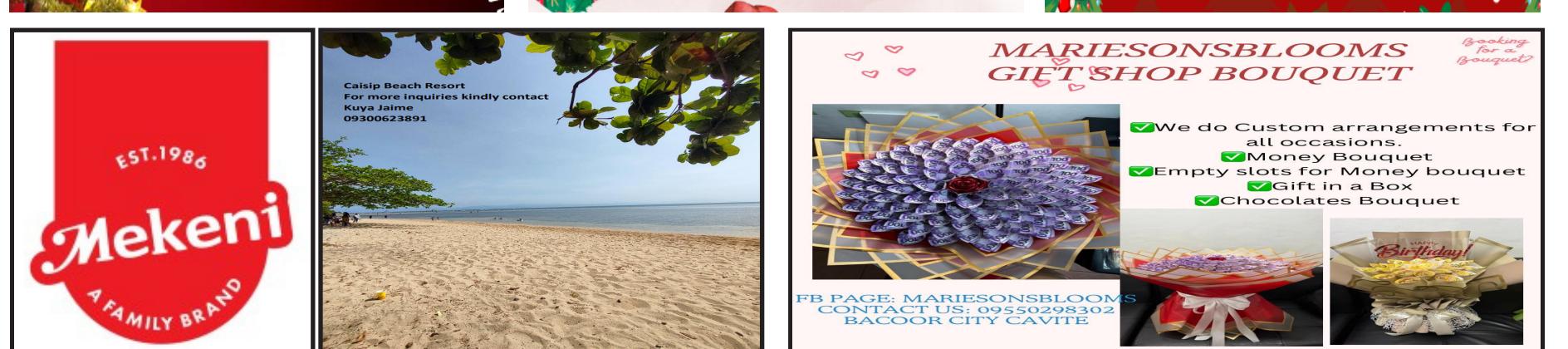




FRONT PAGE NEWS

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Pangilinan-led Luzon Tollways Steps Up Holiday Traffic Preparations, Offers Free Toll p. 6



No hike in premium rates for 2026, says PhilHealth p. 4



PUERTO PRINCESA CITY, Palawan (PIA) — No more increase in contribution starting January 2026 after the five-year gradual rate hike under the Universal Health Care (UHC) Law, says PhilHealth Palawan.

PLDT reports drop in cable theft in 2025 p. 5



TELCO LINES. A lineman installs a new PLDT fiber line in General Trias, Cavite on May 22, 2022. PLDT on Thursday (Dec. 18, 2025) reported a drop in cable and other equipment theft in 2025 following its successful collaboration with local government units and police. (PNA photo by Avito Dalan)

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Pacific Tollways Corporation (MPTC), concessionaire of NLEX, SCTEX in cooperation with BCDA, NLEX Connector, Manila-Cavite Expressway (CAVITEX) in cooperation with PRA-PEATC, and Cavite-Laguna Expressway (CALAX), has intensified its holiday traffic and road safety preparations across its Luzon expressway network to ensure a smooth and safe journey for motorists during the Christmas and New Year peak travel period.

"Our goal this holiday season is to have motorists spend less time on the road and more time with their families," said MPIC and MPTC Chairman Manuel V. Pangilinan.

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Pangilinan...

"We've prepared early, deployed full manpower, and have initiated barrier-up operations, counterflow measures, free towing services, and toll-free passage. The toll-free initiative is our way of giving back to motorists. We hope it helps ease their travels during this holiday season," Pangilinan added.

To manage increased traffic volume, all roadworks and lane closures will be suspended from 6:00 AM on December 19, 2025, until 12 noon on January 5, 2026, except for emergency safety repairs. Additional traffic, toll, and emergency and medical response teams will be deployed, and all lanes in major toll plazas will remain open to accommodate peak traffic.

To further ease congestion along NLEX, Express Lane (counterflow lane) will be activated subject to traffic conditions. These lanes will be accessible to Class 1 RFID-only vehicles, with northbound operations on Fridays from 5:00 PM to 8:00 PM (entry at Balintawak Expansion Plaza) and southbound operations on Sundays from 2:00 PM and early Mondays from 5:00 AM (entry at Bocaue Expansion Plaza).

Free passage in the MPTC Luzon expressways Metro Pacific Tollways Corporation (MPTC) is pleased to announce a toll-free initiative for motorists during select hours over the Christmas and New Year celebrations.

Motorists can enjoy free toll passages on NLEX, SCTEX, NLEX Connector, CAVITEX, and CALAX during the festive hours:

- December 24, 10:00 PM to December 25 at 6:00 AM
- December 31, 10:00 PM to January 1 at 6:00 AM

Trip planning is made easier with the MPT DriveHub app, which provides traffic updates, toll fee calculation, RFID reloading, and access to emergency roadside assistance.

Motorists are encouraged to ensure their RFID accounts are active and sufficiently loaded prior to their travels. Cash-paying customers are advised to shift to RFID for faster transactions. Visit Easytrip's website www.easytrip.ph for more information.

For regular updates and road safety tips, motorists can check out MPTC expressways' official Facebook accounts [@NLEXexpressways](#) and [@OfficialCALAX](#), as well as its 24/7 hotline at 1-35000.

Take a happy holi-trip and create core memories with your loved ones this holiday season.



"Layunin po nating iparamdam ang diwa at ganda ng Pilipinas kahit sa maikling panahon," said the President, adding the program is open to transiting passengers of Philippine Airlines, those connecting through other carriers, and landed travelers with onward domestic flights.

The President said all these improvements will benefit all travelers, including families with children and the elderly, and most especially overseas Filipino workers (OFWs).

The President, together with First Lady Louise Araneta-Marcos, met returning OFWs, including Rhodora Alcaraz Tuñacao from Hong Kong, who was injured in the recent apartment complex fire in Tai Po district while shielding an infant under her care.

The President stressed that, like Tuñacao, all OFWs are sacrificing themselves for their families' welfare, hence deserve to be treated as heroes.

President Marcos also announced that the Bureau of Customs (BOC) has begun to distribute balikbayan boxes from 130 abandoned container vans to their owners, aiming to ensure the owners receive them before Christmas.

The previous improvements include strengthened airside operations; improved seating, cooling systems, restrooms, and Wi-Fi, restoration of old equipment, enhanced baggage handling, and introduction of new mobility options.

President Marcos noted that these efforts are currently delivering tangible results, significantly enhancing the travel experience.

The President cited the single-day high of 92 percent on-time performance amid growth in passenger volumes, routes, and airline partners, and the first-ever customer experience accreditation from Airports Council International, which proves that the Philippines can indeed meet global standards while remaining grounded in genuine Filipino service.

"This accomplishment reminds us that when systems are fixed, and institutions cooperate, efficiency follows—and so does public trust," the President said.

Building on that progress, President Marcos, along with NNIC, proudly introduced on Tuesday more new amenities added at the airport.

These include the new immigration e-gates that allow passengers to clear immigration in as little as 20 seconds; All-Filipino Food Hall and Mezzanine Food Hall that offer travelers better spaces to rest, dine, and reconnect; and the Dignitaries Lounge that reflects the Filipino values of warmth, respect, and hospitality.

The President also led the launch of the Medical Tourism Concierge Area, which is designed to assist patients with efficiency and compassion.

"Ito ay patunay na iginagalang natin ang oras ng bawat biyahero at pinahahalagahan ang kanilang dignidad—sapagkat ang maayos na serbisyo ay karapatang ng bawat Pilipino," the President said.

The Chief Executive also noted the Department of Tourism (DOT)'s introduction of the Transit Tour initiative, which offers international passengers with long layovers an opportunity to explore the country.

Proverbs 23:1-3



Doing wrong is like a joke to a fool, but wisdom is pleasure to a man of understanding.

Proverbs 23:1-3

DILG honors excellence in public service, capacity development at 10th CapDev ACE

The Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG) recognized outstanding public servants and partners during the 10th Capacity Development Awards for Catalysts of Excellence (CapDev ACE), highlighting excellence in public service and capacity building at the local level.

Organized by the DILG-Local Government Academy, CapDev ACE honors exemplary DILG officials and staff, field units, Local Governance Regional Resource Centers (LGRRCs), and partners for impactful capacity development initiatives.

Representing DILG Secretary Jonvic Remulla, Undersecretary Marlo Irangan said the awardees embody President Ferdinand Marcos Jr.'s call for dedicated and honest public service in advancing the vision of Bagong Pilipinas.

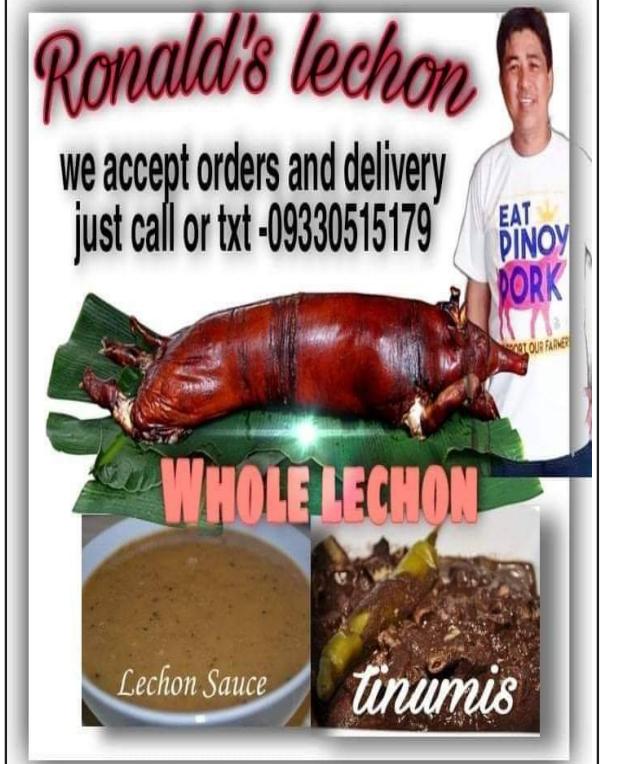
Leading this year's honorees was DILG-National Capital Region Director Maria Lourdes L. Agustin, who received the Tata Agila or Capacity Development Leadership Award for strengthening Metro Manila's disaster preparedness through the Tangguyob 2024 initiative.

The Singsing ng Tanikala Award for Best City or Municipal Local Government Operations Officer was awarded to Olivia Bagasbas of Tandag City and Ildefonso Orquejo Jr. of Calatrava, Negros Occidental for their people-centered and transformative governance initiatives.

Eden Lanuza of DILG Region V received the Dagitab ng Paglilingkod Award for ICT modernization efforts, while DILG Aklan Provincial Director Dino Ponsaran earned the Dangal ng Kagawaran for their comprehensive development planning innovations among local governments.

The Bugkos ng Bayan Award went to DILG Ilocos Sur for integrating cultural heritage into governance, while LGRRCs 6 and 9 received the Ugnay ng Mamamayan Award for collaborative capacity development efforts. DILG Undersecretary Hubert Gervacio was also honored with the Bagwis ng Paglilingkod Award given to top officials for upholding the mandate and core values of the Department in providing capdev to LGUs.

Now in its 10th year, CapDev ACE continues to build a Circle of ACEs that strengthens local governance and advances the DILG's matino, mahusay, at maaasahan brand of service nationwide. (DILG)



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2026 budget seen as 'new normal' for transparency

MANILA — The Senate majority on Thursday said the 2026 General Appropriations Act has set a "new normal" for transparency by opening the entire budget process to public scrutiny, from committee hearings to plenary debates and bicameral conference committee deliberations.

"This is the new normal we are building in the Senate: a budget process that people can watch, read and verify in real time," the Senate majority said in a statement, citing the livestreamed and archived proceedings that allowed the public to track how budget proposals were shaped into final allocations.

The majority said the bicameral conference committee adjourned at 2:22 a.m. after days of marathon talks, stressing that transparency was treated as policy rather than rhetoric.

It said there were no midnight deals, no last-minute insertions done in the dark, and no amendments that escaped public scrutiny, with all adjustments discussed on record and supported by complete documentation.

The Senate majority said the open process strengthened fiscal discipline, particularly in the review of major spending agencies such as the Department of Public Works and Highways, where lawmakers opted for line-by-line scrutiny and rejected across-the-board restorations without itemized recomputation to eliminate overpricing.

The bloc said it would sustain livestreamed bicameral proceedings and public access to budget documents in future budget cycles, stressing that "a budget made in daylight is stronger" and builds public confidence in both the numbers and the process.

The bicameral conference committee approved the PHP6.793-trillion 2026 General Appropriations Act, with education receiving PHP1.38 trillion or about 20 percent of the national budget, while the Department of Public Works and Highways was allocated PHP529.6 billion after CMPD-based (Construction Materials Price Data) adjustments that generated PHP20.7 billion in savings, realigned to PhilHealth (PHP16.5 billion) and the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Fund (PHP4.25 billion).

The Senate majority is composed of Senate President Vicente "Tito" Sotto III, Senate President Pro Tempore Panfilo "Ping" Lacson, Majority Leader Juan Miguel "Migz" Zubiri, and Senators Bam Aquino, Pia Cayetano, JV Ejercito, Sherwin Gatchalian, Risa Hontiveros, Lito Lapid, Loren Legarda, Francis "Kiko" Pangilinan, Erwin Tulfo, Raffy Tulfo, Camille Villar and Mark Villar. (PNA)

No hike..

Local Health Insurance Office (LHIO) Chief Wilfred Hernandez said that the increase started in 2019, from 2.75 percent to 5 percent in 2025, in accordance with Republic Act No. 112223, or the UHC Law.

"Tapos na ang increase. Under the law, hanggang 2025 lang. Nagkaroon tayo ng controversy noong early operation ng law—this time hanggang 2025 lang. Wala na tayong increase mabago ang law na magri-require ng increase," he said.

With the 5 percent premium rate in 2025, the employer and employee will have a 2.5 percent share each for monthly contribution.

For employees who have a salary below P10,000, PhilHealth will charge the member 5 percent, amounting to P500, wherein half of it will be shouldered by the employer.

The contribution of employed members is automatically deducted from their monthly salary, while for self-paying members, payment can be done onsite and online.

Members have the option to make payments through any PhilHealth office, accredited collecting agents, and online methods like GCash, debit, and credit cards.

Meanwhile, Hernandez said in a media forum that the benefit packages given by PhilHealth for various services have increased. (RG/JBG/PIA MIMAROPA-Palawan)

Recto hails DEPDev role in PH progress through long-term, non-partisan planning

Executive Secretary Ralph G. Recto has hailed the Department of Economy, Planning, and Development's (DEPDev) role in building a more resilient and inclusive Philippines through long-term, evidence-based socioeconomic planning, as he led the celebration of its 90th anniversary yesterday.

In his keynote address, Executive Secretary Recto emphasized that the country's development gains have been achieved not through political cycles, but through disciplined, data-driven policies that place the Filipino people at the center of progress.

"We chose to believe that our development should not be dictated by political whims but by data, direction, and discipline," he said.

The Executive Secretary, who served as Socioeconomic Planning Secre-

tary and Director-General of the National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA) in 2008, described the country's planning agency as the nerve center of reason in the noise of populism and the scoreboard keeper of what truly matters: jobs created, investments attracted, infrastructure built, and Filipinos lifted out of poverty.

"Do not stop dreaming and do not stop planning—para sa Bagong Pilipinas at para sa magandang kinabukasan ng bawat Pilipino," he said.

"Because the true state of the nation is written not in rhetoric, but in economic conditions felt by Filipino families every day—sa presyo ng bigas at pagkain, sa pagkakaroon ng disenteng trabaho, at sa pagkamit ng magandang kinabukasan," he stressed.

The Executive Secretary highlighted that since its establishment in 1935, the national planning institution—now DEPDEV—has served as a constant source of continuity and stability across administrations, guiding the country through major economic disruptions, natural disasters, and global crises.

He cited the country's steady progress in poverty reduction as proof of the value of inclusive, evidence-based planning, with poverty incidence declining from 23.5% a decade ago to 15.5% in 2023. The government is determined to bring poverty down to single-digit levels by 2028.

"This means that years of planning have sent millions of children to school, have provided millions of families with roofs over their heads, and have given millions of Filipinos with more dignity in their daily lives over the years," the Executive Secretary said.

With this, he paid tribute to the DEPDev family—past and present—calling them "the unsung heroes of the Republic" who provide continuity, clarity, and stability in governance.

He also expressed gratitude to the country's development partners for their continued trust and support, noting that international cooperation has been critical in the Philippines' development through the years.

The Executive Secretary further reaffirmed the Marcos Jr. administration's commitment to fully implement the Philippine Development Plan 2023–2028 and realize Ambisyon Natin 2040.

In closing, Executive Secretary Recto called on stakeholders to sustain a culture of planning beyond politics, stress-

ing that nation-building depends on collective action—planning, building, and delivering together to secure progress for both present and future generations of Filipinos.



Ombudsman subpoenas Cabral's government-issued devices

MANILA — The Office of the Ombudsman on Monday said it has issued a subpoena duces tecum directing the Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH) to immediately produce all computer and electronic devices previously issued to former Undersecretary Maria Catalina Cabral.

"Upon turnover, these devices will be subjected to forensic examination by a law enforcement agency to determine whether any data was altered, deleted, or tampered with after the flood control scandal was first made public," Assistant Ombudsman Mico Clavano said in a statement.

"The Office expects prompt and full compliance with the subpoena in the interest of accountability and the integrity of the ongoing investigation," he added.

Cabral was found unconscious in a ravine along Kennon Road in Tuba, Benguet shortly after midnight on Friday. She was pronounced dead shortly after authorities retrieved her body.

Based on the result of the autopsy, Department of the Interior and Local Government Secretary Jonvic Remulla said there were no signs of foul play in her death. (PNA)

PLDT...

MANILA — Telecommunications company (telco) PLDT on Thursday reported a drop in cable and telco equipment theft in most of 2025 and attributed it to stronger partnerships with local government units (LGUs), police and communities nationwide.

In a statement, PLDT and its wireless subsidiary Smart (PLDT-Smart) highlighted their collaboration with barangays through the intensified rollout of the asset protection project dubbed "Bayanihan."

As part of the project, PLDT-Smart's Asset Protection and Security Governance (APSRG) group conducted collaboration sessions with barangays in Makati, Dagupan, Davao City, Liloan, Calamba, General Santos, Quezon City, Rodriguez in Rizal, Pasay, Cagayan de Oro and Dasmariñas, Cavite in 2025.

"Our intensified collaboration with barangays this year highlights the importance of bringing communities into the conversation when it comes to protecting our network," PLDT-Smart vice president and head of property Leo Gonzales said.

He added that every cable of equipment safeguarded from theft helps ensure uninterrupted connectivity for their customers.

"By working hand in hand with local leaders and residents, we are not simply preventing theft, we are also ensuring that digital services remain accessible and reliable for millions of Filipinos," Gonzales said.

PLDT-Smart Security and Central Command head, retired Col. Romeo Basco, said such partnerships make a "real difference" on the ground.

"When barangays and local authorities actively help monitor, report incidents, or apprehend thieves, we can respond faster and prevent bigger disruptions. This shared sense of responsibility empowers

communities to protect the infrastructure that keeps them connected," Basco said.

In 2024, PLDT-Smart logged almost 1,000 loss incidents, mostly involving copper cables.

In certain areas in Manila, such thefts occurred as often as every three days.

Since then, PLDT-Smart logged a 34 percent drop in apprehension incidents and a 24 percent decrease in apprehended suspects from January to November of this year compared to the same period last year.

"This underscores the effectiveness of the Group's strengthened security measures, which include efforts to deter theft before it occurs. These results mark a critical milestone in the Group's mission to curb losses, maintain service reliability, and uphold public trust," he said. (PNA)

Experts deem Duterte 'fit' to participate in ICC proceedings

MANILA — A panel of medical experts unanimously believed former President Rodrigo R. Duterte "fit to participate" in the International Criminal Court's (ICC) pre-trial proceedings, including confirmation hearing.

The panel, composed of independent and qualified experts, were earlier appointed by the Pre-Trial Chamber I to assess Duterte's fitness as his camp asserts that he is not fit to stand trial due to cognitive impairment.

According to a court document released on Dec. 18, three different physicians interviewed, examined and assessed the former chief executive from Oct. 8 to Nov. 18.

"Upon completion of their assessments, panel members individually reached the same overall conclusion that,

while frail and elderly, Mr. Duterte nevertheless possesses the necessary capacities to meaningfully exercise his procedural and fair trial rights," it read.

Each of the panel member independently concluded that Duterte can understand his charges, evidence and the purpose of pre-trial proceedings, as well as instruct his counsel to prepare his defense.

"These findings are clear and unanimous, and should be relied upon the Chamber as authoritative, to determine that Mr. Duterte is fit to stand trial," it read.

Duterte's camp, meanwhile, asked the Pre-Trial Chamber to seek further clarification before issuing its decision on the matter, citing "inconsistencies" by which each member of the panel reached their conclusions.

"While the experts pronounce on Mr. Duterte's rudimentary ability to engage in a criminal process, it is not clear what they actually know, if at all, about the complex nature of confirmation proceedings at the ICC, which require a suspect to be familiar, through his defense, with thousands of items of evidence comprising an investigation dating back more than four years," said Duterte's counsel, Nicholas Kaufman.

"For this reason, the Defence seeks an evidentiary hearing whereby the parties will be able to clarify the conclusions of the experts, the reasons for such conclusions, the methodology adopted during the interviews, and the means whereby instructions were communicated to them," he added. (PNA)



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Pagpupugay sa mga Haligi ng Edukasyon ng Lungsod ng Trece Martires

Isang karangalan na makapagbigay-pugay po tayo, kasama sina BM Aldrin Anacan, Vice Mayor Bobby Montehermoso at ang 12th Sangguniang Panlungsod, sa 1,604 na natatanging guro at empleyado na patuloy na nagsisilbi nang tapat at may malasakit.

Kabilang sa kanila ang mga piling guro, service awardees at retired teachers, gayundin ang mga indibidwal at paaralan na kinilala sa kanilang kahusayan bilang Most Outstanding at Best Performing sa Gawad Pag-asa 2025.

Maraming salamat sa inyong kasi-pagan, dedikasyon, at buong pusong paglilingkod upang patuloy nating maitaguyod ang de-kalidad na edukasyon para sa mga kabataang Treceño.

Patuloy kayong maging liwanag at pag-asa ng ating lungsod. Be blessed, Be a blessing! Bagong Trece, Puso ng Cavite, Lungsod ng Pag-asa! #GGBL #GoodGovernanceForBetterLife MGBL FB Page



Barangay: Pundasyon ng Lakas ng Imus

Ang lakas ng ating Lungsod ay nagsisimula sa barangay—at ang pundasyon nito ay ang mga taong handang maglingkod sa araw-araw.

Ngayong kapaskuhan, isang munting pasasalamat at tulong ang ating handog para sa mga Barangay functionaries—ang mga frontliners ng ating barangay.

Maraming salamat po sa inyong walang sawang serbisyo para sa bawat Imuseño. #CONGkretongAJenda #AlagangA dvincula #AngatAngImus



SANGGUNIANG KABATAAN BASKETBALL LEAGUE 2025 CHAMPIONSHIP

Matagumpay na ginanap ngayong araw ang Championship ng SK Federation Basketball League 2025, kung saan naghaharap para sa kampeonato ang Barangay Wawa III at Barangay Sapa III.

Sa isang kapana-panabik at puspusang laban, itinanghal na kampeon ang Barangay Sapa III matapos nilang ipamalas ang pambihirang husay at liksi sa loob ng court.

Ang paligsahang ito ay hindi lamang naging tagisan ng galing sa basketball, kundi isang patunay ng pagkakaisa, sportsmanship, at aktibong pakikilahok ng kabataan mula sa iba't ibang barangay ng ating bayan. Lubos na binabati at pinasasalamat ang lahat ng kalahok na barangay, mga manlalaro, coaches, opisyal, at tagasuporta na naging bahagi ng matagumpay na liga.

Ang makabuluhang aktibidad na ito ay naging posible sa pamamagitan ng patuloy na suporta at masigasig na pamuno ng ating butihing Mayor Voltaire Ricafrente at Vice Mayor Bamm Gonzales, na patuloy na nagsusulong ng mga programang naglalayong makamit ang isang Bayang Tahimik, Masaya, at Maunlad.



Suporta sa Pag-aaral, Gabay sa Hanapbuhay: National Student Allowance Act + School to Employment Program Act

Hindi lang matrikula ang gastusin sa pag-aaral. Kasama rin dito ang school supplies, pamasahé, at baon pang-araw-araw. Sa kasamaang palad, para sa maraming pamilya, ang tila 'maliliit' na gastusing ito ang nagiging dahilan kung bakit nahihiapan makapasok o manatili sa paaralan ang ating kabataan.

Kaya naman mahalaga ang ating isinusulong na House Bill 85 An Act Granting the Annual Stipend for Public School Students from Kinder to Grade 12 to be known as the Baon Para sa Iskolar ng Bayan Act na isinama sa iba pang kaparehas na panukala para sa substitute bill na tinaguriang, **National Student Allowance Act**

Ito ay upang matiyak na ang kakulangan sa budget ng pamilya ay hindi maging hadlang sa edukasyon. Kapag may sapat na suporta, walang batang mapagkakaitan ng maayos na edukasyon.

Sa joint meeting ng Committee on Basic Education and Culture at Committee on Higher and Technical Education kahakailan, pinag-aranan nang mabuti kung paano ipamamahagi ang national student allowance nang patas at napapanahon. Kailangang makarating agad ang allowance sa mga mag-aaral na nangangailangan, habang iniiwasan ang pag-overlap sa iba pang assistance programs ng pamahalaan. Layunin nito ang mas maayos at mas makatarungang sistema ng suporta.

Naaprubahan din sa nasabing joint meeting ang **School to Employment Program Act** na naglalayong palakasin ang mga institutional mechanisms na nag-uugnay sa education at training na kailangan ng labor market.

Tinutugunan nito ang job-skills mismatch at nagtatatag ng school-to-work transition sa pamamagitan ng malawakang collaboration ng pamahalaan, industriya, at akademya upang masiguro ang maayos na trabaho para sa ating mga bagong graduate.

Sama-sama, tulong-tulong nating pangalagaan ang adhikain ng ating mga mag-aaral! #AlagangAteLANI #LaniMerca-doRevilla #LoveMyBacoor

FAO eyes \$521.6-M emergency agri fund for PH, 5 others

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) is seeking to raise USD521.6 million to boost food production and climate-resilient agriculture solutions in Asia and the Pacific, including the Philippines.

The amount forms part of FAO's broader USD2.5 billion Global Emergency and Resilience Appeal for 2026, which aims to support more than 100 million people across 54 countries and territories, the organization said in a press statement on Saturday.

The FAO said the global appeal will fund life-saving emergency interventions, such as the distribution of seeds and tools, animal health campaigns, rapid livelihood recovery, and cash assistance.

It will also support resilience-building programs focused on climate- and biodiversity-positive agri-food solutions, water infrastructure, market access, agri-food systems restoration, and strengthened monitoring systems.

Of the total appeal, the USD521.6 million allocation for Asia and the Pacific is intended to assist about 30.5 million people in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Myanmar, Pakistan, the Philippines, and Timor-Leste.

The FAO formally launched its first-ever Global Emergency and Resilience Appeal on the sidelines of the 179th Session of the FAO Council at its headquarters in Rome on Dec. 3.

Speaking at the event, Philippine Permanent Representative to FAO Neal Imperial backed the agency's call as he emphasized the need for timely emergency interventions to stabilize agricultural production, safeguard livelihoods, and ensure food availability when disasters strike.

"Emergency agriculture interventions save livelihoods and accelerate recovery. They allow farmers to replant, restock, and repair assets quickly, preventing prolonged hunger, avoiding displacement, and reducing the need for extended humanitarian assistance," he said.

"By protecting productive assets early, we lay the foundation for shock-responsive food systems that support broader development goals."

FAO Director-General Qu Dongyu reported that acute food insecurity has tripled since 2016, even with high levels of humanitarian funding.

"The current model simply does not keep pace with today's realities. Supporting farmers to maintain production is critical to ensure food availability. When farmers can keep producing, communities stabilize, and the path to resilience becomes real," he said.

Drawing from the Philippines' experiences, Imperial emphasized the effectiveness of combining anticipatory action with emergency agricultural interventions.

He cited FAO's Special Fund for Emergency and Rehabilitation Activities (SFERA), whose anticipatory action initiatives supported farmers and fisherfolk during the two typhoons

that struck the Philippines in 2024.

He also highlighted the Green Climate Fund-supported Adapting Philippine Agriculture to Climate Change (APA) project, one of the country's largest climate-resilience in agriculture initiatives, led by the Department of Agriculture and the Department of Science and Technology - Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration.

The APA project currently supports 1.25 million farmers and places 250,000 hectares under climate-resilient management.

In the 2023-2024 El Niño event in Isabela, the project provided cash and water management support to at least 4,000 people three months before peak drought conditions.

"These experiences underscore that emergency response saves livelihoods now, while resilience ensures they withstand future shocks. The two must move together," Imperial said.

"Rising needs cannot be met by doing more of the same. Cost-effectiveness is now a humanitarian imperative. Agricultural assistance remains one of the most impactful investments: it enables people to feed themselves, strengthens local economies, and delivers durable results with fewer resources." (PNA)



GLOBAL APPEAL. FAO Director-General Qu Dongyu delivers his opening remarks at the launch of the FAO's 2026 Global Appeal on Emergencies and Resilience at the organization's headquarters in Rome, Italy on Dec. 3, 2025. The appeal aims to strengthen emergency response and resilience in vulnerable countries worldwide. (Photo courtesy of FAO/Alessandra Benedetti)

PCG on alert beginning Saturday for port traffic holiday rush

MANILA — The Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) is set to go on heightened alert nationwide beginning Saturday as part of the government-wide preparations for the holiday travel rush.

In a "Bagong Pilipinas Ngayon" interview over PTV, PCG spokesperson Capt. Noemie Cayabyab said all PCG regional offices, stations and substations will

be on heightened alert status from Dec. 20, 2025, until Jan. 4, 2026, based on the orders of PCG commandant Adm. Ronnie Gil Gavan.

"Nakikita po natin posibleng mama-yang gabii o bukas po ng umaga dadag-sain po ang ating mga pantalan ng ating mga biyahero (We expect an influx of passengers tonight or tomorrow in our ports)," Cayabyab said.

In response to the expected increase in port travelers, the PCG has partnered with the Philippine Ports Authority (PPA) and the Maritime Industry Authority (MARINA) to ensure the availability of help and emergency services in key areas.

This includes the deployment of Malasakit Help Desks, medical teams and intensified vessel inspections for the safety of travelers.

"Ang istriktong direktiba po ng aming komandante ay wala po tayong ia-allow na kahit na anuman pong barko na mag-sasakay po ng excess passenger. We will be strictly implementing that na wala pong maglalayag na sobra po ang pasahero o wala po sa manpesto (Our commandant gave a strict order not to allow excess passengers. We will be strictly enforcing the no overloading policy and that anyone not in the ship manifest will not be allowed to board the ship)," she said.

In addition, the PCG will implement an intensified layered security in major ports, such as the deployment of K-9 units and the barring of prohibited items, including flammable and explosive materials.

"Since last year, we were able to cater a total of 5 million inbound and outbound passengers at nakita rin po natin iyong influx po ng ating kababayan sa mga coastal beaches, tayo po ay magsasagawa ng patrol araw-araw kasama po ang paglalagay po natin ng mga rescue swimmers at mga lifeguard sa mga island resorts (and we can expect an influx to coastal beaches where we'll make daily patrols as well as deploy rescue swimmers and lifeguards in island resorts)," she said.

She reminded port passengers, especially those passing through major ports such as the Manila North Harbor, Batangas Port, Mactan Port and Zamboanga Port, to purchase their ticket as soon as possible and to arrive at the port early to account for the intensified security procedures. (PNA)