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# Manila Standard

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## PBBM open to special session

By Charles Dantes and Joel E. Zurbano

MALACAÑANG on Thursday said President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. is open to convening a special session of Congress if the Senate's new leadership formally requests it and provides valid grounds. This as the Palace reaffirmed its recognition of Senator Sherwin Gatchalian as acting Senate President amid an escalating leadership dispute, saying the chamber must settle its internal issues while the executive branch deals with the leadership it considers legitimate.

Presidential Communications Office (PCO) Undersecretary Claire Castro said the administration is waiting for

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# Cayetano bloc still defiant

## SP's group nixes new majority, holds Blue Ribbon hearing

By Ram Superable, Joel Zurbano, Katrina Manubay, and Pot Chavez

SENATE President Alan Peter Cayetano and his allies on Thursday continued to defy the chamber's new majority bloc, rejecting the new leadership under Senator Sherwin Gatchalian and holding a Blue Ribbon subcommittee hearing as they had scheduled at the plenary hall.

Cayetano continues to claim the Senate presidency despite 12 senators choosing Gatchalian and reorganizing the chamber to their preference on Wednesday.

Cayetano also urged Malacañang to wait for a 13th senator from his group to join what he called the "11 plus 1" bloc -- now led by Gatchalian as Senate President Pro Tempore and Acting Senate

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**TALE OF ONE BLUE RIBBON.** Sen. Pia Cayetano gestures during the start of the revived Blue Ribbon hearing yesterday which she called before a new Senate majority was formed on Wednesday. Top photo shows lawyer Levi Baligod, in Barong Tagalog, with some of the former soldiers who testified at the hearing. Contributed photos



## 'Baligod 18' repeats claim of delivering cash 'maletas'

By Ram Superable, Charles Dantes, Pot Chavez, Joel Zurbano, and Maricel Cruz

EIGHTEEN men claiming to be former Philippine Marines alleged during a Senate hearing Thursday that they delivered suitcases containing cash to President Ferdinand Marcos Jr., Senator Vicente "Tito" Sotto III, Senator Erwin Tulfo, Rep. Leila de Lima, former Rep. France Castro, and other political figures.

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## 'PH TO MISS 2028 POVERTY TARGET'

BUSINESS / B1

## PH fails to get a non-permanent UN Security Council seat

THE Philippines on Thursday midnight failed to achieve the necessary two-thirds majority vote from the United Nations General Assembly to secure a non-permanent seat on the Security Council.

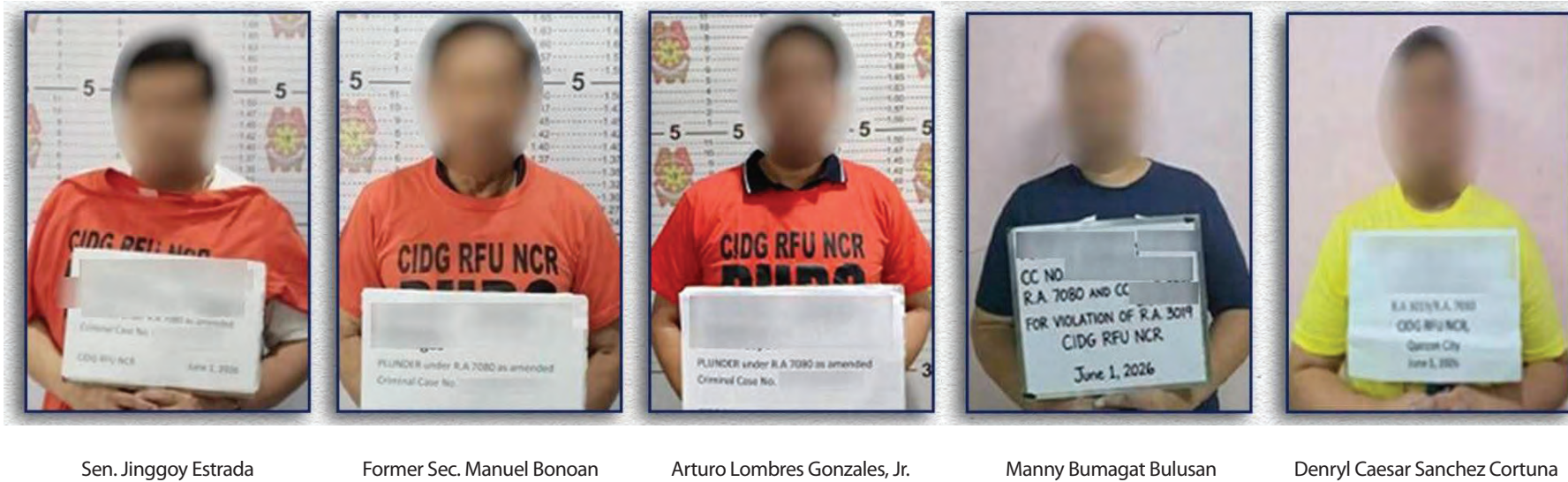
In a statement, Foreign Affairs Secretary Theresa Lazaro congratulated Kyrgyzstan on winning the Asia-Pacific spot for the first time.

"The Philippines respects the decision of the member states of the United Nations and extends its congratulations to the Kyrgyz Republic following today's election for the non-permanent seat in the United Nations Security Council (UNSC)," she said.

Kyrgyzstan received 142 votes in the fourth round, while the Philippines garnered 49.

Lazaro expressed gratitude to the international community for support, emphasizing that the country's campaign was based on long-standing commitments to

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## Sandiganbayan enters not guilty plea for Jinggoy in graft raps

By Vince Lopez and Maricel V. Cruz

THE Sandiganbayan Second Division on Thursday entered a not guilty plea for Senator Jinggoy Estrada who refused to enter a plea during his arraignment on the graft case.

At the same time, Estrada withdrew his petition for bail estimated at P573 million.

Criminal Investigation and Detection Group-National Capital Region (CIDG-NCR) said that former Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH) Secretary Manuel Bonoan failed to attend his scheduled arraignment at the Sandiganbayan

due to medical reasons. The court earlier denied Estrada's bid to quash the graft case against him concerning alleged kickbacks from the government's flood control projects, citing lack of merit. The anti-graft court rejected Estrada's argument that his right to due process was violated with the filing of

plunder and graft cases against him.

"The accused was given a chance to defend himself by submitting the affidavit before the DOJ. The motion to quash... dismiss, is denied," Sandiganbayan Second Division chairman and Presiding Justice Geraldine Econg said.

Estrada, who was arrested

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## Lawyer calls out OMB bias vs. Romualdez

A PUBLIC interest lawyer has criticized Ombudsman Jesus Crispin Remulla for allegedly prejudging former Speaker Ferdinand Martin G. Romualdez in connection with the anomalous flood control projects controversy.

In a radio interview over dzMM, Atty. Antonio Zoleta Bucoy said Remulla has repeatedly tagged the former House leader as the mastermind behind the alleged flood control scam without the benefit of a preliminary investigation and without presenting any evidence.

"There is only one person pushing that narrative, and that is Ombudsman Remulla, who from the very beginning has already branded Speaker Romualdez as the mastermind," he said.

Bucoy said there is no basis for the Ombudsman's allegation.

"The question is, what is his basis? Second, has there already been a preliminary investigation? Because there have been no reports indicating that a preliminary investigation has been conducted," he said.

He added that Remulla's statement should have been based on an evaluation of both the complaint and the response of the accused.

"You can only brand someone a mastermind after you have reviewed and analyzed both sides—the complaint and the answer," he stressed.

Bucoy pointed out that the process has not yet reached that stage.

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## Emil P. Jurado, 98

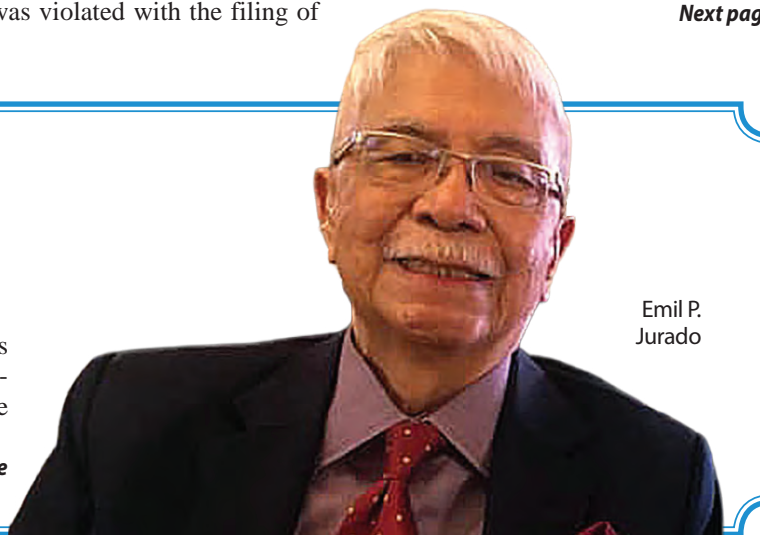
### Journalist, Lawyer

THE family of Emil P. Jurado, chairman emeritus of Manila Standard, announced his passing yesterday.

A multi-awarded journalist, Jurado co-founded the Manila Standard with

journalist Rod Reyes in 1987. He is chairman-emeritus of the paper's editorial board and writes the column "To The Point" for the paper.

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Emil P. Jurado



## PBBM...

From A1

an official request from the Senate bloc led by acting Senate President Sherwin Gatchalian.

“They said they will be the ones to request for special session. So, as soon as the new leadership will send the official request for special session addressed to the President, then the President will act immediately on that,” Castro said in mixed Filipino and English.

Asked whether Mr. Marcos was inclined to grant such a request, the Castro said he was receptive to the idea, citing concerns that ongoing political developments in the Senate could delay legislative work.

“Yes, the President is inclined to give in to the official request for the special session... He does not want Senate work to be delayed because of these developments,” Castro said.

However, she stressed that any request must be supported by valid grounds before the President can formally call a special session.

The possibility of a special session emerged after a Senate reorganization that reshaped the chamber’s leadership and committee structure, with Marcos expressing concern that political disputes could hamper the passage of urgent measures.

### Special session agenda

Among the issues previously identified by the President as requiring legislative attention are a supplemental budget and measures intended to assist Filipinos affected by tensions and instability in the Middle East.

The PCO official said the administration would first review the Senate’s formal request before determining which measures could be included in the agenda of a special session.

## Emil...

From A1

Jurado, who hails from Dolores, Abra, was chairman-emeritus of the Manila Overseas Press Club and a lifetime member of the National Press Club. He published his memoir, “The Road Never Ends” in 2020 and also wrote Eruptions: how to speak English without trial.

He was awarded the Journalism Lifetime Achievement Award by the Manila Rotary Club in 2022.

His wake will be open to the public from Saturday, June 6, until Monday, June 7, from 2 pm to 10 pm, at Heritage Chapels 2 and 3 in Taguig City. The funeral mass will be on Tuesday, June 8, at 10 am. Cremation follows immediately after.

“I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.” (2 Timothy 4:7)

## Cayetano...

From A1

President – before calling a special session to resolve the leadership dispute.

The Senate President, who attended the Blue Ribbon hearing led by his sister, Sen. Pia Cayetano, and Sen. Rodante Marcoleta, said he is willing to step down if doing so would break the impasse and ensure compliance with the 1987 Constitution.

“So Malacañang, iyon lang advice ko sa inyo, hintayin ninyo na makatrese, tawagin ninyo special session. Puwede siguro tayo magpahiram ng isa para makatrese na sila,” Cayetano said during a Senate hearing on the flood control controversy.

(Malacañang, that’s my only advice to you: wait until they reach 13, then call a special session. Maybe we can lend them one senator so they can finally make it 13.)

His remarks came amid reports that President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. is inclined to call a special session if Gatchalian requests one.

The Palace recognizes Gatchalian as the new Senate leader after the “11 plus 1” bloc, with the attendance of erstwhile Cayetano ally Senator Francis “Chiz” Escudero, called a quorum on Wednesday and declared all positions – including Cayetano’s – vacant.

Cayetano and his allies rejected the move, with the Senate President branding it an “illegal coup d’etat.”

“The news ngayon, Mr. Chairman, is that the President will call a special session. That’s good,” Cayetano told Marcoleta, who was presiding over the hearing (see related story on A1 – Editors).

The new Senate majority under Gatchalian criticized what they called “an unauthorized Senate hearing,” urging their peers to focus on legislative work while respecting the chamber’s rules, quorum, and duly constituted leadership.

### Bogus hearing

In a joint statement, the senators called for an end to what they labeled a

“bogus hearing,” emphasizing the importance of following rules, maintaining quorum, and respecting the Senate’s legitimate leadership.

“They have refused to attend legitimately called sessions. Now, they are grandstanding in an unofficial and unauthorized gathering,” the statement read.

“What an insult to the institution and to the Filipino people who pay for every minute of this circus with their hard-earned taxes,” it added.

Cayetano, who did not preside over the Senate’s session days on Monday and Tuesday in what amounted to his bloc’s unannounced boycott, reiterated that he is prepared to relinquish his post if it would help the chamber comply with constitutional requirements.

Under the Constitution, 13 votes are required to elect a Senate president. Cayetano said he would step down immediately if circumstances allowed, but noted that the Senate has yet to elect a successor.

“I hate the fact that we’re in a situation that we cannot follow the law,” he said.

Malacañang maintained that no law was violated and now recognizes Gatchalian as Senate leader.

Former Senate President Franklin Drilon also defended the reorganization, citing Senate practice and the \*Avelino v. Cuenco\* ruling.

Drilon said that while the Constitution requires 13 votes to elect a Senate president, a quorum of 12 senators was sufficient to declare leadership positions vacant and elect Gatchalian as Senate president pro tempore.

“In this particular case, the acts of the group of Win Gatchalian should be recognized as valid until the Supreme Court says otherwise,” Drilon said.

### IBP: Wednesday’s session lawful

The Integrated Bar of the Philippines (IBP) later issued a statement on what constitutes a legitimate quorum for the Senate to conduct official business, saying the session on Wednesday was “lawful and valid” following the Supreme Court ruling in the Avelino vs.

Cuenco case.

“All acts, resolutions, and decisions made by the Senate during its session of June 3, 2026 are presumed to be official acts of the Philippine Senate following the presumption of regularity in the discharge of official functions,” it added.

The lawyers’ group noted that the Avelino doctrine is applicable in relation to the determination of quorum despite the presence of only 12 senators. It explained that two senators – Sen. Jinggoy Estrada and Sen. Ronald Dela Rosa, Cayetano’s allies -- were considered beyond reach of the Senate and cannot be compelled to attend its sessions such that they were excluded from the count of the members.

Still, Cayetano’s bloc disputed that interpretation, arguing that a quorum requires 13 senators.

Senator Pia Cayetano maintained that efforts to remove her as chair of the Blue Ribbon Committee were invalid because they lacked the required quorum.

“Rule 2, Section 2 of the Senate rules states the officers of the Senate shall be elected by the majority vote of all its members. Majority vote is 13. When 12 senators convene and purportedly held session, how can that be valid?” she said.

Senator Loren Legarda -- Cayetano’s President Pro Tempore before Wednesday’s reorganization -- likewise argued that the constitutional requirement for electing a Senate president applies to all Senate officers, including her office, the Senate secretary and sergeant-at-arms.

“If 12 votes were not enough to elect a Senate President, how can the same 12 votes be enough to elect any other Senate officer?” Legarda said.

Detained Senator Jinggoy Estrada also questioned Gatchalian’s election, arguing that “Avelino v. Cuenco” does not apply because neither he nor Senator Ronald “Bato” dela Rosa has resigned from the Senate.

“The Senate President is still Senate President Alan Peter Cayetano,” Estrada

da said.

The conflict spilled into the chamber’s flood control inquiry, which proceeded Thursday despite Gatchalian’s declaration that hearings organized by the new minority bloc would be illegitimate.

### Tensions at the Senate

Tensions rose after security personnel allegedly prevented 18 former Marines and other resource persons from entering the Senate. Alan Peter Cayetano personally administered the oath to the former military personnel outside the gates before entering the plenary hall.

“We are not here to fight, we are not clinging to power. But we will fight for the Filipinos, the Constitution, and the truth,” the Senate President said.

The hearing proceeded under Senator Pia Cayetano and was attended by Legarda, Marcoleta, Senator Imee Marcos and Senator Robin Padilla.

Interior Secretary Jonvic Remulla denied allegations that he blocked senators from entering the Senate after Pia Cayetano claimed he prevented her from accessing the building.

“How can I do that? I was alone,” Remulla said, adding that he was the one pushed aside while leaving the premises.

Gatchalian, who had asked Remulla to help ensure order in the morning session, had earlier announced that the Blue Ribbon hearing would not push through, saying Senator Erwin Tulfo had already been elected as the committee’s new chair.

He also authorized Senate employees to work from home and sought additional security assistance amid reports of a planned rally outside the Senate.

Cayetano meanwhile urged Senate employees to reflect on the constitutional issues raised by the leadership dispute.

“Here today, who is the legitimate Senate President? Because this is not just a quarrel between two groups of friends. All of our employees here will have to decide on Monday,” he said.

## Lawyer...

From A1

“To my knowledge, correct me if I’m mistaken, the case has not yet reached that point,” he said.

He said Supreme Court decisions require conclusions to be based on evidence and a fair investigative process.

“As the Supreme Court has stated, that alone is not enough to immediately label someone a co-conspirator or accomplice,” he said.

“It must be based on credible, solid, and convincing evidence. You also have to hear the side of the accused first. As of now, I have not heard of any such process, unless one has already taken place without public knowledge,” he added.

Bucoy questioned Remulla’s motive for claiming that Romualdez was the mastermind behind the alleged flood control scam, saying the issue was be-

ing sensationalized.

“Why is there already a mastermind? What is the motive behind this? What I see is sensationalism. It is becoming more of a spectacle and drama. The Ombudsman is showing prejudgment and bias,” he said.

He said Remulla’s repeated allegations also suggest that he has a “preset conviction.”

“He is showing that he already has a preset conviction. He keeps saying this person is the mastermind even though the process has not yet taken place. The Ombudsman should stop holding press conferences where he already identifies someone as the mastermind,” Bucoy emphasized.

He noted that in one media interview, Remulla said his allegation was based on the appointment of former Ako Bicol party-list Rep. Zaldy Co as chairman of the House Committee on Appropriations.

“The basis he cited in that interview was that Romualdez was Speaker of the House at the time and that Zaldy

Co was his man,” Bucoy said.

However, he said there was no “predicate action” on the part of Romualdez that would justify Remulla’s assertion that the Leyte congressman was the mastermind behind the alleged scam.

“The problem with that, based on decided cases, is that branding someone a co-conspirator or mastermind requires overt acts or at least one predicate action—some clear act pointing to participation in the alleged wrongdoing. So far, nothing of that sort has emerged,” he said.

“So where did the Ombudsman’s claim that former Speaker Martin Romualdez is the mastermind come from?” Bucoy asked.

He clarified that he was not defending the former House leader.

“I am not defending him. As a public interest lawyer, I am simply looking at this from a distance and asking what is fair and whether the Ombudsman is observing the principles of fair play. Right now, what I see is bias,” Bucoy said.

## Sandiganbayan...

From A1

ed without bail due to plunder charges, is detained at the Quezon City city jail.

Meanwhile, the Philippine National Police (PNP) asserted that its custodial facility at Camp Crame in Quezon City can no longer serve as a detention facility for high-profile respondents.

Col. John Guiagui, chief of CI-

DG-NCR, said that Sec. Bonoan failed to appear before the Sandiganbayan after medical test showed concerning results, including high blood pressure and a possible cardio-related condition.

Guiagui explained that Bonoan’s un-

derlying medical condition prevented his transportation and appearance before the Sandiganbayan for his arraignment while in police custody.

Guiagui also said Bonoan is under continuous monitoring while in custody.

## ‘Baligod...

From A1

They made the allegations during a hearing on the flood control controversy presided over by Senator Pia Cayetano.

Malacañang challenged the witnesses to present evidence to support their allegations.

“Let them present the evidence first. It’s easy to point fingers, especially if you only intend to destroy and serve as an obstructionist or destabilizer,” Palace Press Officer Undersecretary Claire Castro said.

“They should prove it. They should present documents as evidence instead of merely talking,” she added.

De Lima and Fr. Flavie Villanueva had earlier denied similar accusations and filed a complaint against the 18 witnesses and their lawyer, Levito Baligod.

Meanwhile, the National Bureau of Investigation said an informant had alleged that former Anakalusugan Rep. Mike Defensor offered P5 million to one of the supposed former Marines to testify and hold a press conference regarding the flood control controversy.

NBI Director Melvin Matibag said the allegation surfaced in statements given to the bureau on April 28 and May 6.

He said additional subpoenas had been issued to Defensor and the individual identified by the informant as part of the bureau’s effort to verify the claim.

Senate President Alan Peter Cayetano, who attended the meeting later presided over by Sen. Rodante Marcoleta, said the allegations raised during the hearing were serious and warranted scrutiny.

“Mabigat sa atin ‘to,” he said, referring to testimony linking public officials to alleged cash deliveries.

One of the men, Johnny Buduan, testified that he and his companions delivered five suitcases to Ilocos Norte in 2022. He said the luggage was loaded into a bulletproof Lexus escorted by a bulletproof Toyota Hilux.

Asked who the delivery was intended for, Buduan said: “Ang narinig ko po noon ay para kay President Marcos, sir (I heard it was for the President).”

Buduan said they brought the suitcases to what he identified as “Delta Gate,” while individuals identified as Sgt. Belnard Tube and former Ako Bicol Rep. Zaldy Co allegedly continued to Ilocos Norte.

Tube testified that he later traveled to a residence in Paoay, Ilocos Norte, which he described as a U-shaped house near a body of water.

He claimed he saw photographs of

former President Ferdinand Marcos Sr. and members of the Marcos family inside the residence.

When asked by Senator Imee Marcos whether he saw members of the Marcos family there, Tube claimed that Ilocos Norte Rep. Sandro Marcos arrived first, followed by President Marcos and First Lady Liza Araneta-Marcos.

Another witness, Benny Bulontante, alleged that he was part of an advance team that went to a building in Baclaran allegedly linked to Sotto before the arrival of Co and his companions.

Bulontante claimed that five large suitcases containing cash were delivered to the site in 2024 and transported through a basement area into an elevator.

Sotto dismissed the allegation, noting that he was not a senator from 2022 to 2025. He also said the staff member allegedly identified as the recipient had died in 2015.

“I will not dignify such because I was not a senator from 2022 to 2025. The name they mentioned, na EA ko daw na tumanggap, is Mark. Mark died in 2015,” Sotto said.

He also described the hearing as “a bogus investigation in aid of destabilisation.”

Bernard Gumban, another witness, claimed he personally participated in two deliveries allegedly intended for

Tulfo at a residence in Greenhills.

“Nakapag-deliver po ako kay Senator Erwin Tulfo ng dalawang beses,” he said.

Gumban alleged that the first delivery involved two suitcases and the second involved six suitcases.

Tulfo denied the allegations, pointing to inconsistencies in the witness’s testimony.

“With so many lies, he himself is utterly confused,” Tulfo said, noting discrepancies in the number of suitcases and the alleged amounts of cash they contained.

He questioned why only certain individuals were named and described the proceedings as a propaganda effort rather than a legitimate investigation.

“Fake news and trolls have no place in the Senate. See you all at the legitimate Blue Ribbon Committee hearing,” he said.

Another witness alleged that former ACT Teachers Rep. France Castro regularly met with Co at his congressional office and a townhouse, and would leave carrying paper bags after the meetings.

The witness also claimed that former Kabataan Rep. Raoul Manuel, former Gabriela Rep. Arlene Brosas, and De Lima attended some of the meetings and left carrying items afterward.

The witness said some of the meetings allegedly took place during the House Quad Committee hearings.

In a joint statement, Castro, Manuel, and Brosas denounced the allegations as baseless, malicious, and politically motivated.

“All they have are conjectures, vague insinuations, and outright lies because they have no evidence of any wrongdoing by Makabayan,” they said.

The three former lawmakers also stressed that Makabayan lawmakers had no infrastructure projects, allocable funds, or project insertions that could generate kickbacks.

Others named during the hearing included Rep. Zia Alonto Adiong, Joel Chua, Janette Garin, Benny Abante, Gerville Luistro, Terry Ridon, and Jose Alvarez, as well as former lawmakers Stella Quimbo, Ace Barbers and Dan Fernandez.

Adiong, who serves as spokesperson for the House prosecution panel in Vice President Sara Duterte’s impeachment case, denied the allegation and described it as a distraction from the upcoming impeachment trial.

“I categorically deny all their accusations against me. I have not accepted any suitcase, money, or anything from anyone,” Adiong said.

He characterized the testimony as “political theater” intended to create noise and divert attention from the impeachment proceedings.



# Graft raps filed over Bulacan flood projects

By Charles Dantes

THE Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH) has formally filed criminal charges against Curlee Discaya and several current and former public works officials over alleged anomalies in flood control projects in Bulusan, Calumpit, Bulacan, Malacañang announced Thursday.

Presidential Communications Office Undersecretary Claire Castro said the cases were filed Thursday morning before the Regional Trial Court in Malolos, Bulacan.

“Criminal charges were formally filed this morning against Curlee Discaya and other DPWH officials involved in the anomalous flood control projects in Bulusan, Calumpit, Bulacan at the Malolos Regional Trial Court in Bulacan,” Castro said during a Palace press briefing.

According to Castro, DPWH Secretary Vince Dizon and Assistant Ombudsman Mico Clavano led the filing of complaints against Discaya and 10 other individuals from the DPWH-Bulacan First District Engineering Office and the private sector.

The respondents are facing charges for alleged violations of Section 3(e) of Republic Act No. 3019, or the Anti-Graft and Corrupt Practices Act, which penalizes public officials who cause undue injury to the government or give unwarranted benefits to private parties through manifest partiality, evident bad faith, or gross inexcusable negligence.

They were also charged with malversation of public funds through falsification of public documents.

Castro said the cases stemmed from allegedly anomalous flood control projects in Bulusan, a village in Calumpit, Bulacan.

## Senate media slams Marcoleta on ‘paid’ remarks

By Ratziel San Juan

MEMBERS of the Senate media on Thursday issued a statement condemning Senator Rodante Marcoleta’s allegation that most media practitioners are “paid hacks” during a Senate Blue Ribbon Committee hearing on the flood control controversy.

“Such remark by the senator during Thursday’s Senate Blue Ribbon proceedings was not only irresponsible but also a reckless attack on an institution widely acknowledged as essential to any functioning democracy,” the statement read.

Marcoleta later apologized to the media following the release of the statement.

“This was because of frustration over what happened and what is happening as I see it. What I want is for all of you to contribute to the truth,” Marcoleta said.

According to the Senate media, the senator’s remark unfairly maligned journalists “who risk intimidation, harassment, and even their lives to inform the public and hold the powerful accountable.”



**EV MODERNIZATION.** LTFRB chair Vigor Mendoza II, DTI Secretary Cristina Roque, Pasang Masda National President Roberto Martin, and other officials present modernized electric vehicles for public transport in Quezon City on Thursday. The initiative, in partnership with GET Philippines and backed by the LTFRB and DTI, offers loan packages to help jeepney operators shift to cleaner and more sustainable transport. Manny Palmero

## St. Padre Pio shrine elevated to international status

By Vito Barcelo

THE Vatican has elevated the National Shrine and Parish of St. Padre Pio in Sto. Tomas, Batangas, to international shrine status, according to a decree issued by the Dicastery for Evangelization on May 25, the 139th birth anniversary of St. Padre Pio.

The parish announced the recognition on Thursday, making the shrine the second international shrine in the Philippines after the International

Shrine of Our Lady of Peace and Good Voyage in Antipolo City.

Church officials described the designation as a major milestone that is expected to boost pilgrimage activity and deepen devotion among Filipino and foreign faithful.

The Catholic Bishops’ Conference of the Philippines (CBCP) unanimously endorsed the application during its plenary assembly in July 2024.

CBCP president Archbishop Gilbert Garcera of Lipa earlier said

support from several Asian episcopal conferences strengthened the shrine’s bid for Vatican recognition.

Established as a small chapel in 2003, the 12-hectare shrine became an archdiocesan shrine in 2008 and was declared a national shrine in 2015. Housing first-class relics of St. Padre Pio, it now attracts hundreds of thousands of pilgrims each year.

Preparations are underway for the formal declaration of the international shrine on Sept. 23, the saint’s feast day.



**MISS EARTH VISIT.** Miss Philippines Earth candidates visit the Cavite City Aviary at Samonte Park in Cavite City on June 4. The local government highlights the city’s unique attractions, rich history, and recreational sites as it welcomes the delegates. Dennis Abrina



**STRAY CONTROL.** Members of Heart for Animal Welfare sa Kongreso (HAWK) meet with former Speaker Ferdinand Martin Romualdez to seek support for a Trap-Neuter-Vaccinate-Return (TNVR) program for stray dogs and cats within the House of Representatives compound.

## Comelec trims proposed poll budget

By Vito Barcelo

The Commission on Elections (Comelec) is set to reduce its proposed budget for the 2028 general elections by about P6 billion after removing several non-essential features from its election modernization plans.

Comelec chair George Garcia said the poll body initially proposed a P25-billion budget for election preparations but agreed to trim the amount following recommendations from the Department of Budget and Management.

“We presented to the DBM a proposal amounting to P25 billion, but during our discussions, we were advised that the budget could be reduced,” Garcia said. “We were able to identify areas where we can trim

around P6 billion.”

Among the features removed from the proposal are voter verification technology and blockchain-based systems that were originally intended to enhance election processes.

The voter verification system, estimated to cost about P2 billion, would have allowed voters to confirm their identities through biometric data such as fingerprints, facial recognition, and iris scans before casting ballots.

However, Garcia said the technology was not essential to the conduct of elections.

“We removed the voter verification system and blockchain components because elections can still be conducted without these features,” he said.

## IN BRIEF

### Live chicken recovered from building collapse

A LIVE chicken was recovered Thursday morning from the site of the collapsed building under construction in Barangay Balibago, Angeles City, Pampanga, according to the Bureau of Fire Protection (BFP) Central Luzon.

In an update, the BFP said the chicken was found under the rubble at 8:58 a.m. during ongoing search and retrieval operations.

The agency said the chicken is believed to belong to one of the workers affected by the incident.

It added that the animal may have triggered several life-detector activations in the area over the past few days. **Rex Espiritu**

### NAIA passenger arrested with P13.3m marijuana

A FILIPINO passenger arriving from Bangkok, Thailand, was arrested at Ninoy Aquino International Airport Terminal 1 on Thursday after authorities discovered 8.91 kilograms of suspected marijuana, or “Kush,” worth an estimated P13.365 million in his checked baggage.

The Bureau of Customs said the illegal substance was detected during routine X-ray screening of the passenger’s luggage.

The baggage underwent further inspection and was later confirmed after a positive alert from a Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency K9 unit.

Authorities immediately apprehended the passenger and turned over the seized items for laboratory examination and further investigation.

The BOC has yet to release the suspect’s identity and possible charges. The case remains under investigation. **Vito Barcelo**

### PNP hunts financiers of smuggled cigarettes

THE Philippine National Police on Thursday launched an investigation to identify and arrest the financiers and syndicates behind the P13.25 million worth of smuggled cigarettes seized in Picong, Lanao del Sur on June 3.

PNP chief Jose Melencio Nartatez Jr. directed the Police Regional Office-Bangsamoro Autonomous Region to coordinate with the National Bureau of Investigation and other agencies to trace the source of the contraband and determine accountability.

Authorities recovered about 310 master cases of assorted cigarettes valued at P13.25 million during an anti-smuggling operation in Barangay Liangan conducted by the NBI-BARMM with support from PNP units.

Initial inspection showed the products lacked mandatory Department of Health warnings and Bureau of Internal Revenue tax stamps, indicating possible customs and tax violations. **Vince Lopez**



## IN BRIEF

### ‘Never give up,’ SC justice tells law grads

SUPREME Court (SC) Associate Justice Jhosep Lopez urged the 467 law graduates of Arellano University School of Law not to give up despite rejections.

Lopez issued the suggestion in remarks made during the school’s 88th graduation rites held last week.

“Each time, I hoped. Each time, the answer was no. There is no graceful way to describe that moment. You smile. You thank people. You return to work. Then, in private, you ask yourself whether the work was enough. But the next morning, the work remained,” Lopez said in his speech.

“So I continued. I served. I studied. I decided cases. Those rejections taught me the determination to keep working when recognition is delayed,” he added. **Pot Chavez**

### AFP, IGSL widen scope of educational program

THE Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) and the International Graduate School of Leadership (IGSL) have expanded their educational partnership to provide more leadership development opportunities for military and civilian personnel.

The expanded scholarship program was formalized through an addendum to their existing Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) executed during a ceremony held at Camp Aguinaldo on June 3.

The deal was signed by AFP acting chief Lt. Gen. Rommel Roldan and IGSL president Dr. Great Mabuti.

The agreement strengthens the partnership first established in 2010 for the Master of Arts in Transformational Leadership program, which aims to develop values-driven and effective leaders within the military organization.

**Rex Espiritu**

### Two NPA rebels yield to military in Mindoro

THE Philippine National Police-Region 4-B (MIMAROPA) reported the voluntary surrender last Wednesday of two communist insurgents in Abra de Ilog, Occidental Mindoro as a result of sustained intelligence, peace, and security efforts in the province.

The rebels yielded at the headquarters of the Army’s 402nd Battalion Maneuver Company following coordinated operational efforts between the military and the police.

The two were believed among the remnants of A New People’s Army guerilla unit operating in the remote communities of the province. **Vince Lopez**

### INFINITE WONDERS OF MOTHER NATURE.

Pure, undiluted water cascades down multiple waterfalls amidst a vast mountain range, helping irrigate rain-fed highland rice terraces of Kibungan, Benguet.

Dave Leprozo



# House goes on recess with reso hailing Speaker Dy’s leadership

By Maricel V. Cruz

THE House of Representatives on Wednesday capped the First Regular Session of the 20th Congress by adopting a resolution commending Speaker Faustino Dy III for his steady stewardship and consensus-driven leadership.

Adopted shortly before Congress adjourned sine die, House Resolution 1093, introduced by House Majority Leader Ferdinand Alexander Marcos and Minority Leader Marcelino Libanan, hailed Dy’s role in keeping the chamber “stable, productive and united during a critical period.”

The resolution served as the House’s closing assessment of Dy’s leadership during a session that saw major legislative accomplishments, key reforms and the fulfillment of the chamber’s constitutional duties.

“Speaker Dy assumed the stewardship of the House of Representa-

tives during a critical juncture of the Twentieth Congress, stepping into the Speakership with a profound sense of duty, steadiness of hand, and an unwavering commitment to parliamentary solidarity and institutional continuity,” the resolution stated.

The House credited Dy with ensuring a smooth leadership transition while keeping legislative work moving and preserving cohesion among members.

It noted that despite his long experience in public service, Dy chose to lead “not with grandeur, but through an approachable presence that radiates respect and composure.”

The resolution said this leadership style fostered “an environment of genuine collaboration” while sustaining the momentum of the chamber’s legislative agenda.

Under Dy’s stewardship, the House processed 10,809 legislative measures, including 9,695 bills and 1,114 resolutions.

Six measures were enacted into law, one was awaiting presidential action, two bicameral conference committee reports were ratified, four measures remained pending bicameral action, and 222 House-approved measures were awaiting Senate approval. The chamber also adopted 114 resolutions.

### AYE, AYE MADAM.

Cmdr. Sharon De Leon becomes the Philippine Navy’s first female shipper as she takes over command of BRP Tarlac from Cmdr. Ken Roger Jumawan who completed his tour of duty.

**Navy photo**



## Army warns vs. fake online posts on recruitment

By Rex Espiritu

THE Philippine Army on Thursday cautioned the public against social media posts claiming to recruit personnel for a supposed National Guard program, urging the public to verify the information through official channels.

In a public advisory, the Army cited multiple online posts regarding alleged ongoing National Guard recruitment program.

The military reminded the public to exercise caution when dealing with online personalities or pages claiming to be affiliated with the Philippine Army.

The Army emphasized that recruitment updates and announcements should only be obtained from its official communication channels, including the Philippine Army’s official social media accounts, the Join the Army platform, and authorized Army Recruitment Offices.

They also reiterated that the Philippine Army does not collect or request any form of payment from applicants at any stage of the recruitment process.

The advisory further urged the public to avoid interacting with unverified social media pages and individuals claiming to represent recruitment offices or hiring personnel of the Philippine Army.

The warning forms part of the Army’s efforts to protect prospective applicants from online scams and misinformation.

“Think before you click,” the Army said in its advisory, encouraging the public to remain vigilant against fraudulent recruitment schemes.

# DENR inks 5-year deal with Dutch org to clean up Pasig River

THE Philippine government, through the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR), has forged a partnership with Rotterdam-based non-profit organization The Ocean Cleanup with a five-year agreement aimed at removing floating waste from the Pasig River and the introduction of low-cost innovative technologies for a rigorous scientific data exchange and baseline situational analyses.

“The Pasig River has carried the burden of our consumption habits for

far too long,” DENR Secretary Juan Miguel Cuna said.

“We cannot allow this river to remain a pipeline of plastic to the ocean. This agreement is a decisive step toward breaking that cycle,” he added.

The accord represents a twofront strategy. “This partnership allows us to confront the problem from both ends — by holding producers accountable and by deploying the technology needed to intercept the waste already in our waters,” Cuna said.

With the support of the Philippine Embassy in The Hague and the Dutch Embassy in Manila, the partnership is designed to complement the government’s upstream regulatory push under Republic Act 11898, the Extended Producer Responsibility Act, which requires large companies to recover and recycle the plastic packaging they produce.

The Ocean Cleanup was known for engineering largescale river interceptors and oceancleanup systems.

The group has deployed 21 inter-

ceptors in 10 countries and reports collecting more than 52 million kilograms of trash from aquatic environments as of April 2026.

Its technology involving solarpowered, automated, and designed for highvolume capture, is expected to be adapted to the Pasig River’s heavy and continuous waste load.

The Manila Bay Region, including the Pasig River System, is one of the key waterways The Ocean Cleanup is set to deploy in as part of its 30 Cities Program.



**AGRARIAN EMANCIPATION.** Department of Agrarian Reform Undersecretary Amihilda Sangcopan and regional director Joseph Orilla lead the distribution of electronic land titles and certificates of condonation with release of mortgage to thousands of farmers in the Davao region in ceremony held at the Tagum City Hall. **Robert Gines**

## House passes bill to combat deepfakes

THE House of Representatives has approved on third and final reading a priority measure aimed at combating organized disinformation, troll farm operations, and other malicious falsehoods online while safeguarding freedom of expression.

In a vote of 286-3 with seven abstentions, the chamber, led by Speaker Faustino Dy III, approved House Bill 9465, or the proposed Digital Media Anti-False Information Act. The bill was approved before Congress adjourned sine die last Wednesday.

The measure, a Legislative-Executive Development Advisory Council (LEDAC) priority, was sponsored by House Committee on Public Information chair Lordan Suan of Cagayan de Oro City.

Dy said the bill responds to the growing threat posed by deliberate disinformation campaigns that un-

dermine public trust, distort public discourse and threaten democratic institutions.

“Disinformation has evolved into a powerful weapon capable of misleading communities, destroying reputations, disrupting democratic processes and threatening national security. Government cannot simply stand by while malicious actors exploit digital platforms to spread deliberate falsehoods and cause real harm,” Dy said.

House Majority Leader Alexander Marcos of Ilocos Norte, principal author of HB 9465, said the passage of the bill, or the proposed Digital Media Anti-False Information Act, reflects the House’s determination under the leadership of Speaker III confront the growing harm caused by organized disinformation while preserving the constitutional freedoms enjoyed by Filipinos.





About Town  
Ernesto M. Hilario

Which side will win in the Senate?

AS THINGS now stand in the Senate, what used to be a minority of 11 members has now become the majority when Chiz Escudero jumped ship and joined them without any preconditions.

But the dust hasn’t settled yet with Alan Peter Cayetano claiming he is still the legitimate Senate President even as the new majority has elected Win Gatchalian as Senate President Protempore and Acting Senate President.

Expect more fireworks therefore in the days ahead.

At any rate, how should we look at the seemingly irreconcilable rift in the Senate between those lawmakers who want to defend Sara Duterte at all costs and the minority determined to uphold the rule of law?

To be sure, the rift is not merely a clash of personalities or political camps. It should be seen instead as conflict between two competing views of the Senate’s role in a Constitutional democracy.

On one side are senators and political allies who look at the impeachment proceedings against Sara Duterte primarily through a political lens.

Their argument is that the impeachment drive reflects the power struggle between the Marcos and Duterte camps, and that the Senate should not become an instrument for eliminating a major political contender ahead of 2028.

On the other side are senators, legal observers, and critics who argue that the Senate’s Constitutional duty is not to protect political allies but to determine whether the allegations are supported by evidence.

From this perspective, refusing to properly hear the case would amount to abandoning the Senate’s role as an accountability mechanism.

They stress that impeachment is one of the few Constitutional tools available for scrutinizing high-ranking officials accused of serious misconduct.

What makes the situation particularly significant is that it comes after a long period of institutional turbulence.

The first impeachment effort against Sara Duterte in 2025 was eventually nullified by the Supreme Court on procedural and Constitutional grounds, specifically the one-year bar rule.

The Court was careful to say that its ruling did not exonerate Duterte on the substance of the allegations. It merely found Constitutional defects in the process.

That distinction is important. After all, a Constitutional democracy depends on two separate questions: One, was the process lawful? And two, are the allegations true?

The Supreme Court addressed the first question. The Senate impeachment court is supposed to address the second.

This is why many legal observers become concerned whenever political actors appear more interested in preventing a trial altogether than in allowing the evidence to be tested. A functioning rule-of-law system does not guarantee conviction but rather a fair hearing.

The recent Senate leadership changes have intensified those concerns.

The replacement of pro-impeachment figures with leaders perceived as more sympathetic to Sara Duterte inevitably created suspicion that procedural maneuvers could be used to shield her from scrutiny.

House prosecutors and opposition figures openly questioned the timing of those developments.

It is important to point out that impeachment is inherently political. Senators are not judges in the ordinary sense.

They are elected politicians acting as senator-judges. Political calculations have always been part of impeachment proceedings in the Philippines, from the cases involving Joseph Estrada to Renato Corona.

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*Many legal observers become concerned whenever political actors appear more interested in preventing a trial altogether than in allowing the evidence to be tested*

Expecting senators to behave like completely detached jurists is unrealistic.

The real test, therefore, is not whether senators have political preferences. The test is whether those preferences become so overwhelming that evidence, procedure, and Constitutional obligations become secondary.

What is especially striking in the current crisis is that it overlaps with broader questions involving accountability for powerful political figures.

The controversies surrounding ICC proceedings against Rodrigo Duterte and efforts to arrest fugitive from justice Sen. Ronald dela Rosa have reinforced public perception that some institutions are being asked to choose between loyalty and legal accountability.

If the Senate acquits Sara Duterte after a full and transparent trial where evidence is presented and scrutinized, many citizens may disagree with the outcome, but the Constitutional process would have been respected.

If, however, the dominant objective is to prevent meaningful examination of the charges in the first place, critics will conclude that the Senate is acting less as an impeachment court and more as a political shield.

The deeper issue is therefore larger than Vice President Sara Duterte herself.

The question confronting the Senate is whether loyalty to allies outweighs loyalty to institutions.

How senators answer that question will likely shape public trust not only in this impeachment case but in the credibility of the Senate as a constitutional body for years to come. (Email: ernhil@yahoo.com)



EVERYMAN

Growing hope, one tree at a time

(First of two parts)

By Melandrew T. Velasco

AS THE world marks World Environment Day today, June 5, the need for sustained environmental action has never been clearer.

In the Philippines, where worsening floods, deforestation, and climate-related disasters continue to threaten communities and vital watersheds, environmental action cannot wait.

One initiative making a measurable difference is the Annual Million Trees Challenge (AMTC) and the Million Trees Foundation, Inc. (MTFI)—a nationwide movement that has grown into one of the country’s largest and most impactful reforestation and watershed rehabilitation programs.

What began in 2017 as an initiative of the Metropolitan Waterworks and Sewerage System (MWSS) under then Administrator and now MTFI Chairman Emeritus Gen. Reynaldo V. Velasco (Ret) has evolved into one of the country’s most significant watershed rehabilitation and

reforestation movements.

The original goal was ambitious yet simple: plant one million trees every year to help restore critical watersheds that supply water to millions of Filipinos. Nine years later, that vision has blossomed into a nationwide movement.

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*Countless lives have been touched and inspired by a shared mission to care for our common home*

Today, more than ten million trees have been planted across major watersheds and protected areas, including Angat, Ipo, La Mesa, Upper Marikina, Kaliwa, Umiray, Laguna Lake and other environmentally critical ecosystems.

More importantly, countless lives have been touched and inspired by a shared



EDITORIAL

Will the rule of law prevail?

THE adamant refusal of Senator Ronald dela Rosa to surrender despite an arrest warrant issued by the International Criminal Court raises profound questions about law enforcement, political accountability, and the rule of law in the Philippines.

After all, the ICC has confirmed that a warrant for his arrest has been issued in connection with alleged crimes against humanity linked to the Duterte administration’s anti-drug campaign.

This episode tells us whether legal institutions can enforce the law equally against powerful political figures.

A functioning judicial system rests on the principle that no individual is above the law, regardless of rank, popularity, or political influence.

When an ordinary citizen is the subject of an arrest warrant, authorities generally expect compliance or take immediate steps to enforce the order.

When a prominent senator openly resists arrest and remains beyond the reach of authorities, the public inevitably asks whether the same standards are being applied to everyone.

The situation also exposes the tension between law and politics. Dela Rosa is not merely a private citizen; he is a sitting senator, a former police chief, and a close ally of former president Rodrigo Duterte.

His political stature gives the case a significance far beyond the fate of a single individual.

The perception that political alliances can delay or complicate the enforce-

ment of legal processes weakens public confidence in institutions that are supposed to act in an impartial manner.

Police officers are trained to uphold the law and execute lawful orders. If authorities appear hesitant or inconsistent in implementing a warrant involving a powerful political figure, it risks creating the impression that enforcement depends not solely on legal merit but also on political considerations.

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*A functioning judicial system rests on the principle that no individual is above the law, regardless of rank, popularity, or political influence*

Such perceptions can erode institutional credibility and morale.

At the same time, the case demonstrates that the Philippines remains a contested legal and political arena rather than a completely lawless one.

Overtaken by Hong Kong in global wealth management, Swiss keep cool

ZURICH, Switzerland – Though Hong Kong has overtaken Switzerland as the number one in cross-border wealth management, rather than enter panic mode, Swiss banks seem unruffled -- feeling it bolsters the case against looming tighter banking regulations.

Hong Kong is now the world’s largest cross-border booking centre thanks to inflows from mainland China, strong initial public offering activity, and equity market gains, said a study published last week by the Boston Consulting Group (BCG).

Hong Kong had \$2.95 trillion of cross-border assets under management in 2025, while Switzerland had \$2.946 trillion.

Rapid advances in technology innovation and artificial intelligence sectors are “expected to open up greater scope for development within Hong Kong’s asset and wealth management industry,” said the semi-autonomous Chinese city’s Financial Secretary Paul Chan.

More than 60 percent of the external capital comes from mainland China, the BCG 2026 Global Wealth Report said, adding that Hong Kong was “cementing its role as China’s gateway to global markets”.

“Uncertainties around US-China tensions are the main reason they are moving capital and managing wealth in Hong Kong,” Gary Ng, senior economist at Natixis Corporate and Investment Banking, told AFP.

However, China’s market regulator announced a sweeping investigation in May against some brokers running cross-border trading, as it launched a two-year crackdown on investment leaving the mainland.

On Monday, China’s cabinet unveiled new rules due to enter force in July, aimed at curbing outbound in-

vestment and deals with foreign entities which might transfer restricted technology, services and data overseas without authorisation.

“Investors engaging in foreign investment and related activities... shall not endanger China’s national security or harm national interests,” authorities said.

“  
*For wealthy Asian clients, ‘why would you go to Europe’ when Hong Kong is ‘at your doorstep?’*

Ng noted that if Beijing “truly wants to accelerate” the internationalization of China’s yuan currency, “it will need to accept freer cross-border capital movement”.

**Tougher Swiss regulations planned**  
The Swiss Bankers Association told AFP that Hong Kong had been directly benefiting from exceptionally strong asset growth in China.

But it said Swiss banks too had a successful presence in key Asian growth markets.

“For Switzerland, competitive framework conditions are particularly crucial for the future. It is essential that regulation remains targeted and internationally coordinated so that both stability and competitiveness are strengthened,” it said.

Switzerland’s biggest bank UBS is currently at loggerheads with the government, which wants to tighten banking regulations following the implosion of Credit Suisse in 2023.

UBS was strong-armed into a quick-

fire takeover of its closest domestic rival to prevent a major blow to Switzerland’s financial stability.

Bern now wants stronger safeguards, given the merged megabank’s size relative to the Swiss economy.

Hong Kong overtaking Switzerland “shows that international competitiveness must remain at the heart of the discussions,” the Association of Swiss Private Banks, which represents wealth management firms, told AFP.

During debates on the government’s proposals, “parliament will have to keep this in mind”, it added.

**‘Playing half the game’**

Andreas Venditti, an analyst with Swiss investment managers Vontobel, said Hong Kong’s rise to the top had been coming because growth rates were stronger in Asia.

“As Swiss banks are among the largest wealth managers in Asia -- with UBS the largest in the region by very far -- they clearly benefit from the higher growth rates,” he told AFP.

UBS’s assets under management in the Asia-Pacific region amounted to \$781 billion at the end of March, he noted.

Cross-border wealth grew by 10.7 percent in Hong Kong in 2025, compared to 7.6 percent in Switzerland, said BCG.

Dean Frankle, a managing director and financial institutions specialist at BCG, said Hong Kong overtaking Switzerland is primarily down to “the rise of Asia”.

For wealthy Asian clients, “why would you go to Europe” when Hong Kong is “at your doorstep,” he said, hence the importance for Swiss banks to be competitive in the Asian market.

“If you’re not serving both markets, you’re only playing half the game,” he told AFP. **AFP**



# US House stops Trump on Iran war

KUWAIT CITY – The US House of Representatives has backed a resolution seeking to halt American military action in Iran -- a symbolic move that deals a political blow to President Donald Trump as efforts to find a deal with Tehran stagnate.

Weeks of complicated talks marked by sharp rhetoric and flare-ups of violence have not managed to reach a deal to end the war and reopen the Strait of Hormuz, which is essential to oil supplies.

Washington and Tehran have sent divergent message in recent days, with Iran saying Wednesday “no tangible progress” was made, while Trump again

voiced optimism by telling reporters at the White House “it could happen... over the weekend.”

But in the latest episode of violence, Kuwaiti officials said renewed hostilities on Wednesday included an Iranian drone strike on a passenger terminal at Kuwait international airport that killed one person and wounded 63.

In the wake of the flare-ups, four lawmakers from Trump’s Republican party joined Democrats on Wednesday to vote 215-208 in favour of the public rebuke.

The resolution was largely symbolic, as the US president can veto the measure if it gains Senate approval.

“This is a loud and unambiguous message to Donald Trump on behalf of the American people: it’s time to end his deeply unpopular and illegal war of choice in Iran,” Democrats posted on X.

At a congressional hearing, US Secretary of State Marco Rubio said Iran’s highly enriched uranium stockpiles were at the centre of discussions with Tehran.

Washington insists Tehran must turn over its near-weapons-grade enriched uranium, agree to curb its nuclear activi-

ties and re-open the Strait of Hormuz, the key shipping channel for Gulf oil and gas, for any peace agreement to take hold.

Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi said lines of communication with the United States were still open but warned that any Israeli attack on the Lebanese capital Beirut as part of its campaign against Iran-backed Hezbollah would trigger a “full-scale resumption” of the conflict.

“Communications with the Americans have not been cut off, and messages have been exchanged regarding the need to stop aggression against Beirut, but no tangible progress has been made in the negotiation process,” the Tasnim news agency quoted Araghchi as telling Lebanon’s Al Mayadeen TV. **AFP**

## Lebanon reports Israeli strikes after ceasefire

BEIRUT – Lebanese official media reported Israeli airstrikes in the country’s south on Thursday, hours after an announcement that Israel and Lebanon had agreed to implement a conditional ceasefire following talks in Washington.

Lebanon’s state-run National News Agency reported drone strikes along roads at several southern locations, saying at least one caused casualties.

Earlier Thursday morning, the Israeli military said air raid sirens were sounded in northern Israel, with one incident involving a “suspicious aerial target” resolved, while another incident was found to be a false alarm.

In Washington on Wednesday (Thursday, Manila time), Israel and Lebanon agreed to implement a ceasefire but said it would require a “complete cessation” of fire by the Iran-backed Hezbollah, according to a joint statement after a fourth round of US-led talks.

The two sides, which do not have formal diplomatic relations, also agreed to create “pilot zones” in which the Lebanese armed forces “will take exclusive control of the territory to the exclusion of all non-state actors.”

Israel’s far-right National Security Minister Itamar Ben Gvir on Thursday criticised the deal, calling it a “serious mistake”.

Early Thursday before the announcement, Hezbollah said it had launched a “salvo of rockets” at Israeli soldiers and vehicles in south Lebanon’s Qantara, and fired drones at troops near the strategic Beaufort castle.

A previous ceasefire to halt the fighting in Lebanon was meant to take hold on April 17 but has never been observed, with both sides justifying their ongoing attacks by the other’s alleged violations. **AFP**



**‘FAIR’ RETALIATION.** An installation reading ‘15 evil spectators of Russia Today’ and featuring bas-reliefs depicting Western politicians and businessmen is seen at the stand of the Russian state TV-station Russia Today during the St. Petersburg International Economic Forum in Saint Petersburg on June 3, 2026. US Secretary of State Marco Rubio warned of a ‘real’ risk of the Ukraine war escalating as Kyiv underlines its ability to strike deep inside Russian territory with the attacks. Ukraine has described its strikes on Saint Petersburg as ‘fair’ retaliation for a wave of Russian bombardment on its territory. **AFP**

## Bolivian leader moves to use army vs. protests

LA PAZ, Bolivia – Bolivia’s conservative president said he had moved Wednesday to “strengthen” the army’s role in quelling anti-government protests that have paralyzed cities, caused widespread shortages and threatened to topple his fledgling government.

Facing demands to step down, Rodrigo Paz said he had prepared a bill that would empower the military to tackle demonstrations and restore order.

The bill “is intended to strengthen the institutions,” he said at the swearing in of a new defense minister, and “to strengthen our armed forces in their actions.”

On Wednesday in La Paz, thousands of Bolivians queued for hours to buy chicken, a stark sign of how much families are struggling with shortages that have been worsened by protests.

“If I were him, I’d pack my suitcase and leave. As Bolivians, they are killing us already” Elvira Laura Quispe, one of those waiting, told AFP.

“This damned government has no heart.”

Paz entered office a little over seven months ago, after a landmark election that ended two decades of hard left rule.

He moved quickly to restore severed relations with the United States and introduced sweeping economic reforms, including cutting fuel subsidies that ravaged public finances.

Fierce backlash has boiled over across Bolivia, including a month of mass demonstrations calling for him to resign and militant roadblocks that have caused severe food, medicine and fuel shortages. **AFP**



**‘RESTORE NORMALITY!’** People show their turn numbers written on their arms as they stand in line to buy chicken amid food shortages caused by the blockades, in La Paz on Thursday, Manila time. Hundreds of demonstrators demanded on June 1, in Bolivia’s political capital the resignation of President Rodrigo Paz, as one month of protests and road blockades continues across the country with no solution to the crisis in sight. **AFP**

## Ukraine strike kills 3 in Russian-occupied Crimea

MOSCOW – A Ukrainian strike killed at least three people in Crimea, the region’s Moscow-installed authorities said Thursday, a day after Kyiv targeted energy and military sites in Saint Petersburg where Russia was hosting an economic forum.

US Secretary of State Marco Rubio warned of a “real” risk of the Ukraine war escalating as Kyiv underlines its ability to strike deep inside Russian territory with the attacks.

Ukraine has described its strikes on Saint Petersburg as “fair” retaliation for a wave of Russian bombardment on its

territory.

Sergey Aksyonov, the Moscow-installed head of the Crimea region, said early Thursday that preliminary reports showed a strike on non-residential buildings in Simferopol claimed three lives and wounded seven others.

“Emergency services are currently at the scene,” Aksyonov wrote on Telegram.

The strike came as 20,000 people from 130 countries were due at the three-day annual Saint Petersburg International Economic Forum -- an event once

dubbed “Russia’s Davos.”

President Vladimir Putin is to give a keynote address at the forum on Friday and Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov vowed Russia would provide a “systemic” response to Ukraine’s strikes on the city.

Black smoke from the strikes was visible from the conference venue as the first sessions started on Wednesday.

Valeria, a 32-year-old businesswoman from Moscow at the forum, told AFP she was used to the threat of attacks.

“We have been living under such attacks for many years now,” she said. **AFP**



**ELECTION RUNOFF.** A woman walks past a pineapple juice stand in Lima on Thursday, Manila time. Right-wing candidate Keiko Fujimori and leftist Roberto Sanchez will face off in Peru’s presidential runoff on June 7, 2026. Elsewhere, indigenous women sell handicrafts to tourists at Plaza Mayor in Lima. More than a third of the region’s population lives in poverty, according to official figures. **AFP**

## In Peru’s highlands, hopelessness shapes a bitter presidential runoff

CARITAMAYA, Peru – Peru’s presidential runoff has exposed deep dissatisfaction in the Andean south, where poor rural voters see the election as a bitter choice and say Lima has abandoned them.

Under the blistering sun of the high Andean plains, 78-year-old Dominga Quenta sorts potatoes with her rough hands, as she has done all her life.

Days before the country’s presidential runoff, Quenta says she no longer believes political promises from the men and women in Lima.

“No one will give me even a cent,” Quenta says, pondering a hard life at almost 4,000

meters (13,100 feet) altitude, near the shores of Lake Titicaca.

Her husband, Rufino Cutipa, 75, agrees. “No one comes here, no one sees us. We survive on our own.”

Around their adobe house, the bleached plains stretch toward distant hills.

A few cows and sheep graze near the well that supplies water for both livestock and the couple.

In neighboring plots, barefoot women in traditional dress strike the earth with hoes to harvest the season’s last potatoes.

More than a third of the region’s population lives in poverty, according to official figures. **AFP**

## IN BRIEF

### Fiji rejects Australian ‘ashtray’ garbage plan

SYDNEY – Fiji’s environment ministry rejected on Thursday a plan by an Australian billionaire to burn rubbish for energy in the South Pacific nation after a backlash from traditional landowners and tourism operators.

The plan to ship non-recyclable trash from across the region to Fiji -- popular with tourists for its pristine beaches -- and build an incinerator to consume 900,000 tonnes of waste a year had been labelled “waste colonialism” by villagers.

Fiji’s ambassador to the UN, Filipo Tarakinikini, wrote on social media in April that the Vuda coast north of Nadi “must not become the Pacific’s ashtray”.

Billionaire Ian Malouf, partnered with Kookai label fashion entrepreneur Rob Crompt, had earlier claimed government support for the waste incinerator, which was to be built within 15km (9 miles) of Fiji’s tourism gateway Nadi. **AFP**

### China slaps bans on NZ lawmakers

WELLINGTON – China has slapped a travel ban on a group of New Zealand lawmakers after they recently visited Taiwan, Wellington said Thursday.

The four MPs hail from across the political spectrum and visited Taiwan as part of a cross-party delegation in May.

Foreign Minister Winston Peters’ office confirmed the ban and said he was “surprised” by the move.

The top diplomat has asked New Zealand diplomats to raise the issue with Chinese officials in Beijing and Wellington.

China claims self-ruled Taiwan is part of its territory and opposes the self-governed island’s participation in international organisations and exchanges with other countries.

Peters’ office insisted on Thursday that the visit by the MPs was not inconsistent with New Zealand’s “One China” policy, in which Wellington recognises Beijing’s claim over Taiwan. **AFP**

### Apple removes Russia’s Max from App Store

MOSCOW – Apple has removed Russia’s state-backed Max messenger from its App Store, the app’s Russian developers said Thursday.

Moscow has for months been pushing Russians to install Max -- a super-app that lacks encryption and that critics say could be used to track people.

It has throttled WhatsApp and Telegram, the country’s two largest messengers, and forced civil servants, state companies, schools and government agencies to move their communications onto Max.

“Max is temporarily unavailable for download in the App Store,” the messenger said in a statement on its platform Thursday.

It disappeared on Wednesday night, it said.

There has been no comment from Apple and the reasons for the removal are unclear.

Apple and Google have both removed dozens of Russian apps from their online stores -- including those developed by companies sanctioned in the West. **AFP**





Barangay Ginebra's RJ Abarrientos encounters stiff resistance from TNT's Calvin Oftana in Game 1 of the PBA Season 50 Commissioner's Cup finals. PBA Images

# Abarrientos answers Cone's wrath with clutch shooting

By Jeremiah Sevilla

RJ Abarrientos surely knows how to respond after receiving an earful from Barangay coach Tim Cone for his defensive lapses in Game 1 of the PBA Season 50 Commissioner's Cup finals on Wednesday night at the Smart Araneta Coliseum.

Cone was seen screaming at Abarrientos during a timeout after the Rey Nambatac-led TNT erased Ginebra's 18-point lead and snatched a 95-90 advantage with barely three minutes remaining in the game.

Nambatac scored most of his points against Abarrientos when he ignited that furious second-half comeback by the Tropang Giga.

Abarrientos redeemed himself on the offensive end, burying two booming four-pointers inside the final one minute and 30 seconds before Justin Brownlee banked in the game-winning fadeaway

jumper to seal the 102-100 win for the Gin Kings in the best-of-seven title series opener.

The leading Best Player of the Conference candidate admitted to his defensive mistakes and vowed to play better moving forward.

"Nagalit si coach Tim sa akin e. He was pissed off. 'Yong depensa ko ng last two straight against Nambatac, kumbaga sa finals, hindi pwede mangyari 'yon,'" the Season 49 Rookie of the Year said.

"So, I need to be better on that and I need to embrace that kasi lahat kami dito professional, lahat kami nagtatrabaho. I need to accept that

and learn to move on," he added.

Cone said his action was just him doing his job as a coach to Abarrientos as he praised his prized guard for nailing crucial baskets while topscoring for the Kings with 24 points to go with seven assists, three rebounds, and two steals.

"That's me getting hard on a player and the player responded. And that's the way it's supposed to be," the league's winningest mentor explained.

"You know RJ has tremendous character, and no matter what, he keeps his calm. And he's really good at moving on and taking what you're saying and making something from it," Cone added.

"And I thought he did a great job of figuring out down the stretch what they were doing and he responded. He's just a clutch guy. Those two four-pointers were amazing shots."

With Game 1 now behind them, Abarrientos will be eager to spearhead the Kings once again as they gun for a commanding 2-0 series lead on Friday at the same venue.

# Pickleball leaders, GAB seek unified pro scene direction

By Randy M. Caluag

KEY stakeholders in Philippine pickleball took a significant step toward formalizing the sport's professional landscape after holding coordination talks with the Games and Amusements Board (GAB) in Makati City.

Representatives from leading leagues and the national federation, including the Maharlika Pilipinas Pickleball Tour (MPPT), Pickleyard Conference League (PYCL), and the Philippine Pickleball Federation (PPF) met and discussed with GAB chairman Francisco J. Rivera.

The discussions centered on harmonizing standards as pickleball continues its rapid rise in popularity across the country.

Among the key agenda items were defining professional and amateur athletes under existing regulations, streamlining licensing requirements, and developing a unified digital platform for player records and rankings.

Officials also tackled long-



Pickleball groups and officials of the Games and Amusement Board discuss harmonizing the professional pickleball scene in the country. GAB

term priorities such as national team development, international representation, and the standardization of rules, officiating, and certification processes.

"Our main objective is to promote the pickleball community together," said MPPT Commissioner Mark Espinosa. "We love the sport and want everyone to be in sync with one another."

Pickleball, a paddle sport combin-

ing elements of tennis, badminton, and table tennis, has seen a surge in grassroots participation and organized competitions in the Philippines in recent years, mirroring global growth trends.

However, the absence of a unified professional structure has prompted regulators and stakeholders to accelerate coordination efforts to ensure sustainable development and athlete protection.

The GAB, which oversees professional sports in the country, emphasized the importance of collaboration in crafting policies aligned with national sports regulations, including provisions under joint resolutions with the Philippine Sports Commission.

The meeting concluded with a shared commitment among all parties to strengthen cooperation and establish clear standards for the emerging professional scene.

# Arnaldi reaches French Open semis; Berrettini retires injured

PARIS—Matteo Arnaldi booked an all-Italian French Open semi-final against Flavio Cobolli as Matteo Berrettini's run at Roland Garros came to a sad end as he was forced to retire with a hip injury.

Former Wimbledon finalist Berrettini, who has struggled with various injuries in recent years, called it quits in the second set when trailing 7-5, 5-2 on Court Philippe Chatrier.

"You never want someone to end the tournament like this," said the 25-year-old Arnaldi.

"I'm sorry for him and I hope he's going to recover and soon it's going to come the grass and he's going to be very tough to play."

Arnaldi has spent the largest time on court for a player en route to a Grand Slam semi-final, so will likely be grateful for the extra rest ahead of facing 10th seed Cobolli on Friday.

The world number 104, who himself was sidelined with injury earlier this season, had played back-to-back five-setters in the third and fourth rounds, totalling over 10 hours.

"Unbelievable, I still can't believe it if I think where I was one month ago, I was nearly 150 in the world," he added.

"I'm tired, that's for sure, but you know I train and I play tennis to play these kind of tournaments, these kind of matches.

"Obviously today I was a bit more tired than usual... but I'm here."

Berrettini, ranked 105th, had enjoyed a brilliant tournament in his first appearance at Roland Garros since 2021.

But he had also played some demanding matches, including the longest of his career in the last 32 against Francisco Comesana, and his efforts finally took their toll in the last night session of the event.

"I have to take unfortunately the right decision," said Berrettini.

"Even though it was obviously a big stage, I'm the last one that wants to retire. I'm so tired of it. I just I don't want to do it, but sometimes you have to do it." AFP

# Solaire ignites World Cup fever at Waterside

SOLAIRE Resort Entertainment City is rolling out the ultimate pitch-side experience for football fans. From June 12 to July 20, Waterside will transform into a premier sporting and dining destination, offering a vibrant home-away-from-home for both expats and local enthusiasts.

Fans can immerse themselves in the electric atmosphere of the FIFA World Cup 2026, catching every high-stakes goal, dramatic save and historic triumph live on the big screen.

Waterside strikes the perfect balance between an energetic stadium-like buzz and an elevated, comfortable lounge setting. To ensure you never miss a moment of your home country's campaign, Solaire will release a weekly match schedule in advance, making it incredibly easy to coordinate viewing parties with friends and fellow expats.

Because a thrilling match requires proper fuel, the event pays culinary tribute to the tournament's host nations – Mexico, Canada and the US. Guests can dive into a specially curated menu featuring elevated stadium snacks and global comfort food favorites. Furthermore, because the time zones mean early match times for Manila viewers, Waterside is introducing a "Breakfast Menu for Champions" served from 5:30 a.m. to 10:30 a.m. – guaranteeing that early kick-offs come paired with gourmet fuel and hot coffee.

To secure a front-row seat to the global drama, a minimum consumable requirement applies: Group Stages to Round of 16: P1,000+ per person (exclusive of tax and service charge), and the Quarter-finals onward (July 10–20): P2,000+ per person.

# Salamat, Neil!



The Designated Kit Man  
Erel Cabatbat

THE upsides.

We beat Guam, convincingly.

The Philippine Men's National Football Team massacred Guam, 5-1, last Wednesday night for a rousing start in the Tri-Nation Friendlies at the Rizal Memorial Stadium (RMS).

The score could have been bigger, but somehow, some better finishing could have been ordered. However, the more important thing is the team formerly known as the Azkals took the win and for die-hard fans, the win will be enough high for several days. At least for the optimist ones.

Cole Mrowka needed just a few minutes to introduce himself to lo-

cal football lore with his first goal in his first game (and before local fans), for the three stars and the sun. Mrowka's superb start made the long wait for him to suit up for the national team worthwhile.

Andrei Leipold scored a brace in the second half. He also opened his scoring account with the team in the 63rd minute before adding the second one in the closing minutes.

Santi Rublico got his first goal for the country, too.

The Phenom, Jarvey Gayoso, rounded up the final score with his own strike in the 18th minute before capping the night with an assist to Leipold.

Kenji Nishioki could be one of the regular fixtures of future national teams.

Coach Carles Cuadrat said he was happy with what he saw. He also said that the game and the other one against Myanmar will give him

an idea of what the composition of the team will be when it sees action in the 2026 ASEAN Hyundai Cup next month.

Now the downside.

We beat Guam, ranked 201st in the FIFA pecking order, 5-1. Not to take anything from the lads, but this is expected. The scoring could have been bigger, but again, it was against Guam. The Philippine Football Federation (PFF) should work harder in getting quality tune-ups against higher caliber teams or other opponents that our team could learn a lot from. We can afford the losses at this stage; the experience and experimentation are not.

The learning curve is justified because in these games, what the players learn from each other and the other intangibles are far more important than the expected wins.

The midfield. Nothing much to say on this. Just leaving it here.

As we keep on saying before, it's better to lose games during friendlies but not when it truly matters.

The Philippines will next face Myanmar on Tuesday, 7.30 p.m. (June 9) to cap the Tri-Nation

Friendlies at the RMS.

Myanmar is ranked 158th. Definitely an upgrade, on paper, compared to Guam. A win for the country, at least on paper, is a great probability. Reality, however, trumps probability most of the time.

Just like what happened to our team in the ongoing ASEAN U19 Boys' Championship 2026. The U19 squad got bitchslapped with reality after absorbing a 10-0 beat-down from Australia in their opening game in Group C last Wednesday. Medin Memeti opened the floodgates in the 8th minute, and it was downhill from there for the Philippines as the Aussies went up 3-0 after the first half. A porous defense by our boys allowed the Aussies to score seven more until the final whistle, with Memeti racking a total of five goals in the game.

So whatever happened to the declaration that the PFF "will not send a team to a tournament that it can't win"? The sound bite was great, too bad reality doesn't agree, again.

So the last man standing of the legendary Azkal team of the

previous decade has finally said goodbye to international duty. In an Instagram post, Neil Etheridge, the name that has become synonymous with Philippine Football, wrote that all he ever "wanted from the beginning was to make a difference and I hope that I was able to achieve that with my service to the country and national team." And he did more than expected and demanded.

I had several opportunities to interview Neil on and off the pitch. And one of the best things about him was that he speaks his mind off, no bull, no shit too.

And I don't think anyone can also dispute the passion, the commitment, the dedication and the love that Neil has shown and worn on his chest for the flag and country. There are more words to say, but for the meantime, ito na lang muna.

Maraming salamat, Neil!

Stay safe. Stay happy peeps!

For comments or questions, you can reach The Designated Kit Man at erel\_cabatbat@yahoo.com or follow his account on Twitter: @erelcabatbat



# Brunson vows no let up after NY’s triumph

SAN ANTONIO—Jalen Brunson fueled another New York comeback triumph on Wednesday but said the Knicks can’t afford to relax after pulling off a 105-95 victory over the San Antonio Spurs in game one of the NBA Finals.

Brunson scored 13 of his 30 points in the fourth quarter as the Knicks rallied from a 14-point deficit to post their 12th straight victory after sweeping the Philadelphia 76ers and Cleveland Cavaliers in the Eastern Conference semi-finals and finals.

It was the seventh double-digit comeback in the second half of a playoff game by the Knicks over the last two postseasons and their fourth of these playoffs.

That includes their rally from 22 points down with less than eight minutes remaining in their opener against Cleveland.

“I think we know what we have to do,” Brunson said of the Knicks’ ability to dig in when they’re down. “I think we’re a pretty together group and still just continue to fight and have each others’ back and just know that we’re going to keep chipping away, chipping away.

“It’s a credit to the mentality we have as a team,” he said.

Teammate Karl-Anthony Towns said it’s a mentality that reflects New York City.

“It’s something that’s in the city,” Towns said. “You feel that energy in the city -- the grit, the grind, the hard work you’ve got to put in to make it in the city.

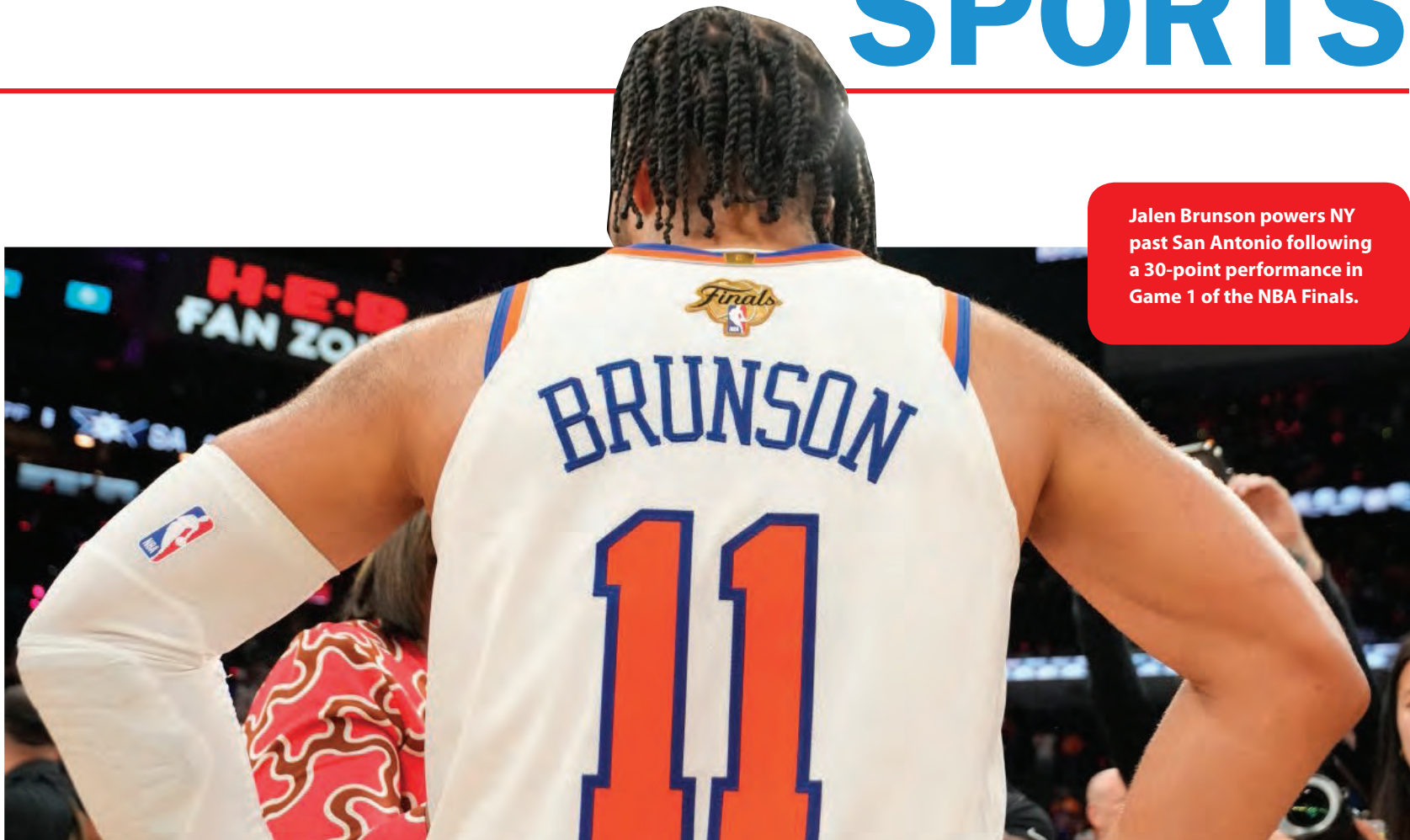
“I think we reflect all our fans and their lifestyles and what it takes to make it in New York City when we step on that court in a Knicks jersey.”

The Knicks, chasing their first title since 1973, are in the Finals for the first time since they fell to San Antonio in 1999.

While they managed to snatch a key road win, Brunson said he expects a young Spurs team led by French star Victor Wembanyama to hit back hard.

“They come ready to play more than any other team we’ve faced,” he said. “We have the utmost respect for them. We know that we’ve got to be ready for game two.

“We can’t just be satisfied,” he added after the Knicks leaned on defense to pull out the victory despite a lackluster offensive showing. “We have a lot of things we can do to be better.” **AFP**



Jalen Brunson powers NY past San Antonio following a 30-point performance in Game 1 of the NBA Finals.

# PH’s Asiad bid gets boost with 4 new taekwondo slots



Abraham Tolentino

FOUR slots in taekwondo have been added to the Philippine delegation for the Nagoya Aichi 20th Asian Games, adding potential sources of medals in the highly competitive event set for September 19 to October 4.

Philippine Olympic Committee president Abraham “Bambol” Tolentino expressed confidence that the added berths—two each in poomsae and kyorugi—enhance the country’s chances of improving on the four gold, two silver and 12 bronze medals hauled from Hangzhou 2022.

“Competition at the Asian Games has already become that high level and elite, so winning medals is close to the degree of difficulty in the Olympics,” said Tolentino, adding that the Japa-

nese host cities also allocated one slot for para taekwondo.

Just recently, the men’s and women’s indoor volleyball teams got their qualification for the games, triggering excitement in the national volleyball community.

The POC is bound to send more than 700 athletes to Nagoya and Aichi with Paris 2024 Olympics gymnastics double gold medalist Carlos Yulo and reigning champion and record holder pole vaulter EJ Obiena leading the charge.

The spotlight will also be on the men’s 5x5 basketball team, which regained the gold medal under coach Tim Cone to the disappointment of the Chinese hosts, including former National Basketball Association star Yao Ming, in Hangzhou.

Jiu-jitsu contributed the other two gold medals in Hangzhou through the now-retired Meggie Ochoa and Annie Ramirez.

The POC is expecting to qualify more athletes in esports and modern pentathlon and kurugi.

## Vibrant side events to spice up Century Tuna IRONMAN tiffs

AS Subic Bay braces for a massive double-header – featuring the milestone 10th Century Tuna IRONMAN 70.3 Subic Bay and the grueling full-distance fifth IRONMAN Philippines – organizers have lined up a high-octane, weekend-long festival. This series of side events is meticulously designed to serve as a vibrant, high-energy appetizer, spicing up the atmosphere and priming the community for the main course on Sunday (June 7).

But before the ultimate drama unfolds, a series of dynamic side events will set the weekend ablaze, ensuring everyone from absolute beginners to the youngest athletes can taste the magic of multisport.

The energy builds early on Friday (June 5) with the Sun Life Underpants Run. Striking the perfect balance between fitness, fun and charity, this colorful dash injects a dose of pure, high-spirited camaraderie into Subic Bay, shaking off the pre-race jitters for athletes and spectators alike.

The momentum intensifies on Saturday (June 6) as the future stars of the sport take over in the RLC Residences IRONKIDS Triathlon and Kids’ Run. Giving the youth their own chance to experience the thrill of crossing a world-class finish line, the junior event electrifies the venue with raw inspiration and family-centric support.

Also on Sunday, adults looking for a rapid-fire challenge have the Birch Tree Adult Boost Sunrise Sprint. Comprising a 750m swim, 20km bike, and 5km run, this short-course format serves as an accessible route for returning athletes and a lightning-fast platform for speed specialists. Adding even more flavor to the weekend is the debut of the Super Sprint. Featuring a beginner-friendly 400m swim, 10km bike, and 2.5km run, it offers the perfect introductory gateway for first-timers.

Together, these short-course thrills and community races act as the perfect festival appetizer. They ignite the crowds, prime the transition zones, and steadily build the competitive energy to a fever pitch, paving the way for Century Tuna’s marquee main events to unleash their full endurance fury on Sunday.

## Wembanyama ‘not worried’ after Spurs’ Game 1 loss

SAN ANTONIO—Victor Wembanyama refused to hit the panic button on Wednesday after the San Antonio Spurs blew a double-digit lead to suffer a potentially crucial NBA Finals game one defeat to the New York Knicks.

The French superstar led San Antonio’s scorers with 26 points but had a poor shooting night before ultimately being upstaged by the Knicks’ Jalen Brunson.

A relaxed Wembanyama was staying calm after the disappointing opening loss, noting that there was still a long way to go in the best-of-seven series.

“Nothing,” Wembanyama replied when asked what aspects of his performance he was kicking himself over. “We’ve been down in a series before. Never in the Finals, obviously.

“But I’m not kicking myself about anything really. I mean, I’m not worried the slightest.”

The 22-year-old is confident San Antonio will bounce back in time for game two in Texas on Friday.

“I’m going to figure it out,” Wembanyama said. “I mean, I was bad tonight. It’s not more complicated than that.”



Victor Wembanyama

## Aguilar rallies to fuel JPGT Finals drive; Clementer prevails

BACOLOD—With coveted tickets to the Elite Junior PGT Finals on the line, Ana Marie Aguilar and Stephen Clementer braved grueling, windless conditions to spearhead a gripping charge in the ICTSI Bacolod JPGT Championship here on Thursday.

Under a heavy, overcast sky that offered no reprieve from the heat, players battled a humid, stagnant atmosphere as the wind veered away from the Bacolod Golf and Country Club course entirely. Despite the stifling air, Aguilar delivered a masterclass in resilience, carding a steady even-par 70 to dominate the girls’ 7-10 division with a 36-hole total of 144, cruising to a commanding six-stroke victory over Soleil Molde.

Heavy overnight rain softened the short but challenging par-70 course, prompting officials to implement preferred lies.

More than just a trophy, the win breathed new life into Aguilar’s post-season aspirations. Entering the week buried at joint ninth in the rankings with just 10 points, her triumph fueled a dramatic backdoor bid for the North vs. South Elite Finals this August at Pueblo de Oro.

While her total rose to 25 points – moving her up to fifth – she remained just outside the crucial Top 4 cut-off. Fortunately for Aguilar, the final leg of the six-stop series starts Monday (June 8) at the Negros Occidental Golf and



Ana Marie Aguilar (Manny Marcelo)

Country Club, her home course.

“I had a good game. I just tried to hit fairways and greens,” said Aguilar. 10. “My short game saved me – I had a lot of steady chips and solid one-to-two putts.”

Now inches closer to a dream finals appearance heading into the final leg at Marapara, Aguilar remained grounded. “I feel good about my chances, but I know I need to practice more, particularly on my chipping and putting. This win will surely boost my confidence, but I need to stay focused and avoid getting distracted.”

Molde carded a 77 to finish second at 150, a result that propelled her to the top



Stephen Clementer (Manny Marcelo)

of the division standings with 42 points. Akeisha Yocte finished third (76-152) to sit third in the rankings with 33 points, while Vanya Go’s final-round 72 placed her fourth at 154, slipping her to second overall in the Visayas-Mindanao Series standings (39 points).

Zoey Mascariñas struggled with an 80 to finish fifth at 157, holding onto the final qualification spot with 28 points.

In the boys’ 7-10 division, Stephen Clementer left no room for drama, completing a spectacular wire-to-wire triumph. The Cagayan de Oro standout gutted out a final-round 72 for a 152 total, burying

Wembanyama also rejected suggestions that the occasion of playing in the NBA Finals might have played a role in San Antonio’s defeat.

“I mean, it definitely felt special, for sure,” he said. “But nothing close that could be an excuse, you know. It was not a factor in our performance.”

Wembanyama added that he was confident of delivering an improved performance in time for game two.

“It’s almost not like I have anything to figure out. It’s almost like I have to play normal, not even good,” he said.

“It’s just like doing the right things is enough. When we play bad, when I play bad, is when we shoot ourselves in the foot.

“This is why I’m not worried. We’re going to be so much better. I’m going to be so much better.” **AFP**

runner-up Thomas Ngo (93-176) by a massive 24 strokes. Ashton Araw-araw placed third at 183 after a 90.

Clementer’s second consecutive victory – following a playoff win over finalist Ethan Lago at Pueblo de Oro – officially punched his ticket to the grand finals. He now sits comfortably in second in the standings with 40 points, just behind Lago’s maximum 45.

“I’m very happy to win again. I had a pretty good game today,” said Clementer, 8, in Filipino, who bounced back in style by firing five birdies after going birdie-less in the opening round.

“My approach shots and putting were great, which is why I got those birdies,” he added. “But I was still a bit nervous. This win is a great confidence boost heading into the grand finals.”

Despite his absence, Lucas Revilleza virtually secured the third spot with 36 points. Meanwhile, Ngo’s runner-up finish boosted him to 26 points, leapfrogging absent Darren Ong (20) for the fourth spot, while Araw-araw stayed in the hunt with 22 points.

The 11-14 divisions featured equally commanding performances. In the boys’ class, Mico Woo ignited his championship run on the par-4 No. 14, thrilling the gallery with a pitch-in eagle. His 76 gave him a 158 total and a six-shot romp over Jordino Mesina (76-164). Isaac Locsin faltered with an 84 to finish third at 173.



# Gov't approves P340b in Green Lane projects

By Othel V. Campos

The government approved P340.07 billion in strategic investments through its Green Lane initiative in the first four months of 2026 that will generate 37,828 jobs for Filipinos.

The Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) and the Board of Investments (BOI) said they certified 14 projects from January to April 2026. The projected employment more than doubled from 18,272 jobs recorded in the same period last year, reflecting a shift toward high-value, capital-intensive investments.

Renewable energy dominated the pipeline, accounting for 85.71 percent of total certifications. The sector brought in P339.09 billion in investments and is expected to create 37,726 jobs.

DTI Secretary and BOI chair Ma. Cristina Roque said the surge in Green

Lane approvals demonstrates the positioning of the Philippines as a hub for smart and sustainable manufacturing and services in Southeast Asia.

“These figures reflect strong investor confidence in doing business in the Philippines, supported by the ease of doing business under the Green Lane Initiative. The P340.07 billion in approved projects sends a clear signal to both local and foreign investors that the Philippines is ready for more strategic investments that will boost our economy and provide jobs to our countrymen,” Roque said.

Large-scale wind and energy developments led the 2026 approvals, featuring projects from Airstream Renewables Corp., Viento Energy 1 Corp. and San Jose Onshore Wind Power Corp.

Four flagship projects alone account for more than P220 billion in investments and over 30,000 jobs. These include the P52.31-billion Pangasinan Wind Farm (10,560 jobs), the P43.59-billion Samar Wind Farm (8,800 jobs), the P43.59-billion Nueva Ecija Wind Farm (8,800 jobs) and the P88.32-billion Bulalacao Bay Offshore Wind Project (2,200 jobs).

Other approved energy developments include a P30.92-billion project by San Jose Onshore Wind Power Corporation (1,100 jobs), a P16.13-billion project by Ilosong Wind Corp. (1,200 jobs), a P14.11-billion project by Energia Pulita Energy Corp. (450 jobs) and a P10.30-billion project by Sembrano Wind Power Corp. (100 jobs).

P340 billion

Green Lane projects in 4 months

14 projects

Newly-approved investments

37,828 jobs

Expected from new projects



Department of Trade and Industry Secretary and Board of Investments chair Ma. Cristina Roque reports that the government approved P340.07 billion in strategic investments through its Green Lane initiative in the first four months of 2026 that will generate 37,828 jobs for Filipinos. The BOI certified 14 projects from January to April 2026.

## WHAT'S INSIDE?



Gov't seeks to cut EV charging permit delays

B2



PSE eyes new rules to boost market

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CAMPI revises 2026 car sales target

B4

## AirAsia PH pays P271.94-m debt, vows expansion

By Darwin G. Amojelar

AIRASIA Philippines settled its P271.94 million in outstanding obligations on Thursday morning after the government warned the budget carrier that it faced a potential suspension of its operations.

The Civil Aviation Authority of the Philippines (CAAP) confirmed the payment but noted that the funds remain subject to standard reconciliation processes.

The regulator previously warned that a failure to pay would force the airline to halt all commercial flights, suspend business activities and lose access to CAAP-managed airport facilities.

“CAAP acknowledges and appreciates the airline’s cooperation and its commitment to addressing its obligations through constructive engagement and coordination with the Authority,” the regulator said in a statement.

“CAAP remains committed to working closely with all aviation stakeholders to ensure regulatory compliance, maintain the stability of air transport operations and safeguard the interests of the traveling public,” it said.

AirAsia Group strongly denied media reports that its local subsidiary was being grounded, calling the narratives entirely false.

The airline operator said that all Z2 flights remain fully operational and continue as scheduled across the network, subject only to standard operational factors like weather.

# World Bank says PH likely to miss single-digit 2028 poverty target

By Thony Rose Lesaca

THE Philippines will not likely meet its reduced poverty incidence target of 8.8 percent to 9.0 percent in 2028, according to World Bank projections that see the national poverty rate reaching around 12.3 percent by the end of the Marcos administration.

The World Bank released its latest Poverty and Equity Assessment report, noting that the country posted strong gains with poverty declining steadily since 2012, excluding the

pandemic. However, the nation still remains far behind upper middle-income country standards.

The multilateral lender reported that the country’s poverty rate declined to 15.5 percent in 2023 from 16.7 percent in 2018 and 18.1 percent in 2021.

The bank projects poverty incidence to further decline to about 12.3 percent by 2028 if the pre-COVID growth-poverty relationship holds, which would exceed the government’s annual target.

“The report projects poverty to 2028, and it does find that it will be

above the [government’s] goal. So as of this moment, we’re not projecting poverty in single digits by 2028, and that’s following just what we’ve seen so far,” World Bank senior economist Liliana Sousa said in a media briefing.

Sousa said only about 24 percent of households are secured in the middle class as of 2023, while vulnerable households sit only 28 percent above the poverty line.

“This means any sort of shock, such as a price increase, job loss, can easily push these families back into poverty,” Sousa said.

Low income, weak job prospects, gaps in insurance and social protection systems, uneven public services and local state capacity undermine the growth of economic security for most Filipinos, the World Bank said.

Despite this, the bank said poverty could still fall to 2.9 percent and boost the middle class to 55 percent by 2040 under a comprehensive reform scenario. Under a business-as-usual scenario, poverty could fall as low as 6 percent and the middle class could grow to 43 percent by 2040.



World Bank officials present the latest Poverty and Equity Assessment report which shows that the Philippines poverty rate declined to 15.5 percent in 2023 from 16.7 percent in 2018 and 18.1 percent in 2021. The bank projects poverty incidence to further decline to about 12.3 percent in 2028.

## SIPP reflects shift to higher value industries

THE Philippine Economic Zone Authority (PEZA) said the newly-released 2026 Strategic Investment Priorities Plan (SIPP) reflects a shift in the country’s investment strategy toward higher-value and future-ready industries amid evolving global economic conditions.

PEZA said the new guidelines place a stronger emphasis on Industry 4.0 investments and encourage the entry of smart and sustainable technologies into the Philippines. The plan reorients investment promotion toward quality, resilience and long-term value creation rather than volume alone.

Priority sectors under the plan include advanced manufacturing, innovation, digital infrastructure and sustainability-oriented industries, which align with the agency’s mandate to strengthen export competitiveness and support industrial upgrading.

PEZA said it has been actively attracting high-impact industries even prior to the new SIPP. These sectors include advanced electronics and semiconductors, electric vehicle supply chains, pharmaceuticals, logistics and renewable energy projects within ecozones. The government views these sectors as key to deeper participation in regional and global value chains.

The investment promotion agency also stressed the need to address infrastructure gaps and operational bottlenecks to support investment inflows. **Othel V. Campos**

## DHSUD, Pag-IBIG Fund turn over housing units to Lipa families

DEPARTMENT of Human Settlements and Urban Development and Pag-IBIG Fund officials turned over house-and-lot units at NuVista Homes Lipa on Wednesday to Pag-IBIG Fund housing loan borrowers who bought homes under President Ferdinand Marcos Jr.’s Expanded Pambansang Pahabay para sa Pilipino Program.

The event followed recent government visits and similar rollouts for Expanded 4PH projects in Pampanga, Nueva Ecija, Laguna, Bacolod and other areas across the country.

DHSUD Secretary Jose Ramon Aliling and Pag-IBIG Fund chief executive Marilene Acosta led the inspection and turnover ceremony alongside officials from project developer P.A. Properties.

Borrowers formally received the keys to their new homes during the event.

Aliling, who also chairs the Pag-IBIG Fund board of trustees, said the turnover reflects the determination of the Marcos administration to make homeownership more accessible to Filipino workers and their families.

“We are pleased to report that the Expanded 4PH Program continues to benefit more Filipinos by helping families gain access to safe, decent and affordable homes,” Aliling said.

“Through stronger collaboration between the public and private sectors, we are able to heed the directive of President Marcos to enable more Filipinos to move from aspiration to actual homeownership,” he said.



The Department of Human Settlements and Urban Development (DHSUD) and Pag-IBIG Fund conduct a project inspection, ribbon-cutting ceremony and turnover of housing units to homebuyers at NuVista Homes Lipa in Lipa City, Batangas, on June 3, 2026. The event was part of the implementation of President Ferdinand Marcos Jr.’s Expanded Pambansang Pahabay para sa Pilipino (Expanded 4PH) Program. Leading the site visit are DHSUD Secretary Jose Ramon Aliling, Pag-IBIG Fund chief executive Marilene Acosta and P.A. Properties chairman Romarico Alvarez.



# ACWA Power, EPI team up for 5,000-MW energy push

By Alena Mae S. Flores

ACWA Power Philippines has signed a joint development agreement with Emerging Power Inc. to explore developing up to 5,000 megawatts of renewable energy and gas-fired generation capacity across the Philippines.

The signing ceremony, witnessed by Finance Secretary Frederick Go, aims to provide renewable and gas-fired power generation at a national scale, establish an immediate pathway to bid jointly into the government’s Green Energy Auction Program, and serve retail electricity suppliers and distribution utilities.

ACWA Power Philippines is a subsidiary of ACWA, the world’s largest private water desalination company and a leader in green hydrogen. EPI is the clean energy arm of natural resources developer Nickel Asia Corp.

Under the agreement, EPI and ACWA seek to identify new power projects nationwide and co-develop facilities where their strategic objectives align.

A priority near-term track for both companies is joint participation in the GEAP, where ACWA and EPI intend to submit proposals in response to the government’s call for more investments in renewable energy.

“The Philippines has set one of the most ambitious clean energy trajectories in Southeast Asia, and reaching it requires partners who can move at scale and at pace,” said Samir Serhan, chief executive of ACWA.

“EPI brings deep local knowledge, an operating renewables base, and a credible growth plan,” Serhan said. “We bring three decades of delivering large-scale power and water assets on time and on budget. Together, 5,000 MW is a starting point, not a limit.”

EPI chairman and chief executive Martin Antonio Zamora said the joint development with ACWA Power Philippines accelerates the nation’s transition to a low-carbon economy.

“Together, we are building scalable, reliable and sustainable power infrastructure that will energize Filipino communities, drive economic growth, and safeguard our generations to come,” Zamora said.

Salman Baray, ACWA Philippines country general manager, said the collaboration is what the company has been building toward since establishing its presence in the country.



**AIC JAPAN DELEGATION.** Aboitiz InfraCapital Inc. president and CEO Cosette Canilao, sixth from left, and AIC Airports chief airline marketing officer Mark Souter, second from right, join Philippine government officials and Japanese corporate executives during a business engagement in Tokyo on May 27 led by President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. The discussions explored opportunities for collaboration across infrastructure, aviation, tourism and investment to strengthen economic ties between the Philippines and Japan.

# DOE eyes new rules to cut EV charging permit delays

By Othel V. Campos

THE Department of Energy is working with other government agencies on a proposed joint memorandum circular to speed up and simplify the permitting process for electric vehicle charging facilities, addressing a key bottleneck in the country’s infrastructure rollout.

Patrick Aquino, director of the DOE Energy Utilization Management Bureau, said the proposed issuance is an interagency measure being developed with the Anti-Red Tape Authority and other concerned offices to harmonize permitting

requirements and cut approval delays that currently take up to six months.

“What we’re working on is an interagency approach. It will be time-bound and allow parallel processing,” Aquino said on the sidelines of the 10th Philippine International Motor Show at the World Trade Center.

Under the proposed joint memorandum circular, applications for EV charging stations will be subject to fixed processing timelines, with several steps processed simultaneously rather than sequentially across different agencies.

The initiative also introduces “deemed approved” provisions for certain applications once prescribed timelines lapse, provided all documentary requirements are complied with. This mechanism is intended to improve predictability for investors and reduce administrative delays.

Aquino said the measure aligns with

the Ease of Doing Business Act and is designed to eliminate overlapping regulatory requirements that have slowed down infrastructure deployment.

As of the end of April, the Philippines had about 1,600 public charging points nationwide. The government targets 7,000 charging stations by 2028.

Running through June 7, PIMS 2026 is an annual event jointly organized by the Chamber of Automotive Manufacturers of the Philippines and the Truck Manufacturers Association.

The motor show features more than 150 vehicle models from 17 participating brands, with over half expected to be electrified units.

Participating brands include BAIC, Chery, Foton, Geely, Isuzu, Kia, Jetour, Honda, Mitsubishi, MG, Omoda, Jaecoo, Nissan, Subaru, Suzuki, Tesla, Toyota and VinFast, alongside around 80 automotive aftermarket partners.

Career Opportunity in TOMORO COFFEE PHILIPPINES INC.

EXECUTIVE ASSISTANT  
(1 Vacancy)

Job Description

- Provides high-level administrative and operational support to senior executives.
- This role is responsible for managing schedules, coordinating meetings, handling correspondence, preparing reports, and ensuring the smooth day-to-day operations of the executive office.
- The ideal candidate is highly organized, detail-oriented, professional, and capable of handling confidential information with discretion.

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

- Educational Requirements Bachelor's degree in Business Administration, Management, Communications, or a related field (preferred).
- Relevant work experience may be considered in lieu of a degree.
- Experience At least 2-5 years of experience as an Executive Assistant, Administrative Assistant, or similar role.
- Experience supporting senior executives, directors, or C-level management is an advantage.

Applications may be sent to:  
HR Name: MIKE JAY D. BALMACEDA  
Email Address avb@toeiphil.com.ph

Company/ Employer	Name of foreign national intending to apply for the position
COMPANY NAME: TOMORO COFFEE PHILIPPINES INC. COMPANY ADDRESS: G/F 8197 SGT. FABIAN YABUT CIRCLE COR. ORENSE ST. GUADALUPE NUEVO 1212 CITY OF MAKATI CITY Nature of Business: RETAIL SALE OF OTHER GOODS IN SPECIALIZED STORE	Name: XING GUI Address: TAGUIG CITY Nationality: Chinese Intended period of employment: 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 - National Capital Region located at 967 Maligaya Street, Malate, Manila.

Career Opportunity in TOMORO COFFEE PHILIPPINES INC.

SUPPLY CHAIN MANAGEMENT  
(1 Vacancy)

Job Description

- Oversees the entire product lifecycle, from sourcing raw materials to final delivery
- Aiming to maximize efficiency, reduce costs, and ensure high-quality standards.
- Key duties include managing inventory levels, negotiating with suppliers, optimizing logistics/transportation
- Implementing strategic plans to meet customer demand.

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

- Typically requires a bachelor's degree in supply chain management, logistics, business, or industrial engineering, combined with 3-7+ years of experience in logistics, procurement, or inventory control.
- Essential skills include ERP proficiency (e.g., SAP, Oracle), data analysis (Excel, Tableau), strategic planning, and strong negotiation abilities.

Applications may be sent to:  
HR Name: MIKE JAY D. BALMACEDA  
Email Address avb@toeiphil.com.ph

Company/ Employer	Name of foreign national intending to apply for the position
COMPANY NAME: TOMORO COFFEE PHILIPPINES INC. COMPANY ADDRESS: G/F 8197 SGT. FABIAN YABUT CIRCLE COR. ORENSE ST. GUADALUPE NUEVO 1212 CITY OF MAKATI CITY Nature of Business: RETAIL SALE OF OTHER GOODS IN SPECIALIZED STORE	Name: FUWEN DUAN Address: TAGUIG CITY Nationality: Brazilian Intended period of employment: 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 - National Capital Region located at 967 Maligaya Street, Malate, Manila.

ERRATUM

This is in connection with the publication of job vacancies by LD EBIKE TRADING CORPORATION, on 29 May 2026 in Manila Standard. LD EBIKE TRADING CORPORATION hereby declares that the above-named foreign national, ZHANG YANAN is able willing and qualified to perform the services and job description for this position, Marketing Specialist. The company has the intention to employ the said foreign nationals and apply for an Alien Employment Permit - Region III located at Matalino cor. Mahusay St., DMGC, Maimpis, City of San Fernando, Pampanga.

If there are any objections or inquiries, please contact the concerned DOLE Regional Office. The company address should have been 539 Unit 9 Benedicto St., corner M. Villarica Road Preza I Maricao Bulacan for one (1) position for a MARKETING SPECIALIST. The company intends to employ the said foreign nationals and to file the corresponding application for an Alien Employment Permit (AEP) with the Department of Labor and Employment-Region III located at Matalino cor. Mahusay St., DMGC, Maimpis, City of San Fernando, Pampanga.

LEGAL NOTICE

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN TO THE PUBLIC THAT JAY ROBIN J. MANUEL OWNER OF DOUBLE M CONSTRUCTION AND SUPPLY HAS RENAMED HIS BUSINESS AS DOUBLE M CONSTRUCTION, WHICH IS LOCATED AT BRGY. 57, PILA, LAOAG CITY, ILOCOS NORTE, PHILIPPINES AS PER DOC NO. 77, PAGE NO. 16, BOOK NO. LXXXI, SERIES OF 2026 UNDER NOTARY PUBLIC ATTY. EMILIO EDGAR V. DOLOROSO JR.

Legal Notice

Notice is hereby given to the Public that a Deed of Extra Judicial Settlement of Estate has been executed by the heirs of the late Spouses Doroteo F. Yambao and Gilda M Manalastas namely: Rodante M. Yambao, Dorothy Yambao Cruz, Cielo Yambao Dacusin, Bernhardt Wagner, Angelo Bryan Yambao Wagner, Christian Yambao Wagner, Dominador P. Caparas, Doni Yambao Caparas, Jeff Yambao Caparas and Joan Yambao Caparas - Solely, over personal and real properties per Deed executed on April 8, 2025 before Notary Public Atty. Marcus Aurelius M. Banares per Doc. No.443, Page 90, Book No.14, Series of 2025

boi  
BOARD OF INVESTMENTS  
PHILIPPINES

dti  
DEPARTMENT OF TOURISM  
INDUSTRY

NOTICE

Notice is hereby given that **KNACK GLOBAL PHILIPPINES, INC.** with office address at Unit 402 and 404, 4th Floor, Tech Hub 7 SM City Clark, Clark-Mabalacat-Angeles Road, SM City Clark Expansion, Dau, Mabalacat City, Pampanga, is applying for registration with the Board of Investments (BOI) as a New Services Export Provider (**Business Process Outsourcing - SM City Clark Tech Hub 10**), under Tier I (Export Activities - Services Exports) of the 2022 Strategic Investment Priority Plan (SIPP) of RA 11534 (CREATE Act), as amended by RA No. 12066, with project site address at 4th and 5th Floors, SM City Clark Tech Hub 10, SM City Clark Expansion, Clark-Mabalacat-Angeles Road, Brgy. Dau, Mabalacat City, Pampanga.

Any person with valid objection/s on the above-mentioned project may file his/her objection in writing, under oath, with the BOI **within three (3) days** from the date of this publication.

(SGD.) **MARY ANN E. RAGANIT**  
Director  
Infrastructure and Services Industries Service



**O.N.E. CAMPAIGN.** Department of Energy officials, led by Energy Secretary Sharon Garin, second from left, and Ayala Land Inc. executives launch the O.N.E. Campaign. The nationwide initiative urges households and businesses to cut electricity use for one hour weekly to boost energy security.

# PH Carabao mangoes debut in Toronto

THE Philippines made its first commercial shipment of fresh Carabao mangoes to Toronto on Wednesday, a move aimed at expanding export markets and reducing reliance on traditional agricultural buyers.

The Department of Agriculture joined the send-off ceremony at the Philippine Airlines cargo terminal in Pasay City, describing the development as a breakthrough for one of the country’s most iconic fruit exports.

“This is another step toward our goal of widening and diversifying the global market for our farm products such as bananas, coconuts and mangoes. It is time for other parts of the world to get a taste of the Philippines,” Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. said.

The shipment follows last year’s inaugural export of fresh Philippine mangoes to Rome, advancing President Ferdinand Marcos Jr.’s broader strategy to expand the global footprint of Philippine agricultural products.

The DA is also promoting a wider port-

folio of high-value crops, including Cavendish, Cardaba or Saba bananas, cacao, pomelo, rambutan, dalandan, pineapple, okra, asparagus, pili, durian, avocado, dragon fruit, calamansi and ube.

Philip Young, head of the Agri-Fishery Export Development and Promotion Office, said the Toronto shipment highlights how government support and private sector participation can open new markets for Filipino farmers.

The Philippine Agriculture Office in Washington coordinated the shipment in collaboration with the Philippine Consulate General and the Philippine Trade and Investment Center, both in Toronto, alongside mango industry stakeholders.

Philippine exporters Hi-Las Marketing Corp. and Castillo Import Export Ventures Inc. supplied the fresh mangoes, while Ontario-based TSI Tropicals Inc. served as the importer. Flag carrier Philippine Airlines transported the shipment through its commercial air freight program.

Othel V. Campos

Career Opportunity in Cardinal Health International Philippines, Inc.

Position title: Advisor, Srst SRChndirect  
Vacancy: (1)

Job Description:

- Manages relationships with vendors including vendor selection, elimination and performance review activities.
- Develops requests for projects, reviews bids, and negotiates contracts with third party vendors.
- Works with business partners to determine sourcing needs and provide indirect sourcing support.

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

- 4-8 years of experience, preferred
- Bachelor's degree in related field, or equivalent work experience, preferred

Applications may be sent to:  
Name of Company HR: Alenne Estrella  
Email address: alenne.estrella@cardinalhealth.com

Company/ Employer	Name of foreign national intending to apply for the position
Company Name: Cardinal Health International Philippines, Inc.  Complete address: 19th Floor, W City Center Bldg., 7th Ave. cor. 30th St. Bonifacio Global City, Taguig City 1634	Name: <b>Alessandra Alves Balsamoo</b> Address: Parañaque City Nationality: Brazilian Intended period of employment: Two (2) Years

Nature of business: a domestic corporation primarily engaged in the business of providing business processes, business support functions, and IT-enabled services, including but not limited to, back-office operations and transactions, customer support, and service functions, technology support and services, general human resource functions, business planning, providing logistics support services for the sale, distribution and transportation of goods, commodities, wares, and merchandise, particularly health and pharmaceutical products by its clients.

Cardinal Health International 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 - National Capital Region located at 967 Maligaya Street, Malate, 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 - National Capital Region located at 967 Maligaya Street, Malate, Manila after this publication. Please inform Department of Labor and Employment - NCR, if you have any information on criminal offenses committed by the foreign national.



PH stocks drop 41 points to break 3-day rally ahead of inflation data

LOCAL shares retreated Thursday as the upcoming release of the May inflation report prompted investors to lock in gains after a three-day market rally.

The Philippine Stock Exchange index declined by 41.24 points, or 0.69 percent, to close at 5,911.93, while the broader all shares index slipped 0.49 percent to 3,323.08.

The government is scheduled to release the May inflation data on Friday. The Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas earlier said it expects May inflation to settle between 7.1 percent and 7.9 percent, compared with 7.2 percent in April.

Analysts at Philstocks Financial Inc. said escalating tensions between the U.S. and Iran also weighed on investor sentiment. The geopolitical anxieties followed remarks from Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu stating that the U.S. and Israel are prepared to launch further strikes against Iran if necessary.

The sell-off was broad-based,

with five of the six major sectoral indices ending in negative territory.

Services stocks posted the steepest decline, falling 2.23 percent, followed by mining and oil, which dropped 1.41 percent. Property shares lost 0.76 percent, while industrial and holding firm counters fell 0.30 percent and 0.26 percent, respectively.

Financial stocks bucked the downtrend, rising 1.29 percent. Value turnover reached P6.14 billion.

Foreign investors turned net sellers, with outflows recorded at P298.93 million.

Century Pacific Food Inc. was the day's top index gainer, rising 4.37 percent to P26.30. Ayala Land Inc. was the worst index performer, dropping 4.76 percent to P14.

Meanwhile, the peso closed stronger Thursday at 61.625 against the U.S. dollar, up from 61.745 on Wednesday.

Jennifer B. Austria



**SHANGRI-LA PLAZA'S AWARDS.** Jovita Poloso, executive vice president for commercial and retail at Shangri-La Plaza Inc., receives an award for Shangri-La Plaza at the Retail Asia Awards 2026. The lifestyle destination was recognized for redefining how Filipinos experience retail, dining and wellness, and for reimagining the use of mall space. Shangri-La Plaza received the Mall Initiative of the Year – Philippines award for its Streetscape development and the Health & Wellness Initiative of the Year – Philippines award for STRIDE: Walkathon at The Shang.

PSE proposes new rules to boost market liquidity

By Jennifer B. Austria

THE Philippine Stock Exchange has proposed amendments to its market-making rules to improve liquidity and trading activity in the local bourse.

The PSE said Thursday it drafted a general framework that would apply to all market-making operations, allowing the exchange to easily introduce product-specific rules in the future.

“Having a main framework will make it easier and more efficient for us to craft product-specific market making rules when need-

ed,” PSE president and chief executive Ramon Monzon said.

Market making refers to the continuous provision of liquidity through the simultaneous posting of buy and sell quotes in compliance with exchange and regulatory rules.

The PSE currently has market-making rules only for exchange-

traded funds. Under the proposed amendments, the framework would also cover Global Philippine Depositary Receipts and could later expand to include individual stocks and other exchange-traded products.

“A market maker has an important role in ensuring continuous liquidity in the stock market. We updated the rules based on global industry standards,” Monzon said.

Under the proposed rules, market makers must be accredited broker-dealers registered with the Securities and Exchange Commission and trading partici-

pants of the PSE.

Eligible trading participants must have an unimpaired paid-up capital of at least P100 million and must have operated continuously as a trading participant for at least three years before filing an application.

Applicants unable to meet the operating track record requirement must have at least two key personnel with a minimum of five years of experience in securities trading in a local or World Federation of Exchanges-member stock exchange.

The proposed amendments also set obligations for market mak-

ers, including maximum bid-ask spreads, minimum quote sizes and required presence during trading sessions.

To encourage participation, the PSE proposed incentives for compliant market makers, including possible clearing fee concessions, price quoting services and connectivity support, subject to commercial agreements.

The proposed rules are available on the PSE website for public comment until June 23. The comments will be considered in the final version of the amendments, which will be submitted to the SEC for approval.



**MUSCOVADO PRODUCTION.** Sugarcane farmers of the Bukidnon Farmers CARP Beneficiaries Multi-Purpose Cooperative in Don Carlos, Bukidnon, continue to produce muscovado sugar as a source of livelihood. The Department of Science and Technology Bukidnon provincial office conducted a Technology Needs Assessment on May 28, 2026, to identify interventions for the cooperative's operational challenges and production bottlenecks.

Career Opportunity in CONCENTRIX CVG PHILIPPINES, INC.	
Position Title: Advisor Bilingual: Email, CRM	Qualification (Education, Experience, Professional License, Skills Certification, Specialized Training):
<b>Job Description:</b> a) Ensure service delivered to our customers meets contractual Key Performance Indicator (KPIs)  b) Listen attentively to customer needs and concerns; demonstrate empathy while maximizing opportunity to build rapport with the customer.  c) Participate in activities designed to improve customer satisfaction, team camaraderie, and business performance.  d) Track, document and retrieve information in call tracking database  e) Participate in activities designed to improve customer satisfaction, team camaraderie, and business performance.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Graduate of any business-related course</li><li>• Excellent written and verbal communication skills in Vietnamese and English language</li><li>• Experience working in international and cross-cultural environment</li><li>• Courteous with strong customer service orientation.</li><li>• Must be fluent in Vietnamese and English speaking, reading, writing, and listening</li><li>• Skilled in multi-tasking; including the ability to be flexible and adapt to changes quickly.</li><li>• Demonstrate patience in all customer contact situations; including maintaining a pleasant and professional tone and manner</li><li>• Strong analytical, organizational and problem solving skills</li><li>• Experience in software programs such as Microsoft Word, Excel, Microsoft Outlook and Internet</li><li>• Clarity of verbal communication (pace and tone)</li><li>• Excellent written communication (grammar)</li></ul>
Applications may be sent to: <b>PH QC EASTW MULTILINGUAL@concentrix.com</b>	
Company/ Employer	Name of foreign national intending to apply for the position
Company Name: Concentrix CVG Philippines, Inc. Complete Address: 14/F to 25/F Ayala North Exchange, Tower 2, 6798 Ayala Avenue cor. Amorsolo and Salcedo Streets, Brgy. San Lorenzo, Makati City Nature of Business: Business to Business IT	Name: Minh Tu Tran Address: Pasig City Nationality: Vietnamese 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 - National Capital Region located at 967 Maligaya Street, Malate, Manila.	

Aboitiz InfraCapital eyes Japanese investments

ABOITIZ InfraCapital Inc. is looking to unlock investment and partnership opportunities in Japan following its recent participation in a high-level, government-led business mission.

Aboitiz InfraCapital president and chief executive Cosette Canilao joined President Ferdinand Marcos Jr., Trade and Industry Secretary Maria Cristina Aldeguer-Roque, Tourism Secretary Bernardita Angara-Mathay and Philippine Ambassador to Japan Mylene Garcia-Albano for a business roundtable at the Imperial Hotel in Tokyo on May 27.

Senior executives from 23 leading Japanese companies also attended the meeting.

“Japan has long been one of the Philippines’ most valued economic partners and a key source of investment, innovation and expertise for our country,” Canilao said. “Engaging directly with Japanese business leaders allows us at Aboitiz InfraCapital to deepen existing relationships and explore new opportunities that can support the continued growth of our airports, water and digital infrastructure businesses while contributing to the country’s broader development goals.”

Canilao was joined by AIC Airports chief airline marketing officer Mark Souter at the event, which provided a platform to exchange in-

sights and explore collaboration across infrastructure, tourism, aviation and finance.

Chief executives from prominent Japanese businesses attended the roundtable, including All Nippon Airways, Japan Airlines, JTB Corp., Toyota Motor Corp., Mitsubishi Corp., Mitsui & Co., Marubeni Corp., Sumitomo Corp., Mitsubishi UFJ Financial Group, Mizuho Financial Group and Sumitomo Mitsui Financial Group.

“The participation in this room of Japan’s most respected industry leaders—representing trading houses, financial institutions, manufacturing champions, technology firms and service groups—speaks for itself,” Marcos said during the meeting. “It is not just attendance. It is confidence—confidence in the Philippine economy today, and even more importantly, confidence in what the Philippines can become.”

As the infrastructure arm of the Aboitiz Group, Aboitiz InfraCapital operates the Mactan-Cebu International Airport, Laguindingan International Airport and Bohol-Panglao International Airport.

Aboitiz InfraCapital president and chief executive Cosette Canilao



NOTICE OF ANNUAL STOCKHOLDERS MEETING

NOTICE is hereby given that the 2026 annual stockholders meeting of ARTHALAND CORPORATION will be held on 26 June 2026, Friday, 9:00 A.M. via remote communication and will be convened by the Presiding Officer in Taguig City. Attendees who may want to participate during the meeting must register at

[https://us02web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN\\_-YNv2uh4Tc-Y-gQsR7DvBg#/registration](https://us02web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_-YNv2uh4Tc-Y-gQsR7DvBg#/registration)

The Agenda for the meeting is as follows:

- Call to Order
- Secretary's Proof of Due Notice of the Meeting and Determination of Quorum
- Approval of Minutes of Annual Stockholders Meeting held on 27 June 2025
- Notation of Management Report
- Ratification of Acts of the Board of Directors and Management During the Previous Year
- Election of Directors (including Independent Directors)
- Appointment of External Auditor for 2026
- Other Matters
- Adjournment

Only stockholders of record by close of business on 04 June 2026 will be entitled to further notice of and to vote at this meeting. Electronic copies of the Information Statement which will include the manner of conducting the meeting and the process on how one can join the same, as well as vote in absentia, among other relevant documents, will be made available in [www.arthaland.com](http://www.arthaland.com) and the Electronic Disclosure Generation Technology of the Philippine Stock Exchange (PSE EDGE).

WE ARE NOT SOLICITING YOUR PROXY. However, if you cannot personally attend and participate during the meeting through remote communication but would still like to be represented thereat and be considered for quorum purposes, you may inform the Office of the Corporate Secretary at the address indicated below or through [investor.relations@arthaland.com](mailto:investor.relations@arthaland.com) not later than 19 June 2026 (Friday). You will thereafter be advised the following business day of any further action on your part, which may include accomplishing a proxy.

SGD. RIVA KHRISTINE V. MAALA  
Corporate Secretary



# CAMPI revises car sales target

By Othel V. Campos

THE Chamber of Automotive Manufacturers of the Philippines Inc. (CAMPI) slightly upgraded its full-year 2026 industry outlook, even as it continues to project a decline in vehicle sales compared with 2025 levels.

CAMPI president Jose Maria Atienza said during the opening of the four-day Philippine International Motor Show that the industry's earlier forecast of a 10-percent contraction has been revised to a 5-percent to 8-percent decline, reflecting a modest improvement in market conditions.

Under the latest projection, full-year 2026 sales are expected to range between 400,000 and 460,000 units. While lower than the previous year, the figures represent an improvement from earlier, more pessimistic estimates made at the height of supply disruptions.

Atienza said early 2026 indicators showed slightly stronger monthly sales performance than initially projected, alongside gradual stabilization in fuel prices and improving supply conditions for several vehicle segments.

The adjustment indicates better-than-expected resilience in demand given increased interest in electric vehicles (EVs) and pick-up models, and a slower-than-anticipated market correction following supply disruptions earlier in the year, he said.

Despite the upgrade, the industry continues to face headwinds from uneven supply recovery. This is particularly true in electrified vehicles,

which experienced volatility in market share due to inventory constraints across several brands.

Atienza said electrified vehicle sales surged to around 35 percent of total sales in April before falling back to about 20 percent in May, underscoring the impact of supply gaps and delayed shipments.

Manufacturers are now working through backlogs accumulated during the earlier surge in demand.

"We are still in a catch-up phase," Atienza said, citing limited visibility on brand-level supply pipelines but expressing optimism that volumes could stabilize in the coming months as inventories normalize.

## ALI rolls out energy efficiency campaign across 350 properties

By Jenniffer B. Austria

AYALA Land Inc. joined the Department of Energy on Wednesday to launch a nationwide energy conservation campaign across more than 350 properties to support the government's energy security goals.

The property developer is rolling out the initiative, called O.N.E. (Oras Natin sa Efficiency), to encourage households, businesses and institutions to reduce electricity consumption for an hour every week from 8 p.m. to 9 p.m.

Under the program, participants switch off non-essential lighting and minimize electricity use to improve energy efficiency and reduce pressure on the power grid.

Ayala Land will implement the campaign across its portfolio. These include 34 malls, 76 office buildings, 16 hotels, 2 resorts, 11 logistics facilities, 26 estates, 136 residential communities, 29 carparks and 270 properties that Ayala Property Management Corp. manages.

The initiative aligns with the company's broader sustainability agenda, including its commitment to achieve net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050.

Ayala Land consumes around 1,000,000 megawatt-hours of electricity annually. The company manages this demand through energy-efficient design, advanced technologies, renewable energy adoption and operational innovations.

"Ayala Land has long recognized that energy efficiency is fundamental to sustainable development. Through our partnership with the Department of Energy, we are proud to support the O.N.E. Campaign and help drive a culture of responsible energy use across communities," Ayala Land chief sustainability officer Robert Lao said.



**OUTSTANDING CONTRIBUTIONS.** Association of Philippines-China Understanding (APCU) chairman and president Raul Lambino (right) and Chinese Ambassador to the Philippines Jing Quan (third from left) present the 2026 Award for Promoting Philippines-China Understanding to Prof. Clarita Carlos (second from left), Peter Ng (second from right), and Prof. Zhang Zhaodong (third from right) in ceremonies held at the Manila Hotel on June 3, 2026. Now on its sixth year, the award is given to Filipinos for their outstanding contributions in strengthening the bonds of friendship, understanding and cooperation between the peoples of China and the Philippines. Also in photo is APPCU vice chairman Sixto Benedicto. Joseph Muego

## Angeles Power secures P2-b BPI loan to fund 49-MW solar project in Tarlac

By Alena Mae S. Flores

ANGELES Power Inc. (API) said Thursday it secured a P2-billion loan from the Bank of the Philippine Islands (BPI) to fund the development of its 49.9-megawatt Paldo CT solar project in Tarlac province.

"The financing will help advance the construction of the project and strengthen API's commitment to expanding clean and renewable energy generation," the company said in a statement.

API said the first batch of solar panels recently arrived at the Concepcion site, marking the start of a critical phase to bring sustainable power to the grid.

The development is the first solar project for API, which expects to complete the facility next year.

API is the parent company of listed solar energy developer Raslag Corp.

Raslag Corp. president and chief executive Robert Gerard Nepomuce-

no said API decided to build its own solar plant to replace its 30-MW embedded plant that uses dirty fuel.

"The shift to renewable energy aligns with the DOE [Department of Energy] direction," Nepomuceno said.

Meanwhile, Raslag Corp. is developing its own 140-megawatt Liwayway solar project in Santa Rosa, Nueva Ecija. The P7-billion project includes a 100-megawatt-hour battery energy storage system.

Raslag is allocating P2 billion to P3 billion for capital expenditures this year to fund the construction of the Liwayway project.

The company awarded Greencity Energy Philippines Inc. the contract as the owner's engineer for the project's subsidiary Raslag Liwayway Inc. in October.

Raslag has 77.84 megawatts of existing capacity and plans to participate in the next round of the Green Energy Auction Program to boost its portfolio.



**STEEL STANDARDS.** Department of Trade and Industry-Fair Trade Group (FTG) assistant secretary and supervising head Regino Mallari Jr. and DTI-Bureau of Philippine Standards (BPS) director Neil Catajay visit Hongda Steel Corp. in Bulacan province and Chuangxing Steel Inc. in Pampanga. The activity focused on the production of deformed steel bars, which are among the 113 products covered under the DTI-BPS Mandatory Product Certification Scheme. These steel bars serve as a foundational component in buildings, residential homes, and public infrastructure projects nationwide.

## Filipino exporters seek US talks over proposed forced labor tariffs

PHILIPPINE Exporters Confederation Inc (PHILEXPORT) expressed concern over a proposal by the Office of the United States Trade Representative (USTR) to impose additional duties of up to 12.5 percent on imports from economies deemed insufficient in preventing and enforcing bans on goods produced through forced labor.

PHILEXPORT president Sergio Ortiz-Luis Jr said Philippine exporters do not engage in such practices, adding that the country's exporters adhere to responsible sourcing, transparency and labor standards required by global markets.

"We urge the USTR to engage in constructive dialogue with Philippine authorities and the private sector to better appreciate the reforms already undertaken and the continuing measures being implemented," Ortiz-Luis said.

He said Philippine laws strictly prohibit forced labor, slavery, involuntary servitude and human trafficking. Violators face severe penalties, including lengthy prison terms and substantial fines.

The Philippines has also reinforced

## 5G expansion to drive PH mobile market

THE Philippines mobile services market will exceed \$5 billion in 2030 as expanding 5G networks trigger a massive shift toward high-speed data consumption, according to a report from data analytics firm GlobalData.

Total mobile services revenue in the country will grow at a compound annual growth rate of 4.6 percent from \$4 billion in 2025. Mobile data services will serve as the primary catalyst for this expansion, offsetting a sharp decline in traditional voice revenues, the report says.

While mobile data revenues will climb 6 percent annually between 2025 and 2030, voice service revenue will fall at an annual rate of 9.7 percent. The decline reflects a steady drop in average voice revenue per user as consumers migrate to internet-based communication, it says.

GlobalData telecom analyst Kantipudi Pradeepthi expects average monthly mobile data usage to rise from 8.9 gigabytes in 2025 to roughly 15.3 gigabytes in 2030. High-bandwidth online video streaming and data-heavy mobile gaming over smartphones will drive this increase.

Fourth-generation, or 4G, technology will remain the dominant mobile network by subscriptions in the Philippines until 2028. However, 5G subscriptions will overtake 4G over the following two years, capturing a 61 percent share of total mobile subscriptions by 2030. Overall 5G network penetration will hit 77 percent by 2030, which analysts say will also accelerate the adoption of machine-to-machine and internet of things services.

Major telecommunications companies continue to invest heavily to capture this growing market. Globe Telecom extended its 5G coverage to 98.7 percent of Metro Manila and 97.9 percent of Visayas and Mindanao cities in May 2025.

The company expanded its 5G infrastructure across 18 municipalities in Tarlac province in March 2026 to boost connectivity.

### NNIC opens shared premium lounge

A NEW shared premium lounge at the Ninoy Aquino International Airport Terminal 3 is already being used by seven international airlines less than a month after its opening, its private operator said, as part of a strategy to optimize limited space.

New NAIA Infra Corp. (NNIC) said the 2,600-square-meter facility, called the First Meridian Lounge, is part of a broader effort to repurpose offices and underutilized areas into high-value amenities. By consolidating premium services into a single space, the common-use model eliminates the need for separate airline-specific lounges that often sit empty outside specific flight windows.

The privately operated third-party facility, located on Level 4 of Terminal 3, serves eligible business class and premium passengers of Thai Airways, Emirates, Japan Airlines, Vietnam Airlines, Cathay Pacific, KLM and Qatar Airways. NNIC expects more carriers to onboard in the coming months.

"This shared lounge supports our effort to improve the passenger experience at NAIA while using terminal space more efficiently," NNIC said in a statement.

"It gives eligible passengers a more comfortable and reliable pre-flight experience, while allowing us to create more space for food, beverage, retail and other amenities that benefit a wider range of travelers," it said.

Darwin G. Amojelar

### Globe expands fiber footprint

GLOBE Telecom Inc. said it is continuing to expand its fiber footprint to meet the demand for high-speed connectivity and anchor its long-term growth.

"As demand for high-speed connectivity continues to grow, our focus is on scaling fiber to meet the evolving needs of Filipino homes while maintaining a reliable and consistent network experience," Globe president and chief executive Carl Cruz said.

"We remain disciplined in how we invest, ensuring that every peso spent delivers meaningful value for our customers and supports long-term sustainability to the business," Cruz said.

The company reported that its total broadband subscriber base grew 22 percent year-on-year to 2.2 million. The growth was led by customer migration to fiber and sustained demand for high-quality internet services

## IN BRIEF

to support remote work, online learning, entertainment and everyday digital activities.

A milestone of 1 million GFiber Prepaid subscribers further highlighted the increasing preference for flexible and accessible fiber solutions nationwide, according to the company.

This allowed the segment to sustain business momentum, marking its fourth consecutive quarter of sequential growth and delivering one of its strongest starts to the year in recent periods.

Darwin G. Amojelar

### UNFPA, PhilHealth sign partnership

THE United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) in the Philippines and the Philippine Health Insurance Corp. signed a partnership agreement to improve maternal health care, family planning services and medical access for millions of Filipino families.

The agreement follows PhilHealth expanding its maternity benefit packages in April. The updated packages cover the recommended number of prenatal and postnatal check-ups and nearly triple the coverage for normal and cesarean births to support women, adolescents and indigent citizens.

Under the new long-term plan, both organizations will combine expertise to advance the Responsible Parenthood and Reproductive Health law, Universal Healthcare Coverage and the Sustainable Development Goals 2030. The collaboration focuses on reducing maternal mortality and improving access to sexual reproductive health care through strategic investments.

"The PhilHealth is an indispensable partner for making universal healthcare a reality in the country," UNFPA country representative Neus Bernabeu said.

"This partnership is about expanding access to quality care, supporting healthier communities, and securing the lifelong wellbeing of every Filipino family. It is more than just reducing out-of-pocket costs, it's for a life-saving cause," said Bernabeu.

The initiative aims to eliminate financial barriers for vulnerable segments of the population seeking essential medical services.





**HOUSING FOR NSCR-AFFECTED FAMILIES.** The Department of Transportation (DOTr), in partnership with the San Pedro, Laguna local government, has officially broken ground on the Sining Apartments Public Rental Facility (PRF) in Brgy. Landayan. The project is the first-ever government-built rental housing facility under the NSCR-Extension Project, aimed at providing decent, livable, and highly affordable homes for displaced families who choose to stay in San Pedro. The initiative follows directives from President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. to ensure safe and accessible relocation for communities affected by major transport infrastructure projects. **[DOTr Facebook Page](#)**



# Govt offers housing for rail-displaced families

**F**AMILIES affected by the North-South Commuter Railway (NSCR) project are expected to move into decent, livable homes by June 2027.

The Department of Transportation (DOTr), in partnership with the City Government of San Pedro, Laguna, broke ground on the Sining Apartments Public Rental Facility (PRF) in Barangay Landayan. This marks the first-ever government-built rental housing facility under the NSCR-Extension Project.

The initiative follows a direct directive from President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. ensuring that all families displaced by national transport infrastructure projects are provided with decent, affordable housing in safe, established communities.

“The President’s order is clear that no family will be left behind due to the construction of large transportation infrastructure. The construction of Sining Apartments is proof of our provision of proper and decent housing for the affected families,” Transportation Secretary Giovanni Lopez said.

For the first time, even those found ineligible for socialized housing but were displaced by the NSCR-

Extension project construction—can avail of the housing rental program within San Pedro, Laguna.

The facility aims to provide displaced families with a safe place they can call their home at very low and affordable rental rates ranging from P500 to P700 a month.

Funded by the DOTr, the Sining Apartments will consist of three multi-storey buildings with a total of 242 residential units. The facility can accommodate 191 non-landowner project-affected families (PAFs).

Each unit has a living room, dining room, bedroom, kitchen, toilet and bath. As an in-city development, residents will remain in areas near schools, workplaces and essential community services.

DOTr assistant secretary for right-of-way and site acquisition (ROWSA) IC Calaguas said the initiative stands out as one of the government’s programs in balancing infrastructure progress with meaningful social support.

“This is a first in the history of the



Department of Transportation. This was funded by the DOTr to ensure that not all affected families will be displaced. So even if there is a little problem with you, the national government under the leadership of our President Marcos, Jr. is ensuring that we will restore your standard of living and make it better,” Calaguas said.

Meanwhile, San Pedro City Mayor Art Joseph Mercado said the project marks a new transformative chapter—brimming with hope, security and a brighter future for the families of San

Pedro City.

“The Sining Apartments are proof that when the government and the community unite, we can achieve more for the welfare of our citizens. I sincerely thank the national government, our agencies, and all sectors that are working together to make this project happen,” Mercado said.

The construction of the housing rental facility being constructed by the San Pedro LGU is expected to be completed by June 2027.

**Darwin G. Amojelar**

## Philippines, Greece strengthen maritime ties

THE Philippines showcased the rapid development of its maritime industry and reinforced its international ties during the successful staging of the 2nd Philippine Maritime Forum in Athens, Greece.

Philippine Ambassador to Greece Giovanni Palec highlighted the enduring maritime partnership between the two nations, emphasizing the Philippines’ readiness to expand cooperation in global shipping, strategic investments, and modern maritime operations.

Representing MARINA, Deputy Administrator for Planning Nenita Atienza underscored the Philippine maritime sector’s ongoing efforts toward modernization, sustainability, and global competitiveness. She cited key initiatives including fleet modernization, regulatory reforms, green shipping programs, and capacity-building efforts aligned with international standards.

A major highlight of the forum was the ceremonial signing of a Memorandum of Understanding between MARINA and the Hellenic-ASEAN Business Council.

## Cathay Group expands fleet order to 8 Airbus A350F freighters

HONG Kong’s Cathay Group has placed a firm order with Airbus for two additional A350F freighters, bringing the airline’s total order to eight of the new-generation cargo aircraft.

The A350F will be operated by the airline’s cargo division, Cathay Cargo, delivering unprecedented efficiency across its extensive global network.

“We are pleased to further strengthen our fleet with these additional A350F freighters that will provide greater connectivity at our home hub



and more choices for our customers.

This strategic, future-ready investment reflects our resolute confidence in our long-term growth prospects and supports Cathay Cargo’s goal of being the world’s best air cargo carrier,” Ronald Lam, chief executive of the Cathay Group said.

“Cathay’s continued endorsement of the A350F is another powerful signal that the A350F brings a new generation of freighter capacity and efficiency.

Benoît de Saint-Exupéry, Airbus executive vice president sales of the commercial aircraft business, said the A350F will fit seamlessly into the airline’s existing Airbus fleet with unrivaled operational and technical commonality, while accelerating the airline’s decarbonization journey.

“We could not be more excited to grow this partnership,” he added.

Designed to be the world’s most advanced cargo aircraft, the A350F meets the evolving demands of the global air freight market. Thanks to a range capability of up to 8,700 kilometres with a payload of up to 111 tonnes, it will allow operators to deploy it on international long-haul routes. Made from over 70 percent advanced materials, the A350F is 46 tonnes lighter than competitor aircraft.

## LRT-2 Pamilya pass ridership surges 95 percent in May

THE Light Rail Transit Authority (LRTA) recorded a massive 95 percent increase in passengers availing of the LRT-2 Pamilya Pass Program in May 2026, with total ridership climbing to 97,894 from 50,295 in April.

This continuous growth highlights the riding public’s growing appreciation for the program, which combines transport savings with a push for greater public transit use.

The Pamilya Pass 1+3 Program allows one paying adult passenger to bring up to three family members or companions for free every Sunday along the entire LRT-2 line, making weekend travel vastly more accessible and af-

fordable for Filipino families.

To avail of the pass, passengers can head to any LRT-2 ticket booth on a Sunday. Upon purchasing a regular single-journey or stored-value ticket, the primary passenger will be issued Pamilya Pass coupons. These coupons allow up to three companions traveling together to ride to the same destination at no additional cost.

Through this landmark 1+3 initiative, the LRTA continues to introduce programs that ease commuting costs, promote family bonding, and encourage eco-friendly mass transit.

Alongside its commuter programs, the LRTA prioritized safe and reliable railway operations by successfully completing its regular safety inspections for May 2026 under the Public

Service Continuity Plan (PSCP).

Conducted by trained and qualified personnel in strict compliance with industry regulations, the comprehensive evaluations verified the integrity of structural elements, safety systems, operational equipment, and emergency facilities across the entire LRT Line 2 system.

During the audits, fire exits and emergency lighting were confirmed to be clearly marked, unobstructed, and fully functional for power interruptions or emergency evacuations. Maintenance equipment and essential tools were also tested for optimal condition and serviceability, with any noted deficiencies immediately addressed through swift corrective and preventive measures.

## NLEX, Pampanga LGU partner to boost disaster resilience

NLEX Corporation and the Provincial Government of Pampanga have joined forces to strengthen the province’s disaster resilience as the rainy season approaches.

To kick off this initiative, around 40 participants from key provincial departments—including the Provincial Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Office, the Department of Public Works and Highways, the Office of the Provincial Agriculturist, and the Provincial Health Office—attended a two-day Policy-Making on Disaster Management Workshop.

Facilitated by the Philippine Disaster Resilience Foundation (PDRF), the primary goal of the session was to identify critical safety gaps and ensure that the province’s disaster management protocols are robust enough to protect residents during emergencies.

Pampanga has demonstrated its resilience through major natural disasters in its history, most notably the 1990 earthquake and the 1991 Mt. Pinatubo eruption. As a rapidly growing economic hub, the province continues to aggressively strengthen its disaster preparedness and resilience efforts to protect local communities, sustain ongoing economic activity, and support long-term regional growth.

“Pampanga serves as one of the vital links between Metro Manila and Central and Northern Luzon. Through this initiative, we aim to help strengthen disaster preparedness and resilience, ensuring the safety and well-being of communities while maintaining the reliability of this vital transport corridor that supports regional growth and connectivity,” s Luis S. Reñon, NLEX president and general manager said.



Workshop participants posed for a photo with (from left, front row) PDRF Center director Arnel Capili, Pampanga PDRRM officer Janica Mikhail Yambao, NLEX government relations manager Kiko Dagohoy, and MPT South Stakeholder engagement assistant manager Mhanny Agosto.

Second District Board Member Claire Lim emphasized that the priority remains the safety of her constituents and the protection of their homes.

“In situations where the lives and livelihoods of Kapampangans are at stake, we welcome this help because even if we are resilient, we still need outside assistance,” she said.

First District Board Member Cherry

Manalo also expressed her gratitude for the collaboration and the dedication of the provincial staff. “We are grateful to NLEX and PDRF for helping upskill our frontliners. This workshop demonstrates our shared commitment to strengthening the province’s disaster management and ensuring we are better prepared to protect every Kapampangan,” she noted.





Pageant Concept  
Eton Concepcion

Who will win  
Man of the World 2026?



Delegates from 28 countries bring cultural pride to the National Costume competition as the pageant heads into its world finals

THE Man of the World 2026 pageant held its National Costume competition at the Palacio de Maynila, with the 28 delegates parading in traditional attire showcasing their cultural identity, creativity, heritage, and national pride.

Special awards were presented at the end of the show. Best in Arrival Outfit (Gold) was awarded to **Arm Thanongsak Chuaykerd** of Thailand, with **Denny Howman** of Indonesia and **Fidel Arellano** of Chile winning the silver and bronze, respectively. Media's Choice went to the Philippines' **Oliver Eugen Kretz** (Gold), with the silver and bronze copped by Arellano of Chile and **Afiq Naufal** of Malaysia, respectively.

The winner of the National Costume award will be announced during the World Finals tomorrow night (Saturday), set at the Palacio de Maynila in Malate, Manila.

Oliver Eugen Kretz earns Media's Choice gold for the Philippines ahead of the Man of the World 2026 finals in Manila



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MEANWHILE, MGI All Stars Philippines 2026 **Gazini Ganados** fell short of winning the MGI All Stars 1st Edition, securing a Top 5 finish for the Philippines during the finals held at MGI Hall in Bangkok, Thailand, on Saturday, hosted by Miss Grand International 2025 **Emma Tiglao**, Miss Universe Philippines 2023 **Michelle Dee**, and Ecuadorian actor **Danilo Carrera**.

**Vanessa Pulgarin** of Colombia bested 55 delegates from around the world and claimed the inaugural title. The 34-year-old Pulgarin was previously unplaced in Miss International 2017 but made the Top 12 in Miss Universe 2025.

Ghana's **Faith Maria Porter** and Vietnam's **Huong Giang** were named first and second runners-up, respectively, while Czech Republic's **Mariana Beckova** rounded out the Top 5 finalists. The Philippines' **Fuschia Anne Ravena** placed 16th overall after making the Top 18.

MGI All Stars is a spin-off of the Thailand-based Miss Grand International pageant, created exclusively for returning beauty queens, including married women and transwomen, who have competed in various international competitions.

SHOWBIZ



Ronnie Alonte (right) says life with Loisa Andalia now revolves around hands-on parenting and everyday moments with their daughter, Runi Lior

How first-time dad  
Ronnie Alonte  
adjusts to parenthood



Very Wang  
Nickie Wang

ACTOR **Ronnie Alonte** described how fatherhood has changed his daily routine, as he and his wife, actress **Loisa Andalia** adjust to life with their first child, balancing family duties with occasional work commitments.



Ronnie Alonte joins fellow performers and ambassadors at the summer festival in General Trias, Cavite

Speaking with *Manila Standard Entertainment* on May 30 at the FiberBlaze Summer Festival at General Trias Sports Park in Cavite, Alonte said leaving home, even for a short time, now feels different since the birth of their daughter, **Runi Lior**, nicknamed Nili.

"*Masaya, nadagdagan na naman ang icecelrate namin* apart from birthdays and anniversaries," he said, noting that their baby is turning three months old.

Alonte noted that the early months of parenthood brought challenges, particularly during the first month after birth.

"Our baby is turning three months this month. The adjustment, it was challenging during the first month. But on his second month *medyo nakapag-adjust na kami*," he noted.

He later added, "Well, to be honest, we haven't fully adjusted, but we're doing just fine."

The actor and his wife have chosen to focus on their child and plan to limit work commitments for now.

"Both of us are focusing on the baby, and maybe we'll spend at least a year before we actually accept projects," he shared.

Alonte expressed admiration for Andalia's role as a mother, particularly her commitment to breastfeeding and recovery after childbirth.

"We wanted to be there to witness her every milestone, and it's

the reason why we didn't get a nanny. We wanted to be hands-on parents and be able to take care of our child the way things are supposed to be," he said in the vernacular.

"She can't have any diet to get back in shape because she needs to be healthy since she's breastfeeding. She doesn't want to compromise that. That's why I really admire her for that," he added.

He shared that their first Father's Day as parents will be kept simple, as they continue prioritizing their child's needs.

"We are really focused on the baby. That's how we celebrate now, quality and quantity moments with our kid," he added. "Just like how we celebrate Mother's Day. We were just at home."

Alonte and Andalia announced the birth of their daughter on March 12.

Our exclusive interview with Alonte took place during the FiberBlaze Summer Festival, a summer event where he joined fellow ambassadors **Arra San Agustin**, **Neil Coleta**, **Arny Ross**, and **Migs Bustos** in entertaining the crowd with song and dance numbers. The event also featured performances from **SunKissed Lola**, **SUD**, **We The Santiago**, **Beyond Galilee**, **RAYA**, **AnnRain**, and **Ataska**.

Alonte also helped during the raffle draw, where five brand-new cars were given away to local FiberBlaze subscribers.

'Pepito Manaloto' celebrates 16 years  
with comedy-filled special episodes

THE Kapuso sitcom *Pepito Manaloto: Tuloy ang Kuwento* marks its 16th anniversary with a two-part special. The first part aired on May 30, and the second part will air on June 6.

The long-running series, known for its mix of comedy and family-centered storytelling, continues the adventures of the Manaloto family.

In the anniversary episodes, Pepito (**Michael V.**) and Elsa (**Manilyn Reynes**) take the family and friends on a beach trip to Sariaya, Quezon, where PM Mineral conducts a commercial shoot.

What begins as a work-related outing turns into a family getaway filled with unexpected reunions, travel mishaps, room upgrades, and clashes during the shoot, along with lighter moments between Pepito and Elsa by the sea.

The storyline also features a romantic twist that leads the group to question who is set to get married.

Guest stars include **Inah de Belen**, **Teejay Marquez**, **Ashley Lopez**, **Phi Palmos**, **Maureen Larrazabal**, and **Ron Angeles**.

The show airs Saturdays at 7:15 p.m. on GMA Network, Kapuso Stream, and the YouLOL YouTube channel.



Pepito (Michael V.) and Elsa's (Manilyn Reynes) enjoying a seaside beach date in the summer special episode of 'Pepito Manaloto'



The cast mark 16 years of the long-running sitcom with a two-part anniversary story set around a family beach trip at Sariaya





'Zsazsa Zaturnnah' returns for 20th anniversary staging

MUSICAL *Zsazsa Zaturnnah Ze Muzikal*, based on **Carlo Vergara**'s 2002 graphic novel *Zsazsa Zaturnnah*, first premiered at the Cultural Center of the Philippines in 2006 and later became Tanghalang Pilipino's longest-running musical.

Known for its mix of comedy, fantasy, satire, and queer storytelling, the production follows Ada, a gay beautician who transforms into superheroine Zsazsa Zaturnnah after swallowing a mysterious stone.

The musical adaptation features a stage version by **Chris Martinez**, with music, lyrics, and musical direction by **Vincent A. De Jesus**.

Previous productions featured performers including **Eula Valdez**, **Agot Isidro**, **K Brosas**, **Joey Paras**, and **Nar Cabico**.



The anniversary staging of 'Zsazsa Zaturnnah Ze Muzikal' opens auditions for performers of different body types, genders, and gender expressions

A 2023 revival also introduced the musical to younger theater audiences.

As the show returns to the stage for a 20th anniversary production. Open auditions for the anniversary staging will take place from June 7 to 9 at SIKAT Performance & Event Venue along Tomas Morato Avenue in Quezon City.

Organizers said that applicants must first submit materials through the official casting form, as walk-in auditions will not be accepted.

Performers are encouraged to prepare 16 bars of a soul, gospel, R&B or blues song, a one-minute comedic monologue, and movement-ready attire.

The production is casting for principal roles, including Ada, Dodong, Didi, Aling Britney, Queen Femina Suarestellar Baroux, the Amazonista warriors, and ensemble members.

Artists of different body types, genders, and gender expressions are encouraged to audition.

The anniversary production continues the musical's legacy as a major work in Philippine theater, recognized for its camp style, queer themes, and pop culture influence.

Zeke gives Tripp a fresh spin



Zeke Polina steps into one of his early major roles while balancing acting work with his studies as a Tourism student



The cast and director of 'Dating Alys Perez' at the series' grand media conference

By Nickie Wang

RISEING star **Zeke Polina** essays the role of Tripp Palma in the upcoming Viva One series *Dating Alys Perez*, replacing **Dylan Menor**, who portrayed the character in the Wattpad adaptation *Seducing Drake Palma*.

At a media conference on May 28, Zeke acknowledged the pressure of portraying a character already familiar to fans of the series while saying he remains focused on giving the role justice.

"I definitely felt the pressure, of course. Especially for someone who portrayed Tripp so well. But I'll try my best, definitely," he said.

Zeke noted that the previous actor who played the role left a strong impression on audiences, while his own approach and interpretation of the character are quite different.

"*Magkaiba po kasi sila ng atake* as Tripp Palma. So that's something to look forward to," he said. "*Wala naman po ako magsasabi* in terms of acting. And I guess it's just our own take on the character that we have to anticipate."

Zeke, who turns 21 in May, views the project as an early milestone in his career while balancing his studies as a third-year Tourism student.

He entered show business in 2024 under Viva Artists Agency, taking on hosting and acting projects that include *Safe Skies*, *Archer*, and *Ang Mutya ng Section E*.

He recalled discovering his passion for acting during his first taping experience for *Ang Mutya ng Section E*.

"I realized it after my first taping day for *Ang Mutya ng Section E*," he recalled. "At first, even before taping and during the first few hours of the shoot, I got overwhelmed by my nervousness. But because of my co-artists' and our director's positive energy, I quickly realized

"I was completely shocked because it was so unexpected. I would've never thought one of the leads of such a popular show would get replaced, let alone with a role," he shared.

He has been preparing for the role by revisiting the original series and studying the script closely.

"As of the moment, I'm still watching it to know the background of the characters, especially Tripp and the plot in general," he said.

*Dating Alys Perez* premieres June 12 on Viva One, continuing the story of Alys Perez and Drake Palma, portrayed by **Angela Muji** and **Rabin Angeles**.

Zeke Polina (left) joins Rabin Angeles (right) and Angela Muji (center) as the series continues Alys Perez and Drake Palma's story through a new take on Tripp Palma



Alfred Vargas, wife appeal dismissal of child abuse complaint



Alfred Vargas and wife Yasmine ask prosecutors to reconsider the dismissal of their child abuse complaint, citing RA 7610 and evidence of alleged psychological harm

ACTOR and politician **Alfred Vargas** and his wife **Yasmine**, have asked the Manila Prosecutors' Office to reconsider a resolution dismissing their complaint against **Rob Sy** and his partner, **Juvelle Bacosa**, arguing that prosecutors based the decision on the wrong law and failed to fully consider key evidence.

In their petition, the Vargas couple argued that the resolution relied on Republic Act No. 10627, or the Anti-Bullying Act of 2013, which specifically covers bullying incidents in schools and educational institutions.

They maintained that their complaint was filed under Section 10(a) of Republic Act No. 7610, or the Special Protection of Children Against Abuse, Exploitation and Discrimination Act, which seeks to protect children from abuse, cruelty, exploitation, and other harmful conditions.

According to the petition, the incident took place during a swimming competition at the Rizal Memorial Sports Complex on Feb. 14, 2026, and not inside a school.

"We respectfully believe that the Resolution erred in adopting a restrictive interpretation of the law and failed to fully appreciate the totality of the evidence on record," the Vargas couple stated.

They argued that the resolution reduced the protections

afforded to their child by treating the incident as a school-based bullying case instead of applying the broader protections under RA 7610.

The couple also argued that prosecutors failed to consider witness testimonies and psychiatric findings that, according to the petition, showed the child suffered fear, anxiety, humiliation, and psychological harm.

The petition further cited what it described as the failure of Sy and Bacosa to take corrective action despite prior warnings regarding their child's behavior.

According to the appeal, their child experienced aggression, ridicule, humiliation, intimidation, and emotional abuse, resulting in "clinically documented psychological distress."

The Vargas couple also rejected the resolution's characterization of the incident as a minor conflict among children.

"These are not trivial matters," the petition read. "These are precisely the kinds of acts and conditions that Republic Act No. 7610 seeks to prevent, particularly when they affect the dignity, emotional security, psychological well-being, and development of a child."

The appeal also cited eyewitness accounts and the child's own statements, which the couple argued were not fully considered in the resolution.

According to the petition, a psychiatric evaluation found that their child suffered emotional and psychological distress, including adjustment disorder with mixed anxiety and depressed mood, fear, humiliation, anxiety, and feelings of betrayal that required professional intervention.

"These manifestations should not be dismissed as mere childish statements or ordinary conflict between minors," the petition stated.



From left: Zeke Polina, Angela Muji, and Rabin Angeles lead the next chapter of 'Dating Alys Perez,' which premieres June 12





## Eight ways to shift to intentional living

Identify and limit major distractions, especially social media and external pressures, to focus on personal goals

OPERATING on autopilot—moving through the day guided by habits, routines, and automatic reactions—may reduce self-awareness, increase burnout, and lessen enjoyment in life.

It can look like eating an entire meal while watching a series or film, only to realize the food was barely tasted. It may also appear as hours spent unconsciously doomscrolling through social media.

By becoming more intentional in daily behavior, individuals can design lives aligned with core values and goals, leading to greater clarity and well-being. Experts say intentional living can improve mindfulness and presence, increase feelings of control, support healthier habits, strengthen relationships, and improve decision-making.

“Take action and make decisions that are important to you,” **Margarita Tartakovsky**, MS, author of the mental health journal *Vibe Check: Be Your Best You*, advised.

“The key is to identify what that personally means for you—and make small but significant shifts and conscious choices to build it,” she added.

Tartakovsky noted that change can feel challenging,



Reflect on your daily actions, ensuring they align with your purpose, either through mental contemplation or journaling



When doing chores, connect to why you are doing them, whether it is to create a more peaceful home or to care for yourself

A NEW shared premium lounge at Ninoy Aquino International Airport (NAIA) Terminal 3 is now serving passengers of seven international airlines, less than a month after opening, with more carriers expected to join in the coming months.

The First Meridian Lounge, located on Level 4 of Terminal 3, is a 2,600-square-meter privately operated facility for eligible business class and premium passengers of participating airlines, including Thai Airways, Emirates, Japan Airlines,

Vietnam Airlines, Cathay Pacific, KLM and Qatar Airways.

The lounge operates under commercial arrangements with airport concessionaires and forms part of the terminal space optimization program of New NAIA Infra Corp. (NNIC), the private operator of NAIA.

NNIC described the initiative as aimed at improving passenger experience while maximizing limited terminal space by repurposing offices, former lounge areas, and other spaces into food, beverage, and retail



The First Meridian Lounge forms part of ongoing efforts to improve passenger services and optimize terminal space at NAIA



Dining spaces inside the lounge cater to eligible passengers of participating international airlines under a common-use model



Kami Ang Inyong Mga...  
PODCAST

LIFE

‘Kami Ang Inyong Mga...’ hosts (from left) Camille Prats-Yambao, Suzi Entrata-Abreira, and Iya Villania-Arellano brings their longtime friendship and candid conversations to digital platforms

WHENEVER I come home from work late at night, I’ve developed a little ritual. While washing up and preparing my things for the next day, I put on a podcast. Sometimes it’s a one-on-one interview or political commentary.

But lately, I’ve been spending those quiet hours with three women who have somehow become my virtual friends. They are **Iya Villania-Arellano**, **Camille Prats-Yambao**, and **Suzi Entrata-Abreira**. Their podcast, *Kami Ang Inyong Mga...[Mars! Not indicated in the actual title]*, has quietly become my go-to channel.

For non-Filipino readers, “Mars” is a term of endearment derived from *kumare*, which itself comes from the Spanish word *comadre*. Over the years, Filipinos shortened it into “Mars,” much like “Sis.” *Kumare* carries a unique Filipino profile. She is someone you trust, someone you share stories with, someone who listens without judgment, and someone who would send you merienda on a random day. That’s the vibe this podcast gives me.

Way before they became podcast hosts, these women were already familiar faces in my life. I’ve long been a fan of morning television and lifestyle programs. I remember watching Suzi during her *Mornings@GMA* stint, and Camille Prats has practically grown up before our eyes, from her *Ang TV* and *G-Mik* years to that iconic stint as Sarah in *Sarah... Ang Munting Prinsesa*. Meanwhile, I saw Iya’s growth from being a teen-oriented show actress to a VJ. That is probably why listening to them feels so natural.

But what makes the podcast work is not familiarity but authenticity.

The title itself carries a bit



### Random Talk Kate Adajar

of history. Years ago, viewers welcomed *Mars*, a daytime program hosted by Camille and Suzi. The concept later evolved into *Mars Pa More*, which featured Camille, Iya, and Kuya **Kim Atienza**. When the television program eventually ended, viewers like me thought that chapter had closed. Fortunately, it didn’t. This year, Camille, Suzi, and Iya reunited to launch *Kami Ang Inyong Mga...*, bringing their conversations to YouTube, Spotify, and Apple Podcasts.

The podcast format suits them perfectly. While writing this, I realized I haven’t missed a single episode.

What I enjoy most is how honest they are. They don’t present themselves as women who have everything figured out. Instead, they openly discuss the realities of marriage, motherhood, careers, self-image, aging, and personal growth. They share stories, lessons, mistakes, and discoveries with a certain level of vulnerability.

One episode that particularly stayed with me was their discussion on beauty and aging. In their industry, where youth is often treated like currency, it was fascinating to hear their candid thoughts about beauty standards, self-care, and growing older. The conversation was deeply personal and insightful.

## The Mars effect

Of course, I also enjoy hearing about their love stories and family lives. But beyond the entertaining anecdotes, what I truly appreciate is the wisdom from their conversations. Here are three women navigating different stages of motherhood, careers, perimenopause, and life in general. Their experiences often differ, and yet it is obvious that they are genuine girls’ girls.

Being girls’ girls means rooting for one another. They celebrate each other’s successes. They listen without interrupting. At a time when competition among women is often magnified, it is refreshing to witness a friendship built on encouragement and support.

Whether you’re in your twenties, *trentahin*, or *kuwarentahin* era, chances are you’ll find something that resonates. You may come for the stories about motherhood, relationships, beauty, wellness, or career challenges, but you’ll stay for the conversations that remind you you’re not alone in navigating life’s many transitions.

For me, *Kami Ang Inyong Mga...* has become like sitting down for tea with trusted friends after a long day. These are friends who make you laugh, make you think, and occasionally remind you of something you needed to hear (like the need to go to the gym or have a mammogram!).

If we really think about it, we could all use a few more Mars like them in our lives.

For your random thoughts, e-mail the author at [randomrepublika@gmail.com](mailto:randomrepublika@gmail.com).

## Inside NAIA’s new premium lounge



The First Meridian Lounge provides spacious seating areas designed for travelers seeking a more comfortable pre-flight experience

amenities.

Under the common-use model, premium lounge services are consolidated into a single facility shared by multiple airlines instead of separate airline-specific lounges that operate only during flight

schedules. Eligible passengers retain lounge access while more space is freed for services available to a wider group of travelers.

“This shared lounge supports our effort to improve the passenger experience at NAIA while using

terminal space more efficiently,” NNIC said. “It gives eligible passengers of participating airlines a more comfortable and reliable pre-flight experience while allowing us to create more space for food, beverage, retail, and other amenities that benefit more travelers.”

The First Meridian Lounge offers dining, work and relaxation areas, along with high-speed Wi-Fi, workstations, shower facilities, and real-time flight information displays.

Amenities include infant care rooms, sleep pods, private rooms, children’s play areas, game and golf simulators, and quiet zones.

Its food and beverage offerings include local and international selections, a bakery, *teppanyaki* station, *halal* section, a full-service bar, and wine cellar.

NNIC noted that the shared lounge model brings NAIA closer to premium airport lounge standards in major international hubs, where common-use facilities serve multiple airlines and access programs, improving efficiency in limited terminal spaces.

The lounge is part of ongoing modernization efforts at NAIA in partnership with concessionaires and service providers.



A dedicated children’s play area is among the family-friendly amenities offered at NAIA Terminal 3’s newly opened shared premium lounge