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PGC SHONE A SPOTLIGHT ON EMPLOYEE'S PERFORMANCES AND SERVICES



MULA SA BAYAN, PARA SA BAYAN

OPPO MARKS 25TH FOUNDING ANNIVERSARY WITH TRIBUTE PROGRAM FOR RETIREES

On January 23, the Office of the Provincial Population Officer (OPPO) celebrated its 25th Founding Anniversary with a meaningful Tribute Program for Retirees, themed "Silver Year of Service: Building Healthy Families, Building a Stronger Province" at the New Provincial Government Center, Trece Martires City.

The program opened with a welcome message

from Ms. Eloisa L. Comia, OPPO Department Head. In her message, Ms. Comia acknowledged the presence of the retirees, and OPPO personnel, commending their unwavering dedication in providing quality public service. She also expressed her heartfelt gratitude for being part of OPPO, sharing her personal career journey as an inspiring testament to commitment and growth

within public service.

A video presentation honoring the retirees followed, highlighting their years of service and significant contributions to OPPO's mission of building healthy families and communities. Messages to the retirees were delivered by current OPPO staff, expressing appreciation and gratitude for the retirees' dedication and legacy.

Retirees were awarded

with certificates in recognition and respect for their years of dedicated service with a serenade which further added warmth to the celebration. In return, the retirees also shared their appreciation, reflecting on their experiences and years of service.

The 25th founding anniversary celebration served not only as a tribute to OPPO's retirees but also as a reaffirmation of the office's continuing commitment to public service, honoring the past while strengthening its resolve to build healthier families and a stronger province. — *R. Tanael / Cavite-PIO*

The Provincial Government of Cavite (PGC), under the leadership of Governor Abeng Remulla and through the Office of the Provincial Human Resource Management Officer, conducted the distribution of Performance Incentives on January 26 following the PGC flag-raising ceremony. As part of the activity, customized wooden wall clocks were awarded to PGC employees celebrating their

birthdays for the month of January, in recognition of their dedication and commitment to public service.

Vice Governor Ram Revilla Bautista, together with Provincial Board Members Maurito Sison, Arnel Cantimbuhan, and Junbie Samala, graced the activity and conveyed their appreciation for the employees' loyalty and continued contributions to the growth and development of the Province of Cavite. — *J. Reyes/ Cavite-PIO*

KAINGEN RESIDENTS RECEIVE FREE MEDICAL AND DENTAL SERVICES

On January 22, the Provincial Government of Cavite's Medical and Dental Mission Team conducted a health outreach program in Brgy. Kaingen, Kawit, benefiting more than 400 residents.

The mission provided medical consultations to 391 patients and dental services to 46 residents, along with diagnostic tests such as fasting blood sugar (FBS), electrocardiogram (ECG),

and X-ray examinations. Free medicines and vitamin supplements were also distributed to further support the health needs of the beneficiaries.

First District Board Member Jygs Gandia showed support for the activity, reflecting the strong commitment of the province's leaders to promoting the health and well-being of their constituents. — *J. Reyes / Cavite-PIO*



25th FOUNDING ANNIVERSARY OF OPPO: TRIBUTE PROGRAM FOR RETIREES
23 JANUARY 2026 | NEW PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT CENTER

MULA SA BAYAN, PARA SA BAYAN



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CAVITE PPO CONFIRMS PASSING OF POLICE PERSONNEL INJURED DURING POLICE OPERATION

Camp BGen. Pantaleon Garcia, Imus City — The Cavite Police Provincial Office deeply regrets to announce the passing of Police Corporal Ryan O. Vizmanos, who was critically injured during a police operation conducted on January 9, 2026, in General Trias City, Cavite. He passed away on January 29, 2026, while undergoing medical treatment.

PCpl Vizmanos sustained severe injuries while performing his official duties in the lawful conduct of police operations. Despite the tireless efforts of attending medical personnel and the unwavering support of his family, colleagues, and the community, he succumbed to his injuries.

PCpl Vizmanos served the Philippine National Police for nearly ten (10) years and was widely recognized for his dedication, professionalism, and

commitment to maintaining peace and order. He will be remembered for his bravery, integrity, and selfless service to the public.

"We mourn the loss of a gallant police officer who dedicated his life to the service of our people," said PCOL ARIEL R RED, Provincial Director, Cavite PPO. "We extend our deepest condolences to the bereaved family, friends, and colleagues of PCpl Vizmanos. He made the ultimate sacrifice in the performance of his sworn duty."

The Cavite PPO is extending all necessary assistance and support to the bereaved family. Appropriate funeral honors, in accordance with PNP protocol, shall be accorded to the fallen police officer, and details of the wake, interment, and memorial services will be announced upon finalization.

REGIONAL LEVEL MOST WANTED PERSON ARRESTED BY NOVELETA POLICE

Camp BGen Pantaleon Garcia, City of Imus, Cavite — A Regional Level Most Wanted Person was successfully arrested at 4:00 in the afternoon today January 29, 2026, in Noveleta, Cavite, through a focused law enforcement operation conducted by personnel of Noveleta Municipal Police Station. PMAJ MARK ANTHONY D SARNO, Chief of Police, Noveleta MPS, identified the arrested accused as "Feli", a resident of Noveleta, Cavite.

The arrest was carried out by Personnel of Noveleta MPS, warrant PNCO and joint operation from Noveleta Maritime Law Enforcement Team (MLET), utilizing an Alternative Recording Device, which resulted in the arrest of the accused who was previously convicted for Violation of Section 5 and section 11 Article II RA 9165.

The arrest was effected by virtue of Warrants issued by Regional Trial Court, Fourth Judicial Region, Branch 16, Cavite City, dated January 29, 2026, for service of sentence.

Upon arrest, the accused was properly apprised of his constitutional rights in a language known and understood by him.

The arrested accused is currently detained at the Custodial Facility of Noveleta Municipal Police Station, while the warrants of arrest shall be returned to the court of origin for proper documentation and disposition.

In his message, PCOL ARIEL R RED, Provincial Director, Cavite Police Provincial Office, emphasized that the arrest underscores the Cavite PNP's firm commitment to ensuring that convicted offenders are immediately made to face the consequences of their actions. "This successful operation reflects our unrelenting efforts to locate and arrest wanted persons, particularly those convicted of drug-related offenses. We remain steadfast in enforcing the law and protecting our communities from the harmful effects of illegal drugs," PCOL Red stated.

He further assured the public that intensified

STREET-LEVEL DRUG PERSONALITY ARRESTED IN BUY-BUST OPERATION IN KAWIT, CAVITE

Camp BGen Pantaleon Garcia, City of Imus, Cavite — Operatives of the Kawit Municipal Police Station, through its Municipal Drug Enforcement Team, successfully arrested a street-level individual during a buy-bust operation conducted in Kawit, Cavite at about 6:30 in the afternoon, January 28, 2026.

PLTCOL KRISTINE V PARAS, Officer-in-Charge, KAWIT MPS, identified the arrested suspect as alias "Danggol," and a resident of Kawit, Cavite.

The operation was conducted through a buy-bust operation with PDEA coordination, utilizing an Alternative Recording Device. The operation resulted in the arrest of the suspect and the confiscation of the following pieces of evidence: three heat-sealed transparent plastic sachets containing white crystalline substance suspected to be shabu,

with an estimated total weight of 0.3 grams and a standard drug price of Php2,040.00; one piece Php500.00 bill used as buy-bust money; one unit caliber .38 revolver; and two pieces caliber .38 live ammunitions.

The suspect was informed of his constitutional rights and was brought to the Kawit Municipal Police Station together with the confiscated evidence for proper disposition. Pertinent documents are now being prepared for inquest proceedings and the filing of appropriate charges, including violations of Republic Act No. 9165 and Republic Act No. 10591.

In a statement, PCOL ARIEL R RED, Acting Provincial Director of the Cavite Police Provincial Office, reiterated the provincial police's intensified campaign against illegal drugs and loose firearms. "This successful operation

REGIONAL LEVEL MOST WANTED PERSON, ARRESTED BY BACOR PNP

Camp BGen Pantaleon Garcia, City of Imus, Cavite — In line with the intensified campaign of the Philippine National Police against wanted persons and illegal drugs, personnel of the Bacoor Component City Police Station successfully arrested a Regional Level Most Wanted Person in Bacoor City, Cavite at around 9:30 in the evening, January 28, 2026.

PLTCOL ALEXIE A DESAMITO, Chief of Police, Bacoor CCPS, identified the arrested accused as alias Stephen, a resident of Bacoor City, Cavite.

The arrest was conducted by personnel from the Warrant Section and SWAT of Bacoor CCPS using a manhunt charlie

manhunt operations across the province will continue to ensure that no fugitive of justice remains beyond the reach of the law.

operation with the aid of an Alternative Recording Device. The accused was apprehended for Violation of Section 13, Article 2 of Republic Act 9165.

The arrest was made by virtue of a Warrant of Arrest issued by the presiding judge of RTC Branch 117, Bacoor City, dated January 28, 2025, for Service of Sentence.

The accused is currently detained at Bacoor Custodial Center, and the warrant of arrest will be returned to the court of origin for proper disposition.

In his message, PCOL ARIEL R RED, Acting Provincial Director, Cavite Police Provincial Office, commended the Bacoor CCPS for the successful service of warrant against a Regional Level Most Wanted Person. "The successful arrest of the accused demonstrates our continued resolve to pursue high-risk individuals and enforce the law without compromise. The Cavite

WANTED SA REGION 4A PARA KASONG RAPE, ARESTADO NG SILANG PULIS

Camp BGen Pantaleon Garcia, City of Imus, Cavite — Sa isang pinagsanib na operasyon ng mga tauhan ng Silang Municipal Police Station, matagumpay na naaresto ang isang Regional Level Most Wanted Person at Rank #2 Municipal Level Silang MPS bandang alas-1:30 ng hapon ngayong Enero 29, 2026 sa Bayan ng GMA, Cavite.

Kinilala ni PLTCOL JOSEPHDMACATANGAY, Chief of Police ng Silang Municipal Police Station, ang naarestong suspek na kilala sa alyas na "Naldo," isang residente ng Silang,

reflects our sustained efforts to control the illegal possession of illegal drugs and unlicensed firearms at the street level. We remain steadfast in protecting our communities and ensuring the strict enforcement of the law," PCOL Red said. The Cavite PPO encourages the public to continue supporting law enforcement efforts by reporting suspicious activities to authorities.

Cavite.

Ang matagumpay na operasyon ay isinagawa ng Warrant Personnel ng Silang Municipal Police Station bilang lead unit, katuwang ang PIT Cavite, RIU4A bilang intel packet provider, at ang 401st Alpha Company, RMFB4A. Ang suspek ay naaresto sa bisa ng Warrant of Arrest na inisyu ng Presiding Judge ng Regional Trial Court, Branch 03 Family Court, Tagaytay City, Cavite para sa kasong Rape under Article 266-a(1)(d) of the RPC as amended by RA8353 na walang rekomendadong piyansa at Sexual Assault under Article 266-a(2), rpc in relation to ra7610 na may pyansang Php200,000.00 na inilabas noong December 20, 2024. Sa kanyang pahayag, sinabi ni PCOL ARIEL R RED, Provincial Director ng Cavite Police Provincial Office "Ang pagkakaaresto sa Most Wanted Person na ito ay patunay na ang inyong kapulisan ay patuloy ang maigting na operasyon laban sa mga kriminal upang tiyakin ang seguridad ng ating komunidad."

CITY LEVEL MOST WANTED, ARESTADO NG GENERAL TRIAS PULIS

Camp BGen Pantaleon Garcia, Imus City, Cavite — Matagumpay na naaresto ng mga tauhan ng General Trias Component City Police Station (CCPS) ang isang City Level Most Wanted Person sa General Trias City, Cavite, dakong alas-8:00 ng gabi noong January 28, 2026.

Kinilala ni PLTCOL BISMARCK S MENDOZA, Chief of Police ng General Trias CCPS, ang akusado

na si alyas Theo, residente ng General Trias City, Cavite.

Ang pag-aresto ay isinagawa ng mga Warrant Personnel ng General Trias CCPS sa pamamagitan ng pagsisilbi ng Warrant of Arrest gamit ang Alternative Recording Device (ARD). Ang akusado ay nahaharap sa kasong Violation of Section 5(i) of RA 9262 na inilabas ng Regional Trial Court, Sixth Judicial Region, Branch 69, Silay City, Negros Occidental na may inirerekomendang piyansang Php72,000.00.

PNP remains steadfast in its commitment to protect our communities from illegal drugs and criminal elements, ensuring peace and security for every Caviteño."

The Provincial Director further reiterated that the Cavite PNP remains steadfast in its intensified law enforcement operations and inter-unit coordination, underscoring the organization's commitment to uphold peace and order and protect the most vulnerable members of the community.

Sa kanyang pahayag, sinabi ni PCOL ARIEL R RED, Acting Provincial Director ng Cavite Police Provincial Office, "Hindi natin hahayaang makapagtago ang mga indibidwal na sangkot sa mga krimen, at sisiguraduhin nating haharap sila sa kaukulang proseso ng ating batas upang mapangalagaan ang karapatan ng bawat mamamayan."

OVER 13K CALABARZON HOUSEHOLDS BENEFIT FROM DSWD SUSTAINABLE LIVELIHOOD PROGRAM 2025

CALAMBA CITY, Laguna (PIA) — More than 13,000 households across the CALABARZON Region gained new and sustainable sources of income in 2025 as the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) IV-A rolled out expanded livelihood opportunities under its Sustainable Livelihood Program (SLP).

DSWD IV-A reported that a total of 13,792 households received P257.81 million in livelihood assistance to support the establishment of micro-enterprises. These ventures include community stores, hog-raising, vegetable farming, duck raising, rice retailing, and other small-scale businesses aimed at strengthening local economies and promoting self-sufficiency. Of the total beneficiaries, 13,720 households have already started operating their livelihood projects.

The livelihood support covered five provinces, with Batangas recording the highest number of beneficiaries at 4,683, followed by Quezon at 3,514, Laguna at 2,718, Rizal at 1,878, and Cavite at 999, reflecting the program's wide reach across the region.

Beyond financial assistance, the SLP emphasized capacity development and collective enterprise management, as beneficiaries were organized into associations and trained in basic entrepreneurship, financial management, and cooperative operations. This approach aims to enhance not only income generation but also social cohesion and long-term enterprise sustainability.

For community leaders like Vilma Madridejos, president of the Golden Harvest Cupang SLP Association in Bauan, Batangas, the program has created shared economic opportunities at the barangay level. Their 30-member association received P450,000 in start-up capital, which they invested in a duck-raising and salted egg production enterprise launched in November 2025.

According to Madridejos, "Napakalaking tulong nito sa aming mga miyembro dahil nagbibigay ito ng bagong pagkakakitaan para sa amin at sa buong barangay."

In Mabini, Batangas, Ruby Serafin, president of the Majuben's Leading Light SLP Association,

highlighted the program's dual impact on income and personal development. "Maliban sa tulong pangkabuhayan, natuto akong makisalamuha sa aking mga kagrupo at lalong nahahasa ang aking kakayahan sa pagnenegosyo," said Serafin.

Their 16-member group established a community store in early 2025, generating dividends for members while strengthening their skills in teamwork and small-scale business management. Serafin reported receiving P4,500 in dividends by September 2025, reflecting early gains from the enterprise.

To safeguard the continuity of these livelihood projects, DSWD Field Office IV-A continues to conduct regular monitoring, mentoring, and technical assistance through its SLP project development officers. This post-implementation support is crucial in addressing operational challenges and ensuring that enterprises remain viable beyond the initial funding period.

The SLP remains a key government strategy in poverty reduction and inclusive growth, shifting households from short-term aid to self-sustaining sources of income, while empowering communities to participate actively in local economic development. (CCM PIA CALABARZON/DSWD4A)
BY CECILIA MALOLES

NCDA BACKS HOUSE BILL EXPANDING AUTISM SUPPORT SERVICES

CALAMBA CITY, Laguna (PIA) — The National Council on Disability Affairs (NCDA) has expressed its support for various legislation pushing for the welfare of Persons With Disability (PWD), particularly those living with autism, that are currently filed at the House of Representatives.

In an interview with the Philippine Information Agency and Radyo Pilipinas Lucena's Sulong Southern Tagalog radio program, Jayme Mariño, OIC chief for Information, Education, and Communication Division, emphasized the importance of PWD representation in policymaking to ensure that their welfare is protected.

"Dito sa NCDA, mayroon kaming committees and advocacies for all disabilities. Ang ating mandate ay hindi paghahatid ng mga direct program dahil kami ay policymaking body, na mayroong governing board."

Mariño cited House Bill 6577, or the Autism Care Act, as a landmark measure designed to improve mechanisms for prevention, early detection, diagnosis, and treatment of autism in the country. Once enacted, it will strengthen investments, align policies, promote public awareness, and expand support systems to

ensure inclusive services for children and adults living with autism.

Recognizing that some disabilities may affect the ability to work, the NCDA is advocating for a social pension or monthly stipend for PWDs under the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD).

The program seeks to provide financial assistance for the consultation sessions, occupational therapy, and other life-saving services, especially for bedridden and indigent PWDs.

"Uunahin nito yung mga bedridden, at indigent PWDs. Nakita namin sa DSWD na malaki ang dapat i-reserve sa pangangalaga ng PWD. Mula sa consultation, occupational therapy, malaki na."

At the heart of these initiatives, Mariño emphasized, are the Persons With Disability Affairs (PDAO) offices at the local government units. These offices serve as first responders who can ensure that PWDs can freely and fully enjoy their rights.

"Patuloy rin kaming nakikipag-ugnayan sa mga PDAO para mapalakas sila na matugunan ang pangangailagan ng mga PWD bilang first responders." (PB-PIA CALABARZON) **BY PATRICIA BERMUDEZ**

EDITORIAL

Pagdagdag ng Insentibo ng mga Atleta

Cash incentives para sa SEA Games 2025 medalists, dinagdagan. Kasabay ng pag-anunsyo ng Pangulo ang pagkakilala ng mga atletang nagkamit ng medalya sa naturang palaro.

Aktibo ang mga Pilipino pagdating sa mga ganitong palaro para sa mga atleta. Bawat Pilipinong kalahok ay higit ang suporta ng mga Pilipino at lalo pa't isa sila sa mga nagiging dahilan upang lubos na makilala ng mundo ang ating bansa. Kaya naman nararapat lamang na dagdagan ang incentives ng mga atleta ng bansa upang mailagay sa maayos ang alokasyon ng badyet ng bansa.

Marami pa ang mga Pilipinong maaaring maging isa magaling na atleta ngunit hindi nabibigyan ng pagkakataon na ipamalas ang kanilang angking galing dahil sa kakulangan ng mga nag-aalok ng trainings maski na rin ang pagbibigay ng oportunidad sa mga nangangarap na maging atleta ay pawang mahirap abutin kung kapos sa pera. Kaya naman sana ay magkaroon ng sapat na badyet para sa mga nagnanais na pasuking ang ganitong larangan at maipamalas pa ng kapwa natin kung gaano kagaling ang mga Pilipino pagdating sa ganitong mga larangan.

CAVITE PPO PARTICIPATES IN PRO4A PAHIYAS- THEMED STORES, WINS BEST THEME BOOTH

Camp BGen Pantaleon Garcia, City of Imus, Cavite — The Cavite Provincial Police Office, under the leadership of PCOL ARIEL R RED, Acting Provincial Director, actively participated in the PRO4A Officers Ladies Club Foundation, Inc. LAB (Love and Blessing) in Action, hosted by PRO4A Regional Director PBGEN PAUL KENNETH T LUCAS, together with Mrs. Mary June T. Lucas, Adviser of PRO4A OLCFI, held on January 27, 2026, at Camp Vicente Lim, Calamba City, Laguna, with the participation of different Provincial Police Offices from the CALABARZON Region.

One of the highlights of the activity was the PRO4A Pahiyas-Themed Stores, which showcased the creativity, cultural appreciation, and unity of the participating PPOs.

Each province installed a booth inspired by the vibrant Pahiyas Festival, symbolizing gratitude, abundance, and Filipino heritage. Products from the respective provinces were displayed and offered for sale, featuring local craftsmanship, indigenous goods, and regional specialties.

The Cavite PPO, through the combined efforts of the Police Community Affairs and Development Unit (PCADU) and the Public Information Office (PIO) personnel, successfully conceptualized, organized, and installed a Pahiyas Festival-inspired booth. The activity was further strengthened by the active support and contributions of the different police stations of Cavite PPO, which provided local products, decorative materials, and manpower to ensure the successful

presentation of the booth.

The Cavite PPO booth stood out for its creativity, visual appeal, and faithful adherence to the theme, drawing positive feedback from participants and guests alike.

The booths were adjudged by Mrs. Mary Rose O. Nartatez, National Adviser of the PNP-OLC Foundation, Inc., together with other members of the panel. After careful evaluation, the Cavite Provincial Police Office was declared the Best Pahiyas Theme Booth.

The recognition highlights the dedication and teamwork of the PCADU, PIO personnel, and police stations of Cavite PPO, and underscores the Office's strong support for the initiatives of the Officers Ladies Club Foundation, Inc., fostering camaraderie, cultural appreciation, and service-oriented participation within PNP PRO4A.



ANABELLE K. DUMALI
Publisher / Editor in Chief

JOHN RENNIEL K. DUMALI
Circulation Manager

BRYAN V. DE LUNA
Editor Consultant

JO-ANN K. ALCANTARA
Lay Out Artist/Special Project Coordinator

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Contact #: 09954361217

Email: cavitegazette@gmail.com

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PBBM SEEKS WHOLE-OF-SOCIETY EDUCATION REFORMS BEYOND POLITICAL TERMS

MANILA – President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. on Thursday called for a collective effort to implement education reforms that go beyond political terms as he received the Second Congressional Commission on Education's (EDCOM 2) final report on the country's learning crisis.

In a ceremony at Malacañan Palace in Manila, Marcos received the final report titled "Turning Point: A Decade of Necessary Reform," detailing EDCOM 2's three-year findings on the Philippine education's current state and the systemic weaknesses affecting learning outcomes.

Marcos also received the National Education and Workforce Development Plan (NatPlan) 2026-2035, a 10-year strategic roadmap developed by EDCOM 2 to reverse the Philippine education crisis and align workforce development with national goals.

"These documents reveal where we have fallen short and what we must do to improve our educational system. The final report of the EDCOM 2, aptly named 'Turning Point: A Decade of Necessary Reform,' provides a clear picture of the learning crisis that our education system needs to overcome," he said in a keynote speech.

"The report includes the NatPlan, which offers us a ten-year plan to address the learning crisis that can be solved if we act in unity, and with determination and with consistency," Marcos added.

Aligning ongoing reforms Marcos noted that his administration has worked closely with the EDCOM 2 over the past three years to align ongoing education reforms with the education agencies' recommendations.

He said efforts focused on addressing learning gaps exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic and other emerging challenges such as climate change.

Marcos expressed confidence that with consistent implementation, support from all sectors, and alignment of

government agencies, the reforms outlined in the report and NatPlan can address the proficiency collapse.

"We revised our basic educational curriculum, making it learner-centered, skill-focused, and decongested. To ensure that our teachers are focused on implementing this curriculum, we filled teaching and non-teaching positions and pursued the expanded career progression system," he said.

He added that the initiatives aim to strengthen education and ensure that all Filipino learners have access to quality education.

Long-term commitment Marcos emphasized the urgency of reforms and the need for long-term commitment to strengthen the education sector.

"This report shows us that we must think beyond the present, beyond my Administration and current local leadership terms. It calls on government, educators, industries, and communities to improve our educational system into one that will prepare every Filipino to meet the challenges of our time," he said.

Marcos cited the PHP1.3 trillion allocation for the education sector in the 2026 national budget, the largest in Philippine history. He said the amount, equivalent to 4.36 percent of the country's gross domestic product, surpasses the global benchmark for education spending.

"Through this budget, we can hire more teachers to reduce their overall workload; implement learning recovery in reading, math and science; expand school-based feeding programs; and construct more classrooms, further improving our educational system," Marcos said.

Health and scholarship support

Marcos also noted the strengthening of the Department of Education and PhilHealth's YAKAP Caravans to provide learners and school personnel with direct access to primary care benefits.

He added that over PHP182 million in the 2026 budget will be used for scholarships in master's degrees for guidance counseling, psychology, and other specializations. Scholarships in technical-vocational education and training have also been expanded.

"With these initiatives, we will continue building on the progress that we have made and strengthening our efforts so that all Filipino learners receive the quality education that they deserve and that they rightly expect," Marcos said.

Findings and recommendations

The NatPlan responds to a systemic "proficiency collapse" in Philippine education, which EDCOM 2 attributes to a combination of stunting, learning gaps, and insufficient skills development.

The report notes that 23.6 percent of children under 5 are stunted, permanently impairing cognitive development.

It also highlights that 91 percent of 10-year-old children cannot read and understand a simple text, while only 0.40 percent of Grade 12 students meet minimum proficiency standards.

The NatPlan also points out that 42 percent of senior high school graduates require remediation in college, and only 20 percent of graduates enter the labor force immediately, reflecting misalignment between education outcomes and workforce readiness.

To address these challenges, EDCOM 2 proposes a foundational-skills approach, emphasizing early interventions in reading, numeracy, and cognitive development to prevent further learning losses.

The plan sets aggressive targets across three milestone years—2028, 2031, and 2035.

These include plans to increase Grade 3 reading proficiency from a baseline of 47.74 percent to 95 percent and raise Grade 12 National Achievement Test proficiency from 0.40 percent to 90 percent.

Other targets include reduction of stunting

PH FORMALLY ASSUMES ASEAN-BAC CHAIRSHIP

MANILA – The Philippines on Thursday officially assumed the ASEAN Business Advisory Council (ASEAN-BAC) chairship during a ceremonial turnover at Malacañan Palace in Manila.

President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. witnessed the handover, as Jose Ma. Concepcion III, this year's ASEAN-BAC chairperson, received the council flag, symbolizing the formal transition of leadership from Malaysia to the Philippines.

Marcos said the Philippines, as ASEAN-BAC chair, is committed to building economic corridors that expand trade and investment, strengthen regional supply chains, and open doors of opportunity for businesses and communities in the region.

He added that the Philippines would push for "forward-looking, inclusive, and responsive" initiatives that support the ASEAN-BAC's plans and programs. "We note that the ASEAN-BAC's priorities for this year, anchored on four pillars -- people, planet, platform, and productivity -- are fully supportive of these priorities," Marcos said.

"These initiatives include empowering micro, small, and medium enterprises, workers, youth, and women; strengthening food security and agricultural productivity; advancing a digital and AI-enabled ASEAN; and boosting industry growth and regional integration across key sectors," he added.

Marcos stressed the importance of translating the ASEAN-BAC's aspirations into concrete action, saying this will be guided by this year's ASEAN chairship theme, "Navigating Our Future, Together."

He pledged to further enhance trade and investment opportunities across Southeast Asia as

prevalence from 23.6 percent to less than 20 percent and increased education spending to 5.5 percent of GDP. (PNA)

BY RUTH ABBEY GITA-CARLOS

ASEAN advances toward inclusive growth and shared progress.

"ASEAN ensures that progress is guided by cooperation, strengthened by mutual trust, and anchored in common accountability. This is how we turn uncertainty into opportunity and change into lasting progress," he said.

Established in 2001, ASEAN-BAC serves as the official private sector voice in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).

The council is tasked with promoting regional economic integration and fostering stronger cooperation between business and government. The ceremonial handover coincided with the first

ASEAN-BAC Council Meeting of the year, gathering key business leaders from the region, dialogue partners, and senior government officials. The meeting set the council's priorities for 2026 and beyond, underscoring the Philippines' role in steering regional private sector initiatives under its chairship.

The ASEAN-BAC was established by the ASEAN heads of state and government at the 7th ASEAN Summit in November 2001 in Brunei Darussalam, with a mandate to provide partner sector feedback and guidance to boost ASEAN's efforts toward economic integration. (PNA) **BY RUTH ABBEY GITA-CARLOS**

DOTr OPPOSES PROPOSAL TO ALLOW CARPOOLING ON EDSA BUSWAY

MANILA – Acting Transportation Secretary Giovanni Lopez on Thursday opposed the proposal to allow carpooling vehicles on the Epifanio Delos Santos Avenue (EDSA) Busway.

In a statement, Lopez said any move to open the busway to private vehicles, even under the guise of carpooling, will "inevitably slow down bus operations and defeat the very purpose for which the busway was created."

"The busway was designed primarily to move more people—not more cars—by providing fast and uninterrupted service to buses carrying up to 300,000 passengers daily," he said.

The proposal was made by Metropolitan Manila Development Authority (MMDA) General Manager Nicolas Torre III as a solution to traffic congestion in the National Capital Region (NCR).

"[President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr.'s] directives are clear: government transport policy must be commuter-focused and pro-mass transit, not car-centric," he said.

He noted that many passengers testify to the effectiveness of the EDSA Busway in providing quick and efficient public transportation.

"Sapat na dahilan ito para manatiling eksklusibo ang EDSA Busway para lamang sa mga bus at mga kompyuter (This is enough for us to maintain the exclusivity of the EDSA Busway for buses and commuters)," he said.

He, however, said a dialogue with the DOTr remains open for Torre, other government agencies, and civil society organizations to "create more innovative, well-thought of and holistic solutions to traffic problems."

On Tuesday, Torre said the MMDA is looking into allowing high-occupancy vehicles, or those with at least 10 passengers, to use the EDSA Busway to help reduce congestion in the metropolis.

He noted that the proposal is being studied as a way to promote carpooling or the practice of sharing a ride on a private vehicle with multiple people. (PNA) **BY RAYMOND CARL DELA CRUZ**

WALANG GUTOM' COOK-OFF SHOWS HOW NUTRITION EDUCATION FIGHTS HUNGER

MANILA – Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) Secretary Rex Gatchalian on Thursday underscored the role of the Walang Gutom Program (WGP) in addressing hunger and malnutrition as beneficiaries demonstrated how lessons learned translate into healthy and affordable meals during the Walang Gutom Kusinero: Cook-Off Challenge - National Capital Region (NCR) leg. Gatchalian said the cooking challenge highlights how nutrition education empowers food-poor families to make informed food choices and maximize government assistance.

"Hindi natin sila binibigyan lang ng food credits. Tinuturuan din natin sila ng kahalagahan kung paano mag-prepare ng masustansya at mura na mga pagkain para sa kanilang mga pamilya (We don't just give them food credits. We also teach them the importance of preparing cheap but nutritious food for their family)," he said during the cook-off challenge held at the Aguilar Sports Complex in Las Piñas City. Under the WGP, eligible food-poor households receive PHP3,000 in monthly food credits, coupled with regular nutrition education sessions that focus on balanced diets, proper meal preparation, and smart food budgeting.

Gatchalian emphasized that the nutrition education session is a key component of the WGP's social and behavioral change strategy, ensuring that food assistance leads to long-term improvements in household nutrition.

"Itong (cook-off) ay selebrasyon ng kanilang mga natutunan over the years of nutrition education sessions kung saan ipinamamalas nila yung kaalaman nila sa food groups – yung go, grow, and glow. Important kasi na hindi lamang natin sila binibigyan ng food

credits, kundi binabago natin yung kanilang behavior o yung kanilang kaalaman sa pamamagitan ng ganitong activities (The cook-off is a celebration of what they learned over the years of nutrition education sessions, where they showcased their knowledge in food groups – the go, grow and glow. It is important that we change their behavior or their knowledge through this kind of activity)," the DSWD chief said.

During the cook-off challenge, the top five provincial-level winners from the NCR competed for the regional championship. The five cook-off challengers, who came from different barangays in Quezon City and Tondo, Manila, prepared unique dishes such as dinuguang puso ng saging, calderetang tambakol, seafood pinangat, kare-kareng bangus, and tortang kalabasa with daing flakes. With a score of 94 percent, Kusinera Cristina Dakendek and Assistant Kusinera Rosalie Mata of Barangay Bahay Pag-asa, Quezon City were hailed as NCR regional champions for their dinuguang puso ng saging.

They received PHP10,000 in cash, livelihood grants under the DSWD's Sustainable Livelihood Program (SLP), and a Masflex cookware set.

Dakendek thanked President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. and the entire DSWD for reaching out to poor Filipino families like their household, and bringing government programs to them.

"Thank you, thank you so much lalo at higit sa lahat, sa DSWD at Walang Gutom Program, at yung may akda nito na si President Marcos. Thank you po sa ganitong patimpalak dahil nakakasama po ang mahihirap na kagaya ko. Hindi po ito maliit na halaga, napaka laking halaga po nito para sa akin. Sana po ganito na binababaaan ninyo yung mga nasa laylayan na nangangailangan ng tulong

DOLE EXTENDS AID TO BINALIW LANDFILL TRAGEDY VICTIMS

MANILA – The Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE), through the Employees' Compensation Commission (ECC), has assured immediate assistance and access to benefits for injured workers and the families of those killed in the Binaliw landfill tragedy earlier this month.

ECC Executive Director Kaima Via Velasquez said Thursday the commission is working closely with DOLE Central Visayas, Social Security System (SSS) and the employer, Prime Waste Solutions Cebu, to fast-track the processing of claims.

"We have instructed our regional officer in Cebu to prioritize these cases and extend all possible assistance to the affected workers and their families," she said in a statement.

The ECC regional office said it has been closely monitoring the incident since it occurred and has met with representatives of the landfill owner, SSS and ECC to coordinate assistance for workers, even as rescue operations were ongoing.

(Thank you so much, to the DSWD and the WGP, especially to the author of this activity, President Marcos. Thank you for this contest, for including poor families like me. The prize is not a small amount for me; it is a large one. I hope this goes on, how you help those on the fringes of society)," she said.

The dishes were judged by Chefs Marky Bartolome, Regina Patricia Cojuangco-Gonzales, Rolando Laudico, Connh Crus, and Rafael John Maclang.

The "Walang Gutom Kusinero: Cook-Off Challenge" is one of the advocacy strategies of the DSWD to promote nutrition education, sustainable food practices, and informed food choices among food-poor families, in support of the Marcos administration's goal to reduce involuntary hunger nationwide. (PNA) **BY ZALDY DE LAYOLA**

Under the Employees' Compensation (EC) Program, families of qualified deceased workers will receive death pensions, funeral benefits and immediate cash assistance. Injured workers may also avail themselves of sickness or disability benefits, as well as reimbursement for medical expenses.

DOLE Central Visayas Regional Director Roy Buenafe said Prime Waste Solutions Cebu has committed to settling all outstanding claims of victims and affected workers.

Aside from EC benefits, DOLE will also extend livelihood and emergency employment assistance to eligible beneficiaries through its Integrated Livelihood Program and the Tulong Panghanapbuhay sa Ating Disadvantaged/Displaced Workers program.

DOLE said profiling and information-gathering activities are ongoing to ensure the timely delivery of services to affected workers and their families. The Jan. 8 incident left 36 people dead and several others injured. (PNA) **BY FERDINAND PATINIO**

PHIVOLCS CHIEF: EVACUATION, CLASS SUSPENSION ORDERS UP TO LGUS

MANILA – Local government units (LGUs) have the final say on suspending classes or implementing preemptive evacuation due to geological hazards, the head of the Philippine Institute of Volcanology and Seismology (Phivolcs) said on Thursday.

"We don't recommend suspension of classes or preemptive evacuation. The final decision is up to the LGUs according to their mandates and based on their assessment on the local conditions," Phivolcs Director Teresito Bacolcol told the Philippine News Agency in an interview.

His clarification comes amid reports of class suspensions due to the ongoing series of earthquakes or swarm around Sultan Kudarat.

"We only recommend evacuation when there's an impending tsunami. For now, we haven't recorded

a tsunamigenic event or earthquake that generates tsunami," Bacolcol clarified.

From 10:52 p.m. Jan. 19 to 7 a.m. Jan. 29, Phivolcs has so far logged 2,264 earthquakes with magnitudes 1.3 to 5.9 around Sultan Kudarat. At least 677 of these were plotted or located, while 84 were felt.

Phivolcs has been recommending to "duck, cover and hold" during an earthquake.

Bacolcol also reiterated that Phivolcs urges coastal communities to be vigilant, and observe signs of tsunamis: strong shaking is felt, roaring sound is heard, and a sudden drop of sea level is observed.

"When they observe even one of the three signs, they should evacuate immediately to a higher ground," he said. (PNA) **BY MA. CRISTINA ARAYATA**

MMDA OPENS SPRUCED UP GREEN PARK FOR KIDS, SENIORS IN MARIKINA

MANILA – The Metropolitan Manila Development Authority (MMDA) and the Marikina City government on Thursday inaugurated the newly improved Jesus Dela Peña Recreational Park that provides green open spaces for recreational use for children and senior citizens.

The project is in line with President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr.'s agenda of prioritizing the creation of livable and resilient communities through the expansion of public open spaces.

During the ceremony, MMDA Chair Romando "Don" Artes said the

rehabilitation of the park is the third one completed by the MMDA in the city.

"This collaboration aims to provide the citizens of the City of Marikina access to a cleaner and greener environment that may improve the physical and mental health of the people as well as improve the air quality within the area and give access to a safe place for the children to explore and have fun," Artes said.

The ceremony was led by Artes, Marikina City Mayor Maan Teodoro and Marikina 1st District Rep. Marcy Teodoro in Barangay Jesus Dela Peña.

The project is part of the MMDA's partnership with

17 local government units in the National Capital Region toward creating a cleaner and greener environment.

The 1,133.21-square-meter recreational park was designed and developed by the MMDA. It features a two-story community "burial" chapel, grand clustered gazebo with concrete benches and tables, perimeter plant box with plants, landscaping works and public comfort rooms.

It is also equipped with outdoor gym equipment and playsets for children and senior citizens. (PNA)

BY RAYMOND CARL DELA CRUZ

TESDA BUILDS UP SCHOLARSHIP, ENTERPRISE-BASED EDUCATION AND TRAINING PROGRAMS

BAGUIO CITY (PIA) — The Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA) is all set in strengthening its scholarship, skills development and enterprise-based education and training programs.

TESDA Director General Jose Francisco Benitez announced that with a bigger budget allocation this 2026, the TESDA is poised to open 650,000 to 700,000 technical – vocation education and training (TVET) scholarship slots for the year.

In Baguio City during the Cordillera State Institute for Technical Education 7th year anniversary program, Benitez led a Memorandum of Understanding signing with the John Hay Management Corporation (JHMC), the Baguio Country Club (BCC) and the Moog Controls Corporations (MCC) for the strengthening of partnership and collaboration for Enterprise – Based Education and Training for TESDA TVET learners.

JHMC, which manages the John Hay Hotels (former Manor and Forest Lodge) and BCC, the only 5 – star mountain resort in the country, will be partners in tourism and hospitality

skills development.

MCC will be a partner in manufacturing where learners will be exposed to advanced systems, precision engineering and quality assurance.

Benitez also encouraged CSITE and other TVET stakeholders in Cordillera to further strengthen, expand and diversify the skills training being offered in the region, and help the country address the job – skills mismatch and demand for skilled workers of industries, locally and abroad.

“Two things are clear to us. It is TESDA that has the fastest impact to our learning crisis because we deal with shorter courses and we are more flexible in addressing employment needs and on job – skills mismatch,” Benitez said.

“Second is that, skills is the new currency of the world of work, much more on quality education or degrees. Some of the richest people in the planet are mostly college dropout, but what they have are industry verified skills, marketable employable skills, whether they use it as employee or entrepreneur, to innovate for themselves or their families,” Benitez added. (JDP/CCD-PIA CAR) **BY CARLITO C. DAR**

DENR CHAMPIONS INCLUSIVE ZERO-WASTE EDUCATION IN ISABELA

CITY OF ILAGAN, Isabela (PIA) — Emphasizing that environmental protection begins with inclusive education, the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) Isabela conducted a Zero Waste Symposium at the Ilagan East Integrated Center, this city.

Raquel Caldez, environment information officer, said the symposium gathered 61 participants, including learners with special needs, intern students, and teachers, highlighting DENR’s commitment to making environmental advocacy accessible to all sectors of society.

Caldez said the participants were introduced to the principles of waste reduction, segregation, and proper disposal through age-appropriate and engaging activities that emphasized practical actions toward environmental sustainability.

She added that a film presentation on responsible waste management underscored the shared role of individuals and institutions in minimizing waste and protecting natural resources.

To further reinforce learning, the DENR

Information, Education, and Communication team distributed waste bins with stands, IEC materials, and school supplies to support the school’s solid waste management initiatives.

Caldez also said the activity reflects the agency’s continuing efforts to promote sustainable and inclusive environmental programs, ensuring that learners with special needs and members of the Youth for Environment in Schools Organization (YES-O) are actively engaged in building a cleaner and greener future.

Hands-on learning was also emphasized, as Ecological Solid Waste Management (ESWM) Focal Person Erma Tarayao conducted a live demonstration on proper waste segregation, allowing participants to apply zero waste concepts in real-life settings.

School officials welcomed the initiative, with the school principal expressing appreciation for the symposium, noting that it enhanced students’ understanding of Zero Waste Month and encouraged concrete actions to protect the environment. (OTB/MGE/PIA Isabela) **BY MERLITO G. EDALE, JR.**

eLGU SPEEDS UP BIZ PERMIT, LICENSING TRANSACTIONS IN MINDORO TOWN

CALAPAN CITY, Oriental Mindoro (PIA) — Faster processing of business permits and reduced queueing of clients have been observed by the municipal government of San Teodoro following its use of the electronic Local Government Unit Business Permit and Licensing System (eLGU BPLS) since 2019.

The use of said system has also strengthened the efficiency in frontline service delivery and improved the ease of doing business in the town.

With more than six years of use, the municipality of San Teodoro was recognized as a model local government unit during the 2024 MIMAROPA eLGU Summit for its adoption of digital government services for business permits and other regulatory requirements.

The local government also implemented the eLGU Building Permit and Certificate of Occupancy system to further improve transparency and service delivery, enabling applicants to apply and receive clearances and permits with less delay. The digital platform has supported faster processing of business permit renewals, building permits, and other regulatory transactions.

Data from the Department of Information and Communications Technology (DICT) show that more LGUs nationwide are adopting electronic permit processing and reduce bureaucratic hurdles, consistent with the Ease of Doing Business and Efficient Government Service Delivery Act.

Nationwide, hundreds of cities and municipalities have automated business permit systems to shorten processing times and improve service efficiency for citizens and entrepreneurs.

well-organized, giving due recognition and honor to the role of all Siquijodnon women,” Quio said. (BPS/RAC/PIA NIR-Siquijor) **BY RIZALIE ANDING CALIBO**

In an interview, DICT Oriental Mindoro Officer in Charge Marvin Bejasa said the project helps strengthen transparency and efficiency across LGU processes.

“Ang proyektong ito ay makatutulong sa pagpapalakas ng transparency at kahusayan sa proseso ng pagkuha ng Business Permit ng LGU. Kasabay nito, nagbibigay ito ng malaking kaginhawaan sa ating mga mamamayan dahil hindi na kinakailangan ang personal na pagpunta at pagpila sa tanggapan upang mag-proseso ng permit,” he said.

Bejasa added “Sa pamamagitan ng proyektong ito, mababawasan ang oras, gastusin, at abalang nararanasan ng ating mga mamamayan sa pagproseso ng permit. Higit sa lahat, epektibong magagamit ang makabagong teknolohiya upang mabawasan ang red tape at mapabuti ang serbisyo publiko.”

On the other hand, San Teodoro mayor Karen Ponce Miranda said the eLGU system eased processing of business permit renewals and improved coordination among offices.

“Aking nasaksihan kung gaano maging maayos at mabilis ang pag-po-proseso ng pag-renew ng Mayor’s permit sa tulong ng eLGU system na dinevelop ng DICT. Kapansin pansin ang ginhawang naramdaman ng mga negosyante sa aming bayan. Nabawasan ang pila at nagawang mas maayos ang koordinasyon ng mga tanggapan,” Ponce Miranda said.

Meanwhile, local business owners and applicants have noted shorter lines and fewer steps in applying for permits, reflecting a broader shift among Philippine local governments to adopt digital governance tools that reduce time and cost burdens for business operators. (JJGS/JBG/PIA MIMAROPA-Oriental Mindoro/Photo from DICT-Oriental Mindoro) **BY JUANITO JOSHUA G. SUGAY III**

SIQUIJOR PREPARES EARLY FOR WOMEN’S MONTH 2026 CELEBRATION

SIQUIJOR (PIA) — The provincial government of Siquijor has started early preparations for the 2026 Women’s Month Celebration, bringing together key stakeholders to plan month-long activities aimed at promoting women’s empowerment, unity, and social development.

In a coordination meeting held at the Sangguniang Panlalawigan (SP) Session Hall, SP Majority Leader Brylle Deeah T. Quio, who also serves as Chairperson of the Committee on Women and Social Services, led the planning of preparations

for this year’s iteration of the Women’s Month.

This was carried out in collaboration with the Provincial Social Welfare and Development Office (PSWDO), the Provincial Council for Women (PCW), the Women’s Federations from the six municipalities, other government agencies, and partner organizations, to strengthen the Programs, Projects, and Activities (PPAs) for the celebration.

During the discussion, Board Member Quio presented the proposed month-long activities, which garnered support and were further

enhanced by participants through suggestions and recommendations.

Planned activities include the Opening Ceremony and Women’s Solidarity Parade, Cooking Contest, Search for Iron Lady Awardee 2026, Marching Band Competition, JVSV Caravan, Women Inspiring Women Series, Takbo Para sa Kababayan-an (Women’s Fun Run), and a musical theatre play about women in collaboration with the Department of Education (DepEd).

Meanwhile, the Culmination Program is eyed to feature a Women’s Bazaar, dance

sport competition, painting contest, and the recognition of outstanding women leaders and women-led local government units (LGUs).

Special focus was given to the Takbo Para sa Kababayan-an (Women’s Fun Run), which will be exclusive to women participants from across the province, as an activity aimed at promoting health, unity, and women’s empowerment.

“Through this collaboration and coordination, the Women’s Month Celebration 2026 is expected to be more inclusive, meaningful, and

P2B IN SAVINGS EYED FROM PROPOSED SUBMARINE POWER CABLE PROJECT

MANILA—The government is expected to save around PHP2 billion annually from reduced energy subsidies in off-grid areas in Antique and Mindoro once a proposed submarine power cable project by DMCI Power Corporation (DPC) is completed this year.

In a press briefing Wednesday night, DPC President Antonino Gatdula said the company is awaiting regulatory approval for the 20-kilometer, PHP3-billion project that will connect Semirara Island in Antique to Mindoro.

Gatdula said the construction of the submarine cable would help ensure sufficient power capacity and improve electricity reliability in the two areas, which continue to face power supply challenges. He added that the company plans to tap foreign experts for the implementation of the project.

At present, DPC operates a 19.7-megawatt bunker fuel-powered facility in Oriental Mindoro and a 12.5-MW wind power project in Semirara Island, Caluya, Antique.

Gatdula said they have also submitted a proposal to put up solar-, wind-, and coal power plants in Semirara to eventually stop using bunker fuel and diesel to operating the power plants.

“When we computed the savings, based on the current price of diesel and bunker, savings for the UCME (Universal Charge for Missionary Electrification) is not less than PHP2 billion per year because we will displace the bunker and diesel. Coal is cheaper and available 24/7,” he said.

UCME is among the fees paid by power consumers in the country and is used to subsidize electricity in areas that are not yet connected to the national grid, including far-flung mountainous communities and island provinces.

It is collected by the

distribution utilities from end-users and the National Grid Corporation of the Philippines (NGCP) from transmission customers, and remitted to the Power Sector Assets and Liabilities Management Corporation (PSALM). It is what the government pays to renewable energy (RE) developers that put up power plants in off-grid areas.

Gatdula said the proposed solar power plant will not displace the agricultural lots “because Semirara is an industrial area.”

“The DOE has realized the benefit (of the project) so we’re working on the submarine cable,” he said. **(PNA) BY JOANN VILLANUEVA**

PEZA APPROVES 18 PROJECTS WORTH P12.86-B IN FIRST MEETING IN 2026

MANILA – Eighteen new projects worth around PHP12.86 billion have been approved by the Philippine Economic Zone Authority (PEZA) Board during its first meeting this year.

In a news release on Wednesday, PEZA said three of these projects are big-ticket items worth PHP11.89 billion, involving a tourism economic zone enterprise in Parañaque City, and two economic zone development projects in Misamis Occidental and Batangas.

All these projects — covering manufacturing, IT-BPM, utilities, economic zone development, logistics, and tourism — are expected to generate 1,005 jobs across several areas and produce about USD59.74 million in projected exports, PEZA added.

The projects will be located in Calabarzon, National Capital Region, Central Visayas, Bicol Region, Northern Mindanao and Soccsksargen.

PEZA said most of these investments are from

MANILA – The impact of government measures to support domestic economic growth is expected to begin materializing in the second quarter of 2026, Department of Economy, Planning and Development (DEPDev) Secretary Arsenio Balisacan said Thursday.

Balisacan made the statement after the Philippine economy grew by 3 percent in the fourth quarter of 2025, slower than the 3.9 percent in the previous quarter and the 5.3 percent recorded a year earlier, according to the latest Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) data.

The PSA said full-year growth settled at 4.4 percent, below the 5.7

percent posted in 2024 and under the revised 4.8 to 5.7 percent target.

On the demand side, fourth-quarter exports of goods rose 22.8 percent, imports of services increased by 4.2 percent, household consumption grew by 3.8 percent, and government spending expanded by 9.1 percent. For the full year, exports of goods grew by 14.1 percent, government consumption by 9.1 percent, imports of services by 6.1 percent, and imports of goods by 4.7 percent.

The government targets GDP growth of 5 to 6 percent this year and 5.5 to 6.5 percent in 2027, with export growth targets of 2 percent and 3 percent, respectively. The foreign exchange assumption for both years is PHP58.60 to a US dollar.

In a briefing, Balisacan said a return to at least 5 percent growth is possible by the second quarter, noting that achieving the full-year target would require growth to reach that level by then.

“That’s the goal anyway, to go to the five to six percent for the entire year. On exactly what month or quarter, it’s something definitely I couldn’t say but, yes, to be able to go to 5 to 6 percent, you have to grow 5 percent by Q2,” he said.

He attributed the slowdown to weather- and climate-related disruptions, issues surrounding anomalous flood control projects, and global economic uncertainties, which dampened construction activity and private consumption. Domestic demand growth slowed to 0.7 percent in the fourth quarter, while full-year expansion reached 3.7 percent.

Balisacan stressed the need to restore investor and consumer confidence through governance reforms, stronger accountability, improved project quality, and better use of public funds. He also cited the importance of improving disaster preparedness, early warning systems, and the capacity of the state

DEPDEV CHIEF SEES ECONOMIC RECOVERY STARTING IN Q2 2026

PCC OKS MERCANTILE INSURANCE-FPG INSURANCE MERGER

MANILA – The Philippine Competition Commission (PCC) has cleared the merger of FPG Insurance Co. Inc. and The Mercantile Insurance Company, Inc., after finding it would not harm competition in the non-life insurance market.

In a news release Wednesday, the PCC said it was notified of the merger on Nov. 19, 2025, with Mercantile Insurance as the surviving entity and the new company to be called FPG Mercantile.

Mercantile Insurance offers health, accident, fire and allied lines, motor vehicle, casualty, marine, cargo, marine hull, comprehensive liability insurance, and allied risks, while FPG Insurance

provides fire and allied perils, motor, casualty, marine, medical, personal accident, engineering, surety, and bonds.

PCC said its Mergers and Acquisitions Office (MAO) Review Team “determined that the merger likely poses no substantial lessening of competition in the relevant markets.”

“The parties’ combined market shares remain low, preventing them from unilaterally influencing market conditions or engaging in foreclosure strategies. Multiple competitors in the relevant markets provide sufficient competitive constraints on the merged entity,” it said.

(JOANN VILLANUEVA/PNA)

BIR LAUNCHES TAXPAYER SERVICE FOR CREATE MORE ACT-REGISTERED BIZ

MANILA – Bureau of Internal Revenue (BIR) Commissioner Charlito Martin Mendoza on Tuesday underscored the importance of a centralized office where registered businesses can transact their tax-related concerns to streamline processes.

Speaking at the simultaneous nationwide launch of the Registered Business Enterprise Taxpayer Service (RBETS) at the BIR main office in Quezon City, Mendoza said around 600,000 business entities have registered under the Corporate Recovery and Tax Incentives for Enterprises

(CREATE MORE) Act. He noted that since incentives are granted to these businesses, “the way the government serves them must align with those incentives.”

“This reform shows our commitment to turn the law into real service. RBETS is mandated under the CREATE MORE Act to provide a centralized, consistent, and responsive approach to tax administration for registered business enterprises. We make that mandate real — not later, but here and now,” he said. Mendoza said RBETS Express Counters are now available in 20 Revenue District Offices nationwide and at the Large Taxpayers Service in the BIR main office, which currently serves as the program’s interim oversight hub.

Mendoza clarified that no new personnel were hired specifically for RBETS, but existing BIR staff were trained to manage the service. “We equipped them with a working understanding of the RBE tax regime under CREATE MORE, strengthening our long-standing commitment to delivering services that are accurate, consistent, and supportive of compliance,” he said. **(PNA) BY JOANN VILLANUEVA**

weather bureau. For infrastructure, he said the government will accelerate the completion of ongoing projects while strengthening anti-corruption safeguards to support economic recovery and achieve more sustainable growth.

“These reforms protect public funds, strengthen our institutions, build a more resilient, inclusive economy, and ultimately, rebuild trust between government and the people we serve,” Balisacan said. **(PNA) BY JOANN VILLANUEVA**

“These reforms protect public funds, strengthen our institutions, build a more resilient, inclusive economy, and ultimately, rebuild trust between government and the people we serve,” Balisacan said. **(PNA) BY JOANN VILLANUEVA**

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“These reforms protect public funds, strengthen our institutions, build a more resilient, inclusive economy, and ultimately, rebuild trust between government and the people we serve,” Balisacan said. **(PNA) BY JOANN VILLANUEVA**



PVL ALL-FILIPINO CONFERENCE TEAMS BET ON CHEMISTRY

MANILA – While several teams overhauled their rosters for the 2026 Premier Volleyball League (PVL) All-Filipino Conference, some opted for just a few changes.

The Akari enters the season-ending conference, which kicks off Jan. 31 in San Juan City, with a seasoned and battle-tested crew.

Cza Carandang, Jyne Sorreno, Judith Abil and Rhose Dapol were added to reinforce depth without disrupting chemistry with the exits of middle blocker Ezra Madrigal and reserves Cams Victoria and Erika Raagas.

With Ivy Lacsina, Ced Domingo, Fifi Sharma, Eli Soyud, Justine Jazareno and Mars Alba now more comfortable with head coach Tina Salak's system, the Chargers appear poised to deliver the consistency needed toward a championship breakthrough.

Choco Mucho, which missed the semifinals in all conferences last season, has signed up star outside

hitter Eya Laure, whose scoring prowess and big-game experience instantly elevate the team's ceiling. With Sisi Rondina returning and Laure anchoring the opposite wing, Choco Mucho now boasts one of the league's most dangerous perimeter attacks.

Supported by Maddie Madayag in the middle, veteran hitters Isa Molde and Dindin Santiago-Manabat, and defensive stalwart Thang Ponce, the Flying Titans gained firepower without sacrificing balance.

Additional acquisitions Caitlin Viray, Jailla Atienza and Alina Bicar helped offset the departures of Royse Tubino, Cherry Nunag, Bia General and Aduke Ogunsanya.

Signal made a minor change after a podium-less season. Led by Vanie Gandler, Erika Santos, Ishie Lalongsip, Rose Doria-Aquino, Jackie Acuña, multi-awarded playmaker Gel Cayuna and libero Dawn Catindig, the Super Spikers' strength

lies in its cohesion and depth.

Meanwhile, Creamline is fielding anew one of the league's formidable cores with Tots Carlos and Bea De Leon now fully reintegrated after a complete offseason, and former Most Valuable Players Bernadeth Pons and Jema Galanza returning.

The addition of libero Jennifer Nierva and the highly anticipated return of setter Jia De Guzman further strengthen the team of coach Sherwin Meneses.

PLDT, which won titles in the PVL On Tour and Invitational last season, made just one notable addition in middle blocker Seth Rodriguez, reinforcing an already elite frontcourt featuring Kim Dy, Majoy Baron and Mika Reyes.

With chemistry preserved and head coach Rald Ricafort's system firmly in place, the success of the High Speed Hitters will once again hinge on the leadership of Savannah Davison. **(PNA) BY JEAN MALANUM**

ADAMSON ENDS ATENEO'S WINNING RUN IN UAAP BOYS' BASKETBALL

MANILA – Adamson University pulled off a 77-73 upset over unbeaten Ateneo de Manila University Thursday in the UAAP Season 88 boys basketball tournament at the Filoil Centre in San Juan.

Chrys Gomez scored on a jumper to give the Baby Falcons a 76-73 lead, going into the final two minutes. Jarl Artango split his charities to seal the win. "The game plan today was to limit their import, so it's still 27-27. Our only backup plan was to try to limit their other players, we were able to do it. Offensively, I just said attack, attack, attack always," said Adamson

head coach Mike Fermin.

"This win really comes with maturity. We're just pounding them and instilling in them that every game or every training, you treat this like your last. We always just think, we're not in the top four now. That's what fuels us to be better," he added.

Artango finished with 24 points, five rebounds, four assists, and three steals, while Gomez chipped in 13 points, five steals, two rebounds, and one assist. Noah Bautista contributed 10 points, five rebounds, three blocks, two assists, and one steal, while Mac Jenodia and Fran Flores had eight points each.

Jude Eriobu led Ateneo with 27 points, 27 rebounds, four blocks, and one steal followed by Noah Banal (11 points, six rebounds, and one assist), Ziv Espinas (11 points and seven rebounds), and Jay-M Leal (nine points, five assists, four rebounds, one steal, and one block). In the other game, Cabs Cabonilas delivered 21 points, five rebounds, two assists, two steals, and two blocks as Far Eastern University-Diliman demolished De La Salle Zobel, 79-61, for its fourth straight win.

FEU-D and Ateneo are tied for the lead with identical 5-1 records, while Adamson improved to 3-3. Marc Burgos paced the Baby Tamaraws with 11 points, three rebounds, one assist, one steal, and one block, followed by JB Cagurangan (11 points and five rebounds), Khean Esperanza (10 points, seven assists, five rebounds, and two steals), and Pat Sohm (six points and three rebounds).

Maco Dabao had 16 points, six rebounds, three assists, two steals, and one block while Nigerian center Yusuf Mikailu added 11 points, 16 rebounds, five blocks, and one steal for the Baby Archers. **(PNA) BY JEAN MALANUM**



WINNER. Adamson University's Jarl Artango goes for a layup during the game against Ateneo de Manila University in the UAAP Season 88 boys basketball tournament at the Filoil Centre in San Juan on Thursday (Jan. 29, 2026). The Baby Falcons won, 77-73. (UAAP photo)

EALA THRU TO PH WOMEN'S OPEN QF; GERMAN TOP SEED MARIA EXITS

MANILA – The Philippines' Alexandra Eala marched to the Philippine Women's Open quarterfinals after beating Japanese Himeno Sakatsume, 6-4, 6-0, at Rizal Memorial Tennis Center in Manila on Wednesday night.

Eala, seeded No. 2 in

the country's first-ever WTA (Women's Tennis Association) 125 event, will be up against fifth seed Camila Osorio of Colombia, who survived Japanese Mai Hontama, 6-4, 4-6, 6-2.

"This (victory) was so enjoyable. I am so very happy with the win, of course although the first set was close," the world No. 49 Eala said. "I am so motivated, and I hope [the Filipino crowd] is just as motivated!"

Meanwhile, Russian Tatiana Prozorova ousted top seed German Tatjana Maria, 7-6 (2), 6-4, to advance against Belgian Sofia Costoulas, a 6-2, 6-4 winner over Chinese Ma Yexin.

Third seed Solana Sierra of Argentina and fourth seed Donna Vekic of Croatia also secured seats to the next round.

Sierra outplayed Yulia Starodubtseva of Ukraine, 6-4, 6-3, to forge a duel with Lanlana Tatarudee of Thailand, who prevailed over Polina Kudermetova of Uzbekistan, 6-4, 6-4.

"It's really nice to see so many people watching our matches," Sierra said.

Vekic, on the other hand, triumphed over Mariia Tkacheva, 6-1, 6-2, to set up a quarterfinal showdown with Zhu Lin of China, who pulled off a 6-3, 7-6 (5) victory over Mananchaya Sawangkaew of Thailand.

In doubles, American top seeds Quinn Gleason and Sabrina Santamaria struggled past Japanese Hiroko Kuwata and Chinese Qiu Yu Ye, 6-4, 7-5, to reach the semifinals. Gleason and Santamaria will battle Li Yu-yun Li of Chinese Taipei and Sara Saito of Japan, who eliminated fourth seeds Nicola Fossa Huergo of Argentina and Darja Semenista of Latvia, 7-5, 1-6, 12-10.

Second seeds Eudice Chong of Hong Kong and Liang En-shuo of Chinese Taipei also moved to the semis, beating Mana Ayukawa and Kanako Morisaki of Japan, 6-4, 6-2. **(PNA) BY JEAN MALANUM**

SKINNER, HOOVER DOMINATE WSL LONGBOARD TOUR QUALIFIER

MANILA – British Ben Skinner and American Cash Hoover topped the World Surf League (WSL) La Union International Pro World Longboard Tour Qualifier off Urbiztondo Beach in San Juan, La Union.

"I don't know what to say, I just can't," said Skinner after winning his first major title in 15 years, in a news release Tuesday.

"La Union, you've been so special to us. The local community, the waves, the weather. Honestly, we cannot thank you enough from the bottom of our hearts," he added. It was the first major title in

15 years for Skinner, who is not only a surfer but is also a shaper, providing boards for many of the world's best, and won on one of his own designs.

Skinner, whose son also joined the event, noted that the Filipino surfers helped him bring out his best.

"These guys and girls from the Philippines are raising the level of longboarding globally, not just here in the Philippines. These guys are some of my favorite surfers in the world right now, so to beat them was epic. I'm back, baby!" said the father of four.

Hoover, on the other hand, posted the equal highest

women's total in her very first heat with a smooth style and solid nose-riding and classic carves.

"I'm so incredibly happy, I don't think I've been this happy in so long," said the 16-year-old after her remarkable performance at Monaliza Point.

"I cried tears of joy coming out of the water. I've worked so hard for this, and this event has been so stressful. And to be able to just feel that I've officially made my spot on tour for this year is the best feeling in the world," she added.

Japan's Natsumi Taoka also qualified for the LT Wildcards for finishing