



# Manila Standard

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## 30 NUP solons back impeaching VP Sara

### Puno: 'Yes' votes may reach 180 in plenary

By Marice Cruz, Ram Superable and Pot Chavez

SOME 30 lawmakers from the National Unity Party (NUP) will vote to transmit the Articles of Impeachment against Vice President Sara Duterte to the Senate, House Deputy Speaker and Antipolo Rep. Ronaldo Puno said.

He said around 180 members of the House of Representatives – well above

the one-third threshold of 106 votes – are likely to support the impeachment

**VP SARA: UNFAIR TO DRAG FAMILY IN IMPEACH RAPS**

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of the Vice President. "The majority [of us in NUP] is in favor of sending this to the Senate."

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## Japan joins US, PH forces in anti-ship missile strike

By Charles Dantes and Rex Espiritu

A DECOMMISSIONED Philippine Navy battleship was sunk on Wednesday during a simulated maritime war exercise off Paoay, Ilocos Norte in connection with the ongoing multilateral Balikatan Exercise, with President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. as a key spectator.

Defense Secretary Gilberto Teodoro Jr. and Japanese Defense Minister Shinjiro Koizumi also witnessed the missile firing and later spoke with troops taking part in the drills.

In a related development, the Philippines and Japan deepened bilateral

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**SUSPECTS.** NBI chief Melvin Matibag presents to the media Peanut Gallery Media Network (PGMN) founder Franco Mabanta, second from left, and four others who were arrested in an entrapment by NBI agents for allegedly trying to extort P350 million from Leyte Rep. and former Speaker Martin Romualdez. Norman Cruz

## Bill establishing PH as regional education hub gets approval

By Maricel V. Cruz

THE House Committee on Higher and Technical Education has approved a measure that seeks to position the Philippines as a regional hub for world-class higher education, research, and educational tourism.

House Bill 7875, or the proposed Philippine Global Education City Act, is principally authored by Leyte 1st District Rep. Ferdinand Martin Romualdez, TINGOG Party-list Reps. Yedda Marie Romualdez, Andrew Julian Romualdez, and Jude Acidre.

The panel's chair, TINGOG Party-list Rep. Jude Acidre, said the measure responds to a persistent gap in the country's higher education system: while the Philippines continues to produce a large pool of skilled and globally competitive graduates, opportunities for advanced, world-class education and research remain limited, often pushing talent to seek these abroad.



**IN THE HOUSE.** Leyte Rep. Ferdinand Martin G. Romualdez engages fellow lawmakers on the House of Representatives' legislative agenda during Wednesday's session wherein his proposed National Land Use Act was passed by a vote of 224-3-0 on third and final reading. Ver Noveno

At the center of the proposal is the

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**MISSILE STRIKE.** Japan fires its land-based Type 88 surface-to-ship missile system during the maritime strike (MARSTRIKE) exercise on Wednesday, marking Tokyo's first full participation in the annual Philippines-United States Balikatan military drills. Inset shows President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. witnessing the strike together with the US embassy and the Exercises Balikatan officials. Department of National Defense/PCO

## House approves 4Ps expansion

By Maricel V. Cruz

SPEAKER Faustino G. Dy III said the government remains committed to lifting poor families out of poverty as the House of Representatives approved on third and final reading the measure strengthening and expanding the Pantawid Pamilyang

Pilipino Program (4Ps).

In a 224-3 vote with zero abstentions, the chamber on Tuesday overwhelmingly approved House Bill 8647, or the proposed "Patuloy ang Pagtawid sa Pamilyang Pilipino Act," to enhance and expand 4Ps in response

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**EALA BEATS FRECH 6-0, 3-6, 6-4 IN ROME**

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**DOH PUSHES FOR TOTAL VAPE BAN**

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# DOH pushes total ban on vapes

THE Department of Health (DOH) is pushing for a total ban on vape products, an official said Wednesday, as lawmakers reviewed regulations amid rising nicotine use among Filipino youth.

DOH officer-in-charge Director Dr. Dominic Maddumba said that if a full ban is not feasible, vape products should at least be limited to plain tobacco flavors to reduce their appeal to minors.

The DOH has warned that e-cigarettes and tobacco products can lead to cardiovascular disease, cancer, and other lung illnesses.

The World Health Organization ear-

lier flagged an “alarming” rise in nicotine addiction linked to e-cigarettes, with millions of children reportedly using vape products.

At the Senate, Sen. Risa Hontiveros raised concerns over increasing vape use among young Filipinos and questioned the effectiveness of existing safeguards.

The Senate Committee on Health and Demography on Wednesday tack-

led Senate Bills 21, 534, and 1918, or the proposed Vapes and HTPs Regulation Act, to reassess current policies.

“We believed that regulation would be enough, that safeguards would control access, and that risks could be managed. We have heard from doctors, experts, and even from the experiences in our communities: young people, some as young as 13 to 15, are already using vape products,” Hontiveros said.

## PBBM:...

From A1

areas, saying their safety would be a priority in summit discussions.

“Their safety is equally important, recognizing the contribution of overseas ASEAN nationals in our societies and our economies,” he said.

ASEAN Foreign Ministers last month encouraged the United States and Iran to press ahead with talks to end the Middle East war and ensure safe passage through the Strait of Hormuz.

Around 20 percent of the world’s seaborne oil trade passes through the Strait of Hormuz, according to the International Energy Agency, 80 percent of it bound for Asian markets.

Beyond energy concerns, President Marcos said the Middle East crisis could also affect food supply chains, prompting ASEAN leaders to reinforce mechanisms that ensure the steady flow of essential goods and support vulnerable sectors such as farmers and small businesses.

The summit, set to open on Friday, May 8, is set under the theme “Navigating Our Future, Together.”

“As one region, our efforts will truly be effective on the basis of a unified approach and collective vision,” Mr. Marcos said.

As this developed, ASEAN spokesperson Dominic Xavier Imperial said the Philippines will push for the adoption of three key regional measures, including the Cebu Protocol to amend the ASEAN Charter, the first revision since the charter was signed in 2007.

Imperial said the proposed amendment reflects efforts to strengthen ASEAN institutions, particularly as the bloc moves toward the full integration of Timor-Leste.

Leaders are also expected to endorse a declaration on maritime cooperation, aimed at boosting coordination across the region through initiatives such as elevating the ASEAN Coast Guard Forum into a formal sectoral body and advancing plans to establish an ASEAN Maritime Centre in the Philippines.

A third document, the ASEAN Leaders’ Statement on the Response to the Middle East crisis, outlines the bloc’s collective approach to ongoing tensions in the region. The statement builds on discussions from two special meetings of ASEAN foreign ministers convened earlier this year.

Imperial said the summit will also focus on broader regional priorities, including energy security, food security and the protection of ASEAN nationals, amid what he described as a period of increasing geopolitical uncertainty.

For his part, Trade Undersecretary Allan Gepty said the implementation of the proposed ASEAN Power Grid is among the Philippines’ priority economic deliverables.

He said the memorandum of understanding on the ASEAN Power Grid envisions cross-border electricity trade, allowing member states to share energy resources and stabilize supply across the region.

## VP Sara: Unfair to drag family in impeach raps

By Katrina Manubay

VICE President Sara Duterte on Tuesday said it is “unfair” to involve her family in the impeachment complaint against her, stressing that they are private individuals entitled to their right to privacy.

In a chance interview with reporters in The Hague, Duterte highlighted the importance of privacy, noting that, like the family members of lawmakers, they are ordinary citizens.

“I think it’s unfair dahil hindi naman

silang Vice President and hindi naman sila ini-impeach. And tulad ng mga asawa at mga anak din ng mga congressman, they have the right to privacy being ordinary individuals and private citizens,” she said.

In a House Justice Committee hearing, former senator Antonio Trillanes IV linked bank transactions involving the Vice President and other members of Duterte’s family to alleged drug lord Samuel Uy, reading and submitting his affidavit during the session.

Meanwhile, Duterte’s husband, Atty. Manases Carpio, filed a criminal complaint with the Quezon City Prosecutor’s Office over the disclosure of his family’s banking records.

He described the publication of the bank transaction reports as “pure propaganda.”

On the same day, a Quezon City regional trial court dismissed Carpio’s request for a 20-day temporary restraining order to stop the production of his Income Tax Return records before the House justice panel.

## 30 NUP...

From A1

We have a hardcore group that is still opposed to the proposal, and some who want to abstain. We will have one more round of district consultations, but the situation in NUP is that a majority favors transmitting the Articles of Impeachment,” Puno said.

“If you count Lakas-CMD with 60 votes, then 30 for us in NUP, and Partido Federal has 51 members—even if you just count 30 for Partido Federal, the number is already at 120. NPC has 49 members – if you count 30 for NPC, that brings it to 150. Then there are 63 party-list lawmakers, whose majority is really in favor of impeaching the Vice President... I suspect it will be about 180,” he added.

Senior Deputy Majority Leader and Iloilo Rep. Lorenz Defensor also expressed confidence the House would secure enough votes, citing both the evidence presented and Duterte’s failure to directly address the allegations.

Defensor said the House Committee on Justice’s 55-0 vote finding probable cause underscored the strength of the case.

“It’s clear that under the Constitution, only one-third is required, and it’s the same intention of the framers of our Constitution,” Defensor said in an ANC Headstart interview.

He also clarified the House vote is not a determination of guilt, but merely a constitutional mechanism to deter-

mine whether sufficient grounds exist to elevate the case to a Senate impeachment trial.

“The one-third vote is not a vote for conviction. It’s simply to transmit it because there is sufficient evidence to have a trial in the Senate impeachment court,” he said.

“And it’s up to them (senator-judges) whether they will acquit or they will convict the respondent,” Defensor added.

Meanwhile, the Upper Chamber may appoint a dedicated impeachment manager to oversee the potential impeachment trial against the Vice President, Senate President Pro Tempore Panfilo Lacson said on Wednesday.

The proposed role would function similarly to a floor leader to ensure the judicial proceedings remain organized and efficient if the Senate convenes as an impeachment court.

“Maybe Sen. (Francis) Pangilinan because he is a lawyer. It is better to have a lawyer who is experienced in trials so they can more or less signal to the Senate President whether an objection should be overruled or sustained,” Lacson said.

The initiative originated from Senate Majority Leader Juan Miguel Zubiri and has received support from Senate President Vicente Sotto III.

Maintaining a regular schedule is considered vital to ensure that priority bills and other essential government work do not suffer from delays, Lacson said.

## House...

From A1

to the needs of low-income households.

The Speaker from Isabela said that strengthening 4Ps is critical to breaking intergenerational poverty and ensuring that gains in social protection are not reversed.

He stressed that “our objective is to make a good program better. As our countrymen confront more challenges, the more help they will need. That is why we need to strengthen, expand, and improve the 4Ps.”

“The assistance continues for our countrymen who are most in need, and

we are fulfilling the promise of stronger and more expanded support for millions of Filipino families.”

The bill amends Republic Act 11310 to expand coverage, enhance benefits, and improve the delivery of the government’s conditional cash transfer program, with the goal of making assistance more responsive amid rising costs and economic pressures.

Dy said the measure reinforces the government’s long-term investment in human capital by ensuring that families have sustained access to education, health care, and basic support. He also expressed confidence that the expanded program will help secure a more inclusive and resilient future for Filipino families.

## Japan...

From A1

defense ties following the signing of a statement promoting cooperation on defense equipment and technology.

During the exercise, Japan fired its land-based Type 88 surface-to-ship missile system and made a direct hit at the Philippine Navy warship BRP Quezon. It marked Tokyo’s first full participation in the Balikatan, held annually between the Philippines and the United States armed forces.

Two missile rounds were launched from the Japan Ground Self-Defense Force (JGSDF)’s Type 88 missile system, targeting the BRP Quezon situated

## Eala beats Frech 6-0, 3-6, 6-4 in Rome

By Jeremiah Sevilla

FILIPINA tennis ace Alexandra Eala fended off Magdalena Frech of Poland for a hard-fought 6-0, 3-6, 6-4 victory and advanced to the second round of the Italian Open 2026 at the Foro Italico in Rome on Wednesday.

World No. 42 Eala squandered a perfect start, but got her bearings back in the deciding set to outlast the gritty No. 45 Frech in the Round of 128 of the WTA 1000 clay tournament.

With the win, the 20-year-old Eala surpassed her first-round finish in last year’s Italian Open while securing €25,515 or P1.8 million in prize money to go with 35 ranking points.

The 2022 US Open juniors champion also arranged a rematch with No. 33 Wang Xinyu of China in the Round of 64.

Eala got off to a searing start as she uncorked crisp forehand attacks and forced Frech to commit numerous errors to wrap up her flawless first set performance in just 27 minutes.

The Pinay lefty, however, fell to a 0-3 hole early in the second set and was not able to completely recover, allowing the former No. 22 Pole to forge a decider.

It was a neck and neck battle in the final set, with Eala nabbing a 4-3 lead before Frech put the match on a 4-4 deadlock.

Eala broke four deuces with a nifty topspin forehand before capitalizing on Frech’s costly errors to walk away victorious after a two-hour tussle.

## Bill...

From A1

establishment of Global Education Cities (GECs). These designated zones will host foreign higher education institutions (FHEIs) of recognized international standing.

Within these zones, institutions may operate at global standards under a defined regulatory framework while remaining aligned with national development priorities and constitutional safeguards.

The bill, according to Acidre, is structured to ensure that the entry of global institutions strengthens, rather than displaces, the local higher education sector.

It introduces safeguards to preserve the international character of foreign campuses and ensure complementarity with domestic institutions, while directing programs toward high-demand and underserved fields.

## NBI...

From A1

Meanwhile, Malacañang dissociated President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. from Mabanta, saying the President was not personally connected to the online political strategist.

NBI director Melvin Matibag disclosed this in a press briefing where Mabanta and the alleged cohorts were presented to the media.

The NBI charged that the suspects attempted to extort P350 million from Romualdez in exchange for not publishing a video about the lawmaker on

their online platform.

The NBI said the arrest was carried out after the suspects accepted marked money from agents posing as Romualdez’s representatives

“The marked money was accepted, so we could definitely say the crime had been consummated. As long as the money has not been accepted, we cannot make an arrest,” Matibag explained.

He said a complaint was filed by Romualdez’s representatives last year, but was revived about two weeks ago, leading to the operation.

Matibag declined to disclose details of the alleged video involving Romualdez.

However, Mabanta categorically denied the accusations against them.

“Not true,” he said, adding that the arrest violated his freedom of speech.

Matibag asserted that the case was not an attack on free expression, adding that the NBI will pursue charges based on evidence.

Mabanta is a Filipino digital strategist, social media personality, and political commentator who rose to prominence during the 2022 national elections due to his involvement in online political campaigns supporting eventual President Ferdinand Marcos Jr.

He has been widely identified in on-

line and media reports as a former social media director or digital campaign figure linked to Marcos’ presidential bid.

Over the years, Mabanta has built a following across Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and other platforms through political commentaries, livestreams, and discussions on national issues.

Mabanta founded the Peanut Gallery Media Network (PGMN), a digital podcast in 2024 to produce political commentary and online content.

Based on publicly available information, PGMN positions itself as an independent media network focused on politics, governance, and social issues.

The platform features several hosts and commentators discussing current events and national controversies, and primarily operates through social media channels including Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok.

Before his arrest, Mabanta remained active online, regularly posting political opinions, interviews, and commentary videos. His Instagram account describes him as being involved in PGMN and media production.

During a press briefing here in Lapu-Lapu City, Cebu, Presidential Communications Office Undersecretary Claire Castro said Mabanta was not a friend of the President.



Photo from the 46<sup>th</sup> ASEAN Summit in Malaysia

# 48<sup>TH</sup> ASEAN SUMMIT STARTS TOMORROW

## ENERGY SECURITY HIGH ON THE AGENDA

Amid the global energy problem brought about by the Middle East crisis, leaders of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations gather in Cebu tomorrow, May 8, for the 48th ASEAN Summit, with the region's energy security high on the agenda.

Leaders from all 11 ASEAN member-states—Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Timor-Leste, and Vietnam—will meet at the Mactan Expo in Lapu-Lapu City to discuss various concerns including economic resilience and sustainability; peace and security; food security; financial integration; digital transformation and people empowerment.

Most events will take place in Lapu-Lapu City, with additional activities in Cebu and Mandaue. About 3,000 delegates, including officials, staff, and international media, are expected.

The Leaders' Summit comes in the wake of supply-chain disruptions caused by the Middle East conflict that broke out on February 28, later worsened by the closure of the Strait of Hormuz, through which more than 25 percent of global crude oil passes.

"A disruption that begins in the Strait of Hormuz ripples through Singapore, the Strait of Malacca, and onward to Manila, Tokyo, Seoul, [and] Jakarta within days,"

President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. said during the Asia Zero Emission Control Summit on April 15, to emphasize the vulnerabilities shared by countries across Asia and ASEAN.

In one of several meetings that set the tone for the Summit, ASEAN's Economic Ministers recognized the close link between energy markets and economic stability and underscored the importance of strengthening regional energy security and resilience, given ASEAN's exposure to global supply routes and developments in international energy markets.

"We emphasized the need to manage energy consumption, diversify energy sources and supply routes,

particularly through biofuels and renewable energy, enhance regional cooperation on energy preparedness, and cooperation on reserves, including with ASEAN Dialogue Partners, and accelerate renewable energy transition and alternative energy development," the Ministers said in a statement.

The Meeting also called for continued collaboration to advance ASEAN's existing energy cooperation frameworks, including the ASEAN Framework Agreement on Petroleum Security (APSA), the ASEAN Power Grid (APG) Enhanced Memorandum of Understanding, and the Trans-ASEAN Gas Pipeline (TAGP), to ensure stable, secure, sustainable, and resilient energy connectivity and supply.

"It is clear that the ASEAN Framework Agreement on Petroleum Security (APSA) matters more now than at any point since its adoption," President Marcos also said.

The enhanced APSA, endorsed at last October's ASEAN Ministers on Energy Meeting in Kuala Lumpur, establishes the architecture for coordinated emergency responses, emergency supply sharing, and, critically, joint oil stockpiling.

President Marcos said the Philippines fully supports its operationalization.

The Philippines is hosting the Summit under the theme, "Navigating Our Future, Together."



MALACAÑAN PALACE  
MANILA

With great pride and a profound sense of purpose, we welcome our brothers and sisters from our ASEAN family to this historic 48th ASEAN Summit.

We gather at a time when the world is wrapped in tension and volatile fuel prices that have disrupted our economies and brought difficulties to our people. All these add to the challenges that we already face—from climate risks to digital divide to geopolitical uncertainty.

Now more than ever, our responses require more than just individual effort; they demand a unified, collective act and vision.

"Navigating Our Future, Together," is, therefore, more than just the theme of our Summit. It captures the strength of our solidarity in facing the challenges ahead and charting the course of our shared future.

Let this Summit then serve as a moment for action – when dialogue leads to results that benefit all of ASEAN.

Together, let us navigate the complexities of this time and forge a future that is secure, peaceful, stable, and prosperous for every ASEAN national.

Thank you to our fellow ASEAN members for the opportunity to chair this 48th Summit.

**Mabuhay!**

(Sgd.)

**FERDINAND R. MARCOS JR.**  
PRESIDENT  
Republic of the Philippines



Office of the President  
Malacañan



Distinguished leaders and partners across Southeast Asia: welcome to the Philippines.

As we gather for the 48th ASEAN Leaders' Summit, we come together as one region with a shared responsibility: to secure a brighter and more resilient future for all our peoples, especially in a time of uncertainty and rapid change.

As Chair of ASEAN 2026, the Philippines is guided by three priorities: Peace and Security, Prosperity, and People Empowerment. These reflect our commitment to keep our region stable, our economies growing, and our citizens at the center of progress.

But today's challenges demand more from us. With tensions in the Middle East affecting us all, this Summit is an opportunity to deepen collaboration on the issues that matter most: energy security, food security, and the safety of ASEAN nationals wherever they may be.

As host, the Philippines is determined to use this platform to advance concrete and sustainable solutions to current and future challenges in order to shape a better future for all. Let us match the scale of today's demands with the strength of our solidarity. We aim not only to overcome these difficulties, but to emerge stronger than ever.

With unity as our anchor, ASEAN will continue to be a force for good in the world. May our partnerships remain steadfast, our institutions responsive, and our aspirations bold as we "navigate our future, together."

**Mabuhay!**

(Sgd.)

**RALPH G. RECTO**  
ACTING EXECUTIVE SECRETARY  
Chair, 48<sup>th</sup> ASEAN Summit  
National Organizing Council





**NAVOTAS RESPONSE.** Metropolitan Manila Development Authority chair Don Artes, League of Cities of the Philippines President and San Juan City Mayor Francis Zamora, and Navotas City Mayor John Rey Tiangco preside over a coordination meeting with the NDRRMC and JICA's Japan Disaster Relief Team to discuss the situation and response to the Navotas Sanitary Landfill fire. Manny Palmero

## Voyage to 48th ASEAN Leaders' Summit continues

WHEN the Philippines assumed the 2026 chairship of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), it set the 11 member-states on a collective voyage toward a shared future of peace and security, economic prosperity, and an empowered citizenry.

Inspired by the theme "Navigating our Future, Together," a series of ministerial meetings from January to April charted a prudent and strategic course for the agenda now before the Leaders' Summit.

The ministers focused discussions on improving coordination for peace, advancing energy security and resilience, regional financial cooperation and capital development, climate change adaptation, digital transformation, and supporting Timor-Leste's integration.

As war in the Middle East broke out, ASEAN ministers also clarified the bloc's position and addressed the conflict's impact on the region and its people. The second Special Meeting of Foreign Ministers on April 13 underscored strengthening regional energy security and economic resilience, emphasizing solidarity in navigating external economic shocks, protecting ASEAN nationals, and enhancing energy preparedness through power integration, a shift to renewable energy, and prioritizing supply during crises.

Facilitating trade and investment, strengthening logistics connectivity, and reinforcing supply-chain resilience to ensure stable access to affordable essential goods—especially food and agricultural inputs through the possible expansion of the ASEAN Plus Three Emergency Rice Reserve (APTERR)—also took center stage.

The meeting reaffirmed the obligation of all states to resolve differences peacefully and respect sovereignty and territorial integrity in line with international law.

ASEAN finance ministers and central bank governors identified financial health as a regional priority and agreed to develop a measurement framework to support monitoring, evidence-based policymaking, and innovation in financial services. They endorsed the ASEAN Finance Sectoral Plan 2026–2030 in line with broader regional goals.

## PH welcomes Suu Kyi transfer, backs ASEAN envoy access

By Katrina Manubay

THE Philippines on Wednesday welcomed reports of Aung San Suu Kyi's transfer to house arrest and the partial reduction of her sentence, while urging Myanmar to grant the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) special envoy access to support inclusive dialogue.

In a statement issued by the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA), the Philippines, as ASEAN chair, expressed hope that Myanmar would allow Foreign Affairs Secretary and ASEAN Special Envoy to Myanmar Theresa Lazaro to have brief, direct access to the former leader.

"As such would be in line with the Special Envoy's role to engage with all stakeholders and parties to create an environment conducive to inclusive national dialogue," the statement read.

The DFA also called on Myanmar to ensure greater transparency in Suu Kyi's transfer, including permitting her to communicate with her family, as this "would demonstrate a genuine commitment to national reconciliation."

"We view these developments as vital steps in a sequence of confidence-building measures necessary for long-term national stability in Myanmar. To further build international confidence, we encourage Myanmar to provide greater transparency regarding this transfer by allowing Daw Aung San Suu Kyi to communicate with her family, which would demonstrate a genuine commitment to national reconciliation," it added.

The statement responds to reports that the son of the former leader is seeking independently verified proof of his mother's well-being.

## IN BRIEF

### Comelec approves MILF political party in BARMM

THE Commission on Elections (Comelec) approved the accreditation of the political party associated with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), clearing it to participate in the first parliamentary elections of the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM).

In a 17-page decision dated May 6, the Comelec en banc denied separate petitions filed by Sahabudin Panambulan Usop and Gasanara Dibaraten seeking to block the registration of the United Bangsamoro Justice Party (UBJP).

The poll body instead granted the party's "Verified Manifestation of Intent in Lieu of a Petition for Registration," formally recognizing it as a regional political party eligible to field candidates in the 2026 BARMM parliamentary elections.

"Wherefore, premises considered, the Commission (en banc) resolved to grant" the UBJP's registration for purposes of participating in the 2026 BARMM parliamentary polls, the decision read.

The ruling was issued during the filing period for certificates of candidacy, from May 5 to May 7, as the region prepares for a transition to a fully elected Bangsamoro government. **Vito Barcelo**

### SC: Paternity required for abuse under Anti-VAWC

PATERNITY must be proven to convict a person of economic abuse under the Anti-Violence Against Women and Their Children (VAWC) Act, the Supreme Court said Wednesday.

In a decision, the SC's Third Division emphasized that a legal duty to provide financial support arises only after filiation or paternity has been established.

The High Tribunal added that when a birth certificate is used to prove filiation, it must be signed by both the mother and the father.

It said the prosecution must show that the victim is a woman and/or her child, and that the woman is the offender's wife, partner, or someone with whom the offender has a common child.

The Court added that refusal to give financial support must be proven intentional and meant to cause mental or emotional suffering, even if paternity has already been established. **Pot Chavez**

# South China Sea COC talks on steady progress

By Katrina Manubay

**M**ACTAN, CEBU — The South China Sea Code of Conduct (COC) talks are making steady progress, with continued Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)-China engagements amid broader regional concerns, including tensions in the Middle East, Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) ASEAN spokesperson Dax Imperial said

In a press briefing ahead of the 48th ASEAN Leaders' Summit and related meetings on Wednesday, Imperial noted that although the COC is an ASEAN-related process, it remains a separate negotiation, showing consistent progress and commitment from all parties.

"We are encouraged by the progress that we are seeing; also very encouraged by the commitment of all parties—so, this is the 10 ASEAN countries and China sitting down together—we are very encouraged by that commitment," he said.

In an exclusive interview with Manila Standard, Imperial highlighted the importance of regular meetings to maintain momentum, noting that monthly gatherings help address contentious issues promptly.

"But if there are monthly meetings, then the contentious issues are immediately addressed rather than delayed. So that's why we think the frequency of these meetings is important for the conclusion of the negotiations," he told Manila Standard.

He confirmed that priority topics such as the South China Sea, including the COC talks and Myanmar's Five-Point Consensus, will continue alongside discussions on energy, food, and migrant workers.

"Momentum is sustained. So as I said or mentioned earlier, while there are recalibrations that were made, the commitment to continue the discussions is there," he added.

Following the ASEAN Ministers' Retreat in January, DFA Secretary Theresa Lazaro announced that ASEAN technical working groups will meet monthly in person to accelerate negotiations on a binding COC, aiming to finalize it this year under Philippine chairship.

Senior officials from the Philippines and China met in Cebu in January to resume COC negotiations after more than a year.

This was followed by a second round in Beijing on February 27–28, with the Philippines represented by DFA Assistant Secretary Marshall Louis Alferez.

The COC negotiations have been ongoing for nearly 17 years.



**BRGY AID.** The Manila city government receives its share of the Bawat Barangay Makikinabang (BBM) Socio-Civic Projects Fund from the Office of the President on Wednesday. Mayor Francisco Moreno Domagoso vows swift implementation of the program benefiting the city's 896 barangays.

## Navotas landfill fire now 79% contained, says disaster officials

By Joel E. Zurbano

THE Metro Manila Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council (MMDR-RMC) convened on Wednesday to provide a status update on the Navotas Sanitary Landfill fire incident, reporting that the fire is now 79.6 percent contained.

Council chairman and concurrent MMDA chief Don Artes said the discussion focused on the situation on the ground, ongoing actions, and the equipment being used to effectively address the issue.

"Moving forward, the incident will serve as a learning experience to improve preparedness and response capabilities," Artes said.

President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. instructed Department of National Defense (DND) Secretary Gilberto Teodoro Jr. to seek technical assistance from foreign partners, including expert teams from Japan and the

United States, to address the Navotas Sanitary Landfill fire.

"The DND chief reached out to our foreign partners, who promptly responded and committed to providing continued support for the needs of Navotas," said Special Envoy for Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Maria Antonia Yulo-Loyzaga.

Navotas City Mayor John Rey Tiangco expressed his gratitude to the MMDA for convening the meeting.

"I am thankful to Chairman Artes for convening this meeting. To provide a status update, the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) reported that the air quality index in Metro Manila remains within acceptable or normal levels despite the recent incident involving the sanitary landfill. Additionally, we are using a drone with thermal imaging capability to assess the possibility of ignition within the 44-hectare site," Tiangco said.



**'OURS.'** Civil society coalition Atin Ito forms a large human inscription spelling 'ATIN ITO' along the shores of Pag-asa Island, asserting the Philippines' sovereignty and territorial rights in the West Philippine Sea. Atin Ito.

REPUBLIC OF THE PHILIPPINES  
COMMISSION ON APPOINTMENTS  
Twentieth Congress  
First Regular Session

ANNOUNCEMENT

President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. has submitted to the Commission on Appointments (CA), for its consent to the nomination of:

Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA)

Mr. NOEL MANGAOANG NOVICIO  
Chief of Mission, Class II, as Non-Resident Ambassador to the Republic of Kiribati, the Republic of Nauru, Independent State of Samoa, Kingdom of Tonga, Tuvalu, and the Republic of Vanuatu, in addition to being Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary to the Republic of Fiji

The public may submit any information, written report, or sworn/notarized complaints or oppositions to the above nomination in seven (7) copies to the CA Secretariat, 6<sup>th</sup> Floor, PNB Financial Center, D. Macapagal Blvd., Pasay City, Metro Manila.

For the schedule of the public hearings, the CA Secretariat can be reached through telephone numbers 8834-2713, 8831-1824, 8831-0527, 8832-9830, 8834-2706 and 8551-1989.

05 May 2026.

*Myla Marie D. Villarica*  
MYLA MARIE D. VILLARICA  
Secretary

(MS-MAY 7, 2026)



**So I See**  
Lito Banayo

## Drowning in politics

KALOOKAN'S Egay Erice has declared that he will not vote when the House in plenary session decides on the articles of impeachment crafted by its committee on injustice, after collecting the signatures of at least a third of the HoR members.

Hiding behind the masquerade of "accountability," men and women with different personal and partisan motives, not to mention, visions of pork rewards, engaged in a fishing expedition along with ludicrous testimonies, to erase In-day Sara Duterte from contention in the 2028 presidential elections.

"This is not about accountability. This is about partisan politics, destroying enemies using instrumentalities of government like the NBI, the AMLC, to persecute political opponents," Erice lamented.

Thus, Erice, one of very few true-blue Liberals, has decided not to participate in a sham.

Removed as senior deputy minority leader because of his outspoken views on current bad governance, openly accusing the president of insincerity and double talk, he was replaced by a fellow Liberal, Leila de Lima, who was detained during the term of the former president for allegedly bedding with drug lords, an accusation later dismissed by our justice system.

I first met Egay Erice when he would accompany Virgilio Robles, one among the 60 candidates of the UNIDO opposition coalition to triumph against the dictator's KBL in the Batasang Pambansa of 1986. We were both young at the time, still learning the ropes of political praxis.

Robles, popularly nicknamed "Biyo" later became mayor of Metro Manila's northern city after Edsa Uno, and Egay became his chief of staff.

He was elected congressman after a stint in the city council, and despite long years as such, he never fathered a political dynasty. And ever since, Erice has tried to introduce legislation that would finally define and curtail the dynasty epidemic in our politics.

In 2016, when many of his fellow Liberals slyly dumped their presidential candidate Mar Roxas in favor of Grace Poe, he stood by Mar, whose grandfather founded the Liberal Party in 1945. He continues to swear by Mar's competence and integrity, which even this writer acknowledges though I supported Duterte's quest in 2016.

In February last year, 215 congressmen rushed to sign the articles of impeachment against the embattled vice-president after being assured of rewards imbedded in the most criminal budget in Philippine history.

The studious Erice who was not a part of the 19th Congress, traced the criminality to all three GAAs signed by Pres. Marcos Jr. since his very first year in office.

Rehashed this year after the Senate and the Supreme Court thrashed their

first attempt to remove Sara from political existence, "avengers posing as champions of accountability" mounted their mini-trial on live TV.

The committee chairperson supposedly owes millions in legal fees payable to Sara's husband Mans who defended her husband from charges of rape.

One of the most vocal persecutors of the committee who claims to be from Bicol via the party-list system, was appointed to an agency in charge of the urban poor by the vice-president's father, who soon fired him for penchant to travel around the world at government expense.

“  
*This charade is all about eliminating the most popular presidential candidate from the race of 2028*

Another is a reverend who "blessed" then presidential wannabe Duterte and in a brief first meeting arranged by his kind brother-pastor. There he unabashedly applied to be a member of the future president's cabinet with the view of running for senator in the 2019 mid-terms. Duterte walked out of that meeting at the Fairmont Hotel lobby after listening to the reverend politician's conditional support.

Another prominent member who has been doing the rounds of media interviews won re-election last year despite the vice-president's campaign forays into his Manila district, whose popular mayor likened his name to a cute pet canine.

The other prominent prosecutor-persecutors in the committee on injustice are members of the vociferous hardline Left and those buoyed by an encouraging party-list victory of their once-decimated ranks in the last mid-term polls.

It is clear to many, both Diehard Duterte Supporters (DDS) and those who simply want to survive this era of bad governance like no other in our contemporary history, that this charade is all about eliminating the most popular presidential candidate from the race of 2028.

The Diehard Duterte Haters (DDH) dread the resurgence of "Dutertismo," thinking without introspective character reading that Inday Sara will be no different from the father they hated and succeeded in banishing to Den Hag.

Which is why Erice, neither DDS nor a BbM temporary ally, would rather focus on the things that matter: ways and means for the poor to survive this economic crisis which is worse than the pandemic of 2020-2022, and championing solutions in a country drowning in politics.



**Duty Calls**  
Florencio Fianza

## Lessons learned

WITH Zaldy Co now in France applying for political asylum, the government has struggled to provide a convincing explanation as to what went wrong or whether it should have handled the situation differently.

When Zaldy Co was reported to have been stopped at the Czech border with Germany for alleged travel document violations it was front page news. The public must have thought that after months of uncertainty, the full story of the flood control corruption scandal could now be finally told.

As we have seen however, the euphoria was premature because what the government wanted did not come out according to plan. This is partly because the government seem to have rushed into action without much research and planning and ended without any substantive results.

The high delegation trip, for instance, was not necessary at all since the information gathered could have been provided by our embassy in that country and saved the government a lot of unnecessary expense.

What the public ended up watching on TV were simply clips of the high level meeting on Zaldy Co and the delega-

tion head saying that Zaldy is still in the Schengen area which the public could have figured out themselves.

But perhaps the reason of the administration for sending a high level delegation and PBBM meeting with the French and Czech ambassadors was to show to the public the government's seriousness in finally resolving the flood control issue.

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*It is basically back to the drawing board for our agencies handling the flood control investigations*

This was not unreasonable but as we have seen, the efforts did not achieve anything.

On the contrary, after going to all the effort and still failing to announce a definite date when Zaldy Co could finally be brought home, the administration will now have to find a new strategy that will work.

## EDITORIAL

# How real is press freedom in PH?

**T**HE Philippines has posted a slight climb in the World Press Freedom Index from 116th to 114th. Should this be cause for celebration?

On paper, an upward movement suggests incremental progress.

In substance, however, the underlying indicators tell a more troubling story: the country's overall score has actually declined, and the environment for journalism remains categorized as "difficult."

This dissonance between rank and reality underscores a key point often overlooked in comparative indices: relative improvement can actually hide deterioration.

The global context explains part of this paradox. According to Reporters Without Borders (RSF), press freedom worldwide is at its lowest level since 2001, with more than half of all countries now falling into the "difficult" or "very serious" categories.

The Philippines' marginal rise is therefore less a function of domestic reform than of sharp declines elsewhere. In comparative politics, this is a classic case of "improving by default," where a country appears to advance simply because others deteriorate more dramatically.

The domestic picture remains deeply concerning. The persistence of "red-tagging,"

or the practice of labeling journalists and activists as communist or terrorist sympathizers, continues to exert a chilling effect on the media.

The case of Frenchie Mae Cumpio illustrates how legal mechanisms can be weaponized to silence critical reporting.

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*Relative improvement can actually hide deterioration*

Prolonged detention on what observers describe as dubious terrorism charges shows not only the vulnerability of individual journalists but also the fragility of institutional safeguards intended to protect press freedom.

The RSF's disaggregated indicators further illuminate structural weaknesses. Our low scores in political and economic dimensions point to alarming pressures from both the state and market forces.

Politically, adversarial rhetoric and legal harassment foster an environment where self-censorship be-

comes a rational survival strategy.

Economically, the decline of print media, particularly regional outlets, erodes the diversity of voices and weakens local accountability mechanisms.

When community newspapers fold up, the information vacuum is often filled by less rigorous or more partisan sources, compounding the risks of misinformation.

Equally significant is the global trend toward the legal constriction of journalism.

RSF has noted the expansion of national security frameworks that can be used to curtail reporting. In the Philippine context, such laws intersect with counterinsurgency policies, blurring the line between legitimate security concerns and the suppression of dissent.

This convergence raises serious questions about proportionality and due process, particularly when journalists become targets of anti-terror legislation.

The broader implication is that press freedom in the Philippines is not merely a media issue but more importantly, a governance issue.

A constrained press limits transparency, weakens democratic accountability, and narrows the space for public deliberation.

The modest improvement in the country's ranking press freedom should not distract us from the urgent need for reform.



EVERYMAN

## When Leviste's ambition turns predatory

By Annie Santos

AMBITION is expected in politics. It drives competition, fuels campaigns, and pushes people to win.

But there is a point where ambition stops being healthy—and starts becoming predatory.

Executive Secretary Ralph Recto's sharp and direct statement against neophyte congressman Leandro Leviste outlines what that line looks like when it is crossed.

Persistence despite rejection. Escalation after refusal. The belief that if the price is increased high enough, resistance will eventually collapse.

That is not negotiation. That is pressure. And it reflects a dangerous assumption: that everything—and everyone—can be worn down, bought out, or manipulated given enough resources and persistence.

This is not just aggressive politics. This is corrosive behavior. Because it erodes the very idea of boundaries.

When "no" is treated as a temporary obstacle instead of a final answer, it reveals a mindset that does not recognize limits. It suggests a person who is not used to being denied—and more importantly, not willing to accept denial.

That is where ambition becomes dan-

gerous.

Recto's account does not just describe an incident. It describes a pattern of behavior—push harder, offer more, insist further.

And when that fails, pivot to narrative warfare. Discredit. Distract. Flood the space with claims, insinuations, and noise.

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*Recto's account... describes a pattern of behavior—push harder, offer more, insist further*

It is a predictable playbook.

Fail to secure influence privately, then attempt to regain advantage publicly—through pressure, through perception, through repetition.

But here is the problem with that strategy: it only works if people forget what happened before the noise began.

Recto's decision to speak disrupts that cycle.

It reframes the issue from personality clashes to behavioral patterns. It forces the conversation back to fundamentals:

respect for boundaries, acceptance of refusal, and the limits of acceptable conduct.

There is also a deeper layer to this.

Predatory ambition does not stop at individuals. It extends to systems. It looks for weaknesses—legal gaps, institutional delays, public confusion—and exploits them.

It thrives in ambiguity. That is why clarity matters.

Because once behavior is named for what it is, it becomes harder to justify, harder to disguise, and harder to repeat without scrutiny.

Recto's statement, at its core, is not just defensive. It is diagnostic.

It identifies a mindset that is increasingly visible but rarely confronted directly—the belief that power is something to be seized at any cost, rather than earned within limits.

And that belief, left unchecked, does not just damage reputations. It damages institutions.

Because when ambition is allowed to operate without restraint, it stops being about public service—and becomes something else entirely.

Something far more dangerous. And far more difficult to undo.

*(The writer is a native Batangueña and a digital creator who has worked in e-commerce, media, advertising, product development, and events management).*

With not knowing his exact location, there is indeed the big possibility that he will not be coming home anytime soon if at all. And we can look at some examples to show that this can happen.

The case of Harry Roque is one example.

He is also a fugitive from justice but he remains in the Netherlands while awaiting the results of his political asylum application.

In the meantime, he goes about trying to embarrass the government at every opportunity. Zaldy Co in all probability could end up like him.

The case of late CPP/NPA supremo Joma Sison is another good example.

He spent many years in the Netherlands eventually dying there several years ago.

Previous governments also protested his apparent sanctuary status in that country to no avail. What this tells us is we should not expect so much help from

many European countries.

Even if France will initially reject Co's asylum application, this could be easily appealed to the European Court.

We have to remember also that Europe is so hung up on human rights which is another hurdle to overcome.

It is not so easy to deport an individual applying for political asylum claiming political persecution in Europe. This is not helped if a country is viewed by them as not having a sterling reputation when it comes to human rights issues and peace and order cases.

And if the public is wondering why the application was filed in France, this must be because it was his initial port of entry when he flew to Europe from the United States.

The administration could have avoided this situation it got itself into if the people who orchestrated the hunt for Zaldy Co were more familiar with the way Europe treats cases of this nature.

As the DILG Secretary explained in his apology, his mistake was assuming that other countries react in the same way as we do in such cases.

Another error is also the thinking that other countries treat an Interpol red notice like the way we do which is not the case.

In that Malacanang meeting between PBBM and the two European ambassadors, both ladies did not even confirm to PBBM whether Zaldy Co is in their jurisdiction, citing privacy laws.

So, it is basically back to the drawing board for our agencies handling the flood control investigations. Hopefully, these agencies can come up with a workable plan.

Otherwise, the investigations will simply proceed without Zaldy Co.

But if this happens, the country will end up with just part of the story and not the whole story which will in all probability not satisfy the public.

PM's cousin says  
owned 30% of  
scam-linked firm

PHNOM PENH – A cousin of Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Manet said Wednesday he owned a 30 percent stake in a digital payments platform linked to cyberscams and money laundering and sanctioned by Washington.

The US government last year accused Huione Group, which owned several companies offering e-commerce, payment and cryptocurrency exchange services, including Huione Pay, of laundering funds for transnational criminal groups perpetrating scams from Southeast Asia.

Huione's former chairman, Li Xiong, was extradited to China last month. Chinese authorities say he was central to a major transnational gambling and fraud syndicate and is suspected of multiple crimes.

"I would like to inform the public that I have indeed owned 30 percent of shares in HUIONE PAY PLC," businessman Hun To said in a statement.

Li owned 62 percent of Huione Pay's shares, while Hun To owned 30 percent, according to a report by liquidator Reachs & Partners.

Huione Pay's liquidation was completed in October 2025, it said.

Hun To said he did not manage the business operations of Huione Pay and "never received any profits, dividends or assets from that company".

The premier's relative was previously listed as a director of Huione Pay on the commerce ministry's online business registry. **AFP**

## IN BRIEF

Teen shooter kills  
2 at Brazil school

RIO DE JANEIRO – A teenage boy shot dead two staff members and injured two other people, including a student, at a school in northeast Brazil on Tuesday (Wednesday, Manila time), prompting panicked students to try to escape over a wall, authorities and a witness said.

A 13-year-old boy was arrested over the attack at Sao Jose Institute in Rio Branco, the capital of Acre state, the local government said in a statement.

Eduardo Rodrigues Cavalcante, who works as a receptionist at a hotel adjacent to the school, told AFP that when the shooting began, some students tried to jump over a wall separating the school from the hotel.

"The wall is six meters high, and only one person managed to jump over and take refuge here in the hotel. The other people were left on the school roof trying to escape," the 19-year-old receptionist said, adding that he heard "gunshots and a lot of screaming."

Images released by a local media outlet showed a woman being evacuated on a stretcher and people crying and hugging each other outside the school. **AFP**

Gala suspect slapped  
with add'l charge

WASHINGTON, DC – A US jury slapped the suspect in last month's media gala attack with an additional charge of allegedly shooting a Secret Service officer, the Department of Justice said Tuesday (Wednesday, Manila time).

The fourth charge -- assaulting a federal officer with a deadly weapon -- comes on top of three charges filed against Cole Tomas Allen, 31, when he appeared in court two days after the incident.

Over the weekend, Jeanine Pirro, the federal prosecutor overseeing the case, said this past weekend that investigators found "a pellet" from the ammunition in Allen's gun "intertwined with the fiber of the vest of the Secret Service officer."

The indictment, handed down by a federal grand jury Tuesday, formally charges Allen with the assault on the officer.

Previously, Allen was charged with attempting to assassinate President Donald Trump, transportation of a firearm and ammunition across state lines with intent to commit a felony, as well as using, carrying, brandishing and discharging a firearm during a crime of violence. **AFP**

Apple agrees to \$250-m  
settlement over AI claims

SAN FRANCISCO – Apple on Tuesday agreed to pay \$250 million to settle a class action lawsuit accusing it of misleading millions of iPhone buyers by falsely touting artificial intelligence capabilities for its Siri voice assistant in late 2024.

Plaintiffs accused the California tech giant of having "promoted AI capabilities that did not exist at the time, do not exist now, and will not exist for two or more years" in order to boost iPhone sales, the document -- reviewed by AFP -- stated.

The Better Business Bureau's National Advertising Division, the US advertising watchdog, had also concluded that Apple falsely suggested the new AI-powered Siri was "available now."

The settlement filed Tuesday for court approval, which includes no admission of wrongdoing by Apple, covers roughly 36 million eligible devices -- the iPhone 16, as well as the iPhone 15 Pro and 15 Pro Max -- purchased in the United States between June 10, 2024 and March 29, 2025. **AFP**

## Trump says pausing Hormuz operation in push for Iran deal

WASHINGTON, DC – President Donald Trump said Tuesday he was halting the US military operation to escort ships through the Strait of Hormuz after just one day, in a bid to reach a deal with Iran to end the Middle East war.

Trump's so-called "Project Freedom" to help vessels leave the Strait of Hormuz, the narrow chokepoint to the Gulf where Iran

has seized control in response to being attacked, began on Monday.

But the US leader said on Truth Social that he was now pausing it after a request by mediator Pakistan and other countries, saying that "Great Progress has been made toward a Complete and Final Agreement" with Tehran.

"We have mutually agreed that, while

the Blockade will remain in full force and effect, Project Freedom... will be paused for a short period of time to see whether or not the Agreement can be finalized and signed," Trump said.

Washington is maintaining a blockade of Iran's ports in a bid to pressure Iran to make a deal to end the war that the United States and Israel launched on February 28.

Tensions had been soaring over the Hormuz operation, with the United States saying it had sunk seven Iranian boats, and several civilian vessels coming under attack, allegedly from Iran.

US Secretary of State Marco Rubio said earlier Tuesday that the United States has completed its offensive operations against Iran, which it dubbed "Operation Epic Fury." **AFP**

Ukraine: Russia ignored  
Kyiv-proposed ceasefire

**MUSK VS. OPENAI.** William Savitt, lead attorney for OpenAI, speaks with reporters outside the federal courthouse during proceedings in the trial over Elon Musk's lawsuit against OpenAI in Oakland, California, on April 30, 2026. Elon Musk took the stand April 28 to accuse OpenAI and its boss Sam Altman of betraying the AI company's altruistic origins, in a trial that could have far-reaching consequences for the industry and oblige the ChatGPT maker to profoundly revamp its business. The legal clash across the bay from San Francisco is widely seen as a battle of egos pitting the world's richest person against a startup Musk once backed and now trails in the booming AI sector. **AFP**

## Musk 'was going to hit me,' OpenAI exec says

OAKLAND – OpenAI President Greg Brockman told a California jury Tuesday (Wednesday, Manila time) that Elon Musk physically threatened him during a 2017 confrontation, testifying that the billionaire stormed out after he was refused absolute control of the artificial intelligence company.

"I actually thought he was going to hit me," Brockman said.

The testimony came on the second day of Brockman's appearance at the trial of Musk's lawsuit against OpenAI and CEO Sam Altman, in which the Tesla and SpaceX founder accuses the com-

pany of betraying its original nonprofit mission.

According to Musk, the company pivoted to a for-profit structure and misappropriated his \$38 million founding donation to build a company now valued at more than \$850 billion.

OpenAI counters that Musk left voluntarily after failing to seize majority control and has since become the company's direct competitor through his own AI venture, xAI.

Under cross-examination by OpenAI attorney Sarah Eddy, Brockman sought to reframe diary entries that Musk's law-

yers had used the previous day to portray him as a calculating opportunist.

One November 2017 entry read: "It'd be wrong to steal the non-profit from him... That'd be pretty morally bankrupt."

"It's very painful, very deeply personal writings that were never meant for the world to see, but there's nothing in there I'm ashamed of," Brockman said in court.

Brockman also testified that when Musk announced his departure from OpenAI in February 2018, he told staff he intended to pursue AI development inside Tesla without regard for safety. **AFP**

Bondi Beach mass shooting  
accused faces 19 extra charges

SYDNEY – A man accused of murdering 15 people in an antisemitic mass shooting at Australia's Bondi Beach is facing a raft of fresh charges, court records released Wednesday showed.

Naveed Akram is accused of opening fire as families thronged Bondi Beach for a Hanukkah celebration in December.

The 24-year-old has already been charged with dozens of serious crimes, including 15 murders and committing an act of terrorism.

Court records showed he is now facing 19 additional charges, including multiple counts of shooting with intent to murder, wounding with intent to murder, and discharging a firearm with intent to resist arrest.

Akram, who is being held in a high-security prison, is yet to indicate how he will plead.

His father and alleged co-conspirator Sajid, 50, was shot and killed by police

during the assault.

The charges were released after a sweeping inquiry opened public hearings into Australia's deadliest mass shooting for 30 years.

"The sharp spike of antisemitism that we have witnessed in Australia has been mirrored in other Western countries and seems clearly linked to events in the Middle East," inquiry chief Virginia Bell said in opening remarks earlier this week.

"It's important that people understand how quickly those events can prompt ugly displays of hostility towards Jewish Australians simply because they are Jews."

The mass shooting has sparked national soul-searching about antisemitism and widespread anger over the failure to shield Jewish Australians from harm.

Australia announced a suite of gun law reforms following the shootings, including a nationwide gun buyback scheme. **AFP**



**RUBIO'S PHRASE.** US Secretary of State Marco Rubio takes questions from reporters during a press briefing in the Brady Briefing Room of the White House in Washington, DC, on Wednesday, Manila time. Rubio on the eve of a Vatican visit played down President Donald Trump's criticism of Pope Leo XIV, who stood firm in calling for the promotion of peace. Trump, in an extraordinary attack on the leader of the world's 1.4 billion Catholics, last month took to social media to call the pope 'WEAK on crime, and terrible for foreign policy.' **AFP**

KYIV – Kyiv on  
Wednesday said  
Russia violated a  
unilateral ceasefire that  
it called for, by attacking  
eastern and southern  
Ukraine with more than  
100 drones a day after  
Russian strikes killed  
almost 30 Ukrainian  
civilians.

Russia rained missiles on several Ukrainian cities on Tuesday, as Moscow gears up to mark its patriotic May 9 parade on Red Square, marking victory over Nazi Germany in World War II.

Moscow had never said it would abide by Kyiv's call to halt fire starting midnight on May 6 — a counter-truce called for by President Volodymyr Zelenskyy after Russia announced a ceasefire to cover its Victory Day parade in Moscow on Saturday.

Zelenskyy had dismissed Russia's "utter cynicism" for calling for a ceasefire to protect the parade — one of the most important days of the year for Russian leader Vladimir Putin — while launching deadly strikes on his country.

"This shows that Russia rejects peace and its fake calls for a ceasefire on May 9th have nothing to do with diplomacy," Ukrainian Foreign Minister Andriy Sybiga said on social media, adding on Wednesday.

"Putin only cares about military parades, not human lives."

A Ukrainian officer at the eastern front told AFP anonymously that "the enemy continued to carry out infantry raids and attempts to storm our positions."

He said that since Russia "did not comply" with the Kyiv-suggested ceasefire, "our unit responded in kind and countered all provocations."

Another frontline commander said: "The intensity of combat operations remains at the same level."

His unit, he said, was also responding: "An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth!"

Kyiv said at least one person was killed in the strikes.

The Kremlin has not commented on the Kyiv-proposed ceasefire, only demanding that Ukraine comply to halt attacks for May 9 — which has become a central event during the 26 years of President Vladimir Putin's rule. **AFP**



**SCARE FOR TOURISTS.** An aerial view of an ambulance boat carrying crew members wearing hazmat suits as they approach the pilot door on the starboard side of the cruise ship MV Hondius, while stationary off the port of Praia, the capital of Cape Verde, on May 5, 2026. Two seriously ill crew members on a cruise ship stricken by a deadly hantavirus outbreak will be evacuated via Cape Verde to the Netherlands, allowing the vessel to sail on to Spain's Canary Islands, the ship operator said. **AFP**

Human-to-human hantavirus strain  
confirmed in cruise passenger ship

JOHANNESBURG – The Andes strain of the hantavirus that is transmissible between humans has been confirmed in a passenger evacuated to South Africa from a stricken cruise ship, the health minister said Wednesday.

A day earlier, the ship's Dutch operator Oceanwide Expeditions said there were 149 people on board, including a deceased German passenger.

It said there were 88 passengers from 15 countries, including 19 from Britain, 17 from the United States 13 from Spain and eight from the Netherlands.

There are 61 crew members, from 12 countries, including 38 from the Philippines, five from Ukraine, five from the Netherlands and four from Britain, it said.

Three people from the cruise ship have died, one of them in Johannesburg after she was transferred on a commercial flight from the Atlantic island of Saint

Helena.

Another passenger, a British national, was evacuated separately and is in a Johannesburg hospital.

"The preliminary tests show that, indeed, this is the Andes strain," South Africa's health minister Aaron Motsoaledi told a parliament committee.

"And it happens to be the only strain out of the 38 that is known to cause human-to-human transmission."

"But as we said, we want to repeat again, such transmission is very rare and only happens due to very close contact between people."

WHO has said there are two confirmed and five suspected cases of the virus.

South African authorities are tracing nearly 90 people who were on the flight that transported a 69-year-old Dutch woman who died in Johannesburg after her husband, 70, died of the virus on the ship. **AFP**

## DSWD calls out 4Ps bashers for selfish motives

THE Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) has issued a warning against social media users pretending to be beneficiaries of the Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (4Ps) for online clout, content, views, or public attention inciting public hate.

"DSWD strongly reminds netizens not to pretend to be 4Ps beneficiaries for personal popularity on social media. This sets a bad example in using online platforms to deceive others," assistant secretary and spokesperson Secretary Irene Dumlao.

Dumlao issued the statement in connection with various online content creators posing as 4Ps beneficiaries on Facebook to gather views and promote negative stereotypes against the program's beneficiaries.

She emphasized that misrepresenting oneself as a 4Ps beneficiary is "irresponsible and disrespectful" to the millions of legitimate beneficiaries who rely on the program for the education and health of their children.

"4Ps is a government program intended for the poorest and most needy Filipino families. Using the identities of beneficiaries as a joke or content strategy is a mockery of their dignity. It also spreads false information or 'fake news' that affects the integrity of the program," Dumlao pointed out.

Instead of promoting disinformation and misinformation online, the Dumlao urged netizens to use social media as a tool to disseminate accurate and relevant information on government programs and services.

"We would like to encourage the public, especially content creators and other online personalities, to be responsible social media users. Let us be careful and sensitive, especially when discussing our government's programs that directly affect the lives of our countrymen," she said.

Dumlao also urged the public to verify information on DSWD's programs and services through its official communication platforms such as the DSWD official website: [www.dswd.gov.ph](http://www.dswd.gov.ph) and official Facebook page: [facebook.com/dswdserves](https://www.facebook.com/dswdserves). **Maricel V. Cruz**



**PMA TOPNOTCHERS.** Females outnumber the males (six to four) in this year's honor roll of the elite Philippine Military Academy in Baguio City. The topnotch graduates are Cadets First Class Iway Inchan Ateo-an, John Roy Erauda Baran, Elaine Lyka Oagdan Canaya, Earl Asnan Berlin Asuncion, Adriane Faith Pe San Jose, Joyce Hanna Marie Danao Pascua, Beatrice Solamo Geralde, Elaine Ruth Sunico Go, and Kairan Shem Flor Resurreccion. Dave Leprozo

## House ratifies bill reinforcing sexual equality in workplaces

By Maricel V. Cruz

**T**HE House of Representatives has approved on third and final reading a bill expanding the prohibited acts of discrimination against women in employment, strengthening legal protection against unequal pay, biased promotions, unfair assignment, denial of benefits, and sex-based dismissal.

The bill was approved by an overwhelming 227-vote during Tuesday's plenary session.

House Majority Leader and Ilocos Norte Rep. Ferdinand Alexander Marcos, one of the principal authors, said House Bill (HB) 7704 updates the Labor Code to better reflect how discrimination actually happens in the workplace today.

"Discrimination is not always loud or obvious.

Sometimes it is hidden in lower pay, fewer assignments, withheld benefits or decisions that quietly push women aside, and that is exactly the kind of workplace we want the law to address," Marcos said, adding that the passage was part of the pro-women legislation under the leadership of Speaker Faustino Dy III.

The measure amends Article 133 of the Labor

Code by making it unlawful for an employer to discriminate against any woman-employee solely on account of sex in terms and conditions of employment.

It keeps the prohibition against paying women lower compensation, including wages, salary, remuneration and fringe benefits, than a male employee for work of equal value.

The bill also expands the prohibition against favoring males over female employees in promotion by adding assignment and employment benefits to the list of covered areas.

It further prohibits employers from favoring males in the dismissal of personnel or in the application of any retrenchment policy solely on account of sex.

## OPAPRU heartens LGUs to help push peace process

By Rex Espiritu

OFFICE of Presidential Adviser on Peace, Reconciliation, and Unity (OPAPRU) Secretary Mel Senen Sarmiento on Wednesday enjoined local chief executives to take a more proactive role in community-driven peace-keeping initiatives following the deadly attack on police officers who were serving a warrant of arrest in Lanao del Sur, leaving one policeman dead and four others wounded.

Sarmiento said he was saddened by the assault against the police officers who were simply doing their job of upholding the rule of law.

"The loss of Cpl. Kelvin D. Francisco is a painful reminder of the dangers faced daily by our police force. We extend our deepest condolences to his family and colleagues. We also pray for the swift recovery of the wounded officers," he said.

Sarmiento underscored the critical role of local government units (LGUs) in preventing such incidents from happening and maintaining peace and order at the community level.

"Our LGUs are at the frontline of governance and peace-building. Knowing the realities on the ground, they play a vital role in fostering safe, secure, and resilient communities," he said.

"By strengthening local conflict prevention mechanisms, improving coordination with law enforcement, and promoting community vigilance, LGUs can help deter violence and protect their constituents from these lawless elements," the peace adviser stressed.

As the chairpersons of their respective Peace and Order Councils, Sarmiento noted that LGUs serve as the frontline defense in upholding the rule of law and ensuring that such "lawless acts" do not undermine regional stability.

Under the Local Government Code of 1991 (RA 7160) and related issuances such as Executive Order No. 773, local chief executives — governors and mayors — are designated as the Chairpersons of their respective Peace and Order Councils at the provincial, city, and municipal levels.



**CEREAL SUBSIDY.** Malabon City Mayor Jeannie Sandoval supervises the distribution of sacks of rice to some 3,000 city residents consisting of fishermen, barangay tanod, pedicab drivers and operators, and ambulant vendors classified as among the most vulnerable sectors of society. **Andrew Rabulan**

## IN BRIEF

### UP discloses P3.8-b shift to solar energy

THE University of the Philippines (UP) is rolling out a "net zero" energy program aimed at powering its campuses through rooftop solar installations, following a P3.8-billion budget approved by its UP Board of Regents over a 10-year period.

UP College of Engineering Associate Dean Ronwaldo Del Mundo said the initiative aims to reduce the university's dependence on traditional power by turning building rooftops into solar generation sites.

"In the future, even if the price of oil will go up, UP would no longer be affected as it will be generating its own electricity," he said at the first UP Innovation Summit "Inoblayon" press conference held at SMX Aura in Taguig City on Tuesday.

Under the plan, solar panels will be installed on most buildings in UP Diliman and eventually across all UP systems campuses nationwide, allowing the university to produce its own electricity. **Rex Espiritu**

### Cops arrest BI agent for extortion attempt

POLICE have arrested a 61-year-old Bureau of Immigration (BI) agent in an entrapment operation Mandaue City for alleged attempt to extort money from a Korean national.

BI Commissioner Joel Anthony Viado relieved the still unnamed suspect on administrative suspension pending filing of criminal cases based on the complaint of the 43-year-old South Korean.

The suspect was apprehended by police intelligence operatives early Tuesday evening inside a restaurant after receiving the marked money from the complainant.

The case was also referred to the Civil Service Commission for possible summary dismissal of the suspect from government service. **Vito Barcelo**

### Nueva Vizcaya scales down Ammungan fest

NUEVA Vizcaya is scaling down its annual Ammungan Festival to a one-day affair in light of the prevailing economic challenges confronting the country as an offshoot of spiraling oil prices triggered by the escalating Middle East crisis.

Gov. Jose Gambito made the decision to reflect the province's commitment to fiscal discipline attuned to President Ferdinand Marcos' call for prudent fiscal spending.

Gambito emphasizes that the essence of the festival, set on May 21, remains intact, focusing on giving thanks, showcasing culture, and strengthening community bonds.

The Ammungan Festival is highlighted by the beauty pageant dubbed Saniata ti Nueva Vizcaya, meaning prestige and splendor, and showcasing the province's core values for culture, heritage, and development. **Jessica M. Bacud**



**SANIATA TI NUEVA VIZCAYA.** Contestants to Nueva Vizcaya's beauty pageant put their best foot forward for the honor of being the province's ambassador for tourism, culture and development. The contest is the center stage of the province's Ammungan Festival which Gov. Jose Gambito scaled down to a one-day affair amid the prevailing economic challenges confronting the country. **Jessica M. Bacud**

## Survey shows significant majority of Filipino adults trust policemen

By Katrina Manubay

A SIGNIFICANT majority of Filipino adults (63 percent) trust the Philippine National Police (PNP), while only 17 percent distrust policemen, according to a survey by OCTA Research.

The latest Tugon ng Masa (TNM) survey also showed 19 percent are undecided, resulting in a net trust score of +46.

Trust in the PNP varies by region, with Mindanao logging the highest at 74 percent, followed by Visayas with 66 percent, Balance Luzon with 59 percent, and the National Capital Region having the lowest at 54 percent.

Distrust is more common among socioeconomic classes, with 42 per-

cent of Class ABC expressing distrust compared to 15 percent of Class D and 7 percent of Class E, while ambivalence is highest in NCR (29 percent) and lowest in Visayas and Mindanao (both 12 percent).

The survey also indicated that most Filipino adults (61 percent) expressing satisfaction with the performance of the PNP, with 20 percent expressing dissatisfaction, resulting in a net performance rating of +41.

Meanwhile, 19 percent remain ambivalent.

Across major areas, satisfaction with the PNP's performance is strongest in Mindanao (69 percent), followed by Visayas (63 percent) and Balance Luzon (59 percent), while NCR recorded the lowest at 52 percent.

## PH sambo youth team dominates Jagsport Open

By Randy M. Caluag

THE Philippine national sambo team powered through the competition at the recent 2026 Jagsport Open Championship, capturing a stellar total of four gold and two silver medals.

Leading the charge were Sophia Novino who proved her dominance in the Under 55kg Girls division and Jeniva Consigna, whom claimed the gold in the Under 67kg Women's category.

On the men's side, Jason Palmes outclassed the field in the Under 64kg division, and Arve Navares secured the fourth gold for the Philippines in the 71kg bracket.

The Philippines' medal count was further bolstered by two impressive silver finishes, showcasing the depth of the squad's talent in the heavier weight classes.

Princess Cortez earned silver in the Under 67kg Women's division, creating a historic all-Filipino 1-2 finish alongside teammate Consigna. Meanwhile, Aeon Kim took home the silver in a hard-fought Under 79kg Men's final.

This dominant performance by the country's young "Sambists" underscored the Philippines' rising influence in international combat sports as they secured multiple podium finishes against a competitive regional field.

The Jagsport Open is widely regarded as a premier developmental stage for combat sports in Southeast Asia.



The PH sambo youth team

## Boatwright nears PH citizenship

By Jeremiah Sevilla

AMERICAN-BORN basketball pro Bennie Boatwright marked a big step in his naturalization bid after the Senate Committee on Justice and Human Rights approved the bills seeking to grant him Filipino citizenship following a hearing on Wednesday.

The San Miguel Beer import appeared before the Senate committee chaired by Senator Francis Pangilinan as he resumed his naturalization process under House Bill No. 6639 and Senate Bill No. 1595 aimed at strengthening Gilas Pilipinas in international tournaments.

The committee endorsed the bills for a third and final reading in a plenary session, a major step toward the final hurdle of transmission to the Office of the President for the signing to become a law.

During the hearing, the 6-foot-10 Boatwright expressed his intention to be naturalized as a Filipino citizen and shared his familiarity with the Philippine culture.

"I grew up in Southern California and there's a big Filipino community there, so I was growing up and playing with young Filipino friends," said Boatwright, who attended alongside Gilas Pilipinas Men program director Alfrancis Chua and Samahang Basketbol ng Pilipinas executive director Erika Dy.



Bennie Boatwright (left) shows up at the Senate together with SBP executive director Erika Dy (center) and Gilas Pilipinas program director Alfrancis Chua. SBP

## SMART/MPVSF taekwondo summer clinic underway

AS summer further heats up, the Philippine Taekwondo Association (PTA) will continue its own SMART/MPVSF Summer Clinic in various venues across the country.

The annual summer activity is designed by the national taekwondo association under the able leadership of Grandmaster Sung-Chon Hong as a natural way to enrich one's health – alertness and mental discipline in particular.

As it is regarded as the most effective and practical way for physical condition, thousands of martial arts enthusiasts – young and old – have already availed of the program since the clinic started last month.

Fully supported by World Taekwondo,

Philippine Olympic Committee, Philippine Sports Commission, and Milo, clinics are ongoing in all PTA-affiliated branches all over the country plus the elite clubs of the Philippine National Police and Armed Forces of the Philippines.

However, mastery of the teachings of the popular Korean sport can only be achieved through continuous training, determination and perseverance.

Through consistent training, students develop not only strength and skill, but also confidence.

For more details, interested parties may contact PTA personnel at tel. numbers –85220518/85220519 or through its email: philtkd@gmail.com/philippinetaekwondo@gmail.com.



A young taekwondo jin in red armor connects with a decisive head kick during a match. PTA photo

## Clementer pulls off final-hole shocker to steal JPGT Pueblo crown

CAGAYAN DE ORO—Stephen Clementer didn't just win a first Junior PGT title – he ripped it away in the most improbable fashion imaginable.

On a day that seemed destined to belong to his rival, the homegrown standout authored a stunning reversal of fortune at the ICTSI Pueblo de Oro Junior PGT Championship, erasing a three-stroke deficit on the final hole before sealing the boys' 7-10 crown in sudden death here on Wednesday.

Clementer kept his composure when it mattered most, coolly draining a nervy three-footer for par on No. 9 in the playoff to complete the stunning, come-from-behind victory as Ethan Lago faltered, three-putting from 13 paces and opening the door for the former to complete a breakthrough.

What followed was pure emotion. Cheers erupted across the course as the eight-year-old champion soaked in the magnitude of his achievement. Clementer later revealed that confidence carried him through the final putt – he knew the greens so well, he trusted every break instinctively.

Moments after the winning stroke, he was doused in celebration, laughter and water splashing under the afternoon sun, before being mobbed by fellow players and adoring spectators. Congratulations poured in as he made his way toward the clubhouse, his smile stretching from ear to ear, reflecting both disbelief and joy.

The victory was made even sweeter by the memory of last week's setback at Del Monte, where he finished



Stephen Clementer is drenched by fellow players in celebration after completing a thrilling comeback victory. Manny Marcelo

a distant third, trailing Lago by a staggering 18 shots. This time, however, Clementer flipped the script in dramatic fashion, turning adversity into inspiration and announcing his arrival with a performance that few will soon forget.

"I'm very happy to win here on my home course," said Clementer in Filipino, whose driving, short game and putting all came together when it mattered most.

## Padilla, Sarines complete wins at JPGT Sherwood

TRECE MARTIRES, Cavite—Routs highlighted the premier 15-18 division in the fourth leg of the Luzon Series at Sherwood Hills Golf Club here on Wednesday, as Tristan Padilla and Lisa Sarines capped off dominant campaigns by turning the final round of the ICTSI Sherwood Hills Junior PGT Championship into a virtual coronation.

Both effectively secured their victories with commanding leads built in the first two rounds, leaving the finale as preparation for the last two stages of the six-leg regional series at Beverly Place in Pampanga and Eagle Ridge in Cavite next month.

Padilla delivered another standout performance, starting the day with an 11-stroke advantage over Shinichi Suzuki and quickly

extending it to 15 after six holes.

Fresh off a six-shot win at John Hay, Padilla proved even stronger on Sherwood Hills' tougher layout, posting back-to-back 71s before closing with a two-under 70 for a 212 total and a dominant 16-stroke victory.

"There's still a lot of room for improvement, and I'll keep working on that," said the 17-year-old from De La Salle-Zobel.

In the girls' category, Sarines mirrored Padilla's dominance, winning by 18 strokes over twin sister Mona Sarines. Lisa closed with a 69 for a two-under 214 total, reversing her 11-stroke loss to Mona at John Hay.

Mona showed early promise with four birdies but faltered with three straight bogeys for a 71, finishing at 232, while Rafa Anciano placed third at 237 after an 80.



Lisa Sarines wins by 18 strokes over twin sister Mona Sarines.

## Shulchenko, Alrefai eye Tour lockdown as mountains loom

By Riera U. Mallari

PAGUDPUD (Powered by PLDT Home)—With seven stages left to decide the fate of the 2026 MPTC Tour of Luzon, the spotlight rests firmly on the shoulders of two riders who have so far dictated the race tempo, Nikita Shulchenko and his LCW UAE Cycle teammate Yousef Ibraheim Alrefai.

The rest day did little to slow the Russian race leader. Instead of recovery, Shulchenko chose to use the break to practice along the coastal Pagudpud roads.

"I don't like stopping," Shulchenko said. "The race continues in the body even on rest day."

His commanding victory in the individual time trial in Stage 7 did more than extend his overall lead as it reinforced the belief within the LCW UAE camp that this Tour is now theirs to lose. Behind him in second place overall is Alrefai, just 1 minute and 38 seconds adrift, forming a 1-2 combination that other teams have struggled to disrupt.

Ahead lie the climbs that traditionally decide Luzon champions, the lung-busting Bessang Pass,

the vicious ramps of Daan Kalikasan, and the uphill drag toward The Manor at Camp John Hay via Loakan Road.

"The mountains are good for me," said Shulchenko. "I've won long stage races in Russia where climbing decides everything. This is where I am strongest. I believe I can keep this jersey until the end."

Alrefai shared the same confidence, but added that this is a team mission rather than an individual defense.

"We already have a good gap over third place," said the Syrian Alrefai. "Our job now is to protect first and second. These next stages will be the hardest of the race, especially Stages 12 and 14.



Shown here are (from right) 7-Eleven's Mavin Corpuz, LCW UAE's Alrefai Yousef Ibraheim and Nikita Shiolchenko, and Korean Dae Yeong Joo. Roman Prospero

Recovery and preparation will be very important. But we are ready to help Nikita keep the lead all the way to the finish."



**TOP TAXPAYERS.** Tanauan City Mayor Nelson Collantes (seventh from left), Vice Mayor Wilfredo Panganiban Ablao (fifth from left) and First Philippine Industrial Park (FPIP) senior manager Reginald Suarez (sixth from left) pose for a photo with other Tanauan City officials during awarding ceremonies to honor the city's top taxpayers. FPIP and a number of its locators are among this year's awardees recognized by the local government unit (LGU) of Tanauan City, Batangas. Data from the LGU showed FPIP and its locators contributed nearly P700 million in business and real property taxes, forming a significant share of the city's revenues for the year.

## Citi predicts 3 more BSP rate hikes as inflation surges

By Jenniffer B. Austria

CITI expects the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas (BSP) to raise its benchmark interest rates three more times this year including an off-cycle adjustment in May following a sharp rise in inflation.

The financial group, in a research note, raised its inflation projection to 7.3 percent for 2026 and 4.6 percent for 2027. Citi said these figures sit above the BSP's own forecasts of 6.3 percent and 4.3 percent respectively.

"We see upside to BSP's inflation forecast of 6.3 percent for 2026 and 4.3 percent for 2027 and now see three 25-basis-point further rate hikes this year, vs. previously 1," Citi said in a report.

The bank expects an off-cycle meeting in May with a 25-basis-point hike followed by similar increases in June and August. Analysts pointed to a 2-percent devaluation of the Philippine peso since the last policy meeting and an expected deterioration in the energy trade deficit as primary drivers for increased foreign exchange demand.

Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) data showed headline inflation jumped to 7.2 percent in April from 4.1 percent in March. The surge reflects the impact of higher international fuel prices on food and energy costs. Average inflation for the first four months of the year reached 3.9 percent, surpassing the central bank's 3.0 percent full-year target.

# Jobless rate rose to 5% in March

5.0%

Unemployment in March 2026

3.9%

Unemployment in March 2025

2.58 million

Jobless Filipinos in March 2026

By Thony Rose Lesaca

**T**HE Philippine unemployment rate climbed to 5 percent in March 2026 as the number of jobless Filipinos reached 2.58 million, the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) said Wednesday.

The jobless rate increased from 3.9 percent a year ago but eased slightly from the 5 percent level recorded in February. While the number of unemployed persons rose from 1.93 million in March 2025, the total was lower than the 2.66 million individuals without work in February.

Underemployment, which counts those wanting more hours or an additional job, was recorded at 12.3 percent. This represents 6.03 million people, a decrease from the 13.4 percent rate in March 2025 but an increase from 11.8 percent in February.

The PSA noted that 59.5 percent of these individuals worked less than 40 hours a week.

Rizal Commercial Banking Corp.

chief economist Michael Ricafort said the sharp increase in fuel prices could have dragged fishing and aquaculture production activities amid higher operating costs and risks of operating losses.

"The resulting narrower profit margins and higher costs for other affected businesses or industries due to much higher fuel costs and overall production costs could have led to some job cuts or losses," Ricafort said in a Viber message.

Reacting to the report, the Department of Economy, Planning and Development (DEPDev) said the government will pursue measures to preserve jobs and provide social protection, job-skills matching and reskilling for workers,

particularly those displaced by the Middle East conflict.

Compared to its Asian peers, the Philippines' unemployment rate is lower than that of China (5.4 percent) and India (5.1 percent), but higher than Malaysia's 2.9 percent and Vietnam's 2.2 percent, DEPDev said in a statement.

DEPDev Secretary Arsenio Balisacan said the government will ensure business and service continuity by accelerating strategic interventions, as prolonged conflict in the Middle East raised the prices of fuel and other inputs, adversely affecting production and employment. "We commit to tightening the delivery of targeted assistance, such as fuel subsidies and service contracting for transport workers, farmers, and fisherfolk to improve alignment and expedite implementation. We will leverage technologies such as e-wallets and other digital platforms, where applicable, to ensure efficient delivery channels," Balisacan said.

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# SEC denies GMA's bid to delay ASM

By Jenniffer B. Austria

**T**HE Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) denied a request by GMA Network Inc. to postpone its 2026 annual stockholders' meeting to December, directing the broadcaster to hold the event within 60 days of its original schedule.

The company's board previously approved moving the meeting from May 20, 2026 to Dec. 9, 2026. GMA Network said it sought the delay to address implications of SEC Memorandum Circular No. 7 Series of 2026, which regulates the election of independent directors.

GMA Network also filed a petition with the Makati Regional Trial Court seeking to nullify the circular regarding term limits for independent directors. Branch 38 of the Makati RTC denied the petition.

The SEC imposed a maximum cumulative term limit of nine years for independent directors of publicly-listed companies at the start of the year. The policy aims to strengthen board independence and align local practices with international standards.

Under the new memorandum circular, independent directors are elected annually but may serve only up to nine cumulative years in the same company on a continuous or intermittent basis. For directors who served before the rule took effect, the nine-year limit is reckoned from calendar year 2012.

The SEC decision follows its broader efforts to reform corporate governance in the Philippines. The said statutory deadlines for shareholder meetings remain a priority for transparency.



The regulator rejected the request on the same day, ruling there were no justifiable grounds for the postponement. The commission said that any reset should fall within 60 days of the original date to comply with Section 25 of the Revised Corporation Code of the Philippines.



**JOLLIBEE'S AWARD.** Jollibee Group global chief marketing officer David Beal (middle) receives the Excellence in Sustainability Reporting Award and the Championship Award for Service Excellence in Singapore on April 28. Presenting the awards were Dr. Humayon Dar, chairman of the Global Good Governance Program, and Noor Qamar Binti Haji Sulaiman, High Commissioner of Brunei Darussalam to Singapore.

## PSEi surges 1.2% as US-Iran tensions ease, peso gains

PHILIPPINE equities ended sharply higher Wednesday, tracking rallies in Wall Street and Asian markets as crude prices eased following US President Donald Trump's announcement of a pause in Iran operations.

The bellwether Philippine Stock Exchange Index surged 69.13 points, or 1.17 percent, to close at 5,967.21. The broader all shares index rose 26.05 points, or 0.78 percent, to 3,363.45.

"The PSEi ended higher, tracking gains across global markets as a US-Iran ceasefire held, easing concerns over escalating tensions in the Strait of Hormuz," said Luis Limlingan,

head of sales at Regina Capital Development Corp. "Sentiment improved after Washington signaled the truce remains intact, helping temper fears of further disruption to global oil supply routes."

Trump said he will pause operations to guide stranded commercial vessels through the Strait of Hormuz for a short period to determine if a peace deal can be reached.

Limlingan noted, however, that investors remain in a wait-and-see stance ahead of the upcoming GDP release amid lingering concerns over stagflation risks.

The mining and oil index

advanced the most, up 5.44 percent, followed by services, which climbed 3.28 percent. Industrials rose 0.74 percent, while holding firms and property gained 0.60 percent and 0.50 percent, respectively.

Value turnover reached P6.41 billion. However, market breadth remained negative as decliners outnumbered gainers, 103 to 93, while 56 stocks were unchanged.

Foreign investors were net buyers with inflows of P129.8 million.

The peso also closed stronger at 61.305 against the U.S. dollar Wednesday, up from 61.55 on Tuesday. **Jenniffer B. Austria**

## The spending catch-up plan to boost the economy is not working



**Out in the Open**  
Ray S. Eñano

“  
The strategy has turned out to be a dud.”

THE government's touted spending catch-up plan to lift the economy in the first half of 2006 is failing to live up to expectations.

The strategy has turned out to be a dud. Infrastructure spending and other capital outlays dropped 40.1 percent in the first two months of 2026. Authorities blamed a slowdown in billing processes and a high base from the previous year's disbursements for the lackadaisical infrastructure performance.

The slowdown in infrastructure spending early in 2026 means a tepid gross domestic product (GDP) growth.

Infrastructure and capital expenditures fell to P88.7 billion in the first two months of 2026 from P148.3 billion in the same period in 2025, per the latest report of the Department of Budget and Management (DBM).

The DBM report indicates the adverse effects of the flood control scandal last year on government spending have lingered.

The DBM traced the slowdown in infrastructure spending to a lull in the processing of progress billing claims as "new project rollouts coincided with the completion of older works."

The 2025 figures, the DBM noted, were unusually high after the government front-loaded expenditures and settled accounts payable ahead of the election ban.

"The growth of disbursements for the first two months of the year was heavily tempered by the significant contraction of infrastructure and other capital outlays, and lower tax expenditures and subsidies," it says.

Expenditures are not about to increase significantly for the rest of the first half. The government expects infrastructure spending to remain soft.

Per the DBM, the impact of large settlements made in previous months and the transition between project cycles will slow down infrastructure spending further.

A strict review of projects and the validation process for payment claims, coupled with the tighter monitoring of project implementation or completion status, are the culprits for the disappointing pace of construction.

As I wrote previously in my column, there is no economic expansion when the government stalls or postpones projects.

The government attempted to change gear late last year, after disappointing growth numbers in the third quarter, to quicken the economic pace and make up for lost time.

It then drew up a comprehensive catch-up plan that aimed to accelerate economic growth by aligning budget disbursements with national priorities.

The economy still grew at a slower pace in the third quarter of the year, weighed down by low spending on public works.

Congressional hearings on flood control anomalies and admissions of corruption and payoffs that involved some lawmakers also put a dent on market sentiments and sparked calls for resignation of some public officials.

The economy bore the brunt of the flood control scandals. Per the account of Department of Economy, Planning and Development (DEPDev) Secretary **Arsenio Balisacan**, the economy grew slower in the third quarter of 2025 as a result of the flood control anomalies and projects that were delayed, questioned, or paused due to procurement and governance issues.

The controversy led to underspending in certain pockets, slower project execution and a drag on construction and related services.

The Philippine economy grew 4.0 percent year-on-year in the third quarter of 2025, the slowest in nearly five years amid the disruption in public works projects caused by the flood-control controversy.

Pump-priming the economy is the only solution to lift the economy. It is easier said than done, however.

President **Ferdinand Marcos Jr.** ordered the release of P1.307 trillion in programmed funds for the fourth quarter of 2025 and directed agencies to fully utilize the budget through targeted, efficient spending to support growth.

The government intervened to quicken the pace by vetting projects faster using standardized integrity checks for flood control and other infrastructure. It tried to green-light clean projects quickly and cancel the rest decisively.

But government, foremost, must practice smart spending instead of adopting austerity. Stalling or postponing projects will simply kill the chances of a faster economic expansion.

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**REBUILDING HOMES.** Through the support of the Aboitiz Foundation, displaced Liloan residents like Adela Gales are rebuilding their homes for a fresh start. In partnership with TotalEnergies, a global integrated energy company, the Aboitiz Foundation extended housing assistance to 10 more families in Liloan affected by Typhoon Tino last year. Each beneficiary received cement and other construction materials, along with cash support for labor.

## Lopez majority slams FPH chair over third 'poison pill' clause

ENERGY Development Corp. (EDC), First Balfour Inc., and First Gen Corp. face potential loan defaults if First Philippine Holdings Corp. (FPH) chairman and chief executive Federico Lopez is removed from his post at First Gen, according to the Lopez family majority.

The majority shareholders characterized the default provision as a third "poison pill" discovered within the conglomerate's structure.

"He has in effect threatened to torch the very house that sheltered him all these years," the Lopez majority said in a statement. "In fact, his family branch, which owns 29 percent of the Lopez group, would also lose billions, all for one reason: Piki must not lose his job."

The statement revealed that the default provision is linked to a P25 billion standby letter of credit secured by FPH from

BDO Unibank. These funds were intended to finance a P62 billion hydropower investment by First Gen, an initiative announced by the subsidiary on April 17.

Under the terms of the provision, a default would trigger immediate loan settlements or the imposition of penalty interest rates. Such a scenario would likely restrict future borrowing and stifle corporate operations, the statement added.

The family majority claimed they were neither consulted nor informed about the specific investments and credit facilities, noting they have been unable to obtain detailed documentation regarding the deals.

According to the group, two previously discovered provisions were also designed to penalize subsidiaries rather than protect them should Federico Lopez be removed from leadership.

## PH agriculture, fisheries output dipped 0.3% in Q1

By Othel V. Campos

**P**HILIPPINE agriculture and fisheries production value fell 0.3 percent in the first quarter of 2026, as declines in crop and fish output offset gains in the livestock and poultry sectors, data from the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) showed Wednesday.

This represented a reversal of the 2.1 percent growth recorded in the first quarter of 2025.

Production at constant 2018 prices amounted to P437.52 billion in the first

quarter. The crop sector, which accounted for 55.7 percent of the total agricultural output, saw its value drop 2.4 percent to P243.62 billion. This contraction was led by a 6.3-percent slump in the value of palay harvests.

Fisheries production also faced challenges, with its value sliding 6.1 percent year-on-year to P52.34 billion. The sector contributed 12.0 percent to the country's total agricultural and fisheries value.

Despite the overall decline, the livestock and poultry industries provided a cushion for the sector. Livestock production grew 5.1 percent to P40.74 billion, representing 13.9 percent of the total value. Hog production served as a key driver for the segment, posting a 6.4 percent increase.

Poultry production expanded 7.1 percent

to P80.83 billion, making up 18.5 percent of the total output. All commodities within the poultry sector registered growth during the first three months of the year.

The agriculture sector is expected to recover in the coming months, with improving rice output and sustained gains in livestock and poultry likely to offset a weak first-quarter performance, Department of Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. said.

"We are seeing encouraging signs on the ground, with rice production likely recovering in the second quarter as planting conditions normalize, palay prices improve, and government interventions take effect," Tiu Laurel said.

He said the continued strength of the country's livestock and poultry sectors is helping cushion overall output and providing stability to the food supply.



**ARCA SOUTH.** Ayala Land Inc. has opened Ayala Malls Arca South, a new retail development positioned to anchor long-term commercial activity within its emerging estate in Taguig. The 100,000-square-meter mall is part of Ayala Land's broader strategy to scale its leasing and hospitality segments.

## Meralco PowerGen backs Semirara Mining in bid for 10 coal blocks

By Alena Mae S. Flores

MERALCO PowerGen Corp. (MGen) expressed optimism that Semirara Mining and Power Corp. (SMPC) will secure the competitive bidding for 10 coal blocks on Semirara Island under the government's latest energy contracting program.

MGen president Emmanuel Rubio said the mining firm holds a distinct advantage due to its existing infrastructure on the island.

"We believe that they have the advantage. They have all the equipment needed to extract coal in Semirara. The logical winner, with the rational bid, I think, is still Semirara," Rubio said.

Rubio noted that MGen intends to partner with SMPC should the government

award the coal operating contract to the mining company, though MGen will not participate directly in the auction.

"We don't have the time to do the due diligence. So, the discussion is, they'll go ahead, they'll bid," Rubio said. "Now, if we see the offer to be acceptable and we see that there's a business case for it, then we will discuss us coming in."

Rubio previously indicated that MGen plans to take a minority stake in the Semirara coal project, citing SMPC's technical expertise in operating mines in Antique province. He emphasized that the move is driven by a need for "fuel security," adding that MGen is only interested in the blocks currently being offered.

The Department of Energy launched the 2026 Philippine Conventional Energy

Contracting Program for coal following a Department of Justice ruling that SMPC's contract cannot be extended beyond 50 years. SMPC's current operating contract is set to expire in July 2027.

The auction offers qualified firms the opportunity to develop coal resources through new contracts across 10 blocks on Semirara Island. The area covers 10,000 hectares with estimated reserves of 160 million metric tons.

While the submission and opening of bid documents have been deferred, SMPC is reportedly preparing a comprehensive mine plan to support its bid. The company aims to ensure the continuity of government revenue and community investments while bolstering national energy security.



**DIALYSIS CENTER.** Imus City Mayor Alex Advincula (3rd from right), Rep. Adrian Jay Advincula (3rd from left), and Dr. Rodolfo Tuazon Jr. (2nd from right), president of Tab Health Solution Corp., lead the inauguration of the two-storey Imus Renal Care Dialysis Center on April 30, 2026. The facility is located within the Ospital ng Imus Compound on Pedro Reyes St., Malagasang I-G. **Dennis Abrina**

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**Job Description:**

- On-site leader of program operations globally and client management across all sites for specific account
- The Director, Global Service Delivery acts in a Business Unit Leader capacity and will be responsible for operational, financial and program performance across our sites for this LOB. To accomplish this goal, they will lead the operations team, manage in a matrix environment with all functional department partners and collaborate with the Global Account and Site Delivery Leadership team. Incumbent has overall responsibility for achieving balanced results of multiple departments within span of control.
- The Global Service Delivery leader will help consolidate the operations, provide delivery expertise, effective client management and ensure global consistency.
- This role will help ensure a standardized process across the sites with building roadmaps to add value through innovation and process automations/improvements.

**Qualification (Education, Experience, Professional License, Skills Certification, Specialized Training):**

- With robust client interface experience
- With experience in managing diverse global workforce,
- Lateral thinking and a progressive mindset, ability to drive operations/delivery teams
- P&L ownership: Having deep understanding of financials and impact points.
- Able to work in a matrix environment & reporting structure
- Highly analytical with good financial acumen

Applications may be sent to:  
PH\_QC\_EASTW\_MULTILINGUAL@concentrix.com

Company/ Employer	Name of foreign national intending to apply for the position
Company Name: Concentrix CVG Philippines, Inc. Address: 10F, The Link Bldg, Asiatown IT Park, Lahug, Cebu City 6000 Nature of Business: Business to Business IT	Name: Sanjeev Kumar Address: Cebu City Nationality: Indian Intended Period of Employment: Two (2) Years

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 VII Central Visayas located at DOLE-R07 Building, General Maxilom Avenue, cor Gorordo Ave., Cebu City, 6000.

**NOTICE TO THE PUBLIC  
LOST OFFICIAL RECEIPT**

This is to inform the public that Ilumicore Company Inc. has lost an official receipt amounting to PHP 539,060.00 (Five Hundred Thirty-Nine Thousand Sixty Pesos), which was issued for the payment of the deposit for temporary connection with Meralco.

The said official receipt is hereby declared null and void and shall no longer be honored for any transaction.

This notice is issued for compliance with documentary requirements and to prevent any possible misuse of the said document.

Issued this [Day] of [Month, Year] at [City/Municipality].

(MS-MAY 7 & 8, 2026)

**ALLIED CARE EXPERTS (ACE) MEDICAL CENTER - BUTUAN, INC.**  
Orchoa St., Corner Villanueva Ext., Butuan City  
PH 83 816-4074 / 0915 735 5076  
acebutuan@gmail.com / www.acebutuan.com.ph

**NOTICE OF THE ANNUAL STOCKHOLDERS MEETING  
OF  
ALLIED CARE EXPERTS (ACE) MEDICAL CENTER-BUTUAN INC.**

**DEAR STOCKHOLDERS:**

Please take notice that the Annual Meeting of Stockholders of Allied Care Experts (ACE) Medical Center - Butuan Inc. will be held on June 12, 2026, Friday at 10:00 in the morning; the meeting will be conducted via Zoom Webinar. Kindly register thru the following link, on or before June 6, 2026 to enable you to participate in the meeting:

**Bit.ly/acebutuan2026**

The link will take you through the process of registration. You will receive a confirmation email once you have successfully registered in the platform, including the details and procedures in the conduct of the meeting.

The confirmation email will also contain a link and instructions for the online voting which will be conducted via an online platform.

The meeting shall be recorded (visual and audio) for future reference. The Agenda:

- Call to Order
- Invocation
- Determination of Quorum
- Welcome Message from the Chairman of the Board
- Reading and Approval of the Minutes of the Y2025 Annual Stockholders' Meeting
- Presentation and Approval/Ratification of the Y2025 Annual Financial Statements
- President's Report
- Ratification of the Acts and Proceedings of the Board of Directors, Officers, and Management of the Corporation
- Election of the Board of Directors for Y2026-2027
- Appointment of External Auditor for Y2026
- Adjournment

Only stockholders of record at the close of business on May 12, 2026 (Record Date) shall be entitled to notice of and to vote at the meeting. If you cannot personally attend the meeting, you may opt to send your proxy to attend on your behalf. Kindly submit your duly executed proxy form with the undersigned via email at acebutuanasm@gmail.com not later than June 11, 2026, but preferably on or before June 5, 2026, to enable your proxy to register in the Zoom Webinar. The sample proxy form is available at the Corporation's website, for your reference. [NOTE: Management is not soliciting proxies]

The Information Statement with the Management Report and SEC Form 17-A are posted at the Corporation's website at www.acebutuan.com.ph.

You may contact the undersigned via email at acebutuanasm@gmail.com, or through telephone/mobile numbers: 0948 994 9325 if you have inquiries or concerns regarding the meeting.

Very truly yours,  
*DR. MAE OCO-MATEOS*  
Corporate Secretary

Career Opportunity in **Colas Rail Philippines, Inc.**

**Position title:** Project Manager  
**Vacancy (1)**

**Job Description:** Responsible for coordinating project and delivery activities and facilitating communication among teams and stakeholders. Monitors project progress, timelines, budget, and resources to ensure alignment with organizational goals and quality standards.

**Qualifications:**

- 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:  
Email address: colasrail.philippines@colasrail.com

Company/ Employer	Name of Foreign National Intending to Apply for the Position
Company Name: Colas Rail Philippines, Inc. Complete Address: Unit 708 Tower One & Exchange Plaza, Ayala Avenue, Ayala Triangle Bel-Air, Makati City Nature of Business: Construction of roads, highways, bridges and railways.	Name: Karim Boudjeltia Address: Makati City Nationality: French Intended Period of Employment: Three (3) years

**COLAS RAIL PHILIPPINES, INC.** 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 - Regional Office NCR located at DOLE-NCR Building 967 Maligaya, Malate, Manila, 1004 Metro Manila.

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 - NCR located at DOLE-NCR Building 967 Maligaya, Malate, Manila, 1004 Metro Manila 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.

Career Opportunity in **Colas Rail Philippines, Inc.**

**Position title:** Reports Analyst  
**Vacancy (1)**

**Job Description:** Responsible for preparing, analyzing, and maintaining reports to support operations and decision-making. Collects and organizes data from various sources and ensures accuracy, completeness, and timely delivery of reports.

**Qualifications:**

- 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:  
Email address: colasrail.philippines@colasrail.com

Company/ Employer	Name of Foreign National Intending to Apply for the Position
Company Name: Colas Rail Philippines, Inc. Complete Address: Unit 708 Tower One & Exchange Plaza, Ayala Avenue, Ayala Triangle Bel-Air, Makati City Nature of Business: Construction of roads, highways, bridges and railways.	Name: Mathieu Max Holden Jean Address: Manduluyong City Nationality: French Intended Period of Employment: Three (3) years

**COLAS RAIL PHILIPPINES, INC.** 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 - Regional Office NCR located at DOLE-NCR Building 967 Maligaya, Malate, Manila, 1004 Metro Manila.

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# Manufacturing grew 7.8% in March—PSA

**P**HILIPPINE manufacturing growth quickened in March 2026 as higher output in basic metals and refined petroleum products offset a cooling food sector, according to Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) data released Wednesday.

The volume of production index (VoPI) increased 7.8 percent year-on-year in March, up from the 3.1-percent growth seen in February. This also marked a sharp turnaround from March 2025, when the sector saw an annual decline of 0.6 percent.

The value of production index (VaPI) followed a similar upward trajectory, rising 10.5 percent in March compared with a 4.5-percent increase the previous month.

This was largely fueled by the manufacture of coke and refined petroleum products, which rebounded to a 4.0 percent increase after dropping 16.6 percent in February. The petroleum sector alone accounted for 41.1 percent of the total value growth.

Other major contributors to the industrial expansion included basic metals, which saw a 36.2 percent jump in volume, and transport equipment, which rose 6.3 percent.

In the food sector, however, production volume slowed to a 2.3-percent increase from 2.6 percent in February. The PSA attributed this deceleration to sharp declines in dairy products, which fell 18.3 percent, and “other food products” including sugar and

bakery items, which dropped 9.5 percent.

The manufacturing sector also saw a rise in sales activity. The value of net sales index (VaNSI) grew 4.3 percent, up from 1.9 percent in February. Petroleum products again led the charge with a 49.5 percent increase in sales value, contributing 66.4 percent to the overall sales acceleration.

Factory efficiency improved during the period, with the average capacity utilization rate reaching 78.5 percent in March. This is an increase from 77.6 percent in February and 76.4 percent in the same month last year.

All 22 industry divisions reported operating above 65.0 percent capacity. Petroleum products recorded the highest utilization rate at 84.4 percent, followed by machinery and equipment at 82.3 percent.

Data showed 34.8 percent of responding establishments operated at full capacity, defined as between 90 percent and 100 percent. Another 40.8 percent of factories operated at 70 percent to 89 percent capacity, while 24.5 percent reported operating below the 70 percent mark.



**BEVERAGE LEADERS.** The Beverage Industry Association of the Philippines (BIAP) celebrates 38 years as the collective voice of the beverage sector. For nearly four decades, the association has played that role, bringing together the country's leading beverage manufacturers to move forward with a shared purpose. Shown are leaders of BIAP member companies at the celebration of association's anniversary on April 22, 2026 in Makati City.

## Metro Pacific's core net income rose 5% in Q1

By Jenniffer B. Austria

recorded in 2025.

Metro Pacific Investments Corp. (MPIC) reported a 5-percent increase in first-quarter core net income as steady performance from its power generation and healthcare units offset lower contributions from its water business.

The infrastructure conglomerate said Wednesday that consolidated core net income rose to P6.9 billion from P6.6 billion a year earlier. Income from operations grew 4 percent during the period.

Stronger generation output and higher patient volumes supported the growth. These gains were partly tempered by the dilution of the company's stake in Maynilad Water Services Inc following its listing in November 2025.

Power remained the primary earnings driver, contributing P5.1 billion or 62 percent of net operating income. Water and toll roads contributed P1.5 billion and P1.4 billion respectively, accounting for a combined 36 percent.

The company said reported net income declined year-on-year because of the absence of a one-off gain from the disposal of Philippine Coastal Storage and Pipeline Corp

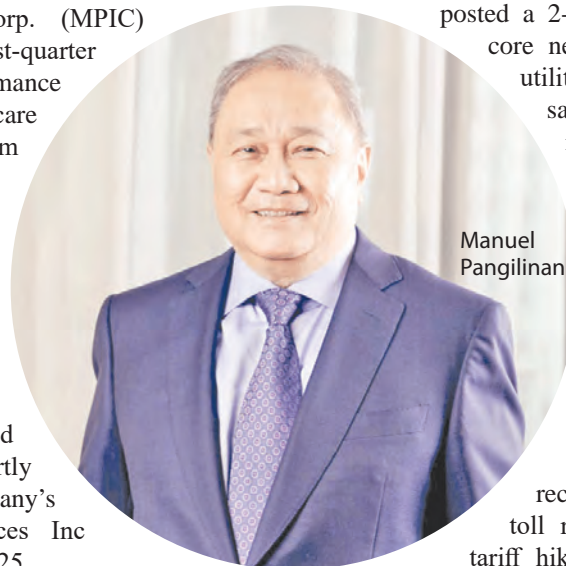
Among its core units, Manila Electric Company posted a 2-percent increase in consolidated core net income to P11.4 billion. The utility benefited from higher electricity sales and stronger generation revenues.

Maynilad's revenues climbed 6 percent to P9.1 billion, led by a tariff adjustment and growth in billed volume. Core net income for the water unit rose 10 percent to P4 billion as network efficiency investments reduced non-revenue water to 32 percent from 34.9 percent.

Metro Pacific Tollways Corp. recorded a 14-percent increase in toll revenues to P9.9 billion due to tariff hikes and higher traffic. However, core and reported net income remained flat as higher borrowing costs and depreciation offset gains from increased ownership in NLEX.

“Even in a more challenging environment, demand for essential services remains steady,” Metro Pacific chairman, president and chief executive Manuel Pangilinan said.

“If we stay focused on execution and service, we are confident our businesses will remain resilient,” he said.



Manuel Pangilinan

## IN BRIEF

### BIR shifting to modern property valuation

THE Bureau of Internal Revenue (BIR) is preparing to shift to a market value-based property valuation system to provide a consistent basis for taxation and real property assessment across the country.

Under the Real Property Valuation and Assessment Reform Act (RPVARA), local government units will keep their authority over tax rates and assessment levels. The Bureau of Local Government Finance will instead strengthen valuation standards and oversight to ensure uniformity.

The new system relies on mass appraisal, standardized valuation protocols and increased coordination between national and local government agencies.

“RPVARA is a much-awaited, long-term reform. It may not be a reform felt entirely overnight, but it will shape the way the government values, administers and taxes real property for many years to come,” BIR Commissioner Charlito Mendoza said.

The bureau held an executive briefing on the law on April 28, 2026. Officials cited the need to upgrade personnel training, data architecture and regulatory frameworks before the transition. **Thony Rose Lesaca**

### Japanese group visits Prime Infra gas complex

A JAPANESE delegation visited the natural gas complex of Prime Infrastructure Capital Inc. last week to advance regional energy security and strengthen bilateral cooperation on critical infrastructure.

Prime Infra, led by businessman Enrique Razon Jr., hosted representatives from Japan's Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI), the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA), the Japanese Embassy and the Japanese Parliament on May 1. During the visit to the Philippine NatGas Complex, officials cited the importance of strengthening gas infrastructure and ensuring long-term energy resilience.

The tour of the Batangas LNG terminal serves as a key component of the Asia Zero Emissions Community (AZEC) initiative. The project is a collaboration between Prime Infra, Tokyo Gas and the Lopez-led First Gen Corp. aimed at promoting sustainable energy pathways across the region. Prime Infra currently controls 60 percent of the facility, while First Gen and Tokyo Gas each hold 20 percent stakes.

“We appreciate the visit and the continued interest of our Japanese partners in strengthening coordination and collaboration in building critical gas infrastructure,” said Prime Infra president and chief executive Donnabel Kuizon Cruz.

Cruz said that as the Philippines expands its renewable energy capacity, reliable natural gas infrastructure will be essential to support the transition and ensure energy security. **Aleña Mae S. Flores**

### The BE Group taps COREnergy

REAL estate and hospitality firm The BE Group of Companies signed an agreement with COREnergy to manage energy consumption at its Mabuhay Towers in Cebu Business Park and Cebu IT Park.

COREnergy, the retail electricity arm of Vivant Energy and a subsidiary of listed Vivant Corp., will provide power to the towers situated in two of the country's fastest-growing business districts. Growth in these areas is driven by the expansion of the IT-BPM sector, which requires reliable electricity to support 24-hour operations.

The partnership allows Mabuhay Towers to transition to the retail competition framework, granting the buildings access to structured energy strategies that offer cost predictability and customization.

“Businesses are no longer treating power as a fixed monthly expense,” COREnergy senior assistant vice-president and head of sales Marko Sarmiento said.

“With the Power of Choice, they can structure how energy supports their operations, whether that's managing costs, improving performance or planning for scale,” he said.

Sarmiento said the company aims to help local brands like The BE Group rethink energy strategies to align with the economic development of Cebu. **Aleña Mae S. Flores**

### Automotive group cuts 2026 sales forecast

THE Chamber of Automotive Manufacturers of the Philippines Inc. (CAMPI) lowered its 2026 industry sales outlook on Wednesday, projecting a 10-percent decline from its initial 500,000-unit target as the sector grapples with global and domestic economic pressures.

CAMPI president Jose Maria Atienza attributed the adjustment to softer market conditions driven by volatile fuel prices, weakening global demand and broader economic uncertainty.

“That number is not actually our main goal for this year. We are seeing the market normalize at lower volumes, and our focus is on how each brand can respond and support customers during this period,” Atienza said during a briefing for the 2026 Philippine International Motor Show (PIMS).

While the industry faces a slowdown, the group noted the current performance remains stronger than the deeper contraction feared at the start of the global downturn.

Growth in the electrified vehicle (xEV) segment has provided a significant buffer, with sales in that category expanding 40 percent year-on-year. Electrified models now represent between 20 and 25 percent of total market volume.

Atienza said brands are actively realigning supply chains to favor these high-demand models while maintaining traditional internal combustion engine lineups. **Othel V. Campos**

**Manila Standard LUXENT HOTEL**

**CLASH OF Rawali**

**Mother's Day Edition**

May 09, 2026 | Luxent Hotel

LIVESTREAMED on Manila Standard's Official Facebook Page

Celebrate. Cook. Love.

## Dried mango king captivates world's taste buds

PROFOOD INTERNATIONAL CORP. dominates about 80 percent of the Philippine mango export market. Under the leadership of its president Justin Uy, the company's flagship labels—Philippine Brand and Cebu Brand—have reached consumers in over 50 countries.

According to Uy, the journey of a dried mango begins with the strict selection of fruit at the farm level. He said the primary factor for success is ripeness, noting that only tree-ripened mangoes achieve the necessary sweetness and aroma.

The growth cycle varies by geography; mangoes at sea level typically require 95 days before harvest, while those in cooler mountainous regions need roughly 140 days.

The company exclusively utilizes the Carabao variety, which Uy prefers for its minimal fiber content and distinct sweet-and-sour flavor profile.

Once harvested, the fruit ripens naturally in a controlled environment before moving to the factory. The processing remains highly specialized, with skilled workers capable of peeling a single mango in just six seconds. The fruit is then sliced into uniform flakes and undergoes a slow drying process that can last up to two days.

Uy's path to success was shaped by early hardship. Driven by family poverty, he left home at 15 and experimented with various ventures, including mushroom cultivation, poultry farming and shell jewelry.

These early experiences—including the struggle with high-interest loans—provided him with a deep understanding of capital and risk, which eventually informed his cautious business strategy.

The major turning point for Uy occurred in the late 1970s during a period of extreme mango oversupply.

When farmers were forced to let fruit rot due to plummeting prices, Uy proposed a unique arrangement. Lacking initial funds, he "borrowed" the mangoes from farmers with a promise to repay them with interest after 90 days. He describes this as a mutually beneficial practice that allowed his business to scale from a small family operation to an international powerhouse.

The scale of production has transformed dramatically since the company's inception. In its first year, the factory produced 18 tons of dried mangoes; today, that same volume is produced in a mere four hours. To ensure consistency, Uy has standardized processing lines across the board.

Despite the growth, the industry faces modern hurdles. Uy acknowledges that rising costs, typhoons and the unpredictable effects of climate change have made the fruit supply increasingly unstable. In response, he has expanded his purchasing network across the Philippines and into Cambodia. He has also diversified the company's product range to cater to both luxury and mass-market consumers.



Profood International Corp. led by Justin Uy now dominate the Philippine mango export market through innovation and quality.

## Chinese envoy urges cooperation with PH

By Michael Wong Ho

**C**HINESE Ambassador Jing Quan called for stability and practical cooperation between China and the Philippines, urging Manila to pursue a "pro-Philippines" policy that prioritizes long-term national interests over rising tensions.

In an article titled "Toward Stability, Not Strain: What Really Matters in China-Philippines Relations," Jing cited a resurgence in political dialogue and economic exchange following a yearlong pause in high-level engagement.

The ambassador noted that three rounds of talks have occurred recently, leading to a steady reopening of exchanges in tourism, agriculture and technology.

A 14-day visa-free policy introduced in January for Chinese tourists has already attracted about 120,000 visitors, representing a 57 percent year-on-year increase. Flight frequencies have also rebounded to approximately 47 percent of pre-pandemic levels with the addition of new routes like Chongqing-Manila.

Enhanced law enforcement cooperation has emerged as a key success according to the ambassador. Joint operations since 2023 resulted in the capture of 102 key fugitives and the repatriation of 2,461 suspects involved in gambling and fraud. In 2026 alone, Jing cited 10 key arrests and 46 repatriations, framing the partnership as a tangible effort to improve public safety.

On the economic front, Jing said China has remained the largest trading partner of the Philippines for 10 years. He pointed to the 15th Five-Year Plan (2026-2030) recently approved during China's "Two Sessions" as a roadmap for continued opening and shared opportunities.

With a middle class exceeding 800 million people, Jing said Chinese demand for Philippine durian, mangoes, and bananas remains robust. He cited \$36.6 million in durian deals secured by Davao exporters at a recent trade expo as proof of direct local benefits.

However, Jing acknowledged that limited political engagement has damaged investor confidence, leaving Chinese investment in the Philippines trailing behind its Southeast Asian peers. He argued that greater predictability is essential to attract capital, particularly in priority areas like infrastructure and clean energy. He specifically named the Terra solar initiative and the Pakil pumped-storage hydropower project as potential models for cooperation.

The ambassador also suggested the Philippines leverage Chinese advances in artificial intelligence, robotics and new energy vehicles. He said that Chinese AI architecture and lower-cost models could align with the national AI roadmap of the Philippines. In the agricultural sector, he highlighted the Chico River Pump Irrigation Project and Chinese hybrid rice as methods to improve local farmer incomes.

Addressing the South China Sea disputes, Jing admitted the issue casts a "persistent shadow" over the relationship but argued it should not dominate the bilateral agenda.

He outlined four possible approaches: fight, talk, maintain the status quo or pursue joint development in areas like environmental protection and oil and gas projects. Jing stated that neither side wants conflict.

## Buddhist leaders pray for peace at Binondo event

By Michael Wong Ho

RELIGIOUS AND COMMUNITY leaders gathered in Binondo, Manila to pray for global stability and inner purification during the 2026 Buddha Bathing Ceremony held at Lucky Chinatown Mall on April 25 to 26.

The Fo Guang Shan Mabuhay Temple and the Buddha's Light International Association Philippines organized the two-day event, which drew devotees for chanting, ritual bathing and prayer.



Buddha bathing ceremony calls for peace and harmony

Fo Guang Shan Mabuhay Temple Abbess Jue Lin led the public in sutra recitation and the "Buddha's Birthday Prayer" authored by Fo Guang Shan founder Master Hsing Yun.

The Abbess dedicated the ceremony's merits to world peace, national prosperity, social harmony and the well-being of the people.

Federation of Filipino Chinese Chambers of Commerce and Industry Inc. vice-president George Hock Huy Chiu joined other community leaders at the ceremony.

In his speech, Chiu said the ritual cleanses the mind and promotes Master Hsing Yun's philosophy of "Three Acts of Goodness, Four Acts of Giving and Five Acts of Kindness."

Chiu addressed contemporary global concerns, noting that the world needs more peace and order as the Middle East conflict involving the United States and Israel spills over. He said such conflicts affect the global economy, energy supply chains and regional security.

"The Buddha Bathing ceremony helps individuals achieve inner peace, eliminate prejudice, doubt and anxiety, and pray for peace and an end to war," Chiu said.

## FFCCII provides medical aid to 680 in Cavite

By Michael Wong Ho

THE FEDERATION OF Filipino Chinese Chambers of Commerce and Industry Inc.'s (FFCCII) social responsibility committee provided medical and dental services to 680 residents during a mission at the Calumpang Cerca Covered Court in Indang, Cavite on April 26.

A team of 7 doctors and 10 dentists treated 500 patients, performed 50 dental extractions, and distributed 130 pairs of reading glasses to the community.

The outreach targeted underserved residents in Barangay Calumpang Cerca to improve access to basic healthcare.

Cavite Filipino Chinese Chamber of Commerce president Zhang Qing Yun joined barangay officials and community representatives to oversee the distribution of care.

The organization said the activity underscores its continuing commitment to community health and social responsibility.

The FFCCII frequently organizes such missions to bridge gaps in local medical infrastructure, often funding the procurement of supplies and medications.



The FFCCII Social Responsibility Committee conducts a medical mission in Barangay Calumpang Cerca in Indang, Cavite, providing healthcare and dental services to 680 residents.

## Agriculture chief urges digital shift for food security

By Julie Ann Lope

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. called for a more resilient and innovation-driven farming sector during an industry forum on April 28, 2026, at the Ascott in Bonifacio Global City.

Speaking at the "From Vision to Harvest: Turning Food Into a Story of Success" event, Laurel outlined strategic priorities aimed at transforming Philippine agriculture into a sustainable and inclusive industry. He emphasized that the agency is prioritizing digital agriculture to modernize the sector.

"Disciplined data collection and use sharpen decision-making," Tiu Laurel said, noting that technology and data-driven insights are essential for the

industry's future.

The forum, organized by the Federation of Filipino Chinese Chambers of Commerce and Industry Inc.'s (FFCCII) trade and industry and agriculture and natural resources committees, gathered stakeholders to discuss strengthening local and global supply chains.

FFCCII president Victor Lim opened the proceedings by highlighting the necessity of cross-sector partnerships to bolster national food productivity.

Beyond digitalization, Laurel identified improved water management and the modernization of irrigation systems as critical factors for enhancing crop yields and climate resilience. He expressed appreciation for the FFCCII for providing "a space where policy meets enterprise."



Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. calls for digital innovation and cross-sector collaboration at the FFCCII's 'From Vision to Harvest' food industry forum.

## Filipino students to join Taiwan Mandarin program

By Julie Ann Lope

MORE THAN 250 Filipino students will travel to Taiwan this year for the 2026 Overseas Community Affairs Council (OCAC) Language Study Program, organizers announced during a pre-departure ceremony.

The initial group of 142 students and teachers departs May 10 for a four-week immersion that combines Mandarin classes with cultural activities.

A pre-departure orientation and flag presentation took place May 2 at the Taipei Economic and Cultural Office (TECO) Culture Center in the Philippines, held in partnership with a leading Filipino community organization.

The session allowed participants and their families to review the academic schedule and cultural itinerary.

Beyond formal classroom instruction, the program includes hands-on experiences in calligraphy, traditional arts, Hakka heritage, and indigenous cultural programs.

More than 250 Filipino students head to Taiwan for the 2026 OCAC Language Study Program, a four-week Mandarin immersion focusing on cultural exchange and language skills.



Students will also participate in study visits and outdoor excursions designed to strengthen practical language skills and expose them to daily life in Taiwan.

TECO Culture Center director Eric Po-chih Chuang urged students to engage actively and use Mandarin confidently in real-life situations. He stressed that the program aims to broaden perspectives and foster cross-cultural understanding.

Community leaders with long-standing ties to the initiative encouraged the youth to maximize the opportunity. Organization president Peter Fong, who first joined the program as a teenager in 1974, called the immersion "formative" and noted its potential to open academic and professional doors.

OCAC senior adviser King-Hua Chua, 94, reflected on five decades of involvement with the exchange. He reaffirmed the commitment of organizers to the program despite 2026 travel-cost challenges and encouraged students to develop independence during their time abroad.

# Aurora Music Festival underscores OPM's growing global reach

By Angelica Villanueva

**T**HE Aurora Music Festival marked its fifth anniversary over the weekend with an estimated 110,000 to 120,000 festivalgoers gathering across its two-day run on May 2 and 3.

Organizers said attendance remained strong even as external pressures, including fuel prices, affected mobility for concertgoers traveling from outside Metro Manila.

"Total around 110,000-120,000 for both days. Usually, at least 100,000 *talaga kami. Ngayon, bigger than the usual,*" said **Louie Alcantara**, owner and CEO of Epic Events, which organizes the festival.

He noted that while the festival has yet to surpass last year's record turnout, this year's attendance still met expectations.

"Very happy *kami na kahit sa prices, sobrang dami pa rin ng turnouts. Na-reach pa rin namin yung goal namin for this year,*" he added.

Alcantara acknowledged that roughly 70 percent of attendees travel from outside the capital region, including Laguna, Tagaytay, Baguio, and Pangasinan, making transportation costs a key factor in attendance patterns.

Despite these challenges, organizers described the milestone edition as a "full circle moment" for the festival, which began in 2019.

Alcantara said the fifth year was designed as a retrospective celebration of artists who helped shape Aurora's growth.

"Parang throwback ng lahat ng mga key artists *namin,*" he said, citing return performances from acts such as **Ben&Ben** and **IV of Spades**.

Alongside the two OPM bands, this year's lineup also included **SB19**, **December Avenue**, **Armi Millare**, **XONARA**, **Kitchie Nadal**, **Parokya Ni Edgar**, **Kamikazee**, and **Sexbomb Girls**. Popstar Royalty **Sarah Geronimo** was part of the first-day lineup but was not able to perform as she was advised to rest after rehearsals.

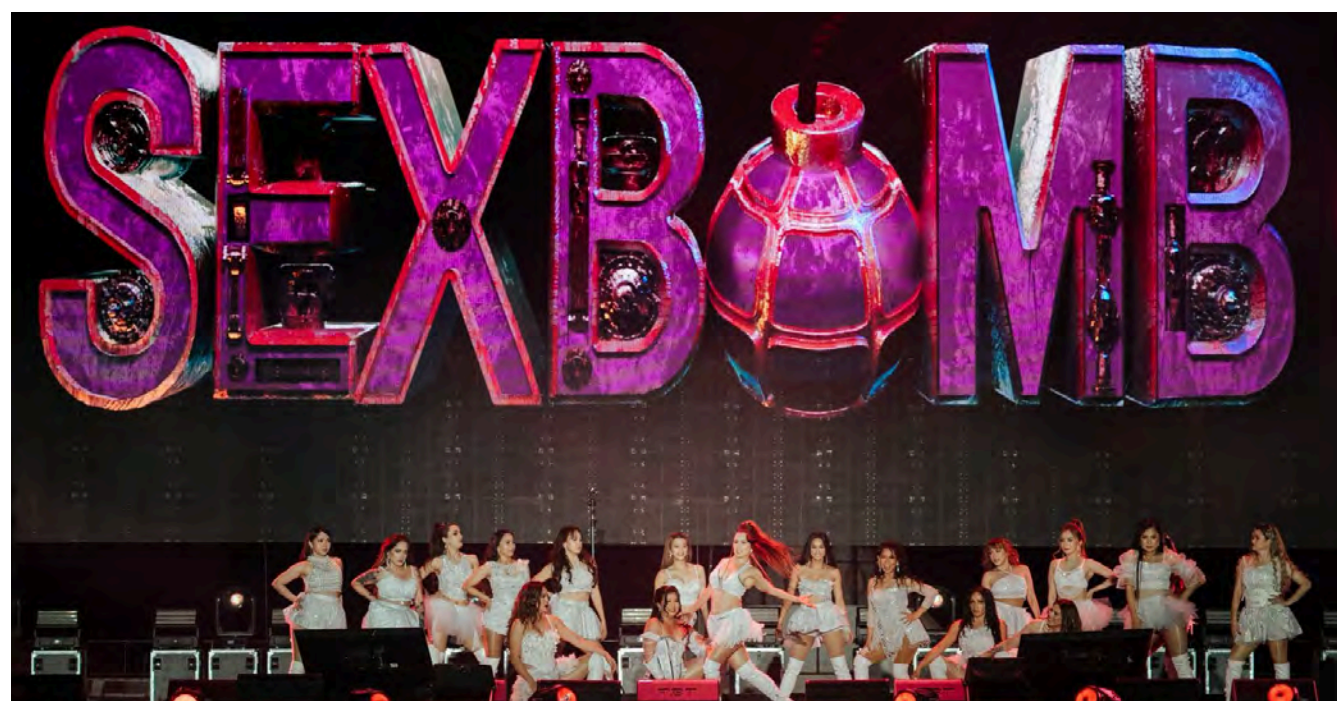
The group was part of the festival's early lineup before their hiatus and returned for the fifth anniversary edition, which organizers said added symbolic weight to the celebration following the pandemic years.

He also emphasized Aurora's focus on Filipino talent despite its increasingly international reach.

"Aurora *talaga 'yung platform na gusto namin for local artists pero international 'yung quality ng production,*" he said.



SB19 fires up the Aurora Music Festival crowd as the fifth anniversary edition highlights the growing global reach of OPM and P-pop



The SexBomb Girls bring nostalgic energy to the music festival in Pampanga



OPM band Ben&Ben returns to the Aurora Music Festival stage and performs some of its hit tracks

While international expansion is not the current priority, Alcantara said the festival has already seen grow-

ing foreign interest, noting attendees from Japan and Korea in past editions, particularly during major sets such as

Ben&Ben.

Looking ahead, organizers said they are planning an expanded 2027 lineup

that could feature a full-day P-pop showcase.

"Sana mabuo *yung* one day all P-pop groups like SB19, BINI, Alamat, G22," Alcantara said, adding that discussions are already underway.

The festival has also become a launchpad for acts gaining international recognition, including SB19 and BINI, both of whom have performed on global stages such as Lollapalooza and Coachella.

"We want to give Filipino artists an international platform. 'Yung talent ng Filipinos pang-international *talaga,*" Alcantara said.

He added that the growing global visibility of OPM suggests stronger international attendance in future editions, potentially drawing audiences from Japan, Hong Kong, and Korea.

"Very exciting *'yung* future. *Parang start pa lang talaga ng Aurora,*" he said. **Gamezone joins festival for first time**

Among this year's sponsors was Gamezone, marking its first participation in the festival. Gamezone events manager **Ava Castillo** said the partnership aligns with the brand's target audience.

"We did a study, and a lot of our younger audiences are very engaged. Aurora has a lot of younger audiences as well, so we want to engage with them in a different way," she said.

Gamezone also promoted its competitive gaming events and responsible gaming advocacy during the festival. Castillo emphasized discipline in gaming practices.

"You have to learn discipline. You should know when to stop," she added.

The brand featured on-ground activations, giveaways, and stage segments, as well as appearances by online personalities and entertainers.

Despite its entertainment focus, Castillo said the company's campaigns also aim to integrate cultural elements into gaming engagement.

## Future of Aurora

As Aurora Music Festival enters its sixth year, organizers said they remain focused on expanding production while maintaining its core identity as a showcase for Filipino music.

"Every year, *nagre-reflect kami kung anong pwedeng i-improve. Hopefully may improvement na something exciting for the fans,*" Alcantara shared.

He added that the long-term vision is to set a benchmark for music festivals in the country.

"We want to set the standard for music festival. We believe Filipino talent is world-class," he continued.

Organizers expressed gratitude to sponsors, artists, media partners, and fans who have supported the festival since its inception, with hopes of sustaining its momentum for the next decade.

"Hopefully we will stay for more than 10 years pa to celebrate OPM," Alcantara said.



## Mexican BTS fans go wild as concerts grow near

BTS fans in Mexico City gather for dance performances and fan activities ahead of the group's sold-out concert run in the country

DANCERS bounced to the sound of BTS on an avenue in Mexico City, clapping and screaming at a pep rally kicking off a string of concerts by the South Korean superstars.

K-pop fervor in Mexico is not limited to young fans. Many parents also support the group, which returned to the spotlight in March after an almost four-year pause as members completed mandatory military service.

BTS will perform in Mexico City on May 7, 9, and 10, with more than 135,000 tickets selling out within minutes. President Claudia Sheinbaum even tried, unsuccessfully, to secure additional shows.

**Jude Pelaez** joined other fans on Paseo de la Reforma for a promotional event ahead of the concerts.

Some danced while others applied temporary tattoos as a poster of the seven members was raised above the crowd.

"Like everyone here, I'm so happy," Pelaez told *AFP*. "We do these events to emotionally and psychologically prepare ourselves and to prepare the energy and vibe of the place."

"Mexico is different," he said.

**Mare Sousa**, 16, said BTS mania is a space where "everyone is free to be who they are."

She attends a K-pop dance school with about 30 students, mostly women, who rehearse choreography in front of mirrors even before class begins.

"Take it easy, breathe," teacher **Ginna Montoya** told the group.

K-pop culture in Mexico also extends beyond dance, with fans meeting in BTS-themed cafés and others studying Korean at cultural centers.

**Lucio Campos** began learning the language after his daughter asked to visit South Korea for her 15th birthday.

"BTS was born with the idea of transmitting healthy questions for young people," he said. "Their war cry is 'let's live life, let's live it healthily, let's live well.'"

He said the group's message contrasts with the themes of reggaeton and "narcocorridos," a Mexican subgenre linked to drug culture.

On the scalping site StubHub, tickets for the Mexico concerts are reportedly selling for as much as \$13,000. *AFP*

THE Th3rd Floor team, led by **Gerald Anderson**, defeated Sparkle in the *Bida sa Arena: Ultimate Celebrity Showdown* held Sunday, May 3, at the SM MOA Arena.

The winning squad featured **Richard Gutierrez**, **Vhong Navarro**, **Jameson Blake**, **Emilio Daez**, **RK Bagatsing**, **Johannes Rissler**, **Argel Saycon**, **Tristan Ramirez**, **Elyson De Dios**, **Binsoy Namoca**, and content creators **Malupiton** and **Tommy Tiango**.

On the Sparkle side, the team was captained by **David Licauc**, with teammates including **Will Ashley**, **Dustin Yu**, **Rayver Cruz**, **Mavy Legaspi**, **Paul Salas**, **Josh Ford**, **EA Guzman**, **Andre Paras**, **Anthony Constantino**, **Kimson Tan**, **Prince Carlos**, and **Mateo Monzones**.

The Th3rd Floor secured the win with 96 points, edging Sparkle's 89.

Fans filled the arena with loud cheers throughout the event, with noticeable support coming from celebrity partners and friends in attendance. **Shaira Diaz** supported EA Guzman, while **Ashley Ortega** cheered for Mavy Legaspi, and **Bianca de Vera**



Sparkle artist Dustin Yu (right) receives support from fellow Pinoy Big Brother: Celebrity Collab Edition housemate Bianca de Vera

## Gerald Anderson-led team wins celebrity basketball showdown



The Th3rd Floor squad celebrates its win over Sparkle at the Bida sa Arena: Ultimate Celebrity Showdown



Best Players of the Game from both teams together with Most Valuable Player Gerald Anderson (leftmost)

backed Dustin Yu.

Others spotted in the crowd included **Barbie Imperial** for Richard Gutierrez, **Shuvee Etrata** for Anthony Constantino, and **Mika Salamanca**

for Will Ashley.

AZ Martinez, muse of the Sparkle team, was also present alongside **Ralph De Leon**, **River Joseph**, and **Vince Maristela**.



Kristoffer Marin gears up for Sparkle Run 2026 as the event brings together fitness, fan interaction, and live entertainment

## A run for fitness and fandom

SPARKLE GMA Artist Center is inviting both seasoned runners and first-timers to join Sparkle Run 2026 at the Quirino Grandstand in Manila on May 30.

The fun run will feature race distances of 3K, 5K, 6.6K, 10K, and 16K, with participants running through historic city routes accompanied by live performances and interactive fan moments.

Fans will have the opportunity to run alongside Sparkle artists **Alden Richards, David Licaucó, Rayver Cruz, Glaiza de Castro, Camille Prats, Derrick Monasterio, Kristoffer Martin, Mikee Quintos, Sofia Pablo, Allen Ansay, and Barbie Forsteza.**

Appearances from *Pinoy Big Brother Celebrity Collab* housemates and other surprise guests are also ex-

pected, adding to the entertainment lineup and fan experience.

Organizers said the event will combine fitness, entertainment, and fan engagement in a large-scale Kapuso celebration, with runners experiencing music, performances, and activity zones along the course.

Sparkle Run 2026 is spearheaded by Sparkle GMA Artist Center in partnership with the Manila Depart-

ment of Tourism, Culture, and Arts, and organized by RUNRIO Inc.

Registration is still open via <https://raceroster.com/events/2026/115775/sparkle-run-2026/register>.

More information on race routes, race kits and event schedules is available through Sparkle and RUNRIO's official social media pages, as well as the event listing at <https://raceroster.com/events/sparkle-run-2026>



Young stars Maika Kemmochi (left) and Yza Uy are joining the fun run at the Quirino Grandstand in Manila on May 30

From left: Sparkle's Campus Cuties Akira Kurata, Tyrone Tan, and Mad Ramos



Senator Loren Legarda calls for earlier climate action and anticipatory disaster financing

By Angelica Villanueva

**E**XTREME heat, stronger storms, and rising seas are no longer distant warnings but daily conditions reshaping how communities prepare for disasters.

At the Asian Conference on Climate Change and Disaster Resilience 2026 at the Asian Institute of Management, officials and experts called for a shift away from disaster response and toward early preparation before impacts occur.

Delivering the keynote address, Senator **Loren Legarda** framed the issue in practical terms. Disasters, she said, have long been met with a familiar cycle—impact, relief, rebuilding—only for communities to face the same risks again.

“We rebuild. But too often, we rebuild into the same risks. This is the status quo. It reflects not only a failure of policy and imagination but a deeper structural misalignment between how risk unfolds in real time and how finance is released in response,” said Legarda.

That cycle is not just a policy gap, but something felt in daily routines: when families delay evacuation because assistance comes late, when local governments wait for formal declarations before acting, or when recovery funds arrive after livelihoods have already been disrupted.

Across sessions, officials and experts described a region facing growing pressure. Asia and the Pacific ac-

# A call for anticipatory approach to climate disaster response



Government officials, policy experts, and climate advocates discuss disaster preparedness and climate resilience strategies at the Asian Conference on Climate Change and Disaster Resilience 2026



From left: AIM President Jikyeong Kang, Assec. Lilian De Leon, Sen. Loren Legarda, Sec. Robert EA Borje, Prof. Chad Briggs, and Prof. Erin L. Downey

count for a large share of global disaster impacts, with climate shocks now happening alongside food insecurity, unstable fuel prices, and weak supply chains.

Speakers pointed to scenarios already affecting households—from prolonged drought tied to El Niño to the possibility of increased rice imports as local production falters. The discussions repeatedly returned to a concept gaining traction in both policy and community planning: anticipatory climate finance. Instead of releasing funds after damage is as-

sessed, the approach pushes resources out earlier—based on forecasts, risk thresholds, and early warning systems.

For Legarda, this shift is about everyday survival as much as it is about government policy. She proposed systems that would let local governments access funds before disasters happen, so they can strengthen infrastructure, store food supplies, or put early warning tools in place.

“Therefore, this is my challenge to you, and my promise to our people: We must legislate for anticipation,” she said, calling for reforms that would al-

low disaster funds to be released based on forecasts, not just declarations.

She added that the same principle should apply at the household level, with support reaching families early enough to act.

“Fiscal policy is meaningless if it does not reach the mother packing her children into a tricycle to flee a flooding home,” the senator continued.

Government officials pushed for a shift in how preparedness is understood, arguing it cannot stop at warehouses filled with relief goods. Planning has to reflect who is most at

risk—women, the elderly, persons with disabilities, and communities in geographically isolated areas—and start well before evacuation centers begin to fill.

The discussion also went beyond policy and focused on everyday realities. Climate change is no longer seen as a distant environmental issue, but as something already affecting how people find food, get around cities, and make a living. Systems built on past weather patterns are no longer reliable, as heat indices reach record levels and rainfall becomes more unpredictable.

Legarda underscored how this disconnect plays out on the ground, saying the country has “become experts in counting the dead and repairing the broken,” while failing to act early enough to prevent losses.

By the close of the conference, the takeaway was straightforward: the gap is not only about resources, but about when they are used. Acting earlier, whether through government policy or household decisions, can spell the difference between disruption and stability.

As Legarda put it, preparedness is measured not by what is rebuilt after a disaster, but by what is prevented from being lost.



Vertical drama 'The Chambermaid's Daughter' gains online traction as viewers follow the developing romance between BGYO's Gelo (bottom) and Alexa Ilacad

## Vertical drama 'The Chambermaid's Daughter' hits 5M views

THE ABS-CBN Studios vertical drama *The Chambermaid's Daughter* is leading the iWant charts in the Philippines. It is also drawing strong online viewership and has accumulated millions of Facebook views since its release.

Starring **Alexa Ilacad** and **Gelo Rivera**, the series has gained traction for its short-form format and light romantic storyline, part of a growing push into vertical dramas on the streaming platform iWant.

The first five episodes released on the ABS-CBN Facebook page have generated a combined nearly 5 million views, with Episode 4 recording 3.7 million views alone after its premiere on April 30, according to platform figures.

*The Chambermaid's Daughter* is the first vertical drama produced by ABS-CBN Studios, featuring short episodes designed for mobile viewing as part of iWant's expanding content lineup.

The story follows Hannah Montano (Ilacad), a hotel room attendant who becomes a private Tagalog tutor for Daniel Jeon (Rivera), a Korean executive, leading to a cross-cultural romance and life-changing experiences.

All episodes are available on iWant, with the first five episodes offered for free on the iWant app, ABS-CBN Facebook page, and the iWant YouTube channel.

Episodes 6 to 30 are available exclusively via subscription, priced starting at P35 per month in the Philippines, \$12.99 per month in the United States, and \$4.99 per month in other countries.



BGYO member Gelo Rivera (left) and Alexa Ilacad play as Korean executive Daniel Jeon and Hannah Montano, respectively

NOW &amp; NEXT

By Nickie Wang

More people experiencing hair loss are turning to science-led treatments focused on long-term prevention and maintenance and anchored on innovation. And as the country's hair loss treatment authority, marking 45 years in the industry, Svenson is introducing a new scalp treatment.

Called Gen45, the product is positioned as the culmination of the company's work in developing treatments for thinning hair, built on years of client consultations and scalp analysis.

The treatment is formulated to be gentle on the scalp while delivering targeted results, addressing concerns about irritation often linked to hair loss solutions. Svenson said the formula combines modern research with traditional ingredients to create a restorative scalp care experience.

Gen45 contains amino acids aimed at supporting stronger and thicker hair growth, alongside biotin and niacinamide, which are commonly used to maintain scalp health over time. It also

# Innovative scalp solution addressing shifting hair care needs



Host Gino Quillamor prefers a gentler, science-based approach to scalp wellness



Svenson introduces its new Gen45 scalp treatment as the company expands its science-led approach to long-term hair and scalp care

Gen45 contains amino acids to support stronger and thicker hair growth, biotin and niacinamide to maintain scalp health



The treatment is designed to fit into evolving self-care routines, where consumers seek integrated approaches that combine effectiveness with comfort and long-term maintenance



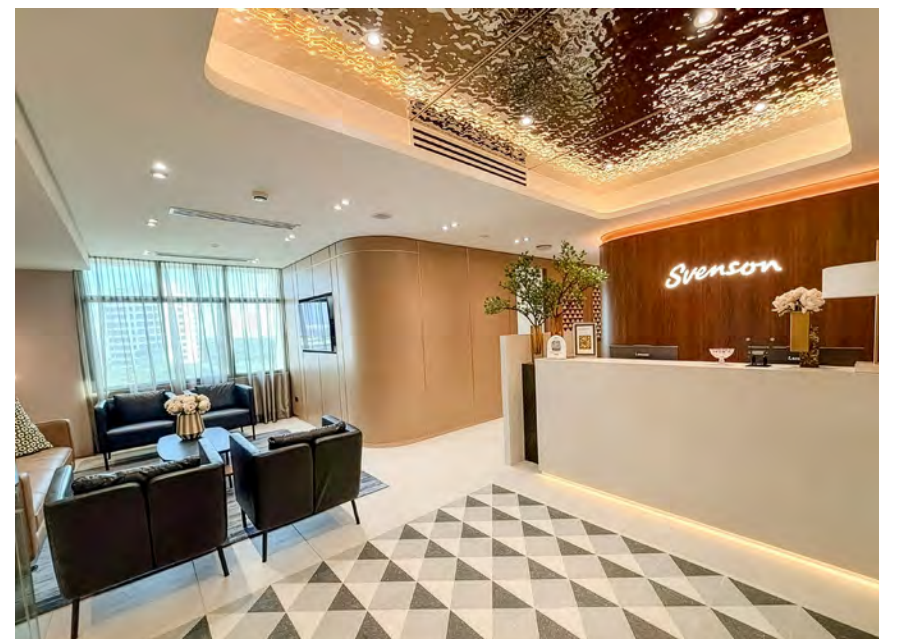
Host and actress Issa Litton tries the newly launched Gen45 scalp treatment

includes plant-based ingredients such as ginseng and burdock, which have been traditionally used to help cleanse the scalp and support hair growth.

The formulation incorporates saw palmetto, an ingredient often used

to help manage dihydrotestosterone (DHT), a hormone linked to hair thinning. Antioxidants are also included to help support blood circulation in the scalp, with the goal of improving nutrient delivery to hair follicles.

"Think of Gen45 as a curated cocktail of nutrients, blending the precision of modern science with the soothing wisdom of tradition. Our formula features a blend of organic, scalp-loving ingredients that work



The hair loss solutions clinic positions scalp analysis and preventive care at the center of evolving self-care routines through its latest hair wellness treatment

in perfect harmony to revitalize your hair from the inside out," the company said in a statement.

Svenson also added that the treatment is designed to fit into evolving self-care routines, where consumers are increasingly seeking integrated approaches that combine effectiveness with comfort and long-term maintenance.

"We've always believed that great hair isn't just styled; it's cultivated. Your scalp is the foundation of your hair. It deserves a dedicated, sci-

ence-backed approach. Gen45 is a big game-changer in scalp care, as this hair-strengthening treatment is designed for the modern individual who refuses to compromise on quality or comfort," the company went on.

The launch comes as competition in the hair and scalp care sector intensifies, with companies focusing on personalization and science-based formulations to address a growing demand for long-term solutions to hair thinning and scalp health.

## How to keep sunburn, acne, and fungal infections at bay

WITH over 7,600 islands and world-class beaches, the Philippines is a summer destination where locals and tourists often spend hours under the sun to achieve a bronzed glow.

But that glow comes with risks, says **Ma. Margarita Isabel Carlos-Tanchiong, MD**, of Makati Medical Center (MakatiMed).

"That tan on your skin is a sunburn. It may look nice, but it also damages your skin. The intense heat and humidity can also lead to skin issues like acne and fungal infections," she said.

MakatiMed highlighted common sun-related conditions and how to manage them.

Sunburn. Excessive sun exposure can cause peeling, blistering, and pain.

"If this happens, get out of the sun immediately and stay in a cool room or bathe in cool water," Dr. Carlos-Tanchiong said. "Apply aloe vera or a ceramide-based moisturizer, avoid popping blisters, and take pain relievers if needed. Topical or oral medication may also be required."

For prevention, use a broad-spectrum, water-resistant sunscreen with SPF 30 or higher, reapply every two hours, and cover exposed areas. Avoid peak sun hours from 10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.



Common sun-related skin conditions include sunburn, acne, and fungal infection

Acne. Heat and humidity increase sweat and oil production, which can clog pores.

"Wash regularly with a soap-free cleanser or one with salicylic acid," she said. "Use non-comedogenic sunscreen and switch to oil-free, gel-based moisturizers. Wear loose cotton clothing if acne appears on the body."

Fungal infections. Warm, moist environments allow fungi to thrive, leading to rashes and itching.

Common cases include athlete's foot, ringworm, jock itch, and yeast infections, often appearing in skin folds or sweaty areas.

Treatment includes keeping the skin clean and dry and using antifungal creams.

"See your doctor for proper diagnosis and avoid scratching to prevent spreading," she said.

## A skin-first makeup system for professionals

AS PART of a broader effort to promote a more structured, skin-first approach to professional makeup application, a new skin-first approach to professional beauty has been introduced in the Philippines with the launch of the Flo Vergara Makeup Line by Pretty Skin & Lamelin Philippines during its first Skin2Confidence PRO workshop for makeup artists.

Held on April 30, the event brought together professional makeup artists for a program focused on integrating skincare and makeup into a single system aimed at improving application, finish, and long-term skin health.

The launch moves beyond a traditional product unveiling, positioning the line as part of what the company describes as a skin-integrated professional makeup system.

The concept was developed in collaboration with board-certified dermatologists and makeup artist **Florence Vergara**, whose skin-first approach shaped the collection.

"Makeup can only be as good as the skin underneath it," Vergara said during the event. "This is not just about color. It is about preparation, understanding, and respecting the skin before we even touch a brush."

The Flo Vergara Makeup Line by Pretty Skin & Lamelin Philippines is designed to address common challenges faced by makeup artists, including poor product adherence, uneven texture, and patchiness linked to underlying skin conditions.

The workshop included dermatologist-led skin education sessions, demonstrations on skin preparation, a live makeup

masterclass, hands-on application, and a product reveal.

Participants were also introduced to a structured learning approach linking dermatological principles with makeup artistry and were named founding Skin2Confidence PRO artists.

Pretty Skin & Lamelin Philippines said the initiative reflects growing demand in the beauty industry for skin-focused and science-informed products, as consumers increasingly prioritize skin health and natural finishes.

The Philippine beauty market, valued at about \$6.7 billion, continues to attract brands offering professional-grade and science-backed solutions.

The

company said it aims to combine Korean skincare science, dermatological input, and professional makeup artistry through its Skin2Confidence platform.

The event also marked the formation of the Skin2Confidence PRO Elite Circle, a network of makeup artists given access to training, certification programs, product releases, and collaborations.



Celebrity makeup artist Florence Vergara (right) promotes a skin-first approach to professional beauty