

AGRI CHIEF EYES LAGUNA DE BAY AS MAJOR FISH SOURCE FOR METRO MANILA



CALAMBA CITY, Laguna (PIA) – The Department of Agriculture (DA) has set its sights on reviving Laguna de Bay as a major source of fish for residents of Metro Manila and nearby provinces.

Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel, Jr. said maximizing Laguna Lake’s potential would mean fisherfolks ramping up their production while lowering down fish prices in the market.

“Our aim is to produce more food at lower prices. For example, bring back bangus prices to P50-P70 per kilo. Maximizing the aquaculture potential of Laguna Lake is essential to achieving that goal. If we can add more capacity, then let’s do it,” Secretary Tiu Laurel told fishpen operators in a forum last week.

The 940-square-kilometer Laguna de Bay produces as much as 90,000 tons of fresh water fish a year and provides livelihood to around 13,000 fishermen, according to data from the Laguna Lake Development Authority which has jurisdiction over the fresh water lake.

According to DA, there are aquaculture associations in Laguna Lake that have sought their help to address concerns about increasing mortality of fingerlings in fishpens, implementation of minimal introduction of salt water for bangus production, and the reintroduction of fresh water.

Fishpen operators groups claim the last time salt water was allowed to flow into Laguna de Bay was in 2022.

The DA chief said he will arrange a meeting with the LLDA, chaired by Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) Secretary Ma. Antonia Yulo-Loyzaga, to discuss their plans and programs for Laguna Lake, along with the opening of floodgates which will be beneficial for a productive aquaculture industry.

Laurel also ordered the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR) to test the lake’s water quality every quarter as well as undertake a study on the capacity of Laguna Lake.

In a study by Filipino scientists of the Mindanao State University-Iligan Institute of Technology and published in the Environmental Science and Pollution Research journal, microplastics were found highest in concentration in areas with ‘intensive’ human activities ranging from household discharges, liquid waste from chemical industries, and intensification of economic activities.

In a report by the LLDA, fisheries and aquaculture remain the dominant activities in the lake which prompted the agency to implement a zoning and management plan that allowed 10,000 hectares of Laguna Lake for fishpen operations, 5,000 hectares for fish cages as well as areas for fish sanctuary, navigational lanes and open fishing since 1999. Pollution continues to threaten the lake as a viable source of fish.

The LLDA said that it continues to implement programs to conserve the lake’s resources such as the Laguna de Bay watershed greening program where seedlings are planted in crucial watershed areas; river rehabilitation program where community volunteers are mobilized in river clean-up operations; and the shoreland management program where they eliminate incompatible elements designed to control pollution. (CH/PIA-Laguna; with reports from DA)

90% OF JEEPNEYS IN BATANGAS COMPLY WITH CONSOLIDATION REQUIREMENT

BATANGAS CITY (PIA) — A transport group said over 90 percent of jeepney drivers and operators in Batangas have joined cooperatives in compliance with the government’s Public Utility Vehicle Modernization Program (PUVMP). The program aims to replace jeepneys that are at least 15 years old with newer and more efficient units by consolidating operators and drivers into cooperatives or corporations. Under the PUV modernization, individual operators are required to ‘consolidate’ or join cooperatives and corporations for easier processing of bank loans when they buy modern version of the jeepney. The application for the consolidation of jeepney operators into cooperatives ended on December 31, 2023 but it was extended until January 31, 2024. Those who failed to apply for consolidation would no longer be allowed to operate starting February 1.

Speaking at the PIA Ngayon radio program on January 10, Batangas Confederation of Jeepney Drivers and Operators Association (BCJDOA) president, Romeo Macailao said that more drivers and operators have enrolled in or created cooperatives to meet the December 31 deadline.

“Many of our jeepney drivers and operators in the province rushed to join the consolidation when the government set the deadline on December 31, 2023. This is because they want to continue their livelihood, and most have families to feed and children to educate,” said Macailao.

The increased rate of consolidation was also attributed to the consistent efforts made by the transport group to educate jeepney drivers and operators about the benefits of the modernization program.

Macalinalao said the importance of implementing modernization in the transportation sector resonated with the transport group members.

He said they continue to explain the benefits of being part of a cooperative or corporation under the PUVMP, emphasizing that each driver would receive a fixed salary with a specified number of days for earnings.

He cited the success of the Batangas Transit Cooperative as an example, operating in certain parts of the province where earnings are at minimum wage, with incentives and overtime pay.

At the same time, Macalinalao encouraged the remaining 10 percent of unconsolidated jeepney drivers and operators to comply with the program’s requirements. He emphasized that fellow drivers should not fear modernization, as the main goal of the program is to improve the transportation system.

“We are open to those who are not yet willing to be part of the consolidation program as they can still apply when they are ready to embrace modernization,” Macailao stressed.

Macailao acknowledged that the jeepney drivers and operators still resisting consolidation have their reasons, with some concerned about potential losses in the implementation of modernization, while others have been influenced by opposing groups.

He expressed hope that the government would continue to provide assistance to their sector through subsidies and other programs for the jeepney drivers and cooperatives. (Bhaby De Castro, PIA Batangas)

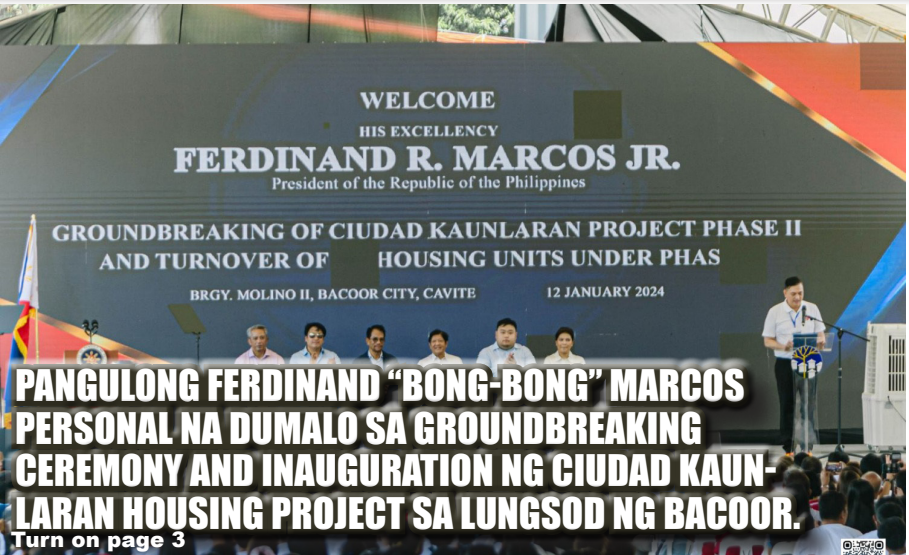


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UN SPECIAL RAPPORTEUR KHAN ARRIVES IN THE PHILIPPINES

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The Philippine Coast Guard held a send-off ceremony for BRP Cabra and BRP Sindangan, which will patrol the West Philippine Sea and Sulu Sea.

MANILA, Philippines — The Armed Forces of the Philippines has reassured the Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) that the military, primarily through the Philippine Navy, is ready to provide more support in patrol operations being carried out in the West Philippine Sea (WPS). The AFP described yesterday the latest incident in Scarborough or Panatag Shoal where the China Coast Guard (CCG) harassed and drove away Filipino fishermen as “alarming.” AFP spokesperson Col. Francel Padilla said, “on the side of the Armed Forces, we will support in however operational way” the PCG in addressing the situation. “We consider this alarming because... incidents are getting closer. But with

the command conference that we had, there was a guidance by the President that we also try to see different approaches to how we handle the situation,” she told reporters at a press briefing in Camp Aguinaldo. According to her, the PCG has already given a statement and has data on the Jan. 12 incident. The Coast Guard is in talks with the concerned fishermen who were allegedly forced to return the seashells they harvested for food. The CCG personnel aboard a rubber boat allegedly went as far as approaching the Philippine fishing vessels and demanding that the catch be returned to the sea before forcing the fishermen to leave. Padilla said Navy patrols in the West Philippine Sea are done regularly but not-



## “Navigating the Gridlock: The Unending Traffic Woes in the Philippines”

The Philippines, a nation known for its vibrant culture and breathtaking landscapes, unfortunately, grapples with a seemingly insurmountable challenge – unending traffic. The daily struggle to traverse the bustling streets of major cities has become an undeniable part of Filipino life. This pervasive issue not only impedes economic progress but also takes a toll on the physical and mental well-being of the citizens. It is high time to delve into the root causes of this traffic nightmare and explore sustainable solutions for a smoother, more efficient transportation system. Urbanization and Population Growth: The rapid urbanization of cities in the Philippines, coupled with a burgeoning population, has led to a surge in the number of vehicles on the roads. Metropolitan areas, especially Manila, have experienced an influx of people seeking better opportunities, resulting in the overburdening of existing transportation infrastructure. This unchecked growth has outpaced the development of road networks and public transport systems, exacerbating the congestion. Inadequate Public Transportation:

A significant contributor to the traffic quagmire is the inadequacy of public transportation. Insufficient and inefficient public transit options force a large portion of the population to rely on private vehicles, further congesting the roads. The lack of a comprehensive and well-integrated mass transit system makes commuting a time-consuming and arduous task for millions of Filipinos. Traffic Management and Enforcement: Weak traffic management and lax enforcement of traffic rules exacerbate the chaos on the roads. The proliferation of undisciplined driving practices, disregard for traffic regulations, and limited consequences for violations contribute to the perpetual gridlock. Strengthening traffic management and imposing stricter penalties for offenders are essential steps toward alleviating congestion. Infrastructure Development: Investing in infrastructure development is paramount to addressing the traffic crisis. Prioritizing the expansion and improvement of road networks, bridges, and public transportation facilities can provide immediate relief. Long-term projects, such as the development of reliable mass transit systems and efficient inter-city connections,

must be pursued to accommodate the growing demands of the population. Promotion of Sustainable Transport: Encouraging the use of sustainable transportation alternatives, such as cycling, walking, and electric vehicles, can contribute to easing traffic congestion and reducing environmental impact. Implementing bike lanes, pedestrian-friendly zones, and incentives for eco-friendly vehicles are steps toward fostering a culture of sustainable commuting. The unending traffic in the Philippines is a multifaceted issue that demands a comprehensive and collaborative approach. While the challenges are daunting, the prospect of a more efficient and sustainable transportation system is within reach. By addressing the root causes, investing in infrastructure, and promoting sustainable practices, the Philippines can pave the way for a future where traffic is no longer an impediment to progress and the well-being of its people. The time to act is now, for the roads ahead hold the promise of smoother journeys and brighter horizons.

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## NAVY...

ed that the WPS, which China is claiming ownership of almost in its entirety including waters inside the exclusive economic zone of the Philippines, is a vast area to guard.

“We will fortify our missions accordingly,” she announced, adding that the AFP assures the public “that we are regularly doing our operations in our territorial waters.” Asked what steps would be taken following the latest act of harassment by the CCG, she said the military will look into it and let the Northern Luzon Command take the lead on what actions to pursue. With weaker internal threats, Padilla said the AFP now has more assets to put into territorial defense as it continues to modernize.

Changes on how things are handled can be expected in the coming months based on President Marcos’ directives that the military be creative and find new ways to approach the WPS problem.

For his part, National Security Council assistant director general Jonathan Malaya called on China to walk the talk when it comes to its alleged efforts to lessen tension in the West Philippine Sea following recent bilateral consultative meetings between Manila and Beijing. He said the latest incident in Bajo de Masinloc is alarming and disappointing.

“Maybe we can request China this 2024 since they are also having Chinese New Year, that their actions on the ground match

what we’ve discussed,” Malaya said in the Bagong Pilipinas Ngayon public briefing.

“Moving forward, I hope what has been talked about is implemented,” he said, noting that it is not in the interest of the Philippines nor of China that tensions rise this year. No government presence in Panatag Philippine Coast Guard-West Philippine Sea spokesman Commodore Jay Tarriela admitted that there was no PCG or Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR) vessel patrolling Panatag Shoal (Bajo de Masinloc) when the China Coast Guard allegedly harassed some Filipino fishermen last Jan. 12.

In an interview with dzBB, Tarriela said at the time the CCG allegedly harassed the Filipino fishermen collecting taktakun shells from Panatag, there were no PCG or BFAR ships present because of rotational deployment.

“To be honest, during that particular incident of Jan. 12, there was no presence of the national government, whether the PCG or the BFAR,” he said, however emphasizing that President Marcos’ guidance was to ensure presence in the area.

The official explained that given the limited number of ships of the PCG with its many responsibilities, as well as BFAR, they were unable to conduct a 24/7 patrol at Panatag Shoal.

This, he said, is one of the realizations of the Philippine government – the need to strengthen its

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presence in order to protect the welfare of Filipino fishermen.

Tarriela suggested a “complementing deployment” between PCG and BFAR. “In instances when there is no presence of the PCG because of rotational deployment, then maybe the BFAR can take over” and vice versa, he said.

Meanwhile, this year’s first rotation and resupply (RORE) mission to deliver provisions to soldiers stationed at the BRP Sierra Madre in Ayungin Shoal has been put on hold due to unavailability of supply boats.

The military nevertheless gave assurance that food and other basic needs will be sent to troops as soon as “technical difficulties” are resolved.

“Until such time that we determine that the vessels to be used are seaworthy, that’s the time that we can reschedule the RORE mission,” AFP’s Padilla told reporters yesterday. She admitted that this year’s first resupply mission to Ayungin Shoal was supposed to be carried out over the weekend.

But because the smaller supply vessels to be used encountered technical difficulties, she said the RORE mission had to be cancelled. She did not elaborate on what these problems were.

Asked if troops on the Sierra Madre would run out of provisions, Padilla said soldiers are trained for any eventuality and will find ways, which may include fishing./ PHILSTAR.COM



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## PBBM Issues EO 53 Reactivating and Reconstituting Task Force El Niño

To ensure the country’s readiness to fight the effects of the El Niño phenomenon, President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. has reactivated and reconstituted the Task Force El Niño through the issuance of Executive Order No. 53, increasing the resilience of communities and securing sufficient water supply, food security and public health and safety.

Under EO No. 53 issued on January 19, 2024, and signed by Executive Secretary Lucas Bersamin, the Task Force El Niño is reactivated under the Office of the President. The Task Force will be chaired by the Secretary of the Department of National Defense and co-chaired by the Secretary of the Department of Science and Technology (DOST).

Among the members are the Secretaries of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DOST), Department of Agriculture (DA), Department of Health (DOH) and National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA).

The Office of Civil Defense shall provide administrative and technical support to the Task Force in the performance of its functions.

The Task Force is mandated to revise and update the Strategic El Niño National Action Plan, monitor the implementation of short and long-term solutions and programs identified in the Strategic El Niño National Action Plan, and coordinate with all concerned agencies in expediting the completion of all ongoing water infrastructure projects intended to cushion or mitigate the impacts of the dry spell not later than end of April 2024.

It is also tasked to coordinate with the Presidential Communications Office (PCO) in conducting massive information campaign on the El Niño phenomenon, and submit to the President, through the Office of the Executive Secretary, a monthly report on the implementation of the Order.

In coordination with the DOST, the Task Force is also directed to establish the El Niño Online Platform, which will serve as a centralized repository for a wide range of data, research, and information concerning El Niño, such as interactive maps and visualizations, as well as well-informed, data-driven plans and programs related to El Niño.

Last year, a National Action Plan Framework was crafted to fortify communities against the effects of El Niño by focusing on five key sectors—water supply, agriculture, electricity, health, and public safety, and with corresponding key priority interventions to be implemented by concerned government agencies.

Recent monitoring and analysis by the DOST-Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical, and Astronomical Services Administration have revealed that the warm sea surface temperature in the central and eastern tropical Pacific has fully evolved into El Niño as of July 2023.

PAGASA reported that it continues to exhibit signs of intensification with majority of global climate models suggesting that El Niño will likely persist until the second quarter of 2024. PND

## PH has sufficient rice supply based on latest inventory, expected grain delivery — DA chief

The agriculture department made an assurance Tuesday that there is sufficient rice supply in the country based on the inventories made in December and January, in addition to the upcoming rice deliveries from overseas.

“As far as supply is concerned we have enough supply of rice – December, medyo healthy ang ating stocks. January, is healthy, there’s additional rice coming. But as far as the price is concerned, mahirap ma-predict, ang problema iyong world price is tumataas eh ‘no dahil sa El Niño,” Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel said in a press briefing in Malacañang.

Laurel pointed out that even rice-producing coun-

tries like Thailand and Vietnam also experience high rice prices. “Ang prices ng bigas sa Thailand, which is a major rice-producing country and Vietnam ay tumataas din as of the moment eh, so even Malaysia and Indonesia tumataas din. So, we have to really manage the situation and we are looking at it on a day-to-day basis,” he pointed out.

According to Laurel, the country has an ending rice stock of 20 million tons last year and it is eyeing for similar volume this year because of the possible effects of the El Niño phenomenon that is forecasted to persist until April.

As to the status of the Philippines’ five-year rice agreement with Vietnam, Laurel said they already have a working draft for a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA), hoping that both countries could sign it during President Marcos’ trip to Vietnam later this month.

Among the salient points of the agreement include providing guarantees to the Philippines of rice supply even during calamity situation.

“So that is part of our food safety. So that is good for us,” Laurel said.

Also according to the DA chief, the government has to invest more in farm-to-market-roads and irrigation facilities to ensure agricultural product availability at affordable prices.

In terms of irrigation system, the government has to invest P1.2 trillion to fully irrigate the country’s 1.2 million hectares of unirrigated land, he said, noting accomplishing it could boost the government’s rice self-sufficiency goals. PND

## Pag-IBIG members to gain more benefits under new rates starting February 2024

Pag-IBIG Fund members are set to enjoy doubled savings and higher cash loan entitlements while continuing to have access to affordable home loans, as the agency is set to increase the nearly four-decade old mandatory monthly savings for both members and their employers starting February 2024, officials announced Wednesday (17 January).

Under the agency’s new rates, the monthly savings of Pag-IBIG Fund members for both the employee’s share and the employer’s counterpart shall increase to two hundred pesos (P200) each from the current one hundred pesos (P100). This follows the adjustment in the maximum monthly compensation to be used in computing the required two percent (2%) employee savings and two percent (2%) employer share for Pag-IBIG Fund members, which shall now increase to ten thousand pesos (P10,000) from the current five thousand pesos (P5,000).

“We at Pag-IBIG Fund have long recognized the need of our members to have higher savings that shall provide them with decent and fair returns upon their retirement, as well as higher cash loans to help them during times of need. By implementing the new Pag-IBIG Monthly Savings Rates of both members and employers originally scheduled in 2021, not only would we be able to improve the benefits of our members, we would also be better equipped to finance the growing demand for home loans of our members while maintaining our affordable rates. All these are in line with the call of President Ferdinand Marcos, Jr. to provide Filipino workers with opportunities to gain comfortable and productive lives,” said Secretary Jose Rizalino L. Acuzar, who heads the Department of Human Settlements and Urban Development (DHSUD) and the 11-member Pag-IBIG Fund Board of Trustees.

Pag-IBIG Fund’s new monthly rates were initially approved by its Board of Trustees in 2019, after obtaining the concurrence of stakeholders to implement a scheduled increase in 2021. During that time, the agency saw

the increase necessary as it projected that the amount of loans disbursed will eventually outpace the total collections from both loan payments and members’ savings. However, due to the difficulties brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic in 2021 and 2022, the Pag-IBIG Fund Board deferred the increase of the agency’s savings rates.

The agency again deferred the implementation of the increase in 2023, following the request of the Employers’ Confederation of the Philippines (ECOP) to provide the business community with time to further recover from the continuing financial challenges due to the health crisis. The deferment was also the Pag-IBIG Fund’s response to the call of President Ferdinand Marcos, Jr. early last year, to alleviate the financial burden of fellow Filipinos due to the prevailing socio-economic challenges brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Pag-IBIG Fund Chief Executive Officer Marilene C. Acosta, meanwhile, expressed her appreciation for the support of stakeholders, and assured members of better benefits under the agency’s new rates.

“We thank the Trade Union Congress of the Philippines (TUCP), the Federation of Free Workers (FFW), the Philippine Government Employees’ Association (PGEA), Overseas Filipino Workers’ (OFW) Organizations, and the Employers’ Confederation of the Philippines (ECOP) for supporting our plans and for recognizing that raising our monthly savings rates will allow Pag-IBIG Fund to continue to provide affordable home loans to its members in the coming years,” Acosta said.

“It is also important to note that the increase in our monthly savings rates shall benefit our members the most because every peso they save will go to their Pag-IBIG Savings. Under our new rates, they will have higher Pag-IBIG Savings that earn annual dividends, which they shall receive upon membership maturity or retirement. For example, based on our old rates, a member would receive around P87,000 upon reaching membership maturity. On the other hand, a member who saves under our new rates over a period of 20 years would receive P174,000 or double the amount. And, because of their higher savings, they shall also be entitled to higher multi-purpose and calamity loan amounts to help them with their financial needs,” Acosta emphasized. (END)

An undocumented Filipina immigrant lands a job as a care-worker for a terminal old man, securing a better life for her and her daughter. But a dark discovery threatens to destroy everything she’s strived for and holds dear.





# CENTURY-OLD PHILIPPINE SCHOOL FOR THE DEAF, NOW A MODERN HUB FOR FUTURE-READY LEARNERS



The Philippines' only government-owned school for the deaf now features new facilities to boost the skills of its students.

The Philippine School for the Deaf (PSD) has been a cornerstone of the deaf community in the Philippines and throughout Asia.

Established in 1907, PSD has a long and proud history of providing educational opportunities for deaf students. As the only government-owned institution for the deaf in the country, it plays an essential role in empowering individuals with hearing impairments and fostering their inclusion in society.

Years of dedicated use had taken its toll on PSD's facilities, leaving them in need of significant refurbishment. This was particularly true for the senior high school laboratory building, which was in dire need of rehabilitation.

"Our challenges include the rehabilitation, major repairs, and maintenance of the school facilities and buildings," PSD principal Shery Funcion said. "Because of these, limited 'yung mga magagawa ng ating mga learners. The teachers cannot really maximize the tasks and activities they give to the students."

"Before the rehabilitation, alongside other challenges, we had issues with the ventilation and the lighting inside the senior high school laboratory building. Dahil mainit at madilim, nahihirapan ang mga guro gawing effective at efficient ang kanilang pagtuturo," she said.

## Creating an inclusive learning hub



Differently abled students inside the newly rehabilitated PSD beauty care room

With the common goal of empowering the youth and fostering a culture of achievement, the Henry Sy Foundation and SM Foundation collaborated with DepEd's School's Division Office-Pasay and Pasay Local Government Unit to strengthen the capabilities of PSD students.



The collaboration for social good paves way for a more hands-on learning experience for students.

Through social good collaboration, the Foundations ensured that the infrastructural limitations of the past were replaced with modern learning spaces specifically designed for practical subjects like dressmaking, electronics, and IT.

A dedicated dance studio with a dressing room and a conference room provides spaces for creative expression and collaboration. New tools and furniture in the baking and cookery laboratory facilitate hands-on learning, while thoughtfully placed ramps and railings ensure accessibility for all students.



The new laboratory building enables teachers to impart essential skills to help their students pursue careers outside the four walls of the classroom.

A handwashing station and PWD-friendly toilets have been rehabilitated with clean, functional amenities. The restored covered court, complete with a spacious stage, creates a dynamic area for outdoor learning and recreation.

For Principal Shery, the SM group's contribution went beyond the classrooms. "Part of our program is to equip our students with essential skills and competencies to help them pursue their careers outside the four walls of the classroom."

"And the rehabilitation of the entire building helped with that. Most especially in the home economics laboratories, maayos na nilang magagawa ang mga performance tasks nila. Mai-apply nila ang mga concepts na natutunan nila sa loob ng classrooms, giving the opportunity to hone their skills and competencies."

With the completion of the building, the Henry Sy Foundation ushers in a new era of diverse and upgraded learning spaces—one that amplifies the often unheard calls of differently abled members of the community.



# INDIGENT SENIORS TO RECEIVE PHP1K MONTHLY SOCIAL PENSION FROM DSWD STARTING FEBRUARY 2024



Indigent senior citizens who are beneficiaries of the Social Pension program of the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) will now receive a Php1,000 monthly stipend starting February 2024, Assistant Secretary for Strategic Communications Romel Lopez said on Monday (January 22).

"We expect that the distribution of the social pension for the first semester with its increased amount will commence this February 2024," Asst. Secretary Lopez, who is also the DSWD spokesperson, pointed out.

Asst. Sec. Lopez said the funds for the realization of Republic Act 11916 or an Act Increasing the Social Pension of Indigent Senior Citizens were already included in the agency's 2024 budget.

"The funds increasing the monthly stipend for social pensioners were already approved and included in the 2024 budget of the agency," the DSWD spokesperson said.

Republic Act No. 11916, which lapsed into law in July 2022, provides for a 100 percent increase in the monthly pension of indigent senior citizens from Php500 to Php1,000 to further help indigent seniors cushion the impact of high inflation.

The monthly social pension for seniors is given to the qualified beneficiaries on a semestral basis with a total amount of Php6,000 per payout to augment their daily subsistence and other medical needs.

"The social pension is provided to eligible and qualified indigent senior citizens to augment their daily subsistence and address their medical needs," the DSWD spokesperson said.

The social pension program, according to Asst. Sec. Lopez, covers indigent senior citizens who are frail, sickly, or have a disability, or those who have no permanent source of income, and regular support from their family or relatives.

The DSWD official explained that senior citizens are considered eligible for the program if they are not receiving pensions from the Social Security System (SSS), Government Service Insurance System (GSIS), Philippine Veterans Affairs Office (PVAO), Armed Forces and Police Mutual Benefit Association, Inc. (AFPMBAI), or any other private insurance company.

Some 4,085,066 indigent senior citizens are covered by the social pension program for Year 2024 and are eligible for their monthly stipend.

# UN SPECIAL... PIA...

MANILA, Philippines — United Nations special rapporteur Irene Khan has arrived in the Philippines on Monday to embark on a 10-day visit to assess the state of free expression and press freedom in the Philippines. According to the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA), the UN rapporteur is the third to formally visit the country during the administration of President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. Alongside consultations with human rights groups and civil society, Khan will be meeting with officials from several agencies such as the DFA, the Department of Justice and the Presidential Task Force on Media Security. The UN special rapporteur will be visiting Metro Manila, Baguio City and Cebu City from January 23 to February 2. Khan's report from the 10-day series of discussions will be presented during the 59th Session of the UN Human Rights Council in June 2025. She was appointed to the role of UN Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression in 2020. The DFA earlier said that Khan's visit will give the Philippines an opportunity to demonstrate its "flourishing democracy ... as seen in the vibrant media landscape and civic space." Khan will also see the government's "respect to the promotion and protection of freedom of speech and expression," the DFA said. Human rights group Karapatan said on Sunday that even as the government has publicly welcomed the visit of the UN rapporteur on freedom of opinion and expression, it has also "disregarded, shrugged off, and rejected" previous findings by UN special rapporteurs on the country's human rights situation.

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# PIA...

MANILA, Philippines — Sen. Pia Cayetano has been elected as chair of the Senate Blue Ribbon committee, becoming the first woman to head the panel in Senate history. "It is a fact that Sen. Pia Cayetano, our distinguished colleague, will be the first-ever female chairperson of the SBRC in its 106th year in existence, providing checks and balances in a bicameral system," said Senate President Juan Miguel Zubiri. As Congress resumed session yesterday, senators elected Cayetano to replace Sen. Francis Tolentino as Blue Ribbon chair. Tolentino announced his intention to step down as panel head in December to focus on his reelection bid in 2025. Senate Majority Leader Joel Villanueva informed the chamber of Tolentino's resignation letter dated Jan. 22, 2024. Senate Minority Leader Aquilino Pimentel III supported Cayetano's election. "The minority applauds the decision of the majority and we congratulate our first-ever female chairperson of the Senate Blue Ribbon committee," he said. Zubiri earlier said Cayetano was the only female and one of three senator-lawyers being considered to replace Tolentino. The other three were Senators Sonny Angara, Francis Escudero and her younger brother Alan Peter Cayetano. Under Tolentino, the Blue Ribbon panel probed the Department of Education's "pricey" and "outdated" laptop deals worth P2.4 billion as well as the sugar importation controversy. The lengthy investigations uncovered some irregularities and recommended the

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filing of charges against some officials involved. Other officials resigned. Tolentino will still head another equally important committee: the Senate special committee on Philippine maritime and admiralty zones, which will have jurisdiction to study and report on all matters relating to archipelagic baselines, maritime zones, archipelagic sea lands and other incidental matters. "It is timely then that the Senate of the Philippines provides the necessary support for our fellow workers in the government and the executive branch in order to better secure the benefits of the vast Philippine maritime zones, including our territorial sea ... and the large, exclusive economic zone," Tolentino said last year.

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# DOLE...

NEW BEGINNINGS. Former communist rebels receive livelihood equipment, groceries and cash from the Department of Labor and Employment-Rizal and civil society groups in this undated photo. DOLE-Rizal said on Monday (Jan. 22, 2024) the material assistance will help the rebel returnees start their lives anew. (Photo courtesy of Pau Mojar)

CALAMBA CITY, Laguna — The Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE), in collaboration with several non-government organizations, distributed over the weekend various livelihood equipment to six former New People's Army (NPA) members to help them return to being productive citizens. Victoria Natanauan, supervising labor and employment officer at DOLE-Rizal, said in a follow-up interview on Monday the unnamed beneficiaries from Barangay San Jose, Antipolo City received from the government and supportive NGOs machines to be used in operating welding shops, car wash stations and coffee shops, among others. "The livelihood packages will enable the surrenderers to start their lives anew through income-generating activities," she said. Good Neighbors International Philippines, a developmental and humanitarian organization, collaborated with DOLE on the project. Meanwhile, another surrenderer from Rizal province received a sack of rice, groceries and a cash gift from two other civil society organizations — the Advisory Council and Sinag Elite Lady Eagles Club — which have committed to helping end insurgency in the country. Personnel of the Philippine National Police's 404th A Maneuver Company (AMC) of the Regional Mobile Force Battalion 4A assisted with the turnover of livelihood packages in an undisclosed location in Barangay San Jose. During the turnover ceremony, the former rebels expressed their gratitude to the government and civil society groups for giving them a new lease on life. (PNA)

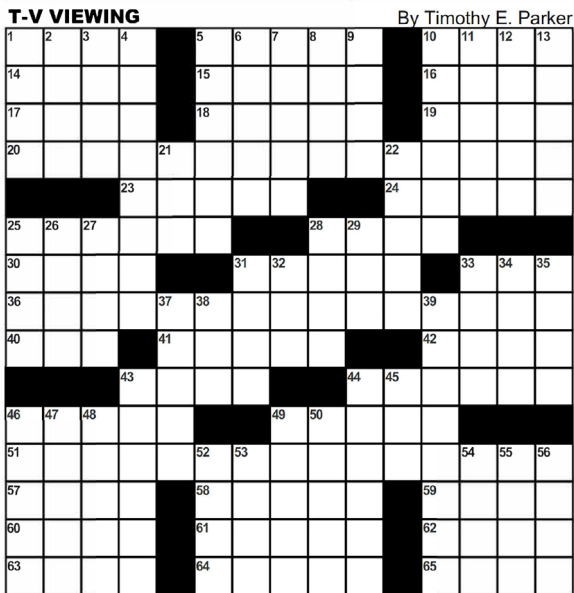
# PANGULONG...

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Pinangunahan ni Pangulong Ferdinand "Bong-Bong" Marcos ang awarding at groundbreaking ng Ciudad Kaunlaran sa Barangay Molino 2, City of Bacoor, Cavite. Kasama ng Pangulo ang mga pinuno ng Lungsod sa pangunguna ni Mayor Strike B. Revilla, Cong. Lani M. Revilla, Board Member Ram Revilla, Sangguniang Panlungsod, Cong. Bryan Revilla, at ni Senator Ramon "Bong" Revilla Jr. na siyang nakatuon rin sa mga proyekto ni Pangulong Marcos. Dumalo rin sa okasyon sina Sen. Cynthia Villar, Sen. Francis Tolentino, DHSUD Secretary Jose Rizalino L. Acuzar, Cong. Jolo Revill Revilla, Governor Jonvic Remulla, Sen. Mark Villar, Cong. Crispin Diego Remulla, mga Punong Barangay ng Lungsod ng Bacoor, Stakeholders, mga Sk, Kagawad at ibang kawani ng Lungsod ng Bacoor. Nagpasalamat naman si Mayor Strike B. Revilla kay Pangulong Ferdinand Marcos Jr. at sa bumubuo ng National Housing Authority (NHA) dahil sa biyayang ibinigay nito sa mga Bacoreño. Sa ngayon nakatutok parin ang Pamahalaang Lungsod ng Bacoor sa mga programa at proyektong makakatulong sa mga Bacoreño. / FBCA00R-CITY







freedailycrosswords.com

ACROSS

- 1) Rough file
- 5) Cold shower?
- 10) Very excited
- 14) Way, way off
- 15) Classic John Wayne film
- 16) "Ain't gonna happen"
- 17) "Frasier" actress Gilpin
- 18) "Encore!"
- 19) "Hold \_ your hat!"
- 20) Stung a second time
- 23) Make president
- 24) Battery projection
- 25) Barroom fights
- 28) It's historic?
- 30) Exercise for the flexible
- 31) Organic fertilizer
- 33) Object stared at in disbelief
- 36) Certain condiment
- 40) Chapter in a history book
- 41) Count of jazz
- 42) Paste alternative
- 43) Legend's cousin
- 44) Fine wool
- 46) Book of many places
- 49) Crooner Sam
- 51) Container ship, e.g.
- 57) "Swan Lake" costume
- 58) Taper off, as wind
- 59) Kind of palm
- 60) Advil target
- 61) Aficionado
- 62) Units of work
- 63) Casting need
- 64) Looks of wickedness
- 65) Backtalk

DOWN

- 1) Wholly absorbed
- 2) Not many
- 3) Wrapped Indian garment
- 4) Bargain hunter's accomplishment
- 5) Tends to stubble
- 6) Mr. Spock's forte
- 7) Make new laws
- 8) Cut a scene
- 9) "Beloved" author Morrison
- 10) Consecrate with oil
- 11) Muppet with a hooked nose
- 12) Didn't take part (with "out")
- 13) Rock containing crystals
- 21) Building addition, sometimes
- 22) Type of jar
- 25) Computer info quantity
- 26) Laugh like a lion?
- 27) Taj Mahal location
- 28) Cover ground?
- 29) Singer DiFranco
- 31) "Gee whillikers!"
- 32) Prefix with "cycle" or "sex"
- 33) Jamaican fruit
- 34) Roman satyr
- 35) Popular cookie
- 37) Bottomless pit
- 38) Gangster's rapid-firer
- 39) Ways out
- 43) Former Panamanian leader Noriega
- 44) Workers with vans
- 45) \_ out a living
- 46) Essence of roses
- 47) Event that buries hatchets
- 48) Carpenter's rotating device
- 49) Yearn for
- 50) Playful aquatic mammal
- 52) Gloomy atmosphere
- 53) Slender woodwind
- 54) Gilbert of "Rose-anne"
- 55) Baker's dozen?
- 56) It's not for a winner

CITY OF BACOR NEWS

REGULAR FLAG RAISING CEREMONY SA LUNGSOD NG BACOR, PINANGUNAHAN NG CITY ACCOUNTING OFFICE AT LIGA NG MGA BARANGAY

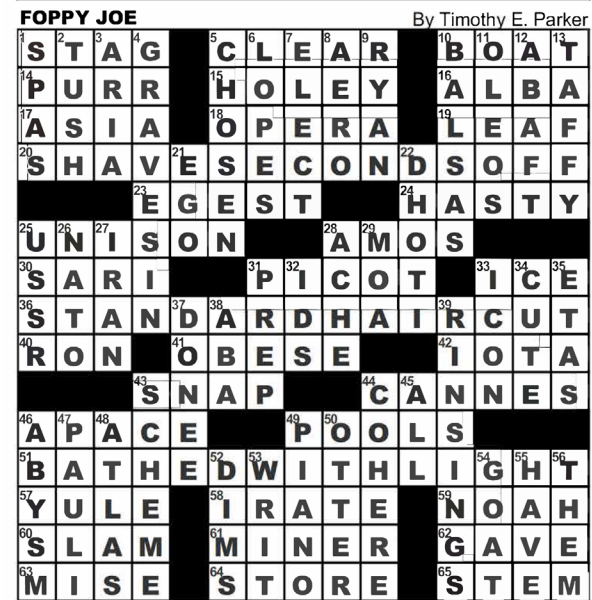
Naging makabuluhan ang isinagawang Regular Flag Raising Ceremony ngayong araw, ika-22 ng Enero taong 2024, dahil sa aktibong pamamahagi mula sa Pamahalaang Lungsod ng Bacor sa ilalim ng liderato ni Mayor Strike B. Revilla. Inumpisahan ni City Councilor Rogelio "Bok" Nolasco ang seremonya sa kanyang pambungad na pananalita na agad ding sinundan ng Awarding/ Turn-Over ng mga sumusunod:

- 1. Seed Capital Fund for Sustainable Livelihood Program Association (SLPA)
- 2. 86" Interactive Smart TV for Selected DepEd Schools
- 3. Turn-Over of Equipment to DICT Tech4Ed
  - Desktop Set with Wifi - 10pcs
  - Computer Speakers - 10 pcs
  - Headset - 10pcs
  - Computer Camera - 10pcs
  - Uninterruptible Power Supply (UPS) - 10pcs
  - Brother Printer - Scanner - 1pc
  - Barcode Scanner - 1pc
  - A Set of 8 CCTV with 8TB HDD
- 4. Awarding of 1st Mayor Strike B. Revilla TODA Basketball Tournament
- 5. Presentation of Graduates to the Students of BCC - PWD (ADHD)

Pagkatapos nito, nabigyan naman ng pagkakataon ang City Accounting Office upang ipakita ang kanilang Accomplishment Report sa pamamagitan ng Audio-Visual Presentation. Nagbigay din ng mensahe ang kanilang bagong OIC na si Atty. Marvie Kate Encarnado. Bukod dito ay nagbigay-alih ang kanilang tanggapan sa mga manunuod sa pamamagitan ng isang intermission number. At bilang pagtatapos ng seremonya, naghandog ng mensahe si Councilor Randy Francisco — Vice President of Liga ng mga Barangay, sa ngalan ni Mayor Strike B. Revilla.



Last week's solution:



NO INJURIES, PROPERTY DAMAGE IN BATANGAS QUAKE



DISASTER-READY. The provincial government of Batangas will be distributing additional multi-purpose vehicles following the continuous earthquakes in recent years. Batangas Governor Hermilando Mandanas on Saturday (Jan. 20, 2024) said the provincial government is committed to provide necessary preparation to make the locals and tourists alike feel secured and safe. (Photo courtesy of Batangas PIO)

BATANGAS CITY – The Provincial Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Office (PDRRMO) here reported zero casualty and property damage from the magnitude 4.6 earthquake that rocked the province Saturday afternoon.

In an interview, Dr. Amor Banuelos-Calayan, PDRRMO head, said the earthquake was tectonic in origin and located in the town of Tingloy. "We are closely monitoring the situation in every town under the supervision of their respective Municipal Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Office (MDRRMO)," said Banuelos-Calayan. Intensity IV was also reported in the towns of Balayan, Bauan, City of Calaca, Calatagan, Lemery, Mabini, San Luis, San Pascual and Taal. Banuelos-Calayan encouraged the locals to be aware of the guidelines before, during and after an earthquake.

In a separate interview, Batangas Governor Hermilando Mandanas called on the public to heighten their vigilance as tremors have been observed growing in frequency in the past two years.

"We do not know when these disasters will happen, so we must be prepared," he told the Philippine News Agency, adding that the provincial government is intensifying its readiness.

Part of this readiness, he said, is to equip the province with multi-purpose vehicles.

"On our part, we will be distributing over 170 multi-purpose vehicles with ambulance facilities," he said.

The vehicles were in addition to the 400 rescue vehicles distributed in recent years.

The Provincial Assistance for Community Development Office (PACD) conducted an orientation to 186 barangays this month regarding the multi-purpose rescue vans (MRVs).

Mandanas said the provincial government is committed to provide necessary preparation to make the locals and tourists alike feel secured and safe. (PNA)

GOKONGWEI ...

BATANGAS CITY (PIA) — A newly-expanded world class manufacturing complex for naphtha was unveiled on January 19 and is poised to generate more jobs, higher income for locals, and more opportunity for the communities in Batangas City. During the inauguration graced by President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr., the President said that the expansion of the first and only naphtha cracker plant in the country, owned and operated by the JG Summit Olefins Corporation, will further revitalize the Philippine manufacturing industry and will aid the progress of Filipinos who will directly benefit from it.

"It is among the linchpins of our industrialization, a vital link in moving up the value chain, and guarantees the supply of a critical production ingredient. It is directly and indirectly employing 6,200 individuals. You are a major contributor to an industry that is forecasted to enrich our economy by Php215 billion next year," President Marcos Jr. said. PBBM said that the 160-hectare petrochemical facility and is a part of a USD 1.3 billion expansion project, is a testament on the greatness and excellence of the Filipino in business and innovation, embodied by businessman and philanthropist John Gokongwei. The President said: "What

you have built here is more than a cutting-edge technology. It is a testament to Filipino skills, a proof of business confidence, an example of manufacturing resurgence, and a realization of the vision of a great Filipino industrialist, the patriot John Gokongwei." He expressed his gratitude to the workers and the local government of Batangas for their support in pursuing a 'national mission'.

"To all the men and women, scientists and engineers, who keep this complex running, thank you for your labor, your hardwork in pursuing this national mission. To the people of Batangas, an economic powerhouse in itself, thank you for hosting this critical enterprise, which you support by supplying the workforce that it needs and providing the local government support which is essential to the success of such large projects," PBBM added.

The President then toured the complex and was accompanied by JG Summit President and Chief Executive Officer Lance Gokongwei, JG Summit Olefins President Arnel Santos, JG Summit Holdings Inc. Chairman James Go; Department of Trade and Industry Secretary Alfredo Pascual; Batangas Governor Hermilando Mandanas and Batangas City Mayor Beverley Rose Dimacuja. In an interview, Mayor Di-

macuja said that the plant significantly helps the city. "There are more jobs, more opportunities that this expansion will usher in, and that is what we really aspire – to welcome more investors for the benefit of our kababayans, to work here and to improve their livelihood," said Dimacuja. Mandanas, meanwhile hopes that the petrochemical plant will expand the local market and slash the country's dependence on importation.

"This will lessen our importation, we could save more money, it will provide more job opportunities, and will lessen the cost of raw materials for the factories so we expect that this expansion will go over and beyond, and will benefit many people," the governor added.

According to JGSOC President and CEO Arnel Santos, the petrochemical industry plays a strategic and basic sector of the economy as it provides raw materials to other major sectors of the economy like packaging for food, fibers for clothing, materials for shelter, components for transport vehicles, other agricultural inputs, among others.

Currently, the company employs more than 40 percent of residents from barangays Pinamucan Ibaba and Simlong in Batangas City as part of their commitment to the communities

