

Palace sees enough evidence to convict VP

Says testimonies showed Duterte controlled confi funds

By Charles Dantes, Maricel Cruz, Katrina Manubay and Joel Zurbano

MALACAÑANG on Monday said the prosecution has "in a way" presented enough evidence to support the conviction of Vice President Sara Duterte on the impeachment article involving the alleged misuse of confidential funds.

"According to the Palace, in a way, yes," Palace Press Officer Claire Castro said when asked if the prosecution has already presented sufficient evidence to convict Duterte for Impeachment Article One.

She said based on the testimonies of witnesses presented, the House prosecution team has proven that the Vice President and Col. Raymund Lachica were "the ones who controlled the confidential funds."

'VP had command and control'

Castro cited the testimony of former OVP special disbursing officer Gina Acosta, who said that while she never personally saw Duterte take or keep the confidential funds, it was the Vice President who ordered the release of the entire P125 million to her security officer, Col. Lachica.

"This only means that the one who had the command and control was none other than VP Sara," the Palace official said.

She, however, acknowledged the final decision rests with the senators sitting as impeachment judges.

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OMB: Davao 'epicenter' of flood control works; Pulong: Prove it

By Rex Espiritu and Maricel Cruz

THE Office of the Ombudsman is probing possible corruption in flood control projects in Davao City, prompting Rep. Paolo "Pulong" Duterte to challenge Ombudsman Je-

sus Crispin Remulla to release Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH) records covering all such projects in the city.

Remulla made the observation Tuesday during the House Committee on Appropriations' deliberations on

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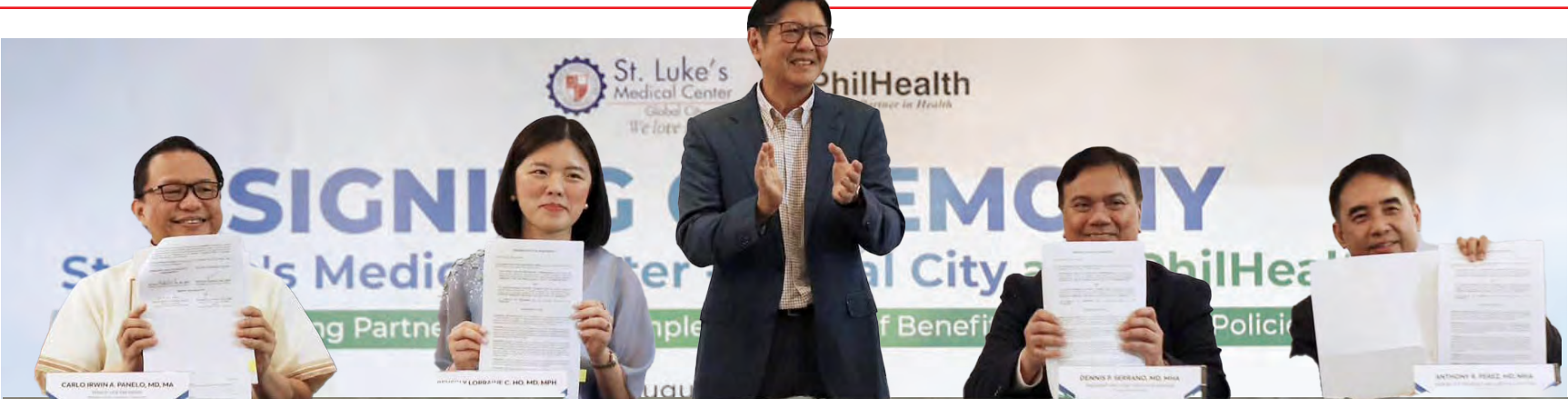
Ex-Speaker to OMB: Apply the rules of evidence in my case

By Maricel V. Cruz

FORMER Speaker Ferdinand Martin Romualdez has challenged the Office of the Ombudsman (OMB) to be more straightforward and precisely apply the rules of evidence in handling the charges against him.

In the 25-page supplemental counter-

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HEALTH PARTNERSHIP. President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. applauds as key DOH, PhilHealth and St. Luke's Medical Center officials present the signed Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) between St. Luke's Medical Center (SLMC) – Global City and the Philippine Health Insurance Corporation (PhilHealth) yesterday at the Henry Sy, Sr. Auditorium, SLMC in Taguig City. With the President are PhilHealth Acting President and CEO Dr. Beverly Ho, Department of Health (DOH) Secretary Edwin Mercado, St. Luke's Medical Center President and CEO Dr. Dennis Serrano, and 1st Vice Chairman Atty. Cirilo Noel. Inset shows the President visiting a patient in the hospital. PCO

Private hospitals now part of govt's health network—PBBM

By Charles Dantes

PRESIDENT Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos Jr. on Tuesday said his administration is including private hospitals in government health programs to make specialized medical care more accessible to Filipinos who cannot afford it.

Mr. Marcos made the statement after witnessing the signing of a memorandum of agreement between PhilHealth and St. Luke's Medical Center-Global City, describing

the partnership as a step toward expanding the government's Universal Health Care program.

"This is a very simple ceremony, belies the importance of what we mark today, because we mark a partnership that strengthens our shared commitment to ensuring that Filipino patients have easier access to quality and affordable health care services and benefits that they all deserve," President Marcos said.

The initiative complements the

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HOSTILE WITNESS.

New witness Lemuel Ortoni, assistant chief of staff of the Office of the Vice President, looks at a document shown to him on Day 18 of the Senate Impeachment Trial at the Senate. Lino Santos

'No bail for illegal use of loose firearms'

By Vince Lopez

DEPARTMENT of the Interior and Local Government (DILG) Secretary Jonvic Remulla on Tuesday pushed for a stricter law on loose firearms, saying the offense should be non-bailable and punishable by up to 20 years jail term in order to curb violent crimes involving unlicensed guns.

Remulla told reporters that stronger penalties are necessary to deter the illegal possession and use of firearms.

The DILG chief's call comes on the heels of the Zamboanga City and Tacloban school shootings, where minors gained access to legally-owned firearms.

Remulla said the incident underscores the need to review and strictly enforce firearm policies, particularly those involving uniformed personnel entrusted with government-issued weapons. The DILG chief said the current penalty does not provide a sufficient deterrent because the offenders

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Trump to impose \$100k fee on firms hiring foreigners

US President Donald Trump's administration on Monday moved to impose a more than \$100,000 fee on employers hiring foreign workers through a highly-skilled visa program, after facing a legal setback in an earlier effort.

Curbing immigration—both undocumented and lawful—has been a

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Marcos: Gov't to equip domestic makers of e-trikes and e-jeepneys

By Charles Dantes

PRESIDENT Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos Jr. said the government is working to equip local manufacturers to produce fully Filipino-made electric tricycles and jeepneys as part of efforts to reduce the country's dependence on imported petroleum products.

Mr. Marcos made the statement during a visit to the MD Juan factory in Caloocan City, where he inspected

the company's facilities and assessed the equipment and government support needed for local electric vehicle manufacturing.

"We are here to look at what needs to be done so they can eventually fabricate all-Filipino electric tricycles and electric jeepneys, if we reach that point," the President said.

Mr. Marcos said the government is assessing the plant's existing

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EYEING 'OBET' AND HABAGAT. Project NOAH staff at their work stations monitoring typhoon Obet at their office in UP Dilliman. Manny Palmero

NBI eyes 20 other suspect steel plants

By Charles Dantes

THE National Bureau of Investigation (NBI) is monitoring 20 other steel plants nationwide as part of a broader investigation into potentially hazardous operations, as authorities defended their recent operation at a steel plant in Davao City.

NBI Deputy Director Melvin Matibag said the operation at Davao Mighty Steel Corp. was the fifth steel plant visited by the agency, stressing that investigators were carrying out their mandate

and should not be accused of targeting the company for political reasons. "There are about 20 more across the country that we are monitoring and keeping under surveillance," Matibag

said. He said NBI personnel, the Presidential Anti-Organized Crime Commission, and other law enforcement agencies would continue inspecting other facilities. "The effort being undertaken by the NBI and PAOCC (Presidential Anti-Organized Crime Commission) and other law enforcement agencies will not end in Davao. We will also go to other places," he said. Matibag said investigators had previously visited two steel plants in

Pampanga and one each in Bulacan and Misamis Oriental before going to the Davao facility. "Truth of the matter, this is the fifth steel plant that the NBI has visited. Two in Pampanga, one in Bulacan, one in Misamis, and Davao. So this should not be given a political color," he said. He also rejected claims that authorities had used force against workers during the Davao operation. "We did not point guns at the employees. What we did was rescue them," Matibag said.

He urged the public to allow investigators to establish the facts based on evidence. "Evidence does not lie. In this age of social media, what we look at here is the proof, the evidence," he said. NBI Disaster Victim Identification Division chief Dr. Wilfredo Tierra said investigators found several workers with lumps in different parts of their bodies, although he cautioned that it was too early to determine whether these were connected to conditions inside the plant.

Palace...

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“Our fellow Filipinos – majority of them – want the evidence to be considered instead of political issues. If the decision is based on evidence, we can uphold due process and justice better,” Castro said. **Lachica ready to face impeachment court** Lachica, for his part, said he is ready to testify in the Senate impeachment trial if lawfully summoned. “I have never refused to appear or testify. If lawfully called, I am prepared to tell the truth, subject to applicable laws and security restrictions,” he said in a statement on Tuesday. Former OVP special disbursing officer Gina Acosta, during Monday’s hearing, repeatedly pointed to

Lachica as the one who implemented the ground activities for which confidential funds were used, including the procurement of P122 million worth of medicines that were eventually classified as reward for OVP informants. Acosta said the Vice President also instructed her to release the initial P125 million confidential tranche to Lachica in December 2022, along with three additional tranches in 2023. **‘OVP has yet to account P500m in confi funds’** As this developed, the prosecution panel said Duterte has failed to account until now for the P500 million in confidential funds released to her office in 2022 and 2023. The prosecution’s hostile witness, OVP assistant chief of staff Lemuel Ortonio, confirmed that Duterte’s request for confidential funds for her office had no supporting documents.

Private counsel for the prosecution panel Mae Divinagracia, in presenting Ortonio, said: “The explanations kept changing; there were no details, no supporting documents—it was a cover-up, not an explanation. And to this day, the public’s P500 million remains unaccounted for.” “In such a failure, the law itself speaks – there is prima facie presumption that the funds were used for personal gain,” Divinagracia said. Ortonio admitted that no computation was submitted to support the OVP’s request for confidential funds. “That’s correct, no computation,” he said. “Yes, none. In fact, there was no attachment supporting the OVP’s request for confidential funds. Correct?” Divinagracia asked. “Yes, that’s correct, no attachments, ma’am,” Ortonio answered.

‘VP’s handprints from request to liquidation’ Divinagracia said the Vice President’s “handprints are on every document that mattered.” “From request to liquidation, her authority and approval are embodied in the essential documents,” she said. She said the OVP reports relating to the use of confidential funds “were written to fit the rules not the facts.” “Four reports, a single template; figures that remain unchanged and are always exactly P125 million—not a peso more, not a centavo less. Nothing left over, nothing returned,” she said. Divinagracia also noted that when the Commission on Audit questioned the medical and food aid items in the OVP liquidation report, “the line disappeared while the report still totaled exactly P125 million.”

Ex-Speaker...

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affidavit filed last Thursday, Romualdez underscored that the OMB cannot file a case first and leave serious flaws in sworn statements for the trial court to sort out later. The lawmaker asked the Ombudsman to accurately assess the pieces of evidence at hand, including 32 sworn statements. The filings consisted of three witness recantations including that of controversial witness Orly Guteza, two supporting statements, 25 new affidavits of denial and non-participa-

tion, and the previous sworn affidavit of Allan Colesio, an erstwhile aide of dismissed Ako Bicol Party-list Rep. Zaldy Co. All taken, the statements challenge the personal knowledge and credibility of witnesses used to connect Romualdez to alleged deliveries of cash-filled suitcases. Romualdez asserted that the Ombudsman must weigh those challenges under its own 2026 Revised Rules of Procedure before filing any information. “Faced with these statements that cast doubt on the truth of the allegations in the Complaints, this Honorable Office cannot have basis to satisfy the standard of prima facie evidence with reasonable certainty of convic-

tion required under Section 3, Rule V of the 2026 Ombudsman Rules of Procedure,” the former Speaker stated in his affidavit. The document maintained that this threshold is higher than the former probable-cause standard. “The evidentiary standard of prima facie evidence with reasonable certainty of conviction was deliberately designed to elevate, and not merely restate, the former standard of probable cause,” it added. In his supplemental sworn statement, Romualdez cited that Ombudsman’s official rule requires prosecutors to evaluate the full import of the documents, including a respondent’s

counter-affidavit. “Admissibility and credibility are thus not concerns reserved for the trial court; they are integral to this Honorable Office’s own determination of whether a case should be filed at all,” he argued. He likewise called attention to the altered testimonies or recantations of the so-called witnesses against him, The lawmaker emphasized that no contractor has stated that money was paid to him, no DPWH official has said he demanded or received a kickback, no identified project has been traced to a payment to him, and no financial record has traced alleged unlawful proceeds to his assets.

Trump...

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key goal of the Republican leader and a persistent demand of his Make America Great Again (MAGA) base. The \$103,265 fee for H-1B visas would serve as a “revenue mechanism” to recoup the costs of administering the lawful immigration system, the Department of Homeland Security said in its new proposed rule. The Trump administration has argued the visa program has been exploited to replace, rather than supplement, American workers, and in September 2025 issued a presidential proclamation imposing a \$100,000 fee to combat what it called “systemic abuse.” But a federal judge in June blocked that order, siding with 20 Democratic-led states in a lawsuit that contended the fee constituted an unlawful tax that bypassed Congressional authority. Another federal judge in December 2025 upheld the same action, finding the president had “broad statutory authority” to address “a problem he perceives to be a matter of economic and national security.” That ruling is being

appealed. In the new proposal, the administration leans more heavily on cost-based arguments, saying it needs to make up the costs of its agencies including US Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), Customs and Border Protection (CBP), Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). However, it also acknowledges it would have what it calls an “indirect” benefit: “US employers, if required to pay an additional \$103,265 fee when filing an H-1B cap-subject petition, would be less likely to hire an H-1B worker over a qualified and highly-skilled American.” And it says the new proposed fee “would be in addition to any other applicable fees or payments,” including the fee from the presidential proclamation under legal review -- however this is set to expire this September, unless it is extended. There will be a 30-day public comments window before any rule can take effect. There are certain to be legal challenges based on a number of arguments, including the previously advanced theory that the new proposal is a de facto tax, and that it exceeds statutory authority.

Private...

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administration’s Zero Balance Billing (ZBB) program, which provides free hospital services to ward patients and is currently being implemented in 79 Department of Health (DOH) hospitals and four government-owned or -controlled hospitals. Aside from St. Luke’s Global City, three other private hospitals have expressed support for the policy, including Cardinal Santos Medical Center, Asian Hospital and Medical Center, and The Medical City Ortigas. He said the partnership seeks to ease the financial burden on families facing serious illnesses, noting that patients may choose private hospitals because they require specialized expertise, advanced equipment and complex treatments even when they may not be able to afford the cost. “Walang pinipiling tao ang sakit (Illness does not discriminate). Anyone can suddenly face a medical

emergency that requires immediate treatment or specialized care,” Marcos said. Under the agreement, St. Luke’s Medical Center-Global City will participate in efforts to strengthen the implementation of PhilHealth’s No Co-payment Policy, which the administration considers part of its broader push for Universal Health Care. Marcos said the arrangement would allow qualified PhilHealth members who previously avoided private hospitals because of cost to access specialized services with government support. “So even those who previously could not go to private hospitals like St. Luke’s can now be supported to come here with assistance from PhilHealth, the DOH (Department of Health) and, sometimes, even the Office of the President,” he said. The president said St. Luke’s was only the beginning and that the government intends to encourage more healthcare facilities to participate in similar programs.

Marcos...

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capabilities and identifying the additional equipment and support needed to establish local electric vehicle production. “That is why we are looking at the facilities—what is already here, what is still lacking, and what additional support is needed from the Department of Science and Technology and the national government so we can start making electric vehicles here in the Philippines,” he said. He said the government aims to strengthen local manufacturing capabilities so the Philippines can eventually produce electric vehicles using technologies and components developed domestically. Mr. Marcos said shifting to locally made electric vehicles would reduce the country’s exposure to fluctuations in global petroleum prices while supporting the livelihoods of public utility vehicle drivers. “We know that this is our goal—to reduce our dependence on petroleum products that come from other places and, in that way, make our economy and the livelihoods of those who operate public utility vehicles more stable,” the chief executive said. Mr. Marcos said the immediate priority is installing the additional equipment needed for electric vehicle

production, and the government is working with technical consultants to determine the requirements. “I believe that we will soon be seeing a Filipino electric vehicle, a tricycle, and maybe down the road, we can make a jeepney,” he said. The government’s push for local electric vehicle manufacturing aims to build domestic production capacity while supporting the transition to cleaner and less petroleum-dependent public transportation. The visit comes as the Marcos administration expands policies aimed at accelerating the country’s shift to electric mobility and developing a domestic EV manufacturing base. Under Executive Order No. 121, signed by Mr. Marcos on July 29, the government established the Electric Vehicle Incentive Strategy (EVIS) Program to encourage local manufacturing of hybrid and battery-electric vehicles and their parts and components. The program has a maximum incentive ceiling of P60 billion, with up to P15 billion available for each enrolled EV model, subject to the annual budget process. The administration’s push builds on the Electric Vehicle Industry Development Act, or Republic Act No. 11697, which provides the broader policy framework for the manufacture, assembly, importation, use and development of electric vehicles, charging stations, batteries and related components.

‘No...

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are able to post bail for their provisional release. Remulla said congressional leaders are already working on proposed amendments to the firearms law, possibly to be ratified early next year. “I think it will be done by January. They’re going to rush it,” he said. He stressed that stronger penalties could have a broader impact on gun-related crimes. “If we do that, we can solve so many crimes,” Remulla noted. At the same time, Remulla called for greater accountability for licensed firearm owners, stressing that the privilege of owning a firearm comes with

the responsibility to keep it properly secured and inaccessible to unauthorized persons. “Gun ownership also carries with it gun responsibility. The government should have the right to inspect their homes at any time and to see if the guns are in safekeeping at any time,” he said. “It is a privilege granted in the Philippines,” he added. “It is a privilege, not a right.” “We have to be strict with all our policies with uniformed personnel and let them realize the gravity of the situation that’s happening,” he said. The DILG chief emphasized that preventing firearms from falling into unauthorized hands requires both stronger laws and greater responsibility among legitimate gun owners in securing their weapons.

OMB:...

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the Ombudsman’s proposed P7-billion budget, where he described Davao City as the “epicenter” of flood control projects during the previous administration. Flood control projects, a major corruption flashpoint under the Marcos administration, were allocated P107.4 billion in the proposed P7.2-trillion national budget, including P19.6 billion for ongoing foreign-assisted projects. Davao City’s First District received approximately P51 billion for infrastructure projects from 2020 to 2022, according to DPWH records. Of that, P9.12 billion went to flood control projects. Questions about the projects were raised by ACT Teachers Party-list Rep. Antonio Tinio who flagged alleged anomalies in 80 of 121 flood control initiatives worth roughly P4.35 billion. Tinio cited overlapping contracts, duplicate funding and discrepancies in project implementation. During the hearing, Tinio asked Remulla whether the Ombudsman was investigating flood control corruption during the previous administration. “Yes, but it is not really easy,” Remulla responded. “The epicenter of flood control before the Marcos administration is Davao City.” Remulla said authorities were having difficulty penetrating what he called an “ecosystem of corruption” in the city. “It’s hard to get information, so many people don’t want to talk, but we don’t stop,” he said. Tinio said Remulla’s statement appeared to establish Davao City as the center of flood control corruption during the previous administration. “What was said is clear: Davao City is the epicenter of flood control corruption in the past administration,” Tinio said. Remulla, however, clarified that he was not immediately drawing that conclusion. “I will not make that conclusion immediately; we are studying this, because what’s important is we see the evidence on the ground,” he said. After the hearing, Remulla explained that he referred to Davao City as the “epicenter” because of the large amount of flood control funds allocated there. “[Epicenter] of flood control, because there was a big budget in the past in Davao City in flood control, that’s what I know,” Remulla told reporters. Asked whether his use of “epicenter” did not necessarily refer to corruption, Remulla said, “Well, we will check out the flood control there.” **Duterte dares Remulla to present documents** Duterte disputed the characterization and called on Remulla to present the documents supporting the claim. “I have my copy. If you don’t have yours, tell me and I will send it to you. Let us both have documents to read before making serious accusations,” Duterte said. Duterte said DPWH Region XI furnished him in 2019, when he was elected representative of Davao City’s first district, a list of completed projects covering 2020 to 2022. He said any investigation into Davao’s flood control projects should cover periods beyond his 2019-2022 term, noting that former Rep. Prospero Nograles represented the district before him. “If you are serious about finding the truth, there should be no sacred cows—regardless of the person, name, political party or administration. If there is an anomaly, investigate it. If there is evidence, expose it,” Duterte said. He cautioned the government against using a political narrative as a shortcut to reach conclusions and urged the Ombudsman to conduct its investigation impartially.

Palace: No DPWH coordination in Bulacan



FAREWELL CALL. Japanese Ambassador Endo Kazuya pays a farewell call on Department of Foreign Affairs Secretary Ma. Theresa P. Lazaro on Aug. 25, expressing gratitude for her leadership and partnership in strengthening Japan-Philippines relations.

By Charles Dantes and Orlan Mauricio

MALACAÑANG on Tuesday said Bulacan Gov. Daniel Fernando could not be faulted for saying he was unaware of some P41 billion worth of flood control projects in the province, saying the Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH) had failed to properly coordinate the projects with the local government.

Presidential Communications Office Undersecretary Claire Castro said local officials could not reasonably be expected to account for projects that were not reported or formally turned over to them by the DPWH.

Castro said President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. encountered a similar problem during his inspections of flood control projects, when a barangay official told him that some DPWH projects, including those started under former President Rodrigo Duterte and continued into Marcos' administration, had not been reported to the local government.

"So, there was no turnover of DPWH projects to the local government," Castro said.

Her remarks came after Fernando said he did not know about the reported P41 billion in flood control projects implemented in Bulacan because the DPWH had not coordinated them with the provincial government.

Castro said the lack of coordination prevented local officials from properly monitoring projects and checking whether they were completed according to specifications.

She said Mr. Marcos has ordered the government to change the system, requiring closer coordination between the DPWH and local governments and ensuring that completed projects are formally turned over before contractors are fully paid.

"There needs to be a say from the local government, and there needs to be a turnover from the DPWH to the local government so it can be checked before it is fully paid," Castro said.

Castro said the administration does not want to return to a system where infrastructure projects could be implemented without sufficient local oversight.

SWS: Hunger eases nationwide, rises in Mindanao

By Katrina Manubay

INVOLUNTARY hunger among Filipino families declined nationwide in June 2026 but increased in Mindanao, according to a Social Weather Stations (SWS) survey.

The latest SWS poll showed the hunger rate fell by 2.9 percentage points to 20.3 percent in June from 23.2 percent in March.

Across major areas, Mindanao recorded the highest hunger rate at 24 percent, followed by the Visayas at 22.3 percent, Metro Manila at 21 percent and Balance Luzon at 17.3 percent.

SWS said the 2.9-point decline in hunger between March and June resulted from decreases in Metro Manila, Balance Luzon, and the

Visayas, despite an increase in Mindanao.

Compared with March, the incidence of hunger fell by 5.7 points in the Visayas, from 28 percent to 22.3 percent; by 5.1 points in Balance Luzon, from 22.4 percent to 17.3 percent; and by one point in Metro Manila, from 22 percent to 21 percent.

In Mindanao, however, hunger rose by 2.3 points, from 21.7 percent to 24 percent.

In a separate survey, SWS found that the proportion of Filipino families who considered themselves poor declined in June, with self-rated poverty falling to 49 percent from 52 percent three months earlier.

The share of families who considered themselves not poor increased to 37 percent

in June from 35 percent in March, while those who placed themselves on the borderline between poor and not poor rose to 14 percent from 13 percent.

SWS emphasized that hunger occurs at different rates among poor and non-poor families, with hunger generally higher among the poor.

However, the research group noted that hunger rates among both poor and non-poor families may increase or decrease from quarter to quarter.

The SWS face-to-face survey was conducted from June 20 to 29, 2026, among 1,500 respondents aged 18 and above. It has a margin of error of ± 3 percentage points for national percentages.

Most adults feel safe in their neighborhoods—OCTA

Most Filipino adults feel safe in their neighborhoods, with 72 percent saying they feel secure in their communities, according to a survey by the OCTA Research group.

In the latest Tugon ng Masa (TNM) survey, results showed that while 68 percent are not afraid to walk alone at night, a smaller majority (54 percent) are not worried about robbers breaking into their homes.

Disagreement is lowest for feeling safe in the neighborhood at 12 percent, followed by not being afraid to walk alone at night at 16 percent.

By comparison, 21 percent disagree that they are not worried about robbers breaking into their homes, with undecided responses being highest for home security at 25 percent, compared with 15 percent for feeling safe in the neighborhood and 16 percent for walking alone at night.

Across major areas, the highest agreement that residents feel safe in their neighborhoods was recorded in the Visayas at 84 percent, followed by Balance Luzon at 72 percent and Mindanao at 71 percent. The National Capital Region registered the lowest at 58 percent.

The survey also revealed that about two in three Filipino adults (68 percent) said they are not afraid to walk alone at night, with Balance Luzon showing the highest agreement and NCR the lowest at 48 percent.

Among the three safety indicators, home security received the lowest positive assessment, with 54 percent of respondents saying they are not worried about robbers breaking into their homes.

Across major areas, agreement is strongest in Mindanao at 26 percent, followed by NCR and the Visayas at 25 percent and 21 percent, respectively, while Balance Luzon registered the weakest at 17 percent. **Katrina Manubay**



MSME PROGRAM. TikTok Shop, the Department of Trade and Industry, Convergence ICT Solutions and the Cebu Provincial Government launch 'Unlad Lokal Visayas,' a joint program providing thousands of Cebuano micro, small and medium enterprises with digital tools, training and wider market access. **Cebu Capitol PIO**



NEW HALL OF JUSTICE. Department of Justice and Iloilo City government officials lead the signing of a deed of donation and memorandum of agreement on Tuesday for the establishment of a new Hall of Justice and prosecution complex in Iloilo City.

Habagat to bring rains over Luzon; 'Obet' exits PAR

By Rio Arajá

THE southwest monsoon, or habagat, will bring rains over Luzon on Tuesday, the state weather bureau said.

The Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration (PAGASA) said Metro Manila, Ilocos Region, Cordillera Administrative Region, Cagayan Valley, Central Luzon, Cavite, Batangas and Rizal will experience scattered rains and thunderstorms.

Moderate to heavy rains in these areas may trigger flash floods and landslides, PAGASA warned.

Heavy rainfall is also forecast

over Benguet, La Union and Pangasinan.

The rest of Luzon will experience isolated rain showers or thunderstorms, while similar conditions are expected over the Visayas and Mindanao due to localized thunderstorms.

Meanwhile, Typhoon Saudel, formerly known as Obet, was outside the Philippine Area of Responsibility (PAR) as of PAGASA's 4 a.m. weather bulletin.

The typhoon was located about 1,180 kilometers east-northeast of Extreme Northern Luzon, with maximum sustained winds of 150 kph near the center and gustiness of up to 185 kph.

IN BRIEF

House OKs stronger workplace safety bill

THE House of Representatives has approved on second reading a measure that would strengthen protections for Filipino workers against emerging workplace hazards, including climate-related risks, while imposing tougher accountability for willful or grossly negligent violations of occupational safety standards.

This came Tuesday after House Committee on Labor and Employment Chairperson Ramon Jolo Revilla III sponsored House Bill 10559 under Committee Report 552 before the plenary.

Revilla called for the immediate passage of the measure, saying earning a living should never require workers to put their health or lives unnecessarily at risk. "Health should not be sacrificed for a livelihood. Life should not be sacrificed for a job," he said.

Revilla said the traditional concept of workplace safety must evolve as the dangers confronting Filipino workers change. He cited extreme heat, increasingly unpredictable weather and other climate-related hazards, particularly for workers exposed to outdoor conditions. **Maricel V. Cruz**

PAL awarded fresh 50-year franchise

THE House of Representatives has approved on second reading a bill granting Philippine Airlines (PAL) a new 50-year congressional franchise, replacing its existing franchise under PD 1590.

Negros Occidental Fourth District Rep. Jeffrey Ferrer, chair of the House Committee on Legislative Franchises, sponsored House Bill 10545 before its approval. He was also among the principal authors of the measure.

Ferrer cited PAL's role as the country's "national flag carrier," saying it serves routes that may not always be commercially attractive but are important in connecting the country's islands, communities and people.

Ferrer said the proposed 50-year franchise would give PAL the certainty to undertake long-term investments, modernize its fleet, expand domestic and international routes, and develop infrastructure and capabilities to meet the country's growing aviation needs. **Maricel V. Cruz**

MECO says Pinay killed in Taiwan crash

A 62-YEAR-OLD Filipina died in a vehicle crash in Taiwan on Aug. 19, the Manila Economic and Cultural Office (MECO) confirmed Tuesday.

MECO identified the victim as Ebelia Escalona Cortes, who died following a vehicular accident along Freeway No. 1 in Miaoli County. Her remains are scheduled to be repatriated to the Philippines on Aug. 30.

MECO also identified two other Filipinos, Gloria Tiu Chua and Gerald Ritkie Tiu Chua, who sustained minor injuries in the incident and received medical treatment in Taiwan. Both returned to Manila on Aug. 23 after completing the necessary medical and immigration requirements.

The victim's family has expressed its intent to pursue available remedies related to the incident. MECO said it would monitor the official investigation and other proceedings and provide the family with all possible support. **Katrina Manubay**

DOH backs V'zuela's Panatag Hotline



DOH-MMCHD, SUPTADO ANG PANATAG HOTLINE NG VALENZUELA CITY
Lungsod ng Valenzuela

YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH DRIVE. Students gather around an oversize poster with mental health tips as Valenzuela City launches its Panatag Hotline which is part of a broader youth mental health campaign spearheaded by Education Secretary Sonny Angara. The hotline provides the youths with immediate access to emotional and psychological support services. DOH-MMCHD photo

By Ram Superable

THE Department of Health-Metro Manila Center for Health Development (DOH-MMCHD) rallied behind Valenzuela City's Panatag Hotline initiative and urged local stakeholders across Metro Manila to expand community-based mental health networks in line with Universal Health Care goals.

The initiative is part of a broader youth mental health campaign being spearheaded by Education Secretary Sonny Angara.

The Panatag Hotline provides the youths with immediate access to emotional and psychological support services.

The DOH-MMCHD said it would continue working with local governments across Metro Manila to strengthen community-based health services.

"The DOH-MMCHD emphasizes the importance of having mechanisms that are easily accessible to citizens, especially for those in need of immediate guidance, a listening ear, and support regarding their mental and emotional condition," the agency said.

Angara's campaign centers on the national rollout of the enhanced Learners TeleSafe Contact Center Helpline (#33733), which directly connects students to the National Center for Mental Health Crisis Hotline.

PhilHealth's YAKAP and Kalinga caravans are also being conducted to provide health screenings and psychosocial support to students, parents and teachers alike.

The combined local and national health programs support provisions under the Universal Health Care Act and the Basic Education Mental Health and Well-being Promotion Act.

"Under the leadership of President Marcos, every student is important to us, which is why we want them to feel that they are not alone and that there is always someone ready to listen to what they are going through," Angara said.

IN BRIEF

Nagtipunan mayor ends Kapehan sa Barangay 7

NAGTIPUNAN, Quirino—Mayor Noel Lim has concluded Kapehan sa Barangay Season 7, encompassing all 16 barangays of this municipality in a move to bring the local government closer to the people. -

The final stops, Barangay San Dionisio II and Barangay Ponggo, capped the tour with a visit to Barangay Anak, the 14th village covered by the Kapehan Season 7 forum.

"Kapehan sa Barangay is our promise that no Nagtipuneros will be left behind. Whether you live in the poblacion or in the farthest barangay, the municipal government will come to you. We listen, we act, and we deliver because your concerns are our mandate," the mayor said.

"It is more than an event; it is a permanent, year-round commitment to bring the full municipal leadership directly to the people," he added. **Jessica M. Bacud**

Power cut-off suspends Ifugao courts operation

THE Supreme Court (SC) on Tuesday (Aug. 25) suspended work and court operations in Banaue, Ifugao due to a scheduled power interruption.

The SC Region 2 Division issued the suspension following an advisory by the National Grid Corp. of the Philippines (NGCP) about the impending brownout.

The High Court clarified however, that executive and presiding judges must ensure the availability of a skeletal workforce to act on urgent matters requiring judicial action, including applications for bail, habeas corpus and other similar urgent reliefs.

The SC also said its hotlines remain reachable and official email addresses are being monitored in accordance with protocols for urgent matters even as regular office work and court operations are suspended. **Gwyneth Nolasco**

Navy ends Southern Luzon maritime drill

THE Philippine Navy's Naval Forces Southern Luzon (NFSL) has concluded its first maritime exercise this year, aimed at strengthening strategic readiness and interoperability among military units and maritime law enforcement agencies operating in the region.

The drills, called Southern Luzon Naval and Maritime Exercise (SOLNAMEX) 2026, brought together naval and other military units across the country, as well as Maritime Law Enforcement Agencies, to enhance their ability to respond to seaborne security scenarios within the NFSL's area of responsibility.

The exercise formed part of the Navy's continuing efforts to improve operational readiness as the entire military transitions toward External Security Operations.

SOLNAMEX featured a series of maritime and air-based activities designed to test coordination, communication, decision-making and operational capabilities. **Rex Espiritu**

Comelec: BSKE deferral may entail more funds

By Vito Barcelo

THE Commission on Elections (Comelec) may require additional funding if the Barangay and Sangguniang Kabataan Elections (BSKE) scheduled for Nov. 2 were postponed, Comelec chairman George Garcia said Tuesday.

Garcia said the poll body has already spent about P8 billion of its P19.57-billion budget for preparations for the BSKE, including the printing of ballots, election forms, and other

materials.

He said a postponement could lead to higher expenses as Comelec may reopen the voter registration period, resulting in an increase in the number of registered voters, precincts, teachers assigned to polling places and election paraphernalia.

"If the November 2 barangay and SK elections will not push through, we will again open voter registration this September," Garcia pointed out.

Despite uncertainty over the pro-

posed postponement, Garcia said the Comelec remains on track with its preparations and is already about 90% ready for the November 2 polls.

The filing of certificates of candidacy is set for Sept. 28 to Oct. 5.

Senator Francis Escudero has filed a bill seeking to extend the terms of barangay and SK officials to five years and reset the elections to 2028.

Garcia earlier urged Congress to settle the issue before the end of September to give the Comelec enough time to adjust its preparations.

Cop-owner of gun used in school shooting sued

By Gwyneth Nolasco

THE Department of Justice (DOJ) on Thursday confirmed that the state prosecutor of Tacloban City has recommended the filing of criminal charges against a policewoman who owned the government-issued gun used by one of the suspects in the June 22 mass shooting at a Tacloban City high school.

The DOJ said a criminal complaint of reckless imprudence resulting in multiple homicide and serious physical injuries will be filed in the Family Court of the Regional Trial Court of Tacloban City against SSGt. Arla Ray Pacencia, aunt of a 14-year-old suspect in the San Jose National High School shooting that left three students dead and 20 others wounded.

DOJ spokesman Polo Martinez declined to give further details of the case.

"What is certain is that, after evaluating the evidence, OCP Tacloban found prima facie evidence with reasonable certainty of conviction to charge the respondent with reckless imprudence," Martinez added.

Pacencia allegedly owned the PNP-issued service firearm used by her 14-year-old nephew in the school shooting.

She also reportedly admitted that she had taken her nephew to a firing range because the teenager wanted to become a police officer like her.



WEEDING OUT MARIJUANA. Policemen uproot fully grown marijuana plants during a weeklong search and destroy operation in the Cordillera highlands. The raids resulted in the destruction of more than 191,000 marijuana plants with a street value of about P50.3 million. **PRO-CAR photo**

DSWD-Caritas tie-up delivers relief items to disaster victims

By Maricel V. Cruz

THE Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) has partnered with Caritas Philippines in bringing family food packs (FFPs) and other relief items closer to the families affected by disasters.

"During times of calamity, cooperation among all sectors is crucial. It is not just the DSWD and local government that should take action; when the government, civil society, and faith-based organizations join forces, we can deliver aid to families in need more quickly and effectively," said DSWD assistant secretary and head of the DSWD's Disaster Response Management Group (DRMG) Irene Dumlaog.

Last August 14, Caritas Philippines assisted the DSWD in providing FFPs to families affected by a series of tropical cy-

clones and the southwest monsoon in Region 3 (Central Luzon).

A total of 970 food packs were distributed by DSWD Field Office 3 at the San Pablo Chapel, while 800 FFPs were delivered to Santo Cristo Chapel in Guagua, Pampanga.

At Catining Chapel in Bataan province, the church served as a channel to extend 960 food packs to the residents of the municipality of Hermosa.

"Our department thanks Caritas Philippines for assisting the DSWD and local governments in distributing food packs to our fellow citizens affected by the calamity in Central Luzon," Dumlaog said.

She said this initiative is in response to the directive of President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. to employ a whole-of-society approach to ensure that immediate response will be provided to disaster-affected families.



VACCINATION DRIVE. The Imus City Health Office rolls out its measles and rubella immunization drive under the auspices of the Department of Health, targeting children aged six months to five years. **Dennis Abrina**



About Town
Ernesto M. Hilario

‘Deeper ground, darker shadows’

THE launching of Ed Quitariano’s book “Deeper Ground, Darker Shadows” took place last July 23 at the University of the Philippines campus in Bonifacio Global City (BGC). BGC used to be part of Fort Bonifacio or the headquarters of the Philippine Army. It was in Fort Bonifacio where until the late 1970s there was a maximum security prison called the Youth Rehabilitation Center, or YRC, where hundreds of political detainees were kept for many years. This prison is now the Makati City Jail.

The conditions in detention facilities such as YRC during martial law and beyond were discussed by the author in his book. Ed Quitariano himself had experienced arrest and detention not just once but several times, if I’m not mistaken, and that was just one aspect of life in the underground that he described in detail in his book.

This book traces Ed’s journey from a seminarian background in the early 70s doing political organizing in both urban and rural communities and later on becoming a full-time member of the CPP-NPA. He described in detail life in the insurgent army, from walking barefoot in the countryside following the example of a comrade of his who said they must do so to show solidarity with the plight of the poor and downtrodden in the countryside. Elsewhere, he narrated that the smell of cordite from furious exchange of gunfire with government forces no doubt enhanced his revolutionary fervor and kept him going for many years deep in the underground amid dark shadows.

The book, however, differs from other accounts of life in the NPA as he focused extensively on his experiences as international representative of the NPA tasked with generating both financial as well as political and moral support from friendly revolutionary forces abroad, from China to North Korea and Japan to Libya in the Middle East and even Peru in South America, much of it in cloak-and-dagger fashion. He even had to undergo a facelift or cosmetic surgery in Cuba, he narrated, so that he could move around freely without having to be identified by intelligence operatives in other countries.

The last part of the book deals with the internal purge of the revolutionary movement starting in the late 80s that led to thousands of his comrades being killed on suspicion of being deep-penetration agents of the military. He lamented this in no uncertain terms and led him, as others did, to turn his back on the rebel underground and choose to return to a peaceful life away from an uncertain fate in the revolutionary project.

Has it all been worth it, from Quitariano’s perspective? And what’s the point or the relevance of this book at this time?

I remember that on at least two occasions, we featured in the Saturday News Forum that I co-host spokespersons of the military, who asserted that the gov-

ernment had already achieved “strategic victory” over the NPA. The first time was in 2023, when they said government troops had succeeded in eliminating all but two of its so-called guerrillas fronts, or areas where NPA still had several company-size formations capable of launching attacks on government troops. A year later, in 2024, they said NPA strength had deteriorated even further, to just one, which they did not name. This, they said, indicated that the government was already close to “total victory.”

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We can expect progressive forces in the legal sphere to pursue the quest for an egalitarian society.

But the military claim of almost certain “total victory” over the NPA in the coming months or even this year—or the next—may be in doubt considering that small units still operate in various parts of the country, from Luzon to Visayas and Mindanao. It cannot be denied that the NPA is still capable of mounting small-scale operations in the countryside. They are still able to engage the AFP in pitched battles, but apparently with the guerrillas emerging from these with the shorter end of the bargain, as what happened in Toboso, Negros Oriental recently.

Given the marked decline in the NPA’s armed strength and the current political situation now characterized by the near-total control by entrenched political dynasties in various parts of the country, the armed struggle is not likely to advance by the proverbial leaps and bounds, as Ang Bayan likes to describe the revolutionary project every December 26 and March 29 each year.

Previous peace talks failed because the NDF practically asked the government side to agree to the People’s Program for a Democratic Revolution or PPDR outlined in the book Philippine Society and Revolution (PSR) published in the early 1970s. The government side wanted the rebels to give up their arms and surrender unconditionally.

Given this impasse, the CPP-NPA-NDF may have to agree to the resumption of peace talks with no preconditions on both sides if only to save more lives and give them ample time to reconsider their political program and offer a viable alternative to the status quo.

As things now stand, I do not see any upsurge in the armed struggle waged by the NPA in the foreseeable future. But we can expect progressive forces in the legal sphere to pursue the quest for an egalitarian society to avert our collective disastrous descent into deeper crises and an ever darker future ahead of us if we keep things as they are without genuine change.

ernhil@yahoo.com



EDITORIAL

A tragic figure

MONDAY’S impeachment trial showed how a seemingly simple woman could tell us many things about ourselves.

Special Disbursement Officer Gina Acosta, formerly with the Office of the Davao City Mayor and now with the Office of the Vice President, could be easily dismissed as someone with limited capacity to understand how the world truly works.

With her language limitations, self-deprecating demeanor, and perennial apologies, Ms. Acosta could appear as though she were a victim of her circumstance: a clueless woman prevailed upon by someone immensely more powerful to expose herself in danger toward a sinister end. And then made to rehearse a script when put on the stand.

But the operative phrases are “seemingly simple” and “appear as though she were a victim.”

There were cracks clear to those watching the trial. Acosta’s response to the private prosecution was labored. She could not remember many things. Her stint in Davao, where she was also SDO handling confidential funds, was too long ago. She was also advanced in years, she said.

But when the defense lawyer took her on a similar recollection trip, she was quick to comprehend questions, remember details, and answer in English or Filipino.

She slipped and admitted no confidential funds were needed to conduct tree-planting activities because

the OVP did so, this year, when there were no such funds. She also inadvertently revealed she had spoken with a defense lawyer “last week or last last week” to talk about her impeachment testimony.

“

We must give Acosta some credit for her own autonomous decisions.

Ms. Acosta repeatedly insisted she was doing her duty as SDO, and that she took it upon herself to verify whether the funds she had disbursed were used as intended – what those intentions are were beyond her, she said, because the security officer said they were confidential in nature. It was he who was designated by the VP, she said repeatedly. He who had expertise on the ground. But her definition of verification was asking the same person who made that claim, relying on the documents that that person provided. She trusted him without reservations.

When asked whether she realized she could potentially go to jail for her deeds, she said she knew she was accountable. So yes, she grasped the



The Fifth Gospel
Jude Avorque Acidre

Rethinking three-year terms

EVERY three years, Filipinos return to the polls to elect members of the House of Representatives, governors, mayors, and other local officials. Campaign season arrives, alliances shift, political temperatures rise, and governing itself adjusts to the electoral calendar.

Perhaps the time has come to ask a practical question: Does a three-year term still serve the kind of governance our country needs today?

Three years is hardly a timeless feature of Philippine democracy. For much of our history, legislators and local officials served under different arrangements. Local officials served four-year terms before the 1987 Constitution. Members of the Batasang Pambansa served six years under the 1973 Constitution. Congressional term limits in their present form came only with the 1987 Constitution.

The three-year term is therefore a policy choice that we can reasonably reexamine after almost four decades of experience.

I favor reviewing the terms of elected officials, while retaining the present constitutional term for the President. For members of the House and local elective officials, a five-year term with a maximum of three consecutive terms deserves serious consideration.

Three considerations guide this view: continuity, capacity, and climate.

First, continuity. Good government requires time. The three-year term is functionally much shorter. The first year involves transition, appointments, budgeting, organization, and planning. By the third year, another election approaches. The period for sustained implementation becomes remarkably narrow.

That timetable hardly matches the realities of government. Major infrastructure projects move through planning, procurement, construction, and completion. Revenue reforms take years to generate results. Education, health, agriculture, transport, and economic programs require sustained implementation before their impact can be fairly measured.

Short terms naturally encourage projects that produce immediate and vis-

ible results. Longer terms give leaders greater reason to pursue reforms whose benefits mature over time.

Five years would provide a wider governing horizon and clearer accountability. Leaders would have enough time to implement their plans, and voters would have a fuller record by which to judge them.

Second, capacity. Local autonomy requires institutional capacity. Giving local governments greater responsibilities also requires giving their leaders a reasonable period to exercise them effectively.

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Democracy requires accountability at the polls, while good government requires enough time to work.

Governors and mayors today manage health systems, disaster resilience, infrastructure, social protection, digitalization, investment, environmental management, and economic development. Congress confronts equally complex issues involving taxation, education, national security, technology, trade, and energy.

Experience strengthens capacity. Institutional knowledge improves judgment. Time allows leaders to identify bottlenecks, correct mistakes, build competent teams, and carry reforms through.

Here we should distinguish term length from term limits.

The safeguard against the concentration of political power rests principally on limiting consecutive service. A three-year term currently allows many local officials and House members to remain continuously in office for nine years. A longer term can therefore be accompanied by carefully designed limits and stronger safeguards against political entrenchment.

Saudi national with US residency who was murdered in the Saudi consulate in Istanbul in 2018.

US intelligence and a United Nations investigation later concluded that Riyadh bore responsibility for his killing.

Attiah had recruited Khashoggi to

gravity of what she had done, or allowed to happen under her watch.

One’s heart almost breaks at one point. The prosecutor was talking about common sense. “May utak po ako, Your Honor (I do have a brain, Your Honor).” When asked by a senator-judge how her husband’s health was doing, she cried. When another senator-judge said she was “stupid in the name of blind loyalty,” she fell back into saying she did not understand.

But we must give Ms. Acosta some credit for her own autonomous decisions. It was she who decided to stay for long at her job where the primary qualification was something as simple and as exacting as loyalty. It was she who decided that Lachica’s words were enough. It was she who decided she would disregard the risks if she is found criminally liable – so long as she received a fat salary every month.

Out of her own free will, she believed that her superior could do no wrong and could protect her until the end. It was she who trusted that the people who knew better would not put a loyal soldier in harm’s way. For her, excelling on the job means doing whatever she is told. Loyalty would trump common sense anytime.

Unfortunately, Gina Acosta is not an aberration. There are many more public servants who pretend they do not have the autonomy and capacity to think for themselves. They confuse serving the country with serving their masters.

The real question is how we balance continuity with accountability, rather than assuming that more frequent elections automatically produce better government.

Third, climate. This deserves greater attention.

Elections shape our political climate. Campaigns energize democracy, yet elections every three years also keep our political temperature constantly high. Rivalries intensify. Political organizations remain mobilized. Policy decisions acquire electoral meaning. Shortly after one campaign ends, preparations for another begin.

Officials themselves experience permanent campaigning. A substantial part of a short term becomes intertwined with political preparation rather than governing.

Frequent elections also consume enormous public and private resources. A longer electoral cycle would allow more national energy to flow toward governing, investing, building, and solving problems.

Longer terms can actually coexist with stronger accountability. Under our present local recall rules, recall is barred during the first year in office and during the year immediately preceding a regular local election. With a three-year term, those restrictions leave only a narrow practical window for recall. A longer term expands that window and gives citizens greater opportunity to exercise accountability between elections.

Democracy needs elections. It also needs enough space between elections for political passions to settle and institutions to work.

After almost forty years, reviewing our three-year terms deserves a serious national conversation. The Constitution itself should remain responsive to the lessons of experience and the demands of effective government.

A five-year term, limited to three consecutive terms, gives leaders enough time to govern, deliver, and be judged by results. Democracy requires accountability at the polls, while good government requires enough time to work.

write about the Arab world, and published his posthumous last column, which called for free expression in the region.

She has advocated for human rights and free expression in her work ever since. **AFP**

Six months of war:

20 dead in 68 incidents near Hormuz – IMO

IN BRIEF

Australia’s top music charts ban AI songs

SYDNEY – Music made by artificial intelligence will be banned from Australia’s top charts under new guidelines aimed at protecting “the human nature of artistry,” an industry body said Tuesday.

Under new rules in force from Friday, music must be “substantially human made” in order to be eligible for the charts, the Australian Recording Industry Association (ARIA) said.

“Wholly AI-generated tracks will not be eligible for the ARIA Charts,” the group said.

It said its charts would exclude songs that use AI “to generate the entirety or the primary portion of the creative elements.”

But “recordings that use generative AI in a supporting role remain eligible,” it added.

The move follows growing concern in the music industry over a surge in AI-generated music hitting the airwaves.

In July, a cover of Madonna’s “Like a Prayer” soared to the top of the charts in Australia but drew scrutiny after it was revealed to have used AI-generated vocals and drums. **AFP**

India rebuked by UN discrimination watchdog

GENEVA – India must better protect tribal peoples and disadvantaged castes subjected to extrajudicial killings, torture and violence by law enforcement, a United Nations watchdog said Tuesday.

The UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) said the world’s most populous country also urgently needed to address hate crimes against Bengali-speaking Muslims.

“The committee was gravely concerned about reports of large-scale violations perpetrated by law enforcement officials against ethnic and ethno-religious groups, Indigenous and Tribal Peoples, including Scheduled Tribes, Scheduled Castes, particularly Dalits, and non-citizens,” it said in a statement on its findings.

“These included racially motivated violence, excessive use of force, extrajudicial killings, arbitrary and prolonged detention without due process, torture, ill-treatment and sexual violence.” **AFP**

Chinese vessel caught with banned shark fin

SYDNEY – Kiribati, a tiny Pacific neighbor to Hawaii that has grown ties with Beijing, detained a Chinese vessel this month for illegally harvesting shark fins, its maritime police told AFP.

The practice of cutting fins off live sharks and throwing the carcasses back into the sea is banned in much of the Pacific Ocean, but persists due to demand in East and Southeast Asia.

The Chinese ship was among four vessels detained in a surveillance crackdown by 11 Pacific island nations between August 3 to 14, assisted by the US Coast Guard in some areas and an Australian military aircraft. Kiribati, however, operates its own patrol boat.

The vessel was licensed to ply Kiribati’s waters but was detained by the maritime police after inspectors found shark fins on board, commander Tom Redfern told AFP.

“It was escorted back to Christmas Island for further investigation,” he said, referring to a large atoll belonging to Kiribati and located south of Hawaii. **AFP**

Syria ‘shakes off dark stain’ with terror list removal

DAMASCUS – Syrian President Ahmed al-Sharaa hailed early on Tuesday the United States’ removal of his country from the state sponsors of terror list, a major sanctions relief step.

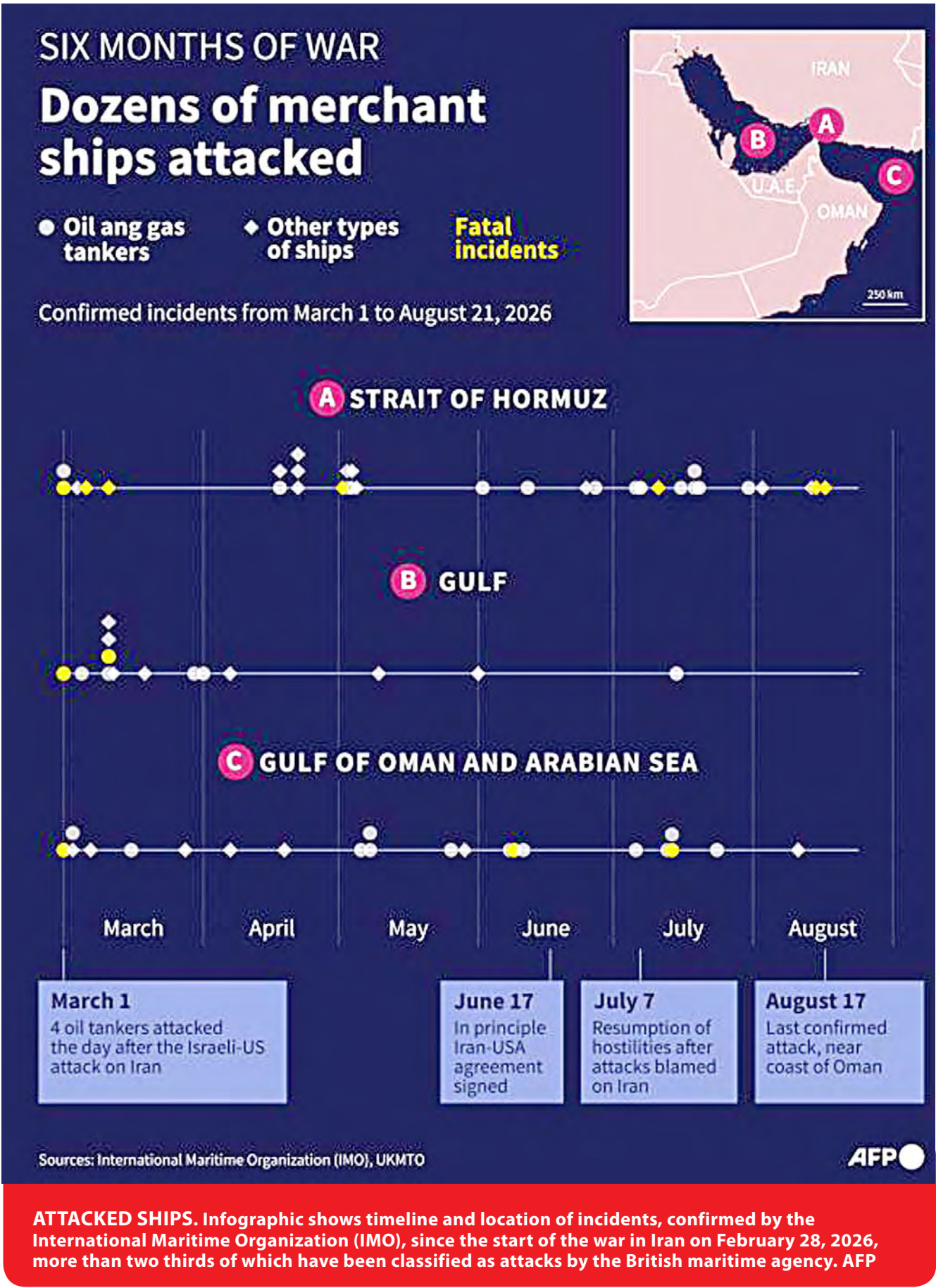
“Today, Syria shakes off a dark stain and tears away a painful chapter of its past to embark on a path of development, reconstruction and rebuilding,” Sharaa said in a speech.

Washington’s decision on Monday rescinded a decades-old designation that came with severe economic restrictions, marking another step in warming ties between the countries following the 2024 ouster of long-time Syrian ruler Bashar al-Assad.

The Treasury Department announced corresponding sanctions relief.

Sharaa expressed his “many thanks to the President of the United States of America, Donald Trump, and to all the friendly and supportive nations that stood by us.”

The US Department of State also revoked its designation of the al-Nusra Front – later known as Hay’at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) – as a global terrorist organization. Sharaa led that group, which spearheaded the blitz offensive that toppled Assad. **AFP**



LONDON – The Strait of Hormuz has been the main focus of the six-month war between Iran and the US and Israel, with many commercial vessels targeted in the vital conduit for oil and gas shipments.

In total, 68 incidents have been confirmed by the International Maritime Organization (IMO) in the Gulf and neighboring bodies of water, the equivalent of one every 2.6 days.

Across all incidents, at least 20 seafarers or port workers were reported killed, 35 wounded and one missing, the UN maritime agency said.

About half of the incidents have involved tankers, 20 percent container ships and 15 percent bulk carriers.

The United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations (UKMTO) classified 47 of the incidents as attacks.

Liberia-flagged vessels have been most affected, being involved in 13 incidents, followed by 10 vessels each from Panama and the Marshall Islands.

Iran-flagged vessels were reported as being involved in four incidents.

The rate of incidents has ebbed and flowed during the various phases of the war.

From the outbreak of war at the end of February until an agreement establishing a framework for peace talks was struck in mid-June, an incident was reported on average once every 2.3 days.

Incidents during this period accounted for 16 of the deaths and 19 of the injuries, and were recorded throughout the Gulf – both east and west of Hormuz, and off the coasts of Iraq, Iran, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Oman and the United Arab Emirates.

As peace talks continued, until around July 7, that rate halved to one incident every 4.6 days, on average.

No seafarers or other workers were reported killed, missing or injured during this period.

Four of the five incidents during this period were clustered off the Omani coast around the strait’s narrowest point, along a route not authorized by Iranian authorities.

Iran, which hopes to retain control of the Hormuz after the war and charge fees for passage, had warned vessels against taking the alternative route.

Since talks collapsed, the rate has climbed almost back to pre-talks levels, with an incident recorded on average every 2.8 days. **AFP**

‘We’re going to keep going’: Venezuela rescuers soldier on

LA GUAIRA, Venezuela – Two months after two huge earthquakes struck Venezuela and killed thousands, volunteer rescuer Domingo Pacheco still faces a mountain of work.

The 53-year-old reached the worst-hit coastal state of La Guaira in the immediate aftermath of the quakes and has been picking through the rubble ever since.

The magnitude 7.2 and 7.5 tremors hit within a minute of each other on June 24, killing over 6,500 people.

Pacheco has the unenviable task of looking for an unknown number of lifeless victims still buried under the debris, although he avoids thinking about the emotional impact.

The work is physically challenging, too.

One evening, after one of many ex-

hausting days of digging through the detritus, he lost his breath and blacked out for a few seconds.

“The oxygen was slowly taken away from me until I kind of lost consciousness,” Pacheco told AFP.

“Everything went blurry and I thought of my young son before asking myself, ‘What’s going on?’”

When the volunteer arrived in June, he went straight to work, searching for a little girl buried under a collapsed social housing complex.

He recalls a trapped family who had lived on the top floor, begging to be rescued during those first hours of confusion.

“There were people screaming, asking us to help them,” he said. “I went where I was needed.” **AFP**



NOT GIVING UP. People light candles in the shape of Venezuela next to a collapsed building from the state-run OPP housing blocks two months after the 7.2 and 7.5-magnitude earthquakes in La Guaira, Venezuela. Venezuela’s interim government reported 6,509 deaths on August 24, 2026, exactly two months after the twin earthquakes. **AFP**



BOILED CHICKEN WITH A ROSE. A cooked boiled chicken vendor waits for customers at her shop in Hanoi on August 25, 2026. **AFP**

World must rein in autonomous weapons – UN, Red Cross chiefs

GENEVA – The United Nations and Red Cross warned Tuesday the world is “dangerously close” to a future where autonomous weapons – so-called “killer robots” – could target humans, and issued an urgent appeal for international regulations.

The warning follows a call in 2023 from UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres and Mirjana Spoljaric, president of the International Committee of the Red Cross, for countries to establish specific bans and restrictions on the rapidly developing technology by this year.

“Today, we renew this call with even greater urgency,” they said in a joint statement, adding that while their “fundamental concerns remain unchanged... the risks have intensified.”

“We are now dangerously close to crossing a moral red line: the autonomous targeting of humans by machines,” they warned.

Lethal autonomous weapon systems are generally understood as weapon systems that select targets and apply force without human intervention.

There has to date been no confirmed use of fully autonomous weapons.

But with global tensions soaring and conflicts raging in the Middle East and Ukraine, where drone warfare has become a major feature of the battlefield, fears abound that it could soon happen.

There is currently no specific treaty on autonomous and artificial intelligence-enabled weapons.

“Autonomous weapon systems are not part of a distant future: a race towards greater autonomy in weapons systems is already well under way,” said Guterres and Spoljaric.

“Future generations will ask whether leaders acted when there was still a chance to set limits before these weapons proliferated beyond control.”

They highlighted that scientists and engineers involved in developing such systems had, in many cases, raised the alarm themselves.

“When the architects of this technology are calling for limits, states cannot afford to remain passive,” they said. **AFP**

PVL top clubs
take on Thai,
Vietnam teams

THE PVL Invitational Conference gets down to business on Aug. 31 at the Araneta Coliseum, with four of the Premier Volleyball League’s top clubs taking on powerhouse teams from Thailand and Vietnam in a six-team sprint that promises little room for error.

Eleven-time league champion Creamline and defending titlist PLDT banner the Philippine side, joined by Farm Fresh and Nxled, in a six-day, single-round-robin battle against Thailand’s EST Cola and a new Ho Chi Minh City-based club from Vietnam.

With three matches scheduled on each playdate and only the top two teams advancing to the championship, every game is expected to carry the weight of a virtual knockout as the field races to the finish.

The compressed schedule should put a premium not only on talent and tactics but also on stamina, depth and the ability to make quick adjustments.

The local teams, meanwhile, will have to make do without some key players who are currently with the national team. Still, Creamline, PLDT, Farm Fresh and Nxled have enough depth and firepower to make the competition highly competitive.

PLDT enters the tournament as the defending champion after ruling last year’s Invitational, where it defeated Japan’s Kobe Shinwa University.

The Japanese side’s fast-paced system, exceptional ball control, disciplined defense and lightning-quick transition game made a strong impression on the local teams, several of which have since sought to incorporate elements of that style into their own systems.

The foreign challenge should be just as formidable this time.

EST Cola, which represented Thailand in the 2024 edition and finished fourth, returns with expectations of a stronger campaign. With a loaded roster and another year of experience against international opposition, the Thai club looms as one of the teams to watch.



Pat Buena of Quezon City

Zamboanga,
Mindoro win

MINDORO regained traction, while Zamboanga SiKat sustained its climb in the SportsPLUS MPBL (Maharlika Pilipinas Basketball League) 2026 Season on Monday at the Orion Sports Complex in Bataan.

Sidetracked last Friday, the Mindoro Tamaraws gored the Negros Hacıenderos, 120-74, in the second game, while the Zamboanguenos thwarted the Bataan Risers, 94-87, in the nightcap.

Mindoro notched its 12th win against 10 losses.

Zamboanga also dominated Bataan, surging ahead, 64-40, before coasting to its 9th win in 21 starts, assuring it of a play-in stint in the South.

Quezon City trounces Imus

The Quezon City Black Bulls stifled the Imus Yangkee with a full-court press in the second half to prevail, 111-94, in the opener.

The Black Bulls, led by Patrick Buena and Jessie Sumoda, rallied from a 44-49 halftime deficit to seize control after three quarters, 89-71, and improve to 9-11 in the North division.

Kobe Monje paced Quezon City with 18 points, 3 rebounds and 3 assists and was named the best player over Sumoda, who tallied 18 points, 4 rebounds and 2 assists, and Buena, who notched 15 points, 6 assists and 2 steals.

Imus tumbled to 3-18 despite Christian Ferrer’s 19 points, John Jezer Calma’s 15, Pardo’s 13, Harold Lomlong’s 12, and Jaypee Belencion’s 11.

The tournament returns to the Pasay Astrodome on Tuesday, featuring games between Pasig and Manila at 5 p.m., and Quezon Province and Pasay at 7 p.m.



FIFA President Gianni Infantino (left) speaks with UEFA president Aleksander Ceferin after addressing the 50th UEFA Ordinary Congress in Brussels. Ceferin has ruled himself out of the running to replace Gianni Infantino, the under-fire FIFA president, who has come under increasing pressure to step down over his now-abandoned plan to secure private investment in FIFA tournaments. AFP

World Cup champion Petit joins
call for FIFA leadership change

LAUSANNE, Switzerland —Several ex-footballers, including Premier League winners Emmanuel Petit and Mikael Silvestre, have called for “change” in FIFA’s leadership following the failed plan to open the World Cup to private investors.

“Change is necessary. Power has blurred the current leadership’s ability to distinguish between

its own interests and what is best for football,” Frenchmen Silvestre, Petit and Olivier Dacourt said in social media posts.

The ex players did not directly mention FIFA president Gianni Infantino, who earlier in the day was backed by former Barcelona star Samuel Eto’o, but they criticised his leadership.

“We share exactly the same concerns as millions of supporters around the world. Like them, we have watched the sport we love drift away from its core values under FIFA’s current leadership,” the former players said.

They also did not directly refer to the behind-the-scenes negotiations conducted by Infantino

to place World Cup revenues into a commercial company open to private investors -- a plan that was abandoned this summer under pressure from the European, North American and Asian confederations.

Petit won the World Cup with France in 1998 and also won French and English titles with Monaco and Arsenal.

Silvestre, who sits on a FIFA anti-racism panel, was a five-time Premier League winner with Manchester United and part of the French squad that reached the 2006 World Cup final.

Under-fire Infantino remains determined to seek another term when FIFA holds its next presidential election in Rabat next March. AFP

PH to join 70-nation Pickleball World Cup in Vietnam

THE Philippines is out to make heads turn when it vies in the tough, 70-nation Pickleball World Cup from Aug. 30 to Sept. 6 in Da Nang, Vietnam.

Pickleball is currently the world’s fastest-growing sport and the Philippines is definitely in the mix, experiencing a local boom that can be compared to that of badminton years ago.

“That is why eyes are on us. They want to see what we can bring. And many will be surprised,” said Philippine Pickleball Federation president Shery Cu during Tuesday’s Philippine Sportswriters Association Forum at the Philippine Sports Commission media room.

Cu was joined at the forum by national team players Ruben Gonzales, former member of the Philippine Davis Cup team in lawn tennis, Nik Isagan, Kelsey Laurente and Fatima Amirul.

The Philippines will field a total of 38 players vying in the Open division, Under-18, Under-14, Kids and Seniors divisions of the event that drew over 4,000 participants.



Shown here are (from left) Nik Isagan, Ruben Gonzales, Shery Cu, Kelsey Laurente and Fatima Amirul.

Cu said the team was formed after almost six months of local competitions, and while some slots were openly selected based on the

players’ current standings, some made it via tryouts.

“We want to make an impression. We are hoping for a podium finish.

We expect a good finish in this World Cup,” added Cu in the forum presented by San Miguel Corporation, PSC, Philippine Olympic Committee, MILO, and the country’s 24/7 sports app ArenaPlus.

Teams to beat in the event, which was held in Peru and the United States in the past two years, include Vietnam and the United States. This year’s staging is considered the most competitive in the event’s history.

“It’s an honor to represent the Philippines in pickleball now. I’ve been with the national tennis team since 2010 and this is my first time playing for our country in pickleball,” said Gonzales, a two-time gold medalist in the Southeast Asian Games.

“There’s a high chance, but it’s going to be tough because there are many powerhouse teams like the US and Vietnam,” said Isagan, who was also into lawn tennis before switching to pickleball in 2023.

“We will do our best and bring that gold medal back home,” said Laurente.

Maharlika tourney-bound Alfonso Siklab Pickleball Team unveiled

By Dennis Abrina



The Alfonso Siklab Pickleball Team will represent Alfonso town at the Maharlika Pilipinas PickleBall Tour, which will kick off on October 3, 2026, in Angeles City, Pampanga. **Dennis Abrina**

ALFONSO, Cavite—Team Siklab Alfonso Pickleball Team, which is set to compete in the inaugural leg of the Maharlika Pilipinas Pickleball Tour (MPPT) on October 3 and 4 in Angeles, Pampanga, officially introduced its roster during a contract-signing ceremony on Monday, August 24, 2026, at Villa Merci in Barangay Esperanza Ibaba.

Alfonso Mayor and team owner Randy Salamat, together with Team Manager Keng Gaspar, oversaw the signing of contracts by players selected during the team’s recent tryouts.

The players who signed to represent Team Alfonso include international tennis and pickleball champion Kim Sazara, also known as “Picklebear”; Red Directo; Al Quiza; and homegrown talent Matthew Lao for the men’s team.

The women’s roster consists of Medelene Sazara; Novi Melendez, a decorated Filipina pickleball ath-

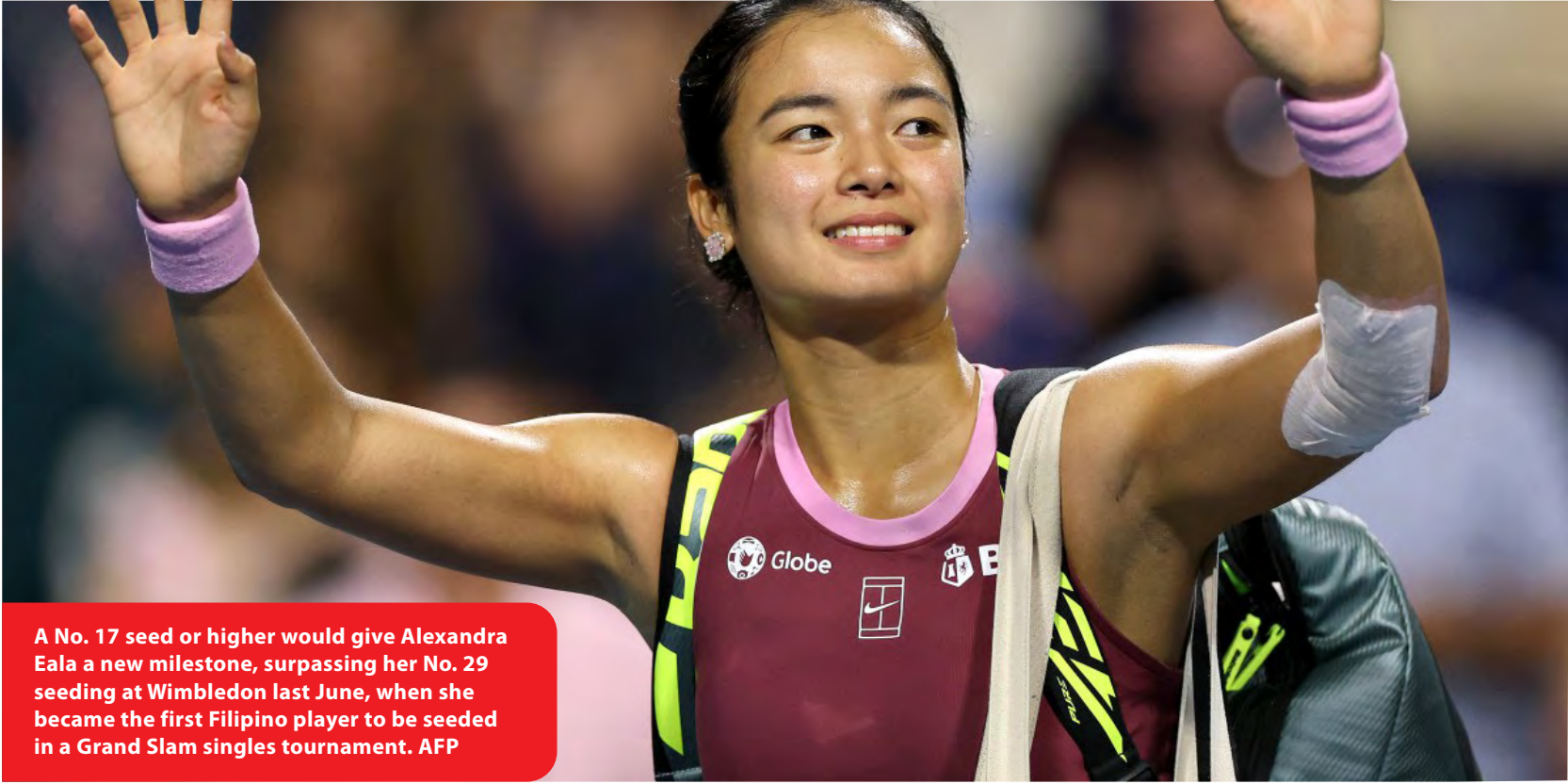
lete and coach; Cindy Nuguit, team captain of the Perpetual Altas Soft Tennis and Lawn Tennis Team and a brand ambassador for Decathlon Philippines; and homegrown talent Dania Lee Abjuela.

Mayor Salamat said Team Alfonso was formed through a series of tryouts aimed at selecting the best players and building a squad capable of competing strongly against the other teams in the tournament.

“Salamat po sa tiwala na ibinigay ninyo sa team. Umasa po kayo na ibibigay namin ang lahat para dalhin namin ang Bayan ng Alfonso with pride sa larangan ng pickleball,” Gaspar said.

The team is now stepping up its preparations, holding regular training sessions at the Villa Merci pickleball court as it gets ready for the upcoming tournament.

“Sa ngayon, we are doing rigorous training, practice and bonding for team chemistry to make sure we are a competitive team from the upland town of Cavite,” Sazara said.



A No. 17 seed or higher would give Alexandra Eala a new milestone, surpassing her No. 29 seeding at Wimbledon last June, when she became the first Filipino player to be seeded in a Grand Slam singles tournament. AFP

Eala projected to be seeded at least 17th at ‘26 US Open

By Jeremiah Sevilla

FILIPINA tennis ace Alexandra “Alex” Eala is on pace to earn her highest Grand Slam seeding in the 2026 US Open women’s singles event after notching a new career-high rank.

Sitting on a fresh career-best No. 18 in the most recent WTA rankings, Eala is projected to receive at least the No. 17 seed in the US Open, with Canadian No. 15 Victoria Mboko set to miss the tournament due to a left knee injury.

A No. 17 seed or higher would give Eala a new milestone, surpassing her No. 29 seeding at Wimbledon last June where she became the first Filipino player to be seeded in a Grand Slam singles.

The 21-year-old Pinay lefty made the most of the opportunity by making a historic fourth-round finish at the All England Club.

With another seeded spot within reach, the highest-ranked Southeast Asian woman netter in history will look to make another breakthrough run in the final Grand Slam of the season.

As a projected top-17 seed, Eala will possibly take on unseeded players in the first two rounds, although she could face a seeded opponent as early as the third round.

The US Open seeding is expected to be

announced three days before the main draw fires off on August 30 at the USTA Billie Jean King National Tennis Center in Flushing Meadows, New York.

Eala was also set to compete in the revamped US Open mixed doubles tilt alongside Canadian world No. 4 Felix Auger-Aliassime. The wildcard pair were set to face real-life partners Elina Svitolina and Gael Monfils in the opening round on Tuesday night (Philippine time).

Eala is also scheduled to compete in the Stars of the Open exhibition on August 27, where she will face American No. 14 and good friend Iva Jovic.

After that, Eala will make her second consecutive main draw appearance in the US Open, where she will aim to eclipse her second-round performance last year.

PH junior fencers set sights on world, Asian tournaments

THERE’S no letting up for the Philippine junior fencing team.

After making their presence felt in a regional tournament recently, the young Filipino fencers are now setting their sights on both the world and Asian championships for junior and cadet levels scheduled next year.

Eight fencers from different fencing clubs earned individual medals in their respective categories in the just-concluded 2026 Southeast Asian Fencing Federation (SEAFF) Championship held in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

Oscar Del Castillo, 16, led the charge for the youth team as he bagged the men’s epee gold medal in the 17-under cadet and settled with a silver medal in the 21-under junior -- the same age bracket where 15-year-old Willa Galvez took a hard-earned bronze medal in the women’s individual foil.

Also with a silver in cadet was Hagia del Castillo in women’s foil, while bronze medalists include Yuna Canlas and Victoria Ebdane in women’s foil, Papina Torre in women’s epee, Jethro Chan in men’s foil, and Don Reyzel Geronimo in men’s epee.

Their respective finishes in the SEAFF earned the fencers



Shown here are (from left) Jethro Chan, Victoria Ebdane, Hagia del Castillo, Oscar del Castillo, Willa Galvez, Papina Torre and Don Reyzel Geronimo.

corresponding ranking points, which will be added to other international events they joined, such as the Asian Cadet Cup, and the local competition, the Philippine Fencing Association (PFA) Junior and Cadet, which will have its third and final leg this weekend at the Rizal Memorial Coliseum.

“It’s not just the medals, but equally important are the points we’ll get from the SEAFF because

the points we earned will be added to our overall ranking points,” Del Castillo said at the weekly Philippine Sportswriters Association Forum on Tuesday in the media room of the Philippine Sports Commission.

According to the 16-year-old Ebdane, a Grade 11 student at Home School Global, competing in the SEAFF is necessary. “It’s important as an athlete to compete in as many international competitions as we

can, especially in a competition that allows me to have exposure. Playing against players from other countries is something that will push me to be better (as a fencer) both locally and internationally.”

Galvez said that following the SEAFF, they are all looking forward to the final leg of the Philippine Fencing Association Junior and Cadet ranking set on Aug. 29 and 30.

Gibbons: Marcial’s 8th pro bout most important in his career

UNDEFEATED Eumir Felix Marcial plunges into the most important fight in his professional career when he faces local guy Omar Ulises Huerta on September 19, as one of the undercards of the Isaac “Pitbull” Cruz-Nestor Bravo main event bout at the Pechanga Arena in San Diego, California.

International dealmaker Sean Gibbons confirmed on Tuesday that Marcial’s World Boxing Council (WBC) middleweight international belt and most likely another vacant regional title will be on the line when they clash in a 10-round bout.

“This is going to be the most important fight in his professional career, as he was never seen on USA television before. Everybody will be watching him closely, so he must look absolutely good. It is going to be a big moment,” Gibbons said.

DAZN Worldwide and TNT will air, for the first time ever, Marcial’s eighth bout in the United States, followed by the main event between Cruz and Bravo for the WBC super lightweight championship, which makes the cards promoted by Premier Boxing Champions (PBC) exciting.

Marcial packs an unbeaten 7-0 record

highlighted by four knockouts, with his last professional bout against Eddy Colmenares of Venezuela, ending via majority decision 10 months ago at the Araneta Coliseum.

He represented the country at the 2025 Bangkok Southeast Asian Games last December, where he was the only Filipino among 13 boxers, who won a gold. Marcial expressed excitement and confidence in his return to the ring.

“I am going for 8-0 on September 19, and I will make everyone know who I am inside the ring. This is the fight that I am longing for, a fight that will lead me toward the promised land by next year,” Marcial, 30, said.

Huerta of San Diego holds a 15-1-1 win-loss-draw record with 13 knockouts.

“This fight is going to be a war, as both fighters are known for their high knockout prowess. I believe Eumir will treat this fight seriously, as we are planning to give him another fight by December once he wins this one before heading for a world title next year,” Gibbons said.

“That is an opportunity he will not waste for sure.”



Shown here are (from left) American trainer coach Kaye Koroma, Eumir Felix Marcial, coach Reynaldo Galido and Sean Gibbons

Federer looks forward to brief return to Arthur Ashe stadium

NEW YORK—Roger Federer said Monday he is looking forward to this week’s celebratory return to Arthur Ashe Stadium to play for the first time since his final US Open in 2019.

The exhibition Tuesday night during “fan week” ahead of Sunday’s start of the tournament features doubles with former rivals Andy Roddick and Andre Agassi, along with John McEnroe, another giant of the sport.

The group collectively has won a dozen men’s singles titles at the US Open.

“It really gives me a true opportunity to say thank you,” Federer said at a news conference Monday previewing the match and his upcoming induction to the International Tennis Hall of Fame later this week in Newport.

New York fans of Federer were deprived of a true sendoff for the 20-time Grand Slam champion as marked by Agassi, Serena Williams and some other champions.

When Federer lost in the 2019 quarterfinals to Grigor Dimitrov of Bulgaria, he had planned to keep playing. And while he did continue to compete, injuries prevented participation in the US Open in either 2020 or 2021 ahead of his last match at the Laver Cup in September 2022.

While Federer has played some other exhibitions since retiring, he said Monday that the time had only seemed to fall into place for a New York match this year ahead of the Newport ceremony.

“The kids are getting older,” he said of his four children, two sets of twins now 12 and 17. “So they can also maybe enjoy a little bit seeing, their dad play.”

Federer expects a “respectful” match with a not-too-intense level of competition.

“We’re not playing best of five,” he said “I hope it’s going to be a lot of fun for us and the same for the fans to just see us back out playing.”

But Federer quickly shot down any questions about a tennis comeback, saying “no” at least nine times to a question on whether he was interested in a wildcard.

“There’s just way too many obstacles, and I’m too busy,” he said. “All good and just just a fan now, just enjoying watching.” **AFP**

FIBA, L1VE agree to 3x3 immersive live rights’ deal

MIES (Switzerland)—FIBA has agreed to an exclusive immersive live rights deal for 3x3 basketball with LIVE, covering the FIBA 3x3 World Tour, Women’s Series and World Cup, which will bring fans from around the world together and closer to the action in real time.

Immersive live rights are a new class of media rights and allow FIBA’s 3x3 basketball events to open an additional platform that complements existing broadcast and streaming activities. It creates a new engagement opportunity for fans who cannot be inside the venue, giving them a new way to experience the live event.

Founded in 2022 and headquartered in New York, with its research & development in Germany, L1VE is the company behind social presence and a pioneer of this new rights category. It also owns a proprietary glass-to-glass technology stack and a direct-to-fan platform.

L1VE runs on every major immersive headset and scales like software: one production reaches every fan at once. Its proprietary technology captures a full venue of live experience in stereoscopic 360° 3D, a real-time pipeline fuses it into a single live scene, and a custom delivery layer keeps every fan worldwide present at the exact same moment.

Fans can invite friends to watch alongside them, wherever they are in the world. Tickets are available for a single day of competition or as a tournament pass covering the full event, in the same way a fan would buy a ticket to attend in person.

The platform has already been used for major live sport and music events internationally, and officially launches with the Detroit Lions on August 22.

L1VE will be in action for the first time at the upcoming FIBA 3x3 World Tour 2026 event in Debrecen, Hungary on August 29 and 30. Fans can access the experience by downloading the L1VE app on a compatible virtual reality headset at l1ve.com.

Over the course of the three-year agreement, the platform will be rolled out across FIBA’s flagship 3x3 basketball events, including the FIBA 3x3 World Tour, the FIBA 3x3 Women’s Series and the FIBA 3x3 World Cup, bringing fans closer to the action at the discipline’s biggest events worldwide.

Alex Sanchez, FIBA’s 3x3 Basketball Managing Director, stated: “3x3 basketball was built to bring the game closer to the fans. Working with L1VE over the next three seasons, we are exploring new ways for audiences around the world to experience the intensity and energetic setting of our events.”

P216 billion

Investments in 8 months of 2026

P105 billion

Investments in 8 months of 2025

P300 billion

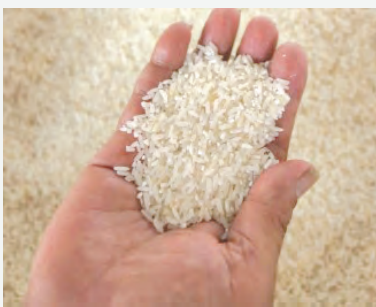
Investment target for 2026

WHAT'S INSIDE?



Higher capital seen affecting small brokers

B2



PH wastes 542,477 tons of rice a year

B3



Time deposits now PERA-eligible

B4

July vehicles sales hit 2026 high of 42,880 units

PHILIPPINE vehicle sales rose to 42,880 units in July, the highest monthly total so far in 2026, as the increase in electrified vehicle supply lifted the broader market even as overall sales remained below year-ago levels, industry data showed Tuesday.

The Chamber of Automotive Manufacturers of the Philippines Inc. (CAMPI) and Truck Manufacturers Association Inc. (TMA) said their member companies sold 37,319 vehicles in July, up 0.6 percent from 37,079 units in June but down 2.5 percent from 38,295 units in July 2025.

The total industry figure of 42,880 units includes estimated sales from nonmember brands.

“With this continuous growth, the industry is riding on a good momentum. We are hopeful that the positive trend will continue for the remainder of the year,” CAMPI president Jose Maria Atienza said.

Electrified vehicle, or xEV, sales more than doubled from a year earlier, supporting the July uptick. Year-to-date xEV sales rose 136.4 percent to 38,286 units in the January-July period from 16,195 units in the same period last year, while July’s monthly xEV sales climbed 161.8 percent to 7,086 units from 6,843 units in June.

“The shift to electrification continues to accelerate, with xEV’s accounting for 29.5 percent of the market last July. This is up 18 points from the same month last year,” Atienza said, noting that demand for internal combustion engine vehicles also remained strong.

Commercial vehicles accounted for most CAMPI-TMA sales at 29,719 units in July, up 1.6 percent from June but down 1.5 percent from a year earlier. Light commercial vehicle sales rose 4.3 percent month-on-month and 1 percent year-on-year to 22,724 units.

Passenger car sales fell 2.7 percent from June and 6.4 percent from a year earlier to 7,600 units.

Othel V. Campos



MARKET REFORMS. The Securities and Exchange Commission pushes next-wave reforms to deepen capital market. SEC chairperson Francis Lim says the commission is now pursuing broader structural reforms, including the proposed One Business Start Date, separate regulatory frameworks for debt and equity offerings, and market-making rules for listed securities.

PEZA investments double to P216b

By Othel V. Campos

THE Philippine Economic Zone Authority (PEZA) approved P216.47 billion in new and expansion investments in the first eight months of 2026, up 104.53 percent from P105.83 billion in the same period last year, led by manufacturing, ecozone development and technology-related projects.

PEZA said it approved 196 projects from January to August, or 9.5 percent more than the 179 projects recorded a year ago. The approvals accounted for 72.16 percent of PEZA’s P300-billion investment target for 2026.

The projects are expected to generate 26,994 jobs and \$6.6 billion in exports. Of the total investments, 34 big-ticket projects accounted for

P193.713 billion.

Manufacturing led the approvals with 80 projects, followed by 31 ecozone development projects, 30 information technology and business process management projects and 19 facilities projects.

The portfolio also included 15 logistics projects, 15 domestic market projects, four tourism projects and

two utilities projects.

Among the major facilities investments approved in August was a P32.54-billion project in New Clark City, Capas, Tarlac, representing the first phase of ENDEC Development Corp.’s planned 300-megawatt hyperscale data center.

Narra Technology Park Development Inc. registered the project, which will provide powered land and additional power capacity for hyperscale operators in New Clark City.

PEZA said the facility will use technologies designed to reduce power and water consumption.

PEZA director-general Tereso Panga said the investment reflected growing demand for reliable and sustainable infrastructure to support

advanced technology industries.

The project is also expected to strengthen New Clark City and Central Luzon as emerging hubs for digital infrastructure and support the development of future-ready economic zones along the Luzon Economic Corridor.

On Aug. 20, the PEZA board approved 22 projects worth P64.57 billion, up 334.13 percent from the P14.87 billion approved in August 2025.

Luzon accounted for 161 of the projects approved during the eight-month period, followed by the Visayas with 23 and Mindanao with 12. Filipino investors accounted for the largest share of the approved projects, followed by investors from the Netherlands, South Korea, Singapore and Taiwan.



NSCR TRAIN. The third 8-car electric multiple unit trainset for the North-South Commuter Railway (Malolos-Tutuban segment) arrives in the Philippines under the importation process of the Bureau of Customs (BOC) and is scheduled to be delivered to the Malanday Depot in Valenzuela City. Transportation Secretary Giovanni Lopez says the NSCR’s construction remains on track to help speed up commuter travel.

PH secures steady ratings from R&I, Moody’s

By Thony Rose Lesaca

THE Philippines has received back-to-back credit rating affirmations from two global agencies, with Rating and Investment Information, Inc. (R&I) and Moody’s Ratings citing the country’s strong industrial base, improving fiscal position and stable banking system.

R&I affirmed the Philippines’ A-investment-grade rating with a stable outlook on Aug. 21, while Moody’s Ratings affirmed the country’s Baa2 investment-grade rating with a stable outlook on Aug. 24.

“These are two votes of confidence in

the Philippines. This proves that investor confidence in our economy and in the governance of President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. remains strong,” Executive Secretary Ralph Recto said.

“We will protect the confidence we have earned. More importantly, we will make that confidence work for the Filipino people through more jobs, higher incomes, better infrastructure and stronger public services,” he said.

High investment-grade ratings allow the Philippine government and businesses to borrow on more affordable and cost-effective terms. For the government, lower financing costs translate into more resources for

classrooms, hospitals, roads, food security, social protection and other essential services.

The Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas (BSP) welcomed Moody’s affirmation of the country’s “Baa2” investment-grade credit rating with a “stable” outlook, citing recognition of the economy’s ability to withstand global headwinds.

BSP Governor Eli Remolona Jr. said the BSP will continue working to bring inflation back close to target, safeguard the soundness of the banking system, promote a safe and efficient payments and settlements system, and prudently manage international reserves.



Pag-IBIG Fund chief executive Marilene Acosta says the savings of millions of Filipino workers are pooled together and put to productive use, much of it to help fellow members have homes of their own.

Pag-IBIG’s housing assets surpass P1t

PAG-IBIG Fund’s gross housing-related assets reached P1.01 trillion as of July 31, 2026, as the state-run fund extended more financing to members buying, building and improving homes, as well as to institutions supporting housing development.

Department of Human Settlements and Urban Development Secretary Jose Ramon Aliling, who chairs the Pag-IBIG Fund board of trustees, said the growth reflects the fund’s continuing role in expanding homeownership while supporting activity across the housing sector and the broader economy.

“Pag-IBIG Fund’s performance continues to reflect its commitment

to achieving the directive of President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. under the Expanded Pambansang Pabahay para sa Pilipino Program to make affordable homeownership accessible to more Filipinos,” Aliling said.

“Reaching more than P1 trillion in housing-related assets is an important milestone. It means more financing is reaching Filipino homebuyers, while qualified developers and institutions receive greater support to provide housing. As investments in housing grow, they also help stimulate the industry, support construction and related sectors, create jobs and contribute to broader economic growth,” he said.

NAIA operator, PAL sign airport use agreement

By Darwin G. Amojelar

NEW NAIA Infra Corp. (NNIC) has signed an airport use agreement (AUA) with Philippine Airlines (PAL) in a step toward the modernization of operations at Ninoy Aquino International Airport (NAIA).

The agreement is expected to strengthen coordination between the airport operator and the country’s flag carrier as NNIC works to improve airport facilities, services and operational efficiency at NAIA.

Under the partnership, NNIC and PAL will establish a framework governing the airline’s use of airport facilities and services while supporting efforts to enhance the overall passenger experience.

NNIC president and chief executive Ramon Ang said the agreement gives the companies “a clearer framework for setting expectations, measuring performance and working together to maintain consistent service standards.”

“That is important to making airport operations more efficient and dependable,” he said.

PAL Holdings president and chief operating officer Lucio Tan III, whose company is the parent of PAL, said the deal is “a positive development for both PAL and NNIC, and ultimately for our passengers.”

Manila Standard



SERVICE RELIABILITY. Manila Electric Co. reinforces its North Port Substation in Tondo, Manila, strengthening the operational safety of its distribution network and enhancing service reliability for customers. The project covered the upgrading of 10 power circuit breakers and 19 disconnect switches from 40 kiloamperes (kA) to 63 kA, as well as the strengthening and improvement of control cables and associated civil works.

PH stocks fall below 6,200 ahead of key policy meetings

PHILIPPINE shares fell Tuesday, with the benchmark Philippine Stock Exchange index breaking below the 6,200 level as investors stayed on the sidelines ahead of the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas policy meeting and the MSCI rebalancing later this week.

The peso held steady against the U.S. dollar, closing at 61.738 on Tuesday compared to 61.73 on Monday.

The PSEi declined 61.15 points, or 0.98 percent, to close at 6,190.23. The broader all shares index fell 22.45 points, or 0.65 percent, to 3,412.44.

“The PSEi broke below 6,200 support, but with turnover remaining subdued as investors stayed on the sidelines ahead of the Aug. 27 BSP meeting and Aug. 28 MSCI rebalancing,” AB Capital Securities said.

All sectoral indices ended lower. Services led the declines, falling 1.65 percent, followed by holding firms, which dropped 1.05 percent. Mining and oil declined 0.77 percent, financials fell 0.65 percent, industrials eased 0.06 percent and property slipped 0.26 percent.

Market breadth was negative, with 108 decliners against 77 advancers, while 66 stocks were unchanged.

Trading activity was relatively subdued, with value turnover reaching P5.27 billion.

Foreign investors were net sellers, with net outflows at P542 million.

Ayala Land Inc. bucked the broader market trend and emerged as the top index gainer, as its share price rose 3.95 percent to close at P15.80. On the other hand, RL Commercial REIT was at the bottom, falling 4 percent to P7.20. **Jennifer B. Austria**

Higher capital rule threatens small brokers

By Jenniffer B. Austria

A PROPOSAL to raise the minimum capitalization of stockbrokers is seen as a fair move to strengthen the Philippine capital market, but it could also force some smaller brokerage houses to close or consolidate if they fail to meet the higher requirement.

A veteran stockbroker who owns a retail stock brokerage in the country said that while the move is fair, a higher capitalization requirement could lead to brokerage houses closing down.

Securities and Exchange Commission chairman Francisco Lim said Monday the agency is reviewing the minimum capital requirement for stockbrokers, currently set at P100 million.

Lim noted that while many brokers already have capital well above P100 million, some firms remain below that level.

The SEC also noted that some brokers investigated for fraud or other violations had capitalization of only P30 million.

Under existing rules, stockbrokers engaged in market-making activities must have minimum capitalization of P100 million. For other brokers, the minimum capital requirement is P30 million.

There are about 120 trading participants at the Philippine Stock Exchange, giving investors and issuers a relatively broad network of brokerage firms.

Lim said the SEC is studying the matter carefully and has not yet settled on a new minimum capitalization level.

However, he noted that the P100 million requirement dates back to 2001 and would be equivalent to about P256 million today when adjusted for inflation.

CHII buys 1.89% stake in CREC for P991.65m

By Alena Mae S. Flores

CITICORE Holdings Investment Inc. acquired 211,441,120 common shares of Citicore Renewable Energy Corp. for P4.69 per share for a total value of P991.65 million.

CREC disclosed the transaction, equivalent to 1.89 percent of the company’s total outstanding shares, to the Philippine Stock Exchange on Tuesday.

CHII is the parent company of Citicore Power Inc., which is the parent company of CREC.

CREC last week reported that its net income nearly doubled to P1.2 billion, up 92 percent from P630 million in the same period last year, driven primarily by the substantial, high-margin contribution of newly energized plants.

Earnings before interest, taxes, depreciation and amortization — or EBITDA — rose 63 percent to P1.5 billion, significantly outpacing the 4% growth in revenues to P2.7 billion, reflecting improved operating profitability and stronger margins.

Profitability strengthened significantly, with gross margin expanding to 51 percent from 32 percent and EBITDA margin rising to 55 percent from 35 percent in the prior period.

Electricity sales continued to anchor CREC’s growth, contributing 87 percent of total revenues, while the company made significant progress in shifting its revenue mix toward long-term, government-backed renewable energy contracts.

Sales under the Green Energy Auction and Feed-in Tariff programs increased to 51 percent of revenues from 13 percent in the prior period.

This shift underscores CREC’s strategy of building a more stable and predictable revenue base through its growing portfolio of renewable energy projects.

“As a pure-play independent power producer in the Philippines, Citicore Renewables remains steadfast in fulfilling our commitments to the Department of Energy, the Filipino people, and our investors,” CREC president and chief executive Oliver Tan said. “The significant improvement in our margins demonstrates the strength and scalability of our growing operating portfolio. We are building on this momentum as we continue working to bring more projects online, expand our capacity, and strengthen our contribution to the country’s clean energy transition.”

CREC has continued to achieve key energization milestones as it scales its renewable energy portfolio nationwide.

The company has installed 1.2 gigawatts of solar capacity ahead of its commitment to the DOE. It remains focused on sustaining its growth trajectory by advancing new projects and expanding select installed sites toward its target of developing 5 GW in five years.

“We are encouraged by the progress we have made in expanding our operating portfolio,” Tan said. “Reaching 1.2 GW in installed capacity is an important milestone for CREC, and we acknowledge that there is significant room to grow. Our next phase will be about translating this scale into capacity as we work toward our 5 GW target.”

Career Opportunity in Yuda Construction Corp.	
Chinese Technical Staff One (1) Vacancy	
Job Description: The Chinese Technical Staff will provide technical support, assist in project coordination, and help ensure smooth communication between Chinese and local teams in construction projects.	
Qualification: - Chinese nationality (Mandarin-speaking). - With knowledge/experience in construction works or project coordination. - Good communication and interpersonal skills. - Able to work well with multicultural teams.	
Applications may be sent to: yudajianzhu789@163.com	
Company/Employer	Name of foreign national intending to apply for the position
Company Name: Yuda Construction Corp.	Name: 1. Zheng Songjun
Company Address: Office 1 G/F Parkville Apartments, 7626 Guijo Cor. Sacred Hearts Sts., San Antonio Village Makati City	Address: 1. Parañaque City Nationality: 1. Chinese
Nature of Business: Construction	Intended period of employment: 1 - Three 3(years)
Yuda Construction Corp. hereby declares that the above-named foreign national is able, willing, and qualified to perform the services and job description for this position. The company has the intention to employ the said foreign national and apply for an Alien Employment Permit with the Department of Labor and Employment - National Capital Region located at Dole Central office muralla st corner general Luna..	

Career Opportunity in Vehicle Master Service Corp.	
Marketing And Sales Consultant Four (4) Vacancy	
Job Description: Identify effective marketing campaigns that will reach targeted audiences effectively and efficiently.	
Qualification: - Strong knowledge of sales and persuasion techniques coupled with excellent knowledge of the products. - Knowledge of data analysis and market research. - Intuition about customer desires and practical needs.	
Applications may be sent to: vehiclemasterservicecorp@gmail.com	
Company/Employer	Name of foreign national intending to apply for the position
Company Name: Vehicle Master Service Corp.	Name: 1. Sha Jianyu, 2. Liu Hualin, 3. Han Mengjiao, 4. Zhao Xin
Company Address: 27 T. Santiago St., Canumay West Valenzuela	Address: 1. Taguig City 2-3. Pasay City 4. Parañaque City Nationality: 1-4. Chinese
Nature of Business: Repairs And Maintenance Of Motor Vehicles	Intended period of employment: 1-4 - Three 3(years)
Vehicle Master Service Corp. hereby declares that the above-named foreign national is able, willing, and qualified to perform the services and job description for this position. The company has the intention to employ the said foreign national and apply for an Alien Employment Permit with the Department of Labor and Employment - National Capital Region located at Dole Central office muralla st corner general Luna..	

Career Opportunity in H1 Prime Construction Corp.	
Construction Technician One (1) Vacancy	
Job Description: Responsible for assisting in the execution of construction projects by supporting site operations, monitoring progress, and ensuring work is done according to plans and specifications.	
Qualification: - Basic knowledge of construction processes, tools, and materials. - Ability to read and interpret plans and technical drawings. - Physically fit and willing to work on-site. - Strong attention to detail and problem-solving skills. - Willing to be assigned to different project locations. - Good communication and teamwork skills. - can work with Chinese and Filipino clients.	
Applications may be sent to: huayiconstructioncorp@gmail.com	
Company/Employer	Name of foreign national intending to apply for the position
Company Name: H1 Prime Construction Corp.	Name: 1. Liu Qiang
Company Address: Unit 118 Six Senses Residences, Metrobank Ave., Metropolitan Park, Zone 10,Brgy. 76 District 1 Pasay City, Metro Manila, Ncr 1300	Address: 1. Caloocan City Nationality: 1. Chinese
Nature of Business: Construction	Intended period of employment: 1 - Three 3(years)
H1 Prime Construction Corp. hereby declares that the above-named foreign national is able, willing, and qualified to perform the services and job description for this position. The company has the intention to employ the said foreign national and apply for an Alien Employment Permit with the Department of Labor and Employment - National Capital Region located at Dole Central office muralla st corner general Luna..	

Career Opportunity in H1 Prime Construction Corp.	
Project Coordinator One (1) Vacancy	
Job Description: To support construction projects from planning through completion.	
Qualification: - Knowledge of file management, transcription, and other administrative procedures. - Or a related field. - Good communication and interpersonal skills. - Familiarity with construction drawings and blueprints. - Strong organizational and multitasking skills. - Knowledge of construction methods, materials, and regulations is an asset. - Preferred with Certification.	
Applications may be sent to: huayiconstructioncorp@gmail.com	
Company/Employer	Name of foreign national intending to apply for the position
Company Name: H1 Prime Construction Corp.	Name: 1. Hu Yang
Company Address: Unit 118 Six Senses Residences, Metrobank Ave., Metropolitan Park, Zone 10,Brgy. 76 District 1 Pasay City, Metro Manila, Ncr 1300	Address: 1. Caloocan City Nationality: 1. Chinese
Nature of Business: Construction	Intended period of employment: 1 - Three 3(years)
H1 Prime Construction Corp. hereby declares that the above-named foreign national is able, willing, and qualified to perform the services and job description for this position. The company has the intention to employ the said foreign national and apply for an Alien Employment Permit with the Department of Labor and Employment - National Capital Region located at Dole Central office muralla st corner general Luna..	

Career Opportunity in Moon Bridge Technology Solutions PH Corp.	
Position Title: Chief Technology Officer	
Job Description: Responsible for the overseeing and dissemination of technology for vendors, clients and customer of Moon Bridge Technology Solutions PH Corp.	
Qualification (Education, Experience, Professional License, Skills Certification, Specialized Training): - Working relationship with executive of the clients of Moon Bridge LLC in the United States; - Well-versed with the technology of Moon Bridge LLC, which will be replicated here in the Philippines; - Able to do training on the technology architecture of Moon Bridge LLC; and - Able to liaise and collaborate effectively with suppliers, vendors and technology partners of Moon Bridge LLC in the United States for a more effective implementation of the technology here in the Philippines	
Applications may be sent to: Ms. Gemie Baronia Contact number: +63 966 428 3223 Email Address: gemie.moonbridge@gmail.com	
Company/ Employer	Name of foreign national intending to apply for the position
Company Name: Moon Bridge Technology Solutions PH Corp. Complete Address: 2nd Floor Philexcel, Business Center 15, M. Roxas Highway, Clark Freeport Zone, Angeles City, Pampanga	Name: Scott J. Gorman Address: 11912 NW 82nd St.,Parkland Florida U.S.A 33076 Nationality: AMERICAN Intended Period of Employment: Two (2) years
Nature of Business: BPO Support Services and related Business activities	
Company hereby declares that the above-named foreign national is able, willing, and qualified to perform the services and job description for this position. The company has the intention to employ the said foreign national and apply for an Alien Employment Permit with the Department of Labor and Employment -Region III located at SWLC Bldg. Matalino St., Diosdado Macapagal Government Center, Maimpis, City of San Fernando, Pampanga	

Career Opportunities in COLAS RAIL PHILIPPINES, INC.	
Senior Trackwork Design Manager	
JOB DESCRIPTION Responsible for leading and overseeing railway track design activities, ensuring compliance with project requirements, industry standards, and safety regulations. Coordinates with stakeholders, manages project schedules and resources, and provides guidance to the design team to support the successful delivery of rail infrastructure projects.	
QUALIFICATION: - Bachelor degree in engineering, construction management, transportation or a related field. 3-5 years of experience in railway operations,construction, training development, or a related role. - Strong knowledge of project coordination, documentation, and compliance procedures.	
Application may be sent to colasrail.philippines@colasrail.com	
Company/ Employer	Name of foreign national intending to apply for the position
Company Name: Colas Rail Philippines, Inc. Complete Address: Level 6 Ayala Triangle Gardens Tower 2, Paseo De Roxas cor. Makati Avenue Bel-Air 1209 City of Makati NCR, Fourth District Philippines Nature Of Business: Construction of roads, highways, bridges and railways.	Name: Emanuel, Andrew Address: Makati City Nationality: British Intended Period of Employment: Three (3) years
COLAS RAIL PHILIPPINES, INC. hereby declares that the above-named foreign national is able, willing and qualifi ed to perform the services and job description for this position. The company has the intention to employ the said foreign national and apply for an Alien Employment Permit with the Department of Labor and Employment – Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE) Building, Muralla Wing cor. General Luna St., Intramuros, Manila, 1002, Philippines.	
Any Filipino jobseeker who is competent, able and willing to perform the services for which the foreign national is intended to be hired for, may file an objection at Department of Labor and Employment – Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE) Building, Muralla Wing cor. General Luna St., Intramuros, Manila, 1002, Philippines after this publication. Please inform the Department of Labor and Employment – NCR, if you have any information on criminal offenses committed by the foreign national.	

NOTICE (of Supplemental Extrajudicial Settlement of Estate) Notice is hereby given to the public that the estate of the late Edgardo M. Eugenio (aka Edgardo M. Eugenio Sr.) has been extrajudicially settled among his surviving heirs as per Supplemental Deed of Extra Judicial Settlement of Estate with Partial Waiver of Rights and Appointment of Property Administrator and Attorney-in-Fact as entered in the Notarial Book of Atty. Rodrigo S. de Real Jr as Doc. No. 48; Page No. 11; Book No. 16; Series of 2026.

NOTICE (of Extrajudicial Settlement of Estate) Notice is hereby given to the public that the estate of the late Spouses Bienvenido L. Garcia and Pura D. Garcia has been extrajudicially settled among their surviving heirs as per Deed of Extra Judicial Settlement of Estate with Appointment of Property Administrator and Attorney-in-Fact as entered in the Notarial Book of Atty. Felipe I. Iledan Jr as Doc. No. 48; Page No. 51; Book No. 449; Series of 2022.

Nickel group
hails EO 122
as boost for PH
critical minerals

THE Philippine Nickel Industry Association welcomed Executive Order No. 122 as a major step toward strengthening the country’s critical minerals industry and its position in the global market.

The group said clear policy direction can boost investor confidence, but consistent implementation will be needed to translate the order into faster and more predictable processes.

“Responsible mining is not solely a private-sector undertaking. It is a national development endeavor in which government and industry have distinct but complementary responsibilities,” PNIA said.

The group said declaring all critical mineral projects as national priority projects recognizes mineral resources as strategic assets that can support industrialization, infrastructure, energy security, digital transformation and the clean energy transition.

PNIA also welcomed reforms under the order to strengthen inter-agency coordination, streamline and digitalize permitting, and make regulatory processes more predictable. It particularly cited the planned virtual one-stop shop and the shift to simultaneous, rather than sequential, permit processing.

PNIA likewise welcomed the strengthened role of the Mining Industry Coordinating Council in addressing regulatory gaps and investment barriers, monitoring implementation and sustaining coordination among government agencies.

The association said EO 122 complements its Nickel Initiative, which brings together government, industry and other stakeholders to identify reforms that can improve Philippine mining competitiveness.

“The global race for critical minerals is already underway. The Philippines has the resources, the global interest is here, and we now have an even stronger national policy direction,” PNIA said. **Othel V. Campos**

REGIONAL COOPERATION.

Antonia Yulo-Loyzaga, special envoy for disaster risk reduction and management stresses the importance of regional cooperation among ASEAN member states during a forum on climate security organized by the Stratbase Institute and the German Embassy in Manila. Photo by Stratbase Group.



JOB FAIR. The Department of Information and Communications Technology, through its ICT Industry Development Bureau, in partnership with the Metro Naga Public Employment Service Office and Robinsons Naga, held the 2nd Trabahong Digital Job Fair 2026 on Aug. 13-14 at Robinsons Naga. The two-day event recorded 941 applicants and featured recruitment opportunities across digital support services, software engineering, marketing, accounting and other fields.

DA says annual rice
waste tops 542,000 MT

By Othel V. Campos

THE Philippines wastes an estimated 542,477 metric tons of milled rice a year, enough to feed 5.17 million people, prompting the Department of Agriculture to step up its year-round campaign to reduce rice waste and promote responsible consumption.

The Philippine Rice Research Institute said the latest estimate translates to about 9.69 kilograms of cooked rice wasted per Filipino annually, or roughly 26.5 grams a day.

In 2024, PhilRice reported that rice wastage stood at about 6 grams of uncooked rice per person daily, with the

remaining waste estimated to sustain 2.79 million Filipinos for a year. The institute also said efforts to reduce waste saved about P3.6 billion worth of rice.

PhilRice is making its Be RICEponsible campaign a year-round advocacy, urging consumers to avoid wasting rice,

buy locally produced rice and choose healthier varieties.

Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. said responsible rice consumption should become an everyday practice given rice’s importance to Filipino households and national food security.

“Every grain of rice carries the work of a Filipino farmer. When we waste less, choose wisely, and support locally produced rice, we strengthen not only our farmers’ livelihoods but also our country’s food security,” Tiu Laurel said.

Agriculture Undersecretary for Rice Industry Development Christopher Morales said responsible consumption must complement efforts to increase production and reduce postharvest losses.

“Every grain saved from waste effectively adds to the food available to our people without requiring additional land, water, inputs, or production costs,” he added.

Launched in 2014 as a legacy program of the 2013 National Year of Rice, Be RICEponsible was initially observed mainly in November. PhilRice has since expanded it into a year-round campaign.

The campaign promotes locally produced rice, including PhilGAP-certified products, and healthier options such as brown, pigmented, low-glycemic index and high-zinc rice. It also encourages rice mixes using corn, saba, camote and adlai.

The campaign also seeks to revive the Half-Cup Rice Ordinance in participating areas, encouraging restaurants to offer smaller servings to help diners avoid taking more rice than they can finish.

Cisco, MCWD
team up to cut
water losses

By Darwin G. Amojelar

CISCO has teamed up with the Metropolitan Cebu Water District to modernize the city’s water distribution network.

Under the initiative, MCWD will deploy Cisco’s advanced networking and industrial edge technologies to cut non-revenue water — treated water lost before reaching consumers — by 15 percent across its network.

The project, under the Cisco Country Digital Acceleration program, marks a significant step in securing the region’s water supply to efficiently deliver resources to local communities.

Metro Cebu faces significant water stress, with about 32 percent of its supply lost to aging infrastructure, such as old valves and pipelines. Pressure fluctuations and leaks often go unnoticed, hindering MCWD’s ability to meet growing demand.

Cisco is implementing a secure, end-to-end industrial architecture using smart sensors to track water flow and pressure conditions in real time. The data is funneled into a centralized supervisory control and data acquisition, or SCADA, platform to provide operations teams with a live view of the network. This allows workers to catch anomalies, such as sudden pressure drops or unusual flow patterns, before they trigger costly pipe bursts.

“Metro Cebu continues to face increasing pressure on its water resource management and reducing operational losses is critical to ensuring long-term supply reliability,” MCWD general manager John DX Lapid said.

Efficiency at scale: Why AI-powered analytics belongs in every HR toolkit



GREEN LIGHT
Armando J. Aguado

It is essential that we continuously improve the AI fluency and critical thinking of our workforces.

IF THERE is one thing that is true in today’s organizational environment, it is that there is no shortage of workforce data to go by. What was largely missing historically was the technology and capability to quickly analyze and utilize the volume of the said data effectively. With the rapid emergence of Artificial Intelligence (AI) models in today’s information systems and workflows, this has now changed. Ordinary analytics, augmented by AI, can now put within reach of the average HR practitioner something that once required an entire data science team and a multinational budget.

To illustrate this, I’d like to point to five applications below of how this gap has been closing.

Attrition modelling. The capability to better forecast attrition, read employee sentiments, and flag wellness risks now exists with the right technology platforms. Attrition can cost large employers millions per year, so combining artificial intelligence with regular workforce analytics systems not only results in faster analysis of employee data, but also provides management with more informed recommendations on hotspots that companies need to focus on. Factors like employee pay position against market, time since last promotion, overtime load, and stalled internal mobility are all surfaced faster to decision makers in time for action to be taken.

Skills inference. Many competency frameworks today suffer from the difficulty of being updated fast enough for the quickly changing working environment. Using artificial intelligence can now provide leaders with required role capability uplifts and potential career trajectories using current trends, job movement history and current skills. AI can now power internal talent marketplaces that match employees globally to roles, projects,

and mentors. In the Philippine context, this can be particularly impactful, especially in the BPO and shared services sectors where redeployment during account or client transitions can be more prevalent.

Listening at scale. Employee pulse or satisfaction surveys generally have dedicated survey sections for qualitative feedback. However, these open-text survey comments were usually historically sampled, rather than running an analysis on each comment in great detail. Modern AI models are now capable of running detailed analysis on thousands of employee comments, cutting analysis time significantly and freeing HR leaders and specialists to focus on concrete action plans to address gaps, rather than on cumbersome sampling analysis.

Recruiting. Another advantage of AI within the HR practice can be found in recruiting, with many organizations already in the process of exploring how to effectively automate the more laborious part of preliminarily screening applications or automatically transcribing interviews at scale. Embedding the right AI tools within recruitment workflows can serve to not just improve the candidate experience, but to also enable talent acquisition specialists to focus their time and effort on screening for better role fit in job opportunities.

Analysis agents. One of the newest developments in using AI within workforce analytics is the advent of reasoning agents that can significantly speed up the nature of analysis itself. Microsoft’s Copilot platform and its Analyst agent, for example, can work through spreadsheets with messy data and subsequently surface deep level insights, help generate executive summaries, and do trend and financial comparisons (among other things). This means less time spent sorting through and trying to make sense

of the raw data and focusing on what actually matters, which is addressing the gaps that the data is showing.

While there are many use cases for AI-powered analytics as evidenced above, having access to these models and tools is not enough. A common finding in a number of workforce studies is that while globally more employees are gaining AI fluency and using AI tools in their work, many are still not getting more structured or formal training to use said tools efficiently in their specific roles.

This means the challenge ahead of us is twofold: on one hand it is identifying the right analytics tools and AI models to invest in that suit the specific use cases for one’s respective organizations. On the other, it is also ensuring we gain the AI fluency to use these tools – and review the data and insights they produce – effectively and correctly. It is essential that we continuously improve the AI fluency and critical thinking of our workforces. Otherwise, we will just be investing in technical capability that is not fully used. Similarly, having practitioners who cannot question the output of AI-augmented tools is not a “human-in-the-loop” but just the last signature on it.

Dr. Armando Ricardo J. Aguado is a Professional Lecturer at De La Salle University Manila and a Senior People Partner with Australia’s leading telecommunications company. Over nearly 2 decades, he has held corporate roles in strategic HR management, business partnering and organizational transformation, while educating minds and taking the opportunity to also learn from the next generation of working professionals. He may be reached at armando.aguado@dlsu.edu.ph.

Time deposits now PERA-eligible

By Thony Rose Lesaca

THE Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas (BSP) said Tuesday that time deposits are now included among eligible investment products under the Personal Equity and Retirement Account (PERA), expanding Filipinos’ retirement savings options.

PERA is a voluntary, tax-advantaged retirement savings program designed to supplement government benefits like the Social Security System and Government Service Insurance System.

It helps Filipinos save and invest for the future, with tax incentives and flexible investment options.

Under guidelines issued Aug. 20, the BSP said banks that meet its applicable prudential

requirements may offer PERA-eligible time deposits.

These banks should obtain accreditation from the Bureau of Internal Revenue and enter an arrangement with an accredited PERA administrator before accepting placements.

PERA time deposits form part of a contributor’s voluntary retirement savings account and may qualify for applicable tax incentives. They also remain bank deposits and are subject to applicable

banking regulations and deposit insurance rules.

“Retirement planning should be simple, accessible, and within reach of every Filipino. By introducing PERA time deposits, we are providing another practical option for individuals who want to build their retirement savings through a product they already understand and trust,” BSP Deputy

Governor Lyn Javier said.

The BSP said PERA time deposits may appeal to savers who prefer a familiar savings product with predictable returns and relatively lower investment risk.

Other PERA-qualified products include unit investment trust funds, stocks, real estate investment trusts and government securities.

IN BRIEF

CAMANAVA business confab set in September

THE Philippine Chamber of Commerce and Industry (PCCI) NCR North Sector has launched the CAMANAVA Business Conference 2026, with the two-day event set for Sept. 3 to 4 at the Navotas Convention Center.

Navotas City and the PCCI Navotas Chapter will serve as hosts for the conference, themed “Reigniting Businesses: CAMANAVA on the Lead.” The event will bring together business owners, entrepreneurs, government officials, industry leaders and other stakeholders from Caloocan, Malabon, Navotas and Valenzuela.

Navotas Mayor John Rey Tiangco, CAMANAVA Business Conference chairman Charlie Policarpio and PCCI NCR secretary general Helen Lising led officials and business leaders at the media launch.

Organizers expect more than 500 delegates to attend the conference, which will feature discussions on entrepreneurship, leadership, business development and current trends in the business sector. Featured speakers include Francis Kong, Chinkee Tan, Carl Balita, Francis Gaw and Rey Pineda.

The conference will also host the Manufacturing, Producing and Processing EXPO, featuring more than 90 exhibitors showcasing products, services, innovations and business capabilities.

The exhibit hall will be open to the public for a P100 entrance fee. Conference registration costs P2,500 for PCCI members and P4,000 for non-members.

Butch Gunio

Visayas grid place on red alert 21 times this year

THE Visayas grid has been placed on red alert 21 times and 86 yellow alerts since the start of the year, according to the National Grid Corp. of the Philippines.

The NGCP placed the Visayas grid on red alert again Tuesday, raising the possibility of power outages. Forecast available capacity is 2,421 megawatts, below the estimated peak demand of 2,570 MW.

The grid operator also issued yellow alerts from 2 p.m. to 5 p.m. and from 8 p.m. to 10 p.m., with the red alert scheduled

from 5 p.m. to 8 p.m.

The NGCP said 10 power plants were on forced outage as of August, while 20 other plants have been offline for months or years: one since July, three since June, seven since May, one since March, three since 2025, two since 2024, two since 2023 and one since 2021. An additional 13 plants are running at derated capacities.

The outages have removed 904.5 MW of capacity from the grid. Major coal-fired plants TVI 1, TVI 2 and KSPC 1 remain offline, while limited power imports from Mindanao due to high local demand have further constrained supply.

Alena Mae S. Flores

PH, Thailand hold trade committee talks

THE Philippines and Thailand held the inaugural Senior Officials’ Meeting of the Philippines-Thailand Joint Trade Committee via videoconference on Aug. 14, advancing bilateral economic cooperation ahead of a ministerial meeting scheduled for September in Manila.

Trade Undersecretary for international trade Allan Gepty and director-general Chotima Iemsawasdikul of Thailand’s Department of Trade Negotiations under the Ministry of Commerce co-chaired the meeting.

The committee was established under the 1999 trade agreement between the two governments and provides a platform to strengthen trade and investment ties, deepen economic cooperation and address trade-related issues.

Officials reviewed bilateral trade and economic relations and identified areas for cooperation ahead of the first ministerial-level meeting of the committee.

Both sides agreed to pursue a joint bilateral trade target, supported by efforts to address market access concerns, facilitate trade and investment and undertake practical cooperation initiatives.

They also explored measures to strengthen trade promotion, agricultural market access and investment cooperation, as well as sectoral collaboration in tourism, renewable energy, financial cooperation, halal industry development, the digital economy, sustainable micro, small and medium enterprises and start-ups and the creative economy. **Othel V. Campos**

Binance’s entry into SEC sandbox not guarantee of approval

By Jenniffer B. Austria

THE Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) said the admission of global crypto leader Binance into its regulatory sandbox program does not guarantee regulatory approval, as the platform will still have to undergo the regulator’s review and testing process.

SEC chairman Francisco Lim said the regulator is keeping an open mind toward financial technology innovations, including Binance’s participation in the sandbox.

“We should not close our minds to

innovation. In fact, my principle is we do not approve innovation only because there is an issue. Neither do we reject it because it is unfamiliar. I think we’re in the midst of global innovation,” Lim said.

The SEC said the sandbox program allows companies to test innovative financial products and services under regulatory supervision. Lim said that Binance’s admission into the sandbox does not mean the proposed activity will eventually be approved.

“It may or may not happen. But we have to test. Because here, we test. We look at the data. We look at the

appropriate regulation,” he said.

SEC commissioner Rogelio Quevedo also said that admission to the sandbox does not exempt a company from penalties for violations of securities regulations.

“Being in the sandbox does not cure the penalties that will be imposed on a company that has committed violations against the securities regulations code,” Quevedo said.

The SEC said the sandbox is intended as a controlled environment for evaluating new products and technologies rather than a pathway to automatic approval.

NGCP asked to complete P6.33-b Pampanga substation project by 2027

By Alena Mae S. Flores

THE Energy Regulatory Commission has ordered National Grid Corp. of the Philippines to complete the P6.33-billion Porac 230-kilovolt substation project by June 30, 2027, moving back an earlier deadline but rejecting the grid operator’s request for a three-year extension.

The ERC, in an Aug. 24 decision, partially granted NGCP’s motion for reconsideration, extending the original Nov. 18, 2026 completion deadline. The commission, however, rejected NGCP’s request to push the target back to December 2029.

NGCP attributed the delay to a lack of regulatory approval for its right-of-way acquisitions.

The ERC said NGCP’s position was without merit, noting the company had already started project implementation as early as February 2022, before the Supreme Court’s April 12, 2023 decision in the Iloilo Grain case cited by NGCP.

The regulator said the delay has created system reliability issues and capacity constraints amid load growth in Pampanga province.

The ERC directed NGCP to submit detailed quarterly status reports within 15 days of each quarter’s end. The company must also implement measures to maintain system reliability and address contingency concerns to mitigate the operational impact on affected distribution utilities.



DIGITAL NOTARIZATION. Bureau of Internal Revenue Commissioner Charlito Martin Mendoza and Supreme Court Associate Justice Alfredo Benjamin Caguioa lead discussions to align the BIR’s Electronic Documentary Stamp Tax (eDST) system with the Supreme Court’s Electronic Notarization (eNotarization) facilities. Mendoza said the meeting aimed to address the paper-based DST affixture requirement.

Two PH startups included in Forbes Asia’s ‘100 to watch’ annual ranking

TWO Philippine companies made Forbes Asia’s 100 to Watch list, the magazine’s sixth annual ranking of small companies and startups on the rise across the Asia-Pacific region.

Enterprise technology firm Clouted and finance company OneLot were the Philippine entries on the list.

Clouted, founded in 2024, is a marketing platform that automates short-form video creation and distribution. The company has headquarters in both Manila and Los Angeles and is led by chief executive officer Justin Banusing.

Clouted combines a network of more than 100,000 freelance video editors with artificial intelligence to optimize where and how videos are promoted across social media platforms. The startup said it has run video distribution campaigns for brands including music label Liquid State

and insurance technology startup Corgi Insurance.

The company raised \$7 million in seed funding in May from investors led by Slow Ventures. Its backers also include AppWorks, a16z Speedrun and Peak XV’s Surge.

OneLot, founded in 2023 and led by chief executive Harm-Julian Schumacher, provides working capital loans to used-car dealers in the Philippines. Research firm Mordor Intelligence estimates the used-car market at \$6.3 billion.

The fintech uses artificial intelligence and in-person inspections to assess a dealer’s inventory before extending a credit line secured by the vehicles. OneLot has raised \$3.3 million in seed funding from investors co-led by Accion Ventures and 468 Capital, with additional backing from Crestone Venture Capital and Everywhere Ventures.

Jollibee Group named 2026 global growth champion

JOLLIBEE Group has been named global growth champion at the inaugural Globie Award organized by the Global Restaurant Leadership Conference which brings together senior executives in the global restaurant and foodservice industry.

The award recognizes companies that have demonstrated strong international expansion and impact in the global restaurant sector. Jollibee Group was selected from 12 brand nominees and received more than 74 percent of votes from the award’s advisory panel.

Jollibee Group has grown from a Philippine-founded business into a global restaurant group operating more than 10,700 stores and cafes across 33 countries, supported by 20 brands across owned, franchised and invested businesses.

The recognition reflects the company’s global growth trajectory, operational agility and strategic portfolio diversification as it continues to expand across key international markets.

“Jollibee Group’s win as our 2026 Global Growth Champion is both decisive and well-deserved. Among several outstanding nominees, Jollibee’s dominance was clear. They’ve transformed from a beloved Filipino brand into a true global restaurant powerhouse, and their strategic portfolio diversification demonstrates they’re playing the long game in international growth. What sets the Jollibee Group apart is how they’ve redefined international restaurant expansion—not just through rapid growth, but through thoughtful, community-driven strategies that honor local cultures while building a diversified portfolio of brands,” said Restaurant Business editor-in-chief Jonathan Maze.



SANAS EXPANSION. Jack Madrid (center), president and chief executive of the IT & Business Process Association of the Philippines (IBPAP) joins speech AI company Sanas as ambassador for the Philippines to lead its expansion in the country, while Christopher Venturina (right) is appointed director of business development for the Philippines. With them is Sanas chief customer officer Monal Patel. The appointments come as Sanas strengthens its local operations, expands customer investments, and builds deeper relationships with enterprises, BPO providers, and technology partners in the country.



Through iron and wood



Traditional Batangas knives with intricately carved wooden sheaths and woven handles are displayed on a banig, showcasing the craftsmanship behind the province's bladesmithing tradition. Meanwhile, local shops such as Liza's and Mauro's Best, whose namesake is pictured, continue to keep the craft visible and accessible to buyers, helping preserve a livelihood rooted in heritage and skill.

Text and Photos by Elena Christine Cancio

TAAL, BATANGAS — Three words guide the bladesmiths of Taal as they pull their dying craft back from the brink: Kultura, Komunidad, Kapatiran or Culture, Community, and Brotherhood.

In 2020, 57-year-old Ramon Bathan founded Balisong Batangas, a collective of craftsmen and collectors working to revive the balisong's fading place in Filipino culture. What began with 120 members, many of them his own relatives, has grown to more than 20,000 members today.

For generations, the balisong wasn't a weapon in Batangas, it was a tool. Farmers used it to harvest, fishermen to work, elders taught it as something you carry with restraint, not aggression. "You only hold onto it when you're ready to use it," Bathan said, recalling the discipline passed down by his own elders.

The bladesmithing industry was among the many local markets affected by the COVID-19 pandemic prompting makers to explore new methods for selling their craft. "Had it not been for the pandemic, balisong or any blades might not be as strong as they are now," Ramon said, believing the struggle was necessary for the survival of the bladehouses.

Through Ramon's guidance, the bladehouses overcame their initial skepticism on adapting to pandemic demands by navigating them through the use of an active Facebook group built within a year to market their crafts online. This initiative also educated bladesmiths on expanding to online selling while reviving their passion for maintaining the craftsmanship of balisong knives.

"What I am proud of in this group is reintroducing or introducing the power of social media," Ramon said. "During the pandemic, no one could go out, the makers there had no customers. Social media became a very powerful tool in sustaining their livelihood. Had it not been for that, they would have had nothing to eat," he added.

One of those makers is Mauro Lopez, who began sharpening blades at nine years old for five pesos apiece and mastered handle-making by thirteen. Before joining Balisong Batangas, his income online was "completely zero," he said. Four years later, he's bought equipment, a house, and land, and now fields orders from the United States and Saudi Arabia. "I've received orders from California, Saudi Arabia, any country where balisongs are allowed," Mauro said.

Although the revival hasn't been easy, Bathan pushed makers to abandon shortcuts and revive decades-old designs, Ramon was challenged in

convincing the makers to revive their past designs but he proved to the market that focusing on quality control and recreating old designs attracted new customers.

Ramon explained that pride in bladesmithing has faded over time. "Before, they staked their name on their work. It had their mark," he said.

Balisongs, known for their skillful artistry are considered exotic souvenirs, particularly in Western countries. These butterfly knives are featured by martial artists, in weapon designs for games such as Valorant and GTA, and are often seen in action films.

While international demand for balisongs has increased, the local market in the Philippines struggles to compete with cheaper Chinese knock-offs.

This is one of the factors that cut local blademakers further, Bathan has banned members from reselling them. "I removed all vendors selling China-made balisongs from the group because it's wrong. We are promoting our own industry, yet you're selling the competitor's product because it's cheaper," Ramon explained.

"They buy it for 250 pesos and sell it in Taal for 350 to 400 pesos. The profit is bigger, but that's only for now. In the long run, you're killing the very industry that sustained you," he added.

Beyond blades, Bathan funds scholarships and community outreach through Balisong Batangas, a byproduct of the same principle that built the collective. "We taught them that if you're all skilled you should help the community. When the community thrives, so do you. You're part of it, and that's the collective capitalism I promote," Ramon said.

Grenada opens Honorary Consulate in Manila



Honorary Consul Catherine Tiu-Tan shakes the hand of Grenada Prime Minister Dickon Mitchell during a high-level courtesy call that solidifies the importance of having an Honorary Consulate in Manila.

Catherine Tiu-Tan

GRENADA has officially established an Honorary Consulate in Manila, marking a significant development that deepens the diplomatic relations between the two island nations.

The opening of the post presents a major milestone following the appointment of prominent business and civic leader Catherine Tiu-Tan as Honorary Consul and the formal establishment of the bilateral relations between the Philippines and Grenada last year.

Former Foreign Affairs Secretary Enrique Manalo formalized the country's diplomatic ties with Grenada by signing a Joint Communique with Grenada Minister for Foreign Affairs, Trade and Export Joseph Andall at the

sidelines of the Council for Foreign and Community Relations meeting of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) in Saint Kitts and Nevis on 8 May 2025.

With that, the Philippines now has established diplomatic ties with all 14 member states of the CARICOM.

President Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos Jr., through Foreign Affairs Secretary Theresa Lazaro, granted the exequatur permitting Tiu-Tan to formally exercise her consular functions in the country.

The new Honorary Consulate is located on the 12th floor of The Boni Prime building at 20th Drive, McKinley Business Park in Bonifacio Global City, Taguig City.

Tiu-Tan said with the formal opening of the post, Grenada will now have a physical footprint in the Philippines that will foster stronger economic, political, cultural, and even sports ties while serving as a dedicated gateway for consular matters and diplomatic collaboration in Southeast Asia.

"Despite the geographic distance between Southeast Asia and the Caribbean, the Philippines and Grenada share identical vulnerabilities, aspirations, and opportunities," said Tiu-Tan, who personally met Grenada Prime Minister Dickon Mitchell in a high-level courtesy call, demonstrating that the Manila post is being recognized at the highest level of the Grenadian government.

"The opening of this Honorary Consulate is a definitive step toward bringing our people closer, advancing strategic partnerships, and translating our shared values into actionable solutions."



The team behind Fuego Costa Pacifica.

Fuego Costa Pacifica adds new spark to Baler local tourism

A NEW chapter is unfolding in Baler as Costa Pacifica is reintroduced as Fuego Costa Pacifica, now under the management of AHG Hotels & Resorts and part of its growing Fuego brand.

With 13 years of history in Baler, the property enters its first year under AHG Hotels & Resorts with a renewed identity and an exciting vision for what lies ahead. The rebranding goes beyond a new name—it marks the beginning of a series of enhancements and new experiences that will continue to unfold throughout the property.

Leading this new chapter are Ms. Myla Caceres, Managing Director of AHG Hotels & Resorts, and Jerri Povibool, General Manager of Fuego Costa Pacifica, together with the property team. Their focus is to build on the property's established presence in Baler while introducing experiences that reflect the energy, character, and spirit of the destination.

"Fuego Costa Pacifica is the

beginning of something new," said Ms. Myla Caceres, Managing Director of AHG Hotels & Resorts. "We are excited about the direction of the property and the many experiences that we will be introducing. This rebranding is only the beginning, and guests can look forward to more developments and surprises in the months ahead."

The transformation will extend to the property's dining experience. As part of the rebranding journey, the restaurant will also take on a new identity, accompanied by an enhanced food offering designed to give guests more reasons to dine and discover new flavors while staying at Fuego Costa Pacifica. More details about the restaurant rebranding and upcoming culinary offerings will be revealed soon.

Beyond dining, guests can look forward to an evolving range of experiences that celebrate Baler—from coastal adventures and outdoor activities to moments of relaxation

and opportunities to discover the destination. Fuego Costa Pacifica aims to bring the spirit of Baler into the guest experience, making the property not just a place to stay, but a place to experience the destination.

For Jerri Povibool, General Manager of Fuego Costa Pacifica, the journey is just beginning. "We want our guests to feel that there is always something new to discover at Fuego Costa Pacifica. From food and dining to adventures and experiences, we are continuously looking at ways to make every visit more memorable."

As the property moves forward under the Fuego brand of AHG Hotels & Resorts, its 13-year legacy provides a strong foundation for its next chapter. With new experiences, enhanced offerings, and further developments on the horizon, Fuego Costa Pacifica invites guests to return and discover what is next.

Fuego Costa Pacifica — a new chapter in Baler, with more experiences to come.

Kim Soo-hyun makes first TV appearance after scandal that rocked his career

By Angelica Villanueva

SOUTH Korean actor **Kim Soo-hyun** returned to television for the first time in more than a year with a guest appearance on Indonesian broadcaster RCTI.

On Sunday, Aug. 23, Soo-hyun appeared on the live program *Mahakarya RCTI 37* in Jakarta as part of the network’s 37th anniversary celebration.

During the broadcast, the 38-year-old actor thanked the audience and performed “Dreaming,” a song from the 2011 drama *Dream High*, in which he played aspiring singer Song Sam-dong.

His appearance was Soo-hyun’s first on-air television activity since stepping away from the public eye in 2025.

The South Korean actor faced controversy in March last year after allegations surfaced that he had dated the late actress **Kim Sae-ron** while she was a minor. Her family later filed a complaint accusing him of violating South Korea’s Child Welfare Act.

Soo-hyun’s side acknowledged that the two had dated but denied that the relationship began before Kim Sae-ron reached adulthood.

His camp also disputed an audio recording released by her family, calling it an artificial intelligence fabrication.

In July, South Korean police cleared him of the Child Welfare Act allegations and did not refer the case for prosecution.

He had earlier resumed official activities by filming a commercial for Bench.



Kim Soo-hyun actor resumes public activities after more than a year away from television following controversy that disrupted his career



‘Dulo’t Dulo’ stars Sky Quizon (left) and Migs Almendras at the launch of KayaFlix

THE *teleserye* is getting a smartphone-sized makeover through a platform that is betting that Filipino drama can fit neatly into the palm of your hand.



Very Wang
Nickie Wang

Vertical drama platform gives Filipino stories a new home

Filipino streaming startup KayaFlix officially launches this month with a format built for viewers who increasingly watch entertainment “vertically.”

The platform, which held its grand launch Aug. 12 at SinePop in Cubao, Quezon City, offers original Filipino series designed specifically for vertical screens, featuring that emotional pull of traditional *teleseryes* with the quick, mobile-friendly rhythm of digital content.

Subscriptions are priced at P199, reduced from the regular P249 rate, giving viewers access to KayaFlix’s growing lineup of original Filipino productions.

But the startup has a bigger plan, it pitches beyond a new way to watch. It wants to become a home for Filipino storytellers, particularly student filmmakers and emerging creatives whose work can disappear after a single campus screening or film festival.

The idea came to creative and managing director **Maki Javier** while he was judging a student film festival at Bulacan State University. Impressed by the quality of the entries, Javier found himself wondering where audiences could watch those films after the festival ended.



KayaFlix creates a mobile-first space for Filipino stories while opening opportunities for emerging filmmakers and creatives

That question eventually became KayaFlix.

The platform aims to partner with universities and create opportunities for student directors, writers, cinematographers, editors, and producers to reach audiences outside the classroom.

Its original vertical series are designed around the habits of mobile viewers, with fast-paced narratives and daily or weekly releases intended to recreate the anticipation once associated with primetime television.

Javier believes that the screen may be changing, but the storytelling does not have to lose its Filipino identity.

“Technology continues to change the way we watch, but it should never change the heart of Filipino storytelling,” he told *Manila Standard Entertainment*.

KayaFlix initially made its web app available to media, creators, and industry partners, with its mobile app set for public release later this month.

The startup’s ambition is clear, according to Javier.

“We make Filipino stories easier to find, give new filmmakers a place to be seen, and prove that the country’s next big storyteller may be working far from the usual production centers,” he stated.

“And since it’s kind of difficult for streaming platforms to pick up local stories made by new filmmakers, we created this platform to be their home,” Javier went on.

Rex Orange County gives Manila fans a concert worth rediscovering

By Angelica Villanueva

REX **Orange County**’s return to Manila offered plenty for longtime fans, but the concert also showed how far his music has traveled beyond those who actively follow his catalog.

The British singer-songwriter, whose real name is **Alexander O’Connor**, performed at the SM Mall of Asia Arena on Aug. 20, three years after his first Philippine concert at the Smart Araneta Coliseum.

Filipino acts Over October and Maki opened the show before Rex took over with a set that stretched to nearly 20 songs.

For casual listeners, some of those songs may have sounded familiar even without immediately recognizing the titles.

Rex’s music has long found its way into TikTok videos, Instagram Reels, and playlists, making tracks such as “Sunflower,” “Loving Is Easy” and “Best Friend” recognizable even outside his core audience. Hearing them inside an arena gave those often-heard fragments a fuller context.

The show opened with “Television / So Far So Good,” followed by “Amazing” and “The Shade.” “Never Enough,” “One in a Million” and “Face to Face” came next, establishing early how comfortably Rex could move between upbeat material and quieter songs without making the set feel uneven.

Some of the strongest stretches came when the production allowed the music to breathe.



The singer provides a well-rounded experience for both longtime fans and casual listeners

“Pluto Projector,” “Untitled,” and “Corduroy Dreams” leaned into the softer side of his catalog, with Rex’s restrained delivery carrying much of the performance. The mood shifted naturally once “Loving Is Easy” and “Sunflower” arrived, drawing louder reactions from an audience quick to recognize the opening notes.

The Manila concert also gave more committed fans something beyond the expected hits. “Indecision,” his collaboration with Daniel Caesar, received its first live performance, while “Take a Drive” also made its live debut. Songs including “Rearrange My World,” “Boyfriend,” and “Always” added variety to a set that did not rely only on his most streamed material.

With two Filipino opening acts and a lengthy headline performance,

the concert delivered strong value for fans who had waited for Rex’s return. It felt generous without becoming overextended, while the pacing kept the quieter moments from slowing the evening too much.

The main set eventually reached “Best Friend” and “Happiness” before Rex returned for “4 Seasons” as the encore.

For dedicated followers, the night was a chance to hear their favorites. For everyone else, it served as a reminder of how many

Rex Orange County songs may already be familiar.

British singer-songwriter Rex Orange County returns to Manila with a nearly 20-song set that mixes fan favorites, quieter cuts and live debuts



From handwritten words to woven stories



Glazing Life
Glaiza Lee



Itneg artisans are known for handwoven textiles and embroidery marked by traditional geometric designs



Panay Bukidnon artisans practice panubok, a traditional hand embroidery technique that is characterized by its elaborate geometric and traditional motifs



T'boli artisans, while widely recognized for their t'nalak weaving tradition, also engage in traditional embroidery. Both textile practices reflect the community's profound cultural heritage.

Bukidnon artisans practice *panubok*, a traditional hand embroidery technique characterized by intricate geometric and traditional motifs; and T'boli artisans, while widely known for their *t'nalak* weaving tradition, also practice traditional embroidery, with both textile practices reflecting the community's rich cultural heritage.

These traditions are reflected in the artisans' own skills and craftsmanship, allowing each community's distinct cultural identity to be expressed in the finished pieces.

This initiative supports NCCA's continuing efforts to safeguard and promote Philippine cultural heritage, particularly through the SLTs, which provide spaces for cultural bearers to pass on traditional knowledge and skills to succeeding generations.

Through the collaboration, Filipino craftsmanship finds a new space in contemporary fashion, giving Filipino artisans an opportunity to reach new audiences while sharing and celebrating the

DURING the Cinemalaya Philippine Independent Film Festival, I met up with my good friend **Esty Bagos**, who currently works at the Ateneo Art Gallery. I first met Esty when she served as a guest curator for the CCP Visual Arts and Museum Division. She dropped by to see the Cinemalaya exhibit featuring portraits of filmmakers photographed and designed by visual artist **Geloy Concepcion**.

Our conversation turned to Geloy's exhibit, *Things You Wanted to Say But Never Did*, which was presented at the Ateneo Art Gallery last July. I had noticed the long lines at the gallery entrance when I went to Areté to watch **Mari Dance**'s production, a day in a dance in a dance.

Geloy eventually joined our huddle and told us about his latest collaboration with Uniqlo, *Notes to Self*.

The fashion collection features embroidered handwritten affirmations designed to encourage mindfulness and self-expression. Through RE.Uniqlo Studio, customers can have selected messages embroidered onto LifeWear pieces.

The fashion project traces its roots to Geloy's art project in 2019, when he posted a simple question on social media: "What are the things you wanted to say but never did?"

Soon, thousands of people from around the world anonymously submitted their fears, hopes, insecurities, questions, and confessions. Geloy transformed these intimate messages into a series of artworks, inscribing the anonymous words onto film photographs.

Over the past six years, the project has continued to evolve, from a simple question posted online to a body of photographic artworks, a gallery exhibition, and now, wearable art.

What began as an invitation for people to express the words they kept to themselves has become an ongoing conversation, one that can now quite literally be worn.

"What excited me about this collaboration was the opportunity to bring my handwritten notes outside the pages of my journals and photographs and into people's everyday lives. This collaboration simply adds another layer of personal meaning to those pieces," Concepcion said.

ANOTHER fashion collaboration I am looking forward to is the one featuring Schools of Living Traditions (SLT), a program of the National Commission for Culture and the Arts that aims to conserve and promote indigenous cultures and traditions.

Through this partnership with the fashion brand, Filipino craftsmanship found a new canvas.

Dubbed *Filipino Artisan Patches for the Celebration of 70 Years of Japan-Philippines Friendship*, the collaboration between Uniqlo Philippines and fashion designer **Wilson Limon**, in partnership with master artisans through the NCCA SLT program, brings together the traditional craftsmanship of different indigenous peoples of the Philippines from the communities



Uniqlo Philippines and fashion designer Wilson Limon (leftmost) collaborated with master artisans to create Filipino Artisan Patches, celebrating 70 years of Japan-Philippines friendship

of the Itneg of Abra, the Panay Bukidnon of Iloilo and the T'boli of Lake Sebu.

Using upcycled Uniqlo alteration fabric scraps, the artisans create handcrafted patches that reflect their respective embroidery and weaving traditions, with each piece individually hand-stitched to highlight the distinct artistry and cultural identity of the communities.

The patches highlight the distinct textile traditions of each community. *Itneg* artisans are known for their handwoven textiles and embroidery featuring geometric patterns; Panay

cultural traditions they continue to pass on through generations.

Running until Oct. 31, the collaboration features handcrafted patches available at selected Uniqlo stores nationwide, including the Uniqlo Manila Global Flagship Store, Uniqlo SM Mall of Asia, Uniqlo Bonifacio High Street, Uniqlo SM North EDSA, Uniqlo SM Megamall, Uniqlo Greenhills, Uniqlo Nuvali, Uniqlo Ayala Center Cebu, Uniqlo SM Seaside City Cebu, Uniqlo SM Davao, Uniqlo Davao Roadside Store, and Uniqlo SM Lanang Premier.



The gala performance will feature works rooted in Bayanihan's traditions and contemporary artistic expressions

Bayanihan rings in 70 years with 'Taginting' gala

THE Bayanihan Folk Arts Foundation Inc. will celebrate its 70th season with a gala performance at the Metropolitan Theater in Manila on Aug. 28 at 7:30 p.m.

Titled *Taginting: 70 Years of Bayanihan Legacy*, the production will trace the company's seven decades of artistry and its continuing work in preserving and promoting Philippine culture through dance.

The milestone production will feature works rooted in Bayanihan's established traditions alongside contemporary artistic expressions, offering a program that draws from the Philippines' cultural heritage.

Through its 70th season production, Bayanihan continues its long-running commitment to artistic excellence, cultural preservation, and the promotion of Philippine identity through the performing arts.



Bayanihan celebrates seven decades of promoting Philippine culture through a milestone program that brings traditional and contemporary expressions to the stage

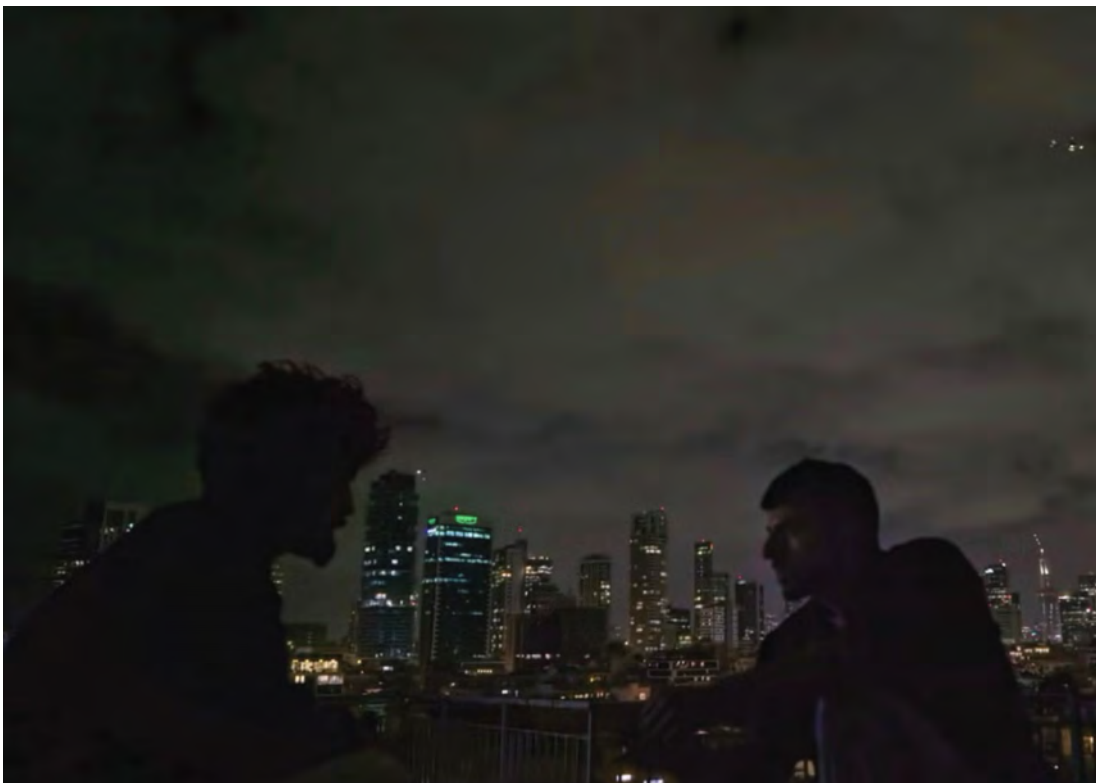
Gaza documentary to premiere at Venice film festival

A NEW documentary called *NAZA* from the same directors as the Oscar-winning Israeli-Palestinian production *No Other Land* will premiere at the Venice Film Festival next month, organizers said on Monday.

The film, which will compete for the Golden Lion award, is about "the systems behind Israel's calculated mass killing of Palestinian civilians in Gaza," according to a synopsis published on the film festival website.

The film is directed by **Yuval Abraham** and **Rachel Szor**, two of the four co-directors of *No Other Land*, which tells the story of Palestinian activists trying to protect a cluster of villages in the occupied West Bank from demolition by the Israeli military.

NAZA is produced by *The Guardian* and **James Wilson** (JW Films) and executive-



'NAZA' examines the systems behind Israeli airstrikes and civilian deaths in Gaza

produced by **Jonathan Glazer**. Wilson and Glazer are the team behind the Oscar-winning film *The Zone of Interest* set in Auschwitz concentration camp.

The Guardian said *NAZA* is "an Israeli military acronym used euphemistically by Israeli intelligence to indicate the number of civilians that it expects will be killed in an airstrike."

The film will be screened on Sept. 10 in the presence of the directors, the producers, *Guardian* journalists, and the official delegation.

It is the only documentary among the 21 films competing for the Golden Lion Award at the 83rd Venice International Film Festival.

Palestinian militant group Hamas launched an attack on Israel on Oct. 7, 2023, which resulted in the deaths of 1,221 people, according to an *AFP* tally based on official Israeli figures. Militants also took 251 hostages to Gaza.

Israel's retaliatory military campaign in Gaza has killed more than 73,000 people, according to the territory's health ministry, which operates under Hamas authority and whose figures are considered reliable by the United Nations.

A ceasefire took hold in October, but progress on permanently ending the war has stalled, and Israeli forces currently control nearly 70 percent of the territory. **AFP**

Manila
Standard



Katie Bradshaw takes on the title role as the production introduces younger audiences to live theater through a familiar story

By Angelica Villanueva

THERE is something comforting about knowing exactly how a story ends and still wanting to watch it unfold.

For many of us, *Cinderella* is one of those stories. We grew up knowing the glass slipper, the wicked stepmother, the fairy godmother, and the midnight deadline long before we understood why the fairy tale continued to be retold from one generation to another.

Last weekend, I went to the REP Eastwood Theater with my friend **Kalev** to watch Repertory Philippines’ *Cinderella: The Tale of the Glass Slipper*. By coincidence, I had rewatched Disney’s animated *Cinderella* only a few days earlier, so the story was still fresh in my mind when the curtain went up.

Directed by **Joy Virata** and **Cara Barredo**, REP’s latest Repertory Theater for Young Audiences production follows the familiar fairy tale while giving it a stage identity of its own. **Janet Yates Vogt** and **Mark Friedman**, who wrote the book, music, and lyrics, introduce characters such as Putterman, Cinderella’s mischievous rat friend, while keeping the story accessible to younger theatergoers.

The songs work well with the production’s light, playful tone, while the short scenes help maintain a pace suited to children. The younger members of the audience seemed especially invested whenever the cast invited them to participate, enthusiastically calling out answers and responding to the characters.

One of the more enjoyable moments came during the Prince’s search for the woman who owned the glass slipper. Instead of keeping the action entirely onstage, the Prince walked among the audience and interacted with several women, bringing a familiar part of the story closer to the

REP’s ‘Cinderella’ makes an old fairy tale feel familiar again



Radson Flores (right) and Katie Bradshaw lead the opening show of Repertory Philippines’ production of ‘Cinderella: The Tale of the Glass Slippers’

crowd. I only wished I had gotten the chance to try on the slipper myself.

Sparkle artist **Radson Flores**, who plays the Prince in alternating performances, makes his professional theater debut in the production. He has a pleasant stage presence, although his singing voice sounded a little soft in some parts of the performance. Stronger projection could help him command the theater more confidently as he gains experience onstage.

For him, taking on the role also carries a sense of childhood wish fulfillment.

“For me, the experience is amazing. Growing up, I would watch a lot of Disney movies and musicals,” he told *Manila Standard Life*.

“Being the prince is one of the dream roles of a kid,” he added.

Radson described the opportunity as something he is still trying to take in.

“And I don’t know, it’s just surreal. It feels like a fever dream until now,” he said.

Although *Cinderella* is his first professional theater production, he had already taken a workshop earlier this year. Viewers might be familiar with him as Mark Gordon in GMA’s *Voltes V: Legacy*, but he said his interest in performing extends beyond the stage.

“I’ve always wanted to do acting in general. So whether it’s

FRONT ROW



REP brings humor and audience interaction into its family-friendly retelling of the classic fairy tale

film or theater, I would love to pursue it,” he shared.

He already has another stage role in mind if the opportunity ever comes.

“Probably *Phantom of the Opera*. Why not, right? I would love to do that,” Flores said.

Among the production’s visual choices, Cinderella’s ball gown, played by **Katie Bradshaw**, was the one element I wished had stayed closer to the version many of us grew up seeing. I don’t know if it was intentional, but the gown she wore was gold under the stage lights, and its look occasionally reminded me more of Belle from *Beauty and the Beast* than Cinderella. I still found myself hoping for the familiar blue.

It is a minor preference in an otherwise enjoyable production.

REP’s *Cinderella: The Tale of the Glass Slipper* succeeds because it understands the value of familiarity without simply putting an old story onstage. Children get an energetic introduction to live theater, while older viewers are given a chance to revisit a fairy tale they may have known for most of their lives.

For me, returning to *Cinderella* felt a little like meeting an old childhood favorite again, only this time from a theater seat.

The Cultural Center of the Philippines is celebrating the 100th birth anniversary of National Artist Lauro “Larry” Alcala with an exhibit and cartooning workshops



THE Cultural Center of the Philippines is celebrating the 100th birth anniversary of National Artist **Lauro “Larry” Alcala** with a monthlong exhibit and a series of free cartooning workshops.

Return to the Popular: Drawing the Filipino Imagination opened Aug. 19 at Gallery 2 of the Metropolitan Theater in Manila. The exhibit features reproductions of Alcala’s “Slice of Life” illustrations, original works, memorabilia, and pieces by members of the Samahang Kartunista ng Pilipinas.

Co-organized with the Larry Alcala Estate, National Commission for Culture and the Arts, Filipino Heritage Festival Inc., and the Metropolitan Museum of Manila, the exhibit looks back at the cartoonist’s depictions of everyday Filipino life.

Curated by Dr. **Jose Santos “Chong” Ardivilla**, the exhibit examines how Alcala turned familiar moments into humorous and often pointed illustrations that resonated with generations of readers.

Known as Mang Larry, Alcala created some of Philippine cartooning’s best-known works, including *Kalabog en Bosyo*, *Siopawman*, *Mang Ambo*, and the weekly series *Slice of Life*. *Kalabog en Bosyo* became one of the country’s longest-running comic strips.

Alcala also taught at the University of the Philippines College of Fine Arts and helped introduce the country’s first college degree course in commercial design. His work as an artist and educator earned him recognition as the “Dean of Filipino Cartoonists.”

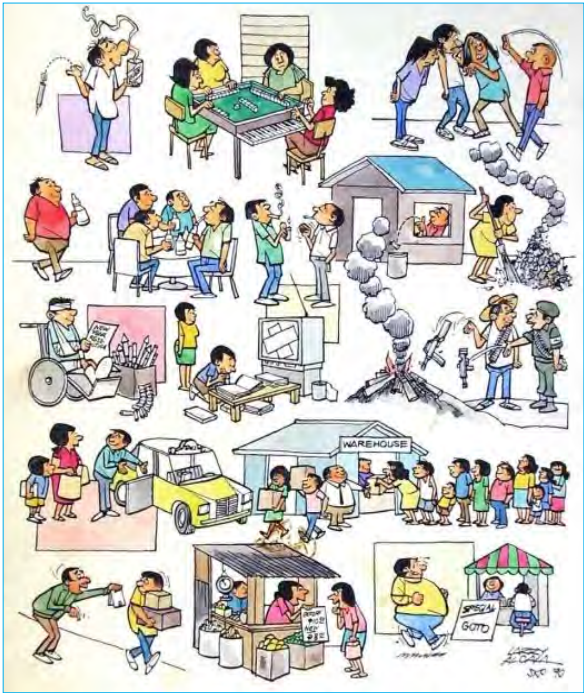
The centennial celebration also includes five cartooning workshops from August to November in partnership with the UP Department of Visual Communication and the Samahang Kartunista ng Pilipinas.

The first two sessions, set for Aug. 29 and Sept. 5 at the Metropolitan Theater, will cover character design, comic strips, and the use of cartoons to communicate ideas. Additional workshops will be held Sept. 22, Oct. 17, and Nov. 21 at the Tanghalang Ignacio B. Gimenez.

The workshops are free, with materials provided to participants. Registration for the CCP workshop series is available through the organizers, while registration for the Metropolitan Theater sessions will be announced through the NCCA’s official Facebook page.

The exhibit and workshops are part of a wider collaboration among cultural institutions, artists, and Alcala’s family to introduce his work to a new generation of Filipino artists and readers.

A century of Filipino life in Larry Alcala’s lines



Larry Alcala’s illustrations capture everyday Filipino life through humor, observation, and familiar neighborhood scenes



Alcala’s cartoons turn ordinary habits, work, and community life into snapshots of Filipino culture



Ayala Museum opens a more personal window into Marcelo H. Del Pilar through artifacts, letters, and artworks tied to his life and family

A hero remembered through the eyes of his family

AN upcoming Ayala Museum exhibit will offer a more personal look at Filipino propagandist **Marcelo H. Del Pilar**, exploring the man behind the national hero through the eyes of his family.

Lolo Marcelo: The man behind the hero (Reflections on the Legacy of Marcelo H. Del Pilar) runs from Sept. 4 to Oct. 17 at the 2F Lobby of Ayala Museum’s Diorama Experience Gallery.

The exhibit is presented by **Pax Pineda**, Del Pilar’s great-great-great-grandson, in collaboration with Ayala Museum and the National Historical Commission of the Philippines. It features artifacts, letters, and artworks that examine Del Pilar’s role in the Propaganda Movement as well as the personal sacrifices behind his work.

Known by his pen name Plaridel, Del Pilar was a lawyer, journalist, and reform advocate who left the Philippines in 1888 amid persecution and continued his campaign for reforms in Spain.

He edited and wrote for *La Solidaridad* and eventually helped finance the publication when funds ran out, leaving him in financial hardship. His work also meant prolonged separation from his wife and children.

“I am very grateful to have this opportunity to tell, show, and share my Lolo Marcelo’s story,” Pineda said, noting that the exhibit also seeks to show the sacrifices experienced by Del Pilar’s family.

Del Pilar died of tuberculosis in Barcelona in 1896, far from the country he sought to serve.

Ayala Museum curator **Tenten Mina** noted that Del Pilar’s story remains



Del Pilar’s descendant, Pax Pineda presents an exhibit that showcases artifacts, letters, and artworks highlighting Del Pilar’s role in the Propaganda Movement and his personal sacrifices

relevant as the country observes the Year of Diplomatic History and Diaspora during History Month 2026.

“He endured physical separation from family and loved ones for the sake of the greater good, a sacrifice many Filipinos still make today,” Mina said.

The artifacts are on loan from the NHCP and were transported from the Marcelo H. Del Pilar Shrine in Bulakan, Bulacan.

Ayala Museum senior director for Arts and Culture **Jorell Legaspi** said the project reflects the museum’s effort to create spaces where Filipinos can engage with history and heritage.

Associate director **Aprille Tijam** added that the exhibit could be the first of several smaller curatorial projects exploring figures and events not featured in the museum’s 60 Dioramas of Philippine History.