

RHU Tanza reports on COVID-19 situation, vaccination in the municipality

TRECE MARTIRES CITY, Cavite (PIA) -- The Rural Health Unit (RHU) of Tanza has recorded more than 2,400 COVID-19 confirmed cases after more than a year since the pandemic hit the country, the 4th among the cities and municipalities with the highest number of COVID-19 cases in the province.

"Out of the more than 2,400 COVID-19 confirmed cases, 600 are active cases," Municipal Health Officer Dr. Ruth Punzalan said.

Meanwhile, the local government had inoculated a total of 1,300 healthcare workers and senior citizens since the start of the vaccination rollout using AstraZeneca vaccines.

Despite the global shortage of AstraZeneca vaccine, the RHU assured the healthcare workers and senior citizens who received the 1st dose of AstraZeneca jab that they will receive the 2nd dose since additional supply is expected to arrive soon.

Dr. Punzalan said vaccination for the A2 priority group will continue with the recent approval of the Sinovac vaccine by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) for the inoculation of senior citizens.

About 300 senior citizens per day are targeted to be vaccinated on a first come first serve basis at the Tanza Specialists Medical Center that started Tuesday, April 2021.

The RHU is also planning to start the vaccination of the A3 Priority group or persons aged 18-59 years with comorbidities as they call

on residents belonging to this group to register for the CoViD-19 Vaccination program of the LGU using the online registration link found on Mayor Yuri A. Pacumio's FB page.

Pursuant to the provincial government's directive to intensify the conduct of the vaccination program of all the LGUs in the province, Mayor Pacumio is looking into the possibility of partnering with Vista Mall, and using the Tanza Sports Complex as additional COVID-19 hubs to speed up the distribution of the vaccines to achieve herd immunity.

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Cayetano, allies want inquiry on utilization of Bayanihan 1 and 2 funds

Former House Speaker Alan Peter Cayetano and his allies on filed a resolution calling on the House of Representatives to conduct an inquiry into the utilization of funds appropriated under Bayanihan 1 and 2 after learning that billions of pesos in the two stimulus packages have remained unreleased and unutilized.

"Basically we want to inquire into Bayanihan 1 and 2 and use that inquiry also in the discussion (in) Bayanihan 3," Cayetano told reporters at a press conference on Tuesday in Taguig.

"(We want) to see which programs were effective and which were not and determine how good or how bad the implementation was. Which programs were funded and which were

not? If they were effective, do we legislate more of such programs? If not effective, why weren't they? We must also propose alternatives," he said.

"Sa madaling sabi, kung ano ang tama sa Bayanihan 1 and 2 kailangan nasa Bayanihan 3; kung anong mali, dapat i-correct," he added.

(In other words, whatever was right in Bayanihan 1 and 2 should



Former House Speaker Alan Peter Cayetano

be included in Bayanihan 3. Whatever was wrong should be corrected.)

Cayetano filed House Resolution No. 1731 along with Taguig 2nd District Rep. Lani Cayetano, Camarines 2nd District Rep. Luis

70K Imuseño families receive cash aid, 35K still in process

IMUS CITY, Cavite (PIA) -- More or less 70,000 families in the city had received the Cash Ayuda from the national government or the Lingap Imuseño cash aid based on the updated master list of beneficiaries verified and encoded by the Lingap Center established by the city government.

City Councilor Emoy Francisco reported the status of the cash aid distribution in the weekly

FB Live of Imus Mayor Emmanuel Maliksi on April 24, 2021. He explained the tedious task of validation of the families in the master list from the DSWD based on the CBMS data.

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TESDA to intensify initiatives to achieve food security

By TESDA

As part of its initiative in promoting agriculture among Filipinos and addressing food security concerns, the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA) has vowed to establish more mini-organic farms and community gardens nationwide.

Since he assumed office in 2018, TESDA Secretary Isidro Lapeña has been pushing for establishment of mini-organic farms and community gardens as growing one's own food is among the best approach to help the country achieve food security.

Lapeña likewise assured that TESDA has always been ready to teach the modern and proper way of planting.

"We all know that as we face this pandemic, we are prone to food shortages. These mini organic farms and community gardens will help address the problem," he said.

"Agriculture is not limited to the rural and far-flung areas. We are pursuing agriculture to achieve food sufficiency in all areas of the country, including urbanized cities," he added.

Meanwhile, Deputy Director General for Communities and Local Government Unit Services Gabriel Luis Quisumbing said that there is a need to collaborate with the Department of Agriculture (DA) and Department of Interior and Local Government (DILG) for farming equipment and allocation of lands.

"Helping one another and sharing in the nurturing of our communities is a true embodiment of the Filipino spirit. We are proud that despite the pandemic, TESDA does not stop in our effort to serve the people," he added.

In May 2019, Lapeña signed a memorandum directing all TESDA training centers to establish their own mini-organic farms as models on encouraging the community to grow their own food.

The TESDA chief also said that these programs will be expanded nationwide especially in Metro areas.

Data released by TESDA's Regional Operations Management Office (ROMO) showed that there are 161 mini organic farms nationwide.

One example is the community garden in Barangay Fortune, Marikina. TESDA has trained several residents there on Organic Agriculture, and from there, they were able to establish a garden which is now a source of food.

Meanwhile, since the onset of the pandemic last year, TESDA has been pushing for urban farming and encouraging the public to take agriculture-related training.

Last year, TESDA-NCR rolled out its pilot urban agriculture and capacity building project at the Armed Forces of the Philippine Officers Village (AFPOV) in Taguig City which aims to transform vacant spaces in cities into urban farms.

Also, last March, TESDA-MuntiparLasTaPat inaugurated its Urban Aqua Farm project in a bid to support food security at the community level. It also aims to boost fish and crop farming in Metro Manila and eventually, other cities.

"This project signifies the importance of farming in our urban areas, particularly to our marginalized sectors who can make farming as a source of their livelihood even if they are living in the city, without going to the remote farming areas," Lapeña had said. (TESDA)

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Gov't support, crucial to PH tech startups' growth amid COVID-19 pandemic

By PIDS

The agility and ability of the government to provide interventions and policies are crucial for technology startup companies in the country to thrive amid the pandemic.

QBO Innovation Hub and Ideospace Executive Director Katrina Chan emphasized this during a recent webinar titled "Cross-Border Regulatory Issues in Philippine Digital Platforms" organized by state think tank Philippine Institute for Development Studies (PIDS).

Chan, a discussant at the webinar, said the country has a huge potential in creating technology startups "largely because of the domestic market".

Also, the Philippines has available talents and is considered one of the largest English-speaking countries, which are advantageous for Filipino workers in a broader ecosystem.

Although these startups "can pivot and respond quickly" amid the pandemic, she said they still need government intervention to withstand the impacts of the crisis.

"The startup industry isn't immune to the COVID-19 pandemic, it's been badly affected as well... This is something that we should pay attention to. We don't have a huge base of tech startups to begin with, and we really need to provide them with immediate support," Chan pointed out.

She also cited major challenges that beset tech startup founders in the country. These include issues on raising sufficient capital, regulatory requirements, general economic conditions, and talent retention.

According to Chan, there is a need to revisit policies and regulations for tech startup firms and make them "simple, tangible, accessible, and hassle-free".

She added that the government should remove barriers to attract foreign investments. "As long as they create jobs, develop talents, and pay taxes, we shouldn't be averse to foreign investors. They can be a force for good if it's done correctly," she said.

Chan also stressed the need for the public sector to lead by example by promoting startups and availing their services. Using locally developed platforms, she said, helps reduce the "bias against new companies" and supports their image in the local and global industries.

She also underscored the importance of speed and bias for action in the

tech startup industry.

For instance, the Philippines need not "reinvent the wheel" to maximize the gains of the startup ecosystem. Instead, it can adopt the best practices of other countries that already paved the way.

Finally, Chan noted that these startups struggle to scale up to acquire investment and funding support. "We have a lot of great ideas, a lot of early-stage companies, but we need to unshackle them in order to allow them to compete in the region and scale up," she explained.

You may watch the webinar at <https://www.facebook.com/PIDSPH/videos/448971246383461>. For more videos of PIDS events, go to <https://www.pids.gov.ph/videos>. (PIDS)



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UPLB-BIOTECH biofertilizers and technologies to boost urban agriculture in Cabuyao City

By UPLB

Cabuyao farmers will soon be able to use cost-effective and environment-friendly biofertilizers of the National Institute of Molecular Biology and Biotechnology (BIOTECH) on their various crops.

This was provided for in one of six partnership agreements that UPLB-BIOTECH and local executives of Cabuyao signed on March 17 to strengthen agricultural biotechnology RDE through sustainable agriculture and environmental protection.

The agreement will enable farmers to use Bio-N, a microbial-based fertilizer from bacteria isolated from roots of talahib to enhance shoot and root growth for rice, corn, and vegetables and Mykovam, a soil-based biofertilizer for fruit trees, agricultural crops, reforestation species, and ornamentals.

It will also cover the use of VAMRI, a root inoculant that assists plant roots in absorbing water and nutrients, protects plants from diseases, and improves growth and soil health while reducing chemical fertilizer use.

The other RDE projects that the two parties will collaborate on are the following: feeding trial of the Protein Enriched Copra Meal (PECM) technology in rabbits; an efficacy study of wood vinegar as biofertilizer, biopesticide, and flower inducer for selected crops; and two projects funded by the Department of Agriculture-Bureau of Agricultural Research (DA-BAR)—a phytochemical nutritional study on sweet potato and cassava, and a pilot testing study of BIOTECH biofertilizers mixed with organic compost on eggplant and tomato farms.

The partnership will enable BIOTECH and Cabuyao City, through its Agriculture Office and Cabuyao Institute of Technology or CITech, as well as farmers from Casile-Guinting Upland Marketing Cooperative and Green Thumb Agricultural Farm to collaborate in research and extension projects in BIOTECH technologies and disseminate its outcomes to Cabuyao and nearby towns and barangays.

“This is a very important project for us. Why? We need to move forward and start doing things. This pandemic

cannot stop us from hoping. Our goal is for our dependents to become independents,” said Cabuyao City Mayor and UPLB 2020 Outstanding Alumni Awardee Atty. Rommel A. Gecolea in his message.

The local chief executive also recognized the importance of using products of biotechnology and the expertise of scientists and researchers in promoting urban agriculture in the city.

He urged the use of evidence-based policy and decision making in Cabuyao, and emphasized the value of scientific research.

BIOTECH Director Marilyn B. Brown said that UPLB will continue to work for and support the farmers of Cabuyao through scientific and agricultural research and its products. She said that technologies derived from local R&D will always be valuable tools for the LGU to empower its people. She also encouraged Cabuyao constituents to support other locally developed products of BIOTECH.

“We are here to provide technical assistance on how to use our BIOTECH technologies. We are hoping that these technologies can help everyone, especially our farmers,” explained Ms. Julieta A. Anarna, program leader of BIOTECH’s Biotechnology for Agriculture and Forestry Program and project leader of the Institute’s Bio-N biofertilizer.

BIOTECH will be implementing capacity building activities through training and seminars to aid farmers and the LGU on the use of its technologies.

The tripartite agreements were signed by Dr. Brown, Mayor Gecolea, program leader for Technology Transfer and Business Development Ronilo P. Violanta, chairman of Casile-Guinting Upland Marketing Cooperative Gregorio L. Casalme, president of the Green Thumb Agricultural Farm Juanito Andal, and farmer collaborator Gaudencio M. Gonzales. (Art John I. Agapito and Sophia M. Mercado, UPLB)



Low COVID reproduction rate in NCR means ECQ/MECQ effective – Palace

By OPS-PCOO

The National Capital Region’s COVID-19 reproduction rate or R naught continues to go down and is at 0.9151 as of April 21, according to the COVID-19 monitoring tool FASSSTER.

“Dahil nga po dun sa napakalaking ibinabang R naught, masasabi naman natin na parang gumana yung ating dalawang linggong ECQ at yung dalawang linggong ating MECQ,” said Presidential Spokesperson Secretary Harry Roque Jr in a press briefing on April 26, 2021.

The Palace official and concurrent spokesperson of the Inter-Agency Task Force (IATF) said that the lowered R naught is indicative, not only of the effectiveness of the Enhanced Community Quarantine (ECQ) and Modified Enhanced Community Quarantine (MECQ), but also of the effectiveness of the enforcement of the Prevent, Detect, Integrate, Treat, and Reintegrate or PDITR strategy in communities.

“Napababa po natin sa less than one ang ating R naught, pero ang kinakailangan natin masigurado ay hindi po masasayang yung gains ng ECQ at MECQ at makakamit naman po ito kung mabibigay ang tamang sagot doon sa mga tanong pagdating sa PDITR sa lebel po ng mga lokal na pamahalaan lalong lalo na dito sa NCR plus,” said Secretary Roque.

The said questions about PDITR were the indicators that Dr. John Wong of Epimetrcis, who

was a resource person in the said press briefing, identified as the factors that have to be considered to assess readiness to go down to the more relaxed General Community Quarantine (GCQ) classification.

For localities, Dr. Wong said that local government units (LGUs) should be able to provide answers to how well people are complying to wearing of masks and social distancing, how fast do they identify people with symptoms and on how fast they test, isolate, and quarantine them, and what percent of cases and close contacts compete isolation and quarantine periods.

While for indoor businesses with crowds, Dr. Wong said they should be able to give information on how well they are observing the two out of three rules on ventilation, masking, and social distancing. And lastly, Dr. Wong said that data on how fast vaccination pace can be increased to 350,000 jabs per day will also be useful to make a complete assessment of our readiness for GCQ.

Aside from the lowered COVID-19 reproduction rate and effective PDITR implementation, improved healthcare utilization rates will also matter in deciding quarantine classifications, said Sec. Roque.

“Patuloy ang pag-uusap namin ni Sec. [Francisco] Duque dahil noong ako’y naka-confine sa PGH talagang nangako ako na maging advocacy ko na makakatulong ako sa proseso ng pagdagdag ng mga ICU beds ... patuloy po ang pag-uusap namin ni Sec. Duque para magkaroon ng iba’t ibang

pamamaraan para madagdagan pa ng 200 ICU beds dito po sa Metro Manila,” Roque said.

Part of the national government’s initiative to improve healthcare capacity, particularly to increase bed capacity to accommodate COVID-19 patients, is the construction of additional facilities. One of these facilities is the Eva Macapagal Super Terminal Isolation Facility, which will formally open today at the South Harbor in the City of Manila.

“Una itong ginawang quarantine facility noong nakaraang taon para ma-accommodate ang ating repatriated seafarers at OFWs na kinakailangang sumailalim sa required 14-day quarantine. Ngayon, na-convert ang Eva Macapagal Super Terminal Isolation Facility, na mayroong 250 na mga kama, upang mag-accommodate ng mga asymptomatic at mild COVID-19 patients para matulungang ma-expand and kapasidad ng ating healthcare facilities,” said Roque.

The Cabinet official added that another isolation facility was opened on Friday, April 23, at the Camp Olivas in San Fernando City, Pampanga. The said facility that is located inside the compound of the Philippine National Police Region 3 has 32 bed capacity.

On the matter of vaccines arrival, the Palace spokesperson said that according to the National Task Force Against COVID-19, 15,000 doses of the Gamaleya or Sputnik V vaccine is expected to arrive on Wednesday, April 28. Meanwhile, another batch of 500,000 doses of Sinovac vaccine that the Philippine government procured from China, will arrive on Thursday, April 29. (OPS-PCOO)

SSS introduces ExpreSSS e-Learning Portal to members, employers

By SSS

The Social Security System (SSS) now offers an online learning platform to all members, employers, and other stakeholders to learn about the benefits and services of the pension fund.

SSS President and Chief Executive Officer Aurora Ignacio said the ExpreSSS e-Learning (ExSSSeL) Portal, which SSS launched in November 2020, represents a milestone in the pension fund's digital transformation efforts.

"The ExSSSeL will allow any participants to learn SSS programs and updates for free at the comfort and safety of their homes," Ignacio said.

"We realized that online services and transactions are now part of the New Normal as a result of the pandemic. We find ExSSSeL more effective in reaching out to more members across the country and keep them updated on the latest developments in our benefit programs and services since existing community quarantine measures restrict us from conducting face-to-face learning sessions in various offices, companies, and other organizations. As of April 27, 2021, we have already recorded a total of 71,491 visitors to the said portal," Ignacio explained.

Through the ExSSSeL Portal, SSS members and interested individuals can learn about the different policies, programs, and updates without the need to gather in a single venue for a training session. They can choose among the five training modules available in the learning portal, namely: Module 1 on sickness benefit, Module 2 on maternity benefit, Module 3 on unemployment benefit, Module 4 on disability benefit, and Module 5 on salary loan.

As part of their

learning process, SSS will be issuing e-certificates to participants upon completion of any of the modules, if they obtain a passing rate of at least 80% in the post-examination conducted at the end of each module.

Interested individuals can access the ExSSSeL Portal homepage using this link https://bit.ly/ExSSSeL_Portal and select their preferred topic among the five modules. Once they chose a module, a registration form via Google Form will appear. Participants need to fill up the registration form to start their selected module. The participant's complete name, valid e-mail address, company name, and the nearest SSS branch or their servicing branch should also be provided. Participating employers should indicate the number of employees represented and may also register in multiple modules.

Participants can study the module at their own pace as access to the said portal is available 24/7. Members may also open multiple modules si-

multaneously.

"At the end of each module, the participant will find a link for post-module examination. It will help them gauge how much they learned. If they failed the test, we advise them to restudy the module and retake the said exam," Ignacio said.

For participants who obtained a passing rate, SSS will send an e-certificate to their registered e-mail addresses within seven working days.

From November 28, 2020 to April 15, 2021, a total of 23,738 participants have already viewed the five modules in the ExSSSeL Portal. Nearly 60% or 14,231 of the total participants have completed at least one module and took the post examination. Ignacio said about 45% or 6,331 of the total participants who took the post-module test received a passing rating and received their e-certificates.

"We encourage members and interested individuals to use the ExSSSeL Portal as it will help them expand their knowledge about SSS," Ignacio pointed out.

For more information, follow the SSS' social media accounts on Facebook and YouTube at "Philippine Social Security System," Instagram at "mysssp," Twitter at "PHLSSS," or join its Viber Community at "MYSSSPH Updates."



Bong Go lauds grant of one-time financial assistance to Employees' Compensation pensioners amid the additional burden imposed on them by the pandemic

By OSBG

Senator Christopher "Bong" Go lauded President Rodrigo Duterte for issuing Administrative Order No. 39 which grants a one-time financial assistance of P20,000.00 to Employees' Compensation (EC) pensioners for permanent partial or total disability and survivorship, in both the private and public sectors.

"Malaki ang negatibong epekto ng pandemya sa mga kababayan nating may kapansanan, lalo na iyong mga pensioners na apektado ang pamumuhay dahil sa community quarantine restrictions," said Go.

"Nararapat lamang natin silang suportahan at bigyan ng alternatibong mapagkukunan ng panggastos para sa kanilang pang-araw-araw na pangangailangan. Kaya naman nagpapasalamat at kinokomendahan natin si Pangulong Duterte sa pag-issue n'ya ng AO na ito," he added.

The issuance of the AO came after the Employees' Compensation Commission approved the proposal to grant the said assistance due to undue financial hardships and prolonged economic impact of the pandemic on the pensioners.

The ECC is mandated to implement the Employees' Compensation Program which provides a package of benefits for public and private sector employees and their dependents in the event of work-connected sickness, injury, disability or death. In addition, the ECC may also upgrade benefits and add new ones, subject to approval of the President.

Under the AO, the ECC will be authorized to grant a one-time financial assistance of PhP20,000.00 to EC pensioners for permanent partial disability, per-

manent total disability and survivorship, both in the private and public sectors.

Notably, the amounts necessary to cover the one-time financial assistance shall be sourced from the reserves of the EC State Insurance Fund that the Social Security System and Government Services Insurance System administer under the country's EC Program.

The AO also directs the ECC, SSS and GSIS to issue the implementing rules and regulations for its effective implementation.

As the pandemic heightens the vulnerabilities of persons with disabilities, Go urged the government to further consider other interventions and strengthen efforts to address their needs and concerns.

"Sa panahong ito ng pandemya, dapat lamang paigtingin ng gobyerno ang suporta nito sa mga PWDs

dahil isa sila sa mga pinaka-apektado ng mga social and economic impacts ng COVID-19," noted Go.

To support PWDs amid the pandemic, Go stressed the need to ensure accessibility of public health measures and services to them. He also emphasized the need to promote inclusivity and equity in the government's efforts and responses to COVID-19.

The Senator also emphasized the need to ensure that government offices and their services are PWD-friendly. He also asked the government to improve the delivery of its services by using assistive technology that would further improve the access of Filipinos with disabilities to public services.

On the other hand, Go also urged the private sector to provide reasonable work arrangements for their employees with disabilities and conduct reasonable adjustments in the workplace to protect their welfare.

"Huwag po nating papabayaang ang mga kababayan nating PWDs. Tuparin natin ang ating pangako sa kanila na walang Pilipinong mapag-iwanan sa landas tungo sa pag-ahon ng bansa mula sa COVID-19," said Go. (OSBG)

