

For stricter food safety compliance, DOST, PCLEDO-Batangas partner to capacitate cooperatives, MSMEs

By John Maico Hernandez



To ensure food safety compliance among food manufacturing and food service businesses operated by cooperatives and micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs), the Department of Science and Technology (DOST)-Batangas and the Batangas Provincial Cooperative, Livelihood, and Enterprise Development Office (PCLEDO-Batangas) collaborated to conduct a seminar-workshop on food safety held at the PCLEDO Conference Room, Capitol Complex, Batangas City, March 21-22.

Given the need for stricter implementation of food safety regulations and the importance of capacitating smaller businesses to comply with these standards, the seminar-workshop aimed to provide participants with knowledge and skills to ensure the safety and quality of their products. Through this partnership, DOST and PCLEDO-Batangas sought to empower cooperatives and MSMEs in Batangas to meet food safety requirements and enhance their competitiveness in the market. As Ms. Felina C. Malabanan, DOST-Batangas' Provincial S&T Director, mentioned, this initiative is part of both agencies' commitment to support local businesses and promote consumer welfare through safe food production.

The seminar-workshop focused on three major topics, such as basic food hygiene (BFH), food safety hazards (FSH), and current good manufacturing practices (cGMP). These helped the participants understand the fundamental principles of food safety, their importance and benefits to a food business, and how to comply with the Food Safety Act of 2013.

The discussion on BFH delved into topics on sanitary permits, health certificates, quality and protection of food, primary production, establishment (design of facilities and equipment), training and competence, establishment maintenance, cleaning and disinfection, pest control, personal hygiene, control of the operation, product information and consumer awareness, and the special provisions of P.D. 856. Meanwhile, the categories of food hazards (physical, biological, and chemical), their implications on food processing, and the control mechanisms for food safety risks were explained under FSH.

For cGMP, topics discussed were GMP laboratory facilities and control, documentation, quality audits, warehouse and distribution, receiving and shipping, recall and traceability, retention of samples, and subcontracting of manufacture. Workshops on handwashing, physical hazards, and cross-contamination were included in the training program to ensure employees understood the importance of the principles discussed. Pre- and post-training tests were also administered to assess the effectiveness of the training. Mr. Mhark Ellgine A. Libao and Mr. John Maico M. Hernandez, both DOST-CALABARZON Food Safety Team members, served as the resource speakers during the two-day activity.

Moving forward, DOST-Batangas and PCLEDO will conduct an on-site assessment of food safety implementation among the participating cooperatives and MSMEs as part of their initiative to ensure that they obtain licenses to operate from the Food and Drug Administration.



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Digital, green projects to improve life quality, lure investments

TAIPEI, Taiwan – South Korea's capital Seoul is determined to push for digital and green projects to improve the people's quality of life, attract investments and foster further collaboration with the international community in turning these visions into reality.

Speaking to international media members on the sidelines of the 2024 Smart City Summit and Expo on March 21, Seoul Digital Foundation (SDF) president Yo-sik Kang said the establishment of smart cities should be aimed at creating a people-centered lifestyle rather than just introducing new technologies.

He said the public sector, for instance, must establish firm digital transportation strategies and approaches "with responsibility". Kang said these efforts must also support measures to combat the effects of climate change.

As an example, he said, the Seoul Metropolitan Government has introduced the "Climate Companion Card" to encourage public transport use. Launched in late January, the card serves as a unified pass for un-

limited 30-day train and bus transportation for a single charge of 62,000 Korean won (KRW) (around PHP2,600), while an additional 3,000 KRW (PHP125) would be charged for those who would want to avail of unlimited use of "Ttareungi" bicycles owned by the city government.

In February, a youth discount for those aged 19 to 34 further cut the price range of the pass from 55,000 (excluding Ttareungi bicycles) to 58,000 KRW (PHP2,200 to PHP2,400). "Also, Seoul Parliament Plaza in the center of Seoul is now transformed into a lasting space to create a garden city with more greens. SDF continues to pursue research projects for natural and green space creation and so on," Kang added.

Seoul's SCSE booth, meanwhile, showcased projects of local firms aimed at boosting smart city efforts. These include Aone Traffic Research and Development's LED (light emitting diode) floor-type pedestrian traffic lights at the bottom of the pedestrian waiting line. This technology is equipped with a voice

guidance assistance device allowing the public and the transportation vulnerable to safely cross the crosswalk through a voice signal, resulting in fewer pedestrian accidents.

Meanwhile, K4 Security features its decentralized ID-based product passport system, which uses identity verification technology and enables the digitalization of products and the achievement of carbon-centric goals.

Another firm The Spatial Party XR offered a 3D-based extended reality (XR) control system which enables quick onsite response by connecting the control room with real-time sensor data display and screen mirroring.

Upsight, meanwhile, highlighted its building management solution using artificial intelligence (AI) deep learning which focuses on four major areas – process, material, drawing and report management.

These methods aim to increase work efficiency and quality accuracy, check drawing-based production material volume, solve drawing changes and missing material problems and

LTFRB to award 8K motorcycle taxi slots outside Metro Manila



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MMDA: Provincial buses allowed along EDSA starting March 25

Gatchalian sounds alarm on drowning incidents; pushes for lifeguards in public pools

VP Sara: Biz mentorship to address skills mismatch among learners

DILG, gov't fiscal bodies partner on sound financial mgmt in LGUs

DA sees rice production hike at 1.1% in Q1

Sen. Alan on 1987 Constitution: You can't just change it on a whim



PBBM to NGCP: Ensure timely completion of power projects

MANILA – President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. on Monday called on the National Grid Corporation of the Philippines (NGCP) to ensure the timely completion of key power projects to ensure reliable electricity supply across the country. Speaking at the ceremonial energization of the recently completed Cebu-Negros-Panay (CNP) 230-kiloVolt (kV) Back-

Cont. on Page 2



The Department of Tourism recognized #EnchantedKingdom, the first and only world class theme park in the Philippines, for its valuable contribution to the tourism industry during the CALABARZON Tourism Excellence Appreciation 2023, held last January in Twin Lakes Hotel in Laurel, Batangas. EK's Chairman and President Mr. Mario O. Mamon and Chief Operating Officer (COO) Dr. Cynthia R. Mamon accepted the recognition - alongside Local Government Units (LGUs), partner National Government Agencies (NGAs), private tourism enterprises, the academic community, me-



dia partners, institutional partners, and notable individuals in the region. EK's Learning and Development Department Head, Pauline C. Barreiro also received an award for her participation as a trainer for the Filipino Brand of Service Excellence (FBSE) Training program for 2023. Currently, 90% of Enchanted Kingdom's Cast Members (employees) are FBSE trained.

POINT OF VIEW

HEALTH HINTS FOR ELDERSD FROM AGES 45 TO 100 YEARS

13. have a daily green smoothie
Green smoothies as a snack or simple, on-the-go breakfast are an easy way to get your greens in each day. Check out our curated list of healthy (veggie-packed!) smoothie recipes for our favorite starter green smoothie recipe ideas.
14. work hard + be kind
Enough said!
15. cultivate a positive mindset
“The only difference between a good day and a bad day is your attitude.” It’s true—mindset is everything! Cultivate a positive mindset by recognizing negative thought patterns and countering them with positive thoughts or affirmations. Here are more mindset resources for positive thinking.
- jenna-anderson-DFlg-Mm6zHw-unsplash (1).jpg
mike-marquez-Z6fFC5zVlkQ-unsplash.jpg
- brooke-lark-kwaP8ybRPWk-unsplash.jpg
16. get enough sleep
Most adults need 7-9 hours of sleep each night. But in addition to quantity, quality of sleep matters too! Follow our tips on getting quality sleep—things like keeping your bedroom cool at night, avoiding blue light after dark, and more.
17. start your day with a healthy morning routine
Start each day with fulfilling activities that set the tone for how you want to feel—whether that’s inspired, relaxed, productive, or something else. □ Check out our list of ideas for starting a healthy morning routine to start your day right!
18. eat the rainbow
Aim to eat all the colors of the rainbow each day. (Natural colors only, no Skittles!) Download our free fillable/printable Eat the Rainbow daily & weekly tracker to help keep track.
19. floss your teeth
Floss your teeth daily for good dental health and overall health. Not only does flossing daily protect your teeth and gums, but good dental health is also important for immunity and heart health.
20. spend time alone
Spending regular time alone helps to get to know and stay in touch with yourself (we’re all constantly growing and changing!). Alone time is an opportunity to check in with how you’re doing and what you want, so you can live your most intentional life. Some people enjoying hiking, going for a walk or run, meditating, or even sunbathing as a healthy source of alone time. □
21. do things you enjoy
This often gets overlooked as an essential element of healthy living—doing things each day that you enjoy! Whether that’s exercise, baking, crafting, reading a book or watching TV, reserve time each day to spend doing activities you personally enjoy.
22. choose organic foods when possible
There are a gazillion health, environmental and so-
- Cont. on next week serries 6th

DILG...



MANILA – The Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG) has partnered with the government’s fiscal oversight bodies on the adoption of sound public financial management measures to ensure improved performance and efficient delivery of basic services by local government units (LGUs).

DILG Secretary Benjamin Abalos Jr. and representatives of the Secretaries of the public financial management (PFM) oversight agencies – the National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA) and the departments of budget and management (DBM), finance (DOF) and human settlements and urban development (DHSUD) – signed Joint Memorandum Circular (JMC) 1 s. 2024 on Public Financial Management (PFM) in simple rites in Quezon City on Wednesday, the DILG said in a news release Friday.

“Effective public financial management is the backbone of our governance framework and vehicle in driving inclusive growth and sustainable development in the country,” Abalos said.

He also noted that sound fiscal management, including the improvement of the tax regime, is outlined as one of the goals in the Philippine Development Plan (PDP) 2023-2028.

Abalos said the JMC aims to strengthen the adoption of a more evidence-based approach to service delivery of LGUs, ensuring that local programs and projects to be budgeted and implemented are truly responsive to the existing situation and needs of local communities.

The joint memorandum was designed to harmonize and align the DILG, DHSUD, NEDA, DBM, and DOF’s respective PFM policies, implementing guidelines, tools, programs, and projects with key cross-cutting concerns in local governance.

“We envision a stronger partnership and convergence of ef-

forts among all the PFM Oversight Agencies in continuously providing guidance, developing relevant systems and tools, and in building capacities of LGUs in the implementation of effective and efficient PFM in their respective localities,” Abalos said.

He also assured that the DILG would implement efforts to uphold the practice of fiscal discipline and sustainability, transparency, and accountability in the use of public funds at the local government level.

He added that the DILG’s Seal of Good Local Governance (SGLG) includes LGU Financial Administration and Sustainability, as one of the areas being assessed to foster a culture of good governance among LGUs amid the challenges in the local government landscape.

Boosting food security

In a related development, the DILG has signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with an Israeli agricultural center to provide intensive training and education to selected local agriculture students on modern food security solutions.

Abalos and AgroStudies chief executive officer (CEO) Yaron Tamir signed the MOU in Camp Crame, Quezon City on Tuesday.

Under the pact, the DILG will collaborate with LGUs in the selection of eligible students to participate in the 11-month AgroStudies program in Israel, focusing on various aspects of agriculture, including crop cultivation, livestock management, and agricultural technology.

Agrostudies is an international training center that provides a program for agricultural education to interns from developing countries around the world.

Abalos thanked the Israeli Embassy and the center for their friendship and partnership, noting that this would be a great boost to President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr.’s vision of ensuring food security

under the Bagong Pilipinas (New Philippines) brand of governance.

“We thank our partners for this continuous partnership of you transferring the technology and best practices to our Filipino farmers,” he said.

Abalos also cited the agency’s Halina’t Magtanim ng Prutas at Gulay (HAPAG) Program, which complements the national government’s food security measures, and the KADIWA ng Pangulo program, which provides access to quality and safe food items at affordable prices.

Meanwhile, Tamir said the Philippines was the first partner country of Israel over the past 20 years, with about 8,000 Filipinos as scholars in this program, the largest among 15 partner countries in the AgroStudies internship program.

“Our purpose is for the students and farmers to learn modern technologies in Israel and engage in businesses in the Philippines. I promise that as long as I am the CEO, the Philippines will have the highest quota,” he said. (PNA)

PBBM... FROM PAGE 1

bone Project in Bacolod City, Marcos underscored the importance of a stable power supply not only in the daily lives of Filipinos but also for regional and national economic development.

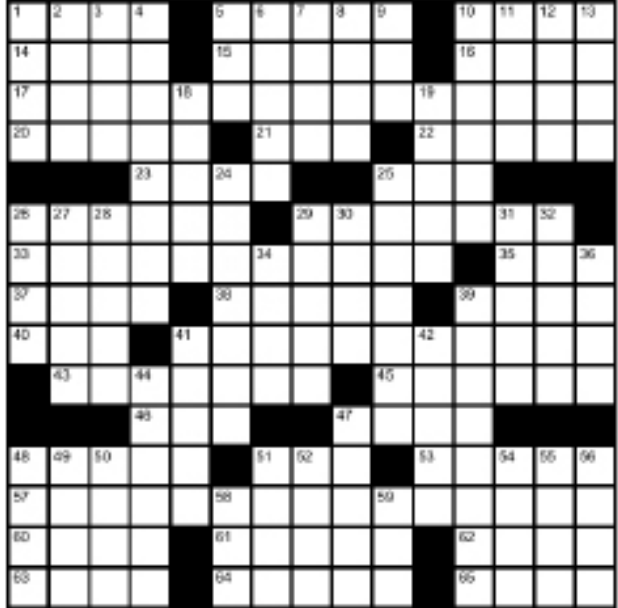
“Power outages are a hindrance to progress. Our power system must be a spark to ignite development,” Marcos said.

“The timely completion of critical transmission projects in strategic locations is paramount to avoid power disruptions and to ensure our continued development,” he added.

Marcos then called on the NGCP to ensure the timely completion of the remaining major transmission projects even as he assured the state-run firm that the administration is one with its mission to bolster the stability of the power grid.

“I urge the NGCP to deliver on the expansion commitment in a timely manner. Rest assured that the government will continuously assist you in this shared endeavor. We always consider it that way, it is a shared endeavor,” he said.

“It is not the project solely of the NGCP, it is not solely the project of the Department of Energy, it is a joint project and we bring all our resources



- ACROSS
1. Tibia
5. Respond by changing
10. Mold
14. Yield
15. The original “101”
16. Beach banquet
17. Result
20. Pickle portion
21. Treacherous curve
22. Gives the boot to
23. Hardy heroine
25. Give a single star, perhaps.
26. Miss Vanners’ metier
29. Twitchy
33. Water quality evaluation?
35. Fidel’s friends
37. Type of Tennis or bowling
38. She Played Gia on Full House
39. James of Rollerball
40. Suffix with lex-or-morph-
41. Succinet Sahara summary?
43. Former Senator D’Amano
45. Edmonton Skaters
46. Gore and Sharpton
47. Eso Beso balladeer
48. When Macbeth kills Duncan
51. American Uncle
53. Mutual of ____
57. Midmorning fruit disg?
60. Rapids rider
61. Like some verbs, abbrev.
62. Kind of Garden
63. T-men, generally
64. Mercantile establishment
65. Squid sprays.

ALEXSWEDEN
BEASTINSHEN
BOTNDLOING
DARTHDOUX
KILLAHBEE
SISU
NOMANUAL
UKRAINIAN
RADIANCE
ZEROT
PIKIWEDIA
BARNEEY
SHAHIL
HOLDNEXT
BACH
CAITHNESS
KEROKAI
OLIV
INTEGRATION
NISMO
ARF
VIPJUN
TEPPLES
SIRTETRIS
BLAZENAZN

UKRAINIAN
RADIANCE
ZEROT
PIKIWEDIA
BARNEEY
SHAHIL
HOLDNEXT
BACH
CAITHNESS
KEROKAI
OLIV
INTEGRATION

NISMO
ARF
VIPJUN
TEPPLES
SIRTETRIS
BLAZENAZN

TAMSAND
CONFUGAL
LUCHO
DANNYBARS
BASEBALLBOY
SOBORED
APOCALYPSE
XENOSLASH
EXCHLIORE

APOCALYPSE
XENOSLASH
EXCHLIORE
BENMULLEN
DASORATH
PIZZAPIZZA

FRAAANKIE
FELIPEMAYRINK
KEVINDDR
PINEAPPLE
KODOMO
TELESTO
KWILLIN

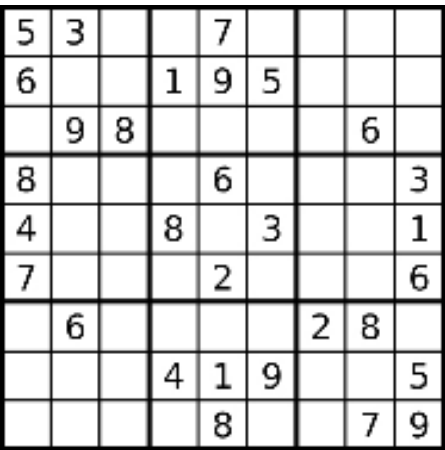
HEBOMAI
PARADOX
XAEI
VRILENT
JOEYBEANS
KITARU
BELZEBUB
PANDA
PAUL
MICROBLIZZ
LAPSILAP
MOM
ESTRELLETA
SALAMI
ENFUEGO
CAFFEINE
MASERATI
OHITSSTEF
WOJTEK
LARRY
DAS
MEOW
SHIZI
CORROSIVE
GLINCHER

DOWN

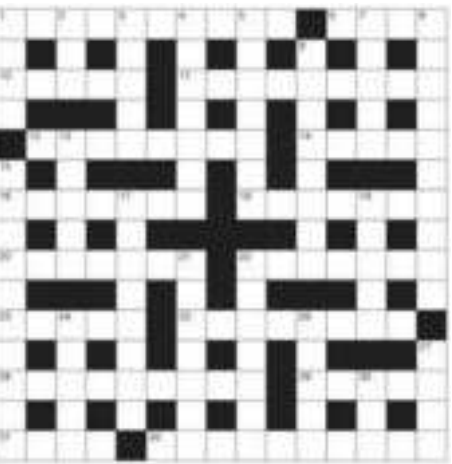
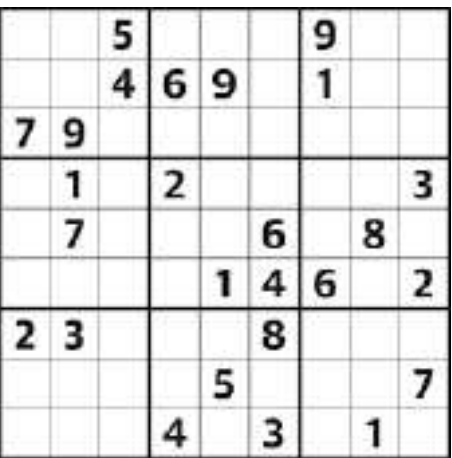
1. Sec 30 down
2. Give a hand
3. Like some hands
4. Denial
5. Member of the colonial army?
6. Saharan fruits
7. Fruity refreshments
8. Bowler’s targets
9. Children’s chase game
10. Show off and show often
11. Avignon ayes
12. Rave’s partner
13. Rumble
18. Last name in Vacuums
19. Treatments for a cow or a celeb
24. Sunday speeches
25. Ideal example
26. Fit
27. Golden Globe category
28. Wheel of fortune buy
29. Buying binge
30. With I down govt. students.
31. Meeting maestro
34. Eyeglass Holders?
36. You’d like to make them meet
39. Squid snack
41. Kind of acid
42. Big name in cameras
44. Swoons
47. Decorative resin
48. Incantation initiation
49. Alpine porch
50. Clump of curls
51. Reorder
52. Retro do
54. Very prolife auth?
55. Wield a machere
56. Says “who”?
58. Towel label
59. Iron or bronze, e.g.



SUDOKU



- ACROSS
1. Talkative person.
6. Motorway off-ramp
10. Cathedral, ... Dame
11. Slanting lines
12. Ticketed
14. Japanese seaweed roll
16. Pierced with fork
18. Every evening
20. Annoyed
22. Nuclear process
23. Vanilla slice topping
25. Railway bridges
28. Take apart
29. Was gloomy
31. One-on-one fight
32. Carry out (crime)
- DOWN
1. Dollar division.
2. Appropriate
3. Here, ... & everywhere
4. Overrun (with disease)
5. Continually (2,3,2)
7. Bone photos (1-4)
8. Giving evidence
9. Delivers (goods)
13. In existence
15. Tolerant (4-6)
17. Weight unit
19. Discredit (reputation)
21. Dedicated adminr
22. Sudden outburst (5-2)
24. Agenda item
26. Unfulfilled
27. Rom
30. Ham & ... soup



PRESCRIPTIONS

OVERWHELM

Take your life in your own hands, and what happens? a terrible things: no on to blame.

WHEN YOU ARE FEELING OVERWHELMED, stop and ask yourself why you are feeling that way. Who created the situation that you find overwhelming? If it was someone asking for your help, why didn't you say no? If you feel overwhelmed because of all the things you have undertaken, when will you realize that you have needs too?

Becoming angry or resenting your family, co-workers, and the world in genereal will not solve anything. Only you can change things by accepting your humanity and asking for what you need. Remember that saying no to others is saying yes to you.

No matter what you learned growing up, there is no reason to feel guilty about caring for yourself you will find much more peace with thre world and the people in it. Instead of blamming them for your troubles, you will realize you aere problem and you are also the solution.

Soulution of the Week

Become more aware of your needs.
Ask for the help you require, and say
no when you need no

Life's challenges can either make or break one's determination. While some may falter when confronted with adversity, for some reasons, Ma. Ruby Bullag remains resilient and brave.

Ma. Ruby, the eldest of eight siblings, left Negros Occidental to find work in Iloilo City. Starting as a store bagger, she later became a saleslady in a boutique. When the store branched out to Boracay, she immediately moved there.

A year later, she married Rino Bullag, a Boracay-based hotel staff. Despite Rino's steady income, it was still insufficient to make ends meet, so she sold siopao and pancit molo and built a sari-sari store for an additional income.

Through her store, Ma. Ruby met CARD Bank in 2010. She will never forget her initial loan of PHP 5,000.00 on October 27, 2010, because that money, along with their house and belongings, was burned into



With grit and determination, Ma. Ruby Bullag, together with her husband Rino, started a business venture and successfully found the restaurant to be a perfectly fit business for them.

ashes that same night due to a neighborhood fire. She was left with nothing but the courage and strong will to start over. By God's grace, a lot of people, including Boracay citizens and CARD Bank provided essential necessities, which greatly aided

their recovery. She utilized the gathered funds from kind-hearted people to acquire a siopao steamer and continue her business. They slowly got back on track, producing 300-400 pieces of siopao daily.

Despite the setbacks, she stayed positive, believing in eventual success. "Life has been constantly revolving. We may experience failure, and a lot might be a reason for us to quit, but I am positive that in perfect timing, we would achieve the



success that we are aiming for," she said.

They were able to rent a house, rebuild a sari-sari store, and add a small cafeteria, all because of her income from the siopao business. Their small cafeteria gained popularity, and when apartment tenants left, she rented the entire house, turning it into her whole cafeteria.

With expansion in mind, they found a land where they built a three-story establishment, turning the ground floor and second floor into a 24-hour open restaurant and the third floor into their home.

They had also let go of the cafeteria after the end of the contract with the land owner and solely focused on their restaurant.

However, the

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flourishing business was affected when the COVID-19 pandemic hit in 2019. As a result, they had to cut their workforce and limit their operations during that time.

But as the world returns to normal, so do their businesses. Right now, they are expanding into providing a catering service. Sustaining the needs of her thriving business is quite tough, but she is thankful for CARD Bank because it is one of the reasons why her business got this far. In fact, she currently has a PHP 300,000.00 loan from the bank that she uses for their restaurant business.

Although they are still renting, years from now, with the help of her business, she hopes that they can purchase the land and call it their own.

Digital...

resolve work intensity and workforce issues.

Piquant, on the other hand, showcased an integrated real-time monitoring solution that can monitor up to 11 air pollutants designated by the World Health Organization and South Korea's Environment Ministry.

Kang, meanwhile, said Seoul is set to stage its own Smart Life Week (SLW) on Oct. 10 to 12, aimed at providing a venue for networking and spreading innovation cases among cities and companies around the world by sharing smart city innovation technologies.

One of the highlights of the SLW is the Seoul Smart City Prize 2024, which recognizes institutions at the forefront of promoting human- and technology-centric approaches, with a particular focus on uplifting underprivileged sectors.

Luring investments Meanwhile, the city of Sapporo in Japan also aims to lure more investments through digital and green

solutions as it also wants to excel in the information technology, renewable energy and semiconductor industry.

In a separate interview during the SCSE, Hitoshi Yoshitake, senior manager of Japanese multinational company Pasona Inc., said the capital city of Japan's northern Hokkaido Prefecture has a huge potential for renewable energy.

"There is a national project going on to produce a plant for the next-generation semiconductor, which is backed by Sony, Toyota and IBM. The company will start the production of the advanced semiconductors of two nanometers by 2025," he said.

Yoshitake said Sapporo and its neighboring cities are going to form a so-called "Hokkaido Valley".

"The IT or semiconductor or green-related industries will be concentrated. So in order to attain this goal, we need to invite more advanced

FROM PAGE 8

foreign companies to this area. Yes, that's why we are here," he added.

Pasona Inc. senior manager Hitoshi Yoshitake (PNA photo by Benj Bondoc)

In cooperation with the Hokkaido Prefecture government, the city of Sapporo serves as a one-stop shop for supporting foreign companies, offering assistance on recruiting media, human resource agencies and employment services, as well as property inspections arranged in cooperation with real estate agents.

Yoshitake also said they met with representatives from the Seoul city government on a possible collaboration toward green transformation and digitalization.

"We are also trying to realize the green transformation and also the digitalization of society. The goal is very similar, by the close cooperation with them, I think we can both achieve this goal," he added. (PNA)

Poe to water concessionaires: Ensure uninterrupted service this summer

MANILA – Senator Grace Poe on Tuesday called on water concessionaires to implement supply contingency and augmentation plans during the summer months, and coordinate with relevant agencies to ensure continuous water supply.

The heat is on, water is on high demand, and without it, our health is at risk. Water providers must ensure an uninterrupted, 24/7 supply," Poe said in a statement.

Poe, who chairs the Committee on Public Services, said this is to prevent the outbreak of heat-induced diseases, like heat stroke, due to a combination of water shortage and intense heat.

She said the water firms should also coordinate closely with the Metropolitan Waterworks and Sewerage System (MWSS) and the National Water Resources Board (NWRB) to help ensure that customers will experience continuous water supply, even during peak demand periods.

"Kung walang tubig sa gripo dahil sa wa-



ter interruption, ang iba sa atin walang magagamit na tubig kahit sa inumin (If there's no water coming out in the faucet because of a water interruption, some of us will not be able to drink)," Poe said.

The senator authored Senate Bill No. 102 seeking to create a Department of Water Resources to put in place robust policies to address the country's water woes.

A priority measure of President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr., the measure envisions the agency to lead and consolidate whole-of-society efforts for the comprehensive and integrated development and management of water resources in the country. (PNA)

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EDITORIAL: Why are threats used indeed?

The ball is now on China's turf.
This, after Defense Secretary Gilbert Teodoro Jr. challenged China to put its sovereignty claim to arbitration after it had warned – again – the Philippines to bear all "potential consequences" amid its actions in the South China Sea.

As Teodoro said, and we rally behind his statement, "If they really want ... if they are not afraid to tell the world of their claim, why not go into international arbitration so it will be clear to everyone what right does one have over the matter? Why are they hesitant to do so?"

Teodoro maintained it is Beijing that is continuously intruding into the Philippines' territorial waters.

Teodoro was clear, "How are we challenging them? It is China that is intruding into our territory, what's the bottomline that they are talking about?"

"No country in the world believes in their narrative. This is just their way of threatening the Philippines."

We agree with Teodoro's reading of China's claims that other countries, like the United States, have influenced the Philippines as regards territorial dispute were a major insult to Filipinos since our territories are already being grabbed and the Philippines is just following what other countries say.

Teodoro is correct in declaring the Philippines can only be rightfully accused of doing provocative actions if it is doing these humanitarian and supply missions within the exclusive economic zones of other nations.

Adding muscle to Teodoro's statement, the Department of Foreign Affairs also summoned officials of the Chinese Embassy to express the Philippines' "strong protest" over the "aggressive actions" by the Chinese Coast Guard and its maritime militia against the rotation and resupply mission in Ayungin Shoal last weekend.

China's continued interference with the Philippines' routine and lawful activities in the latter's own exclusive economic zone is indeed "unacceptable."

Blatantly, China's aggressive actions call into question its sincerity in lowering the tensions and promoting peace and stability in the South China Sea.

The DFA said the Philippine Embassy in Beijing has also been instructed to lodge the same démarche (formal diplomatic representation) with the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

"In these démarches, the Philippines stressed, among others, that China has no right to be in Ayungin Shoal, a low-tide elevation that lies within the Philippines' exclusive economic zone and continental shelf in accordance with the 1982 UNCLOS (United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea) and as affirmed by the 2016 Arbitral Award," it said.

As the DFA said China's aggressive actions contradict and put to waste ASEAN-China efforts to promote practical activities to foster peace and cooperation in the region even as the Philippines continues to engage China in dialogue and diplomacy at the bilateral and multilateral levels.

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DA sees ...

MANILA – As the El Niño phenomenon continues to affect many parts of the country, the Department of Agriculture (DA) projected around a 1.1 percent increase in rice production for the first quarter of the year.

At the Bagong Pilipinas Ngayon briefing on Thursday, Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. said the incremental increase would help lower import volumes contrary to the March 2024 forecast of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA).

The total production is expected to reach about 4.78 million metric tons (MT), Laurel said.

"Ang palay natin first quarter ay tataas ng (our palay for the first quarter will increase by)



1.1 percent compared to last year. So, the total production should reach about 4.78 million metric tons (MT) dahil narin sa tuyong panahon (because of the dry season)," he said.

The USDA projected a 4.1 million MT import volume this year, which the DA chief described as a "worst-case scenario".

But Laurel was optimistic that the country would not have to reach that level, adding that rice production seemed to be OK despite the phenomenon.

"If you may recall, 2022 ang (the) imports statistics is 3.8 million eh; last year it went down to 3.5 million metric tons. So, I think, hopefully, hindi tayo aabot sa (we will not reach) 4 million metric tons this year since

production seems to be okay even with El Niño," Laurel said.

The El Niño phenomenon has so far left PHP2.63 billion worth of agricultural loss in the Philippines, with the highest damage accounted for rice worth PHP1.72 billion.

NFA operations

Laurel, meanwhile, assured that the DA's efforts to procure the country's rice buffer stock through the National Food Authority (NFA), remain uncompromised.

"We are managing with our limited resources and manpower, nama-manage naman nang maayos ang NFA (the NFA is being managed well) as of the moment," he said.

In an earlier

interview at the Food Security Cluster Communication Workshop in PhilRice, Science City Muñoz, Nueva Ecija, Laurel said that the operation of 97 NFA warehouses remained suspended amid the ongoing probe on the alleged questionable selling of rice buffer stocks to select traders.

Despite this, the agri chief said farmers may continue to sell their harvested palay to the NFA.

To date, the NFA's buying price is pegged at PHP23 per kilogram, lower than the average buying price of traders set at PHP27/kg to PHP30/kg.

The NFA needs to secure around 300,000 metric tons of rice for national buffer stock. (PNA)

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a business. I will buy a ticket, I will go wherever Taylor Swift is)," she added.

Concepcion, meanwhile, shared that 'youthpreneurs' must focus on the technological trends, particularly in social media, to attain success in the business industry.

He said that even the business sector has shifted from traditional to social media marketing, maximizing platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok.

"Be aware of the changing phase in the lifestyle, in the economy, things to do. Social media has rapidly changed the landscape of how products are being sold today. That is an area that all of you can do," he said.

Through the Youthpreneur program, SHS learners shall be able to connect with successful business mentors to discuss the dynamics and innovation of entrepreneurship in the country.

To date, the DepEd and Go Negosyo have rolled out the Youthpreneur program in Baguio, Bataan, and Pasig City. (PNA)

Following the death of 37 people, including 12 minors, during the Holy Week due to drowning, Senator Win Gatchalian reiterated his push for the mandatory designation of lifeguards in public swimming pools and bathing facilities.

Gatchalian's Senate Bill No. Lifeguard Act of 2022 (Senate Bill No. 1142) requires pool operators to employ at least one certified lifeguard for each public swimming pool operated for commercial purposes or free of charge. These include pools operated in hotels, inns, motels, condominium buildings, clubhouses, and any other public setting or residential setting other than a single-family home.

The proposed measure requires an additional lifeguard for every excess area of 250 square meters. These lifeguards must be duly

certified by nationally recognized organizations accredited by the Department of Health (DOH).

While the temperature continues to rise in many parts of the country, Gatchalian continues to urge vigilance as the deaths due to drowning tend to be highest during the summer months. In 2022, the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) reported 3,576 deaths in the Philippines due to drowning, with the highest number of cases recorded during March (317), April (391), and May (345). According to the World Health Organization (WHO), drowning is one of the top five leading causes of death among children aged one to 14.

"Nakakalungkot at nakakabahala na sa panahong masaya dapat tayo kasama ng ating mga pamilya sa bakasyon, siya namang dating ng trahedya dahil

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Sen. Alan ...

Senator Alan Peter Cayetano on Monday urged those seeking to amend the 1987 Constitution to first consider the underlying protective nature of the country's Charter, saying there is a reason its framers made it "difficult to amend."

"The Constitution was made very protective (and) you can't just change it on a whim," the independent senator said during the first hearing on Resolution on Both Houses No. 6 on February 5, 2024.

"No one is saying, 'Don't amend the Constitution' because no one said it's a perfect document. But what is the underlying principle behind the Constitution, and why did the framers of the Constitution make it difficult to amend?" he said.

Cayetano also urged those calling for

amendments to uphold the ideals that the Preamble of the Constitution represents, noting that the controversy that has been sparked by the People's Initiative (PI) has threatened to divide the Senate and the House of Representatives.

"I really want to honor everyone who worked on the Preamble. Throughout this debate, I hope this will guide us because what's happening now is the opposite of truth, justice, freedom, love, equality, and peace," he said.

Cayetano also acknowledged that while the proposed amendments deal with economic provisions, what the people are concerned about are the possible political amendments that could be introduced, particularly on changing or removing term limits of

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Cong. Mike Tan, DTI-
for 3PK BIDA Youth



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Quezon lead MOU Signing
Farm



During the 37th Anniversary of the Philippine Trade Training Center - Global MSME Academy on February 27, 2024, Cong. Atorni Mike Tan showcased the achievements of the 3PK Bida Youth Program and Four K Kakao Farm. This event not only highlighted the 3PK Products and Tangerine Chocolates but also celebrated the impactful collaboration between DTI Quezon and Cong. Mike Tan through the 3PK Bida Youth Program.

The 3PK-BIDA Youth Project serves as a beacon for young entrepreneurs, providing cash grants and a

complete support structure to encourage the formation of youth-driven firms. The program focuses on several industries and offers intense entrepreneurship training, mentorship, market linkage support, and advice through legal and regulatory requirements, all with the goal of empowering young entrepreneurs.

Significantly, the 3PK Bida Youth Program has already assisted three batches of beneficiaries: 3PK BIDA Youth Atimonan, Lopez, and Guinayangan, indicating significant progress in promoting young entrepreneurship in the region. This year, the initiative will expand its reach with two new beneficiaries, Gumaca and Alabat Island, therefore encompassing its impact and fostering economic growth through youth-led businesses.



Meralco rates down by nearly P1/kWh in April

MANILA – The Manila Electric Company (Meralco) announced Monday that electricity rates in its franchise areas declined by nearly PHP1 per kilowatt hour (kWh) in April 2024.

Meralco spokesperson and head of corporate communications Joe Zalzarriaga said in a press briefing in Pasay City that the company reduced their power rate by PHP0.9879 per kWh this month to PHP10.9519 from the electricity rate in March at PHP11.9397 per kWh.

The said adjustment will bring down the electricity rate of a household customer consuming 100 kWh a month to PHP198 for its April 2024 electricity bill.

"The significant reduction in this month's overall electricity rate wiped out the increases

in power rates for the first quarter of the year," Zalzarriaga said. The increase in Meralco rates for the past three months stood at PHP0.6813 per kWh. With the rate reduction for April, the year-to-date adjustment had a net decrement of PHP0.3066

per kWh. Lower generation and transmission charges cut the overall rates for this month, which declined by PHP0.3613 and PHP0.4655 per kWh, respectively. "Despite the rate reduction, Meralco

continues to encourage its customers to continue practicing energy efficiency, especially during summer when consumption historically increases anywhere from 10 to 40 percent due to warmer temperatures," Zalzarriaga added. (PNA)

LIBRENG FULL TANK GAS PARA KAY MANONG DRIVER

Naghandog si Mayor Alex Advincula ng libreng full tank gas sa ating mga masisipag na tricycle drivers sa Lung-sod ng Imus kamakailan.

Nakasama po natin sa ceremonial fueling ang mga TODA drivers mula sa iMart, San Roque sa pangunguna ng kanilang presidente na si Ernesto Beltran at ang Imus Public Market TODA kasama ang kanilang presidente na si Emmanuel Camantigue at



konsehal ng lungsod. Sa programang ito, lahat po ng miyembro ng 37 na Tricycle Operators and Drivers Association o TODA sa ating lungsod ay makatatanggap ng gas coupons na maaari nilang ipalit ng libreng full tank sa ating mga participating gas stations. Layunin po natin sa programang ito na makatulong sa hanapbuhay ng ating mga tsuper sa kabila ng nagtataasang presyo ng petrolyo.

LTFRB...

MANILA – The Land Transportation Franchising and Regulatory Board (LTFRB) is looking to award 8,000 motorcycle (MC) taxi slots outside the National Capital Region (NCR).

In a press conference at the LTFRB headquarters in Quezon City on Monday, Chair Teofilo Guadiz III said the decision was made by Transportation Secretary Jaime Bautista and the House of Representatives' Committee on Metro Manila Development.

"I am meeting the TNC (transport network company) operators to propose to them now that the slots will be given to areas outside Metro Manila like Regions 3 (Central Luzon) and 4 (Calabarzon and Mimaropa), and then Region 7 (Central Visayas) -- specifically Cebu -- and Region 11, which is Davao," Guadiz said.

The decision was arrived at after the Coalition of Transport Sectors appealed to President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. to stop the

expansion of the MC taxi study in NCR due to its adverse effects on traffic.

Initially, Guadiz said the 8,000 slots were supposed to be awarded to four new MC taxi companies in NCR to expand the current players in the study -- Angkas, JoyRide, and Move It.

"Ang kagustuhan namin sana ay dito muna (What we wanted is for the additional slots to be awarded within Metro Manila) because this is just a pilot study," he said.

"We would like to see exactly the saturation point before we can say that there is ample supply of MC taxis."

In deference to the House committee and Bautista, Guadiz said all 8,000 slots will be outside of Metro Manila.

Guadiz also debunked allegations of irregularities in the awarding of slots, emphasizing that the pilot study is handled by the MC Taxi Technical Working Group, composed of the LTFRB, Land Transportation Office, Office

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of Transportation Cooperatives and the Department of Transportation.

"The last person to sign the resolution is the chairman of the LTFRB. So, the allegation of irregularities is highly suspicious and preposterous. Never po ako nagkaroon ng hand dito (I've never had a hand in this)," he said.

To date, he said TNCs that will receive the 8,000 slots are completing their applications.

They have until April 15 to complete their allocations.

"We're still in the process of vetting or evaluating the application. But the order is it's effective immediately. So, the moment we award the slots, they will be outside Metro Manila," he said.

Earlier, Bautista announced that there will be no more additional units of MC taxis allowed to operate within NCR following opposition from transport groups. (PNA)

MMDA...

MANILA – Public utility buses (PUB) headed to the provinces will be allowed to pass through Epifanio de los Santos Avenue (EDSA) beginning Monday night to help lessen travel time for commuters and ensure sufficient number of PUBs during the Holy Week.

In a press conference at the Parañaque Integrated Terminal Exchange (PITX), Metropolitan Manila Development Authority (MMDA) acting Chair Romando Artes said these PUBs will be allowed on EDSA on Monday and Tuesday from 10 p.m. to 5 a.m.

In addition, PUBs will be allowed to ply EDSA at all hours beginning Holy Wednesday until Easter Sunday.

"Yan po ay para bumilis ang turnaround time ng mga buses, lalong-lalo na mga galing probinsya, para maka-cater sila ng mas maraming pasahero (That would help hasten the turnaround time for buses, especially those coming from the provinces, allowing them to cater to more passengers)," Artes said.

He also announced that number coding will be suspended

in the National Capital Region (NCR) on Thursday and Friday.

To ensure there are enough PUBs to serve the expected influx of commuters, the Land Transportation Franchising and Regulatory Board (LTFRB) has issued more than 1,021 special permits for the duration of the Holy Week.

During the press conference, Department of Transportation (DOT) Secretary Jaime Bautista said a special office of the LTFRB has also been setup at the PITX ready to issue special permits whenever necessary.

"Meron kami ng special office dito sa PITX na pwedeng mag-issue kaagad ng special permit para sa mga na-traffic na bus sa probinsya ay mapalitan at magkaroon ng additional capacity dito sa PITX (We have a special office here at PITX that can immediately issue a special permit to replace buses that encountered heavy traffic and to provide additional capacity)," Bautista said.

The office would be open 24 hours a day for the duration of the Holy Week.

He estimated

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that there will be around 1 million domestic and international (land, sea and air travel) passengers from March 24 to 31 this year, up from 926,755 in 2023.

DOT data showed that there was a total of 134,660 passengers on Sunday alone —62,097 arrivals and 72,563 departures.

"Sa ngayon, nakita natin na maraming pasahero. Ito'y nakikita naming average of 120,000 per day (To date, we can see that there are a lot of passengers already. We're estimating an average of 120,000 per day)," he added.

Artes and Bautista were joined in the press conference by Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG) Secretary Benhur Abalos, Department of Information and Communications Technology (DICT) Secretary Ivan John Uy, and several other government officials.

Before the press briefing, these government officials conducted an inspection of PITX and its facilities to ensure their proper operation during Holy Week travel rush. (PNA)