

# CAVITE GAZETTE

P U B L I S H I N G

VOL.1 NO.50

March 3-9, 2026

P10.00

## PNFPWD NATIONAL SUMMIT ADVANCES UNIFIED ACTION FOR DISABILITY-INCLUSIVE DEVELOPMENT

A powerful convergence of advocates, trailblazers, and changemakers took place during the Philippine National Federations of Persons with Disabilities (PNFPWD) National General Assembly and Summit from February 24–27 at One Tagaytay Place Hotel Suites, Tagaytay City.

The five-day gathering united the nation's strongest voices in the disability sector—leaders and champions committed to shaping a more inclusive and accessible future for all Filipinos. Anchored on solidarity and shared purpose, the summit became a dynamic platform for collaboration, policy discussion, and empowerment.

The program formally opened with welcome remarks from Philippine National Federation Chair Bonifacio Castigador, who underscored the importance of unity and collective action in advancing the rights and welfare of persons with disabilities (PWDs) nationwide.

Delivering the keynote message was Glenda D. Relova, Director of

the National Council on Disability Affairs (NCDA), who highlighted the government's continued commitment to mainstreaming disability-inclusive policies and strengthening partnerships with federations and local government units. She emphasized that inclusion must go beyond compliance—it must be embedded in governance,

development planning, and everyday community life. Representing the host region, REGION IV-A Federation President Danilo Emelo expressed gratitude for the overwhelming participation and reaffirmed CALABARZON's support for national initiatives that uplift the PWD community. Ms. Marie Shiela Haloc, Provincial Disability Affairs

Officer, attended the event on behalf of Governor Francisco Gabriel "Abeng" Remulla, conveying the Provincial Government of Cavite's full support for programs that champion inclusivity and accessibility. On Day 1 (February 24), participants engaged in an eye-opening learning session entitled "Katawa-tawa lang ba ang PWD?" facilitated

by Mr. Crisaldo Pablo of PWDigitables Channel. The discussion tackled persistent stereotypes, discrimination, and the importance of respectful representation of persons with disabilities in media and society. The session sparked meaningful dialogue among delegates, reinforcing the need to challenge harmful narratives and promote dignity and empowerment. Meanwhile, the Tagaytay City Persons with Disability Affairs Office (PDAO) shared the city's best practices in implementing disability-friendly initiatives, showcasing local efforts that can serve as models for other LGUs.

In the succeeding days, the summit will delve into critical thematic discussions including Inclusive Tourism, Inclusive Agriculture, and Inclusive Services Industry. These sessions will explore innovative strategies and practical approaches to ensure that PWDs are not merely beneficiaries but active contributors to economic development across various sectors. —  
**OPIO**



## DHSUD HONORS CAVITE LGUS AT GAWAD HUSAY SA PAGPLANO AWARDING CEREMONY

The Office of the Provincial Planning and Development Coordinator and the Department of Human Settlements and Urban Development (DHSUD) Regional Office IV-A successfully held the Gawad Husay sa Pagpaplano Awarding Ceremony on February 19 at the New Provincial Government Center in Trece Martires City. The event gathered local officials and planners in

celebration of innovative and sustainable planning practices that strengthen communities and promote inclusive growth.

In his opening message, Governor Abeng Remulla underscored the vital role of strong local governance and proactive planning in shaping resilient and well-planned communities. He commended the LGUs for their continuous efforts in improving the welfare of their constituents and fostering sustainable development across the province.

DHSUD IV-A Assistant Regional Director Atty. Naiza Mae N. De Los Santos followed with a brief message highlighting the vision and objectives of the Gawad Husay sa Pagpaplano, emphasizing the importance of excellence

in plan formulation, data management, implementation, and monitoring in advancing sustainable urban development.

This year's awardees include the Municipality of Magallanes, the City of General Trias, Tagaytay City, and Trece Martires City for demonstrating exemplary performance and innovative planning initiatives in their respective localities. The GHP Hall of Fame Award was also awarded to the Municipality of Naic and the City of Carmona in recognition of their remarkable achievement of receiving the Gawad Husay sa Pagpaplano for five consecutive years, reflecting sustained excellence and dedication to quality urban planning.

DHSUD IV-A likewise recognized the Sangguniang Panlalawigan of Cavite with a Certificate of Appreciation received by Board Member Aldrin Anacan, for its proactive role in supporting the completion and approval of Comprehensive Land Use Plans – Zoning Ordinances (CLUP-ZOs) of LGUs in the province.

In addition, the Provincial Government of Cavite through the Office of the Provincial Planning and Development Coordinator was acknowledged as a steadfast partner in delivering technical assistance to LGUs and in promoting sustainable, well-planned communities throughout the region. The Certificate of Appreciation was received by Governor Remulla, whose leadership continues to advance sound planning and local governance initiatives in Cavite.

In her closing remarks Engr. Lorna Leyran, Provincial Planning and Development Coordinator, congratulated the LGU awardees and encouraged them to continue striving for excellence in local governance. She emphasized, "Gawin itong [awards] inspirasyon, hindi lamang bilang parangal kundi bilang hamon na ipagpatuloy ang kultura ng kahusayan sa pagpaplano para sa mas matatag, mas handa at mas maunlad na Cavite para sa lahat. Mabuhay ang LGU na patuloy na nagpaplano para sa kinabukasan".

Through strengthened partnership and shared commitment to excellence, the Provincial Government of Cavite continue to champion quality urban planning ensuring a more sustainable, resilient, and progressive future for every Caviteño. —  
**R. Tanael/ Cavite- PIO**

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### REGIONAL LEVEL MOST WANTED PERSON FOR RAPE CAPTURED BY AMADEO POLICE

**Camp BGen Pantaleon Garcia, Imus City, Cavite** — In a major breakthrough against high-profile sexual offenders, the Amadeo Municipal Police Station successfully apprehended a Regional Level Most Wanted Person in Silang, Cavite, at approximately 1:55 in the afternoon today, February 26, 2026. PMAJ JULIUS ROSALES MARQUEZ, Chief of Police of Amadeo MPS, identified the arrested suspect as alias Orestes, a resident of Silang, Cavite. The accused was apprehended by virtue of a Warrant of Arrest for the crime of RAPE with NO

BAIL recommended for his temporary liberty. PCOL ARIEL R RED, Provincial Director of the Cavite Police Provincial Office, stated, "The successful apprehension of this Regional Level Most Wanted Person is a testament to our intensified manhunt operations and our firm commitment to seeking justice for victims of heinous crimes. We will continue to track down those who think they can hide from the law, ensuring they face the full consequences of their actions to maintain a safer environment for our community."

### CITY LEVEL MOST WANTED PERSON FOR QUALIFIED THEFT ARRESTED IN GENERAL TRIAS

**Camp BGen Pantaleon Garcia, City of Imus, Cavite** -Rank No. 10 Most Wanted Person (City Level) was arrested in Brgy San Francisco, General Trias City, Cavite in the morning of February 26, 2026. PLTCOL BISMARCK S MENDOZA, Chief of Police of General Trias CCPS, identified the accused as alias KEN, presently residing at General Trias City, Cavite. He was apprehended by virtue of a Warrant of Arrest for the crime of Qualified Theft issued by the Presiding Judge of the Regional Trial Court, Fourth Judicial Region,

Branch 131, Trece Martires City, Cavite dated February 23, 2026, with bail recommended at Php 40,000.00. The accused is now detained at General Trias Bureau of Jail Management and Penology in Barangay Navarro, pending further court proceedings. Provincial Director PCOL ARIEL R RED, commended the operating team for the successful service of warrant and reiterated the office's firm stance against criminality. "Our intensified campaign against wanted persons remains relentless. This arrest demonstrates our unwavering commitment to track down individuals who attempt to evade the law. We assure the public that Cavite Police will continue to serve warrants efficiently, lawfully, and with full respect for due process. Justice will be served," he said.

### MUNICIPAL LEVEL MOST WANTED PERSON ARRESTED IN MENDEZ, CAVITE

**Camp BGen Pantaleon Garcia, City of Imus, Cavite** - In a major boost to the local campaign against wanted persons, the personnel of Mendez Municipal Police Station served a warrant of arrest against a person under police custody and listed as Most Wanted Person (municipal level) at the Station's Custodial Facility on February 25, 2026. PMAJ IVAN HOWELL B BAYLA, Officer-in-Charge of Mendez MPS, identified the accused as alias ROX, 47 and a resident of Mendez, Cavite. The warrant was served for the crime of Estafa under Criminal Case No. 4513-2026 and for Violation of PD 1096 Section 1201 issued by the Presiding Judge of the Municipal Trial Court, 4th Judicial Region, Tagaytay City,

Cavite, dated February 23, 2026, with bail fixed at Php 18,000.00 and Php 12,000.00 respectively. The accused is currently detained at the Police Station Custodial Facility pending further court proceedings. PCOL ARIEL R RED, Provincial Director stated that financial-related crimes and cyber-enabled offenses damage public trust and must be addressed firmly. He emphasized that proper documentation and lawful procedures remain the cornerstone of police operations. "We ensure that every action we take is within the bounds of the law. Accountability and due process go hand in hand in our mission to serve the people of Cavite," he said.

### PROVINCIAL LEVEL MOST WANTED PERSON FALLS IN CARMONA PNP'S TRACKER OPERATION

**Camp BGen Pantaleon Garcia, Imus City, Cavite** — In a significant achievement for the province's campaign against offenders of women and children, the Carmona Component City Police Station successfully apprehended a Provincial Level Most Wanted Person in Carmona City, Cavite, at approximately 2:00 in the afternoon today, February 26, 2026.

PLTCOL MELVIN M BALBA, Chief of Police of Carmona CCPS, identified the arrested suspect as alias Emerson, resident of Carmona City. The accused was apprehended by virtue of a Warrant of Arrest for Acts of Lasciviousness (under Art. 336 of the RPC) and Acts of Lasciviousness in relation to Sec. 5(b) of RA 7610 (Special Protection of Children Against

Abuse, Exploitation and Discrimination Act), with a total recommended bail of PHP 360,000.00. PCOL ARIEL R RED, Provincial Director of the Cavite Police Provincial Office, stated, "The arrest of this Provincial Level Most Wanted Person underscores our commitment to protecting the vulnerable members of our society, especially children. Our tracker

teams remain relentless in their mission to locate and apprehend high-profile fugitives, ensuring that no one is above the law and that justice is served for the victims."

### PROVINCIAL LEVEL MOST WANTED FOR CARNAPPING FALLS IN TAGAYTAY CITY

**Camp BGen Pantaleon Garcia, City of Imus, Cavite** - In an intensified campaign against wanted person conducted by the personnel of Silang Municipal Police Station, a Provincial Level Most Wanted Person was arrested in Tagaytay City, Cavite on February 25, 2026. PLTCOL JOSEPH D MACATANGAY, Acting Chief Police of Silang MPS identified the arrested individual as alias LIZA, presently residing at Bacoor City, Cavite. She was arrested for Violation of Republic Act 10883, otherwise known as the New Anti-Carnapping Law of the Philippines issued by the Presiding Judge of the Regional Trial Court, Branch 131, Trece Martires City, Cavite

dated June 30, 2020, with bail recommended at Php 300,000.00. PCOL ARIEL R RED, Provincial Director emphasized that no matter how long a case has been pending, the law will eventually catch up with offenders. "To those who believe they can hide from accountability, let this serve as a clear message that Cavite PPO will not stop until justice is achieved. Our personnel remain steadfast in implementing lawful orders of the court. We stand united in ensuring that law and order prevail in every corner of Cavite," the Provincial Director stated. The Cavite Police Provincial Office continues to encourage the public to cooperate with authorities and report information that may lead to the arrest of wanted individuals.

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## NATIONAL ORAL HEALTH MONTH CELEBRATION 2026: "PARA SA MALUSOG NA NGITI NG ATING MGA KAWANI"

The Provincial Government of Cavite, through the Office of the Provincial Health Officer (OPHO) – Oral Health Cluster, proudly spearheaded the observance of National Oral Health Month this February 2026 with a pioneering initiative designed to advance employee wellness and preventive health care.

In line with the provincial theme, "Para sa Malusog na Ngiti ng Ating mga Kawani," the program brought essential dental services directly to employees of the New Provincial Capitol Building, underscoring the government's commitment to safeguarding the health and productivity of its workforce.

Headed by Dr. Mary Ann G. Montenegro, the Oral Health Cluster conducted free oral prophylaxis sessions at the OPD E-REG Function Hall on February 4, 10, 18, and 24, 2026. This month-long, structured in-house dental service program marked a significant milestone as the first of its kind for Provincial Government of Cavite

(PGC) employees.

To complement the clinical services, Dr. Cristina J. Lim delivered an Oral Health Awareness Lecture, reinforcing the importance of proper oral hygiene and regular dental consultations as vital components of overall health.

The initiative was met with strong participation, benefiting a total of 418 employees, each of whom received oral health kits upon availing of the services.

This successful undertaking highlights the Provincial Government of Cavite's unwavering dedication to fostering a culture of prevention and sustaining comprehensive employee wellness programs. By championing initiatives such as this, the Provincial Government continues to set a benchmark in public service—truly embodying the spirit of "Para sa Malusog na Ngiti ng Ating mga Kawani." — **Dr. Cristina J. Lim/ Cavite-PIO**

## PGC COLLECTS 85 BLOOD BAGS IN WOC BLOODLETTING ACTIVITY

The Provincial Government of Cavite (PGC), through its Workplace Organization Committee, in partnership with the Philippine Red Cross, successfully conducted a Bloodletting Activity on February 20, at the Function Hall of the New Provincial Government Center in Trece Martires City.

The life-saving initiative brought together employees from various offices of the provincial government, resulting in the collection of 85 blood bags. The activity forms part of PGC's continuing commitment to corporate

social responsibility and community service, helping ensure an adequate and stable blood supply for patients in need.

In her message, Ms. Michelle F. Alcid, Quality Management Representative, expressed her heartfelt appreciation to all employee-donors for their willingness to extend help beyond their official duties. She emphasized that each bag of blood represents hope and a renewed chance at life for countless individuals.

Meanwhile, Ms. Adelina B. Castillo, RN, MMPA, Chapter Administrator

## CAVITE ENTREPRENEURSHIP STUDENTS CARAVAN SPARKS YOUNG BUSINESS MINDS IN AMADEO

More than 300 Grade 12 students gathered for an inspiring and knowledge-filled day during the Cavite Entrepreneurship Students Caravan dubbed "ABM BIZ Talks: Igniting the Next Generation of Entrepreneurs" held on February 23 at Amadeo Integrated High School.

The activity was facilitated by the Office of the Provincial Cooperatives Development Officer (OPCDO) headed by Ms. Myrachel P. Cuadra, as part of its continuing commitment to nurture entrepreneurial awareness among the youth of Cavite. Dr. Gloria T. Villela, Principal III – Amadeo Integrated High School warmly welcomed the participants and emphasized the importance of equipping students with practical knowledge and skills that will help them become future-ready entrepreneurs. Meanwhile, Amadeo Mayor Jose R. Domingo inspired the students through his message, encouraging them to explore business

opportunities, embrace innovation, and contribute to the local economy of Amadeo and the entire province.

Highlighting the programs and services of OPCDO, Ms. Liza Gabatan, OPCDO Entrepreneurial Division Head, presented various initiatives designed to support aspiring entrepreneurs, including cooperative development assistance, training programs, and business-related services available to Caviteños. Her presentation introduced students to opportunities they may pursue as they transition from school to the business world.

Adding depth to the learning session, Dr. Leo D. Manansala, Vice Dean – College of Professional & Graduate Studies, De La Salle University-Dasmariñas, delivered an engaging lecture on Entrepreneurial Mindset, where he discussed the importance of creativity, resilience, risk-taking, and adaptability in building successful ventures. He encouraged students to shift their perspective from merely seeking employment to becoming job creators in the future.

An open forum followed the discussion, allowing students to actively participate by raising questions and sharing insights. The interactive exchange created a dynamic learning environment and further strengthened the students' understanding of entrepreneurship.

Through the initiative, the Provincial Government of Cavite continues to empower the next generation—igniting passion, building confidence, and shaping young Caviteños into future entrepreneurs ready to take on the challenges of the modern business landscape. — **OPIO**

## EDITORIAL

### Ang Pandemya ng Kasinungalingan sa Digital na Panahon

Sa bawat pindot ng ating mga daliri sa screen ng cellphone, tila nasa dulo na natin ang lahat ng kaalaman sa mundo. Ngunit sa likod ng kislap ng teknolohiya, isang madilim na katotohanan ang mabilis na kumakalat. Hindi lang ito simpleng tsismis sa kanto. Ito ay naging isang sopistikadong sandata na sumisira sa reputasyon, lumilinlang sa masa, at bumubuwag sa pundasyon ng ating demokrasya. Pinapalalim nito ang galit sa pagitan ng mga magkakaibang panig, kaya imbes na magtulungan, tayo ay nag-aaway-away dahil sa mga gawa-gawang kwento. Huwag basta-basta maniwala sa clickbait na headlines. Suriin ang pinagmulan kung ang mga impormasyon ay galing sa isang kagalang-galang at mapagkakatiwalaan na organisasyon o sa isang blog.

Ang pagiging mapanuri ay isang obligasyon. Sa mundong puno ng ingay at kasinungalingan, ang pagpili sa katotohanan ang pinakamabisang sandata upang protektahan ang ating bayan.

## CAVITE GAZETTE PUBLISHING

**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*

Ang CAVITE GAZETTE PUBLISHING ay inilalathala tuwing araw ng Martes na may tanggapan sa 217 Ligas 1, Bacoor City Cavite.

Contact #: 09954361217

Email: cavitegazette@gmail.com

**PAUNAWA:** Ang dyaryong ito ay natanggap ng kontribusyon na balita, artikulo sariling pananaw o opinyon ng mga kolumnista ang nilalaman ng kanilang mga artikulo ay wala pong kinalaman at pananagutan dito ang pamunuan ng publishing

**ADVERTISING RATES**  
**COMMERCIAL - - - - - P200/col.cm**  
**LEGAL NOTICES - - - P160/col.cm**

## DSWD REPORTS SIGNIFICANT PEACE, DEV'T GAINS IN 2025

**MANILA**—The Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD), through its Peace and Development Buong Bansa Mapayapa-National Program Management Office (PDBBM-NPMO), reported significant gains in its peace and reintegration initiatives during the DSWD media forum on Thursday.

Director Miramel Laxa of the DSWD's PDBBM-NPMO presented the program's 2025 accomplishments, highlighting the department's strengthened social case management for Former Members of Non-State Armed Groups (FMNSAGs).

Laxa said the program has reached 27,432 FMNSAGs or 84.88 percent of its target, including 24,912 former Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) members.

She said that under the direction of Secretary Rex Gatchalian, the DSWD seeks to ensure that these ex-combatants receive proper assistance and prevent them from returning to their former armed groups.

"The instruction of Secretary Gatchalian is to case manage these former members of non-state armed groups. Meaning that after we give them initial intervention, there is continuous follow through nang sa ganoon ay mas makita natin kung ano pa yung kanilang pangangailangan at masiguro na hindi na talaga sila babalik doon sa kabilang grupo (so that we can better see what their other needs are and ensure that they won't return to the other side)," Laxa told reporters.

Laxa said inter-agency cooperation plays a huge part in these social case management efforts to ensure the successful reintegration of every single FMNSAG.

"We will see to it na maibibigay pa rin yung other needs nila (that their other needs are met), which is outside the DSWD programs and services. Kaya nga po iyong ating referral pathway ay talagang pinaigting natin nang sa ganon, yung iba pa nilang pangangailangan ay matugunan ng gobyerno (That's why we intensified our referral pathways to

ensure that their other needs are provided by the government)," she added. Based on the PDBBM database, Laxa said a portion of these FMNSAGs have already been integrated into the Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (4Ps), with more expected to qualify under updated targeting systems.

Aside from the 4Ps, she reported that under the MILF Normalization Program, the PDBBM served 16,039 beneficiaries in 2025, which is equivalent to 101.05 percent of its target.

This was made possible through various interventions such as cash-for-work (CFW), provision of seed capital fund (SCF), as well as educational assistance.

A total of PHP450,000 worth of grants were also disbursed to former members of the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF), covering 71.4 percent of the 2025 target.

For its PAYapa at MASaganang PamayaNAn (PAMANA) program, all 511 targeted PAMANA Livelihood Program Associations (PLPAs) successfully received their SCF.

Laxa said assessments are ongoing to expand assistance beyond the current limits to further strengthen household-level support for former rebels.

"At the moment, in terms of the educational assistance, isang anak pa lang nila ang pwede nating ma-extend ng assistance. We are still looking for funding source na kung saan mas maibibigay pa natin yung kanilang mga pangangailangan (we can only extend assistance to one child. We are still looking for funding sources where we can better meet their needs)," she said.

"Kaya ang naging instruction ngayon sa atin ni (That's why the instruction to us by) Sec. Rex, including when we had the meeting at Malacañang with Special Assistant to the President (Antonio) Lagdameo, is to further assess the needs of the whole household ng ating mga (of our) FMNSAGs."

Circling back to the social case management service, Laxa said the DSWD is looking to expand its coverage beyond

## PCG SACKS, SUSPENDS PERSONNEL AFTER MV TRISHA KERSTIN 3 SINKING PROBE

**MANILA** — The Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) on Thursday announced the sacking, suspension, and other penalties meted out to several PCG personnel and officers following an investigation into the sinking of passenger ferry MV Trisha Kerstin 3 in Basilan.

The investigation and administrative proceedings were carried out by the Coast Guard Inspector General and Internal Affairs Service (CGIG-IAS).

Four enlisted personnel making up the Pre-Departure Inspection (PDI) Team responsible for MV Trisha Kerstin 3 were given "dismissal without honor"—Petty Officer (PO) 1 Sabhal Turaini, PO3 Khalid Asmawil, PO3 Al-Yazar Muyong, and ASW Mar-lya Anawie.

These four personnel were dismissed due to their failure to independently verify the actual number of the ship's passengers and to properly document the "load line markings"

Zamboanga Peninsula, Northern Mindanao, and Central Mindanao by institutionalizing the PAMANA program. She said case management of FMNSAGs will expand to the Cordilleras, Cagayan Valley, Negros Island Region, Western Visayas, and Eastern Visayas where the Communist Party of the Philippines-New People's Army (CPP-NPA) is concentrated.

When asked by members of the media whether the department faced difficulties engaging with FMNSAGs, Laxa highlighted the strength of inter-agency collaboration and the DSWD's commitment to assisting former rebels.

"Hindi po kami nahirapan pumasok sa mga areas nila kasi they recognize na serious po ang DSWD (We don't find it difficult in going to their areas because they recognize that the DSWD is serious), in particular, in providing the assistance to them. I think that is the beauty of our inter-agency efforts," she said. (PNA) BY JOSE CIELITO REGANIT

of MV Trisha Kerstin 3 — all critical in ensuring safe sailing.

On the other hand, PO3 Jestoni Barretto—who was at Duty Office Watch during the incident—was given a "one rank demotion" due to his lack of care and neglecting his duty.

On the other hand, PCG Zamboanga Station Lieutenant Commander Tristan Jener Erediano and acting Station Commander Lieutenant Jason Pagbonocan were given "one year suspension without pay."

Both were also ordered to undergo mandatory retraining on the proper regulations of ship inspection, the effective supervision of PDI teams, and operations management.

In a statement, PCG Spokesperson Captain Noemie Cayabyab said the publication of the decision emphasizes the agency's disapproval of any rule violations on safety at sea. "Patuloy palalakasin ang mga mekanismo ng inspeksyon, pangangasiwa,

at pagsasanay ng mga tauhan upang matiyak ang kaligtasan ng publiko sa dagat at serbisyo publiko (We will continue to improve the mechanism of inspections, management, and personnel training to ensure the safety of the public at sea and to improve public service)," Cayabyab said.

Final underwater inspection

On the other hand, the PCG Technical Diving Group held its final underwater operation at the site of the sunken MV Trisha Kerstin 3 off Baluk-Baluk Island in Basilan.

After the final sweep of five technical divers, no additional bodies were recovered from the shipwreck.

To date, the PCG has recorded 65 fatalities, 293 survivors, and 14 persons still missing based on joint validation efforts of the Philippine National Police-Scene of the Crime Operatives, City Disaster Risk Reduction

## HOUSE FAST TRACKS NAT'L WAGE BILL, EYES REG'L WAGE BOARDS ABOLITION

**MANILA** — House Speaker Faustino "Bojie" Dy III has ordered the fast tracking of a sweeping overhaul of the country's wage system, consolidating key bills that would establish a single national minimum wage and abolish the Regional Tripartite Wages and Productivity Boards.

The consolidated measure pulls together several proposals pending before the Committee on Labor and Employment, authored by lawmakers across party lines.

The broad backing signals serious momentum behind restructuring how wages are set nationwide.

Dy directed that the consolidated bill be included in the plenary agenda for discussion next week and committed for the House to tackle the measure immediately, to secure its passage by Labor Day, according to a news release on Thursday. "I fought for higher wages during my time as Governor

of Isabela," Dy said. "We owe our workers a fair and unified wage system, and the House will act on this." Under the proposal, wage-setting authority would shift to the National Wages and Productivity Commission, replacing the current regional boards.

The plan adopts a phased approach, with the initial national minimum wage set no lower than the prevailing rate in the National Capital Region.

It also provides transition support mechanisms to help affected sectors adjust.

If enacted, the reform would narrow long-standing regional wage gaps and establish a clearer national wage floor for workers across the country.

With plenary debate set for next week and a Labor Day target in sight, Dy has sent a clear signal: wage reform is moving, and the House intends to deliver. (PNA) BY JOSE CIELITO REGANIT

## AFP MONITORING SCARBOROUGH SHOAL FOR RECLAMATION ACTIVITIES

**MANILA** — A ranking naval official said the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) is using all means possible to monitor Scarborough Shoal (also known as Bajo de Masinloc) in the West Philippine Sea (WPS) to ensure that no illegal or reclamation activities are taking place in the vital waterway.

"Yung (the) AFP, we use all sources of information. All sensors available to us. Sea-based, land-based, air-based, and even space-based. We have regular patrols by sea and by air," Philippine Navy (PN) spokesperson for the WPS Rear Admiral Roy Vincent Trinidad said during an interview with reporters late Wednesday.

Trinidad was reacting to

and Management Office, Coast Guard District Southwestern Mindanao, and the affected families. (PNA) BY RAYMOND CARL DELA CRUZ

questions on whether the PN or AFP has monitored any reclamation or construction activities in Scarborough Shoal which lies around 124 nautical miles away from Zambales. The PN official said the military can easily deploy aircraft or naval vessels to confirm such claims.

"There are different indicators that would tell us kung may mga nag-uumpisa nang (if they have started) reclamation activities on Bajo de Masinloc. So far, what we have monitored ay 'yung mga buya lamang nila, (and) yung tali na pinangharang sa entrance (are the buoys they have placed and the towline they have installed in the entrance of Scarborough Shoal)," Trinidad added.

Also monitored are ships from China's People's Liberation Army Navy and its Coast Guard.

Meanwhile, Trinidad said the communication interference experienced by Philippine naval and air patrols in the WPS happens when Filipino ships and aircraft get near Chinese vessels or artificial islands. (PNA) BY PRIAM NEPOMUCENO

## PDEA, BOC FORGE PACT VS. DRUG SMUGGLING

**MANILA** – The Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency (PDEA) and the Bureau of Customs (BOC) have renewed their partnership to prevent the entry of illegal drugs and controlled precursors and essential chemicals (CPECs) into the country.

The two agencies formalized the partnership through a memorandum of agreement (MOA) signed Thursday in Quezon City by PDEA Director General Undersecretary Isagani Nerez and BOC Commissioner Ariel Nepomuceno.

Under the MOA, the two agencies will enhance operational coordination through advanced information-sharing, integrated systems and joint efforts targeting the smuggling, importation, transportation and transshipment of dangerous drugs and CPECs.

"This agreement sends a clear message to drug syndicates: our ports are

not safe havens for drug trafficking. By combining PDEA's expertise with BOC's border control capabilities, we are determined to intercept illegal drugs before they reach our communities," Nerez said.

The MOA also emphasized digital innovation as a cornerstone of border security, with both agencies implementing integrated databases, pre-shipment inspection systems, and modernized scanning facilities.

A central feature of the partnership is the establishment of a Drug Interdiction Task Group, designed to foster closer collaboration between PDEA and BOC.

The task group will oversee intelligence exchange, joint investigation of suspected drug smuggling activities and sharing of best practices and operational expertise. **(PNA) BY CHRISTOPHER LLOYD CALIWAN**

## LGUS DELIGHTED OVER CLASSROOM CONSTRUCTION PARTNERSHIP WITH DEPED

**MANILA** – The Department of Education (DepEd) on Wednesday disclosed positive feedback from local government units (LGUs) over their participation in the Nationwide Classroom Building Program.

Education Secretary Sonny Angara made the statement shortly after the DepEd sealed a partnership with LGUs nationwide, alongside the launch of public-private partnerships (PPPs) in a unified effort to speed up the construction of classrooms in line with President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr.'s directive to address classroom backlogs.

"Tuwang-tuwa ang ating mga LGUs (The LGUs are really happy), if I'm not mistaken, kasi si Pangulo talaga, sabi niya (because

the President said) let's empower the local government. Instead of asking them to do things, let's be true partners," he told the Philippine News Agency in an ambush interview at Malinta Elementary School in Valenzuela City.

Unlike the centralized system, he said the partnership will help expedite the delivery of classrooms, considering the actual capacity of the local government.

"The LGUs have a lot of expertise, alam nila saan iyong lupa, alam nila araw-araw, may engineering department sila. May capacity sila (they know where the land is, every day, and they have an engineering department. They have the capacity),"

## PAG-IBIG INVESTMENT INCOME JUMPS TO P9.43B IN 2025, ASSETS HIT P1.23T

**MANILA** – Pag-IBIG Fund's investment income rose nearly 50 percent to PHP9.43 billion in 2025, bolstering the agency's financial position and supporting affordable home financing and growing member savings.

In a news release on Wednesday, the state-run home lender said the stronger earnings lifted its overall financial standing, with total assets reaching PHP1.23 trillion as of end-2025.

Its gross investment portfolio climbed to PHP190.13 billion, up PHP55.27 billion, or 41 percent, from year-end 2024.

A significant portion of the portfolio was invested in government securities, while the remainder was placed in time deposits, corporate bonds and preferred shares.

Officials said these instruments are subjected to rigorous review and established safeguards.

Department of Human Settlements and Urban Development Secretary Jose Ramon Aliling, who also chairs the Pag-IBIG Fund Board of Trustees, said the agency's investment growth reflects its commitment to responsible stewardship of members' savings.

"Through sound governance and prudent financial management, we continue to strengthen Pag-IBIG Fund's financial position and secure its long-term stability. This

Angara said.

Under the first-time national-to-local partnership, mechanisms across local governments will be unified to help fast-track processes for classroom construction.

For its part, the DepEd Central Office will download funds to support local construction projects. According to DepEd, the country has a backlog of about 165,000 classrooms. **(PNA) BY STEPHANIE SEVILLANO**

allows us to grow our members' savings, deliver competitive returns, and sustain affordable home loans under the Expanded 4PH program," Aliling said. Of the agency's total assets, housing-related assets accounted for PHP922.07 billion, while PHP96.41 billion were in short-term loans.

Income-generating investments totaled PHP190 billion, with the remaining PHP25.98 billion in other assets such as property and equipment, cash, and intangible assets.

Pag-IBIG Fund Chief Executive Officer Marilene Acosta said investment decisions are undertaken within a strong governance framework designed to protect members' savings. "All our investments are lawful, prudent, and fully compliant with our internal protocols and Board-granted authorities, with regular reporting to the Board to ensure transparency and accountability," Acosta said.

She assured members that funds are managed with safety and sustainability in mind.

Stronger investment income supports the agency's mandate to provide competitive dividends while sustaining housing and short-term loan programs nationwide, she added.

Under its charter, Pag-IBIG Fund returns at least 70 percent of its annual net income to members as dividends.

In 2024, it declared dividend rates of 6.60 percent for Regular Savings and 7.10 percent for Modified Pag-IBIG 2 (MP2) Savings, which is the highest since the pandemic.

The agency is expected to announce its 2025 dividend rates on Friday.

Pag-IBIG Fund said it remains focused on growing members' savings while keeping home financing accessible to more Filipino families. **(PNA) BY MA. TERESA MONTEMAYOR**

## PROPOSED OPEN FINANCE BILL TO ADDRESS INEQUITIES IN EDUCATION SECTOR

**MANILA** – The Tingog Party-list on Wednesday expressed its full support for the immediate passage of the proposed Philippine Open Finance Act, joining the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas (BSP) and leaders in the financial technology sector in advancing a reform aimed at broadening access to financial services for millions of Filipinos – including students, faculty and personnel in higher education institutions nationwide.

Tingog Party-list Rep. Jude Acidre, chairperson of the House Committee on Higher and Technical Education, said open finance is not merely a financial sector reform but also a structural reform that addresses inequities long felt in the education sector. "Financial inclusion is educational inclusion. When students, teachers, and university personnel gain fair access to credit, savings, insurance, and digital financial platforms, we remove structural barriers that limit their ability to pursue education, research, innovation, and professional advancement," Acidre said in a statement.

The BSP has emphasized that open finance will promote transparent, customer-centric and interoperable financial services.

Stakeholders in the fintech sector have likewise called for a clear statutory framework that enables secure, consumer-authorized data sharing to unlock more responsive and competitive financial products.

The proposed measure establishes a secure, interoperable system for consent-driven financial data sharing. It codifies consumer data rights, mandates the use of secure application programming interfaces (APIs), and promotes competition

and innovation while safeguarding data privacy and security.

Acidre said the higher education community stands to benefit significantly.

Through the measure, students may gain access to education loans, digital wallets, micro-savings, and insurance products—even without traditional banking history; faculty and researchers may access fair credit and financial tools to support academic work, innovation, and professional development; non-teaching personnel, many of whom remain financially underserved, can build credit profiles and access affordable financial services; and state universities and colleges (SUCs) can adopt more efficient systems for scholarships, stipends, payroll, and broader financial inclusion initiatives.

Acidre said the proposed law incorporates strong safeguards consistent with the Constitution and the Data Privacy Act, ensuring that consumer consent, control, and protection remain central to implementation.

"Para sa Tingog Party-list, ang Open Finance Act ay batas ng pagkakataon at pagkakapantay-pantay. Nakikiisa kami sa Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas at sa fintech sector sa pagsusulong ng makabago at inklusibong sistemang pinansyal. Kapag mas inklusibo ang pananalapi, mas nagiging inklusibo rin ang edukasyon – at ito ang diwa ng Bagong Pilipinas (For Tingog Party-list, the Open Finance Act is a law on equal opportunity. We are on with the BSP and the fintech sector in pushing for a modern and inclusive financial system. If finance is inclusive, education will also be inclusive – and this is the spirit of the New Philippines)," Acidre said. **(PNA) BY JOSE CIELITO REGANIT**

## PANAGBENGA TO HIGHLIGHT BAGUIO'S EVOLUTION FROM 1990 EARTHQUAKE

**BAGUIO CITY** – Organizers of the Baguio Flower Festival will feature a special presentation during the street dancing parade highlighting the city's evolution and its resilience following the devastation of the 1990 earthquake, officials announced Thursday.

Evangeline Payno, chief of staff of the executive committee under the Baguio Flower Festival Foundation Inc. (BFFFI), said the presentation will showcase five important eras: the early years of Baguio, the 1990 earthquake that reduced the city to rubble, the birth of Panagbenga, the city's inclusion as a UNESCO Creative City, and the 30th Panagbenga festival.

"This presentation will only happen this year in celebration of our 30th anniversary," said BFFFI President Federico Alquiros.

Performers from the University of Baguio, Baguio City National High School special program for the arts, Saint Louis University Laboratory Senior High School, and the University of the Philippines-Baguio will take part.

For the first time, a 1,500-square-meter

artificial turf has been laid on Melvin Jones Football field to protect performers' feet and allow them to move freely, addressing past concerns about stones hurting dancers.

"We are listening and this is one of the things that we have wanted to do and we have it now. We will store it after the parades for use again next year," said Anthony de Leon, chairman of the BFFFI executive committee.

De Leon emphasized that Baguio's youth remain the core performers — street dancers, drum and lyre and cultural dancers — proving strong community participation. Barangays are also participating in a landscaping competition. Unlike other festivals, Panagbenga runs on private funds with support from corporations and volunteers, without government subsidies.

Meanwhile, Mayor Benjamin Magalong issued an executive order suspending classes in all levels in Baguio on Saturday, citing road closures and clogged roads due to thousands watching and participating in the street dancing parade. **(PNA) BY LIZA AGOOT**

## DICT URGES ILOCOS MSMEs TO ADOPT AI TOOLS FOR BUSINESS GROWTH

**LAOAG CITY** – The Department of Information and Communications Technology is urging micro, small and medium enterprise owners to level up their digital skills and boost their businesses by maximizing free artificial intelligence tools, an official said Thursday.

Undersecretary Faye Condez-De Guzman, speaking in a press conference in the Ilocos Region, said AI tools can save time, cut operational costs and improve business operations.

"Let us use AI for our benefit. Let us integrate it in our business as AI is ready to use," she said in

an interview.

According to DICT, AI is now being adopted across the supply chain for product design, market research, marketing, documentation and logistics.

In response to President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr.'s directive to make AI a tool for progress, DICT has been conducting regional campaigns to promote AI for inclusive growth, particularly among MSMEs.

The agency also announced an AI summit to be held in Clark, Pampanga this year, to be attended by digital ministers from ASEAN countries and private partners to

**LAOAG CITY** – The Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) in Ilocos Norte announced Thursday the opening of a free online business mentorship program for registered business owners in the province.

The Kapatid Mentor Me Program (KMMe), a flagship DTI initiative under the Negosyo-Kapatid Project, is open to individuals at least 18 years old who manage a team or have operated a business for at least one year.

Maricor Racela, senior trade industry development specialist and trade promotions officer of DTI-Ilocos Norte, said the program consists of 10 modules providing weekly learning sessions and guidance from experienced business mentors.

"The program is designed to empower MSMEs (micro, small and medium enterprises) by providing access to the 3Ms — Mentorship, Money, and Market. It aims to help entrepreneurs strengthen their operation, improve financial management, enhance marketing strategies, and grow their business sustainably," DTI said in a statement.

Racela said applications for the 2026 batch are now open, with the first batch accepting registrations until March 13. Applicants

will undergo screening and evaluation. Interested parties may register at <https://tinyurl.com/R1-KMME-MME-Registration>.

The program follows a "big brother-small brother" concept, allowing mentees to learn strategies on marketing, finance, human resources, and operations management. On the 11th week, mentees present their business development plans before graduating. Hundreds of business owners have graduated from the program since its 2017 launch in the province.

Mary Grace Lamug, a 2025 KMMe graduate and co-owner of Enrique's Great Mulberry Farm in Bacarra, shared her experience: "Through KMMe, I developed an entrepreneurial mindset and gained valuable knowledge in marketing, product development, financial management, and business planning. The mentoring sessions guided me in improving our operations, strengthening our branding, and making better business decisions." **(PNA) BY LEILANIE ADRIANO**

## DTI-ILOCOS NORTE OPENS FREE ONLINE BIZ MENTORSHIP PROGRAM

## CONVENTION TO OPEN MARKET LINKAGE FOR ILOILO CITY FARMERS

**ILOILO CITY** – A two-day convention here starting Thursday is looking to link farmers from this highly urbanized city with hotels, restaurants and other establishments as their market.

City Agriculturist Iñigo Garingalao said the first Farmer's Congress, organized by the local government and More Electric and Power Corp. (MORE Power) and participated by farmer leaders, was conceptualized to raise awareness that Iloilo City still has agricultural areas. "We want to revive talks on how our high-end hotels and restaurants can get their ingredients directly from our farmers," he said in an interview.

He said among the challenges they need to tackle are the volume and quality of products, payment schemes and delivery, among others.

"The result that we would like to happen is, of course, it will add to their livelihood, it will afford us fresher vegetables," Garingalao said.

This initiative will also guide the City Agriculturist Office and the Department

of Agriculture on the kind of intervention they should provide.

Iloilo City has close to 250 hectares of farming area, planted with either rice or vegetables or both, or into integrated farming.

More than 200 of the over 500 farmers in the city are into vegetable farming. The number of vegetable farmers increases at the onset of summer or "ber" months.

MORE Power chief operating officer Paul Almedilla, in his message, cited the thriving and growing agricultural sector in the city.

He said that their support for farmers began during their early days, starting with seed donations.

"Through the linkage of farmers like the Iloilo Hotels, Restaurants and Resorts Association, we hope to build together a stronger farm-to-table linkage and be able to assist and contribute in sustaining Iloilo City's distinction as a UNESCO Creative City of Gastronomy," he said.

The gathering coincided with the regular Mercado Lokal, a venue where local farmers sell their produce twice a month. **(PNA) BY PERLA LENA**

## ANIMALS IN NEGROS ORIENTAL FREE FROM FOOT AND MOUTH DISEASE

**DUMAGUETE CITY** – The Provincial Veterinary Office (PVO) in Negros Oriental said on Thursday that animals in the province remain free from foot and mouth disease (FMD).

PVO spokesperson Jaymar Vilos told the Philippine News Agency in an interview that FMD in animals is different from the hand, foot, and mouth disease (HFMD) in humans.

The statement comes as the Provincial Health Office (PHO) reported HFMD cases in Negros Oriental, mostly among young children.

As of Feb. 21, a total of 31 HFMD cases in humans with zero deaths were reported in the province, a PHO report said.

Vilos said based on the World Animal Health Information System, "it

turns out that FMD from animals and HFMD from humans are significantly different, and the transmission of FMD from animals to humans is very rare."

He assured the public that it is safe to eat meat from cloven-footed animals, such as pigs, cattle, and goats, which are usually susceptible to FMD, as there are no cases of the animal disease in the province.

The PVO said it undertakes continuous monitoring and surveillance in the province to ensure that animals vulnerable to FMD are not infected with the disease.

Blood sample screening of these animals is also carried out regularly. At the same time, those to be transported outside of the province must obtain certification from the PVO

that they are not sick with any diseases, including FMD.

Border checkpoints are also established to inspect documents accompanying animals being transported to the province.

Meanwhile, Vilos said he believes the human-to-human transmission of HFMD cases in Negros Oriental may have started from an "imported case" or an infected person who came to the province.

Health authorities in Negros Oriental urged the public to observe proper hygiene, specifically frequent hand washing before eating.

The HFMD is a highly contagious viral illness that is transmitted from one person to another through respiratory droplets, close contact, and fecal matter. **(PNA) BY MARY JUDALINE PARTLOW**

## DOE REQUIRES ENERGY STORAGE SYSTEMS FOR NEW 10-MW RENEWABLE PLANTS

**MANILA** – All prospective variable renewable energy (VRE) plants with at least 10 megawatts (MW) capacity must now integrate an energy storage system (ESS) under new rules from the Department of Energy (DOE).

The requirement follows Department Circular No. DC2026-02-0008, which updates the ESS policy framework.

"The updated framework advances the government's commitment to a just energy transition by supporting ESS deployment and ensuring its systematic integration in both grid-connected and off-grid areas, enabling higher renewable energy penetration while preserving power quality and system reliability," the DOE said in a news release Thursday.

The DOE added that ESS installations are encouraged "to include grid-support capabilities,

including but not limited to grid-forming (GFM) inverters that help stabilize voltage and frequency."

These capabilities, it said, "are intended to mitigate the inherent variability of renewable output, enable optimized dispatch, minimize generation losses, and strengthen the grid's ability to maintain power quality, reliability, and overall system stability."

"Energy storage is not only about storing surplus energy, it is about strengthening the grid's capability to absorb more renewable while maintaining reliability," Energy Secretary Sharon Garin said.

"This policy ensures that ESS integration becomes part of system planning and project development, supporting better outcomes for consumers," she added. **(PNA) BY JOANN VILLANUEVA**

## PH TO SIGN 25 DEV'T ASSISTANCE LOANS FROM JAPAN, KOREA, FRANCE

**MANILA** – The Philippines, through the Department of Finance, is set to sign 25 official development assistance (ODA) agreements with other countries, Finance Secretary Frederick Go said Thursday.

"What's obvious to us now are actually 10 ODA loans from Japan, 10 pipeline loans from Korea, and five loans from France. These three totals 25 ODA loan agreements with a total value of USD10.3 billion," Go said at a briefing at the Social Security System office.

Separate DOF data showed 10 pipeline ODAs worth USD2.29 billion are targeted for signing within Japan Fiscal Year 2026, which ends March 2027. Ten ODAs worth USD6.2 billion and five ODAs worth USD1.83 billion are targeted for signing this year.

ODA refers to loans or grants aimed at promoting sustainable social and economic development, contracted with foreign governments that maintain diplomatic, trade, or bilateral agreements with

the Philippines.

As of end-2024, the country's total ODA portfolio rose 6 percent to USD39.61 billion, comprising 92 project loans, 19 program loans and 315 grants.

The government is exploring alternative funding as the Philippines becomes less reliant on ODA.

"We will be less reliant on concessional loans once the country moves into an upper-middle class. So we will have to find other sources of financing," Go said.

"For major projects like infrastructure, climate change, energy, and agriculture, I think we will become more reliant on PPP (Public-Private Partnership) projects which is why we are pushing for the PPP law for the past two years...with our 200 plus infra projects that are being offered for PPP, that will have to become the alternative to the concessional loans," he added.

Go, meanwhile, said the Asian-Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB)

## DOE AUTHORIZES TRANSCO TO FAST-TRACK PRIORITY TRANSMISSION PROJECTS

**MANILA** – The Department of Energy (DOE) has designated the National Transmission Corporation (TransCo) to lead the planning, financing and construction of priority transmission projects.

In a news release on Wednesday, the DOE said Department Circular No. DC2026-02-0007 authorizes TransCo to ensure timely implementation and prevent delays in the installation and completion of the priority projects.

Priority projects are those aligned with the Philippine Energy Plan and long-term energy security; those that support generation, interconnection, and demand growth; and/or those delayed by interventions.

The DOE warned that delays in transmission facilities "can hinder the alignment of generation and grid development programs, constrain the timely entry of new capacity, and weaken investor confidence."

The DOE said "TransCo may engage one or more government agencies, government-owned and -controlled corporations (GOCCs), or qualified private entities to implement Priority Projects on their behalf" through competitive bidding, unsolicited

is looking at funding two projects this year.

"I actually met with the AIIB representatives yesterday and they are looking at two projects for 2026. The first one is the Luzon Digital Connectivity. I believe that should be half a billion dollars," he said.

The AIIB is also considering a USD150-million loan for the Manila Sponge City project.

"So those are the two that they are looking at but not certain yet, still discussing with the AIIB, DICT (Department of Information and Communications Technology), and MMDA (Metropolitan Manila Development Authority). The cooperation with AIIB continues to be robust," Go said. **(PNA) BY ANNA LEAH GONZALES**

proposals subject to Swiss Challenge, or partnership arrangements.

The Energy Regulatory Commission (ERC) was tasked to issue the regulatory framework to ensure clear and predictable processes.

"Transmission readiness is a prerequisite for meaningful progress in the energy transition," Energy Secretary Sharon Garin said.

"By establishing a clear framework for priority projects, anchored on accountability, transparency, and stronger coordination, this policy is expected to enable the timely delivery of grid facilities needed to integrate new capacity, reinforce reliability, and sustain investor confidence in the Philippine power sector," she added. **(PNA) BY JOANN VILLANUEVA**

## FOREIGN FIRM EYES EV MANUFACTURING IN PH – ECONOMIC EXECS

**MANILA** – A foreign firm manufacturing electric vehicles (EVs) is considering a "substantial investment" in the Philippines, which is expected to boost manufacturing and clean energy adoption.

This was disclosed by Department of Finance Secretary Frederick Go in his speech during the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Editors and Economic Opinion Leaders forum in Makati City on Tuesday.

Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) Secretary Ma. Cristina Roque, in a sideline interview, declined to name the firm or reveal discussion details.

"Maganda 'yung discussions (The discussions are great)," she said. "But I can't say exactly how much. But once we have it, we'll put it out. We're still in talks."

Asked if the investment

## GOV'T, UNIONBANK INK MOA TO STRENGTHEN DIGITAL TAX PAYMENT SYSTEM

**MANILA** – The Bureau of Internal Revenue (BIR), Bureau of the Treasury (BTr) and UnionBank have signed a memorandum of agreement (MOA) to integrate UnionBank's UPay Facility into the national collection system. In a statement Wednesday, BIR said the partnership aims to provide taxpayers with expanded and more convenient web- and mobile-based channels for the payment of taxes and other government obligations.

The partnership also aims to further enhance efficiency, transparency and security in electronic tax payments while ensuring timely remittances and accurate collection records.

The MOA, signed on Tuesday at the UnionBank Plaza in Pasig City, consolidates previous agreements covering UnionBank's role as an

Authorized Agent Bank for the collection and remittance of National Internal Revenue Taxes and Customs Duties.

BIR Commissioner Charlito Martin Mendoza said the agreement forms part of the bureau's continuing modernization efforts to improve taxpayer experience and strengthen revenue administration. "The UPay Facility provides taxpayers with enhanced web and mobile options to settle their obligations, reducing the need for in-person queues and manual processing," Mendoza said.

"Sa madaling salita, pinapadali natin ang pagbabayad ng buwis (In short, we're making paying taxes easier). And when the process is easier, trust grows and voluntary compliance becomes stronger," he added.

Mendoza said the initiative supports the directive of President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. to raise service excellence across government, and aligns with the Department of Finance's economic reform agenda.

UnionBank President and CEO Ana Maria Aboitiz Delgado, meanwhile, said the bank aims to provide accessible and secure payment channels that support national development.

"Under this supplemental agreement, UnionBank will continue to provide multiple ways for taxpayers to fulfill their obligations — through over-the-counter payments in our branches, digital banking channels, and UPay leveraging InstaPay, PCHC, PayGate, and other electronic payment rails," Delgado said.

Treasurer of the Philippines Sharon Almanza cited the importance of digital transformation in strengthening public financial management and improving taxpayer access to government services.

"Through this Memorandum of Agreement and the UPay Facility, we are introducing secure, convenient and cost-effective digital payment solutions that will help accelerate remittances and enhance transparency," Almanza said. **(PNA) BY ANNA LEAH GONZALES**



## FILIPINO IM BEATS INDIAN RIVAL IN PACQUIAO INTERNATIONAL OPEN CHESS

**MANILA** – Filipino International Master (IM) Christian Gian Karlo Arca on Thursday defeated Indian Grandmaster Pa Iniyon to gain a share of second place after six rounds in the Manny Pacquiao International Open at the Family Country Hotel in General Santos City.

The Zamboanga City-based Arca now has 4.5 points, the same score of Bulgarian GM Arkadij Naiditsch, Singaporean GM Tin Jingyao, Filipino IM Chito Garma, Swiss GM Peng Li Min, Swedish GMs Vitaly Sivuk and Platon Galperin and Indian GM Visakh N R.

"I hope I can sustain the momentum," said Arca,

who split the points with top seed Norwegian GM Johan-Sebastian Christiansen in the fourth round before beating compatriot Sherwin Tiu in the fifth.

Indonesian GM Novendra Priasmoro settled for a draw with Indian GM

Visakh N R to remain on top with 5.0 points.

Organized by Pacman Chess Association, the five-day Standard (90 minutes plus 30 seconds increment time control format) event offers USD20,000 to the champion. (PNA) **BY JEAN MALANUM**



International Master Christian Gian Karlo Arca (Contributed photo)

## PH TO HOST INAUGURAL U19 ASIAN SEPAK TAKRAW CHAMPIONSHIP

**MANILA** – The Philippines will host the inaugural U19 Asian Sepak Takraw Championship on Nov. 18 to 25 at the historic Rizal Memorial Coliseum in Manila.

More than 600 athletes from 12 to 16 countries are expected to join the tournament featuring regu, quad and mixed quadrant events.

"We are very honored to host this event, this is big and special because we take so much pride in hosting," said Pilipinas Sepak Takraw president Karen Caballero during a press conference at the Rizal Memorial Sports Complex Wednesday.

Also present were Philippine Sports Commission (PSC) chairperson John Patrick Gregorio and commissioner Walter Torres, and Asian Sepak Takraw Federation deputy secretary general Muhammad Fariq.

"If there is an opportunity to help promote sepak

takraw, let's do it," said Gregorio.

The PSC has supported the country's successful hosting of the FIFA Women's Futsal World Cup and FIVB Men's Volleyball World Championships last

year and the WTA 125 Women's Open tennis last month.

"This tournament is a start, it is a career path for future superstars," said Fariq. (PNA) **BY JEAN MALANUM**



SEPAK TAKRAW TILT. Pilipinas Sepak Takraw President Karen Caballero (2nd from left) talks about the hosting of the inaugural U19 Asian Championships during a press conference at the Rizal Memorial Sports Complex on Wednesday (Feb. 25, 2026). With her (from left) are Philippine Sports Commission commissioner Walter Torres, chairperson John Patrick Gregorio and Asian Sepak Takraw Federation secretary general Muhammad Fariq. (PNA photo by Jean Malanum)

## SAN BEDA, SAN SEBASTIAN TRIUMPH IN NCAA WOMEN'S VOLLEYBALL

**MANILA** – San Beda University defeated Lyceum of the Philippines University, 25-14, 25-19, 25-16, in the NCAA Season 101 volleyball tournament at the San Andres Sports Complex on Wednesday.

Jeliane May Catubig finished with 14 points, seven digs, and seven excellent receptions while Janelle Bachar had 13 points built on 11 attacks and two blocks as the Lady Red Spikers improved to an 8-2 record in Group B.

San Beda coach Emilio "Kung Fu" Reyes was surprised with how his players responded following their 19-25, 20-25, 25-15, 25-22, 15-17 loss to Perpetual Help last Sunday.

"We were like unstable then, it was very uncharacteristic for the team," he said.

"It all boils down to our emotions. Our skills didn't lack, so I told them, let's

have a lot of takeaways from this game. The important thing is how they bounce back. They responded today, we went back to our system, we limited our unforced errors."

Johna Denise Dolorito scored 12 points for the Lady Pirates, who slipped to 3-7.

Meanwhile, San Sebastian College-Recoletos

prevailed over Jose Rizal University, 27-25, 20-25, 26-24, 17-25, 15-7.

Juna May Gonzales scored 20 points, Kristine Dionisio added 15 points, while Jercine Balajadia made 19 excellent sets for the Lady Stags, who took their sixth loss against four wins in Group A.

Czarina Ramos and Nicole Deala scored 28 and 23 points, respectively, for the Lady Bombers (2-8). (PNA) **BY JEAN MALANUM**



VOLLEYBALL ACTION. Jeliane May Catubig of San Beda University tries to score against Gwynwyth Taghoy of Lyceum in the NCAA Season 101 volleyball tournament at the San Andres Sports Complex on Wednesday (Feb. 25, 2026). The Lady Red Spikers won, 25-14, 25-19, 25-16. (NCAA photo)

## PACQUIAO LEGACY IMMORTALIZED; MEMORABILIA TURNED OVER TO SPORTS MUSEUM

**MANILA** – There are a few athletes whose legacy transcends sport. Manny Pacquiao is one of them.

On Tuesday, President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. accepted from the boxing icon a carefully curated collection of his memorabilia at the newly modernized National Sports Museum in Pasig City, ensuring that Pacquiao's story -- triumphs, heart, Filipino spirit -- will continue to inspire generations to come.

Among the items formally entrusted to the Museum are:

- Representative fight trunk (Miguel Cotto bout, 2009) - Symbolizing Pacquiao's victory for the World Boxing Organization welterweight championship at MGM Grand Garden Arena in Las Vegas, Nevada, USA, securing his seventh world title in his seven different weight divisions.

- Representative fight trunk (Antonio Margarito bout, 2010) - Commemorating Pacquiao's historic triumph at Dallas Cowboys Stadium, where he became the first and only fighter to win world titles in eight separate weight categories.

- World Boxing Council championship belt — A globally recognized emblem of excellence, representing not only victory but a legacy defined by resilience, courage, and reinvention.

The artifacts, now part of the museum's permanent collection, are more than relics. They are symbols of

courage, perseverance, and national pride.

In his heartfelt speech, Marcos reflected on Pacman's journey.

"Hindi lamang sa boxing, kung hindi sa lahat ng kanyang katangian bilang isang Pilipino, ang ating minamahal na champion (Not only in boxing, but in all his qualities as a Filipino, he's our beloved champion)," he said.

Also present during the handover ceremony were Philippine Sports Commission Chair Patrick Gregorio, Commissioners Bong Co, Fritz Gaston and Walter Torres, and Executive Director Guillermo Iroy.

"When the President recognizes and memorializes an athlete, he places sports at the center of nation-building--this

appeals to the heart and nobility of athletes across the nation," Gregorio said.

The President recalled witnessing Pacquiao capture hearts across the globe, admired not just for his punches but for the pride he brought to every Filipino watching.

Beyond the ring, Pacquiao's generosity shines just as brightly.

Marcos praised the champion's quiet acts of kindness, helping Filipinos in need without seeking recognition.

"Hindi lang siya champion sa boxing (he's not just a boxing champion). He is a champion of humanity. He is a champion as a Filipino. He is a champion as a man. And he is a champion in all our hearts," he said. (PNA) **BY DARRYL JOHN ESGUERRA**



IMMORTALIZED. President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. (left) accepts a collection of boxing icon Manny Pacquiao's memorabilia at the modernized National Sports Museum in Pasig City on Tuesday (Feb. 24, 2026). The collection includes two pairs of competition trunks from Pacman's bouts with Miguel Cotto and Antonio Margarito, and the World Boxing Council world championship belt that cemented his stature as the only boxer in history to win titles across eight weight divisions. (RTVM Screengrab)