

Enchanted Kingdom receives several government recognitions; and finalist for the IAAPA 2023 Brass Ring Excellence Awards for two categories

Enchanted Kingdom (EK), the first and only world class theme park in the Philippines, garnered three government recognitions this year from the Bureau of Internal Revenue (BIR), Department of Trade and Industry (DTI), and the Department of Tourism (DOT) – amplifying the company's steadfast vision to be a world-class integrated attractions destination in Asia, and the Philippine leader in wholesome family leisure and entertainment

EK was recognized by BIR as the Top 2 Highest Value Added Tax contributor in the Biñan - West Laguna District for the first semester of 2023. The said recognition stands as proof of the company's prompt and accurate payments, making a significant contribution

to the attainment of the district's revenue goal for the first half of 2023.

EK's Chief Financial Officer (CFO) Melissa Y. Monicayo emphasized the company's commitment to pay the right taxes on time to the BIR. "This is in part of EK's obligation to give back to our community, as we recognize our impact to the progress of our region," she explained. In fact, Santa Rosa City Mayor Arlene B. Arcillas acknowledged EK as one of the city's top taxpayers during EK's Giant Parol Lighting held last November.

Last November, the DTI-Bureau of Domestic Trade Promotion (BDTP) gave a special recognition to Enchanted Kingdom for being the first and longest Go Lokal retail partner during the FlexPinoy: Saludo sa Go Lokal!

Retail Partners appreciation ceremony held at the DTI Head Office in Makati City. The event recognized Go Lokal retail partners and store operators who have made significant contributions to the continued success and growth of the innovative market access program of the DTI-BDTP.

According to Ms. Ma. Cherina Consunji, Head of Merchandise Division, Enchanted Kingdom embraced the "Go Lokal" initiative and promotes indigenous products through the establishment of "Pugad" in 2016. "Pugad is EK's local souvenir shop which aims to provide access to new markets and a bigger audience for artisanal products in the country," Ms. Consunji furthered.

And most recently, EK was one of the awardees during the "Mabuhay at Salamat

Po! Filipino Brand of Service Excellence (FBSE) Recognition Celebration of Love" held last December 12 at the Makati Diamond Hotel, Makati City. Led by DOT Secretary, Maria Christina Frasco, the event recognized the significant contributions of Enchanted Kingdom and other institutions in advocating the FBSE and contributing greatly to the achievement of training more than 124,000 tourism frontliners for 2023.

As of this writing, 89% of EK's full-time Cast Members have been trained under DOT's flagship program which is envisioned to enhance and uplift the quality of tourism services in the country aimed at fostering excellent service to tourists as part of our distinct Filipino brand. Pauline C. Barreiro, EK's Learning and Development Manager and a certified FBSE enterprise



trainer shared that EK is geared towards training 100% of its full-time Cast Members by next year.

Moreover, Enchanted Kingdom's Chief Operating Officer (COO) Dr. Cynthia R. Mamon also shared that the world-class theme park is a finalist in two categories for the International Association of Amusement Parks and Attractions (IAAPA) Brass Ring Excellence Award, which recognizes significant achievement in the global attractions industry.

EK is a finalist for the Human Resources Excellence: Best Health and Wellbeing Strategy

category and the Games and Merchandise Excellence: Best Retail Visual Merchandise Display category. Winners will be officially announced and the awarding will be in the The Venetians, Las Vegas in March 2024.

"The year 2023 is a remarkable year for Enchanted Kingdom, as we recover from the impact of the recent pandemic. We are looking forward to a more magical 2024 as we continue to deliver world-class leisure and entertainment to all Filipinos. As our Anniversary slogan goes, "Be the Magic... Be Enchanted!" Dr. Mamon said.

PUV consolidation reaches 76% nationwide: LTFRB

MANILA – An estimated 76 percent of all active public utility vehicles (PUVs) are now operated by cooperatives and corporations or are owned by operators who have applied for consolidation before the Dec. 31 deadline.

In a press conference at the Land Transportation Franchising and Regulatory Board (LTFRB) headquarters in Quezon City on Friday, LTFRB Board Member Riza Paches said 145,721 PUVs, or 76 percent of all PUVs operating in fixed routes nationwide, are consolidated or have applied for consolidation.

Specifically, Paches said the consolidation rate for public utility jeepneys (PUJs) has reached 73.9 percent while UV Express (UVE) units have reached 82 percent.

She noted that the National Capital Region (NCR) has reported the highest number of last-minute consolidation

applications, with 97 percent of registered PUVs having complied with the consolidation requirement.

"Tayo po ay 21,655 (consolidated) because there are only 22,284 confirmed units for PUJs and for the UVEs, nasa 100 percent almost 'yung consolidation when we try to look at the figures of confirmed units (We have 21,655 consolidated PUJs out of 22,284 confirmed units, and for UVEs we have almost 100 percent consolidation compared to confirmed units)," Paches said.

These confirmed units, she added, are PUVs that have valid franchises or other necessary documentary requirements.

She noted that the consolidation applications received by the LTFRB exceeded their projections.

"Overall, we projected around 18,026. But after Dec. 31, those who

consolidated and applied for consolidation were 25,629 units. This makes up 142 percent of what we projected," Paches said.

She said the consolidation campaign was "successful," especially during the last stretch of December last year.

"The government agencies that have been opening up their offices, relaxing certain policies and requirements, and even reaching out to all these transport operators, was to the LTFRB's perspective, effective in trying to reach more than what we expected," Paches said.

In the same presser, LTFRB chair Teofil Guadiz III said while some unconsolidated PUVs would be allowed to operate until Jan. 31, they would not be allowed to register with the Land Transportation Office (LTO) beyond that date without joining a transport cooperative or company.

"Meron require-

ment na confirmation ang LTFRB na ibibigay sa LTO para 'yun po 'yung basis ng LTO na ire-register kita na PUV. Pero kung hindi kayo nag-consolidate, hindi na kayo bibigyan ng confirmation so hindi ka na rin po mare-rehistro as PUV (The LTFRB provides a confirmation to the LTO, which they would use as the basis for their registration as PUV. But if they're not consolidated, they will not be given confirmation so they won't be able to register)," Guadiz said.

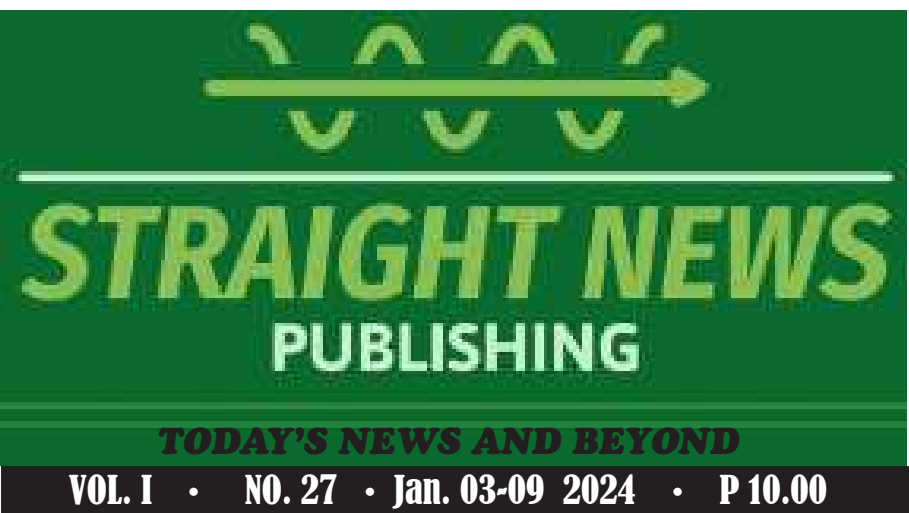
However, Office of Transportation Cooperatives chair Andy Ortega assured PUV operators and drivers affected by the consolidation drive that the government would provide them with due process.

He encouraged drivers who worked for operators who failed to consolidate, to join transportation cooperatives and companies to continue working as PUV drivers. (PNA)

IT'S SM HOME'S GRANDCLEARANCE SALE AT SM CITY BACOR AND SM CITY MOLINO!



SM CITY BACOR, SM CITY MOLINO, CAVITE - This is your sign to refresh your home for a great start this 2024! Grab your home essentials at the SM HOME GRAND CLEARANCE SALE from January 1 to 31, 2024. Get up to 50% OFF on select linens, furniture, kitchenware, tableware, storage, and décor! Head now at SM Home at SM City Bacor and SM City Molino to find great deals and exquisite home essentials. We've Got It All For Your Home at #SMHome!



PHrecords 5.45M int'l visitors in 2023

SSS implements contribution hike

Pormal nang naisalin ng Philippine Statistics Region IV-A sa lokal na pamahalaan ng Magallanes ang mga resulta ng 2022 Community-Based Monitoring System (CBMS) noong Disyembre 27, 2022. Sa pangunguna nina Chief Statistical Specialist Benigno Perido at Magallanes Municipal Mayor Jasmin Maligaya-Bautista, sinaksihan ng mga kawani ng lokal



Gatchalian asks DOE to explain delay in submission of new energy roadmap

na pamahalaan at mga bumubuo ng PSA IV-A ang pagsasalin ng CBMS System Data sa lokal na pamahalaan. Ang Community-Based Management System ay isang technology-based data collection, processing, and validating system na kumakalap ng iba't ibang datos mula sa mga komunidad. Ang mga ito gagamitin para sa pagpa-plano, pagpapatupad, at pag-monitor ng mga mga economic programs ng pamahalaan. | via Philippine Statistics Authority – Calabarzon

Cultivating "CREATIVE-ty": DTI-Rizal Champions Creative Industries at Bonsai Art Workshop

Cebu Pacific Recognized for Exemplary Support in Government Relief Efforts

Cebu Pacific receives an appreciation award from the Department of Social Work and Development. (From left to right: Irish Flor Yaranon, Chief Administrative Office of NRLMB; Diana Rose Cajipe, undersecretary of DSWD-Disaster Response Management Group; Roxanne Gochuico, corporate communications specialist of Cebu Pacific; Marga Lera, corporate communications manager of Cebu Pacific; Leo Quintilla, OIC-National Resource and Logistics Management Bureau; Mark Poul Agner, OIC - Division Chief, Resource Management Division, NRLMB cont. on Page 2



PGC extends Healthcare Services to Indang Community



In a commendable initiative to address the healthcare needs of the community, the provincial government of Cavite organized a medical and dental mission on December 22, 2023, in Brgy. Alulod, Indang, Cavite. The mission aimed to provide essential medical and dental services to the residents, enhancing their overall well-being.

A total of 222 beneficiaries, including adults and children, gathered at the mission site to receive much-needed healthcare services. Out of

these 222 beneficiaries, 176 individuals received medical services, while 46 individuals availed dental extraction. Additionally, the Office of the Provincial Governor staff distributed maintenance medicines, multivitamins, and mosquito repellent lotion to further support the health and well-being of the community. The success of the mission was attributed not only to the expertise of healthcare professionals from the Office of the Provincial Health Officer but also to the cooperation of the local government unit, particularly local officials headed by Baran-

gay Chairman Marlito A. Penuis and barangay health workers. Their collaborative efforts played a crucial role in ensuring that healthcare services reached those in need.

Beneficiaries expressed gratitude for the opportunity, emphasizing the positive impact on their health. The extension of healthcare services to Indang community exemplifies a commitment to public health and underscores the importance of community engagement in addressing healthcare disparities.--- Romelyn P. Dones



Illness is highly contagious

The Upper Respiratory Infection affecting China at present is quite serious. The virus causing it is very potent and is resistant to existing antibiotics. The prevention method now is to keep your throat moist, do not let your throat dry up. Thus do not hold your thirst because once your membrane in your throat is dried, the virus will invade into your body within 10 mins. Drink 50-80cc warm water, 30-50cc for kids, according to age. Everytime you feel your throat is dry, do not wait, keep water in hand. Do not drink plenty at one time as it does not help; instead, continue to keep throat moist. Till end of March, do not go to crowded places, wear mask as needed especially in train or public transportation.

- Avoid fried or spicy food and load up vitamin C. The symptoms/ description are:
1. Repeated high fever.
 2. Prolonged coughing after fever.
 3. Children are more prone.
 4. Adults usually feel uneasy, headache and mainly respiratory related illness.

15K police to secure around 2M Black Nazarene devotees on Jan. 9

MANILA – A 15,000-strong police force will secure the Traslacion on Jan. 9, with some of them already deployed as early as December, the Philippine National Police (PNP) said Friday.

Citing estimates from the 2020 Traslacion, PNP spokesperson Col. Jean Fajardo said around 2 million devotees are expected to attend the religious activity, the first in three years since the pandemic hit.

"Inaasahan natin na mga more or less mga ganun din ang bilang na halos 2 million sa kalahatan 'yung ine-expect natin na lalahok ngayon (We are expecting that around 2 million devotees overall will be attending this year's Traslacion)," she said.

Traslacion is the procession of the centuries-old black image of Jesus Christ, starting from Quirino Grandstand to Quiapo Church.

Police have been deployed early, Fajardo said, since there were Traslacion-related activities as early as Dec. 30 last year.

Aside from the 15,000 police officers,

Meanwhile, the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Operations Center will raise to "blue alert" its level status starting Jan. 7, which means heightened monitoring and coordination with other agencies.

An incident management team headed by the Manila City DRRM office will be activated on the ground to monitor the situation and manage incidents.

No-fly, sail zone

As an added security measure, the vicinity of Quirino Grandstand at the Rizal Park and the Quiapo Church are a no-fly and no sail-zone.

"Magsisimula 'yan sa January 7 at tatagal 'yan hanggang January 10 (This will start on January 7 and end on January 10)," Fajardo said.

A liquor ban will take effect starting Jan. 8 to 10 within a 500-meter radius of the Quirino Grandstand and Quiapo Church along with a gun ban in the City of Manila on the same dates.

DOF secures concessional financing for PBBM's Build Better More Program, grants for development projects

The Department of Finance (DOF), through its International Finance Group (IFG), has successfully secured concessional financing for big-ticket infrastructure projects under President Ferdinand R. Marcos, Jr.'s Build Better More Program as well as grants for various development projects to support the country's rapid economic growth.

Since the beginning of the Marcos, Jr. administration, the DOF has been able to secure concessional financing for 16 project loans amounting to USD 6.47 billion to support the continuous implementation of key infrastructure projects and other priority initiatives of the government.

This includes 10 loans amounting to USD 5.18 billion to support the high-impact infrastructure flagship projects (IFPs) under the Build Better More Program such as the Bataan-Cavite Interlink

The Traslacion will start from Quirino Grandstand, turn left to Katigbak Street; pass through Padre Burgos Street; and along Finance Road, and Palanca, Arlegui, Fraternal, Vergara, Duque de Alba, Castillejos, Farnecio, Nepomuceno, Concepcion Aguila, Carcer, Hidalgo, Bilibid Viejo, Gil Puyat, and J.P. De Guzman Streets; under the Quezon Bridge; and Villalobos Street en route to Plaza Miranda right outside the church.

Road closures, traffic re-routing

Meanwhile, the city government has released a traffic advisory regarding road closures and rerouting of vehicles.

From Monday (Jan. 8) beginning 9 p.m. onward until Tuesday (Jan. 9), the following roads are closed to vehicles: stretch of Bonifacio Drive from Anda Circle to

Bridge Project, supported by the Asian Development Bank (ADB) with pipelined co-financing from the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), which is poised to become one of the world's longest marine bridges.

Financing was also secured for other IFPs including the North-South Commuter Railway Extension Project, Davao Public Transport Modernization Project, and the Three Priority Bridges Crossing Pasig-Marikina River and Manggahan Floodway Bridges Construction Project from the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), ADB, and Export-Import Bank of China, respectively.

Meanwhile, about USD 7.04 billion in budget support financing has been successfully secured by the government through Official Development Assistance (ODA) sources over the same period. Along with USD 6 billion in global bonds is-

P. Burgos Ave.; Katigbak Drive and South Drive (one lane accessible to Manila Hotel and H20 Hotel); Roxas Blvd. from Katigbak to U.N. Ave.; P. Burgos from Roxas Blvd. to Jones, McArthur, and Quezon Bridge; Finance Rd. from P. Burgos Ave. to Taft Ave.; Ma. Orosa St. from TM. Kalaw to P. Burgos Ave.; Taft Ave. from U.N. Ave. to P. Burgos Ave.; Romualdez St. from U.N Ave. to Ayala Blvd.; Ayala Ave. from Taft Ave. to Romualdez St.; C. Palanca St. from P. Casal to Plaza Lacson; P. Casal St. from C. Palanca to Arlegui St.; Legarda St. from CM. Recto Ave. to Arlegui St.; Quezon Blvd. from Fugoso St to Quezon Bridge; and Westbound Lane España Blvd. from P. Campa to Lerma Street.

All vehicles traveling southbound of Mel Lopez Blvd. (R-10) going to Roxas Blvd. shall turn left to Capulong St., straight to

sued in coordination with the Bureau of the Treasury (BTr) and other budget support financing sources, loan proceeds help bridge the programmed fiscal deficit consistent with the Medium-Term Fiscal Framework (MTFF).

As laid out in the Philippines' first-ever MTFF, the government aims to bring down the country's debt-to-GDP ratio to less than 60 percent by 2025, cut the deficit-to-GDP ratio to 3.0 percent by 2028, and maintain infrastructure spending at 5.0 to 6.0 percent of GDP annually.

Aside from loans, the IFG also processed grants, technical assistance, and other bilateral agreements between July 1, 2022 to December 15, 2023.

Among the grants include the Green Economy Programme in the Philippines from the European Union (EU); the Capacity Building for Higher Education and the Establishment of Genome

Yuseco St. to Lacson Ave. to point of destination. (old truck route); those traveling southbound of Rizal Ave. intending to utilize McArthur Bridge going to south area shall turn left to CM. Recto Ave., left to Legarda St., to point of destination; vehicles traveling southbound of A. Mendoza St. going to Quezon Blvd. shall turn right to Fugoso St., to Rizal Ave., to point of destination.

Those traveling westbound lane of España Blvd. going to Quezon Blvd., shall turn left to N. Reyes St., to CM. Recto Ave., to point of destination and vehicles traveling southbound of J. Abad Santos Ave./R. Regente going to Intramuros Area., shall turn right to San Fernando St., left to Madrid St., left to Mulle. Dela Industria to Binondo-Intramuros Bridge to A. Soriano Ave. to point of destination or take Juan Luna St., right to Muelle Dela Industria to Binondo-Intramuros. **cont. on page 3**



January 03-09, 2024 SSS...

The Social Security System (SSS) said today it has started implementing the provisions of the Republic Act of RA 11199 or the Social Security Act of 2018, which mandated a contribution hike to ensure the financial viability of the state pension fund for private sector workers.

SSS President and Chief Executive Officer Rolando Ledesma Macasaet said the law-mandated contribution increase would translate to immediate benefits to the country's 13 million workers and will ensure the viability of the SSS fund designed to provide them with social security protection.

Enacted on February 7, 2019 by Congress, the Social Security Act of 2018 rationalized and expanded the powers and duties of the Social Security Commission (SSC) to ensure the long-term viability of the SSS. Under the law, SSS should gradually increase the contribution rate by one percentage point every two years until it reaches 15 percent by 2025.

In accordance with the schedule provided under RA 11199, the contribution rate increased to 14 percent from 13 percent in the previous year. Under the new contribution rate, employers will shoulder the one percent increase, which means their contribution will now be at 9.5 percent. The remaining 4.5 percent will be deducted from the employee.

Finance Secretary and SSC Chairperson Benjamin E. Diokno has expressed his support for the new contribution rate saying, "it is the right thing to do for the institution and its members."

Macasaet said the implementation of the contribution hike would eventually redound in a system that would serve workers better. "The contribution hike will benefit the workers with the SSS being able to provide a financially viable social protection system to Filipino workers and their families," Macasaet said. "It will not be a burden on workers but will be shouldered by employers. Workers earning less than P25,000 per month, who comprise

78 percent of SSS-paying employee members, will not be affected," he added.

Macasaet served as President and General Manager of the Government Service Insurance System (GSIS) during the Duterte administration and was appointed by President Marcos to head the SSS last January 5 to replace former SSS PCEO Michael Regino.

At the same time, Macasaet noted that under existing tax laws, employers would be allowed to deduct their share of the contribution hike from their taxable income. "This underscores a whole-of-nation approach in securing the future of our workers with the Philippine government also contributing in the form of tax relief to employers," Macasaet explained.

The SSS is being urged by employer groups, such as the Philippine Chamber of Commerce and Industry (PCCI), the Employers Confederation of the Philippines (ECOP), and the Philippine Exporters Confederation Inc. (PECI), to suspend the implementation of the Social Security Act of 2018 that mandates the one percent increase in SSS contributions starting this month.

The request of the employers' groups was opposed by SSS officials as postponing the measure would reduce the

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actuarial life of the fund. The SSS said they gave due consideration to the plight of small employers in past contribution hikes, but ultimately had to act in favor of workers' interests and the fund's long-term solvency.

In his statement, Macasaet clarified that employees would not be required to shoulder the addition financial burden that goes with the contribution hike.

"The contribution hike will not be paid by the lowly worker but by financially-stable employers who can afford such adjustments. I am appealing to the PCCI, the ECOP, and the Peci, who we consider our valuable partners in our mission to provide social protection to our workers, to treat the contribution hike not as another operational expense but as a noble investment to ensure the viability of the workers' pension fund," Macasaet said.

"We appeal to our friends in big business to help us provide meaningful protection to the members of the working class and their families against the hazards of disability, sickness, maternity, old age, death, and other contingencies resulting in loss of income or financial burden," he added. "A socially protected working class is our best recipe for continued industrial peace in our country."

Gatchalian..

Senator Win Gatchalian asked the Department of Energy (DOE) to explain the delay in submitting a new energy roadmap to Congress and urged the agency to do so promptly.

The country's Philippine Energy Plan (PEP), which extends up to 2050, seeks to increase the use of renewable energy and come up with an energy mix towards a clean energy scenario.

"The Philippine Energy Plan will be the foundation for achieving cleaner energy, promoting economic growth, and enhancing the well-being of our people," said Gatchalian.

According to the senator, the DOE is supposed to submit to Congress an updated energy roadmap by September 15 of each year as mandated under Republic Act 9136, also known as the Electric Power Industry Reform Act (EPIRA).

"The submission of the PEP is already more than three months overdue. The DOE needs to comply with this requirement immediately," Gatchalian emphasized.

The Philippines' current renewable energy goals are at 35% by 2030 and 50% by 2040.

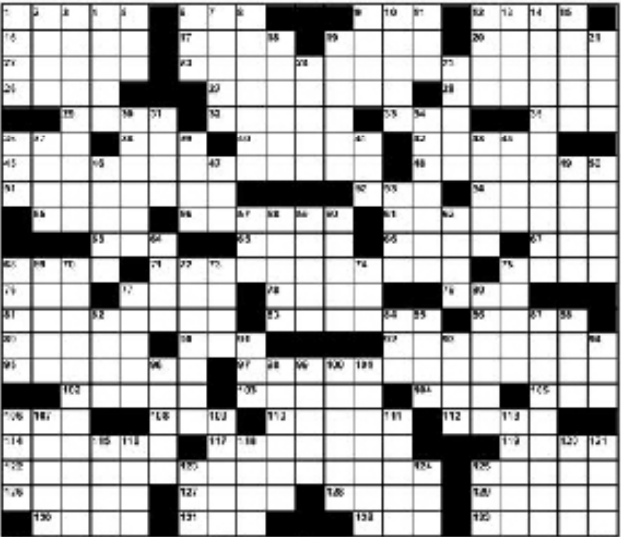
"Hindi katanggap-tanggap na naantala na nang husto ang

ACROSS

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- 54 France's longest river
- 55 Novel ending
- 56 Skier's coverup
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MYTH UNICORN FAIRY FANTASY MAGICAL
PERFECT LEGENDARY MYSTICAL RAINBOW BEAUTIFUL WILD
SPARKLE MYSTERIOUS BEAST REAL TALES

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Cultivating “CREATIVE-ty”: DTI-Rizal Champions Creative Industries at Bonsai Art Workshop

As part of the extensive two-month long celebration of Angono Higtantes Festival and the implementation of Fiestakucha, the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) Rizal Provincial office in collaboration with the Local Government Unit (LGU) of Angono and the Art Capital Bonsai Club, orchestrated a one-day Bonsai Art Workshop at the Lakeside Ecopark in Barangay San Vicente, Angono, Rizal, on November 27, 2023.

The workshop



commenced at 9:00 in the morning with opening preliminaries and an introduction of the resource speaker by DTI Rizal Trade-Industry Development Specialist (TIDS) Jonalyn Adaya. Mr. Nonoy Gutlay of the Art Capital Bonsai Club then delivered an engaging presentation on the history and principles of bonsai, including discussions on bonsai soil preparation and fertilization. Following this, Mr. Romy Cojas demonstrated pruning and wiring techniques which illuminated the artistic side of bonsai cultivation.

DTI-Rizal officials, including OIC Provincial Director Cleotilde Duran, Business Development Chief Trade-Industry Specialist Sharon Dioco, Competitiveness Bureau Representative Judy Anne Chan, and Ms. Christine Querubin from DTI-4A Regional Office, along with LGU Angono Tourism Officer Adonis Antolines, graced the occasion.

At the end of the workshop, some participants left with a care-

Cebu ...

In its Volunteers and Partners' Recognition Day, the DSWD commended CEB, alongside other government agencies, private organizations and dedicated volunteers, for delivering humanitarian assistance and relief to communities in need.

"We would like to express our sincerest gratitude to our valued partners and volunteers who extended their support to the National Resource

and Logistics Management Bureau in delivering immediate responses to families affected by various calamities. We are grateful to have you as our volunteers and partners and commend all of you for your outstanding contributions to alleviating the suffering of vulnerable and disadvantaged people during crisis situations," said Diana Rose Cajipe, undersecretary of DSWD-Disaster Re-

January 03-09, 2024

Leads on the Road



Jennifer Suico takes the lead in operating e-Bikes together with her partner, Limwell Morales.

While the COVID-19 pandemic adversely affected some people's businesses, Jennifer Suico, a native of Davao City, experienced the reverse.

The event was a testament to DTI's Fiestakucha initiative, locally branded as "Championing CREATIVE" (Creative Related Efforts and Transforming Into Viable Industries) Rizal. This collaborative effort aimed to cultivate the cultural richness of the Angono Higtantes Festival with the transformative potential of creative industries. PR

From Page 3

sponse Management Group.

In 2023, CEB airlifted more than 258 metric tons of humanitarian cargo, showcasing the airline's unwavering dedication to supporting communities in times of crisis.

"We are honored to contribute to the government's noble efforts in making a difference in the lives of those in need. Cebu Pacific's purpose goes beyond flying—it's about connecting and supporting communities, especially during challenging times," said Cebu Pacific chief corporate affairs officer Michael Ivan Shau.

Looking ahead to 2024, CEB is steadfast in its commitment to social responsibility and advancing humanitarian causes. The airline also envisions fostering collaborative initiatives that provide sustainable and impactful change for every Juan. END

businesses.

Reflecting on her journey, Suico emphasizes the importance of nurturing one's business. "It is crucial to care for and grow your business because, in time, you will get the sweet taste of success," she said.

Journey with CARD

Jennifer's clientship with CARD Bank, a microfinance-oriented rural bank, has become her shoulder to lean on. As a loyal client for over 12 years, she has also become a konek2CARD agent. Serving as a bridge between the bank and the community, she facilitates various transactions including cash transfers, loan payments, bill settlements, and e-loading.

Initially, Jennifer noted that some clients were hesitant about konek2CARD because they found technology intimidating. But they realized the convenience it offers, especially during weekends or holidays.

Jennifer's story is a story of resilience, innovation, and the spirit of community upliftment during challenging times.

January 03-09, 2024

EDITORIAL: Reprieve for PUV operators

There's both good news and bad in so far as public transportation is concerned.

The good news for jeepney drivers and the public is that public utility vehicle (PUV) operators who have yet to comply with the consolidation requirement under the government's PUV modernization program will still be allowed to ply selected routes.

The bad? They only have until the end of January 2024 to do so.

Last month, President Marcos stood firm against extending the Dec. 31 deadline for PUVs to join or organize cooperatives that would be issued consolidated franchises in line with the PUV modernization program.

These groups would be entitled to government subsidies, access to credit facilities, and other forms of assistance to help modernize their fleets.

It seems, however, that the month-long reprieve appears to be too short to allow PUV operators adequate time to meet LTRFB requirements for the modernization program.

We can't help but think this is a concession given to PUV operators to placate or mollify them and keep them from continuing their protest actions in the streets.

The inevitable result of the ban on traditional jeepneys by Jan 31 could be a massive public transportation crisis in Metro Manila and elsewhere by Feb 1.

And, with it, more protests from the affected jeepney drivers and operators who stand to lose their source of livelihood.

We do realize the need to modernize the country's transportation system.

The US Army jeeps transformed into jeepneys since the end of the Second World War and a staple of mass transportation since then have become an anachronism in this day and age when other fast and affordable transport modes are already available.

Many traditional jeepneys running in city streets today have seen better days and run on diesel fuel that spews out toxic fumes that impair the quality of air we breathe in the cities.

But instead of banning traditional jeepneys outright, the government could perhaps subsidize their conversion to more environment-friendly vehicles and

15K police ...

muros Bridge.

Vehicles coming from A. Mabini St. intending to use TM. Kalaw Ave. shall turn right to U.N. Ave., straight to P. Guanzon St. to Mabini Bridge to point of destination

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PH...

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MANILA — The Philippines welcomed a total of 5,450,557 international visitors in 2023, well above the 4.8 million target arrivals the Department of Tourism (DOT) earlier set for the entire year.

Of this number, 91.80 percent or 5,003,475 are foreigners while the remaining are 447,082 overseas Filipinos.

From January to Dec. 31, 2023, the country also generated an estimated PHP482.54 billion in international tourism revenue, more than double the receipts it recorded in 2022.

"My deepest appreciation goes to every tourism stakeholder, collaborative partner, and passionate contributor who propelled our shared aspirations forward. Under President Ferdinand 'Bongbong' Marcos Jr.'s guiding vision and leadership, tourism has become a pivotal force driving our nation's economic resurgence," Tourism Secretary Christina Frasco said in a statement Tuesday.

"These numbers speak very well of the performance of the tourism industry under the Marcos Administration,"

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she added.

She said the DOT will continue its work to "realize the vision of this administration to make tourism a catalyst for economic growth and resurgence."

More than a quarter or 1,439,336 of the arrivals came from South Korea, retaining its spot as the country's main source of international visitors.

This was followed by the United States with 903,299 tourists (16.57 percent) visiting the country; Japan with 305,580 (5.61 percent); Australia with 266,551 (4.89 percent); and China with 263,836 (4.84 percent).

Ranking sixth was Canada followed by Taiwan, the United Kingdom, Singapore, and Malaysia.

Frasco said the 2023 visitor receipts also show that the tourism industry is "recovering faster than expected."

The country's 2023 international tourism receipts grew by 124.87 percent compared with the PHP214.58 billion estimated visitor receipts from 2022.

Before the pandemic in 2019, the DOT recorded PHP482.15 billion in international tourism receipts.

READ: PH tourism, a year of exceeding expectations

In 2023, the DOT's marketing arm the Tourism Promotions Board (TPB) generated PHP6.317 billion in total sales leads both from international and local business-to-business and promotional events.

While reintroducing Filipino destinations before the global tourism arena, the Philippines represented by Frasco last year was also elected Vice President of the 25th General Assembly of the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), a prestigious global position last

held by the country more than two decades ago.

She was also elected as chair of the Commission for East Asia and the Pacific, allowing the country to host the Joint Regional Meetings of the Committee for East Asia and the Pacific and South Asia in Cebu in 2024.

The Philippines in 2023 bagged at least 15 travel and tourism honors from prestigious award-giving bodies in diving, beach, cruise, culinary, retirement, and Muslim-friendly tourism, "a testament that the Philippines is indeed an emerging tourism powerhouse."

"The extraordinary journey of Philippine tourism in 2023 saw the world express its love for the Philippines with our country's rise to global prominence as the World's Leading Beach and Dive Destination, and Asia's Best Cruise Destination, among many other accolades," Frasco said.

"The indomitable spirit of the Filipino has been globally acclaimed with the Philippines receiving the Global Tourism Resilience Award with our country seen as a benchmark for innovation amidst trials and challenges," she added.

By 2024, the DOT targets 7.7 million international visitors, around 500,000 lower than the country's pre-pandemic arrivals of 8.2 million.

"Looking ahead to 2024, our commitment to the transformation of Philippine tourism is unwavering. Guided by our National Tourism Development Plan 2023-2028, we are poised for a thriving tourism landscape, evident in surpassing our targets in international and domestic arrivals and receipts, fostering economic prosperity and further job creation for our people," Frasco said. (PNA)

The Maharlika Investment Corporation (MIC), which shall govern the Maharlika Investment Fund (MIF), held its first board meeting on January 3, 2024 to discuss the Fund's capitalization and potential projects to tap, among other matters.

"In today's meeting, we aim to fully operationalize the Maharlika Investment Fund. I look forward to your cooperation and support as we work together in mobilizing greater investments in the country's growth-enhancing sectors, while upholding the highest standards of accountability, fiscal responsibility, and good governance," Finance Secretary Benjamin E. Diokno said in his opening remarks.

Established under Republic Act (RA) No. 11954, the MIC serves as the sole vehicle responsible for mobilizing and utilizing the MIF for investments in transactions aimed at generating optimal returns on investments.

Investments in the Fund will be used to fast-track the implementation of the Philippines' 197 high-impact infrastructure flagship projects (IFPs) worth about PHP 8.7 tril-



lion.

MIC President and Chief Executive Officer (PCEO) Rafael D. Consing, Jr. presented the following sectors that may potentially be tapped by the MIF to achieve multi-generational commercial, economic, and social development value creation: Infrastructure; Oil, Gas, and Power; Agroforestry Industrial Urbanization; Mineral Processing; Tourism; Transportation; and Aerospace and Aviation.

The Board approved the presented Capitalization Scheme of

the MIC amounting to PHP 125 billion.

The creation of the MIF, which is the Philippines' first-ever sovereign wealth fund, is in line with the Marcos, Jr. administration's 8-Point Socioeconomic Agenda for poverty reduction and Philippine Development Plan (PDP) 2023-2028 for deep economic and social transformation.

The Fund is designed to catalyze economic development and accelerate the country's growth by optimizing the use of government finan-

Gan for the Investment Committee, Lichauco II for the Corporate Governance and Ethics as well as Related Party Transactions Committees, Tan for Nomination and Remuneration Committee, and the PCEO himself for the Executive Committee.

Meanwhile, the Board approved the appointment of the Bureau of the Treasury (BTr) as the Interim Fund Manager of the MIC.

PCEO Consing also updated the Board on start-up activities such as staffing and recruitment for the MIC and the hiring of its management team.

Also present during the meeting was the Fund's Advisory Body, which is composed of the Secretary of the Department of Budget and Management (DBM) represented by Undersecretary Leo Angelo M. Larcia and Treasurer of the Philippines Sharon P. Almanza.

The Advisory Body is tasked to guide the Board of Directors in the formulation of general policies related to investment and risk management.

The next MIC Board Meeting is scheduled to convene in the fourth week of January 2024. DOF.GOV

FIRST LADY LIZA ARANETA-MARCOS, HEALTH SECRETARY HERBOSA, NGA AND PRIVATE SECTOR REPRESENTATIVES LAUNCH 'LAB FOR ALL' IN PALAYAN CITY, NUEVA ECIJA

Muling nagpakita ng suporta ang Department of Health (DOH) sa paglulunsad ng pamahalaan ng programang LAB for ALL Caravan sa Palayan City, Nueva Ecija.

Ang caravan na ito ay inisyatibo ng administrasyong Marcos upang magpaabot ng libreng serbisyon pangkalusugan kagaya ng pamamahagi ng libreng gamot at konsultasyon para sa

pediatrics, obstetrics, gynecology, ECG, dental extraction, minor surgeries, eye check-up, family planning, at HIV and STI consultation at iba pa.

FIRST LADY LIZA ARANETA-MARCOS, HEALTH SECRETARY HERBOSA, NGA AND PRIVATE SECTOR REPRESENTATIVES LAUNCH 'LAB FOR ALL' IN PALAYAN CITY, NUEVA ECIJA Maliban sa DOH, nagpahatid din ng tulong at suporta ang iba pang mga ahensya ng gobyerno gaya ng Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA), Food and Drug

Administration (FDA), Philippine Health Insurance Corporation (PhilHealth) at lokal na pamahalaan ng Nueva Ecija.

"Tuluy-tuloy lamang po ang pagsuporta ng Kagawaran ng Kalusugan sa programang ito ng pamahalaan para sa isang layuning angatin ang antas ng kalusugan ng ating mga kababayan para sa isang Healthy Pilipinas....Kung saan Bawat Buhay ay Mahalaga tungo sa Bagong Pilipinas!" batid ni Health Secretary Teodoro J. Herbosa.

#DOH #Health #KagawaranNgKalusugan #OneDOH #UHC

LeBron, Giannis lead in first fan returns of NBA All-Star Voting

ANKARA – LeBron James (Western Conference frontcourt) and Giannis Antetokounmpo (Eastern Conference frontcourt) lead in first fan returns of NBA All-Star Voting.

The Phoenix Suns' Kevin Durant and Los Angeles Lakers' Anthony Davis follow James in the Western frontcourt.

In the Eastern frontcourt, Philadelphia 76ers center Joel Embiid and Boston Celtics guard Jayson Tatum are behind Giannis.

Luka Doncic tops the Western guards' list while Tyrese Haliburton tops the Eastern guards'



list in the voting.

The Houston Rockets' Turkish center Alperen Sengun placed 7th in the frontcourt of the Western Conference.

The next NBA All-Star fan voting update will be posted on Jan. 11. (Anadolu)

PhilHealth launches outpatient mental health benefits package

The Philippine Health Insurance Corporation (PhilHealth) introduced its mental health benefits package for outpatient services during the launching ceremony of the Philippine Council for Mental Health Strategic Framework for 2024-2028 on October 12, 2023.

PhilHealth President and CEO Emmanuel R. Ledesma, Jr. witnessed Vice President for NCR Dr. Bernadette Lico entered into a contract with the National Center for Mental Health led by Dr. Noel Reyes for the implementation of the outpatient mental health benefits package.

Republic Act No. 11036, also known as the Mental Health Act, governs the compulsory treatment of people with mental disorders. As a purchaser for health services, PhilHealth is mandated to provide and improve health



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PhilHealth launches outpatient mental health benefits package

NCMH, the state agency expanded its mental health services to make it more comprehensive and responsive to the needs of the people with mental disorders. "PhilHealth will implement a progressive mental health package, providing members, as well as their dependents, with responsive benefits that ensure financial risk protection as they go through their healing from anxiety and depression." PhilHealth's Chief Emmanuel R. Ledesma, Jr. declared.

The state health insurer published its PhilHealth Circular No. 2023-0018 on October 12, 2023 stipulating its mental health benefits for outpatient services which includes consultations, diagnostic follow-up, psychoeducation and psychosocial support that will soon be available in mental health outpatient facilities that will be accredited for the purpose.

This support for mental health consists of two packages: general mental health services packages amounting to

P9,000 and the specialty mental health services packages amounting to P16,000 per person annually. Individuals must be 10 years and older to be eligible to the aforementioned benefits to receive psychiatric services. Meanwhile, no age restriction is imposed for those needing neurological services.

As a way forward, the government aims to prevent premature mortality and improve the quality of life of Filipinos struggling with mental disorders. The state agency is also working towards an enhanced delivery of accessible mental health services and to help stop stigmatization and discrimination.

To ensure that this is progressively realized, PhilHealth has issued a call for mental health facilities nationwide to be accredited to ensure that needed mental health services are accessible to the people. "Together, we can promote mental health among our Kababayans not only here in urban but also in rural areas." Ledesma said. END

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