ISSN: 2651-8228

Perlas ng SILANGAN BALITA

Entered as FIRST CLASS MAIL at Imus Post Office with Business Mail Permit No. IC-19-06-250

Vol. 19 No. 21 May 18-24, 2020 P 10.00

Cavite to test 1,100 a day for COVID-19 after university lab gets green light

Cavite is set to ramp up its local testing capacity after the Department of Health (DOH) approved the use of a university molecular laboratory in the province to test for coronavirus.

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Cavite ecozone hums back to life

BARTOLABAC

TAÑAG

REMULLA

About 40,000 workers are expected to report back to factories and assembly lines in Cavite once businesses reopen after nearly two months of suspended operations due to the lockdown imposed by the national government to contain the spread of the coronavirus.

As Cavite prepares to ease its quarantine rules, local officials are still making adjustments to travel restrictions, especially since public transport is allowed to resume only on a limited passenger capacity.

Another issue was the cross-border movement between provinces with varying sets of rules, said Noel Bartolabac, regional director of the Department of the Interior and Local Government and of the Inter-Agency Task Force on Emerging Infectious Diseases (IATF-EID) in Calabarzon (Cavite, Laguna, Batangas, Rizal and Quezon).

This affects particularly the workers living in Laguna but who are employed in manufacturing and business processing companies inside Cavite's export processing zones. Laguna remains under a modified enhanced community quarantine until May 31, while the rest of the region transitions to a more relaxed modified general quarantine by May 16.

Norma Tañag, the Philippine Economic Zone Authority (Peza) manager for Cavite, said that ideally, workers with company identification cards and employment certificates should be allowed through the checkpoints. "But we still encourage [companies to provide] shuttle services to avoid contact with the general public during commute," she said.

Under the new guidelines, companies are allowed to increase their production capacity up to 70 percent of their total workforce. Evening shifts will also be allowed to resume.

"They [companies] are all preparing for that now," Tañag said.

DOH-Calabarzon to appeal decision to put Cavite, Rizal provinces under GCQ starting May 16

The Department of Health (DOH) Region 4A will appeal the decision of the government to place Cavite and Rizal provinces under a relaxed general community quarantine (GCQ) starting May 16 amid the continuing threat of the novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19).

DOH-4A regional director Eduardo Janairo said they will ask the Inter-Agency Task Force for the Management of Emerging Infectious Diseases (IATF-MEID) to reconsider its recommendation, which was

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Perlas ng Silangan Balita is published weekly and circulated in the province of Cavite and throughout the Philippines. It has its editorial and business offices at Block 16 Lot 12 Good Family Homes Subdivision, Anabu I-A, City of Imus, Cavite. It is registered with the Department of Trade and Industry-Philippines under Certificate No. 04264737. Our landline is (046) 489-1878; cellphone is 0927-7569547 and e-mail is nestorsbarco@yahoo.com.ph

Subscription Rate:
1 month - P 40.00
3 months - 120.00
6 months - 240.00
One year - 480.00

Advertising Rate:
Commercial- P200/ col. cm.
Legal - 160.00/ col. cm.

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Biggest economic decline since waning years of Marcos regime seen

The Philippine economy's contraction this year could be greater than earlier predicted as measures to contain the coronavirus outbreak weigh on domestic demand and investments, and the budget deficit is expected to rise sharply in 2020.

Gross domestic product (GDP) was expected to decline 2 percent to 3.4 percent this year, the first contraction in 22 years since the Asian financial crisis and the biggest decline since the waning years of the dictatorship of Ferdinand Marcos, and worse than the government's forecast of -1.0 percent to zero growth in March.

The further downgrade was decided last May 12 during a meeting of the Cabinet-level Development Budget Coordination Committee (DBCC) chaired by Budget Secretary Wendel Avisado. The DBCC is an interagency body in charge of setting the government's macroeconomic goals and policies.

While full-year 2020 GDP may slide at a faster pace, acting Socioeconomic Planning Secretary Karl Kendrick Chua said last May 13 that he was hopeful of a quick, "V-shaped" recovery before the end of the year.

"Probably more negative in the second quarter before positive growth in the second half," said Chua, who heads the state planning agency National Economic and Development Authority (Neda).

In March, at the onset of the enhanced community quarantine (ECQ) imposed on Luzon and other parts of the country to halt the spread of the coronavirus, the DBCC projected GDP to post zero growth or contract by 0.8 percent to 1 percent.

But the GDP already shrank by 0.2 percent year-on-year during the first quarter— ending 84 quarters of growth since 1999 — no thanks to Taal Volcano's eruption and the coronavirus pandemic, which not only slowed global trade and tourism but also forced lockdowns.

(DOH... from page 1)

approved by President Rodrigo Duterte, to lift the enhanced community quarantine (ECQ) in Cavite and Rizal provinces as these are among the areas in Calabarzon region that have recorded high COVID-19 infections.

"Gagawa kami ng appeal para ma-consider yung dapat i-consider sa Calabarzon kasi ang alam ko mas alam namin ito kesa sa kanila," Janairo said.

In its Resolution No. 37, the IATF-EID released last May 16, Metro Manila and Laguna remained under modified ECQ as earlier announced.

Among the areas in Calabarzon region, only the Laguna province will be placed under MECQ starting May 16 as stated in the resolution released by the IATF last May 12.

The IATF Resolution No. 35 states that a modified ECQ will be imposed on Metro Manila, Laguna and Cebu City until May 31.

Latest data from the DOH-4A showed that Rizal province has 343 confirmed infections and 45 fatalities - the highest recorded in the region.

Laguna has 333 confirmed cases with 30 deaths and 171 recovered patients while Cavite reported 234 positive cases with 25 deaths.

"Hindi kami makapagsang-ayon doon dahil mali yun eh. Ang data nila with the local at saka national at dito sa region malaki ang discrepancy eh," Janairo said.

The health official said he will also ask the IATF to consider the proximity and safety of Rizal and Cavite provinces to Metro Manila, which is the epicenter of COVID-19 in the country.

The IATF said provinces, cities, and municipalities characterized as low, moderate, and high-risk may appeal their quarantine classification to the task force's screening and validation committee not later than May 13.

(CAVITE... from page 1)

The DOH and the Research Institute for Tropical Medicine (RITM), the country's main testing center, issued the certification on May 8 for the De La Salle Medical Health and Sciences Institute in Dasmariñas City to perform independent testing.

It was the first subnational government-accredited laboratory in South Luzon seen to help free up RITM of the bulk of specimen samples at least those coming from Cavite.

Since the local outbreak, provinces in the Cavite, Laguna, Batangas, Rizal, Quezon (CALABARZON) region submit specimen samples collected from its residents to RITM.

Haydee Sy, De La Salle's director for Institutional Communications, said with the laboratory's current set up—three polymerase chain reaction (PCR) and a natch CS extraction machine that automates the testing process—Cavite can now test as much as 1,100 samples in a day.

Over the past month, the De La Salle laboratory has started taking in samples from suspected or probable cases in the province although only for the purposes of acquiring the DOH certification.

"We'll just finish those (already in the laboratory) and after that, we can start with the targeted mass testing," Sy said last May 10.

Governor Jonvic Remulla said the order for the mass testing would start with the healthcare workers and medical frontliners.

After which, Sy said they would test people involved in relief missions, the personnel manning border checkpoints, and then the factory workers and market vendors as well as people in their households.

EXTRA JUDICIAL SETTLEMENT OF ESTATE

NOTICE is hereby given that the estate of the late **CRISANTO ARGA** and **AQUILINA AUSTRIA-ARGA** who both died intestate on February 20, 2006 and on January 7, 1998 both in Dasmariñas, Cavite, respectively, consisting of certain real property/ies situated at Lot 3805-C-3-C-3, Bo. of Salitran, Dasmariñas City, Cavite containing an area of Two Hundred Ninety Eight (298 sq.m.) square meters under Transfer Certificate of Title (TCT) NO. T-305230 and Lot 3805-C-3-C-4, Bo. of Salitran, Dasmariñas City, Cavite containing an area of Two Hundred Seventy Six (276 sq.m.) square meters under Transfer Certificate of Title (TCT) NO. T-305229 of the Registry of Deeds for the Province of Cavite, respectively, has been adjudicated and extra-judicially settled by and among their heirs in pro indiviso equal shares on March 12, 2020 in Dasmariñas City, Cavite before Notary Public Atty. Kareen T. Hermosa and entered in her Notarial Register as Doc. No. 257; Page No. 52; Book No. 126; Series of 2020.

(Sgd.) Affiants/Heirs

Publication : PERLAS NG SILANGAN BALITA
Dates : May 18, 25 and June 1, 2020

EXTRA JUDICIAL SETTLEMENT OF ESTATE

NOTICE is hereby given that the estate of the late **HERNANI E. VALIENTE** who died intestate on April 1, 2006 at Calamba, Laguna, consisting of a certain real property situated at Blk. 80, Lot 25, Bautista Property, Sampaloc 4, City of Dasmariñas, Cavite containing an area of Twenty Five (25 sq.m.) square meters, more or less by virtue of Deed of Sale executed by Jorito Repol on 26 September 2007 notarized before notary public Bonifacio G. Caboboy, Jr. entered and registered in his notarial register as per Doc. No. 78, Page No. 15, Book No. 01, Series of 2007 has been adjudicated and extra-judicially settled by and among his heirs in pro indiviso equal shares on March 14, 2020 Dasmariñas City, Cavite before Notary Public Atty. Kareen T. Hermosa and entered in her Notarial Register as Doc. No. 292; Page No. 59; Book No. 126; Series of 2020.

(Sgd.) Affiants/Heirs

Publication : PERLAS NG SILANGAN BALITA
Dates : May 18, 25 and June 1, 2020

Corporate income tax cut to 25% by July pushed

The Philippines' corporate income tax rate—Asean's (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) highest at 30 percent—can slide to 25 percent during a one-time, big-time reduction planned in July if Congress will listen to the economic team's pitch contained in its proposed COVID-19 recovery program.

Called the Philippine Program for Recovery with Equity and Solidarity, or "PH-Progreso," Acting Socioeconomic Planning Secretary Karl Kendrick Chua told the online "Sulong Pilipinas" youth workshop last May 14 that this plan, which was eyed for implementation between June and December this year, sought budget and procurement flexibility, reprioritization of the P4.1-trillion 2020 budget, prioritization of "Build, Build, Build" infrastructure program resumption, creation of jobs and increases in incomes, infusion of equity and liquidity into affected firms as well as guarantees through the financial sector, and targeted tax incentives for investors.

Finance Secretary Carlos Dominguez III said the PH-Progreso package would cost P130 billion to P160 billion, but its multiplier effect would bring some P800 billion to P1 trillion in value-added to the economy.

Through PH-Progreso, the economy may achieve a "V-shaped" recovery, Chua said, after first-quarter gross domestic product (GDP) shrank by 0.2 percent and the second quarter expected to contract deeper to bring the Philippines into recession.

Last May 12, the economic team projected GDP to decline by 2-3.4 percent in 2020.

To recuperate, the economic team was pitching to Congress three bills: "Bayanihan 2" for spending and capital support to restore consumers' jobs and incomes, a follow-through to the Bayanihan to Heal as One Act containing the government's initial COVID-19 response; the Corporate Recovery and Tax Incentives for Enterprises Act (Create)—an upgraded version of the pending Corporate Income Tax and Incentives Reform Act (Citira), and the proposed 2021 national budget of P4.18 trillion approved by the Cabinet-level Development Budget Coordination Committee (DBCC) last May 12.

Under Create, Chua said an across-the-board, immediate lowering of the corporate income tax rate to 25 percent would happen by the middle of the year—unlike Citira, under which the reduction of the tax rate will be gradual over a 10-year period before reaching 20 percent.

Also, Chua said Create would extend net operating loss carryover to five years from three years under the Tax Code, while "losses in 2020 can be credited to future tax payment."

Based on Chua's presentation, new investors would enjoy "targeted, time-bound, and tailor-fitted tax incentives to proactively attract the right types of investment (demand-driven led by the Board of Investments, not supply-driven, to attach investors leaving China, etc.)."

For existing investors, there will be no change in present incentives for the next four to nine years, he said.

As for investors in the countryside, Chua said "targeted and time-bound tax incentives [will] support the Balik Probinsya, Bagong Pag-asa program."

"In all these, the Fiscal Incentives Review Board (FIRB) [will] manage and decide the grant of tax incentives to improve governance," Chua added.

"Enhancements under a more COVID-19-responsive version of the bill could include the power of the President, upon recommendation of the FIRB, to grant a mix of incentives that better suit an investor's unique needs," Dominguez earlier said.

AUCTION SALE

Ang sumusunod na mga sangay ng **GIE JARO PAWNSHOP CORP.** ay magsasagawa ng subasta mula ika- **25 hanggang ika- 29 ng MAYO 2020** para sa lahat ng hindi natubos na sangla para sa buwan ng **DISYEMBRE 2019. JULIO R. PEÑA Auctioneer**

1. **ALFONSO BRANCH :** Poblacion II, Alfonso, Cavite, 9:00 am
2. **ANABU BRANCH:** Brgy. Anabu I-C, Imus City, Cavite, 8:00a.m
3. **BINAKAYAN BRANCH :** Balsahan Binakayan Kawit, Cavite, 9:00 a.m
4. **BINAKAYAN KAWIT, CAVITE BRANCH 2 :** Tirona Hiway, Tramo Buetayan, Binakayan, Kawit, Cavite, 9:00 am
5. **BAILEN BRANCH :** Real St. Poblacion 2 General Emilio Aguinaldo Hi Way, Cavite, 9:00 am
6. **BACLARAN BRANCH :** 0061 Quirino Ave. Baclaran, Parañaque City, 9:00 am
7. **BACLARAN, PARAÑAQUE CITY BRANCH :** C-Side Comm'l Ctr. A. Garcia St. Corner Roxas Blvd., Baclaran, Parañaque City, 9:00 am
8. **BIÑAN CITY, LAGUNA BRANCH :** Capinpin St. Poblacion Biñan City, Laguna, 9:00 a.m
9. **BUHAY NA TUBIG:** Buhay na tubig Imus City, Cavite, 9:00 am
10. **BUCANDALA BRANCH :** FCRS Building Bucandala II, Imus City, Cavite 9:00 am
11. **CAVITE CITY BRANCH :** 654 P. Burgos Ave. Caridad Cavite City, Cavite, 9:00 a.m
12. **AREA D BRANCH :** Blk 9 Lot 2 Cluster A, Brgy. Luzviminda 1, Dasmariñas City, Cavite, 9:00 a.m
13. **AREA D 2 BRANCH :** Blk A-1 Lot 1 Luzviminda 1, Dasmariñas Cavite, 9:00 a.m
14. **AREA F BRANCH :** Congressional Road Sta. Cruz II DBB Area F, Dasmariñas, Cavite, 9:00 a.m
15. **AREA G BRANCH :** Congressional Road, North Brgy. Sta. Lucia, Dasmariñas, Cavite, 9:00 am
16. **DASMA BAYAN BRANCH :** 108 G/F, CM Plaza Bldg., #61 Don P. Campos Zone III Dasmariñas, Cavite, 9:00 a.m
17. **INDANG BRANCH :** A. Mabini St. Poblacion III, Indang, Cavite, 9:00 a.m
18. **IMUS NUGUID :** Appliance 6 & 5 Imus, Public Market Imus, Cavite, 9:00 am
19. **IMUS PUBLIC MARKET BRANCH 2 :** Imus Public Market, TanzangLuma 1, Imus City, Cavite, 9:00 am
20. **IMUS PUBLIC MARKET, CAVITE BRANCH :** Drygoods 48 Imus Public Market, Tanzang Luma 1, Imus, Cavite, 9:00 am
21. **KADIWA, DASMARIÑAS CITY, CAVITE BRANCH:** Congressional North Avenue. Brgy. 102, Dasmariñas City, Cavite, 9:00 am
22. **KADIWA BRANCH 2:** Blk 2 Lot 1 Sanlang Sikap Brgy Burol 1 Dasmariñas, Cavite, 9:00 am
23. **LIPA 2 BRANCH :** Blk 3, 15 V. Malabanan St. Brgy. 4 Lipa City Batangas, 9:00 am
24. **LIPA 3 BRANCH :** Semordoc Bldg. P. Torres St. Brgy. 5 Lipa City Batangas, 9:00 am
25. **LEMERY BRANCH :** Sanggalang St., Maguihan, Lemery, Batangas, 9:00 am
26. **LAS PIÑAS BRANCH :** 4250 Aguilar Ave Pulang Lupa Dos Las Piñas City 1740, 9:00 am
27. **LAS PIÑAS 1 BRANCH :** U1 G/F Gochengco Bldg., 404 Alabang-Zapote Road, Talon Uno, Las Piñas City, 9:00 am
28. **LAS PIÑAS CITY BRANCH 1 :** 425 Alabang Zapote Road Talon 1, Las Piñas City, 9:00 am
29. **LAS PIÑAS BRANCH :** 132 Saging St., CAA BF International, Las Piñas City 1740, 9:00 am
30. **LAS PIÑAS CITY BRANCH 2 :** Door 2 G/F Rubetan Bldg 1, CV Starr Ave., Pamplona Dos, Las Piñas City, 9:00 am
31. **MANGGAHAN 1 BRANCH :** 083 Governor's Drive, Brgy. Manggahan, General Trias, Cavite, 9:00 a.m
32. **MANGGAHAN II BRANCH :** Crisanto M. Delos Reyes Ave. Brgy. Manggahan, General Trias, Cavite, 9:00 a.m
33. **MALABON BRANCH:** Brgy. Pinaza, General Trias, Cavite 9:00 a.m
34. **MALAGASANG IMUS, CAVITE BRANCH :** Malagasang II - A Imus, Cavite, 9:00 a.m
35. **MOLINO 1 BRANCH :** 278 Molino Rd. Molino 3, Bacoor, Cavite, 9:00 am
36. **MOLINO BRANCH :** Infront of Camella Springville Molino III Bacoor, Cavite 4102, 9:00 am
37. **MOLINO BACOOR CITY, CAVITE BRANCH 3 :** Molino Road, Molino I Bacoor City, Cavite, 9:00 am
38. **NAIC BRANCH :** Pascual Poblete St Cor., Zamora St Gombalza Naic, Cavite 4110, 9:00 am
39. **NAIC CAVITE BRANCH 1 :** Capt. C. Nazareno Naic, Cavite, 9:00 a.m
40. **NASUGBU BRANCH:** # 168 J.P. Laurel St. Brgy. 3 Nasugbu Batangas 9:00 am
41. **NOVELETA 2 BRANCH :** Poblacion, Noveleta, Cavite 9:00 am
42. **PALIPARAN BRANCH :** Paliparan Wet & Dry Market, Paliparan III, Dasmariñas, Cavite, 9:00 a.m
43. **PALIPARAN BRANCH 2 :** Stall #2 Baucare Bldg. Dela Cuesta St., SitioPinongGebon, Paliparan 3, Dasmariñas, Cavite, 9:00 am
44. **PALA PALA DASMARIÑAS CITY, CAVITE BRANCH :** RIVA Bldg. Aguinaldo Highway, Brgy. Sampaloc 1, Dasmariñas City, Cavite, 9:00 am
45. **PASAY BRANCH :** 688 Andrews Avenue Villamor Air base, Brgy. 183 NCR Fourth District Pasay City 1300, 9:00
46. **RETIRO BRANCH :** #73 ANS Amoranto Sr. Ave. Paang Bundok Quezon City, 9:00 am
47. **SALITRAN DASMARIÑAS CITY, CAVITE BRANCH :** Jose Abad Santos Ave., Brgy. Sampaloc 1, Dasmariñas City, Cavite, 9:00 am
48. **SILANG BRANCH :** 55 P.Montoya St., Poblacion V, Silang, Cavite, 9:00 am
49. **STA. ROSA 1 BRANCH :** Unit 4 B1 L11 Ciudad Grande Subd., Market Area, Sta. Rosa City, Laguna, 9:00 am
50. **STA. ROSA 2 BALIBAGO BRANCH :** G/F JMB Bldg. F. Reyes St. Balibago Sta. Rosa City, Laguna, 9:00 a.m
51. **STA. ROSA 3:** #1601 Purok 5 National Highway Dila Sta. Rosa Laguna, 9:00 am
52. **BALIBAGO 2:** #1478 National Hi Way Balibago Sta. Rosa Laguna, 9:00 am
53. **TANZA, CAVITE BRANCH :** A Soriano Highway, Daang Amaya 1, Tanza, Cavite, 9:00 a.m
54. **TANZA CAVITE BRANCH 2 :** Cantia St., De Roman Subd. Daang Amaya 1, Tanza, Cavite, 9:00 am
55. **TRECE MARTIRES BRANCH :** 5-D Extension West Public Market, San Agustin, Trece Martires City, Cavite, 9:00 a.m
56. **TRECE BRANCH 2 :** Purok 7, Brgy. San Agustin Trece Martires City, Cavite, 9:00 am
57. **TRECE BRANCH 3 :** Brgy. Hugo Perez Trece Martires City, Cavite, 9:00 am
58. **ZAPOTE, BACOOR CITY, CAVITE BRANCH :** Stall #2 HDR Bacoor Public Market Zapote IV, Bacoor City, Cavite, 9:00 am
59. **ZAPOTE BRANCH 2 :** Zapote IV, Bacoor, Cavite, 9:00 am

BIR: No more tax deadline extension as gov't in dire need of funds

Although enhanced community quarantine (ECQ) has been extended but modified for another 15 days in COVID-19 hot spots, the Bureau of Internal Revenue (BIR) will no longer push back tax deadlines beyond the latest extensions as the government direly needed money to respond to the pandemic.

The BIR's Revenue Regulations (RR) No. 11-2020 published early this month provided that "in case of another quarantine extension, defined extended due dates... shall be allowed further extension of 15 calendar days."

However, Internal Revenue Deputy Commissioner Arnel S.D. Guballa said last May 14 that the BIR will amend this rule.

"There's still a quarantine. It's just that we won't allow an extension," Guballa said.

"The government needs funds," Guballa added.

Last May 12, the Cabinet-level Development Budget Coordination Committee (DBCC) slashed the government's revenue collection target for 2020 to P2.61 trillion from the March projection of P3.17 trillion as the tax take was expected to be weak amid a bad economy.

In December last year, the DBCC programmed tax and nontax revenues to amount to P3.49 trillion this year, higher than the actual take of P3.14 trillion in 2019.

Guballa said that the BIR will first validate with the DBCC if the agency's 2020 goal was also reduced.

Last March, the BIR's 2020 tax-collection target was downscaled to P2.26 trillion from P2.58 billion previously in light of the COVID-19 pandemic's impact on the economy.

Under RR 11-2020 signed by Finance Secretary Carlos G. Dominguez III and Internal Revenue Commissioner Caesar R. Dulay, the deadline to file and pay 2019 income tax returns (ITRs) was further extended until June 14, a Sunday.

RR 11-2020 amended an earlier regulation by inserting this rule: "If the new extended due dates fall on a holiday or a non-working day, then, the submission and/or filing contemplated herein shall be made on the next working day."

As such, the actual cut-off date for the June 14 deadline will be on June 15, Monday.

But Dulay said taxpayers "should not wait for the last day" to settle their 2019 dues, as they were already given two more months to do so from the mandatory deadline.

Also, RR 11-2020 moved to June 22 the last day to avail of the ongoing tax amnesty on delinquencies, from April 23 originally and the two earlier extensions to May 23 and June 8 following the prolonged ECQ periods.

Besides the 2019 ITR and tax amnesty deadlines, RR 11-2020 also adjusted cut-off dates for 48 other transactions and documents, including value-added tax (VAT) refunds, and tax credit/refund applications, among others.

Last month, the Department of Finance (DOF) reported that the BIR—the country's biggest revenue agency—collected P480.64 billion from Jan. 1 to April 17, down 32 percent year-on-year and 45.3-percent below target.

During the period April 1-17, the BIR collections reached only P25.01 billion.

In the past, BIR collections peaked in April as the Tax Code mandated the deadline of filing and payment of the previous year's ITRs on or before April 15.

On the other hand, expenditures on public goods and services were now estimated by the DBCC to hit P4.18 trillion for the entire year, higher than the P4.16 trillion programmed last March as "the emerging disbursement program takes into account the releases for COVID-19 initiatives charged to savings coming from austerity measures, among others."

The larger expenditures and weaker revenues will inflate this year's budget deficit of the national government to P1.56 trillion, equivalent to 8.1 percent of gross domestic product—wider than the estimated P990.1 billion or 5.3 percent of GDP last March.

Hotel buffets on the chopping block in post-coronavirus travel

Contactless check-in and reduced breakfast buffets are among some of the new measures that will be adopted by Europe's biggest tour operator, in a strong sign of what's to come in packaged holiday travel.

Tui Group, which is based in Hannover, Germany and is made up of 1,600 travel agencies, five airlines, 400 hotels and 18 cruise liners, released a 10-point, post-coronavirus plan for its hotel operations in a bid to boost consumer confidence.

"Customer surveys clearly indicate that safety and hygiene will be of paramount importance for holidaymakers after the lockdown," said Sebastian Ebel, the member of the Group Executive Board responsible for Holiday Experiences in a statement.

"With our Group-wide, integrated health and safety management system, we can ensure that our hotels meet guests' high expectations and offer the best possible protection against infections during these unusual times. We are laying the foundations for an agile and safe return to business so we can be ready to offer our unique holiday experiences again as soon as possible."

To minimize contact, online check-in will become widely available via the hotel website or smartphone. Guests will be required to respect physical distancing (1.5 to 2 meters) and tables at hotel restaurants will be spaced accordingly.

To minimize crowds, buffets will also be reduced to a minimum. Sporting events such as soccer tournaments, which call for large teams and close contact will be suspended, but golf and tennis will be maintained.

Rooms will also undergo new enhanced cleaning procedures, and hand sanitizers will be made available throughout its hotels.

Tui Group follows the lead of major hotel groups like Marriott, Hilton and Hyatt which have released new health and sanitation protocols that includes everything from high-tech electrostatic sprayers and partnerships with the makers of Lysol.

DOF to finance training of badly needed contact tracers

Department of Finance (DOF) Secretary Carlos G. Dominguez III said last May 13 the government was planning to fund the training of contact tracers to be hired from among those who lost their jobs as a result of the new coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic and the consequent lockdowns that forced major economic hubs to limit operations.

During May 11's meeting of the Inter-Agency Task Force on Emerging Infectious Diseases aired on PTV-4 the next day, Dominguez said the government "should also hire contact tracers en masse to boost our efforts to stop transmission and defeat COVID-19 while providing jobs."

The Duterte administration's chief economic manager said, however, the government could not just pluck out contact tracers from those who lost their employment. They would be needing technical know-how, he said. Many businesses either closed shop or limited operations at the start of the lockdown, resulting in 1.5 million Filipinos losing their jobs.

"If we hire these guys to do contact tracing, which we are having a very hard time [doing] ... I think we can provide good jobs to people," Dominguez said.

He said it would sometimes take one contact tracer to determine how far and wide the exposure made by just one single case.

"So we need to hire enough contact tracers to match the numbers we expect that will come with more testing," he added.

Dominguez said the Philippines could adopt a similar course offered online by Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health.

Johns Hopkins University made available for free a class called "COVID-19 Contact Tracing" over online learning platform Coursera. Over 8,200 individuals from around the world have already enrolled.

The six-hour course would "train contact tracers on the principles of the public health strategy many consider critical for slowing the spread of COVID-19," the university said, noting that contact tracing has helped break infectious diseases' transmission chain in the past.

Dominguez said he would recommend a budget to train potential contract tracers. He could not yet provide how much was needed for the program and how many would be hired.

PH war chest vs COVID-19 up to $16.7B, but 4th lowest per person in Southeast Asia

The Philippines' war chest against COVID-19 inched up to $16.7 billion in May, but still lagged behind most of its Southeast Asian neighbors if spending was divided across the population, the latest data compiled by Asian Development Bank (ADB) economists showed.

The updated COVID-19 policy database of the ADB's economic research and regional cooperation department showed that as of May 4, its developing member-countries had committed a total of $1.9 trillion to fight the pandemic, of which 11 Southeast Asian countries accounted for 13.4 percent.

In the case of the Philippines, the sum of the government's COVID-19 policies and response to date slightly rose from $16.5 billion last April.

The Philippines had the sixth largest COVID-19 package in Southeast Asia, after Thailand's $82.5 billion, Indonesia's $57.9 billion, Singapore's $45.1 billion, Malaysia's $32.5 billion and Vietnam's $26.2 billion, while exceeding Cambodia's $2.1 billion, Brunei Darussalam's $318.1 million, Timor-Leste's $250 million, Myanmar's $98.6 million and Laos' $3.4 million.

However, if the sum was divided among the countries' respective population, the Philippines' COVID-19 economic response per capita of $156.39 only surpassed Cambodia's $127.39, Myanmar's $1.84, and Laos' $0.48.

Seven Southeast Asian countries had bigger COVID-19 response per capita than the Philippines, with Singapore having the largest at $7990.93; Thailand, $1,188.77; Malaysia, $1,031.32; Brunei, $741.61; Vietnam, $274.02; Indonesia, $216.58; and Timor Leste, $197.17.

As a share of gross domestic product, the Philippines' response was equivalent to 4.5 percent of GDP, compared with Brunei's 2.7 percent, Cambodia's 7.8 percent, Indonesia's 5.5 percent, Laos' 0.02 percent, Malaysia's 9.2 percent, Myanmar's 0.1 percent, Singapore's 12.8 percent, Thailand's 15.7 percent, Timor Leste's 8.5 percent, and Vietnam's 10 percent.

In a background document, the authors of the ADB database led by Jesus Felipe said they included the sum of the measures that provided liquidity, encouraged credit creation by the financial sector, and directly funded households, businesses, and/or state/local/regional governments amid the pandemic.

In the Philippines, actions to support normal functioning of money markets included non-lending actions by the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas (BSP) such as the cut in banks' reserve requirement ratio (RRR), among other measures amounting P220 billion.

Loan guarantees being extended to small businesses amounted P120 billion.

Long-term direct lending to businesses, households, and state/local/regional governments contributed P14 billion in support.

Also part of the Philippines' economic war chest vs. COVID-19 were P30.6 billion in direct financial support for the health sector and front-liners, on top of P464.4 billion in non-health dole outs for vulnerable sectors such as poor households and displaced workers, farmers, micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs), and taxpayers, among others.

To avoid double-counting, the sum of key economic measures against the COVID-19 pandemic did not include the P300-billion bond repurchase agreement between the BSP and the Bureau of the Treasury, the BSP's P62-billion expanded purchase of government securities, as well as the P87.7 billion in loans and grants secured from multilateral lenders such as the ADB and the World Bank to date.

PH to remain world's top rice importer

Despite moves by the Department of Agriculture to increase the country's local production of palay, global projections showed that the Philippines is still on its way to become the biggest importer of the grain this year and the next.

Based on a report released by the US Department of Agriculture Foreign Agricultural Service, the Philippines is expected to import 2.5 million metric tons (MT) of rice this year and 3.3 million MT of rice in 2020—seen to be the highest in the world and the highest for the country.

This would make the Philippines the biggest rice importer for three consecutive years, with a population of 108 million, eventually displacing China from the top spot. The economic behemoth, with a population of 1.4 billion, is only projected to import 2.3 million MT and 2.2 million MT of rice for this year and in 2021.

The Federation of Free Farmers (FFF) said the government's decision to allow the unimpeded arrival of imports and its campaign to increase local production might sow confusion among Filipino rice farmers, adding that pursuing both policies would inevitably result in an overwhelming glut.

"Based on our computations, we will have an ending inventory by Dec. 31 of this year of 3.9 million MT of rice, good for 110 days, if both these policies are pursued," FFF national chair Raul Montemayor said. "This will create a glut that will bring down prices during the main harvest season from September to November this year and will even spill over to the dry season harvest from February to April next year."

DA's own computation showed that there would be an excess supply for 94 days by the end of 2020, assuming that all import permits would be used by the private sector. According to the Bureau of Plant Industry, it has approved the entry of 2.7 million MT of rice this year, 28 percent of which have already arrived in the country.

Lockdown extension to delay recovery

The latest two-week extension until May 31 of the COVID-19 lockdown in the Philippines will hurt the economy some more and risk delaying recovery, London-based Capital Economics said.

"The Philippines faces at least two more weeks before the economic recovery will begin. We think GDP (gross domestic product) will contract by 6 percent this year, which would make it one of the hardest-hit countries in the region from the crisis," Capital Economics senior Asia economist Gareth Leather said in a May 12 report titled "Philippines: Lockdown extension to delay recovery."

Capital Economics noted that the extended quarantine covered about 45 percent of the Philippine economy.

"The restrictions on economic activity, which are among the toughest in Asia, are having a severe impact on economic activity. The high-frequency activity data we track point to a much bigger hit to growth in the second quarter. Data from Google's community mobility reports show that attendance at workplaces has fallen by nearly 60 percent since the crisis began. Congestion in Metro Manila has dropped precipitously, while routing requests according to data from Apple are just 20 percent of the normal level—the lowest in the region," Capital Economics said.

As such, Capital Economics projected a 17-percent contraction in GDP during the second quarter.

The Philippines' GDP shrank by 0.2 percent year-on-year during the first quarter—ending 84 quarters of growth since 1999—no thanks to Taal Volcano's eruption and the COVID-19 pandemic, which not only slowed global trade and tourism but also forced a domestic lockdown to contain the disease. The first-quarter print increases the possibility of a recession or two consecutive quarters of economic contraction as the enhanced community quarantine imposed in Luzon and other parts of the country since mid-March had been already extended by four times in areas with high COVID-19 cases.

"Recovery should begin to take shape once restrictions start to be eased. A gradual pickup in global demand should also provide some support," Capital Economics said.

Separately, UK-based Oxford Economics said that the Philippines and Malaysia were expected to lag behind their Asia-Pacific peers in bouncing back from the socioeconomic fallout caused by the COVID-19 pandemic due to slow containment of the disease.

"Asia-Pacific economies that have convincingly contained the coronavirus outbreak have seen workplace mobility recover to levels close to normal (China, South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Vietnam) or are moving in that direction (Australia and Thailand). These economies will lead the economic recovery. Other Asia-Pacific countries that have not succeeded in fully containing the virus will lag the upturn," Oxford Economics head of Asia economics Louis Kuijs said in a May 12 report titled "Containing the virus is the key to recovery."

"Malaysia and the Philippines have also made progress with containment, but not yet decisively. With less room to ease restrictions, we expect their economic recovery to lag that of [Australia, Thailand and Vietnam]," Oxford Economics warned.

Oxford Economics noted that the Philippines, Australia, Malaysia, Thailand and Vietnam were hit by the pandemic at around the same time—later than the outbreak that started in China and later spread to Hong Kong, South Korea and Taiwan.

"In the second half of March, all these [five] governments started to implement increasingly stringent restrictions on the movement and gathering of people, especially the Philippines and Thailand," Oxford Economics said.

In the case of Australia, Thailand and Vietnam, Oxford Economics noted that these three countries had been "able to lift some [restrictions] following good progress with COVID-19 containment."

Moody's: PH economy to shrink 2% in 2020

Moody's Investors Service sees the Philippine economy shrinking by 2 percent this year, but the credit watcher's decision to maintain the country's debt rating and outlook is a positive development given the economic malaise that is spreading around the world due to the coronavirus pandemic, the head of the central bank said last May 12.

In a statement to reporters, Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas (BSP) Governor Benjamin E. Diokno said the country was standing on solid fiscal and monetary ground as it prepares to weather the expected economic contraction this year.

"Given the unprecedented collapse of the global economy, the recent Moody's credit opinion of the Philippines—maintaining it Baa2 stable outlook—is actually a vote of confidence on the country's strong macroeconomic fundamentals and the way the Philippine government is managing the coronavirus pandemic," he said.

In addition to maintaining its rating and outlook for the Philippines, which is effectively two notches below the coveted investment grade of 'A', Moody's predicted that the local economy may contract by as much as 2 percent this year. The central bank chief expects a contraction of only 1 percent.

"As I said before, the once-in-a-lifetime COVID-19 crisis hit the Philippines from a position of strength," Diokno assured. "It has ample fiscal and monetary space."

To date, the central bank has reduced its key interest rate by 125 basis points and curbed bank reserves by 200 bps, with another reduction of the same magnitude primed to go—all with the goal of flushing the financial system with growth-inducing cash.

Diokno also proposed that the government reallocate some P400 billion of fiscal output into "quick disbursing" programs, like a nationwide work scheme that will be distributed among the residents of more than 42,000 barangays across the country.

"While the economy is likely to contract this year, the contraction would be less severe compared to most economies in the world," the central bank chief assured. "In fact, barring a second wave of infections, I expect the Philippine economy to have a strong rebound, estimated at 7.8 percent in 2021."

Airlines seek gov't help in getting bank loans

The country's biggest airlines are urging lawmakers to include loan guarantees for their industry in a proposed stimulus bill to support sectors devastated by the coronavirus pandemic.

Roberto Lim, vice chair of the Air Carriers Association of the Philippines (Acap), clarified last May 13 that the airline sector was not asking for any cash support but instead help in securing loans as banks put their credit lines on hold.

"In this time of crisis, institutions are all afraid to release funds from the airlines' existing credit lines that are duly collaterized, much less grant new ones," Lim said last May 13. "Only the government can bring confidence to the system by directing banks to lend to vital industries to bridge the gap," he said.

Lim said during the Senate hearing last May 11 that the country's three major carriers—Philippine Airlines, Cebu Pacific and AirAsia Philippines—would need help to the tune of P8.6 billion a month. Most of the amount, or P6.8 billion, comes from working capital, which Lim said was mostly for aircraft lease payments. Another P1.3 billion was for monthly wages while the airlines pay P500 million a month in airport and navigational fees.

Some senators questioned the figures and said the money could be better used to support the poor. Lim said the airlines were not seeking any cash bailout.

"Since last month, we have written to the executive branch and legislators in both houses. Our immediate request is a credit guarantee scheme and not cash. Private banks need to lend money out but must be given confidence," he said. "We will pay it back," he added.

The problem now is restarting operations so airlines can start earning revenues again. With the extension of strict quarantine measures in key markets such as Metro Manila, major airlines said they would continue to suspend flights through the end of May.

Record drop in energy use, carbon emission in 2020 seen

Carbon emissions are expected to drop by a record 8 percent in 2020 as shrinkage of global energy consumption is expected to be seven times worse than that seen during the 2008 financial crisis, according to the International Energy Agency (IEA).

A new report from the Paris-based IEA shows that the new coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic—described as "the biggest shock to the global energy system in more than seven decades or since the World War II—may result in a drop in demand that would dwarf the impact of the 2008 debacle.

Using data on at least 100 days of 2020, the report suggests that the pandemic's "staggering" impact will be seen across all major fuel types—especially coal, oil and natural gas.

Also, the report projects that annual energy demand will fall 6 percent this year, which is seven times the decline during the 2008 crisis.

The IEA said this was the equivalent of losing the entire energy demand of India, the world's third-largest consumer of energy.

The projections are based on the assumption that lockdowns implemented around the world in response to the pandemic are progressively eased in most countries in the coming months, accompanied by a gradual economic recovery.

"This is a historic shock to the entire energy world. Only renewables are holding up during the previously unheard-of slump in electricity use," IEA executive director Fatih Birol said in a statement.

"It is still too early to determine the longer-term impacts, but the energy industry that emerges from this crisis will be significantly different from the one that came before," Birol said.

For electricity alone, full lockdowns have pushed down demand by at least 20 percent. In 2020, the drop in power consumption is expected at 5 percent, the worst since the Great Depression in the 1930s.

Perlas ng SILANGAN BALITA

Vol. 10 No. 21 May 18-24, 2020 P 10.00

Facing a future of empty seats, Cebu Pacific forced to scuttle big plans

Budget airline Cebu Pacific is slashing spending this year by over 50 percent as the new coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic forces a review of its long-term expansion plans.

Operator Cebu Air Inc. expected capital spending in 2020 to hit P13 billion, down from the original budget of P28.3 billion, company CEO Lance Gokongwei said last May 14.

The COVID-19 crisis has dealt a severe blow to the airline business as carriers were forced to ground their fleets amid strict quarantine rules and as countries raise travel bans.

Cebu Pacific is coming off a strong 2019, when it placed a $6.8-billion order for next-generation planes from Airbus to support aggressive growth targets. Its main concern today is winning back customers afraid of flying amid the pandemic.

"This is the biggest challenge we face today: When will Cebu and everyone be ready to fly again?" Gokongwei said during the company's annual meeting, which was streamed live to shareholders last May 14.

Data from the International Air Transport Association points to a slow recovery spanning several years. It said on May 13 the industry could return to precrisis numbers in 2019 by 2023 or 2024.

Cebu Pacific's capital spending is mainly for the acquisition of new planes. Gokongwei said they would pursue an "overall review" of the firm's long-term fleet plan.

"We will have a discussion with Airbus on how we [will] manage these airplanes and for the succeeding years," he said, referring to aircraft deliveries this year and those on the pipeline.

From 76 planes at present, Cebu Pacific has 61 plane deliveries until 2026 to upgrade its fleet and replace older jets. It earlier expected to have 88 planes by 2024 through a mix of A330 NEOs, A320NEOs and A321NEOs, A321 XLRs and ATR 72-600s.

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• Nehemiah Ezekiel B. Barco

Q & A on Consumer Rights

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Japan's Abe says world economy in 'once-in-a-century crisis'

Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe said last May 14 that the world economy is facing a "once-in-a-century crisis."

He made the remark while lifting a national coronavirus emergency except for Tokyo and seven other prefectures that remain at high risk. Abe declared a monthlong emergency in parts of Japan, including Tokyo, on April 7. He later expanded that move to nationwide and extended through May 31.

The state of emergency allows local leaders to legally take social distancing and other measures, such as requests for nonessential business closures, though they carry no penalties if violated.

The number of new cases has significantly decreased in Japan. Abe urged a slow return to social and economic activity to avoid triggering a resurgence of the spread of the infections.

"The spread of global infection is never-ending. The world economy is facing a once-in-a-century crisis and is not even comparable to the Lehman shock," Abe said, referring to the giant investment bank and the financial crisis of 2008.

He added that even the world's largest corporations are suffering significant damage and that it is "absolutely necessary to prevent chain bankruptcy."