insecurity and Undernutrition with Electronic Vouchers (REFUEL) Project, the USD400-million Marine Ecosystems for Blue Economy Development Program, and the USD300-million Accelerating Expansion and Sustainability of Health Services for Universal Health Care (ACCESS UHC).

"[These are] just some of the items included in this year's project pipeline, they are among the biggest in loan amount terms in the list of projects for delivery this year," Ramachandran said. **(PNA) By Kris Crismundo**

## PH, S. KOREA DEPOSIT INSURANCE BODIES RENEW INFO SHARING PACT

**MANILA** – The Philippine Deposit Insurance Corporation (PDIC) and the Korea Deposit Insurance Corporation (KDIC) have further firmed up their cross-border relations through the signing of a memorandum of understanding (MOU) intended to sustain their insurance systems.

The two institution's partnership, which started in 2014 and renewed in 2019 and on March 25 this year, is aimed at institutionalizing continued cooperation and information-sharing on deposit insurance, receivership and liquidation, bank resolution, risk management, premium assessment for banks, sources and methods of funds, information technology for database administration, legal and administrative procedures,

and public awareness issues.

The MOU was signed by PDIC President and CEO Roberto Tan and KDIC Chairman and President Yoo Jaehoon, the PDIC said in a news release on Wednesday.

PDIC said the continued cooperation bid "attests to the mutual commitment of the Philippines and Korea to sustain the enhancements of their respective deposit insurance systems."

"Both the PDIC and KDIC are members of the International Association of Deposit Insurers (IADI) and the continuing collaboration between the two DIAs is aligned with the IADI Core Principles for Effective Deposit Insurance Systems, particularly the Core Principle on cross-border issues, which provides



## CREAMLINE READY FOR BATTLE IN AVC CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

**MANILA** – Expect Creamline Cool Smashers to display its brilliant form in the Asian Volleyball Confederation (AVC) Champions League, which will kick off on April 20 at the Philsports Arena in Pasig City. The Cool Smashers will face Al Naser, one of Jordan's most storied clubs, at 4 p.m. on Sunday before wrapping up its Pool A play with Zhetysu VC, a nine-time Kazakhstan Women's Volleyball League champion, on Monday at 7 p.m. The team failed to achieve a historic five-peat and 11th Premier Volleyball League title after losing to the Petro Gazz Angels in the All-Filipino Conference Finals last April 12. "We need to move on quickly, especially since we have an AVC tournament. I think the players recovered

quickly," Creamline head coach Sherwin Meneses said. "The players are competitive. So at the end of the day, maybe that's what they're thinking too. But, for now, they've returned to their respective homes. So, hopefully, they'll recover. But, I think, the team will recover quickly. Maybe they'll just bounce back in another conference," he added. Bernadeth Pons, Jema Galanza, Tots Carlos, and Pangs Panaga will banner the Cool Smashers, along with Erica Staunton. Staunton, the 2024 Reinforced Conference MVP, played an important role in the Cool Smashers' historic Grand Slam last year. "I'm excited. I'm excited to play with Creamline again. I love these girls. I love playing with these girls. And

then, face some different competitions. So, I'm happy to be back and to get to play some more volleyball. Yeah, I'm really excited," said Staunton. Also joining the team are 6-foot middle blocker Anastasiya Kolomoys and 6-foot-4 outside hitter Anastasya Kudryashova, who played together for VC Kuanysh. The team can also bank on skipper Alyssa Valdez, Michele Gumabao, liberos Kyla Atienza and Denden Lazaro-Revilla, veteran setter Rhea Villarete, and three-time PVL Best Setter Kyle Negrito. Meanwhile, other matches on Sunday are Taipower against Hiping in Pool B (10 a.m.), Baic Motor against Iran in Pool C (1 p.m.), and Queensland against PLDT in Pool D (7 p.m.). **(PNA) By Jean Malanum**

## PBA ALL-STAR WEEKEND IN JEOPARDY DUE TO DAVAO TENSION

**MANILA** – Unless they can forge an agreement for a new location, the Philippine Basketball Association (PBA) could completely call off its scheduled All-Star Weekend. Commissioner Willie Marcial announced on Wednesday night that the league is postponing its scheduled All-Star festivities in Metro Davao due to tense moments in the city over the past few weeks. Marcial said political tension was mainly due to the arrest of former president Rodrigo Duterte for crimes against humanity. "May mga pangyayari na hindi natin kontrolado. Security concern. At tiningnan namin, mas makakabuti sa karamihan kaya natin pinostpone

(There were circumstances that are beyond our control. Security concern. And after looking at it, for the sake of the majority, we decided to postpone it)," Marcial said. Two special exhibitions were scheduled for May 2-4 in line with the PBA's 50th anniversary. The first game in Davao City would have featured a showdown between the league's top players from Mindanao. And then the annual All-Star Game in Tagum, where, for the first time since 2012, the stars from the last three PBA Draft classes would have collided with the league's marquee veterans. Marcial said the PBA is looking at the possibility of bringing the All-Star Weekend back to Visayas, although the event will

be rescheduled after the elections. Last year's All-Star festivities took place in Bacolod, where Team Barroca and Team Aguilar battled to a 140-all draw. However, Marcial also revealed that if they fail to find a replacement venue for the All-Star Game, they may have to cancel the event altogether. During the Wednesday night doubleheader at the Smart Araneta Coliseum in Quezon City, Rain Or Shine ripped NorthPort, 113-96, and Magnolia subdued San Miguel in overtime, 98-95. The league will not hold games during the entire Holy Week holiday period and will resume action next Wednesday also at the Smart Araneta Coliseum. **(PNA) By Ivan Stewart Saldajeno**

## PH'S MADIS ADVANCES TO 2ND ROUND OF MALAYSIA J200 ITF

**MANILA** – Philippine Tennis Academy player Tennielle Madis kicked off her campaign at the International Tennis Federation (ITF) J200 Kuala Lumpur event on a high note after beating local wild card Dhevieena Sarawanan, 6-0, 6-2, in the first round match on Tuesday at the National Tennis Center in Malaysia. The 17-year-old from M'lang, North Cotabato will next face fourth seed Australian Renee Alame, who took a first-round bye along with top seed Reina Goto and second seed Kanon Sawahiro of Japan, and third seed Yuyao Li of China.

Madis is currently No. 213 in the ITF Juniors singles rankings. After Malaysia, she will fly to Thailand for the J300 Nonthaburi Closed Regional Championships scheduled on April 28 to May 3.

"She needs to join more tournaments and get better results to further improve her rankings," said former Davis Cupper and SEA Games medalist Robert Angelo in an interview on Wednesday.

Under the guidance of Angelo, head coach of the PTA founded by long-time sports patron Romy Chan, Madis secured two doubles titles in the United Arab Emirates last January.

Last year, she bagged five doubles titles, including four with PTA teammate Stefi Marithe Aludo in J60 events held in Manila, China, Thailand and Sri Lanka. **(PNA) By Jean Malanum**

## ARCA STUNS GERMAN SUPER GM IN BANGKOK CHESS TOURNEY

**MANILA** – Filipino FIDE Master Christian Gian Karlo Arca stunned top seed German Super Grandmaster Jan Gustafsson Tuesday night to keep his share of the lead in the 22nd Bangkok Chess Club Open at the Royal Orchid Sheraton Riverside Hotel in Thailand. Arca, playing the white pieces, prevailed over two-time champion Gustafsson (ELO 2601) after 39 moves of a Reti Opening.

"I hope I can sustain my good performance so I can possibly get an IM norm or GM norm," said Arca, who has an ELO rating of 2250.

## WORLD MASTERS ATHLETICS BRONZE 'DREAM COME TRUE' FOR PH PENTATHLETE

**MANILA** – For pentathlete Brenda Ramos-Zinampan, winning the Philippine team's lone medal in the 10th World Masters Athletics Indoor Championships proved that it's never too late to chase her dream.

"It was a deeply fulfilling moment, a dream come true," the 47-year-old teacher from Solano, Nueva Vizcaya said in an interview on Wednesday after winning a bronze medal in the women's pentathlon 45-49 age category in the biennial meet on March 23-30 at the Alachua County Sports and Events Center in Gainesville, Florida.

Despite limited training time, tight budget, and hectic schedule, Zinampan said she gave everything to win her medal through God's help, discipline, consistency, and "unwavering love and support" of her family.

"This success is a reminder that it's never too late to chase our dreams. Age is just a number. This win is not only for me, but for everyone who dares to dream, no matter the age or circumstances," she said.

The country was represented by an eight-member delegation from the National Masters and Seniors Athletics Association of the Philippines (NMSAAP) in the tournament, joined by over 4,000 athletes and participants from 80 countries.

Nhea Ann Barcena of Panu-kulan, Quezon also came up with an impressive performance after finishing 7th among 82 runners in the women's 8K cross-country (40-44 age group).

She also placed 15th overall and 9th in her age division in the 10K road race competed by 108 runners.

Riezel Buenaventura registered her personal best in the women's pole vault (35-36 category), matching her Masters' record and achieving a season-best mark of 3.30 meters.

Drolly Claravall took 13th place out of 20 competitors in the women's hammer throw (55-59 age group), registering a solid throw of 26.27 meters.

Meanwhile, Judith Staples set a new personal best in the women's pole vault (50-59 group), clearing 2.20 meters, which earned her 13th place out of 17 entries, and 5th place within the 55-59 age category.

On the men's side, Edward Obiena delivered a consistent performance in the discus throw (55-59 age group), landing 11th place with a distance of 30.10 meters.

Sotronio Igay, competing in the men's 70-74 category, finished 13th out of 16 in the 800-meter run with a time of 3:32.70, and 17th out of 22 in the 1,500-meter race.

Rodelio Gadapan also impressed with a personal best time of 2:38.15 in the men's 800-meter (55-59 age group), placing 20th out of 24 runners.

He later competed in a longer distance event with 167 runners from various age groups, where he finished 66th overall, and 11th in his category, clocking 41:28—another season and personal best. **(Alona Cochon/PNA)**

Babu MR Lalith of India and FM Alexander Chernyavsky of Russia.

Meanwhile, Filipinos WNM Arvie Lozano, John Paul De Guzman and Remark Bartolome remained perfect after three rounds to share the lead with Zwe Wait Yan Lin of Myanmar, Tran Nguyen Dang Koa of Vietnam, Azzamy Khalid Shafwan of Indonesia and Nikolay Gutsulyak of Russia in the Challenger category. Filipino Almario Marlon Quiroz Bernardino Jr. beat Peerathat Asvahem of Thailand for his second win in three outings. **(PNA) By Jean Malanum**