

DOST-CALABARZON leads conduct of LBSCFI Strategic Planning Workshop, re-visits its 40 years of milestones with fellow member-agencies

The Los Baños Science Community Foundation (LBSCFI) conducted a Strategic Planning Workshop at the RD Guerrero III Hall, DPITC, DOST PCAARRD last 18-19 January to develop the direction-setting, Five-Year Strategic Plan of the Foundation. A Pre-Workshop Meeting was conducted last 12 January 2024 via Zoom.

The workshop aims to gather LBSCFI member-agencies' heads and representatives to help develop a comprehensive strategic plan that aligns with the organization's mission, vision, and goals for the years 2024-2028.

Dr. Melinda dP. Bandalaria, President of the LBSCFI and the Chancellor of the University of the Philip-pines Open University (UPOU) emphasized the crucial role of the foundation in offering S&T solutions to the Los Baños community and its nearby areas.



"We believe that Science and Technology are essential for solving the challenges of our time and creating a better future for all, kaya nga tayo ay Science Foundation," she said, "Very timely itong pagpupur-sigi nila Director Emy na magkaroon talaga tayo ng Strategic Planning because it's also time for us to review ano na ang nagawa natin vis-a-vis our vision and what we hope to accomplish because this is our 40th year."

The LBSCFI was formed in 1984 and was

officially registered as a science foundation at the Securities Exchange Commission in 2001. Currently, the foundation has 25 active member-agencies.

Meanwhile, Ms. Emelita P. Bagsit, echoed Dr. Bandalaria's sentiments. She mentioned, "It is imperative that we recognize the significance of having a better harmonized vision, mission, and goals for our foundation. After all, the strategic planning process serves as the compass that guides sci-

ence foundations or any other organization towards success and impact."

During the two-day workshop, faculty and staff of the UPLB Department of Community and



Environment-tal Resource Planning (UPLB DCERP) facilitated the discussion. Representatives and heads from the LBSCFI's eight committees (i.e. Education, Membership, Environment, R&D Awards, Information, Tourism, Livelihood, and the Ways and Means) identified the Foundation's mission, vision, and core values; SWOC Strategies and its Roadmapping; and examined the re-sponsibilities of each committee. The new LBSCFI strategic plan aims to align the Foundation's Programs, Projects, and Ac-

tivities (PPAs) with the Los Baños community's needs and concerns to make a more meaningful impact to its citizens. For more information about the Foundation, visit <https://lbscfi.org/>. Note to editors: DOST-CALABARZON is one of the regional offices of the Department of Science and Technology and is located at Jamboree Road, Brgy. Timugan, Los Baños, Laguna. For more information, you may visit us on Facebook at facebook.com/dostcalabarzon or our website at www.region4a.dost.gov.ph. You may also reach us at parcu@ro4a.dost.gov.ph.

CARD MRI celebrates entrepreneurs in the PsMLNI 2023

The Executive and Management Committee of CARD MRI, along with the Pagkilala Sa Mga Likha Ni Inay 2023 awardees: Lailane Gomintong, Mary Celine Gordon, Rosario Agarin, Rowena Baya, and Rizalina Tolentino

CARD Mutually Reinforcing Institution (CARD MRI) recognized the outstanding microentrepreneurs at the "Pagkilala sa Mga Likha ni Inay Awards 2023" held in San Pablo City, Laguna on December 6, 2023.

The annual PsMLNI awards celebrate the impactful businesses of CARD MRI clients, underscoring their contributions to the well-being of their families and communities. The award also reflects the organization's commitment to empowering members of the communities, especially the MS-



MEs and acknowledging their remarkable self-sufficiency.

The Executive and Management Committee of CARD MRI attended and witnessed the event, which took place at Maharlika Square.

CARD MRI Managing Director Aristeo A. Dequito commended the

awardees in a speech during the event for embodying the strength and resilience of Filipino entrepreneurs and providing the institution with the motivation to remain steadfast in its goal of poverty eradication. He also emphasized the transformative impact of the awardees as they generate employment

opportunities in their own communities, ultimately contributing to the social and economic growth of the country.

The selection process involved judging based on predefined criteria. After careful deliberation, Juvy Fabro of CARD Bank, Inc. San Fernando Branch secured the insti-

tutional winner and the "Gawad Maunlad Micro," while Rosario Agarin of CARD SME Bank Naga Branch earned the "Gawad Maunlad SME."

Three clients from CARD SME Bank won the special awards: Mary Celine Gordon from Manaoag Branch was awarded the "Gawad Ma-

likhain"; Romeo Bustamante from Lipa Branch won the "Community Service Award"; and the "Innovative Family Enterprise Award" for Rizalina Tolentino of San Pablo Branch.

Other institutional winners for this year include Lailane Gomintong of CARD, Inc. (A Microfinance NGO) Sta. Lucia Branch and Rowena Baya of CARD MRI Rizal Bank, Inc. Carcar Branch.

CARD MRI, a group of 25 mutually reinforcing institutions, has been dedicated to poverty eradication through financial, non-financial, and social development initiatives since 1986. The organization is serving more than 9.1 million clients nationwide as of October 2023.

For more information about CARD MRI, please visit <https://cardmri.com>.

Fuel surcharge increases to Level 6 in March



SMC-led group to operate NAIA

Cavite celebrates the 2024 Provincial Oral Health Month



In ensuring healthy teeth of the children of the municipality of Ternate, the Office of the Provincial Health Officer, together with the Cavite Public Health Dentists and Dental Aides Association, kicked-off the Provincial Oral Health Month Celebration, bannered the theme "Chikiting Sagipin Unang Ngipin", held on February 16, 2024 at Ternate Central Elementary School with the aim to promote the importance of good oral hygiene and proper tooth brushing practices among the children.

In the opening

remarks, Mr. Leonardo Cargullo, TCES District Supervisor, and Mrs. Reby Nuestro, TCES Principal, delightfully welcomed the dental team, conveying their genuine gratitude for the time and effort they spent in extending the services to their locality.

The program commenced with the talk of Dr. Raymundo Parnala, presenting brief oral health education and demonstrating proper tooth brushing. He, then, inculcated the significance of brushing the teeth three times a day for a healthier smile.

Following was

the distribution of dental kits to 40 school children by Cavite Public Health Dentists, conducting an actual tooth brushing exercise as part of the celebration.

Ms. MJ Aggabao, Representative from Colgate -Palmolive Philippines, Inc., and some DepEd dentists graced the event and expressed their support in the activity.

The initiative underscores the dedication of the provincial government in adherence to good oral hygiene and dental care for the benefit and welfare of the Caviteños. - Jam Elisse M. Reyes



P2.5-M halaga ng interbensyon tinanggap ng mga naghahayupan sa Padre Garcia



Pormal na tinanggap ng Cawongan Farmers Association ang mga interbensyon mula sa Department of Agriculture Regional Office No. IV-A (DA Calabarzon) noong ika-15 ng Pebrero, 2024, sa Brgy. Cawongan, Padre Garcia, Batangas.

Ang naturang mga interbensyon ay binubuo ng 27 ulo ng kambing, isang pabahay, isang forage chopper, 71 botelya ng Bitamina ADE, at 114 litro ng oral dewormer bilang bahagi ng patuloy na implementasyon ng programang Livestock Economic Enterprise Development (LEED) sa rehiyon.

Ang LEED ay isang estratehiya ng ahensya na naglalayong mapalakas ang kontribusyon ng industriya ng livestock at poultry sa pagpapataas ng kita at produktosyon ng mga maliit na magsasaka na mula sa rehistrado at kwalipikadong Farmers' Cooperatives and Associations (FCAs) na dumaan sa masusing akreditasyon.

Samantala lubos ang pagpapaabot ng pasasalamat sa kagawaran ni Cawongan Farmers Association president at isang livestock farmer, G. Arwin Escueta. Anyia, ang mga natanggap nilang interbensyon ay malaking

DTI-Laguna Conducts Seminar-Workshop on How to Start Your Business, Business Plan Preparation, and Consumer Education



tulong upang madagdag ang kita ng kanilang mga miyembro na patuloy nilang palalawakin at paunlarin. Pinangunahan ang naturang turn-over ceremony ni OIC-Regional Executive Director Engr. Marcos C. Aves, Sr. at Regional Livestock Program Focal Person, Dr. Jerome Cuasay. Dumalo din sina Batangas 4th District Representative Congresswoman Lianda Bolilia, Padre Garcia Mayor Celsa Rivera, mga opisyal ng lokal na pamahalaan at asosasyon ng mga magsasaka ng Padre Garcia, at mga kawani ng DA Calabarzon. ##### (Bryan E. Katigbak, DA-4A RAFIS)



HOW WE TREAT THE CHURCH
versus
HOW WE TREAT OUR WORK

1. We don't mind being late for church, but we try our best not to be late for work.
 2. We miss church because we say we are tired from work, but we never miss work for church.
 3. We spend two hours a week in church and complain that it's too long and go to work for eight hours a day for five or six days a week.
 4. When we are confronted with our mistakes in church, we quickly transfer to another church. When we are confronted of our mistakes at work, we apologize and promise to do better next time.
 5. When we are called to be at church other than on a Sunday, we make excuses that we are busy. When we are called to work on a Sunday, we miss church and give the excuse that we have to work.
 6. We miss church because we "are not feeling well," but go to work even if we are not feeling well.
 7. We want our Christmas Party in church to be for FREE, but we pay P500 or P1000 for Christmas Parties at work.
 8. We check our phones during the Church service, but we turn off our phones during meetings at the office.
 9. We shy away from responsibilities in Church, but we work hard at the office to be promoted.
 10. We complain that the sermon in Church is too long, but we can work for four hours overtime at the office.
 11. Many times, the boss at the office receives more respect and honor than the pastor of the church.
 12. We give the Church excuses and give our Work results.
- "But pastor," you say, "we get our living from our work."
- That's true, but you get your Life from God.



SMC-led...



MANILA – SMC-SAP & Co. Consortium emerged the winning bidder to operate and rehabilitate the Ninoy Aquino International Airport (NAIA), Transportation Secretary Jaime Bautista announced Friday.

The group, composed of San Miguel Holdings Corp., RMM Asian Logistics, Inc., RLW Aviation Development, Inc. and Incheon International Airport Corp., bagged the PHP170.6 billion public-private partnership (PPP) project by offering the biggest revenue share of 82.16 percent to the government.

"The privatization of the operations and maintenance of NAIA was conceptualized as early as 30 years ago when the government of then president Fidel Ramos started the privatization of Terminal 3. Unfortunately, it ended up in court and in early 2000, it was taken over by government. So 30 years in the making, now we will be able to privatize the operations and maintenance of the Manila International Airport," Bautista said in a press briefing.

Transportation Undersecretary Timothy Batan said the project could be among the fastest in the country's PPP history -- from the project development process that started on Feb. 2, 2023 until its approval on Feb. 15 this year.

"This process is one of if not the fastest solicited PPP project of the Philippine government. Prior to this, it was 18 months for the MCX PPP project," he said. "It is the directive of President (Ferdinand) Marcos Jr. to make the PPP more attractive to the private sector," he added.

This was seconded by Bautista, saying the Transportation department, along with the PPP Center, the Manila International Airport Authority, the Department of Finance and the National Economic and Development Authority worked hard to implement the project the soonest.

The government opened the bidding for the contract to rehabilitate, operate, and maintain the

NAIA in August 2023.

Aside from SMC-SAP & Co., two other groups qualified for the bidding -- the GMR Airports Consortium which offered 33.30 percent revenue share, and the Manila International Airport Consortium that offered a 25.9 share.

As winner, the SMC-led group is expected to improve the NAIA complex, including facilities such as the runway, taxiway, and ramp areas and firefighting facility.

It is also expected to increase the airport's current annual passenger capacity of 32 million to 60 million.

The turnover to the new operator will be by the second half of 2024, MIAA earlier announced.

The private operator's contract initially cover 15 years and could be extended by 10 years.

MIAA, on the other hand, will govern the private operator and set the standards.

It will monitor the key performances and service level of the private proponent.

Meanwhile, Senator Grace Poe said she is looking forward to the success of the government's new partnership with the SMC-led consortium to rehabilitate NAIA.

"The rehabilitation's success will not only give the Filipinos safety and convenience, but pride in welcoming the world with a world-class gateway," Poe said in a statement.

The chairperson of the Senate Committee on Public Services said she also wishes the consortium "the best of luck" as it addresses the efficiency and safety needs of the increasing number of passengers at NAIA.

"The winning bidder faces a herculean task of giving the decades-old structure the crucial expansion and modernization so it could graduate from the list of the world's infamous airports," Poe said.

She also expressed her trust in the Department of Transportation in its role of monitoring "the efficiency and transparency of the project."

'Best deal out of biggest PPP'

House Ways and Means Committee chair Joey Salceda lauded the Philippine government for locking in the "best deal out of the biggest" PPP in the country's history with SMC offering 82 percent government share out of the airport revenues, as well as an "upfront outright payment" of at least PHP30 billion to the government.

"All in all, an excellent deal for the government. We got the best deal out of the biggest PPP in history, right after the enactment of the PPP Code," Salceda said in a statement.

He said the rate-based bidding also makes it fair to all parties involved.

"Since we can't really equalize proposals qualitatively, the best metric is what gives the best deal for the government. We fought for rate-based bidding, as the ultimate measure of what counts as a fair deal in PPPs," he said.

Salceda said he would convince SMC to do "immediate improvements to the airport" including the installation of walkalators along the full length of Terminal 3, the interconnection of Terminals 1,2, and 3, and better lounge facilities for overseas Filipino workers.

The NAIA rehabilitation project is the largest solicited PPP project under President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr.

A solicited proposal refers to projects identified by the implementing agency from the list of their priority projects, with the selection of the private proponent done through a public bidding process. (With a report from Filane Cervantes/Wilnard Bacelonia/Anna Leah Gonzales/PNA)

Salceda said he looks forward to a "de-clogged pipeline" of PPPs modeled after the "fair and verifiable" rate-based bidding system.

Coca-Cola... FROM PAGE 5

sition of AEV and CCEP's acquisition of CCBPI for USD1.8 billion.

The PCC's approval will pave the way for the closing of the transaction by the end of February.

Under the joint acquisition of CCBPI, AEV will have a 40-percent beneficial ownership, while CCEP will hold 60 percent stake.

The acquisition builds on CCEP's successful expansion in the Asia-Pacific region, making CCBPI the exclusive bottler and distributor of Coca-Cola products in the country, Garafil said.

Welcome development

Finance Secretary Ralph Recto welcomed the MIAA Board's approval to award the contract to SMC-SAP & Co. Consortium.

"This is certainly a welcome development for this long overdue project. NAIA has been operating beyond capacity for 9 years, leading to poor service and passenger inconvenience," Recto said in a statement Friday.

"The NAIA PPP project has been in the works for three decades, spanning six administrations. It has finally turned into a reality under the Marcos, Jr. administration," he added.

The PPP deal is projected to generate around PHP900 billion in revenues for the national government in the course of a 15-year concession period, with a provision for extension of another 10 years.

The DOF said this is opposed to the total dividends remitted by MIAA to the government from 2010 to 2023, which was only PHP22.05 billion.

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February 21-27, 2024

WORDHUNT

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- ACROSS
- 1 Grand, as an adventure
 - 5 Calgary's prov.
 - 6 (K) Suddenly bright star
 - 12 Famed fiddler
 - 13 (K) Farmer's pasture
 - 14 "National Velvet" author
 - 15 (K) Tools that turn pancakes
 - 17 Got 100 on, as a test
 - 18 Violate the law
 - 20 Memorial tribute
 - 23 (K) Lowest whole number
 - 24 (K) By oneself
 - 25 Food connoisseur
 - 29 Genetic initials
 - 30 (K) Did more than walk
 - 31 (K) Two words spoken when people get married
 - 32 (K) They care for children
 - 35 (K) Parts of chickens
 - 37 (K) Opposite of young
 - 38 Motherless calves
 - 39 Promise for the New Year
 - 43 (K) Became older
 - 44 (K) Give some thought to
 - 48 Four-time Super Bowl-winning coach
 - 49 (K) Humpty Dumpty was one
 - 50 (K) Fish used in salads
 - 51 "Robinson Crusoe" locale
 - 52 (K) Make a statement
 - 53 Whirlpool
- DOWN
- 1 Printer's

Crossword Puzzles

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MANILA – Fuel surcharge, extra fees that airlines may collect in addition to the base airfare, will increase for the first time this year to Level 6 for March from the current Level 5.

The Civil Aeronautics Board (CAB) previously downgraded the fuel surcharge by one notch for February and January.

CAB Legal Division chief Wyrrou Samodio said the rise in fuel surcharge does not automatically mean the airfare would also increase as this would depend on the airlines.

The fuel surcharge, he said, balances the welfare of both the airlines and the passengers when prices of things essential to flight operations increase. Should airlines increase the airfare, the rate should not go beyond the matrix allowed by the CAB, Samodio said.

Under Level 6, the fuel surcharge could

DTI-Laguna . . .

Calamba City — In lieu with the capacity building for entrepreneurs, the Laguna Provincial Office of the Department of Trade and Industry supports the City Government of Calamba's initiative to conduct ladderized trainings for existing and potential MSMEs to equip them with knowledge and skills in order to continuously operate their respective businesses.

Last February 16, 2024, DTI-Laguna, through Negosyo Centers Calauan and Santa Cruz, in partnership with the City Government of Calamba through its Cooperatives and Livelihood Development Department (CLDD) conducted a workshop-seminar on How To Start Your Business, Business Plan Preparation, and Consumer Education at Calamba City, Laguna. The event was attended by sixty (60) aspiring entrepreneurs.

Jean Kristine Torres, Senior Business Counselor of Negosyo Center Calauan, first discussed the pros and cons of entrepreneurship and factors to consider in establishing a business. She reiterated that entre-

range from PHP185 to PHP665 for domestic flights, and PHP610 to PHP4,538 for international flights, depending on the distance.

With the current Level 5, however, fuel surcharge ranges from PHP151 to PHP542 for domestic flights, and PHP498 to PHP3,703 for international flights.

Sought for comment, local carriers said they have been trying to cushion the impact of increased fuel surcharge by offering seat sales and urging the passengers to book their flights ahead.

“Cebu Pacific (CEB) will continue to offer great value through our seat sale that help keep air travel more affordable and accessible,” CEB president Xander Lao said on Monday, encouraging passengers to book their flights ahead to take advantage of low fares.

Flag carrier Philippine Airlines (PAL) will

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FROM PAGE 1

preneurs must be determined, open-minded, and resilient. Several aspects in choosing the place for business were then enumerated. Afterwards, Torres gave an overview on DTI's programs and services, specifically the step-by-step process on registering one's business name and on Barangay Micro Business Enterprise (BMBE).

Liana Mara DL. Bayunggan, Senior Business Counselor of Negosyo Center Santa Cruz, then tackled the concept and importance of a business plan followed by a detailed orientation on its three parts namely: (1) Business Basic Information; (2) Marketing Plan (this includes discussion on 7Ps of Marketing Mix); and (3) Business Operations. It was followed by Torres' explanation on the 4th part of business plan which is the Finance section.

For the consumer education, Bayunggan emphasized the rights and responsibilities of consumers.

After the discussion, the participants were tasked to create their own business plans. Selected

adhere to the surcharge matrix set by the CAB, PAL spokesperson Cielo Villaluna said.

“We sustain demand by providing the flexibility to choose from a variety of flight frequencies and connectivity. We also offer booking options designed to cater to a passenger's niche,” she told the Philippine News Agency.

AirAsia Philippines, in a statement, said it would continue to diversify product offerings to cater to the needs of the passengers. The airline also launched a “piso fare” from Feb. 19 to 25.

In an advisory, the CAB said the conversion rate for the fuel surcharge in March is USD1 to PHP56.14.

Airlines wishing to collect fuel surcharge must file their application to the Office of the CAB Director on or before the effectivity. (PNA)

Thailand on Board with PH-Initiated Agri MSME Development Plan

The ASEAN Business Advisory Council (ABAC) Thailand has become the latest to sign to the region-wide private sector-led agriculture-MSME Development plan initiated in the Philippines. Thailand's signing brings to near-completion the consensus among the ASEAN BACs of nine ASEAN-member states to bring together agriculture companies from the private sector to conduct possible joint business ventures and increase trade and investment within the region.

“This is an absolute win for the ASEAN, for its MSMEs, and for agriculture and food security in the region,” said Joey Concepcion, chairman of ABAC Philippines. “Successful ventures made possible by the region-wide partnerships can result in the agriculture sector's development by involving more players across the value chain, especially farmers and fisherfolk,” he explained.

The signing was held during the 99th ASEAN BAC Council Meeting last January 29, 2024 at Luang Prabang in Lao PDR. It was led by Concepcion and Kobsak Duangdee, ABAC Thailand Chair, and witnessed by the ABAC Council chairs from the ASEAN countries. The areas of collaboration with Thailand cover rice, banana, vegetables, and palm oil.

ABAC Philippines initiated the project with each ASEAN member-state, starting with Malaysia, which signed its MOU last July. This was followed by the ABACs of Brunei, Cambodia, Singapore, Laos, Myanmar, and Indonesia, who all signed last September in time to coincide with the ASEAN Business Investment Summit, with Philippines President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. and Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Manet as witnesses.

The MOUs covered the exploration of joint partnerships in knowledge and technology development; trade and investment opportunities; research and development; and strategies in sustainable agriculture, among others. The agri-MSME development partnerships are patterned after Go Negosyo's Kapatid Angat Lahat sa Agri Program (KALAP) which aims to integrate small farmers into the value chain of large agri companies, also called “big-brother com-

panies” under the KALAP program. Conception is also the founder of Go Negosyo.

During the meetings in Laos, it was also decided that the Philippines should chair the technical working group on Food Security of ASEAN BAC in 2024.

An initial trade mission has been tentatively scheduled this April 23 and 24, coinciding with the 100th ABAC meeting on April 25 in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, to facilitate engagement between key industry players from the Philippines and Malaysia, as part of the MOU implementation. The objective is to explore collaborative opportunities and exchange best practices in sectors including oil palm, rubber, rice, dairy, poultry, pineapples, durian, banana, coconut, and corn, and generate mutual commercial benefits for both parties. Following suit, other ASEAN BAC member countries who have endorsed the MOU will also conduct a similar trade mission.

Duterte said they

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EDITORIAL: Needed: Tra Gearing up for El Niño ffic czar

This week, 41 of the country's 82 provinces have been affected by the effects of the El Niño phenomenon, prompting government to ramp up efforts to temper its repercussions. The bulletin board has been raised by Science and Technology Secretary Renato Solidum that all provinces will be affected depending on the month, although he said the peak will be in April, a month earlier than expected, or starting as from the end of the Holy Week which in previous years inflicted blistering heat. There is of course a Task Force El Niño, chaired by Defense Secretary Gilberto Teodoro Jr. who emphasized this week the importance of the collective effort of various government agencies in addressing the impacts of drought. Teodoro also noted the need to strengthen public information to engage people in preparedness measures. The El Niño developed rapidly during July-August last year, and reached moderate strength by September and churned into a strong phenomenon from November 2023 to January 2024. Weather authorities now say the possible dry spells and drought could peak in April but the government, at the ready, revived a 2001 executive order creating a task force – chaired by Teodoro and co-chaired by Solidum – to start early preparations and resolve possible interventions. Solidum said the effects of the weather phenomenon will gradually decrease from April to June, which means rainfall could be back to normal levels in May or June. The Department of Science and Technology is expected to inform the local government units, being the first responders, on the

Recto...

Senator Win Gatchalian said potential economic benefits that the country could derive from the Energy Virtual One-Stop Shop (EVOSS) system, such as lower energy prices, are hampered by the weak implementation of the measure which is intended to attract investments into the renewable energy (RE) sector.

Since its enactment in 2019, a comprehensive implementation of EVOSS is yet to be realized for the country to fully benefit from the measure, Gatchalian stressed.

“Further streamlining should be done for investors to enter the local RE market. This is precisely the reason why we vigorously pursued the enactment of EVOSS but up to this time it has not been fully implemented,” said Gatchalian, citing that investors still have to go through 167 permits to establish RE projects. Previously, they had to endure

250 permits. Data from the Department of Energy show EVOSS implementation stands at 85% as of November 2023.

As of September last year, 48 processes from 8 national agencies and 2 local government units have been included in the EVOSS process system. In the case of a hydro project, for instance, the number of calendar days needed to establish such a project has gone down to 1,697 from 1,835 previously.

Even with the decrease, Gatchalian emphasized that the timeline for the process is still extensive, underscoring the need for additional enhancements in streamlining the procedure for the benefit of prospective investors and consumers down the line.

The principal author of EVOSS, Gatchalian emphasized it makes sense for the country to pursue RE projects

conditions whether they can declare a state of calamity and use their calamity funds. There is also the El Niño National Action Plan, a living document, subject to regular reviews and revisions to maintain its relevance, effectiveness, and alignment with evolving circumstances, emerging challenges, stakeholder insights, and the attainment of specified objectives. Based on the latest assessment of the Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Service Administration, the provinces of Batangas, Laguna, Masbate, Oriental Mindoro, Antique, Biliran, Capiz, Cebu, Eastern Samar, Guimaras, Iloilo, Leyte, Negros Oriental, Samar, Lanao del Norte, Sulu and Tawi-Tawi are now experiencing dry conditions. Provinces under a dry spell are Abra, Aurora, Bataan, Isabela, Metropolitan Manila, Occidental Mindoro, Quirino, Rizal, Zambales and Negros Occidental while under drought conditions are Apayao, Benguet, Cagayan, Cavite, Ifugao, Ilocos Norte, Ilocos Sur, Kalinga, La Union, Mountain Province, Nueva Ecija, Nueva Vizcaya, Palawan and Pangasinan. Dry is when it is not a wet season, and the little rain dropping during that time is just normal for the period. Dry spell occurs when those little rains fall even below the normal for three consecutive months. As the El Niño continues to exhale threats on the population, there is an urgency to heed what Teodoro underscored as the importance of collective effort of government agencies in addressing the impacts of drought. They cannot be expected to turn a deaf ear to the call.

FROM PAGE 1

Economic...

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Pay hike won't bust economy - Chiz

MANILA – Senator Francis “Chiz” Escudero on Tuesday assured that a PHP100 wage increase would not bust the economy.

Escudero allayed businessmen's hesitation in granting pay hikes, following a Senate bill that seeks a PHP100 increase in the daily minimum wage for private sector workers.

Escudero noted that whenever talks on raising the minimum wage begin, whether in Congress or on wage boards, “these are always met with the shrill warnings of these individuals that the economy will go bust if we give workers their due.”

“If some self-proclaimed business leaders had their way, wages would have remained the same for the last 40 years as they have not in one instance supported any move to raise workers' pay,” Escudero said, describing the critics of the proposed wage hike as “ivory tower individuals who love to preach about the economics of a running business when they themselves have not even managed a sari-sari store.”

“Tuwina na lang pag may diskusyon sa

wage increase, maglala-bas na ang mga iyan ng kanilang crystal ball at tatakutin tayo na babagsak ang ekonomiya (Everytime there are discussions on wage increase, they will bring their crystal balls out and try to scare us that the economy will go down),” Escudero said. Escudero also scored the contrasting reception that tax breaks for business and wage hikes for workers receive saying “they taut the steep cut in Corporate Income Tax (CIT) rates for business, saving them billions, as an economic necessity, while they treat a wage increase of a few pesos for workers, as if it were economic sabotage.”

He recalled that in 2021, the projected foregone revenues given to the moneyed class was almost PHP139 billion, “and they called it a form of economic stimuli, for the wealthy who did not ask for it.”

The lawmaker also recalled proponents of tax breaks for the rich as having argued that profits retained as a result of the lowering of the CIT will be used to retain payroll, or boost pay.

over other sources of energy as it is a lot cheaper to generate power from RE sources compared to diesel, nuclear, biogas, and even waste, based on variable operational costs of different technologies cited in the 7th ASEAN Energy Outlook released in 2022.

Currently, there are 3 additional agencies, namely the National Grid Corporation of the Philippines, the Philippine Ports Authority, and the National Water Resources Board, with ongoing series of discussions for the integration of their processes in the EVOSS system.

“Kapag lubos na ang pagpapatupad ng EVOSS, magiging mas mabilis na ang proseso para makapasok sa bansa ang mga mamumuhunan para sa mga proyektong pang enerhiya. Makinabang din dito nang husto ang mga konsumer at lalago ang ekonomiya ng bansa,” he said.

Labor groups, he said, have presented data which showed that for large firms who have racked up PHP1.1 trillion in annual profits, the cost of a PHP170 daily wage hike for their three million workers would account for about 14 percent of their profits.

For 1.8 million workers of small enterprises, the proposed wage increase is equivalent to 17 percent of their income.

“This should be debunked by oppositors, with facts, and not with the old and tired scare tactics, without proof,” Escudero said.

He, however, admitted that many micro-enterprises, or those with less than 10 employees and assets not exceeding PHP3 million, will be distressed by legislated pay increase which can be addressed by crafting the language of the bill “that responds to their situation.”

Another study, the senator cited, is saying that if adjusted for inflation, minimum wages across 17 regions are worth less today than in July 1989, when the last legislated nationwide wage took effect. (PNA)

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Chinabank welcomes the Year of the Dragon with Michelle Dee as brand ambassador



From left: Chinabank Chief Finance Officer Patrick Cheng, President & CEO Romy Uyan, Michelle Dee, Sparkle GMA Artist Center Vice President Joy Romina Marcelo, and Miss Universe Philippines Creative Director Jonas Gafud.

Chinabank has signed up its first ever brand ambassador, the reigning Miss Universe Philippines Michelle Marquez Dee. The collaboration was formalized on February 14, 2024 at the Chinabank head office in Makati City.

The beauty queen, actress, host, athlete, and model is a fitting and inspiring representative for Chinabank. Michelle, who has won the hearts and minds of Filipinos and the world with her charisma, authenticity, and sense of purpose, is redefining contemporary Filipino culture on a global stage. Her lifelong autism acceptance and inclusivity advocacy has led her to a degree in BS Psychology and to use her platform and her work with the Autism Society of the Philippines to create awareness about the condition. With Michelle on board, Chinabank is strengthening its brand presence and building a profound connection with the new generation of dynamic and forward-thinking banking customers.

"This engagement with Michelle Dee signifies the beginning of many things to come. For us, Michelle is family. But beyond her obvious lineage to the bank's co-founders, we firmly believe that Michelle has the qualities to aptly represent a bank with a storied history and an unwavering commitment to building an inclusive and sustainable future for every Filipino," Chinabank President & CEO Romeo D. Uyan Jr. said during the contract signing.

Michelle expressed her happiness and excitement for her new role, noting that

she and Chinabank are a good fit as they share the same high regard for building trust, making an impact, and bringing about change.

"Chinabank isn't just any bank, it's been a beacon of trust and resilience for over a century. Now that's a lot of years of making a difference in people's lives and making dreams come true, but it's also the spirit of making a difference that really resonates with every Filipino heart," she said. "I would like to keep it real. I'm here to share my stories and the incredible work Chinabank does... I can't wait to make memories and make such ground breaking opportunities for everyone around us as

well." Chinabank founder Dee C. Chuan was Michelle Dee's paternal grand-uncle. Her grandfather was former Chinabank Chairman Dee K. Chiong whose leadership shaped the bank into prominence. He also led the bank's early foray into computer technology, becoming the first bank in Southeast Asia to process deposit accounts online.

Chinabank is the fourth largest private universal bank in the Philippines. The bank is set to launch an advertising campaign featuring Michelle as it continues to innovate and improve its products and services with a keen focus on its customers.

WHAT'S NEW AT EBC – SM CITY MOLINO?



Jump into the newest obsession: the Cheesy Rice Bowl! Swing by EBC Store here at SM City Molino, and relish in the indulgence of their mouthwatering Cheesy Cordon Bleu, crowned with Creamy Jalapeño Cheese Sauce. Satisfaction guaranteed! Available for dine-in or take-out for only 139 Pesos only.

February 21-27, 2024

FREE COFFEE OR GELATO AT AMARE LA CUCINA – SM CITY BACOR

SM CITY BACOR, CAVITE – There's more to enjoy at Amare La Cucina! Get your free Coffee or Gelato Dessert when you follow their official Facebook account @Amare La Cucina SM Bacor, IG @amarelacucinasmbacor, and Tiktok @amarelacucinaph account. Upload a video reel or Tiktok of your #AmarePizza experience in any of your social media accounts and tag @amarelacucinambacor and @amarelacucinaph with the hashtag #AmarePizza and show it to the manager-on duty to get your COFFEE or FREE DESSERT. Visit Amare La Cucina SM City Bacor at the Upper Ground Leve today with your family and friends!



Busan PH at SM City Rosario is now open!



Unique Samgyupsal vibe is now set to be experienced at SM City Rosario with the re-cent opening of BUSAN PH. They offer variety of Korean noodles and stew, samgyup and Korean street food for a very reasonable price. Aside from the Korean food experience, you can also enjoy the restaurant's Busan Train centerpiece that brings you to a complete Korean experience. Visit BUSAN PH at the first floor of SM City Rosario. (Pho-tos by Lakwatsero Caviteño Travels)

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PhilHealth releases P257.6 million to boost pri-mary care service delivery thru Konsulta Konsulta-info-desk

The Philippine Health Insurance Corporation (PhilHealth) announced that it released more than P257 million representing the first tranche of capitalization payments to Primary Care Provider Networks (PCPNs) to boost the nationwide implementation of its expanded primary care benefit package or the Konsultasyong Sulit at Tama (Konsulta) Package.

According to PhilHealth President and CEO Emmanuel R. Ledesma Jr., the move is expected to help accredited Konsulta facilities under the partner networks to ensure readiness to serve patients availing of Konsulta services from consultations to health screening and assessment, to the dispensing of essential drugs and medicines and laboratory procedures as recommended by qualified physicians.

"This initial wave of releases will definitely hasten enlistment of members under the networks' catchment areas and facilitate patients being seen by the providers that they have chosen," Ledesma explained.

"This is an investment in the general welfare of the Filipino

people. Nakahanda kaming mag-invest sa Konsulta para makaiwas ang marami sa pagkakasakit o maagapan ang karam-daman para hindi na lumala," he added.

To date, four out of the first seven PCPNs under a sandbox setting have received their capitalization funds from the state health insurer, namely Quezon Province, P72.9 million; South Cotabato, P53.9 million; Ba-taan, P114.7 million; and Baguio City, P15.9 million.

"These funds were frontloaded, meaning we have advanced the funding even before they render the services. This way, these networks can mobilize these to augment health resources and even ground personnel so they can serve patients adequately especially those underserved communities and the vulnerable segments," Ledesma explained.

The PCPN sandbox sites were launched by PhilHealth in June last year through a simple signing ceremony. The partnership aims to strengthen primary care services, digitize patient records and streamline claims processes within select areas. The State Agency has allotted P30

billion this year to intensify the implementation of Konsulta in more participating networks to cover more regions especially in geographically isolated and depressed areas.

"To further improve our reach, we are also actively participating in the LAB for ALL or "Laboratory, Kon-sulta, at Gamot Para sa Lahat" Caravan, the flagship project of First Lady Liza Araneta Marcos," he reported, noting that in the first 17 caravans held in different parts of Luzon and the National Capital Region as of December 31, 2023, a total of 14,000 beneficiaries have been served and availed of consultations with primary care physicians.

One Konsulta beneficiary in the person of Chessa Amana from Mati, Davao City expressed her appreciation for the Konsulta program. "Nag avail ako ng Konsulta sa CHO Mati last May at laboratory (CBC, Uri-nalysis, Stool). Sa pag-avail ko ng Konsulta, naka less ako ng gastos at may ibinigay pa na gamot na libre. Overall, na-satisfied ako sa kanilang serbisyo. Sa non-member, ngayon pa lang magpa rehistro na kayo. Kung may PhilHealth ka, garantisado!"

Coca-Cola commits \$ 1B to expand ops in PH

MANILA – Beverage firm Coca-Cola is eyeing to invest around USD1 billion to finance its expansion plan in the Philippines in the next five years, Malacañang announced Tuesday.

The plan was discussed when top executives of Aboitiz Equity Ventures Inc. (AEV) and Coca-Cola Europacific Partners (CEPE) paid a courtesy call on President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. at Malacañan Palace in Manila on Monday, Communications Secretary Cheloy Garafil said in a statement.

Present during the meeting were AEV president and chief executive officer (CEO) Sabin Aboitiz and CEPE chair-

person Sol Daurella Comadrán.

During the meeting, Comadrán expressed Coca-Cola's confidence in the business climate in the Philippines, adding that the beverage company wants sustainable operation as part of its corporate social responsibility.

Emphasizing the company's initiatives toward the collection and recycling of plastics, Comadrán said the good thing about its operation in the Philippines is its "very significant returnable glass bottle business".

She also noted that Coca-Cola currently has 9,000 direct employees and an estimated 100,000 indirect employees in the country.

"We generate 100,000 plus (employees) throughout the distribution, through our supplies," Comadrán told Marcos, as quoted by the Presidential Communications Office.

"And we're very enthusiastic and we see (that) we need to invest in the Philippines, invest to grow the business. And in the next five years, we're planning for USD1 billion investment, and in fact, we've been doing a new plant, which we are building in Tarlac," she added.

Marcos welcomed the beverage firm's plan to seize the opportunities in the domestic market and take advantage of the country's large and young consumer pool.

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DepEd assures EDCOM to deliver textbooks on time

MANILA – The Department of Education (DepEd) has committed to deliver 80 percent of textbooks for Grades 1, 4, and 7 by July this year.

The Department made this commitment during a meeting with the Second Congressional Commission on Education (EDCOM 2) held at the University of the Philippines in Taguig City on Thursday.

Representatives from DepEd noted that the award for successful bidders for textbooks will be issued by March and the Notice to Proceed by April which signals the start of printing.

"By July, we'll have around 80 percent of textbooks [for Grades 1, 4, 7]," assured Director Ariz

Cawilan of the DepEd Bureau of Learning Resources.

During her Basic Education Report 2024, Vice President and Education Secretary Sara Duterte said that alongside traditional textbooks, they will also provide e-textbooks for learners.

Duterte said they have consulted with various publishers to facilitate the provision of e-textbooks and leveraging digital technology.

"In the procurement of textbooks for the MATATAG K-10 Curriculum, we will require the winning bidder to provide us with electronic copies that learners may access anytime, anywhere," she

said. In its Year One Report, EDCOM 2 cited one of its findings that for Grade 1 to Grade 10, only 27 textbooks have been procured since 2012.

"Specifically, since the introduction of the K to 12 curriculum, only Grades 5 and 6 textbooks have been successfully procured," the report read.

EDCOM 2 has been urging DepEd to ensure timely textbook procurement for the upcoming school year and recommended for the agency to look into the possibility of procuring books that are already available in the market rather than engaging publishers to develop new ones. (PNA)

No threats against Quiboloy - PNP

MANILA – The Philippine National Police (PNP) on Thursday denied the claims of Kingdom of Jesus Christ (KOJC) leader Pastor Apollo Quiboloy that it was allegedly conniving with the United States government to eliminate him through rendition.

Rendition is defined as the surrender by a state of a fugitive to another country charging a

suspect with a crime.

In a press briefing in Camp Crame, Quezon City, PNP spokesperson Col. Jean Fajardo said they have no idea as to where the religious leader obtained this information.

Fajardo, meanwhile, said they have not received any information on the alleged threats against Quiboloy's life.

"With respect to the threat against his life, if Pastor Quiboloy has a basis for saying that, as always, not only limited to him, all people, whether it's a government official or ordinary citizen na may natatanggap pong banta sa kanyang buhay (who receives threats to his/her life), the PNP is ready to provide appropriate security if there is a request for one," Fajardo told reporters.

In an audio recording, Quiboloy, citing information from a reliable source, accused the US and Philippine governments of working together to eliminate him through rendition.

Quiboloy has been indicted by a federal grand jury in Santa Ana, California, for conspiracy to engage in sex trafficking by force, fraud, and coercion, and sex trafficking of children; sex trafficking by force, fraud, and coercion;

conspiracy; and bulk cash smuggling.

On Nov. 10, 2021, a federal warrant was issued for his arrest.

Meanwhile, Fajardo said the PNP is ready to extend assistance to Congress for the possible serving of a subpoena against the religious leader.

"Yes, I understand there is an issued subpoena from the Senate requiring the attendance of Pastor Quiboloy and we have to wait if Pastor Quiboloy will respond to the sent subpoena. But if Congress and the Senate will seek the assistance of the PNP in serving the subpoena, then we are ready to assist them. But for now, let us wait for the response ni Pastor Quiboloy," said Fajardo.

The Senate Committee on Women, Children, Family Relations, and Gender Equality summoned Quiboloy to attend its hearing on the alleged abuses within his religious group.

The House of Representatives also issued the same against Quiboloy amid the chamber's hearings on the alleged franchise violations of Swara Sug Media Corporation, which operates Sonshine Media Network International (SMNI). (PNA)