

# Mekeni Joins Hospital on Wheels Medical Mission for over 1,000 Porac Residents



PORAC, Pampanga (December 12-13, 2025) — Mekeni Food Corporation reinforced its commitment to community health and inclusive development as it actively supported the Hospital on Wheels (HOW) medical mission that served more than 1,000 patients at the Jose Songco Lapid Gymnasium in Barangay Cangatba, Porac, Pampanga.

The two-day mission delivered free medical, surgical, dental, and vision screening services to residents, with a strong focus on reaching indigenous peoples (IPs) and underserved communities in Porac. Mekeni joined Hospital on Wheels, the local government of Porac, and various partner organizations in mobilizing resources and volunteer support to bring essential healthcare closer to those

who need it most.

Mekeni President Mr. Prudencio “Pruds” Garcia underscored the value of collaboration in creating lasting impact.

“When organizations work together with a shared purpose, we can do great things for our communities. This mission is close to my heart because our parents, Mekeni founders Mr. Felix Garcia and the late Mrs. Meding Garcia, once taught indigenous peoples in the mountains. Supporting this initiative continues that legacy of service,” Mr. Garcia said.

Hospital on Wheels founder Dr. Jim Sanchez expressed appreciation for Mekeni’s continued partnership and the collective effort behind the mission.

“For 18 years, Hospital on Wheels has advocated accessible

healthcare. We are deeply grateful to Mekeni Food Corporation, the local government of Porac, and all our partners who shared their time, resources, and expertise to make this mission successful,” Sanchez said.

Porac Municipal Vice Mayor Trisha “Jen” Capil welcomed the initiative, noting its alignment with the municipality’s priorities.

“This medical mission is a big help to our community, especially our indigenous peoples. We thank the Hospital on Wheels, Mekeni, and all the partners for bringing this service to Porac, as it supports our administration’s goal of inclusive and accessible healthcare,” Capil said.

Aside from the medical, surgical, dental, and optical services, the mission also brought mo-

ments of care and comfort to beneficiaries through the distribution of gift packs for IPs and children who attended the activity.

Hospital on Wheels has been conducting medical missions nationwide for 18 years, while Mekeni Food Corporation has supported the initiative for three consecutive years, demonstrating the company’s sustained commitment to health-focused community partnerships.

Other organizations that supported the mission include Rotary Club of Malolos (D3770), Rotary Club of Maharlika (D3780), Philippine Travel Operators Association (PHILTOA), Aguman Capampangan, Office of Senator Imee Marcos, Eagles, BNI Pampanga, Philippine Air Force (PAF), PAF Reservists, and Scrubbed BPO.

## SMC TO WAIVE TOLLS ON EXPRESSWAYS ON CHRISTMAS, NEW YEAR’S EVES

San Miguel Corp. (SMC) said it will again waive toll fees across its expressway network on Christmas Eve and New Year’s Eve, continuing an annual practice aimed at easing holiday travel.

The toll holiday will apply to all SMC-operated expressways, including the Skyway System, NAIAX Expressway (NAIAX), South Luzon Expressway (SLEX), STAR Tollway and the Tarlac-Pangasinan-La Union Expressway (TPLEX).

Tolls will be waived from 10:00 p.m. on Dec. 24 until 6:00 a.m. on Dec. 25, and from 10:00 p.m. on Dec. 31 until 6:00 a.m. on Jan. 1, 2026, the company said.

SMC said the toll waiver is intended to benefit motorists traveling late at night to reach their families during the holidays.

SMC Infrastructure, the company’s infrastructure arm, said it has placed safety and security



personnel on heightened alert and rolled out measures to manage the expected increase in traffic during the holiday period.

Beginning noon on Dec. 20, additional patrol and security personnel have been deployed in critical areas, while emergency response teams are placed on standby to quickly clear any road obstructions, the company said.

Traffic monitoring centers across SMC-operated expressways are staffed around the clock to track traffic conditions and coordinate with emergency responders. Roadworks that may affect traffic flow have been sus-

pended from Dec. 20 until Jan. 4, 2026, to help ease congestion.

Tow trucks and other emergency vehicles have also been placed at strategic locations to ensure faster response to incidents.

SMC Infrastructure advised motorists to plan their trips ahead, allow extra travel time and ensure sufficient balance in their Autosweep accounts to avoid delays at toll plazas.

The company added it has coordinated with local government units and national agencies to help manage traffic on public roads connecting to the expressways.

## KERNELS OF HOPE



**Chella Baraquel operates a food cart that offers freshly boiled corn, peanuts, and buttered corn kernels, each product telling the story of her hard work and homegrown success**

Like the kernels of corn that endure heat, pressure, and time, yet remain full of potential to grow tall and strong, Chella Baraquel, a corn vendor from San Vicente North, Calapan City, Oriental Mindoro, embodies survival and resilience in both life and business. From a simple kariton they built themselves to a permanent stall in the market, Chella and her family turned their humble beginnings into a lasting space to sell corn.

At an early age,

Chella learned the values of perseverance and self-reliance. She had to leave school early due to family circumstances, having only reached the third year of high school, which prompted her to start working and support herself. She left home at the age of 16 and worked various jobs: a household helper in Manila, a contractual factory worker in Laguna, and then a cashier and waitress in Batangas. Each role refined her work ethic and determination to persevere.



When she returned to Oriental Mindoro in 2007, fate introduced her to Jeffrey Casalla, the man who later became her partner. Together, they faced the daily challenges of making ends meet. With little to no capital, they started selling root crops and fruits, such as singkamas and rambutan, using a kariton they had built themselves.

By 2009, they turned to selling corn, which soon became their steady source of income. Without a fixed supplier, they learned to adapt, constantly finding ways to keep their business running. Their persistence enabled them to meet customer demand and support their growing family.

But in 2014, everything changed. A series of financial challenges struck their family, draining their business capital and even their daily funds for food and expenses. With no resources left to sustain the business, Chella made the painful decision

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# CALABARZON workers among top earners in PH

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Bacoor police launch new alert system to strengthen crime prevention

**Set 'realistic' expectations, DOH advises to prevent stress during the holiday season**

**CAVITE HOLDS 4TH QUARTER JOINT CPPOC, PADAC, PTF-ELCAC COUNCIL MEETING; LGUS**

**DA-4A NAMA HAGI NG 24 NA HAULING TRUCK PARA SA MGA MAGBABABOY NG CALABARZON**

**Partner LGUs in CALABARZON pledge their commitment during 2025 NSTW towards climate-smart agriculture**



Local government units (LGUs) in CALABARZON — Magallanes in Cavite, Siniloan in Laguna, and Lucena City in Quezon — take center stage as they join the “Presentation of DOST–UPLB SARAI CeNTRO LGU Partners” during the 2025 National Science, Technology, and Innovation Week (NSTW) held on November 19 at the Ilocos Norte Centennial Arena, Laoag City. DOST-CALABARZON partnered with these LGUs in the implementation of the program, Smarter Approaches to Reininvigorate Agriculture as an Industry in the Philippines – Centralized National Hub for Regional Operations (SARAI CeNTRO) in the region which involves adopting innovative tools that support smarter farming decisions.

Representatives from these partner LGUs—Engr. Freddie D. Sisante of Magallanes, Cavite; Ms. Agnes G. Morales of DOST Laguna for Siniloan, Laguna; and Ms. Jocelyn C. Guinto of Lucena City, Quezon—joined other Year 1 program partners of the SARAI Regional Hubs nationwide. Each received a 3D-printed plaque, symbolizing not only their official acknowledgement but also their commitment to adopting Project SARAI’s science-based decision-support systems and

**cont. on page 2**

The Provincial Government of Cavite, under the leadership of Governor Francisco Gabriel “Abeng” D. Remulla, continues to prioritize education through the Iskolar ng Lalawigan ng Cavite program, an initiative aimed at easing the financial burden of students in higher education.

A total of 15,249 students from Cavite State University (CVSU) received P2,000 in cash assistance, benefiting enrollees from CVSU campuses in Silang, Imus, Rosario, and Cavite City. The program seeks to provide direct educational support to deserving Caviteño students, helping them meet academic and daily school-related expenses.

The initiative reflects the provincial government’s ongoing efforts to invest in human capital by ensuring that students have access to resources necessary to pursue and complete their studies. Through programs like Iskolar ng Lalawigan ng Cavite, the province reaffirms its commitment to empowering the youth and building a more educated and resilient Cavite. — A. Sarte



**PGC RELEASE EDUCATIONAL ASSISTANCE FOR CVSU ROSARIO STUDENTS**

**CAYETANO URGES REDIRECTION OF DPWH'S P60-B TARGET SAVINGS TO KEY PUBLIC NEEDS**



**Bacoor City steps up relief efforts for fire victims**

**COA Flags SSS for Excessive P13-Million Tissue Paper Purchase**

**FORGING SYNERGIES FOR INCLUSIVE GROWTH: CAVITE ALIGNS MSME PROGRAMS WITH MMSMED PLAN 2025-2028**

EDITORIAL:

Is the end near for the armed rebellion?

The National Task Force to End Local Communist Armed Conflict recently said the membership of the Maoist New People's Army had gone down as of this month to only 780, or a far cry from its peak of 25,000 guerrillas in the 1980s.

The latest reported strength of the NPA is roughly half of the previously available military data from 2023, which estimated the Communist Party of the Philippines armed wing's membership at about 1,500.

The Armed Forces of the Philippines, through its spokesperson Col. Francel Margareth Padilla, echoes this view.

It has reported that, in fact, there are no more active NPA guerrilla fronts, a departure from its previous claim last year that there was only a single guerrilla front operating in the country after 57 years of the communist rebellion that began in Dec. 1968.

If validated, the report on the decline of NPA guerrillas highlights both the apparent gains of the Philippine government's counterinsurgency campaign and the ambiguities that surround conflict-related data.

On its face, the figure cited by the NTF-ELCAC suggests a dramatic contraction of the NPA's estimated armed capability. If accurate, this would represent a strategic inflection point in a rebellion that has persisted for more than five decades.

However, the political context in which the number is presented warrants caution.

NTF-ELCAC is not merely a data-gathering body but the government's lead institutional instrument for a whole-of-nation counterinsurgency approach.

As such, it has strong incentives to emphasize success, particularly on the occasion of its anniversary.

Quantifying insurgent strength has always been fraught with methodological problems, such as double counting and reliance on surrenders' testimonies to the difficulty of distinguishing armed fighters from part-time supporters in guerrilla zones.

The sharp reduction from the 2023 estimate invites scrutiny about whether the decline reflects real attrition or a change in counting standards.

The CPP's response, while predictably dismissive of government figures, is also revealing.

By refusing to disclose its own estimates, the CPP adheres to a long-standing operational practice, but its spokesman's admission of "setbacks" acknowledges the movement's weakened position.

This implicit concession aligns with broader trends: the aging of cadres, sustained military pressure, the loss of former rural strongholds throughout the country, and the erosion of ideological appeal among younger Filipinos.

These factors collectively suggest the insurgency is indeed in decline, even if the precise number is debatable.

But it should be pointed out that transforming numerical "success" into durable peace requires credible reintegration, livelihood support, and local governance reforms, not just security operations.

The real test, we believe, lies in whether reduced numbers translate into irreversible peace on the ground.

PGC...

The Provincial Government of Cavite, under the leadership of Governor Abeng Remulla, distributed financial assistance to 5,475 student-beneficiaries under the Provincial Scholarship Program during the Iskolar ng Lalawigan educational assistance distribution held on December 16 at Cavite State University–Rosario Campus.

The activity aimed to help ease students' educational expenses while promoting academic excellence. Governor Remulla was joined by First District Board Members Romel Enriquez and Jygs Gandia, who expressed their support and encouragement to the scholars.

The Iskolar ng Lalawigan ng Cavite program continues to underscore the provincial government's strong commitment to investing in education and empowering the future of Caviteño youth. - R. Tanael

KERNELS...

to seek work abroad in Egypt as a domestic helper. Unfortunately, even there she faced hardships. Chella experienced maltreatment and abuse by her employers and was forced to return home after several months.

That same year, her partner, Jeffrey, became a client of CARD Bank, a microfinance-oriented rural bank, and applied for a PHP 5,000 loan to revive their corn business while Chella was abroad. In 2015, when Chella decided to stay home for good, she also became a member of CARD Bank and applied for another PHP 5,000 loan to help expand their small enterprise. Together, they slowly rebuilt what they had lost.

By 2016, their perseverance paid off. They were able to rent a stall in the Calapan City

CALABARZON...

CALAMBA CITY, Laguna (PIA) – Workers in the CALABARZON region were reported among the top earners in the Philippines, trailing only the National Capital Region (NCR), according to the 2024 Occupational Wages Survey of the Philippines Statistics Authority (PSA).

In a media forum, Adrian Cerezo, Assistant National Statistician, reported that CALABARZON posted a P19,711 average monthly wage rate. It is the second-highest average monthly wage in the country, behind the National Capital Region (NCR) with an average monthly wage of P29,310.00

Other regions posting the highest average monthly wages include Central Visayas (P19,084), Central Luzon (P18,274), and the Davao Region (P17,953).

Despite national trends, women in CALABARZON earn less

Also, despite posting second in the national average, the data highlights a persistent gender pay gap among workers in CALABARZON.

On a national scale, female workers nationwide are earning more than their male counterparts—averaging

Public Market while continuing to sell at the night market. Their stall became a familiar sight, offering a variety of corn cobs. They also continued selling from their kariton, but this time, they improved it into a more durable food cart. They nurtured a simple yet thriving business that continues to sustain their family.

Their business helped them send their children to school. Their eldest is now a college nursing student, and the younger two are in senior and junior high school.

Then came the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, their most formidable challenge yet. Lockdowns halted their selling, their savings were depleted, and they were forced to sell their tricycle just to survive. Before this happened, they had taken out a loan of almost PHP

P22,236.00 compared to P21,009 for males. However, the trend is reversed in CALABARZON, where female employees are earning less than their male colleagues.

Cerezo noted a 'positive value' wage gap, favoring men in the formal sector over their female colleagues.

"Let's keep in mind that this is under formal employment, [such as] establishments."

In a separate press release, the PSA Region IV-A further noted the wage gap between male and female workers in the region.

"In 2024, male workers in CALABARZON earned a higher average monthly wage of P20,313, compared to P19,025 for female workers."

Based on reports by the PSA, the Department of Labor Employment (DOLE), and the Department of Economy, Planning and Development (DepDev), there are 12.333 million individuals aged 15 years old and above in the CALABARZON region.

It also recorded a 93.4 percent employment rate, where six out of 10 individuals are part of the labor force.

80,000 from CARD Bank to expand their business further. That very loan became their lifeline, helping them keep their business afloat by selling within nearby neighborhoods and covering their daily expenses. After the pandemic, they gradually repaid the loan little by little while rebuilding their business.

With only limited resources left, they began again with just two sacks of corn as their supply, steadily earning and saving until their livelihood regained its strength.

They expanded their product offerings to include peanuts, boiled corn, and buttered corn. They were even able to

purchase a new tricycle, gradually recovering what they had lost during the pandemic.

Chella believes that true capital in life and business is not just money, but also patience, hard work, and perseverance. Like a kernel of corn that grows into a strong, sustainable livelihood, her story reflects steady effort overcoming challenges.

In the future, she and her partner, Jeffrey, hope to have their own non-rented stall and expand into fruits and condiment retail, a dream they will once again pursue step by step, believing that setbacks are never final for those who keep moving forward.

Partner...

technologies to improve agricultural planning and deliver enhanced services to their respective communities.

DOST-CALA-BARZON commends its partner LGUs for championing smart and sustainable agriculture and looks forward to working closely with them as the SARAI CeNTRO program enters full implementation in the region. With continued collaboration, the program aims to improve local agricultural planning and ensure that scientific innovations reach farmers where they are most needed.

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Set 'realistic'...

CALAMBA CITY, Laguna (PIA) – Setting realistic expectations for holiday gatherings can significantly prevent stress and lower the risk of other heart-related issues usually common during the holiday season, an official from the Department of Health (DOH) has advised.

In an interview with the Philippine Information Agency CALABARZON and Radyo Pilipinas Lucena's Sulong Southern Tagalog radio program, Dr. Voltaire Gualupe, OIC-Assistant Regional Director of DOH CALABARZON, noted that while the holiday season is a time for family gatherings and reunions, it can

also trigger unnecessary stress.

Stress, combined with sleep deprivation, overeating, and excessive alcohol intake, can also pose health risks even to those without underlying heart conditions. This can lead to 'holiday heart syndrome,' a condition characterized by irregular heart rhythm during the festive season.

Usually associated with alcohol consumption and binge drinking, the holiday heart syndrome is the onset of irregularities in heart rhythm in patients without a history of heart ailments.

"When you drink alcohol, you still cannot rest well despite being un-

conscious.

You also have stressors and emotional excitement from the gathering. So the combination of these can contribute to the holiday heart syndrome."

To prevent excessive stress, Gualupe advised the public to practice mindfulness and set realistic expectations of annual gatherings to prevent stress, which can also lead to various diseases.

"Stress and mental health concerns are common during the Christmas season. Let us set our expectations [of the holiday], have adequate sleep, and practice mindfulness, meditation, and light movements."

ADAC functionality.

Following the awarding ceremonies, the joint councils proceeded with the formal meeting and deliberations.

Several joint resolutions of the CPPOC, PADAC, and PTF-ELCAC were presented and approved, covering updates on council membership and meeting schedules, the pursuit of proposed peace and development initiatives, and the utilization of budget allocations as stipulated in the Peace and Order and Public Safety (POPS) Plan.

Major General Ronald Jess Alcudia, Commander of the Reserve Command of the Philippine Army, delivered a directional message urging all stakeholders to remain vigilant, proactive, and closely coordinated to sustain the province's gains in peace, order, and security.

DILG-Cavite OIC Provincial Director Marcial Juangco also conveyed the agency's message of support, emphasizing the importance of sustaining peace and order and strengthening coordinated efforts toward ensuring drug-free communities.

Meanwhile, Lieutenant Colonel Rommel S. Panganiban, Executive Officer of Task Force Ug-

COA...

The Commission on Audit (COA) has called the attention of the Social Security System (SSS) after discovering what auditors described as an "excessive and impractical" procurement of tissue paper worth more than P13 million. The finding, released in COA's latest audit report, has sparked questions about the agency's procurement practices and its stewardship of members' contributions.

According to state auditors, the quantity of tissue rolls purchased was far beyond the SSS' projected consumption for a two-month supply. COA noted that the supply ordered was so large that it could not even fit inside the SSS' storage facilities, indicating that the procurement did not match the agency's actual operational needs. This mismatch, auditors said, suggests poor planning, lack of proper assessment,

and a failure to follow prudent spending standards required of government offices.

COA emphasized that the SSS, being a fund built from workers' mandatory contributions, must be especially careful in ensuring that every expenditure directly supports its mandate and benefits its members. "It is crucial that SSS funds are used judiciously. These are contributions entrusted by members who rely on the system for financial protection and social security," the report underscored.

The discovery has triggered public concern, with members and citizens expressing alarm that resources meant to support retirement, disability, and other benefit programs may be mismanaged or wasted on non-essential office supplies. Advocacy groups have also urged the SSS

Bacoor City...

BACOR CITY, Cavite (PIA) — The Bacoor City government has continued its relief efforts for families displaced by recent fires in Sitio Bulate, Barangay Dulong Bayan, and Camella East, Barangay San Nicolas 2.

Under the leadership of Mayor Strike B. Revilla and in partnership with the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) Region IV-A, Family Food Boxes were distributed on Monday, December 15, 2025, to ensure that affected residents have sufficient food while staying in evacuation centers.

The distribution was attended by DSWD Region IV-A representatives Marlden Tongson and Ric Vertudez, along with personnel from the City Social Welfare and Development (CSWD) Of-

A total of 88 families, comprising 298 individuals from Sitio Bulate, along with one family of three from Camella East, received assistance.

Each Family Food Box contains six kilos of rice, 10 cans of assorted canned goods, and 10 sachets of drink mix or soup, providing essential sustenance during their displacement.

The distribution was attended by DSWD Region IV-A representatives Marlden Tongson and Ric Vertudez, along with personnel from the City Social Welfare and Development (CSWD) Of-

to review its internal controls and provide a clear explanation on how such a procurement was approved.

In response to the findings, COA recommended that the SSS strengthen its supply and demand assessments, improve inventory monitoring, and implement stricter procurement guidelines to prevent similar issues from occurring in the future. Auditors also advised the agency to ensure that all purchases are adequately justified and aligned with realistic consumption patterns. As of this writing, the SSS has yet to issue an official statement addressing the audit observations. The controversy adds to the ongoing public call for greater transparency and accountability in government agencies, especially those entrusted with managing billions in members' contributions for long-term social protection.

fice.

According to the city government, this activity forms part of the city's broader relief efforts, which have already included the provision of hot meals, hygiene kits, clothing, kitchen sets, and sleeping kits for internally displaced persons (IDPs).

City officials emphasized that relief operations will continue as monitoring and verification activities remain ongoing in the affected communities, assuring fire victims of sustained support and assistance throughout their recovery.

vincial Government of Cavite's continued commitment to an integrated, whole-of-government approach in promoting peace, countering illegal drugs, and safeguarding communities through strong collaboration among LGUs, law enforcement agencies, national government partners, and other stakeholders. — EMR



# DOE Secretary Garin opens MGI Visitor Center; Pushes geothermal growth and environmental stewardship in the country



DOE Secretary Garin cites MGPP's unique compact design enabling baseload supply with minimal environmental footprint.

Sto. Tomas, Batangas, December 22, 2025 – Department of Energy (DOE) Secretary Sharon S. Garin led the formal opening of Maibarara Geothermal Inc. (MGI) Visitor Center located inside the Maibarara Geothermal Power Facility (MGPF) complex in Sto. Tomas, Batangas, attended by MGI partners PetroGreen Energy Corporation (PGEC), ACEN, and PNOC-Renewables Corporation (PNOC-RC). PGEC is a joint venture

between Yuchengco-led PetroEnergy Resources Corporation and Kyuden International Corporation (KIC), the overseas investment arm of Japan's Kyushu Electric Power Company, Inc.

"It's a pleasure to be here in MGI, to formally open MGI's Visitor Center, and join partners who share one clear purpose of accelerating transition to cleaner energy under the Philippine Energy Plan," said Secretary Garin. "Just this week, we have signed

a MOA with the Land Bank, operationalizing the Philippine Geothermal Resource De-Risking Facility (GRDF), to address investment risks in exploration and drive the development of geothermal energy in the Philippines. Maibarara's success demonstrates that achieving our purpose requires more than just technological advancements. It is ensuring that we deliver benefits for the people and for our country," adds Garin.



(L-R) ACEN President & CEO Eric Francia, PGEC Chairman Milagros V. Reyes, DOE Sec. Sharon S. Garin, MGI President Francisco G. Delfin, Jr., ACEN Managing Director/COO Atty. Miguel de Jesus, PNOC-RC President and CEO Ronald R. Estilles, and PNOC-RC Director Inocencio G. Silbol, during the inaugural planting of Kapa kapa plant in MGPP.

The newly inaugurated facility serves as a hub for geothermal energy education, stakeholder engagement, and sustainability advocacy. Designed to offer learning experience, the Visitor Center features displays on geothermal energy, key information on the development and operations of MGPF, and overview of MGI and its community partnership and environment protection programs.

The event also marked the launching of the Maibarara segment of We Power C.A.R.E., PGEC's flagship biodiversity-focused environmental initiative which champions conservation, awareness, restoration, and ecotourism in regions hosting PGEC renewable energy projects. MGI commits to adopt Kapa-kapa (Medinilla magnifica Lindl.), a critically endangered flowering

plant found only in the Philippines. The species is one of 30 endangered species adopted for conservation over the next 30 years under the We Power C.A.R.E program.

First introduced in 2024 through a partnership with UPLB, the program underscores PGEC and MGI's call for collective action to protect natural ecosystems while advancing clean energy use.

# TESDA CALLS FOR STRONGER INDUSTRY ROLE IN TECH-VOC TRAINING

In a renewed push for industry-led workforce development, the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA) called on more enterprises and industry leaders to actively take part in shaping the country's tech-voc training landscape.

Last November 24, TESDA held the 2025 National Summit on Industry TVET Boards (ITBs) and Enterprise-Based Education and Training (EBET), where it gathered key players from industry, business groups, policy-makers, and training institutions.

In his speech, TESDA Secretary Kiko Benitez emphasized the summit's significance, highlighting its role in shaping the nation's workforce for years to come, and underscored that the

summit's collaborative effort would ensure training programs remain responsive to evolving industry needs and global demands.

"By gathering key stakeholders, showcasing success stories, and learning from local and global practices, TESDA solidifies EBET and ITBs as enduring pillars of skills development, moving the country closer to a future where every Filipino worker is equipped, empowered, and globally competitive," the TESDA chief said.

"This is not just an event but a call to action for all sectors to work together in creating pathways for meaningful employment, lifelong learning, and sustained growth. With unified commitment, we can build a workforce that is not only resilient

but also at the forefront of innovation," the secretary added.

Anchored on the newly enacted Enterprise-Based Education and Training (EBET) Framework Act (Republic Act No. 12063) which was signed into law in the last quarter of 2024, the summit highlighted how apprenticeship, learnership, and dual training programs are now unified under one competency-based national framework.

Further, the law highlights the crucial role of enterprises as co-trainers and co-developers of the Filipino workforce amid rapid technological change, artificial intelligence, and global competition.

The summit also featured audiovisual presentations on the milestones of the EBET and

ITB journeys, followed by a panel discussion on EBET titled "Scaling Up the Role of Enterprises in Building a Robust Workforce" and another panel discussion on ITB on "The Role of the Private Sector for Effective Engagement in Skills Development: Strategies and Best Practices."

Participants then took part in breakout sessions, where stakeholders reviewed the progress of EBET and ITB initiatives, celebrated key achievements, and gave recommendations on how to address the challenges faced by enterprises and training providers.

Meanwhile, through the summit, TESDA renewed its commitment to building a flexible, inclusive, and industry-centered TVET system, urging more enterprises to invest in training

today to secure a stronger, more competitive Filipino workforce tomorrow.

Several government agencies and bureaus also participated in the summit such as: Department of Trade and Industry; Philippine Trade Training Center; Construction Manpower Development Foundation; Department of Finance; Department of Agriculture – Agricultural Training Institute; Bureau of Internal Revenue; Department of Education; Department of Science and Technology; Board of Investments; Bureau of Customs; Department of Information and

Communications Technology; Department of Economy, Planning, and Development; Philippine Economic Zone Authority; Department of Labor and Employment, Bureau of Local Employment; and the Philippine International Trading Corporation.

The conduct of the 2025 National Summit on ITBs and EBET follows President Ferdinand "Bongbong" Romualdez Marcos Jr.'s directive to address the job-skills mismatch in the country and align the workforce with the demands of the rapidly evolving, technology-driven job market.



# SARAP NG PASKO, SARAP NG PUREFOODS



Purefoods Helps Families Celebrate Cherished Traditions, New Additions This Holiday Season

In a country of more than 7,600 islands, Christmas in the Philippines is celebrated in many ways, varying across the regions through traditions that have remained through generations, along with new iterations that reflect the growing diversity among Filipino families.

Today's Christmas celebrations in Filipino households range from grand gatherings among extended families, along with OFW households, dual-income no kids (DINKS)

couples, single parents, and same-gender partners who are marking the season in their own meaningful way. Through it all, the desire to gather, to share, and to connect remains at the heart of each celebration.

## Feast for Filipino families

This holiday season, Purefoods recognizes both the traditions that have been passed down through generations, along with the new meaningful ones that we create along the way. Around the Noche Buena table, families remember the Christmases past, while embracing the present, and celebrating what brings

them together.

Whether its recipes that have been handed down through many generations, or new dishes to celebrate the joy of togetherness, Purefoods provides a wide range of products to make every holiday meal more memorable.

As a legacy brand with generations-long trusted consistency in quality and taste, Purefoods products have long been a part of occasions that matter most to Filipino families. The different Purefoods products help make homecooked Noche Buena feasts easier and more enjoyable. What's more, the products

# BRING FESTIVITY TO YOUR NOCHE BUENA WITH MEKENI CHRISTMAS HAMS



## Mekeni Christmas Hams

As the Christmas season approaches, many of us are thinking about how to make our Noche Buena celebrations truly special. It's a time for family, togetherness, and delicious food that brings everyone closer.

One delightful option to consider is Mekeni's range of Christmas hams. Known for their quality and commitment to safety, Mekeni offers a variety of hams that cater to different preferences and budgets, ensuring that everyone can join in the festive cheer.

Whether it's the rich smokiness of the Gold Premium Ham, the traditional sweet-savory profile of the Deli Premium Ham, or the unique glaze of the Jamon De Bola, each option is crafted with care to enhance your Christmas

are easily available in supermarkets, groceries, and markets to support different regional traditions and unique family celebrations across the country.

As part of its mission to spread Christmas cheer, Purefoods turned the homecoming of OFWs into a full-blown holiday celebration this December, taking center stage at the newly refreshed Ni-

meal. For anyone seeking a healthier alternative, Premium Chicken Ham is an excellent choice. These hams can serve as a stunning centerpiece or a thoughtful gift for loved ones, making them a versatile choice for any gathering.

Launched as the specialty of the season, these hams are not just food; they're a way to uphold cherished traditions, especially during Noche Buena. With a focus on accessibility without compromising quality, Mekeni is dedicated to elevating your Christmas experience.

As a trusted name in food processing, Mekeni is committed to safety and community upliftment, providing Filipino families with a reliable and delightful alternative this

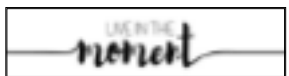
festive season. The Pear-Shaped Ham and Brick Ham offer budget-friendly options without compromising the flavor of the festive celebration.

This season, let the flavors of Mekeni Christmas Hams add a touch of joy to your celebrations. For more festive inspiration, follow Mekeni Food Corp on Facebook and Instagram. Explore their offerings and see how you can bring warmth and tradition to your table, this Noche Buena!

Mekeni also provides attractive packages and competitive deals for those interested in exploring business opportunities as resellers and distributors- a perfect chance to partner with a reputable brand and bring quality products to your community. PR

tion to create new Christmas memories with their loved ones through food.

Food that is lovingly prepared and joyfully shared is at the core of every Christmas celebration. No matter how Filipino families celebrate, Purefoods helps bring the joy of the season to every table.



# DAR LAUDS LANDBANK FOR DRIVING AGRI GROWTH AT 2025 AGRARYO TRADE FAIR



**Agrarian Reform Secretary Conrado M. Estrella III and LANDBANK EVP Ma. Celeste A. Burgos formally launch the Enhanced ARISE Lending Program at the 2025 Agraryo Trade Fair (ATF), expanding credit support for ARBOs and small farmholders whose livelihoods have been disrupted by various disasters and calamities.**

LANDBANK has formally launched the LANDBANK's Innovative Financing Thrust Towards Inclusive National Growth thru Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (LIFTING MSMEs) Lending Program, a comprehensive financing initiative aimed at strengthening support for micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) across the Philippines.

The Department of Agrarian Reform (DAR) lauded LANDBANK for its unwavering commitment to agricultural development and rural progress

during the opening of the 2025 Agraryo Trade Fair (ATF) on December 1 at Gateway Mall 2, Quezon City.

In a press conference at the event, DAR Secretary Conrado M. Estrella III highlighted LANDBANK's pivotal role in uplifting small farmers, fishers, and agrarian reform beneficiaries (ARBs) through accessible and responsive financing programs nationwide.

"Noong umupo ang bagong administrasyon, yung dating 11 pages na loan application forms, ngayon isang pahinang na lang — may tumutulong pa. I will say this with authority, that LANDBANK is indeed performing their mandate. They are serving our farmers. Mahusay talaga sila," Estrella said.

As of October 2025, LANDBANK's agriculture, fisheries and rural development (AFRD) loan portfolio reached ₱829.15 billion, accounting for 58.93% of the Bank's total loan portfolio—reflecting focused support for infrastructure development, value chain strengthening, sustainable agribusiness, and farmer- and fisher-centered initiatives

nationwide.

## Expanded market access

The Agraryo Trade Fair forms part of DAR's key support services to strengthen market access and enterprise opportunities for ARBs and agrarian reform beneficiaries organizations (ARBOs). This year's fair features over 80 ARBs and ARBOs from across the country, showcasing more than 300 products—including fresh produce, processed foods, traditional delicacies, natural fibers, handicrafts, and artisanal items rooted in local culture.

## Building resilience for ARBs

During the event, DAR and LANDBANK formally launched the Enhanced Assistance to Restore and Install Sustainable Enterprises (Enhanced ARISE) Lending Program, which provides expanded credit support for ARBs and ARBOs, particularly those whose livelihoods have been affected by natural calamities, human-made disasters, pest infestations, and disease outbreaks.

## Expanded support to the agri value chain

Complementing Enhanced ARISE is the LANDBANK AGRISENSO Plus Lending Program, which provides broader and more affordable financing for small farmers, fishers, ARBs, cooperatives, and other key players across the agricultural value chain. The program supports a wide range of needs, including crop production, livestock and fisheries, acquisition of farm machinery and equipment, construction or rehabilitation of facilities, and long-term working capital for agribusiness operations.

As of October 2025, LANDBANK has released a total of ₱2.18 billion in loans under the AGRISENSO Plus Lending Program, supporting over 12,000 borrowers nationwide, with continued rollout in different regions of the Philippines.

AGRISENSO Plus also extends free life and credit life insurance to eligible borrowers through the LBP Insurance Brokerage, Inc. (LIBI), while participating farmers and ARBOs may access capacity-building initiatives designed to enhance financial management, enterprise development, and sustainable farming practices. These interventions equip borrowers with the skills and resilience needed to sustain and grow their operations.

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## ABOUT LANDBANK

LANDBANK is the largest development financial institution in the country promoting financial inclusion, digital transformation, and sustainable national development. Present in all 82 provinces in the country, the Bank is committed to provide accessible and responsive financial solutions to empower Filipinos from countryside to countrywide.

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## DA-4A...

Pormal na tinanggap ng dalawampu't apat (24) na Farmers' Cooperatives and Associations (FCAs) sa rehiyon ng tig-iisang animal hauling truck mula sa Department of Agriculture IV-CALABARZON (DA- 4A) Livestock Program noong ika-15 ng Disyembre sa Lipa City, Batangas.

Ito ay bilang suporta sa kanilang operasyon sa transportasyon ng mga hayop na makakatulong sa pagpapalakas ng kabuuang produksyon at kita sa sektor ng pagbababuyan. Kasabay nito, nagsagawa rin ng aktwal na demonstrasyon sa paggamit at pagpapaalala sa wastong operasyon ng truck at katiyakan sa kaligtasan.

Kasama sa mga benepisyaryo ang Cavite Farmers Feedmilling and

Marketing Cooperative at Silang Livestock Agriculture Cooperative mula sa Cavite; Malinao Farmers Association at Pangkalahatang Samahan ng Magsasaka (PASAMASI) mula sa Laguna; Libato Farmers Husbandry and Corn Farming Association Inc., LIMCOMA Multi-Purpose Cooperative, Magahis Multipurpose Cooperative, Lucban Multipurpose Cooperative, Kamahari Agri-based Multipurpose Cooperative, Padre Garcia Development Cooperative, at Guinhawa Farmers Association mula sa Batangas; Sampaloc Agrarian Reform Beneficiaries Multi-purpose Cooperative, Amoranito Social and Economic Community Organization (AMORSECO), Organikong Tatak Yapak Farmers Association, Samahan

ng mga Magbababoy ng San Francisco, Tulo-Tulo Hog Raisers Association, at Capuluan Tulon Farmers Association mula sa Rizal; at Agdangan Agri-business Farmers Agriculture Cooperative, Grupong Magsasaka ng Brgy. San Nicolas, General Luna Inc., Sampaloc Farmers Association, Dolores Development Cooperative, Pinagdanlayan Farmers Association, Concepcion Pinagbakuran Farmers Association, at Manggalang Agrarian Reform Beneficiaries Cooperative mula sa Quezon.

Samantala, inihayag ni DA-4A Regional Executive Director Fidel Libao na patuloy na isusulong ng ahensya ang mga programang magbibigay ng konkretong suporta sa sektor ng paghahayupan sa rehiyon.

## CAVITE CAREER CARAVAN BRINGS JOB OPPORTUNITIES TO BACOR DURING DOLE ANNIVERSARY JOB FAIR

The Cavite Career Caravan organized by the Office of the Provincial Public Employment Service Manager was successfully conducted at SM City Bacoor on December 11, in line with the celebration of the 92nd Anniversary of the Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE).

The activity provided a valuable platform for jobseekers to explore employment opportunities and access government services in one convenient venue.

A total of 116 jobseekers tried their luck during the job fair, where 31 participating companies offered 5,913 job vacancies covering various industries and positions. Notably, 21 applicants were hired on the spot, highlighting the effectiveness of the initiative in directly linking employers with qualified jobseekers.

In addition to the participating companies, several national government agencies were present to extend on-site assistance and information to applicants.

These included Department of Trade and Industry (DTI), Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA), Bureau of Internal Revenue (BIR), the Social Security System (SSS), and the Office of

the Provincial Legal Officer (OPL), ensuring a holistic and supportive job fair experience.

Board Member Chelsea Sarno, SK Federation President also graced the event and expressed her support for initiatives that bring employment opportunities closer to the people.

The Cavite Career Caravan continues to serve as a vital program in strengthening employment generation and reinforcing the Provincial Government of Cavite's commitment to empowering its workforce through accessible and inclusive job facilitation activities. — OPIO



## Historic P1.37 Trillion Education Budget Gets Senate Nod — Gatchalian

The Senate has approved on third and final reading its version of the 2026 national budget, the first to meet the United Nations benchmark on education spending.

According to Senator Win Gatchalian, Chairman of the Senate Committee on Finance, the Senate version of the 2026 national budget allocates P1.37 trillion to the education sector, the equivalent of 4.5% of Gross Domestic Product (GDP). This meets the 4 to 6% benchmark of UNESCO on education spending.

"Titiyakin natin na mabibigyang prayoridad ang mga mahahalagang programa upang mapalawak ang access sa edukasyon at mapatatag ang pundasyon ng mga kabataan," said Gatchalian.

He highlighted improvements in the budget of education. For one, the Senate added P19.2 billion to the allocation set in the General Appropriations Bill (GAB), or House Bill No. 4058, to construct more than 24,000 new classrooms.

The Department of Education's School-Based Feeding Program will receive P28.6 billion to cover 200 school days and benefit 4.8 million learners. The program will cover all Kindergarten and Grade1 learners, while continuing support for wasted and severely wasted learners from Grades 2 to 6.

State Universities and Colleges (SUCs) will receive P139.03 billion, P7.35 billion more than what was allocated in the GAB, to expand their carrying capacity. Gatchalian previously flagged that at least 168,000 qualified students were denied admission because SUCs lacked sufficient capacity.

Gatchalian also emphasized the P1 billion allocation under the Local Government Support Fund to convert over 3,000 daycare centers into Child Development Centers (CDCs) in 4th and 5th class municipalities, along with the creation of 150 plantilla positions for Child Development Workers.

## Bacoor police...

CITY OF BACOR, Cavite (PIA) — To further enhance public safety and protect businesses, the Bacoor Component City Police Station has launched Project SOS: 'Strike One SMS,' a new crime-prevention and rapid alert system designed to improve police response during emergencies.

The initiative was formally introduced during a recent coordination meeting held at the Strike Multipurpose Hall in the Bacoor Government Center, Barangay Bayanan. P/ Lt. Chief Alexie A. Desamito led the meeting attended by local officials, police officers, program developers, and representatives from major convenience store chains operating in

the city.

Among those present were Provincial Board Member Hon. Alde Pagulayan, City Councilor Hon. Manolo "Noly" Galvez, P/Lt. Chief Basman A. Macarangel Jr., P/Maj. Kris Albin B. Gonzales, Project SOS programmer, Yvan Mercado, and various business stakeholders.

Participants reviewed crime data covering calendar years 2023 to 2025 and discussed ways to strengthen preventive measures in commercial establishments.

These measures included the enforcement of window transaction and clear-face policies, the use of advanced CCTV systems, door-clamping

## Cayetano...

Senate Minority Leader Alan Peter Cayetano welcomed the Department of Public Works and Highways' (DPWH) plan to align construction material prices with market rates, saying the projected P60-billion savings should be redirected to basic government services that directly benefit Filipinos.

Cayetano said the funds can strengthen priority sectors such as education, health, and social aid where additional resources are urgently needed to reinforce existing programs.

"If we go to the programs of all the departments, ang gaganda ng mga programa but that's not our question. You might be hitting the target pero mali target mo," he said.

The senator said for one, utilizing the DPWH's target savings can help curb the alarming effects of child stunting, emphasizing that addressing it early will give the "best return on investment" because it will prevent bigger challenges for the government later on.

"Marami sa stuntad na bata ang magiging future PWDs. The more that we take care of the stunting now, the less we have to spend on the interventions later on," he said.

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mechanisms, and intercom integration to improve security and monitoring.

A highlight of the meeting was the demonstration of the OR-MS-ART, a rapid-response device capable of instantly sending alerts to law enforcement during robbery incidents.

PLT Chief Macarangel suggested incorporating an acknowledgment feature to confirm that responding police units receive alerts in real time.

Local officials expressed strong support for the project.

Board Member Pagulayan and Councilor Galvez both committed to backing the initiative and exploring the passage of a local ordinance to institutionalize its implementation throughout Bacoor.

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Cayetano also said the savings can address classroom shortages that have caused double and triple shifting in many public schools through coordinated and targeted construction efforts, citing the City of Taguig as a model for managing school shifting schedules.

"Maybe we can take Taguig as an example because we started building seven-storey buildings na may elevator," he said.

He also reiterated his long-standing push for stronger financial aid programs, saying government savings should help families struggling with rising prices and the continuing impact of inflation.

Cayetano said the DPWH's effort to lower material costs is a good start toward more accountable spending, but emphasized that the real challenge is ensuring that the savings reach sectors that have long suffered from limited budgets.

He added that true reform in public spending is not only about saving money but also about making sure government funds uplift lives and serve their intended purpose. "You cannot have good governance if you have a corrupt mentality," he said. PR

tionalize its implementation throughout Bacoor.

P/Lt. Desamito thanked all stakeholders and the Bacoor local government unit for their cooperation, underscoring the city's continued commitment to public safety and ensuring the protection of convenience store employees and customers.

Setting the direc-

## Forging...

The Office of the Provincial Cooperatives Development Officer (OP-CDO), brought key stakeholders to the same room during the event "Forging Synergies for Inclusive Growth: A Consultative Meeting on MSME Program Convergence with the Micro, Small and Medium Enterprise Development (MSMED) Plan 2025–2028," held on December 4, at the New Provincial Government Center in Trece Martires City.

The day-long engagement convened 48 participants representing 32 agencies, composed of local government units (LGUs), provincial offices, national government agencies, and non-government organizations. The broad participation highlighted a shared commitment to strengthening collaboration and aligning programs toward a unified, inclusive, and future-ready MSME development agenda for the province.

In her welcome remarks, Ms. Myrachel P. Cuadra, Officer-in-Charge of OPCDO, emphasized that meaningful growth for micro, small, and medium enterprises is best achieved through strong inter-agency convergence. Messages of support followed from Ms. Sheryll S. Loyola, Chairperson of the Provincial Government of Cavite Employees and Community Multi-purpose Cooperative (PGCECC) and Livelihood Division Head of OPCDO, and Ms. Lilibeth R. Chavez, OIC Provincial Director of the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) Cavite, both underscoring the importance of inclusive, sustainable, and resilient MSME development.

Setting the direction for the discussions, Ms. Liza C. Gabatan, Entrepreneurial Division Head of OPCDO, presented an overview of the activity, outlining its objectives and the critical role of coordination in translating policy into impact.

The morning session was highlighted by the presentation of the MSMED Plan 2025–2028 by Ms. Susan Mae Salonga, Assistant Director of the Bureau of Small and Medium Enterprise Development (BSMED)—DTI. Her comprehensive discussion of national MSME priorities was followed by an interactive question-and-answer segment, allowing participants to clarify strategies and identify concrete opportunities for program alignment.

Existing MSME programs and services of LGUs and other stakeholders which were collated beforehand by the OPCDO was then presented, fostering transparency and surfacing areas for complementation and convergence.

In the afternoon, stakeholders took part in a workshop session on MSME program alignment with the MSMED Plan 2025–2028, translating national strategies into actionable provincial and local initiatives.

The consultative meeting concluded with action planning and presentations of the harmonized Cavite MSME Development Plan and convergence opportunities, capped by a Pledge of Support and Commitment Setting.

This collective affirmation reinforced the resolve of partner agencies and stakeholders to move forward not in silos, but in synergy.

Overall, activity marked a significant step toward institutionalizing program convergence in Cavite ensuring that MSME interventions are coordinated, inclusive, and responsive, and that economic growth across the province is not only sustained, but shared. — R. Dones

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