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DSWD cites military's role in reaching far-flung areas for SAP

MANILA – The Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) cited on Tuesday the role of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) in helping distribute the government's financial assistance to low-income Filipino

families hard-hit by the coronavirus pandemic. DSWD Secretary Rolando Bautista said the delay in the distribution of cash assistance was primarily due to the hard-to-reach locations of many identified beneficiaries.

“Malalayo ang lugar ng beneficiaries, island municipalities, isolated areas. May mga lugar na high-risk dahil mataas ang Covid-19 cases (The residences of our beneficiaries are far, many are located in island municipalities, (Turn to p. 2)

SAP payout deadline in NCR extended to May 10

MANILA – The Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG) on Thursday extended to May 10 the deadline for local government units (LGUs) in Metro Manila to complete the distribution of the first tranche of the Social Amelioration Program (SAP) financial assistance to poor families.

“Metro Manila is a populous region. We have to give them some additional days. I'll be extending the deadline up to May 10, for some other areas it depends on their efforts,”

Interior Secretary Eduardo Año said in a television interview.

He also ordered the Philippine National Police (PNP) to exempt personnel engaged in the distribution of cash aid and its recipients from curfew in their localities.

“We are now working 24/7. In fact, I have given instruction to the PNP to exempt all citizens who are going to distribution points to be exempted from curfew because all our LGUs are working all the time,” Año stressed.

Año said local government officials are already doubling their efforts to finish the distribution of cash assistance from the government.

Meanwhile, Año said that as of 8 p.m. Wednesday, a total of 985 out of 1,654 LGUs have already completed the distribution of cash assistance to qualified families.

On Tuesday, the DILG hailed 828 LGUs nationwide that have completed the payout of the first tranche of the SAP.

Of the 828 LGUs that beat the deadline



BEATING THE DEADLINE. Personnel from the Parañaque City government distribute cash aid as part of the Social Amelioration Program to around 859 beneficiaries at the Tambo Elementary School on Monday (May 4, 2020). The Department of the Interior and Local Government has given local officials in Metro Manila until May 10 to complete the distribution of the first tranche of the cash aid. (PNA photo by Avito C. Dalan)

on Monday, 56 are in the Cordillera

Administrative Region, 38 in Ilocos Region, 31

in Cagayan Valley; 36 (Turn to p. 2)

DOH sets up more Covid-19 isolation facilities in Cavite

MANILA – The Department of Health (DOH)-Calabarzon (Cavite, Laguna, Batangas, Rizal, Quezon) and Cavite local government units have established isolation facilities in the province to be used as quarantine facilities

for persons under investigation (PUI) and confirmed patients with mild symptoms of the Covid-19 virus.

“These isolation facilities were identified by the municipal and city government units of the province to be

designated as quarantine facilities for Covid-19 patients. They were temporarily converted and designated for isolation and quarantine services,” regional director Eduardo Janairo said in a media release on Friday.

Among the designated community isolation units already accredited by DOH includes the Kawit ISO facility and the Cavite City quarantine facility which both operated last April 29, the Noveleta MeDCare Center Covid-19 isolation facility in Barangay San Jose 1 in Noveleta opened on April 30 and the

Rosario ISO facility located in Poblacion, Rosario, Cavite which began operation on May 4.

“The regional office will ensure that patients accommodated in these facilities will be well-taken cared of until they are fully recovered and tested negative of the novel coronavirus,” Janairo said.

Community isolation units (CIUs) are DOH certified publicly or privately owned none hospital facilities set-up in coordination with or by the national government or LGUs to serve as quarantine facilities for probable and confirmed cases of Covid-19 based on DOH guidelines.

(Turn p. 2)

Covid-19 afflicted Filipinos abroad rise to 1,905

MANILA – The Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) on Wednesday said a total of 1,905 Filipinos abroad has contracted the coronavirus disease 2019 (Covid-19).

"Today, the total number of Covid-19 cases among Filipinos abroad has breached the 1,900-mark with 38 new confirmed cases, 10 new recoveries, and one new death in the Americas, ASPAC (Asia Pacific), Europe, and the Middle East," DFA Assistant Secretary Eduardo Meñez said.

Based on the latest DFA data, the total number of overseas Filipinos who recovered from the respiratory disease at 523 remains higher than the total number of deaths at 215.

Of the death toll, two were recorded from the Asia Pacific region, 73 from Europe, 19 in the Middle East/Africa, and 121 in the Americas.

Meñez said figures from the Philippine embassy in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) that 17 Filipinos from

Dubai and four others from Abu Dhabi who died of Covid-19 have yet to be "officially" reported to the DFA.

"Yong sinabi ni Ambassador Quintana ay hindi pa reported officially sa amin... 'Yong 17 in Dubai and four in Abu Dhabi na sinabi niya ay may bagong info kasi dati eight lang ang recorded [Filipino] deaths sa UAE (The one mentioned by Ambassador Quintana is not yet reported to us officially. The 17 in Dubai and four in Abu Dhabi that she was saying have new info because the last recorded deaths in UAE were eight)," he said in a text message.

Meanwhile, the government has assisted in the repatriation of some 24,442 Filipinos, prior to the suspension of inbound flights amid the pandemic.

The DFA advised all returning Filipinos affected by the suspension to contact the nearest embassy or consulate in their host country. (PNA)

DOH... Fr. p 1

As of May 7, a total of 1,251 Covid-19 cases were reported in the region, with 156 patients recovered and 84 recorded deaths.

The province of Rizal has the highest number of Covid-19 with 394 followed by Laguna with 360, Cavite with 288, Batangas with 109, and

Quezon with 64.

To date, there are 10,343 cases with 1,618 recovered and 685 deaths nationwide.

"Let us continue to be vigilant, stay safe, stay at home at always practice proper hygiene and make it a part of your daily routine," Janairo said. (PR)

SAP... Fr. p 1

in Central Luzon, 63 in Calabarzon, 62 in Mimaropa, 70 in the Bicol region, 114 in Western Visayas, 52 in Central Visayas, 95 in Eastern Visayas, 71 in Zamboanga Peninsula, 17 in Northern Mindanao, 26 in Davao region, 32 in Soccsksargen, and 65 in Caraga.

Metro Manila LGUs and the provinces of Cavite, Rizal, Laguna, Bulacan, and Cebu and Davao City were earlier given until May 7, a seven-day extension from the initial April 30 deadline, to complete the first tranche of the SAP payout.

Meanwhile, DILG spokesperson and Undersecretary Jonathan E. Malaya said 77.68 percent of the intended beneficiaries nationwide have received their SAP as of 10 p.m. Wednesday.

He said that Caraga has the highest payout rate at 99.88 percent followed by the Bicol Region at 99.51 percent

2 PH Navy ships in India to pick up face mask donation

MANILA – Two Philippine Navy (PN) ships, the landing dock BRP Davao Del Sur (LD-602), and the offshore patrol vessel BRP Ramon Alcaraz (PS-16) have docked in Cochin, India and loading up boxes of donated face masks.

In a statement Wednesday night, Lt. Commander Maria Christina Roxas, PN public affairs office chief, said the face masks were donated by Paul Dantes of LegalZoc Co., a Filipino donor who sources masks from India.

She added that this donation is done in coordination with the Office of Civil Defense.

and CAR at 89.26 percent.

It is followed by the Ilocos Region at 86.36 percent; Soccsksargen at 85.59 percent; Northern Mindanao at 82.26 percent; Central Luzon at 78.50 percent; Eastern Visayas at 76.05 percent; Western Visayas at 77.89 percent; Cagayan Valley at 77.39 percent; Calabarzon at 73.61 percent; Zamboanga Peninsula at 70.42 percent; MIMAROPA at 66.97 percent; Central Visayas at 62.58 percent; National Capital Region at 62.51 percent; and Davao Region at 57.87 percent.

He said that the national pay-out rate is expected to increase to 80 percent by the end of Thursday.

"That means that for every 10 low-income families, 8 would have received their emergency subsidy by the end of the day today (Thursday). That is a good number," he said. (PNA)

"The hauling process began shortly after they docked with strict adherence to stringent measures to ensure the safety of PN personnel in charge of the hauling which includes wearing of (personal protective equipment) PPEs and disinfection of the boxes prior loading. A total of 59 boxes constituting the initial 200,000 out of 1 million pieces (of) donated face masks were loaded to LD-602," Roxas said.

She added that the two ships sailed from Sultan Qaboos, Oman last April 21 and arrived in India on the 29th. The PN vessels stayed in the anchorage area

(Turn to p. 5)

DSWD...FR P. 1

and isolated areas. There are areas categorized as high-risk because of the growing numbers of Covid-19 cases," he said in a live-streamed press briefing.

In an interview with the Philippine News Agency, DSWD spokesperson Irene Dumlao said they found "difficulties in reaching coastal and island municipalities".

"We have coordinated with the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) and Coast Guard for the provision of air and naval assets," she said.

In the agency's special guidelines on the measure of the Social Amelioration provision, the AFP and the Philippine National Police (PNP) are to be tapped to secure the area identified by the DSWD or local government unit where social amelioration shall take place.

They are also tasked to accompany, secure, and assist the DSWD and/or LGU representatives in the exercise of their

functions; lend technical assistance to further effectuate the social amelioration provisions of those guidelines; and provide land, air, and sea assets to transport DSWD and LGU personnel and goods for the purpose of delivery of assistance to the beneficiaries.

On Wednesday, the DSWD reported on its website that it has given n PHP16,703,851,750 to 3,812,526 Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (4P's) beneficiaries through their cash cards.

Meanwhile, out of the PHP80 billion fund downloaded to local government units, PHP55,051,328 were disbursed to 9,291,540 non-4P's beneficiaries.

The DSWD has also provided PHP323.3 million for 40,418 drivers of transport network vehicle services (TNVS) and public utility vehicles (PUVs) who were affected by the suspension of mass transport in Metro Manila. (PNA)

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WEEKLY NEWSPAPER

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Swab test facilities to ramp up Covid-19 testing capacity: Duque

MANILA – The opening of swab test facilities would help ramp up the country's testing capacity for coronavirus disease 2019 (Covid-19), Department of Health (DOH) Secretary Francisco Duque III on Tuesday said.

"The facility is really well-made, well-planned and well-executed. Maganda naman talaga ang lugar, malaki ang lugar at 'yung mga booths na tinayo dito (The place is nice and spacious and the booths that were set up) more than 60 booths, these will really ramp up our testing capacity," Duque told reporters during the inspection of the Palacio de Maynila Tent along Roxas Boulevard, one of the mega swabbing centers in Metro Manila.

"This will help us achieve our goal to eventually do 30,000 tests daily by May 30, barring unforeseen circumstances," Duque added.

As of May 3, the DOH situational report show that the testing capacity of laboratories for Covid-19 has reached the 5,000-mark. Currently there are a total of 22 licensed testing laboratories.

The department is also eyeing to increase the testing capacity to 8,000 daily this month and expand it further to 30,000 tests daily by May 30.

Bases Conversion and Development Authority (BCDA)



SWAB TEST FACILITY. The swab test booths set up at the Palacio de Maynila along Roxas Boulevard in Manila. Health Sec. Francisco Duque III said the swab test facilities would help ramp up the country's testing capacity for Covid-19. (Photo courtesy of NTF vs. Covid-19)

president Vivencio Dizon, who was designated National Task Force Deputy Chief Implementer of the government's response against the Covid-19 pandemic and chief coordinator of the government's Trace, Treat, and Test (3T) program, said the facility, together with other swabbing sites, can perform 5,000 tests per day.

Dizon said Covid-19 testing is a "very delicate process which requires proper training" and so to avoid mistakes in the handling of specimens, encoding and barcoding must be done properly.

"If we can achieve that, the 20,000 OFWs theoretically will finish it in five days and then we can also move on to accept our kababayans from the local government units. This one is ready by tomorrow and the run will be ready Thursday," he said.

Dizon added that the swabbing sites at the Mall of Asia Arena in Pasay City would be ready this weekend.

Other swabbing facilities are the Enderun Tent in Taguig City and the Philippine Arena, which also serves as a patient care center, in Bulacan.

"Yung Philippine Arena matagal kasi gagawa pa tayo ng ganitong tent hindi 'yung meron na, so, gagawa pa kaya medyo matagal (The Philippine Arena might take longer because we still need to put up a tent like this)," Dizon said.

Armed Forces of the Philippines Surgeon General, Col. Nelson Pecache said the facility would be manned by personnel from the Philippine Coast Guard and the Bureau of Fire and Protection.

"Once we have organized and systematized the system, 24/7 we can probably produce 2,000 conservatively, 2,000 a day. We'll be doing a round-the-clock testing operation. Our personnel will be divided into shifts, we're looking into providing three shifts. Per shift, we'll provide 65 swabbers, 20 encoders and 10

Global food prices drop in April amid pandemic: UN

ISTANBUL – Global food prices fell for the third consecutive month in April, the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) said on Thursday.

Food prices decreased 3.4 percent on a monthly basis, averaging 165.5 points, while it decreased 3 percent on an annual basis, the FAO said.

Sugar prices hit the 13-year low level in April, dropping 14.6 percent from the previous month.

"Collapsing international crude oil prices reduced demand for sugarcane to produce ethanol, diverting output to producing sugar and hence expanding export availabilities," the FAO said.

Vegetable oil prices decreased by 5.2 percent from the previous month, "driven lower by falling palm, soy, and rapeseed oil values."

Crude oil prices also affected vegetable oil by reducing biofuel

runners," Pecache said.

Dizon added that the specimens from the facility would be sent to the Philippine Red Cross laboratory in Mandaluyong City.

"They are capable of processing 8,000 per day. Turn-around time earliest is 24 hours up to 72 hours depending on the volume. If they (OFWs) test negative in the PCR... 'pag may PCR test na, pwede na sila pauwiin pero home quarantine at babantayan pa rin (if



demand globally, the UN agency noted.

In April, dairy and meat prices were both down by 3.6 percent and 2.7 percent, respectively.

Due to the measures against the coronavirus disease (Covid-19) pandemic, such as restricting borders, limiting foreign trade and closing restaurants, dairy and meat prices were affected, the FAO expressed.

"The FAO Cereal Price Index declined only marginally, as international prices of wheat and rice rose significantly while those of maize dropped sharply," it added.

International rice prices increased by 7.2 percent in April versus

they already have PCR test, they will be sent off for home quarantine but will still be monitored) by the Department of Health, Department of the Interior and Local Government," he said.

The facility, which

March, due to export restrictions by Vietnam.

The FAO Food Price Index is a trade-weighted index that tracks international market prices of five major food commodity groups.

After originating in China last December, Covid-19 has spread to at least 187 countries and regions. Europe and the US are currently the worst-hit regions.

The pandemic has killed more than 264,100 worldwide, with total infections nearing 3.77 million, while recoveries are close to 1.25 million, according to figures compiled by the US' Johns Hopkins University. (Anadolu)

is mainly for the testing of land-based and sea-based overseas Filipino workers (OFWs), is a project of the Ayala Group, Manila Bulletin, and Razon Group of Companies. (PNA)

**DRAW CLOSE TO
GOD AND HE WILL
DRAW CLOSE TO YOU**
James 4:8

Virus to shrink global tourism 60%-80% this year: UN

ANKARA — Depending on the speed of containment, the duration of travel restrictions, and the shutdown of borders, the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) projects international tourism to decline by 58 percent to 78 percent year on year in 2020.

This places millions of livelihoods at risk and threatens to roll back progress made in advancing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the UN tourism body said on Thursday.

As tourism is one of the most labor-intensive sectors of the economy, the coronavirus crisis will put 100 million to 120 million direct tourism jobs at risk, the UNWTO said.

It projected that the crisis would lead to a loss of USD910 billion to USD1.2 trillion in export revenues from tourism this year.

Calling the crisis by far the worst that international tourism has faced since records began in 1950, the UNWTO said the



impact would be felt in varying degrees in different global regions and at overlapping times, with Asia and the Pacific expected to rebound first.

Citing a UNWTO Panel of Experts survey, the report said domestic demand is expected to recover faster than international demand, with the majority expecting to see signs of recovery by the final quarter of 2020 but mostly in 2021.

Based on previous crises, leisure travel is expected to recover more quickly — particularly travel to see friends and relatives — than business travel.

The latest data from the organization shows international tourist arrivals slipped 22 percent in the first

quarter of 2020, compared to the same quarter last year.

"Although Asia and the Pacific shows the highest impact in relative and absolute terms (minus 33 million arrivals), the impact in Europe, though lower in percentage, is quite high in volume (minus 22 million)," it said.

The virus' impact was felt in earnest this March with the widespread introduction of travel restrictions and the closure of airports and national borders, pushing tourism figure down 57 percent year on year.

This translates into a loss of 67 million international arrivals and about USD80 billion in receipts (exports from tourism), the UNWTO said. (Andolu)

Domestic travel key to jumpstart tourism after ECQ

MANILA — Domestic travel is seen to jumpstart the country's tourism industry once measures against coronavirus disease 2019 (Covid-19) have been relaxed, the Department of Tourism (DOT) said Friday.

"Once the ECQ (enhanced community quarantine) is lifted, once the GCQ (general community quarantine) is lifted, once the tourism enterprises start operating again, we see that the domestic tourists will be the ones initiating movement," Tourism Undersecretary Benito Bengzon Jr. said in Filipino during the Laging Handa briefing.

Bengzon said social distancing and health protocols are likely to stay and would serve as the "new normal".

"Safety before anything else and we need collective efforts to really flatten the curve. Time will come when the tourism activities will go back to normal," he said.



Boracay (File photo)

Earlier, Tourism Secretary Bernadette Romulo-Puyat said international travel might not happen this year, pending the travel restrictions of other countries.

For the three months of 2020, Bengzon said revenues from foreign arrivals fell by 35 percent compared to the same period last year.

Under a proposed stimulus package, Bengzon said the DOT is expected to get approximately PHP43 billion to fund its tourism recovery plans, with focus on helping tourism stakeholders survive.

"In our initial computation, out of the

PHP43 billion that will be allocated to us, around PHP36 billion will go to working capital," he said.

Since the ECQ was implemented in March, the DOT's immediate response included coordinating with government banks to provide rehabilitation financing support to tourism businesses severely affected by the pandemic.

Among others, DOT also mounted its own sweeper flights and assisted over 20,000 stranded foreign tourists.

Currently, it is working on the return of affected local travelers to the National Capital Region. (PNA)

Seaoil's free fuel for front-liners extended till May 15

MANILA -- Seaoil Philippines has extended its special fuel discount for all front-liners which can be availed at all open Seaoil outlets.

In a press release Tuesday, Seaoil said the discount will continue to be PHP5 for gasoline and PHP3 for diesel.

Front-liners include medical professionals, uniformed personnel of the Armed Forces of the

Philippines, Philippine National Police and Philippine Coast Guard, and local government unit officials, health workers, and quarantine enforcers.

The company has also extended its fuel subsidy assistance for buses participating in the "Free Ride for Health Workers" program of the Department of

Transportation (DOTr) until May 15.

Seaoil Philippines said it has been providing 50 liters of free fuel to 15 bus units that are participating in the free ride initiative since April 13, 2020.

With the extension, the oil company has pledged to provide a total of 24,750 liters of fuel, translating to PHP742,500.

Transportation

Secretary Arthur Tugade said the company's move will ensure the continuity of the free ride program, as he expressed his gratitude to Seaoil Philippines for its continuous support for the department's shuttle service initiative.

"We're grateful for the decision of Seaoil Philippines to extend its grant of fuel subsidies until May 15. With their help, along with our partner oil firms, we can

ease the burden of our bus operators in terms of filling up their tanks in their daily service to medical frontliners while the ECQ in Metro Manila is in place. Sa panahon ngayon, kailangan nating magtulungan upang umagapay sa pangangailangan ng ating mga modern heroes -- our frontliners," he said.

Bus units in the "Free Ride for Health

Workers" program can fill up their tanks for free at any Seaoil gas station in Metro Manila.

The DOTr has been transporting health workers to their medical communities since March 18, 2020.

As of April 27, 2020, the program has a total 450,791 combined figures of ridership in NCR, and other regions covered. (PR)

90K health care workers infected with Covid-19: ICN

GENEVA – The International Council of Nurses (ICN) said Wednesday it believes at least 90,000 health care workers had been infected and more than 260 nurses had died in the coronavirus disease 2019 (Covid-19) pandemic.

Failure by governments to record infection rates and deaths of health care staff "is a scandal that puts staff at higher risk" and underestimates the true scale of the problem, it said in a statement released in Geneva.

"The lack of official data on infections and deaths among nurses and other health care workers is scandalous," ICN chief executive officer Howard Catton said. "Nurses and health care workers have been put at greater risk because of the lack of personal protective equipment (PPE) and poor preparedness for this pandemic."

The ICN called on governments to immediately start keeping accurate records of infections and deaths among health care workers as failure to do so increases the chances of more deaths and fails to honor those who have died.

In April, the ICN reported that more than 100 nurses from around the world had died after contracting Covid-19.

In addition, the World Health Organization (WHO) had reported 23,000 infections among health care workers, it said.

Figures released by the ICN and WHO



were shocking, but that the ICN now believes them to significantly underestimate the situation.

The council has gathered further information from its member National Nursing Associations, some official government figures, and media reports, which suggest that at least 90,000 health care workers have been infected, and more than 260 nurses have died.

It said thousands of nurses have been infected with Covid-19 and hundreds have already died, but governments are not able to provide accurate data as they are not collecting the data.

Such a lack of

while waiting for the assembly of donations at the port.

Roxas said the PN contingent was accorded a simple welcome ceremony led by the chief staff officer for operations of India's Southern Naval Command, Commodore Sanjay Nagar.

"LD-602 will also ferry home around 20 Filipino tourists who are stranded in India with the onset of (the coronavirus disease 2019) Covid-19

definite figures has led to a serious underestimation of the infection rate among nurses and the number of deaths, it added.

The ICN said this failure to record both infection rates and deaths among health care workers is putting more nurses and their patients in danger.

"ICN is calling for data on health care worker infections and deaths to be systematically collected by national governments and held centrally at the WHO," it said.

Such a move would inform prevention strategies and address fundamental issues, including testing and lack of PPE. (Anadolu)

pandemic. All of them have medical certificates clearing them from coronavirus infection but will still be put in isolation inside the vessel with 24-hour supervision by an onboard medical team," she added.

Roxas said both vessels will immediately depart for the Philippines upon the completion of their mission in India and are expected to arrive within the month. (PNA)

Bill complementing Balik Probinsya program filed in House

MANILA – A lawmaker at the House of Representatives has filed a measure seeking to establish the "Balik Probinsya" public housing and relocation program for the urban poor.

In a statement on Thursday, Bohol Rep. Alexie Besas Tutor said House Bill (HB) 6674 seeks to complement President Rodrigo Duterte's Executive Order (EO) 114, which aims to decongest Metro Manila and ensure balanced regional development.

"We appreciate the swiftness of Malacañang in the issuance of the EO 114 because it also boosts the chances of HB 6674 at becoming law as soon as possible," she said.

She said the bill goes into the details of methodically identifying beneficiaries by the Philippine Statistics Authority, registering the urban poor for basic government services, and laying out the "broad strokes" of creating the public housing communities for the beneficiaries.

"This bill draws lessons from the first National Migration Survey done in 2018 and the results of which were released last January. This bill is also follow-up legislation to the charter of the Department of Human Settlements and Urban Development," she added.

Tutor said the proposal seeks to address the main reasons for the rural-to-urban migration that "has spawned thousands of informal settler neighborhoods



Bohol Rep. Alexie Besas Tutor

and more so in the country's three main metropolises", particularly Metro Manila, Metro Cebu and Metro Davao.

The bill, she added, shall mandate ready employment for the beneficiaries, public housing, and the essential components of a functioning community.

"Jobs, education, electricity, water, and health services are mandated. For economic sustainability of the public housing communities, the bill includes mandates for ecozones and tourism enterprise zones as components of the commercial areas of the communities," she said.

"The Balik Probinsya program is a medium-term solution to the urban congestion and population density of Manila, Cebu and Davao. I am hopeful that by Year 2022, the first Balik Probinsya public housing communities would have its first batches of residents settled in," she added.

EO 114 creates a "Balik Probinsya, Bagong Pag-asa" (BP2) Council to ensure a whole-of-government action of the implementation of the BP2 program.

Executive

Secretary Salvador Medialdea will serve as the BP2 chairperson while Acting Socioeconomic Planning Secretary Karl Kendrick Chua will be his vice chair.

The council will be tasked to formulate within 30 days the guidelines necessary to implement this order, including the BP2 program framework and at the same time provide overall direction in the implementation of the program.

It will also have the powers and functions to identify legislative, regulatory and policy changes to promote balanced regional development and recommend to the Congress the enactment of such reforms into law and engage, consult and coordinate with local government units in the formulation of policies, and implementation of the components of the BP program.

As for the BP2 program framework, it will be divided in four key areas — empowerment of local industries; food security and agricultural productivity; social welfare, health, and employment; and development of infrastructure. (PNA)

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Palace expects 'V-shaped' economic recovery

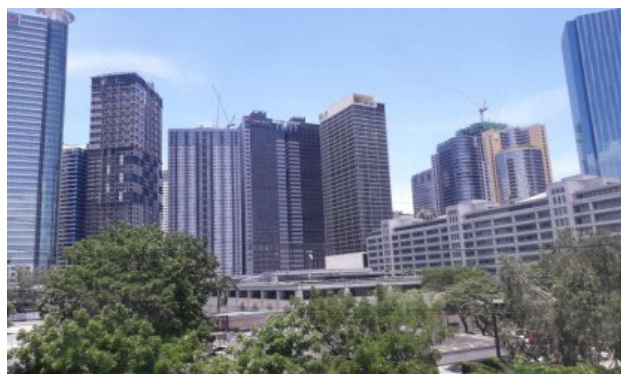
MANILA – Malacañang on Thursday said it expects a "V-shaped" economic recovery in the third quarter of the year as the country continues to grapple with the impact of the coronavirus disease 2019 (Covid-19) pandemic.

Presidential Spokesperson Harry Roque made this remark after the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) announced that for the first time since 1998, the country's gross domestic product (GDP) decreased by 0.2 percent in January to March this year.

Roque described the decline as a "minimal contraction", saying the enhanced community quarantine (ECQ) placed over Luzon and some parts of Visayas and Mindanao was expected to take a toll on economic activity.

"Of course, we regret it but we're glad that it's a minimal contraction given that nag ECQ na po tayo ng (we already went on ECQ during the) last two weeks ng March which is part of the first quarter," he said in a virtual presser.

He is optimistic that the country would be able to make a rebound given the efforts exerted by the government and "sound economic



fundamentals" as evidenced by a high credit rating and strong peso despite the ECQ.

"We expect of course the economy to shrink even more during the month of April because the whole month of April was basically under ECQ and the first two weeks of May as well. We definitely expect a big contraction but the economic planners are very vigilant. We foresee a V-shape of economic recovery," Roque said.

A V-shaped economic recovery refers to a sharp economic decline followed by a quick and sustained recovery.

He also acknowledged that the second quarter will be worse because of the ECQ extension in April but remained hopeful that the economy will benefit from "Build, Build, Build" program and "very prudent" fiscal policy.

"There will be a steep decline in GDP for the second quarter

perhaps but we expect a very strong rebound courtesy of the Build, Build, Build program of the government and very prudent fiscal policy as well as prudent monetary policy which means we're using public spending as a tool for recovery and we're also using money supply as a tool also for economic recovery," he added.

Asked about the possibility of the country facing a recession, Roque expressed hope that the country's GDP would not reach that point.

"Ang (A) recession po kasi (is) three consecutive quarters of decline in the GDP. We're hoping po that pursuant to the V-strategy baka naman umakyat na (it might rise) by the time we hit the third quarter," he said.

In a separate virtual presser, NEDA acting Secretary Karl Chua said increasing the country's Covid-19 testing capacity to

States, federations decide on sports resumptions: WHO

GENEVA – It is a sovereign right of sporting federations, national federations and governments hosting events and tournament to decide whether they go ahead amid the novel coronavirus pandemic, the World Health Organization (WHO) said Wednesday.

"We offer them [countries] advice on how to manage risk. What we don't do, is make the decision as to whether certain events or any event goes ahead," Mike Ryan, WHO's executive director of emergencies told Anadolu Agency.

Turkey will host the 2020 UEFA Champions League final in August and will resume Turkish leagues in June, while Germany's top tier football league will start again this month.

"That is the sovereign right of those

30,000 tests per day could reverse the economic trajectory by June so that by the second half of the year, the country can recover.

He said areas which have moved to general community quarantine (GCQ) could also help minimize the expected contraction in the second quarter, he said. Since March 17, Metro Manila and other "high-risk" areas have been under ECQ which is expected to end on May 15.

The GCQ, with relaxed quarantine measures, is currently being implemented in all low-risk and moderate-risk areas nationwide since May 1. (PNA)

federations and the national federations and the governments which are hosting those types of events," Ryan said.

He added: "We all want to see our normal social and economic lives return. The question is, what are the risks? How are those risks being managed? And what is the process by which that will be achieved?"

"So, I think we would have to get specific information for example, for Turkey and for Germany, as to what the risk management measures are that are being put in place and certainly if asked by the governments of those countries or by the federations."

On March 24, 2020, the International Olympic Committee (IOC) announced the postponement of the 2020 Tokyo Olympic Games for one year as the world grapples with the impact of coronavirus disease (Covid-19).

The committee later announced that the Olympic Games, will be held on July 23-Aug. 8, 2021, while the Paralympic Games between Aug. 24 and Sept. 5, 2021.

The 2020 professional cycling season will commence in August, according to the revised schedule announced on May 5.

UCI World Tour 2020 will start with Italy's Strade Bianche on Aug. 1 and finish with Vuelta Ciclista a Espana, or Tour of

Spain, on Nov. 8, governing body Union Cycliste Internationale (UCI) said in a statement.

The 2020 cycling season, which was among hundreds of sports competitions disrupted by the Covid-19 pandemic, will have 25 events.

These include the three grand tours – Tour de France from Aug. 29 to Sept. 20, Giro d'Italia from Oct. 3 to Oct. 25, and Vuelta Ciclista a Espana from Oct. 20 to Nov. 8.

"We have drawn up a solid, attractive and varied new calendar that is as realistic and coherent as possible," said UCI president David Lappartient.

"We will continue to move forward together towards the resumption of the season ... with the reminder that the health of riders and all concerned parties is still the overriding priority, and that the recommencement of our activities will remain dependent on the evolution of the world health situation."

After originating in China last December, the Covid-19 has spread to at least 187 countries and regions.

The pandemic has killed more than 263,800 worldwide, with total infections reaching more than 3.75 million, while recoveries exceeded 1.2 million patients, according to figures compiled by the US-based Johns Hopkins University. (Anadolu)