

MPTC GEARS UP FOR HOLY WEEK WITH THE "BI-YAHENG ARANGKADA" MOTORIST ASSISTANCE PROGRAM



BIYAHENG ARANGKADA
SEMANA SANTA

 **ENHANCED TRAFFIC OPERATIONS**

 **ON-CALL EMERGENCY MEDICAL SERVICES**

 **FREE TOWING SERVICE**

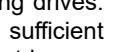
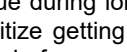
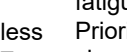
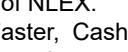
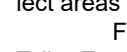
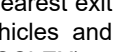
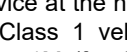
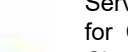
 **FREE MECHANIC SERVICE**

 **ELECTRIC VEHICLE CHARGING**

 **FREE HEALTH & WELLNESS CONSULTATION**

 **FREE WI-FI SERVICE**

CALL 1-35000 FOR ROADSIDE ASSISTANCE



Metro Pacific Tollways Corporation (MPTC), concessionaire of NLEX, SCTEX, NLEX Connector, Manila-Cavite Expressway (CAVITEX), Cavite-Laguna Expressway (CALAX), and Cebu-Cordova Expressway (CCLEX) is rolling out its robust "Biyaheng Arangkada Semana Santa" motorist assistance program from April 16-21, 2025. For CAVITEX, MPTC is implementing the program in partnership with its joint venture partner Philippine Reclamation Authority through PEA Tollway Corporation. This road safety initiative aims to provide a comfortable and stress-free journey for all motorists during peak seasons such as Holy Week in MPTC's extensive network of expressways.

With an expected 10% increase in traffic volume during this period, MPTC has developed

MPTC Biyaheng Arangkada a multifaceted strategy centered on providing a range of enhanced assistance services, increasing toll plaza efficiency through RFID awareness campaigns and promoting responsible road safety practices.

MPTC President and CEO Jose K. Ma. Lim affirms: "MPTC's role during Holy Week goes beyond traffic management by taking measures towards ensuring a travel experience that's safe, seamless, and reassuring. 'Biyaheng Arangkada Semana Santa' reflects our commitment to service that anticipates the needs of our motorists and helps families reconnect and travel with peace of mind."

Enhanced Roadside Assistance and Support Services:

MPTC is significantly bolstering its on-ground presence with an array of readily available

assistance for motorists who may encounter emergencies on the road:

- On-call assistance services for roadside emergencies; a dedicated hotline (1-35000) and the MPT - DriveHub app is available 24/7.
- Roadside assistance stations are strategically positioned along the tollways.
- Enhanced Traffic Operations: More than 2,000 personnel along all MPTC expressways will be deployed as early as April 8 to manage traffic flow effectively and respond swiftly to incidents.
- Free on-call Emergency Medical Services: Well-equipped medical teams will be on standby to provide immediate assistance in case of medical emergencies along the expressways.
- Free Basic Mechanical Service at select Rest and Refuel Stations:



Cavite-Laguna Expressway Entry



CALAX Patrol crew on-duty

Motorists may avail complimentary basic mechanical checks and minor repairs at designated rest and refuel stations along the MPTC network.

- Free Towing Service at the nearest exit for Class 1 vehicles and Class 1M (for CCLEX) to provide immediate relief in case of vehicle breakdowns:

> NLEX, SCTEX, CALAX, CCLEX, and NLEX Connector:

- April 9, 6am to April 14, 6am
- April 16, 6am to April 21, 6am

> CAVITEX

- April 16, 6am to April 20, 6pm

- Easytrip RFID Services On-Ground: Easytrip teams will be at strategic locations to assist motorists with RFID installation, reloading, and account inquiries.
- CCLEX RFID services for installation, reloading and inquiries are available at the Toll Plaza Tent (Cordova-bound).
- Free Wi-Fi Stations (Powered by SMART) and complimentary Drinking Water (Provided by Maynilad) at participating Rest and Refuel stations and motorist camps.
- Free health and wellness consultation

Essential Road Safety Guidelines

Travelers can observe critical road safety reminders to promote responsible driving practices:

- Ensure vehicle roadworthiness. Conduct a thorough pre-trip vehicle inspection before embarking on your travel. Pay close attention to tires, fluids, lights, and brakes to prevent unexpected breakdowns.
- Stay alert and well-rested. Take regular breaks at designated rest and refuel areas to combat fatigue during long drives. Prioritize getting sufficient sleep before your trip.
- Adhere to designated speed limits and maintain strict lane discipline.

MPTC's Biyaheng Arangkada commits to ensuring a seamless and safe Holy Week journey for all motorists. These, coupled with ongoing efforts to promote road safety and RFID readiness, demonstrate dedication to providing comprehensive support and a positive travel experience.

Motorists are strongly encouraged to stay updated on traffic conditions and the locations of all available services through MPTC expressways' official social media channels and the MPT DriveHub app.

Travel safely and conveniently this Holy Week with the enhanced MPTC "Biyaheng Arangkada Semana Santa" program.

For inquiries about this press release please email us at: **corp-comm@mptsouth.com**

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AGRI RENEWS CALL TO PROBE P11-B EXPIRED MEDICINES, VACCINES IN DOH WAREHOUSES, HEALTH FACILITIES

PNP CAUTIONS PUBLIC ON ROAD CONGESTION DURING HOLY WEEK, SUMMER BREAK **PAGE 02**

Calabarzon workers get a boost as 2nd tranche of wage hike takes effect



To gain insights into Cavite State University's (CvSU) Administrative Services and Non-Teaching Association, Don Mariano Marcos Memorial State University – Central Administration (DMMMSU-CA) and the National Apiculture Research and Training Development Institute (NARTDI) conducted a benchmarking activity at the institution.

During their visit, the DMMMSU delegation explored CvSU's administrative services to understand how the university structures its operations in areas such as Human Resources Management, Records Management, Supply and Procurement, Finance, and Quality Assurance. In addition, the processes and activities of the Non-Academic Employees Association (NAEA) were also discussed.

The activity concluded with a visit by the DMMMSU delegation to the offices of the Procurement Office and Supply and Property Office, Human Resource Management Office (HRMO), Office of the University Registrar, University Health Services, and the Agri-Eco Tourism Park.



DOST UPSKILL UNIVERSITY OF BATANGAS' FACULTY MEMBERS, RESEARCHERS ON PROPOSAL WRITING



The Department of Science and Technology (DOST)-Batangas, in partnership with the National Research Council of the Philippines (NRC), capacitated the faculty members and researchers of the University of Batangas (UB) – Batangas City and Lipa City Campuses on research proposal writing, focusing on DOST research priorities, proposal evaluation, NRC membership procedures, funding development, and research and development (R&D) opportunities, during a semi-nar held at Tierred Hall, Building C, University of Batangas – Lipa Campus, March 21.

The seminar aimed to equip UB's faculty members and researchers with the necessary knowledge and skills to develop high-quality research proposals, enhance their understanding of DOST's funding opportunities, and encourage participation in national research initiatives. It also

cont. on Page 2



10 practical health tips to help you start off towards healthy living in 2025.

1. Eat a healthy diet
Eat a combination of different foods, including fruit, vegetables, legumes, nuts and whole grains. Adults should eat at least five portions (400g) of fruit and vegetables per day. You can improve your intake of fruits and vegetables by always including veggies in your meal; eating fresh fruit and vegetables as snacks; eating a variety of fruits and vegetables; and eating them in season. By eating healthy, you will reduce your risk of malnutrition and noncommunicable diseases (NCDs) such as diabetes, heart disease, stroke and cancer.

2. Consume less salt and sugar
Reduce your salt intake to 5g per day, equivalent to about one teaspoon. It's easier to do this by limiting the amount of salt, soy sauce, fish sauce and other high-sodium condiments when preparing meals; removing salt, seasonings and condiments from your meal table; avoiding salty snacks; and choosing low-sodium products.

On the other hand, consuming excessive amounts of sugars increases the risk of tooth decay and unhealthy weight gain. In both adults and children, the intake of free sugars should be reduced. WHO recommends consuming less than 5% of total energy intake for additional health benefits. You can reduce your sugar intake by limiting the consumption of sugary snacks, candies and sugar-sweetened beverages.

3. Reduce intake of harmful fats

Fats consumed should be less than 30% of your total energy intake. This will help prevent unhealthy weight gain and NCDs. There are different types of fats, but unsaturated fats are preferable over saturated fats and trans-fats. WHO recommends reducing saturated fats to less than 10% of total energy intake; reducing trans-fats to less than 1% of total energy intake; and replacing both saturated fats and trans-fats with unsaturated fats. The preferable unsaturated fats are found in fish, avocado and nuts, and in sunflower, soybean, canola and olive oils; saturated fats are found in fatty meat, butter, palm and coconut oil, cream, cheese, ghee and lard; and trans-fats are found in baked and fried foods, and pre-packaged snacks and foods, such as frozen pizza, cookies, biscuits, and cooking oils and spreads.

cont. on next issue

DOST ...

sought to foster a culture of innovation and scientific advancement within the university.

Engr. Francisco R. Barquilla III, Assistant Regional Director for Technical Operations of DOST-CALABARZON, discussed "R&D Opportunities and the Regional R&D Agenda," emphasizing the importance of aligning research initiatives with regional development priorities to maximize impact and funding potential.

Mr. Jesse M. Nicavera, Senior Science Research Specialist from the Research Development and Management Division of the NRCP, presented "NRCP Research Priority Areas and the Proposal Evaluation Process." He outlined the criteria for proposal assessments and highlighted best practices for crafting successful research applications.

Meanwhile, Ms. Mary Charlotte O. Fresco, also a Senior Science Research Specialist from NRCP, provided an overview of "NRCP Membership and Application Procedures." She encouraged eligible researchers to apply for membership and leverage the benefits of being part of NRCP's research network.

Dr. Aileen H. Orbecido, a professor from the Gokongwei College of Engineering at De La Salle University Manila, conducted a session on "Developing Research Proposals for Funding." She guided participants on crafting competitive research proposals, outlining essential components and strategies to secure grants from various funding agencies.

Ms. Felina C. Malabanan, Provincial Science and Technology Director of DOST-PSTO Batangas, concluded the seminar with an informative discussion on "DOST Scholarship Programs." She presented available scholarship opportunities, eligibility criteria, and the application process, aiming to encourage faculty and students to take advantage of these initiatives.

FROM PAGE 1

tives for academic and research advancement.

Hon. Lily Marlene J. Hernandez, University President of the University of Batangas; Dr. Ramon Christian Eusebio, Chair of the Division of Engineering and Industrial Research, NRCP; and Dr. Pastor Arguelles Jr., Director of the Research and Publication Office, University of Batangas – Lipa Campus also graced the activity. The conduct of this seminar underscores DOST-Batangas, NRCP and the University of Batangas' commitment to strengthening research capabilities, fostering collaborations, and advancing scientific and technological development in the region. PR

PNP cautions...

CALAMBA CITY, Laguna (PIA) — Authorities have reminded motorists to stretch their patience on the road especially this time of the year when travelers troop to ports and stations for the Holy Week pilgrimage, and the summer break.

Brig. Gen. Paul Kenneth Lucas, police regional director for Calabarzon, said that this season of ten causes heavy road congestion as devotees visit churches and tourists head to the region's popular destinations.

"For our fellow kababayans who will be going to tourist spots and for the devotees visiting well-known churches, expect heavy traffic. We anticipate congestion. Although our police will be assisting, we really cannot avoid that kind of traffic," Lucas said.

Following a recent road rage incident in Antipolo City, Rizal between drivers of a sports utility vehicle and motorcycle, the police executive also advised the public to remain calm and patient on the roads, particularly during peak travel times.

He also emphasized that maintaining composure may prevent minor incidents from escalating into more serious situations.

CALABARZON...

TRECE MARTIRES CITY, Cavite (PIA) — Private workers across Calabarzon are now set to fully benefit from the wage hike approved by the regional wage board last year, as the second tranche of the increase takes effect.

With the latest adjustment, workers in the non-agriculture sector in component cities and first-class municipalities will receive an additional ₱20, raising their daily minimum wage from ₱520 to ₱540.

Meanwhile, non-agriculture workers in fourth, fifth, and sixth-class municipalities will receive a ₱30 increase, elevating their daily minimum wage from ₱420 to ₱450.

The Wage Board added that workers in the

April 16-22, 2025 FROM PAGE 1

agriculture sector in first-class municipalities will receive an increase of ₱35, adjusting their daily minimum wage from ₱465 to ₱500.

"These adjustments follow the initial tranche implemented on September 30, 2024, and are part of the government's ongoing efforts to ensure fair compensation for workers in the region," the Regional Tripartite Wages and Productivity Board Calabarzon (RTWPB IV-A) said in a statement.

The RTWPB IV-A advised employers to comply with the new wage rates to avoid penalties, while workers are encouraged to stay informed about their updated compensation entitlements.

FROM PAGE 1

tified as high-traffic zones for both pedestrians and vehicles.

To immediately address public safety concerns, police assistance hubs and checkpoints are being set up in strategic areas, and ambulances and patrol vehicles will be deployed at tourist spots.

Aside from these precautionary measures, Lucas also encourages travelers to bring plenty of water and food to stay hydrated and avoid unnecessary stress in case of heavy traffic.

PRO4A reassures the public of their continued presence and vigilance during Holy Week and the summer vacation, as they work together to keep the entire Calabarzon safe, orderly, and secure for all.

DOT PROJECTS OVER 30M TOURISTS DURING HOLY WEEK, URGES VISITORS TO TRANSACT WITH DOT-ACCREDITED BUSINESSES

The Department of Tourism (DOT) anticipates more than 30 million domestic and international travelers during the Holy Week break as tourists head to popular destinations across the country.

To ensure a smooth flow of tourists and manage peak volumes, Secretary Christina Garcia Frasco said the Department

Enchanted Kingdom treats Filipinos with magic and family fun at Eldar's Easter Adventure



Enchanted Kingdom, the first and only world-class theme park in the Philippines, introduces yet another magical twist to the classic tradition of egg hunting at Eldar's Easter Adventure on April 20, Sunday.

As part of The Enchanted Story of Eldar the Wizard campaign from April and June, guests will embark on a fun-filled quest with EK's beloved characters — Eldar the Wizard, Benny, T-Tops, and Ogg — as they search for special egg stickers through exciting activities around the park. Aside from trying out rides, attractions and spectacular shows, kids and the young-at-heart can channel their wit and creativity

through eduFUN, EK's very own educational and fun activities.

Exciting prizes and surprises await the lucky participants who will be able to complete Eldar's Easter Adventure. Those who stood out in their best on-theme attire will also receive special treats from the theme park's jolly and wise wizard.

In order to unlock this whole magical experience, avail the Eldar's Easter Adventure bundle, inclusive of Park access and event pass. Enjoy early bird rates when you book this limited-time offering at the EK Online Store on or before April 19, Saturday. Early bird rates include: Regular Day Pass for kids

DOT...

stressed the 24/7 operations of the DOT Tourist Assistance Call Center (TACC), which can be reached through hotline **151-TOUR (151-8687)**, mobile number **0954-253-3215**, email at **tourismassistance@tourism.gov.ph**, or via Facebook Messenger at Department of Tourism – Philippines.

The call center, which now offers multilingual support, including

Korean and Mandarin, has served over 14,000 inquiries from 72 countries.

"I also just want to remind na active po, and live 'yung ating Tourist Assistance Call Center. +151-TOUR.

Maari po nilang tawagan kung meron silang queries or request for assistance anywhere across the country.

And we have already launched the Ko-

48 inches and taller at Php 1,300; Junior Day Pass for kids 32 to 47 inches at Php 900; and EKsperience the Magic Card (EKMC) for Php 3,800. Existing EKMC members will also get access to this enchanting event with a special rate of Php 300.

Walk-in guests can avail the event bundle for its regular rate, subject to slot availability.

For more information and updates regarding Eldar's Easter Adventure and EK's other upcoming events and offers, visit <https://www.enchantedkingdom.ph> and EK's official social media accounts @enchantedkingdom.ph for Facebook and TikTok, and @ek_philippines for Instagram.

FROM PAGE 3

rean-speaking call center agent. And very recently, we have also already launched the Mandarin-speaking call center agents. So we've catered to over 14,000 calls already from 72 countries," added the DOT chief.

Click here for the list of DOT-accredited establishments:

<https://beta.tourism.gov.ph/accreditations/#dot-accredited>

PREVENTIVE ORAL HEALTH SERVICES IN PRIMARY CARE FACILITIES, NOW AVAILABLE IN CALAMBA CITY



PREVENTIVE ORAL HEALTH SERVICES IN PRIMARY CARE FACILITIES, NOW AVAILABLE IN CALAMBA CITY

The Calamba City Health Office located in Brgy VII, Calamba City and Cuba Urban Health Center located in Brgy. Punta, Calamba City are now accredited as the First Dental Clinics nationwide to provide the preventive oral health services in primary care.

Through its Accreditation and Quality Assurance Section (AQAS) and Local Health Insurance (LHO) Calamba City, PhilHealth Regional Office IV-A (PRO IV-A) has facilitated the accreditation of the said facilities with a validity period from February 18, 2025 to December 31, 2025.

This initiative ensures that members and their qualified dependents can avail themselves of routine preventive oral care. This provision includes mandatory services such as:

- dental prophylaxis (cleaning)
- fluoride varnish application

On the other hand, the pit and fissure sealant application or root surface protection/Class V restoration (limited to two teeth per year) and emergency tooth extractions can be availed as applicable only.

PhilHealth beneficiaries can avail themselves of the Preventive Oral Health Services through the Konsulta Package Provider (KPP) where they are registered.

The KPPs that are direct service providers will provide oral health services to their PhilHealth Konsulta clients within their catchment population through their own dental/oral health service or clinic. On the other hand, KPPs that are referring facilities shall assign and refer their clients to their affiliate PhilHealth-accredited primary dental care clinics for the provision of oral health services.

More dental clinics are anticipated to be accredited to provide preventive oral health services so that patients can easily and conveniently avail it. ###RFV

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Konsulta KPP POP MIX

Samar Receives Entrepreneurship Mentoring From Go-Negosyo



"We thank the First Lady for making it possible for Go Negosyo to help the aspiring entrepreneurs of Samar realize their dreams of prosperity," he said.

More than a hundred beneficiaries were mentored in entrepreneurship by 19 volunteers from the Philippine Chamber of Commerce and Industry (PCCI) Catbalogan and PCCI Tacloban- Leyte. The mentoring was with the help of Go Negosyo partners from the Department of Trade and Indus-

try (DTI) Region 8, DTI Samar, the Municipal Government of Basey, and the Provincial LGU of Samar. Booths of Negosyo Center, SB Corporation, and One Town, One Product (OTOP) Philippines were on hand to extend further assistance to the beneficiaries.

For more than a year now, Go Negosyo has supported LAB for All by providing entrepreneurship mentoring to program beneficiaries, enabling it to reach more nano, micro-, and small entrepreneurs in far-flung communities

across the country. Go Negosyo has sent its entrepreneurship mentors to several LAB for All caravans nationwide, including La Union, Cagayan, Isabela, Zamboanga City, Misamis Oriental, Zambales, Davao del Norte, Mandaluyong City, Bacolod, Leyte, Sorsogon, Bayambang, and several cities in the National Capital Region.

"Entrepreneurship mentoring is one step in helping people by giving them the means to lift themselves out of poverty," said Concepcion.

SSS RESUMES CAMPAIGN VS ERRING EMPLOYERS IN SOUTHERN LUZON



Social Security System (SSS) Vice President for Luzon South 1 Division Engr. Edwin Igharas explains to the warehouse's employer representative on how to register their business with the SSS during the Run After Contribution Evaders (RACE) Campaign in Cabuyao City. Joining Igharas are SSS Accounts Officer Caroline Masa (center) and SSS Calamba Acting Branch Head Sherry Lou Portas (left).

The Social Security System (SSS) Luzon South 1 Division started this year's Run After Contribution Evaders (RACE) Campaign with its 13 branch offices simultaneously issuing written

no-tices to delinquent employers in the region.

SSS Vice President for Luzon South 1 Division Edwin S. Igharas said that 132 erring employers in Cavite, Laguna and Quezon received

violation notices wherein 87 of them failed to remit P15.48 million worth of SSS contributions with corresponding penalties while 45 employers got a stern warning for not registering their businesses

PAG-IBIG RECOGNIZES STAKEHOLDERS IN SOUT LUZON



Pag-IBIG Fund recognized the top employers, developers, and collection agencies in the South Luzon region during the third leg of its Stakeholders' Accomplishment Report held in Pasay City on Tuesday (25 March 2025).

The Pag-IBIG STAR is held by the agency to apprise stakeholders in each of the country's major regions of its accomplishments and recognize them for their outstanding contributions.

The event also served as a platform for Pag-IBIG Fund and its stakeholders to reaffirm their commitment to integrity, underscoring their shared dedication to upholding professionalism

with the SSS.

"Employees rely on their SSS benefits for financial security in times of need. Employers' failure to register their businesses and remit their workers' contributions not only violates the law but it also deprives their employees with the benefits they rightfully deserve," Igharas said.

He underscored that the RACE Campaign shows SSS' commitment to enforce the law so they can protect the rights of workers in the region. "Employers must understand that timely and accurate contribution remittance is more than a legal obligation but a moral responsibility."

He explained that SSS is giving these delinquent employers 15 days

and the highest standards of public service in all their transactions.

Here's the complete list of Pag-IBIG STAR Awardees in South Luzon for H2 2024:

Top Employers in the Government Sector

- Batangas Medical Center
- City Government of Naga
- Bicol Medical Center

Top Employers in the Private Sector

- Palawan Pawnshop Inc.
- Center for Agriculture and Rural Development
- Furukawa Automotive Systems Lima Philippines Inc.

to coordinate with their respective branch offices and settle their contribution delinquencies to avoid any legal consequences, noting that business owners can take advantage of existing condonation programs and flexible payment terms.

"We are sending a clear message that SSS will take necessary actions to uphold the welfare of Filipino workers. We urge all employers to comply voluntarily and work with us in building a more secure future for their employees," he added.

He concluded that failure to comply may result in imprisonment of six years and one day to 12 years and or a fine ranging from P5,000 to P20,000. PR

EDITORIAL:

THE Commission on Elections is on the right track in proposing compulsory debates for candidates, both for national and local positions.

This, we hope, will give the electorate the opportunity to closely examine the qualifications of candidates and what they propose to do once elected to public office.

The Constitution, after all, only lists down the most basic qualifications for all candidates: they should have reached a certain age, are Filipino citizens, able to read and write, registered voters, and residents of the Philippines.

Those are the basic requirements. But candidates should be able to explain to voters what they stand for, whether on national or local issues and concerns, and to offer a clear platform on what they intend to do after they have been sworn into public office.

The fundamental law also makes it very clear: "Public office is a public trust. Public officers and employees must at all times be accountable to

Compulsory poll debates

the people, serve them with utmost responsibility, integrity, loyalty and efficiency, act with patriotism and justice, and lead modest lives."

Voters should be able to sift the chaff from the grain, so to speak, and not rely solely on the basis of name recall or popularity of candidates.

Should you vote for a candidate who declines to explain what he wants to do in public office and says that he would do so only when he has been declared among the winners? Of course not.

Voters should be able to distinguish between candidates who make false or empty promises and those who have the proven competence and expertise to make a difference in the lives of Filipinos.

And we need to remind the electorate that no less than the fundamental law frowns on political dynasties: "The State shall guarantee equal access to opportunities for public service, and prohibit political dynasties as may be defined by law."

The Comelec, as explained by Chairman

AGRI RENEWS...

AGRI Party-list Rep. Wilbert Lee reiterated his call for an investigation into the P11 billion worth of expired medicines and vaccines in Department of Health (DOH) warehouses, following a recent Senate resolution by Senator Joel Villanueva. Lee emphasized that the expiration of essential drugs, including over 7 million vials of COVID-19 vaccines, is a clear case of negligence and misuse of public funds.

Lee, who filed House Resolution No. 2117, highlighted the importance of accountability

and efficient use of health resources. He also called on the DOH to submit a comprehensive report on the expired supplies and the steps taken to address the issue. AGRI Party-list continues to push for free medicines and healthcare services for all Filipinos, stressing the need for proper government action to ensure public health resources are used effectively.

AGRI Party-list Representative Manoy Wilbert Lee reiterated his call to investigate the P11 billion worth of expired medicines and vaccines

in Department of Health (DOH) warehouses and health facilities flagged by the Commission on Audit (COA).

The Bicolano lawmaker renewed his call after Senator Joel Villanueva recently filed Senate Resolution No. 1326 to probe the said issue.

"Buo ang suporta natin sa panawagang ito ni Senator Joel Villanueva para imbestigahan din sa Senado ang malaking kapabayaang at malaking kasalanan na ito sa taumbayan," Lee said.

"Such negligence is both unacceptable and unlawful. Pondo ito na nasayang at serbisiyong ipinagkait para sa kalusugan ng mga Pilipino," he added.

Lee filed House Resolution No. 2117 on December 2024, stressing that the expiration of these essential drugs, medicines and vaccines, which the DOH allowed to deteriorate without proper utilization or timely action, constitutes a clear dereliction of duty and a violation of their mandate.

According to the COA audit report for the year 2023, P11.18 billion worth of drugs, medicines and medical supplies, including over 7 million vials of COVID-19 vaccines that were unused, expired in DOH warehouses and health facilities. Among the reasons cited for such

wastage are inadequate procurement planning and poor distribution and monitoring systems.

AGRI Party-list, which is running for reelection in the 2025 National and Local Elections underscored the importance of probing this issue to hold the involved officials and personnel accountable, identify underlying systemic issues, and ensure that public health resources are utilized efficiently, properly accounted for, and distributed in a timely and effective manner.

It also called on the DOH anew to submit a comprehensive report to Congress detailing the status of all expired supplies, including COVID-19 vaccines, and the steps taken to address the situation.

It can be recalled that during the last House Plenary Deliberations on the DOH Budget last September, Lee inquired about the lack of medicines in public hospitals.

"Mayroong bilyon-bilyong pondo para sa mga gamot pero bakit kinakailangan pang bumili ng mga kababayan natin sa labas ng ospital? Bakit kailangan pa nilang gumastos para sa gamot kahit na sa charity wards sila naka-admit? Isa pa ito sa dumaragdag sa out-of-pocket expenses nila; dagdag isipin ng may sakit; dagdag pasanin ng

George Garcia, has the power given to it by the Constitution to issue rules and regulations pertaining to elections.

Hence, it can compel compulsory attendance by candidates in public debates, in the same way that it can regulate the size of campaign posters, or require the registration of social media accounts, violations of which can lead to a candidate's disqualification from the race.

What the Comelec wants is for public debates to be conducted by media would be "just and fair to everyone" and that all candidates will have equal opportunity whether they belong to any party or not, or whatever their beliefs are.

Candidates should comply with Comelec guidelines or else they will face the corresponding punishment if they fail to do so.

Debates are important as these allow voters to know the stand of candidates on key political, economic and social issues.

This is democracy at work and runs counter to vote-buying, intimidation or coercion that undermines our goal of free and fair elections.

FROM PAGE 1

pamilya," AGRI Party-list earlier pointed out.

AGRI Party-list has been pushing for free medicines and healthcare services. Through Lee's leadership, AGRI Party-list was the first to expose that the Philippine Health Insurance Corporation (PhilHealth) had billions of available funds in September 2023, which then led to the implementation of PhilHealth's increased benefits after over a decade that it was not updated

ed and no longer responsive to the hospitalization cost of the beneficiaries.

"Hindi magiging posible ang ipinaglalan-ban nating libreng gamot at libreng pagpapagamot kung magpapatuloy ang kapalpakang ito sa gobyerno. Dapat may managot sa mga kapabayaang na nagkakait ng mga serbisiyong pangkalusugan para sa mga Pilipino. Buhay at kabuhayan ang nakataya dito," AGRI Party-list stated. PR

DOT...

establishments to ensure safety, quality, and a standardized experience.

"Overall, we are delighted to note that Filipinos are actively traveling within the country, and our international tourists are enjoying experiential — meaningful and enriching experiences. With this, we continue to encourage both international and local travelers to choose DOT-accredited establishments as we prioritize tourist safety and convenience. These accredited establishments have undergone a thorough accreditation process, ensuring that visitors receive truly high-quality experiences," the Tourism Secretary said in a media interview at the Ninoy Aquino International Airport on Thursday (April 10).

Meanwhile, in Manila, Intramuros remains one of the capital's most visited heritage and faith tourism sites, projected to welcome 2.4 million visitors this season, up from 2.2 million in 2023 driven by cultural attractions and Holy Week traditions such as Visita Iglesia.

For tourism concerns, Secretary Frasco **cont. on Page 7**

PICKLEBALL GAINS MOMENTUM AT SM CITY RO-SARIO'S ACTIVE HUB



Pickleball groups in Cavite came together to experience the excitement of Pickleball at SM Active Hub in SM City Rosario, enjoying the sport in a fun and dynamic mall setting.



Pickleball is a sport for everyone—welcoming players of all ages and skill levels to join the game and have fun.

As part of SM Supermalls Active Hub, Pickleball is bringing fun and fitness to SM City Ro-sario! Enthusiasts from various Cavite groups joined the action, enjoying this fast-growing sport that blends tennis, badminton, and table tennis.

With Pickleball gaining popularity in the Philippines, having it at the mall makes it more acces-sible for players of all levels. Whether you're a pro or a be-ginner, SM Active Hub offers the per-fect space to enjoy the game in a safe and welcoming environment.

Get in the game and experience the Pickleball excitement at SM City Rosa-rio!



Experience a whole new level of excitement as you play Pickleball at SM Active Hub, SM City Rosario!



Pickleball can be played as singles (one-on-one) or doubles (with a partner), making it a versatile and engaging sport for all players.

DA, San Miguel Foods partner in their first nationwide agri PPP to boost farmer incomes



Department of Agriculture (DA) Undersecretary Roger V. Navarro (third from left) and San Miguel Foods Group General Manager Emmanuel B. Macalalag shake hands after signing their first nationwide public-private partnership (PPP) in agriculture. Others in photo are (from left) San Miguel Foods Inc. (SMFI) Protein and Animal Nutrition Business Group Head Jose Marcelo Blanco, Dr. Leo Obviar, SMFI VP and Protein and Animal Nutrition Business GM; SMFI Senior Vice President for Strategic Planning and Corporate Affairs Head Rita Imelda B. Palabyab, and DA Assistant Secretary U-Nichols A. Manalo.

The Department of Agriculture (DA) and San Miguel Foods, Inc. (SMFI) have launched their first nationwide public-private partnership (PPP) in agriculture designed to improve Filipino farmers' incomes, boost food security, and bring quality food to more Filipinos.

Through a memorandum of understanding (MOU), SMFI will establish and manage buying stations for key crops such as corn, cassava, sorghum, and soybeans. With this, farmers will have direct access to an institutional buyer, ensuring a stable and fair market for their produce and delivering better financial returns.

The partnership also incorporates strategies to modernize and streamline agricultural supply chains nationwide. These improvements are expected to promote long-term growth and sustainability in the sector benefiting farmers, consumers, and the entire country.

To further support the agricultural community, SMFI will share laboratory procedures for crop acceptance and conduct capacity-building seminars for DA-recog-

quality raw materials are used," said Francisco Tiu Laurel, Jr., Secretary of the Department of Agriculture, in a statement.

"We are also safeguarding the health of our consumers. Let us continue to harness this partnership to create a more sustainable and resilient local agriculture industry that will empower our farmers and ensure food security, and drive economic growth in the country," he added.

San Miguel Food and Beverage Inc. (SMFB) Chairman Ramon S. Ang added, "This partnership allows us to invest directly in our farmers and the future of Philippine agriculture. By offering fair prices and consistent support, we help farmers improve their livelihoods and make agriculture a more sustainable and rewarding industry."

The signing of the MOU was led by DA Undersecretary Roger Navarro and San Miguel Foods Group General Manager Emmanuel Macalalag. The ceremony was attended by key representatives from DA-recognized farmer cooperatives and associations, together with senior officials from both organizations.

conduct capacity-building seminars for DA-recognized farmer cooperatives and associations (FCAs). Additionally, it will offer its food products to cooperatives, creating opportunities for additional income.

The DA, on the other hand, will introduce advanced technologies to improve crop monitoring and harvest volume projections. It will also provide technical assistance to SMFI's farmer partners, particularly those in DA-recognized FCAs.

Moreover, the DA will deliver quality assurance training, support SMFI's information campaigns for direct buying and community reseller programs, and grant access to select research stations for varietal preservation and planting material development.

"This partnership will not only benefit the farmers, but also the broader society as a whole. By sourcing quality local ingredients for feed production, we can significantly reduce import costs which will in turn lower prices of meat in the market, eggs, and several other meat (products) for consumers — creating a win-win scenario for both producers and households by ensuring that only high

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