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Cavite health execs break ground for TB culture testing lab



TRECE MARTIRES CITY (PIA)—Provincial health executives in Cavite recently broke ground for the first public tuberculosis culture and drug susceptibility testing laboratory at the ancillary building of the General Emilio Aguinaldo Memorial Hospital here.

Dr. Eva Marie Torio, Department of Health (DOH) infectious diseases unit head, said tuberculosis is one of the major health problems in the province.

"The establishment of the TB culture lab is essential in the diagnosis, monitoring, and treating of drug-resistant TB as well as improving the TB management turnaround time," she added.

During the groundbreaking, district Board Member and health committee chair Reyniel Ambion on

behalf of Governor Jonvic Remulla and Vice Governor Athena Tolentino thanked everyone involved in the project.

"This project will benefit healthcare providers and those who are infected with TB as they need not travel to other hospitals outside Cavite for laboratory testing," Ambion said.

The Philippines ranks fourth among the 30 high-TB burden countries with an estimated 599,000 TB cases, and seventh among the high multidrug resistant TB-burden countries, according to the World Health Organization.

Provincial Health Officer Dr. Nelson Soriano was hopeful that with the province's capacity and logistics for diagnosing tuberculosis, the occurrence of infection can be averted. **(RBF/PIA-Cavite with reports from PICAD)**

Mt. Pico de Loro is now open to hikers

CALAMBA CITY (PIA)— Popular hiking spot Mt. Pico De Loro found in the Palay-Palay-Mataas-na-Gulod protected landscape in Cavite province has started welcoming back hikers and mountaineers on January 12 or six years after it was closed down for rehabilitation.

The Department of Environment and Natural Resource (DENR)-Calabarzon through its Protected Area Management Office (PAMO) earlier hosted a soft opening last December 21 and

22 and tested PAMO's personnel and tour guides in accommodating enthusiasts.

The protected landscape covering an approximate area of 3,972.70 hectares was declared a national park and said to be the last remaining lowland rainforest in Cavite known for the hiking destination Mt. Pico de Loro.

The park's Protected Area Management Board (PAMB) said the two-day dry run attracted a total of 143 hikers who

all booked online through <https://mppmngnp.com/>.

The park will be opened from Wednesdays thru Saturdays with a maximum of 90 hikers per day. It will only accommodate those who reserved or booked online.

The protected area was closed in October 2016 for rehabilitation from voluminous solid wastes, soil erosion and degradation. Authorities also cited uncontrolled vendors along the trail,

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DHSUD holds talk with cause-oriented groups on housing issues

Committed to ensuring the success of their centerpiece housing project, Department of Human Settlements and Urban Development (DHSUD) Secretary Jose Rizalino Acuzar has engaged community and cause-oriented groups in an open dialogue for President Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos Jr.'s Pambansang Pabahay para sa Pilipino Program.

Leaders and representatives from various cause-oriented groups namely Renato Reyes Jr. of BAYAN, Satur Ocampo of Bayan Muna, Estrelita Bagasbas of Kalipunan ng Damayang Mahihirap (Kadamay),

Mary Joy Guevarra of Gabriela, Jaime Valdez of Anak Pawis, Maria Fe Hullipaz of Samahang Maralita sa Temporary Housing-Tondo Chapter, and Andrea Trinidad of Urban Poor Coordinating Council-National Capital Region attended the meeting at the DHSUD Central Office on Thursday.

Secretary Acuzar presented the administration's plan to address the 6.5 million housing need in the country through the Pambansang Pabahay para sa Pilipino Program.

The project aims to build six million housing units in the next six years.

During the dialogue,

the groups have shared their first-hand experiences of relocating to government housing projects and provided insights for consideration in program implementation.

They further expressed appreciation of the program's strategies, noting the program's sustainability.

KADAMAY-Southern Tagalog meanwhile, requested for a separate meeting to further discuss their interest to participate in the flagship housing program, which Secretary Acuzar approved.

"This dialogue is a testament of our administration's flagship

housing program's inclusivity. We, at DHSUD, recognize and value each sector of the economy. When we conceptualized the program, we had everyone in mind. You have my word—every Filipino family can avail of this program," said Secretary Acuzar.

With the growing interest in the housing program, Acuzar reiterated his openness to dialogue with all who wish to participate.

"DHSUD remains open to everyone who wants to join the Pambansang Pabahay Program. Let us all work together to ensure that this housing program succeeds," he added.

Ligtas-Paskuhan

It is with joy to mention that the past ten days ushering Christmas Day had been generally peaceful throughout the country with no major untoward incident reported by Police Regional Offices.

This encompasses the entire period of the 9-day "Simbang Gabi" or the Novena masses that were similarly peaceful and orderly under the watchful presence of police patrollers.

Since the first hour of December 16th until 6:00AM of Christmas Day, December 25th, The PNP Command Center reported zero casualty from firecrackers or stray bullet incidents in all 17 regional jurisdictions.

In general, the Index Crimes went down by 31.13% or 926 from 2,975 from December 1-25, 2021 compared to 2,049 for the same period in 2022. Index Crimes decreased in Luzon by 30.11% (513); Visayas by 29.49% (189); and Mindanao by 35.56% (224).

With continuous police operations, 17 persons were arrested for illegal sale of firecrackers online.

The PNPs deployment of 85 percent of personnel to the different transportation hubs, seaports, airports, business establishments, and other places of convergence resulted to the peaceful means of peoples' celebration of Christmas.

Notable also is the strong collaboration and coordination among concerned government

agencies and support of the community which once again proved its effectiveness in thwarting criminal activities.

"To all PNP personnel, I commend you for the relentless effort in maintaining peace and order during this yuletide season. May all these efforts be sustained until the celebration of the coming year, 2023.

Sa mga kababayan natin, patuloy po ang panawagan naming na iwasan po natin ang gumamit ng mga ilegal na paputok para maging ligtas ang ating bagong taon.

In line with this, we are also working in cooperation with the Bureau of Fire Protection and Department of Health and other partner agencies to help decrease, if not to eliminate, the number of damaged properties and victims of firecrackers-related incidents this new-year celebration.

To our Police officers, I am once again reminding you that administrative sanctions will be filed against those who will be caught in unofficial use or firing their firearms indiscriminately. Hence, as PNP members, we should live with our mandate: to protect and save lives at all times.

To all other gun holders, be responsible owners and do not fire your guns indiscriminately for the law will be swift to go after you.

Let us welcome the new year safely and peacefully.

PBBM leads rollout of internet for students from remote areas on Christmas Eve

President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. led the rollout of internet for students and teachers in remote areas on Christmas Eve as part of his administration's "BroadBand ng Masa Program" (BBMP), which aims to provide internet connectivity in geographically isolated and disadvantaged areas (GIDAs) across the country.

In a surprise appearance in an "Online Kamustahan" organized by the Department of Information and Communications Technology (DICT), the chief executive talked to

students and teachers from various parts of the country, including the remote Pag-asa Island in the West Philippine Sea.

Students and teachers were thrilled to talk directly to President Marcos for the first time.

Many others waved their hands and greeted the President with a Merry Christmas, thanking him for taking the time to join them on Christmas Eve.

"Thank you po sa DICT... Merry Christmas, Mister President," one teacher from Palawan said at the online gathering.

In his message, the President vowed to cover

all areas in the country under the BBMP, particularly those that have no access to mobile cellular services.

"Yung mga malalayo, 'yan ang mas kailangan. Lalo na 'yung mga bata, para sa kanilang eskwela. Buti na lang, maraming bagong teknolohiya na pwedeng gamitin, na we're taking full advantage of," the President said.

The use of digital technologies will significantly improve government services and help the country improve interconnectivity, according to the President.

"Para naman kahit saan sa Pilipinas, makakaramdam tayo ng connectivity. At napakaimportante na ngayon niyan," the President pointed out.

DICT Secretary Ivan John Uy said the program seeks to build a "direct connection" between geographically isolated and disadvantaged areas and the government.

"Meron na po tayong direct na koneksyon sa pamahalaan, sa paggamit nitong mga teknolohiya. Marami pong magagawa, hindi lang sa mga bata, sa estudyante, kundi pati sa transaksyon natin sa gobyerno," Uy said.

"Paiigtingin po natin ito, at gagawin ho nating mas marami ang

koneksyon," the DICT secretary pointed out.

According to the DICT, among the government's accomplishments towards enhancing the country's digital infrastructure are the Free Wi-Fi for All Program, which established an additional 628 operational free Wi-Fi sites – on top of the existing 4,129 sites – bringing the total live sites to 4,757 areas nationwide.

This government service has been accessed by at least 2.1 million unique users, which translates to 100,000 families provided with connectivity all over the country.

Among those who joined the "Online Kamustahan" event were students and school representatives from Pag-asa Island Elementary School in Kalayaan, Palawan; Armenia Elementary School in Uson, Masbate; Bandera Elementary School in the Island Garden City of Samal; Amai Pakpak Central Elementary School in Marawi City, Lanao del Sur; Dioryong Integrated School in Nagtipunan, Quirino Province; Villa Espina Elementary School in Lopez, Quezon; and Landang Laum Elementary School in Zamboanga City.

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MT. PICO...

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campsite, and summit and unregulated number of hikers.

The DENR said the closure gave way to the clean-up, rehabilitation, and improvement of Mt. Pico de Loro.

Stalls for food vendors and souvenir items were constructed at the DENR park station where the jump-off point is located. Concrete stairs and steps were also constructed along the eroded portions of Mt. Pico de Loro to control soil erosion and mountain degradation.

DENR CALABARZON said online booking can be done through the website mppmngnp.com and announcements can be seen at the official Facebook page of PAMB-MPPMNGPL @picoPAMB. (PB/DENR IV-A)

2022: 'Remarkable year' for Filipinas

MANILA — No one could doubt that 2022 was a banner year for the Philippine women's football team.

The now-called "Filipinas" fulfilled what Filipino football fans are hoping for with the men's team, winning a Southeast Asian Games medal again after a long while by ruling the AFF Women's Championship last August in front of up to 8,257 fans at the Rizal Memorial Stadium.

The biggest story of all, the Filipinas has qualified for the FIFA Women's World Cup.

"It's been a remarkable year and to sum it up in just two sentences would be an

injustice. To qualify for a World Cup for the first time in the history of the country is truly amazing. The bronze medal at the SEA Games was amazing. Winning the tournament at home for the first time, the AFF, was really really remarkable and humbling. To have that in front of our home crowd is really special," said Coach Alen Stajcic in a yearend recap.

The Filipinas' success led to many friendlies, particularly against squads also bound for the FIFA WWC, giving them an idea of how to gear up for the event.

"The first trip to

Europe, winning in Central America, getting a point in Central America. The first trip to South America, getting a point in South America. Learning how to travel across time zones and getting your body right in preparation for matches are so many things that we achieved, so many things that we did, different footballing countries, and different pedigrees," Stajcic said.

The team has played 30 matches throughout the year, winning 18 of these, including a penalty shootout win against



Chinese Taipei in the AFC Women's Asian Cup quarterfinals in January that sealed their FIFA WWC berth. They also won against Myanmar in the SEA Games bronze medal match last May, and victories against perennial powerhouses Vietnam and Thailand in the AFF Women's Championship playoffs in August to take the championship gold.

He described the 18 wins out of the 30 matches in 12 months as "incredible statistics and an incredible ride" for the team.

The Australian mentor then credited all the Filipinas'

achievements to their team manager, Jeff Cheng.

"We've said it many times, but the support of Jefferson Cheng is amazing, the players and the staff are blessed to have his support in sponsoring this team and for us to achieve to be able to achieve the things that we have. It's been an incredible journey," Stajcic said.

However, he added, the real battle has yet to come, admitting that they have a lot of things to improve.

He hinted that he might recruit more talented Filipina players to the national team for

added firepower ahead of the FIFA WWC.

"We know how much we have to work harder to climb up that mountain next year. We've raised the expectations of the country which is fantastic, we've raised the expectations of the playing group which is even better now it's about the players competing not just for the country, but competing for spots, increasing the depth and the flexibility, people able to do different roles and understanding roles even better," Stajcic added. **(PNA)**

Azkals fall to Indonesia to close out AFF ME Cup stint

MANILA — The Philippine Azkals started 2023 on a sour note on Monday night after dropping a 1-2 defeat to Indonesia in their final match in the 2022-23 AFF Mitsubishi Electric Cup at the Rizal Memorial Stadium in Manila

Despite a hot start, the Azkals could not give longtime captain Stephan Schrock a fitting sendoff in his retirement match as the Garudas formally punched a place in the tournament semifinals.

Dendy Sulistyawan put the visiting squad ahead with a 21st-minute header off a long throw-in to the penalty box that Anthony Pinthus could not tap away.

Marselino Philipus then slotted a 43rd-minute goal from just the edge of the box as Pinthus was once again beaten to the ball.

Jens Rasmussen struck one back for the Azkals in the 83rd minute, but the home side could not complete the comeback.

Already sensing defeat come halftime, however, the Ultras Filipinas, arguably the top ultras fan group visibly present in all the national team events including those of the Azkals, expressed their disappointment by flashing placards with letters that spell "Put some f***** fight!"

While it mainly was a call for the Azkals to bounce back in the second half after the poor first-half performance, the Ultras colored the letter P and the two F's in red for emphasis, apparently calling out the Philippine Football Federation (PFF) as well.

The Azkals missed the knockout stages for the second straight time, and they fell to fourth place in Group A with only their 5-1 win against Brunei last week to show.

Coupled with their 2-3 defeat at Cambodia, this was the worst performance by the Azkals since the pre-"Miracle in Hanoi" days, which for the Ultras was a valid reason to lash out at the PFF.

Thailand still top seed

Despite the win, Indonesia settled for the second seed in Group A after Thailand defeated Cambodia, 3-1, in a simultaneous showdown.

Over at the Thammasat Stadium in Rangsit, Thailand, the host squad found itself in danger of entering halftime goalless as Cambodia, needing a win to sneak into the semifinals, brought the challenge to them for most of the first half.

However, Teerasil Dangda converted a penalty in the second minute of stoppage time to put Thailand ahead.

Sumanya Purisai then started the second half with a 50th-minute strike to give the Thais a 2-0 cushion.

Cambodia got back into the match as Sieng Chanthea razzled and dazzled past the Thailand backline for the 68th-minute goal to make it 2-1.

Thailand got the last laugh as Dangda completed his brace just before the second-half stoppage time began.

Thailand and Indonesia finished the group stages unbeaten at three wins and one draw each for 10 points, but Thailand took the top spot with a better goal difference. **(PNA)**

Schrock to retire from Azkals

MANILA — Stephan Schrock will be playing his final match in a Philippine Azkals kit when the national team takes on Indonesia in its last assignment in the AFF Mitsubishi Electric Cup on Monday night at the Rizal Memorial Stadium.

In the first sports news for 2023 right on New Year's Day, Schrock announced during the pregame press conference at the nearby Ninoy Aquino Stadium that he is calling it an international career after nearly 12 years starting in 2011.

"In football, nothing is for sure, but 99 percent this would be my last game for the national team," Schrock said.

According to Schrock, he began pondering about retiring

from international football when former Azkals coach Thomas Dooley left him out of the national team pool for the AFC Asian Cup Qualifiers last year.

"Given that I was not selected in the AFC qualifiers, I think it's about time to step down and to enjoy the last 90 minutes of my Azkals career," Schrock further said.

The 36-year-old midfielder will play his 55th match in the first team in the Azkals' 8:30 p.m. showdown against Indonesia.

The Azkals are already out of contention in the playoff race, but they would want to give Schrock a fitting sendoff by denying Indonesia a shot at stealing the top seed in Group A from Thailand entering the

semifinals.

"Obviously a sad moment for us that we're eliminated already, but there's always something to play for when you wear the national team jersey, and we wanna finish the tournament with a good performance and with a good result obviously," Schrock further said. "We want to at least duplicate our performance of what we've shown against Brunei."

It's uncertain if his club career will follow suit, although he remains listed as the playing assistant coach of the Azkals Development Team in the PFL even as his post-playing job is now set by founding the Azkals Development Academy. **(PNA)**

Better consular services, more overseas Pinoys assisted under PBBM admin

As part of efforts to bolster response to the needs of overseas Filipinos (OFs) under the administration of President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr., the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) said it has repatriated more than 7,000 OFs this year as part of its duty to ensure the

welfare of Filipinos abroad.

Through the repatriation efforts led by the Office of the Undersecretary for Migrant Workers Affairs (OUMWA), a total of 7,880 overseas Filipinos were repatriated from January to November 2022.

In its accomplishment report presented to Malacañang, the DFA said 57.67 percent of this number are from the Middle East; 942 OFs and distressed Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) are from Kuwait, and 70 are from Sri Lanka.

President Marcos



earlier said the coordination between the DFA and the newly created Department of Migrant Workers (DMW) would be further strengthened in a bid to provide assistance to OFs.

"Lalo nating paigtingin ang tambalang ito upang makapagbigay nang mabilis at karampatang serbisyo at tulong sa mga overseas Filipinos na nangangailangan ng tulong," the President said in a meeting with the Filipino community in Cambodia in November, which took place on the sidelines of the 40th and 41st Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Summit and Related Summits.

In his official trips abroad, the chief executive has described OFWs as the pride of the Philippines who "bring honor to the Filipino nation."

Marcos likewise recognized the valuable contribution of OFWs, especially during the time when the country's economy was dampened by the COVID-19 pandemic.

"You provided a much-needed boost to the pandemic-stricken economy... nakakapagpondo tayo ng mga social programs na tumutulong sa mga mahihirap at saka 'yung pinaka nangangailangan ng tulong na pamilya sa Pilipinas," the President said in a speech in

Phnom Penh.

Meanwhile, on the delivery of consular services, DFA issued a total of 3,589,620 passports from January to October this year.

The DFA opened an additional six temporary off-site passport services facilities.

As of November this year, DFA has issued 55,574 visas and 551,635 Apostille certificates.

On bilateral engagements, bilateral agreements were signed on defense, culture, counterterrorism, trade and investment, technology and data protection, and migrant workers protection.

PBBM admin activates thousands of areas under Broadband ng Masa program in 2022

The administration of President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. has activated thousands of previously offline areas under the Broadband ng Masa (BBM) and Free Wi-Fi for All programs of the Department of Information and Communications Technology (DICT).

Reporting its accomplishments for 2022, the DICT said 4,757 live sites were activated in 17 regions, 75 provinces and the National Capital Region under the government's digitalization initiative.

This is in addition

to 606 cities and municipalities which have undergone digitalization.

To promote investments, the DICT carried out the Digital Startup Development and Acceleration Program (DSDAP), led the Brunei Darussalam-Indonesia-Malaysia-Philippines East ASEAN Growth Area (BIMP-EAGA) ICT cluster for the year 2022-2025, and signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with Singapore's ministry of communications and information.

In order to improve bureaucratic efficiency, the DICT launched the e-Gov Super App, the country's first one-stop platform for local and national government services that will streamline processes and transactions and ensure ease of doing business for Filipinos.

To ensure social protection, the DICT pushed for the passage of the SIM Card Registration Act, monitored more than 1,000 cybersecurity threats, conducted sessions on Data Privacy Act, and launched

Cybersecurity Awareness programs.

The DICT also listed in its year-end report its plans and targets for next year.

These include plans for digital infrastructure, investment promotion, as well as improvements in bureaucratic efficiency.

Under its digital infrastructure thrust, the DICT plans to complete the Broadband ng Masa's Luzon Bypass Infrastructure (LBI) Phase 1 in the first half of 2023, launch more than 15,000 free Wi-Fi sites, and improve

satellite connectivity with Starlink and Satellite Systems Providers and/or Operators (SSPOs).

To promote investments, the Digital Cities Program will set up Information Technology and Business Process Management (IT-BPM) locations in 31 cities by 2025 to generate jobs in the countryside.

The DICT will also push for the development and implementation of interagency initiatives such as the National ID of the Philippine Statistics Authority

(PSA), iLGU of the Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG), Vaxcert of the Department of Health (DOH), E-Commerce of the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI), and OFW App of the Department of Migrant Workers (DMW).

The DICT will also play a significant part in the implementation of the SIM Card Registration Law, being the agency mandated to collect SIM Card registries from public telecommunications entities (PTEs) and maintain the records.

And to protect the country from online threats, the DICT will develop the National Cybersecurity Plan for 2023.