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Dominguez

Gov't saving lives from virus, hunger—DOF

Finance Secretary Carlos Dominguez III has assured the business community that the Duterte administration is focused on saving lives not just from the coronavirus pandemic but also from hunger and other diseases that could happen as a result of the economic fallout from this global health crisis.

Dominguez said the government is full-
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Gov. Jonvic shares province's best practices, insights on COVID-19



Cavite Gov. Jonvic Remulla shared to PCOO Sec. Martin Andanar during a brief interview that the local government units (LGUs) stayed on top of the situation and strictly implemented the guidelines set by the NTF as well as the local ordinances crafted by LGUs to contain the spread of the coronavirus diseases in the province. (Photo: Mark Bryan I. Lito)

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DTI 4-A launches KMME-MME Program in Laguna, Batangas, and Rizal

After the successful launching in the provinces of Cavite and Quezon, the Department of Trade and Industry Region 4-A, in partnership with the Philippine Center for Entrepreneurship- Go Negosyo, kicked off its KAPATID Mentor ME (KMME) - Money and Market Encounter (MME) Program on August 20, 2020 via Zoom with 47 mentees in the provinces of Laguna, Batangas, and Rizal

To survive and thrive amid the COVID-19 pandemic, a blended KMME-MME program for the New Normal is developed as a practical delivery mechanism for the same mentorship modules for the micro, small, and medium enterprises. The program addresses the urgent need for the continued access of mentees to Money,



GenTri head welcomes joint national task force teams against COVID-19

General Trias Mayor Antonio 'Ony' Ferrer shared the local government's support to the different sectors severely affected by the pandemic during an interview with Presidential Communications Operations Office (PCOO) Secretary Martin Andanar. (Photo: Mark Bryan I. Lito, PIA-4A)

Story on Page 5



Market, and Mentorship (3Ms). This will be achieved through the presentation of the Business Improvement Plan (BIP) to an expanded panel of evaluators composed of representatives from banks, online market platforms, and other business support organizations.

During her Welcome Remarks, DTI CALA-BARZON Assistant Director Marissa Argente mentioned that the program will have business experts, who also have their own businesses, to provide practical teachings for the mentees, at the same time, for the mentees to enjoy the whole learning experience.

DTI-Regional Operations Group Assistant Secretary Asteria Caberte, on the other hand, thanked the mentees for rising up and going beyond the challenge of joining the program despite the drastic on-

Cont. on Page 4

EDITORIAL:

"We see a failure of leadership at the DOH, whose secretary also sits as chairman of PhilHealth." The signs are everywhere. Five months into the COVID-19 pandemic, we are far from achieving the much-vaunted "new normal" and there is no sense that we are heading in the right direction. We are experiencing pandemic fatigue.

The most disturbing sign, of course, is the constant rise in new cases, despite an 80-day lockdown—the longest in the world—and a return to stricter quarantine restrictions after a brief relaxation to get the economy going.

As of Sunday, the total number of infections since the pandemic began breached the 160,000 mark, with 3,420 new cases reported on that day. It is a sign of our creeping desperation that we are actually view this high number as positive—coming as it does after the 6,958 new cases recorded on Aug. 7. Fatalities continue to rise as well, with 65 new deaths due to COVID-19 reported Sunday, bringing the total death toll to 2,665 to date.

Meanwhile, reports of 40,397 recoveries

Pandemic fatigue

on Sunday, instead of being welcomed, were treated with skepticism despite the Department of Health's explanation that these were patients who were deemed recovered even without a second test, after being quarantined and showing no symptoms of the disease 14 days after they first tested positive.

The DOH says such time-based assessments are accepted by the World Health Organization and local medical groups, many still look askance at the dramatic one-day improvement, and view it as a prelude to rationalize a relaxation once again of quarantine restrictions as the economy remains firmly rooted in a recession.

Amid the seemingly endless ebb and rise of new cases and deaths, it does not help when government officials try to compare us favorably with other countries that are struggling as well to contain the pandemic. We now have the most number of cases in Southeast Asia, and efforts by some officials to spin this as a result of more vigorous testing on our part versus other countries sounds almost Trumpian. Let's call a spade a spade: the numbers are rising because of

community spread and our inability to isolate and treat people who are spreading the coronavirus.

As if this were not enough, the Philippine Health Insurance Corp. (PhilHealth) is racked by allegations of widespread corruption, suggesting that untold billions of pesos that should go to the COVID-19 response are ending up in the wrong hands. Those allegations have a real-world impact on the COVID-19 response. Already, the Philippine Red Cross, which has invested heavily in building testing facilities, may have to suspend its COVID-19 testing as PhilHealth's debt to the organization approaches a staggering P1 billion. The decision to suspend testing, we are certain, is not being done on a whim. Money is simply running out for new test kits and for salaries of the people who man the PRC test centers.

In all of this, we see a failure of leadership in the DOH, whose secretary also sits as the chairman of PhilHealth. There can now be no doubt that had the department moved more swiftly and decisively, we would not find ourselves at the losing end of the world's longest COVID-19 quarantine, battling pandemic fatigue.

FROM PAGE 2

Gov't saving...

ly aware that fighting COVID-19 should be done alongside efforts to rebuild the economy, given that unemployment and reduced incomes resulting from the lockdowns also have public health consequences.

"We cannot fight a pandemic with a weak economy; nor can we restore economic vigor without solving the public health crisis. We need a healthy people and a strong economy," Dominguez said in his videotaped message to participants of the 29th North Luzon Area Business Conference, which was organized online via Zoom by the Philippine Chamber of Commerce and Industry (PCCI).

Dominguez lauded private sector employers for their own brand of heroism as they continue to shore up businesses and help their employees survive in this time of crisis.

"We have seen much heroism from all sectors during the five months that the nation has been battling the COVID-19 pandemic. While our medical workers braved the frontlines to save lives and treat the infected—you—our entrepreneurs, worked day and night to shore up businesses and help your employees survive," Dominguez said. "You have ensured continued access to basic goods and services. The country is grateful for your efforts."

As for the government, Domin-

guez said it will continue to be judicious in its use of its fiscal and financial resources, considering that the global health emergency is likely going to be a drawn-out series of battles, with no knockout punch against COVID-19 and its resulting economic crisis.

"We are therefore conserving our fiscal stamina for a full, 12-round fight. Our capacity to fight can and will outlast this health challenge," he said.

Even though the Philippines may not have one of the biggest economic stimulus packages when compared to other countries, Dominguez said it has performed better compared to some economies owing to its fiscal strengths.

Citing data from various sources, Dominguez said that there appears to be no correlation between the size of a country's stimulus plan and the coronavirus-induced contraction of its economy.

While the Philippine economy shrank by 16.5 percent in the second quarter with a stimulus package at 4.2 to 6.4 percent of gross domestic product (GDP), Malaysia's economy contracted even more by 17.1 percent in spite of a bigger economic stimulus equivalent to 18.2 percent of its GDP, he noted.

The United Kingdom (UK)'s total stimulus is at 23.4 percent of GDP but its economy went down by 21.7 percent.

Sweden's economy decelerated by 8.2 percent, despite having a bigger stimulus package of between 10.8 and 16.6 percent of GDP.

"It appears that no matter how much money countries pump into their economies, their GDP would have shrunk massively, anyway. It is not the sheer size of the stimulus package that matters now but also whether it is actually saving the productive parts of the economy," Dominguez said.

"This is because the problem is not a systemic contraction or a cyclical bust. Simply, necessary mobility restrictions hamper aggregate demand," he added.

Dominguez said the economy can recover if the country can keep the pandemic at bay so that tough restrictions such as widescale lockdowns are no longer necessary.

"Preventing outbreaks in the workplace is as much a lifesaving responsibility as it is good business practice," he reminded businessmen at the conference.

Dominguez said the effects of the pandemic would have been much worse had it not been for President Duterte's prudent approach to fiscal and economic management as reflected in the Philippines historic low debt-to-GDP ratio of 39.6 percent, a 22-year high revenue effort of 16.1 percent of GDP, and infrastructure investments equivalent to 5.4 percent

of the economy in 2019, as well as the unprecedented amount of \$98 billion in gross international reserves as of July this year, to name a few.

Without continued and increased public sector spending—especially on infrastructure, public health and social protection—the economy would have performed much worse, Dominguez said.

The first semester GDP would have shrunk by 2.5 percentage points more than it did, or a total of 11.5 percent versus the actual 9 percent, he added.

He pointed out, however, that the worst part of the economic crisis may now be over as signs of recovery are emerging in the manufacturing sector and merchandise trade, along with increases in tax collections.

To further ensure an effective recovery plan and improve the post-COVID-19 business climate, Dominguez said the Duterte administration is supporting the swift approval of a "fiscally responsible"

Bayanihan To Recover As One Act, which will provide another round of fiscal measures to stimulate consumer demand and support pandemic-hit businesses and individuals.

This proposed law, also known as the Bayanihan 2, is the first of five legislative imperatives that Dominguez said the Congress needs to act on quickly to ensure the economy's strong and re-

silient recovery.

The other imperatives involve infusing additional capital to government financial institutions for them to be able to act as wholesale banks and fund substantial portions of loans that other commercial banks will provide to COVID-hit businesses; and allowing banks to dispose of non-performing loans and assets through asset management companies similar to special purpose vehicles.

Rounding up these legislative imperatives are the need to provide greater support to the agriculture sector by giving the banking system the ability to support the whole value chain of agri-enterprises; and the passage of the long-due Corporate Recovery and Tax Incentives for Enterprises Act (CREATE) that will reduce the current 30 percent corporate income tax (CIT) to 25 percent immediately, extend tailor-fit incentives to investors and extend the period of the net operating loss carryover (NOLCO) for 2020 from three to five years.

The Duterte administration will also continue with the "Build, Build, Build" program as the "cornerstone of our economic recovery," given its high multiplier effects of creating jobs, encouraging investments and expanding economic activity, Dominguez said.

Northern Luzon stands to benefit from many of the projects under "Build, Build, Build" as this area is one of the

centerpieces of this signature program of President Duterte.

These projects include New Clark City (NCC), whose first phase was completed by end-2019; the final segment of the Tarlac-Pangasinan-La Union Expressway (TPLEX) that was opened on July 15; Clark International Airport (CIA), which is 99.8 percent complete; Central Luzon Link Expressway (CLE), which is scheduled for completion by end of 2020; and the Phase 1 of the North South Commuter Railway (NSCR), which was 40 percent complete as of July.

"When the pandemic finally recedes, we expect our economy to resurge. I am hopeful that the business community of Northern Luzon will continue to partner with us at the frontlines of our economic revival," Dominguez said.

He said that while the pandemic remains, the government continues to beef up the capacity of the healthcare system and had earlier imposed the lockdowns to slow the rate of infections.

The latest data suggest that a little over one percent of all COVID-19 cases in the country are severe or critical, Dominguez noted.

The Philippines' mortality ratio is at 2.5 people per 100,000 population, as compared to the UK at 70, Spain at 61, Sweden at 57, and the United States at 52, he said. (PR)



Provisions of Bayanihan 2 will benefit academic institutions, teachers, students

Senator Win Gatchalian lauded the provisions in the Bayanihan to Recover as One Act (Bayanihan 2) that will help schools foster continuity of learning through loans and other subsidies while ensuring job security of teachers and other school personnel amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

Under the ratified bicameral conference committee report on the Bayanihan 2, academic institutions will have increased access to funds for the purchase of distance learning tools. For private institutions, however,

availing these loans or grants have these conditions: retention of personnel and no retrenchment of employees for at least nine months upon receipt of aid.

Gatchalian cited Section 4 (iii) of Bayanihan 2 which calls for the provision of loan assistance, subsidies, discounts or grants to schools, universities and colleges, and technical vocational institutions for the purchase of information and communications technology (ICT) devices and equipment to be used under alternative delivery modes of teaching and learning, including computers, laptops, and tablets. Aside from schools, teachers and students can also apply for these loans and other forms of financial assistance.

These loans and aid will be made available through the Department of Education (DepEd), the Commission on Higher Education (CHED), and the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA) in partnership with government financial institutions (GFIs). The loans, however, should have terms that are more reasonable than those prevailing in the market.

Gatchalian recalled that a survey on micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) presented in May by the National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA) and the Department of Finance (DOF) showed that the education sector had the second highest number of job losses at 130,514 when

the Enhanced Community Quarantine (ECQ) was implemented in areas including the National Capital Region (NCR).

The lawmaker also added that for many schools, especially the smaller ones with limited resources and technical expertise, the cost of transitioning to distance learning is a financial burden.

At a Senate panel hearing held earlier this month, Gatchalian emphasized the need to help more than 1,000 small private universities with limited financial capacities. He pointed out that if these small private universities are not able to install remote learning systems, learning for the 525,000 students enrolled in these institutions will be hampered.

Sa ilalim ng Bayanihan 2, hindi lamang natin matutulungan ang ating mga paaralang maipagpatuloy ang edukasyon sa pamamagitan ng distance learning. Mabibigyan din natin ng proteksyon ang mga trabaho ng ating mga guro at kawani sa panahon na ang ating ekonomiya ay humaharap sa isang matinding krisis na dulot ng COVID-19," said Gatchalian, Chairman of the Senate Committee on Basic Education, Arts and Culture.

Gatchalian concluded that in the long run, helping schools invest in their ICT infrastructure would accelerate modernization in the education sector, which in turn would equip learners with competencies required of the 21st century and Industry 4.0.

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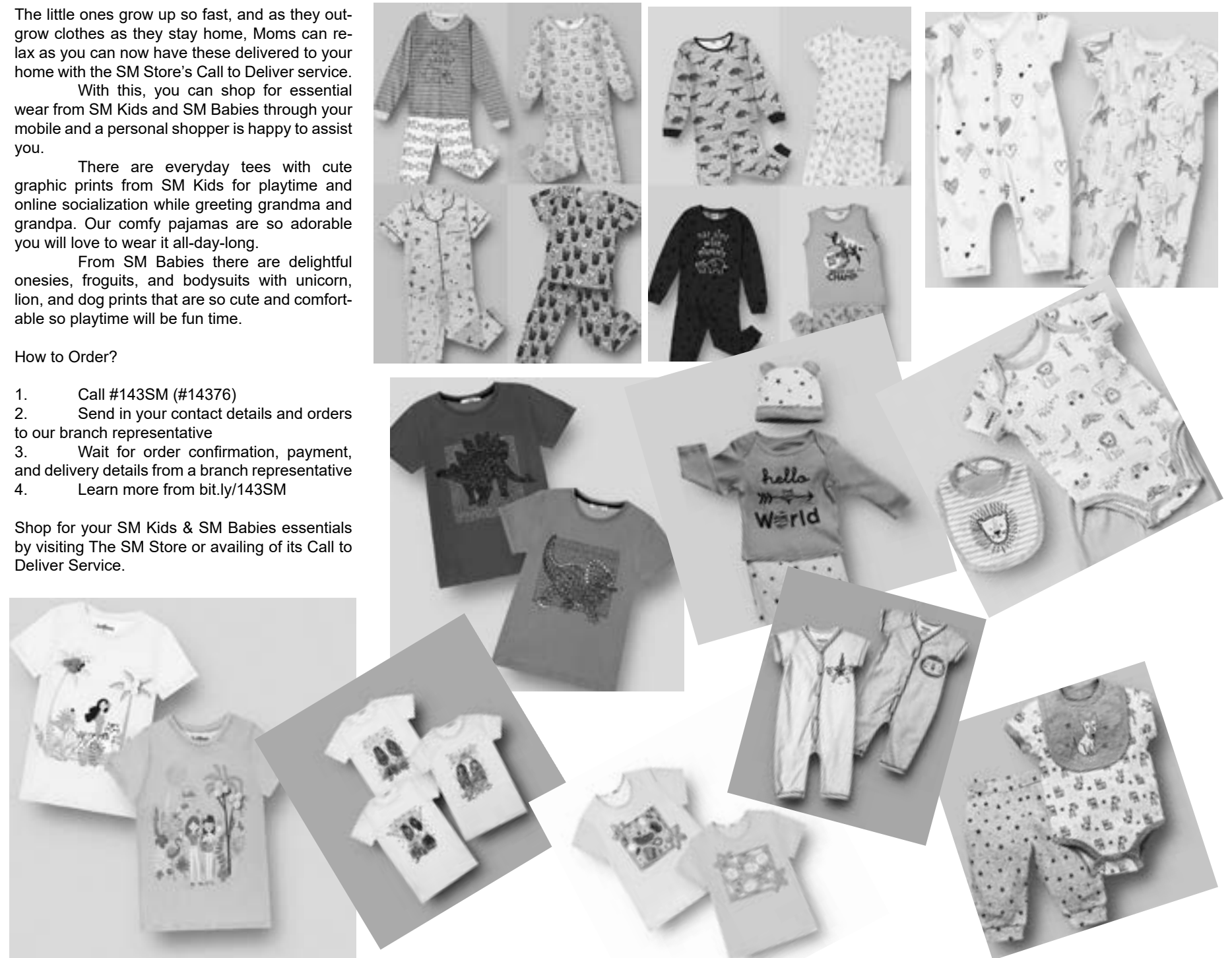
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Enchanted Kingdom pays homage to the unsung heroes in the time of pandemic



The spotlight will gleam on the tireless individuals who are working above and beyond the call of duty in these challenging times as Enchanted Kingdom officially announces the opening of nominations for the 6th Enchanting Heroes of Change: You're my Hero.

This year, the premier and word-class theme park is paying tribute to these unsung heroes of today who are selflessly devoting efforts on the frontlines and continuously making positive impacts in many lives during the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic.

For kids ages 4-12 years old, this is your chance to show your support and give cheers to the real-life superheroes. If you know an individual, a friend or a family member that you consider a hero, nominate them by sharing a photo as well as their inspiring story. Enchanted Kingdom wants to hear about them.

Terms and Conditions:

Like Enchanted Kingdom's official Facebook page (<https://www.facebook.com/enchantedkingdom.ph/>).

Nominate your hero by posting his/her photo with a description of his/her incredible deeds to the community and tell us why he/she deserves a trip to EK. Post the photo entry at EK Heroes of Change 2020: You're My Hero FB post's comment section

Tag your hero on the post (if they have an FB account). Use the hashtags: #EKHeroesOfChange2020, #loveEK and #EKatHome.

Submission of entries is until August 28, 2020 and winners will be announced on August 31, 2020 (National Heroes Day). Five (5) chosen heroes will win three Regular Day Passes each, and the kids who submitted the winning entries will also receive two Regular Day Passes each plus a special Elder Doll!

Enchanted Kingdom is excited to read different stories of hope and inspiration from all you, EK Kids, as the invaluable services from these extraordinary people deserve honor and are worthy of celebration.

For more information, visit Enchanted Kingdom's official website and Facebook page at www.enchantedkingdom.ph and www.facebook.com/enchantedkingdom.ph or check on <https://www.facebook.com/notes/enchanted-kingdom/6th-enchanting-heroes-of-change-youre-my-hero/3860612573955040/> to know the complete contest mechanics. (PR)

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DTI 4-A...

slaught of the COVID-19 pandemic. The KMME-MME program is composed of twelve (12) mentorship modules such as Entrepreneurial Mind-setting, Marketing, Product Development, Marketing Expansion and Internationalization, Business Model Canvass, Operations Management, Business Laws, Taxation, Financial Management, Human Resource/Organization Management, Supply and Value Chain, Business Improvement Plan, and Culmination and Product Exposition.

"We hope that our mentees will be able to finish this program because they can learn a lot of things about business and be able to expand their

business without paying anything. The support structure is available for them to access," said PCE Senior Adviser for MSME Development Engr. Merly Cruz.

According to DTI CALABARZON Director Marilou Q. Toledo, KMME-MME Program aims to help the MSMEs to adapt their business strategies in responding to the challenges of the New Normal business environment

"Despite the difficult situation that we are currently experiencing right now caused by COVID-19, DTI still continues to help our existing and aspiring entrepreneurs by providing a platform to learn and enhance their business skills and resiliency through a crisis," added Toledo.

FROM PAGE 1

Republic of the Philippines
REGIONAL TRIAL COURT
FOURTH JUDICIAL REGION
Brach 21
City of Imus, Cavite
Tel. No. 046-471-2518
Cellphone No. 0947-524-2993

IN RE PETITION FOR CHANGE OF NAME
IN THE CERTIFICATES OF LIVE BIRTH
OF KEVIN YAGO AND BOY YAGO,

SPEC PRO CASE NO. 1805-19

KEVIN YAGO and BOY YAGO
Petitioners,
-versus-

PHILIPPINE STATISTICS AUTHORITY,
THE LOCAL CIVIL REGISTRAR
OF MANILA CITY,

Defendants.

x _____ x

ORDER

A verified Petition has been in this Court by Petitioner, through counsel, praying that after due notice and hearing, judgement be rendered ordering the change of name in the Certificates of Live Birth of Petitioners from Kevin Yago and Boy Yado to Kevin Yago Disser and Boy Yago Disser respectively.

Finding the Petition to be sufficient in form and substance left the instant Petition be set for hearing on October 20, 2020 at 8:30 in the morning at the Hall of Justice, Imus City, Cavite. At which date, time and place, all persons who may have opposition to the instant Petition may appear and show cause, if any, why the instant Petition should not be granted.

Let also copies of this Order be published at the expense of the Petitioner in accordance with the Supreme Court issuance on proper fees and corresponding receipts, (3) week successively, chosen by raffle previous to the time appointed, in a newspaper of general circulation in the province which has jurisdiction over the subject of this Petition, in accordance with the Supreme Court issuance on proper fees and corresponding receipts

The Petitioner is likewise directed to furnish all the heirs named in the Petition with a copy of the Petition together with its annexes and to show proof of receipt thereof.

SO ORDERED.

City of Imus, June 10, 2020

(SGD.) ROCILLES AQUINO TAMBASACAN
Presiding Judge

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Marlyn Lebores Yago
Restituto Lebores Yago
Block 5 Lot 59
Green Estate
Phase 2 Extension
Malagasang 1st
Imus City

Restituto I. Yago Sr.
No. 94 Quirino Blvd,
Cuta, Vigan City

Joel Lebores Yago
No. 23 A. Enero St.,
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August 10, 17 & 24, 2020

Gov. Jonvic ...

FROM PAGE 1

Governor Jonvic Remulla gave an in-depth answers for the COVID-19 situation in the province during a brief interview by Presidential Communications Operations Office (PCOO) Secretary Martin Andanar in the recent visit of the joint National Task Force CODE Team in the province.

During the interview, Gov. Remulla shared that the local government units of the cities and municipalities in the province stayed on top of the situation with the strict implementation of the 'Stay-at-Home' policy wherein the Home Quarantine Pass system remained in effect since the Enhanced Community Quarantine (ECQ) started. Likewise, ordinances for the safety health protocols like the mandatory wearing of face masks, and physical distancing were strictly observed in public places like commercial establishments, and malls with regulations limiting the time spent for basic essentials only.

"The main problem in the province is that about 100,000 Caviteños are employed in the NCR where there is very high risk of transmission which resulted to 80% of our COVID-19 positive cases," stated the governor. Talking about the economic plans and programs for the province, Gov. Remulla said the infrastructure projects that soon to start will give the economy a boost. "We are now in the final

stages of negotiations for the Sangley International Airport with a Php500B worth of investment. This would create about 10,000 jobs in construction and more than 50,000 jobs when it is operational and up to a million more jobs from tourism, transportation, and services," revealed Remulla. Moreover, the road infrastructure projects like the CALAX and the Coastal Road which will decongest traffic along Aguinaldo highway and other major thoroughfares in the province would contribute to faster economic progress of the province and neighbouring cities and provinces since construction gives a huge multiplier effect in economy.

When asked if ever the government declares the four high risk areas including the province under ECQ, Gov. Remulla answered, "It would be disastrous for the economy of the country when that happens. Many will go hungry and the economy will go spiralling down. The government must reinforce the information campaign for the safety protocols against the COVID-19."

In conclusion, the Governor said, "Let us not lose hope, there is always a light at the end of the tunnel... especially now that the national and local governments are in-tune with the steps and measure in the fight against the pandemic." (PIA)

GenTri ...

FROM PAGE 1

Mayor Antonio 'Ony' Ferrer on Aug 13 led the city government in welcoming the joint national task force teams composed of the National Task Force (NTF) Against COVID-19 Coordinated Operations to Defeat Epidemic (CODE) Team, and the Inter-Agency Task Force for the Management of Emerging Infectious Diseases (IATF-EID), in their move to support the local government units with high number of COVID-19 positive cases.

During his interview with the Presidential Communications Operations Office (PCOO) Secretary Martin Andanar, Mayor Ferrer shared the local government's support to the different sectors severely affected by the pandemic.

The mayor said the local government had always been in coordination with the City Schools Division Superintendent and the Department of Education to stay on top of the situation especially for the gadgets acquisition for the online/blended learning modalities of education in the New Normal setting. Meanwhile, Mayor Ony revealed that there were 22 Micro Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) in the city that had closed due to the adverse effect of the pandemic.

In support of the struggling businesses in the city, "The local government had issued an ordinance to waive penalties and surcharges for the payment of business taxes, and the like, and the provision of free training programs for would-be entrepreneurs," said Mayor Ferrer.

He also mentioned that although the city have a limited agriculture sector because the city is primarily an industrial city, the city government in collaboration with the Department of Agriculture (DA) had distributed free vegetables seeds to barangays to promote backyard gardening for food security during the health crisis. The economic recovery plan of the city government mainly relies with the continued operation of the two (2) industrial estates in the city, the Cavite Economic Zone and the Gateway Business Park.

Mayor Ony said, "We continue to have a dialogue with the employers of the locators in the industrial estates to inform us what support they need from the city government, like the establishment of halfway houses for their workers who need go home to their families and expose them to health risks from the COVID-19 disease." (PIA)



Carmona LGU distributes risograph machines and paper supplies to schools: On August 11, 2020, the Municipal Government of Carmona distributed 6 units of risograph machines and supplies of bond paper to public elementary schools, Carmona National High School, and Angelo Levarado Loyola Senior High School at the Carmona Town Plaza. This is to help in the production of materials to be needed by students for modular learning this coming school year 2020-2021.

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SM Foundation donates more ventilators to hospitals nationwide

SM Foundation (SMFI) donates 25 ICU-grade ventilators to hospitals with high COVID-19 cases across the country, as part of its continuing COVID-19 response.

This additional donation of ventilators will help augment each hospital's capacity to manage severe COVID-19 cases, particularly with patients who require intubation.

The hospital recipients include Tarlac Provincial Hospital, Calamba Doctors Hospital, General Emilio Aguinaldo Hospital, Bicol Regional Training and Teaching Hospital, West Visayas Medical Center, Cebu South Medical Center, Zamboanga City Medical Center, Northern Mindanao Medical Center, and other government hospitals.

To date, SM has donated almost Php 400 million in essential medical supplies, equipment, rt-PCR testing, and assistance to help national efforts in the fight against COVID-19.



Tarlac Provincial Hospital in Tarlac City



Calamba Doctors Hospital in Laguna

CARD Bank partners with Western Union to widen international-domestic remittance service

Driven by its mission in promoting financial inclusion among all Filipinos through its digital innovations and services, CARD Bank, a microfinance-oriented rural bank under CARD MRI, partnered with Western Union to further boost its international and domestic remittance service.

Said CARD Bank President and CEO Marivic Austria, "The partnership is one of the key strategies of the institution in providing the best services to underserved communities in rural and urban poor areas in the country. Becoming one of Western Union's authorized agents bridges us to reach and serve more as the latter has presence in more than 200 countries, while CARD Bank has more than 1,500 affiliated offices under CARD MRI across the country. This broad presence will help most especially the OFWs to send their hard-earned money to the Philippines. The partnership will provide more convenience and greater accessibility to money transfer to and from their families abroad."

Austria added that since the establishment of CARD Bank in 1997, its goal is to provide financial and non-financial services to Filipino families. With this partnership, financial inclusion is promoted by providing convenient access to remittance facilities for Filipino families in Western Union branches in the country.

"Western Union is uniquely positioned to meet the needs of today's complex and interconnected world. We want to provide freedom, dignity to move money when, where and how our

customers choose," said Western Union Head of Network Middle East and Asia Pacific Sohini Rajola.

Rajola added that the partnership with CARD Bank shows a clear and shared vision of what they hope to accomplish, "Financial services aren't just a luxury for the few, but a necessity for all- an economic lifeline that we are determined to deliver. We are proud to extend our network with

CARD Bank, offering our money transfer services to everyone, including underserved customers in rural and remote areas."

"We, at CARD Bank assures that with this partnership, our clients will experience more convenient payout transactions when it comes to their remittance from abroad and we are looking forward to a fruitful partnership of serving the underbanked communities," Austria concluded. (PR)

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POOLED TESTING IS THE GAME CHANGER - CONCEPCION, GARIN

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We recommend to perform pool testing in the following targeted populations:

- A. Low prevalence communities
- B. Mass testing in hot zone communities;
- C. Surveillance of health care workers;
- D. Workplace testing to include factory workers, market vendors, call centers, transportation workers and others;
- E. Border testing at airports and seaports for inbound foreign travelers and returning residents;
- F. Overseas deployment of OFWs;
- G. Returning OFWs;
- H. Frontline government workers (police, military, quarantine, immigration officers to name a few);
- I. Locally Stranded Individuals (LSI);
- J. Any other vulnerable populations to be determined in the future.

4. The initial recommendation is to use a pooled sample of 5 until an accurate prevalence of SARS –COV-2 is identified in the population.

5. The quality and accuracy of the sample pooling strategy must be ensured.

6. All participating COVID testing laboratories should have a technical validation process.

7. Sample pooling is a strategy to ensure a wider population to be tested in an efficient, cheaper and faster manner, more importantly, is the need to implement contact tracing for those exposed to persons who tested positive in order to break the cycle of transmission at the earliest time possible;

8. Pool testing will accelerate the analytical process but there is a need to address the pre-analytical and post-analytical phases when dealing with thousands of specimens to be handled at the same time. The pre-analytical and post-analytical processes should address organized, systematic, streamlined procedures for mass specimen collection, documentation, and reporting, including the use of appropriate Information Technology systems.

9. This a dynamic situation and PSP will be issuing updated guidelines when circumstances dictate.

The PSPI, Go Negosyo and PCMC will officially turn over preliminary results and recommendations to DOH. Go Negosyo has committed to further support Pilot Implementation Sites, namely: JB Lingad Memorial General Hospital, National Kidney and Transplant Institute, Lung Center of the Philippines, and Dr. Jose N. Rodriguez Memorial Hospital/Tala Hospital. Validation of the outcome of the research will then be submitted to DOH, who in turn will allow the immediate cascade to qualified COVID testing centers. RITM, our National Reference Laboratory will set the standards for quality control.

“Proper technique and procedure in the laboratory are very important. We at RITM commit to mentor existing labs,” Dr. Amado Tandoc, Head of RITM Molecular Laboratory said.

“This is indeed a game-changer. With the private sector and the government working together, hurdling the challenges of a pandemic is doable. We commit to test, test and test to find where enemies are hiding and respond appropriately with speed,” Sec. Vince Dizon, the Chief Testing Czar emphasized. (PR)



PA Joey Concepcion together with ARK PCR private Sector Chief Implementor Cong. Janette Garin, PCMC's Dr. Julius Lecciones and Dr. Raymundo Lo, PSPI President, Dr. Robert Padua, Head of RITM Molecular Laboratory Dr. Amado Tandoc, Makati City Mayor Abigail Binay, and more than 680 Zoom participants attended the Formal Announcement of the Results of the Go Negosyo Pooled PCR Testing Research.

With asymptomatic and mildly symptomatic individuals accounting for 90% of the country's confirmed cases, COVID-19 surely knows how to camouflage itself while continuously and persistently infecting others.

“The need to co-exist with the virus paved the way for Go Negosyo to work with the Philippine Society of Pathologists Inc. (PSPI). These doctors together with laboratory specialists and medical technologists are our ‘eyes’ in finding this invisible enemy,” says Joey Concepcion, Presidential Adviser for Entrepreneurship and Go Negosyo founder.

Believing that testing is key to co-existing with COVID, Dr. Janette Garin, Chief Implementor of the Project ARK PCR initiative and Former Secretary of Health, requested PSPI, Research Institute of Tropical Medicine, and Philippine Children's Medical Center (PCMC) to embark on major research entitled “An Evaluation of Pooling Strategies for qRT-PCR testing for SARS-COV-2 Infection: A pragmatic parallel multi-site operational study by the PSP Inc.” Garin stressed that testing is not just about availability. “Affordability with results released within 48 hours is key to pandemic response,” she quipped.

“Based on our preliminary research findings, sample pooling can be used as a strategy to enhance Covid-19 testing to increase the number of tests conducted in the country. It will conserve much-needed resources, improve turnaround time, and make the test affordable,” the PSPI said in a statement.

The recommended pools of 5 will be able to offer 70% savings, speed up turnaround time by 1.08 times, and offer accuracy levels of 98%, although the dilution brings sensitivity rate to 83%.

The research was conducted together with the Research Institute of Tropical Medicine and the University of Perpetual Help DALTA Medical Center as research study sites. Private sector partners through Go Negosyo supported and funded the research.

“The private sector will fund a pooled PCR testing pilot for 16 cities and one municipality in NCR this month. That represents about 160,000 pooled PCR tests that will be done for this part of the research. This will be a game-changer for our country. We will also bring more private sector companies to support more cities in NCR. It could speed up testing, increase the capacity, and make it cheaper. Testing will create greater visibility,” said Concepcion.

The equipment and kits that will be used were donated through Go Negosyo by private sector partners BDO Foundation, Ayala Corporation, National Grid Corporation of the Philippines, RFM Corporation, PLDT-Smart Foundation, LT Group, Inc., Wilcon

Depot, Yazaki-Torres Manufacturing, Inc., First Philippine Holdings, GT Capital Holdings, Unilab Corporation, Mercury Drug Corporation, and Filipino Chinese Community Calamity Fund.

Angkas, CDO Foodsphere, Inc., Federation of Indian Chamber of Commerce & Industry, Inc., Penshoppe, Universal Leaf Philippines Inc., Century Pacific Food, Inc., PTC Group and Lazada Philippines also pledged their support in conducting NCR-wide testing initiatives.

According to PSPI, sample pooling identifies positive asymptomatic patients that are potential spreaders and transmitters of COVID-19.

PCMC Executive Director Julius A. Lecciones said the PCMC established a COVID-19 testing Laboratory to aid the limited testing capacity and act as a support for the healthcare system.

“We will not back out from this fight. We intend to crush COVID at its core. However, it's very difficult for us frontliners if testing is expensive. As frontliners, we need a laboratory technique that will drastically reduce the cost especially that we are being tested every three weeks. Our institution agreed to engage in this study, even if it will mean more work and sleepless nights because this innovation can be a great help to address the testing result delays at laboratories, increase the number of tests, save resources and reduce costs,” Lecciones explained.

Dr. Raymundo Lo, Principal Investigator of the study, emphasized the importance of accuracy of COVID test results. “The techniques we will be cascading is meant to retain the quality of results but faster turnaround time. Test results are meant to help clinical management and control of infection. That's why cost and timely results are paramount”, Dr. Lo emphasized.

PSPI President, Dr. Robert Padua has mobilized their society to help with the campaign. “Many of our patients rely on us, pathologists, to see beyond what is recognizable by our naked eyes. As called to duty, we will never stop mentoring and finding ways of how pathologists can maximally help our country. Testing the asymptomatics, immediate isolation of positives, and ensuring confidence in workplaces by allowing the negatives to work, means being one step ahead of the virus.”

In the same statement, the PSPI recommends the following actions to achieve a significant and expanded number of target testing populations:

1. Individual testing shall be done for symptomatic patients;
2. Sample pooling is an expanded targeted testing strategy for screening asymptomatic persons.