

# CAVITE NEWS

A COMMUNITY NEWSPAPER THAT'S NATIONAL IN SCOPE

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## TESDA gears for alternative learning modes, safety measures

MANILA -- In a phone combination of face-to-face and online, distance learning, as well as a combination of distance and face-to-face learning.

Learners of the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA) may expect the implementation of new modes of learning and safety precautions as the agency plans to resume classes by June.

Philippine News Agency (PNA) on Tuesday, TESDA Secretary Isidro Lapeña said this would include several flexible modes of learning, such as face-to-face, online, "blended" or a

He clarified that the physical classes would only take place in areas where they would be

(Turn to p. 2)

# Malacañang says DepEd ready for school opening in august

MANILA -- threat posed by the Malacañang on Thursday expressed confidence that the Department of Education (DepEd) is ready for the scheduled opening of classes on August 24 despite the

learners' access to basic education even though Covid-19 continues to grapple the country.

At the same time, Roque said President Rodrigo Duterte and his administration would not put the students'

## Duterte, Vietnam PM commit to stronger ties, stable rice supply

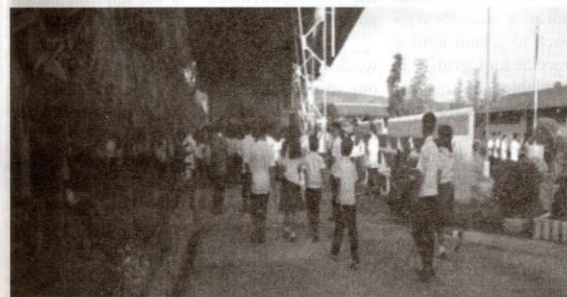
MANILA -- In a telephone conversation requested by the Vietnam Prime Minister on Tuesday, both leaders underscored the importance of maintaining adequate supply of staple food and critical medical equipment and supplies to successfully combat the Covid-19 pandemic.

Duterte thanked Phuc for guaranteeing the long-term supply of rice to the Philippines, stressing that Viet Nam, as the country's

top source of rice imports, is a vital partner in food security.

Earlier in the conversation, Phuc told Duterte: "We assure you that Vietnam will continue to supply rice to the Philippines on a long-term basis at competitive prices."

Duterte said partnership in ensuring strategic rice supply stability is one of the key aspects of the Philippines-Vietnam cooperation and "the Philippines thanks Vietnam for its kind



lives at risk once classes resume in August.

"Ang mensahe ni Presidente, hindi niyang ilalagay sa alanganin ang kabataan. Meron naman pong mga hakbang na ginagawa kalusugan ng ating

(Turn to p. 2)

support in assuring supply of rice."

The Filipino leader also stressed to Phuc the need to implement key Asean initiatives to combat Covid-19, especially the Asean Response Fund and Asean Regional Reserve Medical Supplies.

During the Special Asean Summit and Special Asean Plus Three Summits on Covid-19 last April held via videoconference, Duterte stressed the



**STRONGER TIES.** President Rodrigo Duterte is welcomed by Vietnamese Prime Minister Nguyen Xuan Phuc during a courtesy call on September 29, 2016. In a telephone conversation on Tuesday (May 27, 2020). The two leaders committed to stronger bilateral and regional cooperation against coronavirus disease and long-term supply for the Philippines. (Presidential photo by Ace Morandante)

vital need to boost medical equipment and production of vital

(Turn to p. 2)

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P 10.00

## DOH bares qualifications on hiring of contact tracers

MANILA – The Department of Health (DOH) is working with the Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG) on the emergency hiring of contact tracers in strengthening its efforts to fight the spread of the coronavirus disease 2019 (Covid-19) in the country.

In a Covid-19 virtual presser on Wednesday, DOH Undersecretary Maria Rosario Vergeire said this effort could help those who lost their jobs due to the Covid-19 pandemic and are currently seeking employment.

"We have proposed the following qualifications to them (DILG) when they hire. These include being allied medical

professionals such as a nurse, or at least a graduate or an undergraduate of an allied medical course," Vergeire said.

"We have also suggested the following to include in data gathering, and being able to interview cases and close contacts to gather data on travel history and conduct a health assessment and advocating public health because they need to provide health education messages as well," she added.

Earlier, the DOH asked the DILG to also consider tapping barangay health workers and social workers in support of our national response against Covid-19.

As of Tuesday, the DOH has processed 204 facility requests for the emergency hiring of additional health workers and has approved 8,606 slots for hiring in 204 hospitals, quarantine facilities, Philippine Arena Covid-19 facility, and Quezon City Institute temporary quarantine facility.

"We also have 2,730 personnel hired in different hospitals and quarantine facilities. We have also redeployed 1,221 nurses in DOH and local government unit hospitals under the DOH redeployment program, 185 nurses in Luzon and 1,036 in Visayas and Mindanao," Vergeire said. (By Ma. Teresa Montemayor/PNA)

## Duterte extends term of Boracay rehab task force until May 2021

MANILA – Citing the need to complete the critical projects in Boracay Island, President Rodrigo Duterte has extended the term of the Boracay Inter-Agency Task Force (IATF) until May 8, 2021.

Under Executive Order (EO) he signed on May 11, Duterte said despite the creation of the task force in 2018, several establishments in Boracay Island, a world-famous beach destination in the country, have yet to comply with the beach and road easement

protocols.

"Upon further validation made by the Task Force last 31 March 2020, 33 percent of establishments in the Boracay Island are not yet compliant with the 25 meters plus five meters beach easement, and 27 percent of establishments have not complied with the road easement," Duterte said in his EO.

Duterte noted that there are still 723 structures built on forestland blocks, 112 establishments on the beach easement, and 334

facilities on the road easement that need to be demolished.

Duterte saw the need to extend the Boracay IATF's term until May 8, 2021, "unless extended or sooner terminated by the President."

"There is a need to complete critical projects in Boracay Island, pursuant to the Boracay Action Plan," the EO read.

Duterte on May 8, 2018 created the Boracay IATF through EO 53 to strictly implement the laws and local ordinances

## Duterte eases community quarantine status

MANILA – President Rodrigo Duterte on Thursday announced the relaxation of quarantine restrictions in the country despite the government's continuing battle against the coronavirus disease 2019 (Covid-19).

In a public address, Duterte said General Community Quarantine (GCQ) will be imposed in Metro Manila, Davao City, Cagayan Valley, Central Luzon, Calabarzon, Pangasinan, and Albay starting June 1.

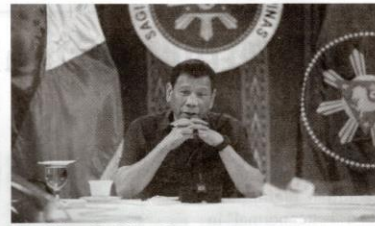
Duterte said the implementation of GCQ will remain in effect until the general situation has been reviewed.

"We are not happy to put you in this place but after review, maybe we can," he said in his speech delivered late Thursday night.

Duterte's decision was based on the recommendation of the Inter-Agency Task Force for the Management of Emerging Infectious Diseases (IATF-EID).

"The rest of the country will be placed under the modified general community quarantine. That is very clear now," he said.

Duterte said his official mouthpiece, Presidential Spokesperson Harry Roque, would give updates on the possible changes in the latest



President Rodrigo Duterte

classification of community quarantine in some places in the country.

"In other areas, it will be again on a piecemeal basis depending on the viability of the place to meet the challenges of Covid-19. From time to time, Secretary Roque will give us the places where there will be changes," he said.

Metro Manila along with Laguna, Bataan, Bulacan, Nueva Ecija, Pampanga, and Zambales are presently under Modified Enhanced Community Quarantine (MECQ) until May 31.

ECQ was earlier imposed in Cebu and Mandaue cities from May 16 to 31 since these are considered as high-risk areas for Covid-19 while the rest of the country were placed under GCQ until May 31.

Duterte said the government needs to continue the imposition of strict quarantine measures to ensure the Filipinos' protection against Covid-19.

"The state has every right to control your movement if you pass on a contagion to the other population," he said.

Duterte's latest announcement was different from the supposed recommendations of the IATF-EID contained in the leaked resolution circulating on social media.

Resolution 40, which was allegedly approved by the IATF-EID on Wednesday, recommended the implementation of MECQ in Cebu City.

The leaked resolution also stated that beginning June 1, GCQ would be imposed in Baguio City; Pangasinan; Cagayan Valley; Central Luzon; Metro Manila; Calabarzon; Albay; Iloilo City; Central Visayas, except Cebu City; Zamboanga City; and Davao City.

Duterte did not mention that Cebu City will be placed under MECQ. (By Ruth Abbey Gita-Carlos/PNA)

to ensure the rehabilitation and ecological sustainability of Boracay Island.

Boracay was closed to tourists from April to September 2018 to pave the way for a massive rehabilitation of the island, which has long been plagued with environmental problems.

The Boracay IATF, whose term was supposed to end two years after its creation, has been tasked to ensure that policies on the island are consistent with relevant laws, rules, and regulations.

It has also been mandated to fully implement, in coordination with relevant government

agencies and local government units, the policies, laws, rules and regulations, including the Boracay Action Plan.

The Boracay Action Plan provides for synchronized and strategic national and local interventions to ensure the island's rehabilitation over the medium term and sustainable management over the long term.

The action plan intends to make Boracay a "globally-competitive and world-class tourism destination with a vibrant, productive, inclusive and climate-resilient

economy."

Duterte's latest EO, which was released by the Palace just on Thursday, takes effect immediately.

On Tuesday, Malacañang said Boracay may shift to a modified general community quarantine (MGCQ), considering the low cases of coronavirus disease 2019 in the island.

Under MGCQ, tourist destinations are allowed to operate for up to 50 percent of its full capacity. (By Ruth Abbey Gita-Carlos/PNA)

**MAKATI . . . FR. P.1**

ang DepEd para tuluy-tuloy po ang pag-aaral ng ating mga kabataan (The President's message is he would not endanger the youth's health. DepEd is looking for ways to make sure the youth continue learning)," he said.

Roque issued the statement a day after he announced that formal learning of students will resume on August 24.

Parents were encouraged to enroll their children starting June 1 even though Duterte announced on Monday that he would not allow students to go back to school until a vaccine for Covid-19 is available.

Roque said the DepEd would need to adopt the "blended learning," an approach that allows students to learn through electronic and online media and traditional face-to-face classes, in case the country is still far from the "new normal."

"Pero lalinawin ko po, ang blended learning, hindi naman altogether mawawalan ng face-to-face (But I will just clarify that altogether there will be no face-to-face teaching once we go for blended learning)," he said.

On Monday, the

**DUTERTE . . . FR. P.1**

supplies as well as to ensure sufficient rice supply to effectively overcome the challenge of Covid-19 pandemic.

Duterte praised Vietnam for its effective response to Covid-19,

Alliance of Concerned Teachers-Philippines claimed that starting the school year sans mass testing is a "sure recipe for disaster" as it could endanger the lives of teachers and learners.

Roque guaranteed that students would be protected from Covid-19 because the government is "exploring blended learning rather than face-to-face learning."

He added that state-run and private television and radio firms would be tapped for "education purposes."

"I'm sure we would need more than one, more than two, more than three companies at a time to partner with DepEd for distance learning," Roque said.

The Inter-Agency Task Force for the Management of Emerging Infectious Diseases has adopted the DepEd's basic education learning continuity plan amid the Covid-19 crisis.

The IATF-EID has agreed that the formal opening of School Year 2020-2021 will start on August 24 and end on April 30 next year. (By Ruth Abbey Gita-Carlos/PNA)

noting that the Philippines and Vietnam can share best practices.

Phuc, on the other hand, lauded the Philippine government's

allowed, and subject to the approval of the Inter-Agency Task Force on Emerging Infectious Diseases (IATF-EID).

"TVIs (technical vocational institutions) can (also) adopt flexible learning modes, should the said plan will be approved (by the IATF-EID)," Lapeña added.

The new learning modes can be applied to the courses that people are going to take for the first time, as well as for the classes that were temporarily halted due to the implementation of the enhanced community quarantine (ECQ).

"Flexible learning modes (are applicable) depending on the courses. Courses like bookkeeping may be fully taken online. For courses like welding which require face-to-face (classes), the blended learning can be adopted," he explained.

Lapeña also clarified that online classes as an alternative mode are different from the online classes he has been advocating

comprehensive approach against Covid-19.

"We appreciate the strong measures of the Philippines in fighting Covid-19, including preventing community transmission, implementing community quarantine measures and providing social protection to the Filipino people," he

since the start of the Luzon-wide ECQ in March.

"What I have been promoting since March is the TOP (TESDA Online Program), wherein most of the courses are only short courses that learners could complete, and not full qualifications," Lapeña said.

To better ensure safety, TESDA would implement a strict one-meter physical distancing in training workshop areas.

With this, the number of students to be accommodated per schedule would depend on the size of workshop areas, to strictly follow the one-meter physical distancing, he said.

Meanwhile, Lapeña also mentioned that should the IATF-EID approve the conduct of physical classes, he would like to prioritize agriculture courses to help support food security.

Physical distancing may be well observed in agriculture courses," Lapeña said. (By Ma. Cristina Arayata/PNA)

added. Noting the importance of regional cooperation to address Covid-19 and other emerging diseases, Duterte assured Phuc of the Philippines' continued support for Vietnam's Chairmanship of Asean. (OPAFAPCOO)

**7.5K OFWs transported back to their provinces so far**

MANILA – Some 7,500 returning overseas Filipino workers (OFWs) have already been assisted by the government under the OFW Return Program, the Overseas Workers Welfare Administration (OWWA) reported on Wednesday.

"So far we have 7,500 OFWs who were provided transportation (land, sea and air) in the first two days and we are hoping that the number will increase. We are on Day 3, it's a seven day period given to us by President Rodrigo Duterte. We are looking forward for more buses and sea transport," OWWA Administrator Hans Leo Caedac said in a phone interview in a Laging Handa briefing.

Over the weekend, the President gave the DOLE and other

agencies a week to send home some 24,000 OFWs who were stuck in quarantine facilities.

"We were given a seven-day period by the President. That (period) ends on Sunday," the OWWA chief added.

Some of the OFWs have been in the country for at least a month and under quarantine for the mandatory period of 14 days. They were displaced due to the coronavirus disease 2019 (Covid-19) pandemic.

Meanwhile, Caddac reported that the OWWA Balik Pilipinas, Balik Hanapbuhay Livelihood Program has a budget of PHP700 million.

"We have around PHP700 million

allocation for the reintegration program, (Turn to p. 5)

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## House okays bill to ease pandemic threats on financial industry Gov't validating identities of new SAP beneficiaries

MANILA – A bill seeking to strengthen the resiliency of the country's financial industry has gained traction with its second reading approval in the House of Representatives.

During a plenary session on Thursday, the lower chamber passed on second reading House Bill 6816, or the proposed Financial Institutions Strategic Transfer Act, which aims to help banks and other financial institutions in their bad debt resolution and management of their non-performing assets (NPAs) to mitigate the economic impact of the coronavirus pandemic on their operations.

House committee on banks and financial intermediaries chairman Junie Cua, sponsor of the bill, said most financial institutions are facing a period of delayed loan collections and are at risk of recording higher NPAs across all borrower segments as a result of the disruption in economic activities.

### SLEX western section closed to traffic till June 9

MANILA – The western section consisting of two lanes in the southbound direction of the South Luzon Expressway (SLEX) was closed to traffic starting May 28, the Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH) said Friday.

In an advisory, the DPWH said the portion will be closed until June 9 to give way to the bored piling works for the Sucat-Alabang Extension.

With the shift of the National Capital Region and Region 4-A (Calabarzon) from modified enhanced community quarantine



NPAs are financial institutions' non-performing loans (NPLs) and real and other properties acquired (ROPAs) in settlement of loans and receivables, which prevent banks and financial institutions from effectively performing their role of financial intermediation.

Cua said it is not hard to imagine that the increase in the NPLs and NPAs would affect the financial liquidity of the banking industry.

"It will affect its resiliency or profitability. And it could affect its very viability," he added.

He said the proposed measure would help

banks and other financial institutions offload their NPAs, induce economic activity, and improve the liquidity of the financial system to propel economic growth.

The bill seeks to encourage financial institutions to sell NPAs to asset management companies, created as Financial Institutions Strategic Transfer Corporations (FISTC), that specializes in the resolution of distressed assets.

"The banking sector must continue to provide credit. It has to be liquid all the time to be able to meet the continuous flow of credit to the economy, the very lifeblood of economic activity," Cua said. (By Filane Mikee Cervantes/PNA)

works at the subject area be reduced between 10 to 12 days.

With the start of closure of southbound lanes on May 28 and the reduction between 10-12 days for the bored piling works, the previously scheduled opening of the area on June 16 will be reset to June 7 to 9.

The DPWH also ensured that public advisories will be immediately disseminated and alternative routes shall be identified and made available to motorists. (PR)

MANILA – The government has yet to distribute the second tranche of emergency subsidies under the Social Amelioration Program (SAP) as it is still validating the identities of additional 5 million poor families who will benefit from the program, Malacañang said on Thursday.

"Hindi pa po sila nagsisimula. 'Yung 5 million po, vine-verify pa nila 'yung mga pangalan (The release [of the second wave of payouts] has not yet started. The additional 5 million [families] are still being verified)," Presidential Spokesperson Harry Roque said in a virtual presser aired on state-run PTV-4.

The Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD), the lead agency tasked to oversee the SAP implementation, said the inter-agency technical working group will meet this week to discuss the key details concerning the release of the second wave of cash aid.

The meeting was scheduled after Malacañang issued a memorandum on May 22, directing the inclusion of 5 million more households as beneficiaries of the second tranche of emergency subsidies, apart from the 12 million existing SAP recipients.

Roque said the Palace expects the speedy validation process, since the DSWD already pushed for the automated disbursement of the second wave of financial aid.

"Inaasahan po natin na mas mabilis iyan kasi nga (We expect that the validation will be done faster because) they're using technology to distribute the second tranche," he said.

The PHP200-billion SAP seeks the granting of monthly emergency cash subsidy ranging from PHP5,000 to PHP8,000 to low-income households for the months of April and May.

Around 18 million indigent families benefited from the implementation of the first phase of SAP.

However, only the 12 million of 18 million families who are residing in areas under enhanced community quarantine will receive the second tranche of cash assistance.

The total number of beneficiaries of the second wave of payouts is 17 million since an additional 5 million poor households will join the 12 million families.

Roque ensured that the government would not allow any delays in the release of the second tranche of emergency subsidies.

He said the DSWD may seek the military's

help in case some low-income families do not want the electronic cash transfers.

"Bagama't nasabi na po ni [DSWD] Secretary [Rolando] Bautista na electronic, makikipag-ugnayan pa rin sa local government (While DSWD Secretary Rolando Bautista already announced the electronic distribution of cash aid, we will still coordinate with the local governments) but they will also use the Armed Forces of the Philippines," he said.

Malacañang on Tuesday said the largest bulk of the PHP100-billion budget for the second tranche of emergency subsidies will be electronically distributed to poor households.

ReliefAgad, a quick-relief system launched by the DSWD on May 14, would allow the speedy distribution of cash aid to SAP beneficiaries through an electronic payment using their smartphones.

The launch came following mounting complaints against local officials who were supposedly involved in the unlawful distribution of the first tranche of emergency subsidies that should have been given to the intended SAP beneficiaries. (By Ruth Abbey Gita-Carlos/PNA)

**DRAW CLOSE TO GOD AND HE WILL  
DRAW CLOSE TO YOU**

*James 4:8*

## DOTr braces for transport modernization in 'new normal'

MANILA – As the country braces for the 'new normal' due to the coronavirus disease 2019 (Covid-19) pandemic, the Department of Transportation (DOTr) is preparing for the opportunity to modernize the country's transportation systems.

In a news release on Thursday, the DOTr said this will involve technology-driven, integrated, and sustainable initiatives that will not only address disease transmission but will also revolutionize road transport to become efficient, reliable, environment-friendly and safe.

Some of the projects, policies, and measures undertaken and will be undertaken, for the new normal include the following:

### **-Consolidation of Operators and Rationalization of Routes**

Most of the routes in the metropolis are either too long, overlapping, and results in inefficient travels. Operators with a few units and drivers without formal employment are badly hit by the transport stoppage, as a result of the pandemic. With the reduction of capacity in public transportation, it is high time to improve the public transportation system. Operators need to consolidate for economies of scale. Drivers need to be employed into the formal society so that employment benefits will be provided. Routes should be optimized for operators to gain more load factor per trip.

### **-Dedicated lanes for**

### **public transport**

With the new normal and community quarantine reducing transportation requirements, it is an opportunity to showcase the efficiency of public transport, through the provision of dedicated lanes for buses. People should not stay long in traffic. What we need is a system where public transportation can do a quick turn-around, and with reliable travel.

### **-Online transactions and online payments**

The Land Transportation Office (LTO), Land Transportation Franchising and Regulatory Board (LTFRB), Office of Transportation Cooperatives (OTC), and Toll Regulatory Board (TRB) will be pushing for continued innovations on their transactions.

Payment of permits and fees that require no appearance, such as renewal of driver's licenses, will be done online. Part of the process for motor vehicle registration will also be done online. OTC required seminars to coops can also be done via telecon/ webinars. Aside from these, licenses and permits will also be delivered at the client's doorsteps.

All of these efforts reduce face-to-face transactions, not only reducing

physical contact but ultimately improving the delivery of public service of the Road Sector agencies. It will also decrease opportunities for corrupt practices.

### **G N S S / G P S monitoring of fleet**

The Covid-19 pandemic highlighted the need for fleet monitoring systems in public transportation. The buses being used by the DOTr for the free ride service were installed with GPS devices to monitor the bus whereabouts in real-time.

This technology enabled the front-line commuter to track the location of the buses and plan their travel ahead of time. The commuter can monitor the time of arrival of the bus to his location making his commute more hassle-free. To the operator and government regulator, it will enable us to track driver behavior and trips made, and kilometer run of the buses, monitor how many are running, and minimize waste of resources such as engine idling.

### **-Automatic Fare Collection Systems in public transport**

Cash payments in public transport have been a burden to commuters and public transport operators. You have experienced being short-changed by the driver, or the commuter having a big bill for his commute. Pilferage is also common within public transport operators and drivers. Sudden and

unregulated increases in fares were also being done by drivers. All of these will be a thing of the past once automatic fare collection systems (AFCS) become a standard in all public transportation. With cashless transactions, there will be less transmission of the virus, and accounting of revenues in public transportation will be faster. Further, "big-data" collected through the AFCS can help operators and policymakers improve the efficiency of public transport services.

### **-Online seat booking**

Coupled with AFCS and GPS Technology, commuters may be able to book their rides in advance, reducing the need to fall in-line in terminals. This also ensures the availability of commuters' ride home, unlike in the current system where commuters have to wait for a ride for several hours at terminals or on the road. This will not only cut down on exposure risks but can also help trace possible contacts and quickly disseminate information if a passenger is diagnosed with any infectious disease.

### **-E-toll collection technology**

In the metropolis, a lot of motorists are already switching to RFID stickers for toll payment. People have seen its vast benefits of faster queuing time at tollbooths, rather than cash transactions. Further, imagine the cash being handled by

toll booth operators, aggravated by the tight and cramped conditions inside the small toll booth. That is a health and safety hazard no person should endure. Thousands of people handing out the cash to them is a hyper virus-spreader. Thus, we are calling on all motorists to take advantage of the opportunity being given by the toll operators for free RFID stickers.

### **-Requirement of shuttle services and school bus for employees and schools**

All government agencies will be asked to provide shuttle services for their respective employees, to which the agencies agreed.

This requirement is seen now as a new normal. For companies, instead of providing car plans to executives, why not also provide employee shuttles to the more needy, as part of their benefits? Companies will be assured that their employees will be able to come to work on time and safely. Schools will also be required to provide school service for their students, thus reducing the chance of students catching sickness from mixing with public transport. This can be seen as a benefit to the establishment, as after the Covid-19 pandemic. (PR)

become less prone to tardiness because of the more reliable transport.

### **-Use of bicycles, non-motorized transport**

The DOTr's Road Sector shall also promote non-motorized transport such as the use of bicycles as an alternative mode of transportation that would be useful in maintaining physical distancing, at same time will deliver substantial environmental and health benefits and achieving efficient use of road space. The integration of the non-motorized transport to the road space and development of necessary infrastructures shall be prioritized. The DOTr is pushing for the LGUs to develop more facilities to make biking much safer, and for them to craft ordinances to encourage biking, requiring bike racks, lockers, among others.

A Joint Administrative Order is being drafted by the DOTr, Department of the Interior and Local Government, Department of Health, and the Department of Public Works and Highways that will identify the guidelines on the use and promotion of public transport during and after the Covid-19 pandemic. (PR)

*It is the blessing of Jehovah  
that makes one rich,  
And He adds no pain with it.  
Proverbs 10:22*

## 'Better Normal' bill hurdles House panel

MANILA – A measure seeking to establish regulations for a "better normal" in workplaces and public spaces amid the threat from the coronavirus disease 2019 (Covid-19) pandemic hurdled committee level at the House of Representatives on Thursday.

The House Defeat Covid-19 Committee (DCC) approved a substitute bill to House B No. 6623, or the proposed "Better Normal for the Workplace, Communities and Public Spaces Act of 2020", which seeks to institutionalize safety measures such as the mandatory wearing of masks and observance of physical distancing in public places.

It also seeks to impose mandatory temperature checks, availability of handwashing and sanitizing stations in public areas, contact-tracing systems, and establishment of government-operated quarantine facilities, among others.

House Majority Leader Martin Romualdez, co-chairperson of the DCC, said the bill seeks "to lay the groundwork that will expedite our people's adaptation to the demands of the new normal life."

Romualdez said the bill aims to prepare and educate Filipinos for life after the lifting of the restrictions imposed by the national government and local



government units (LGUs) to contain the spread of Covid-19 through new norms of social or physical distancing and safety measures in government and private offices, schools, commercial establishments, and other public spaces.

"As soon as we adapt to the new normal, businesses can resume operations and workers can go back to their jobs without fear of contracting the dreaded coronavirus. Through physical distancing and other stringent safety and health protocols, we can also keep our families safe and prevent the spread of Covid-19 in our communities," Romualdez said.

"We have no choice but to adapt to the new normal. The soonest time possible, the better," he added.

Under the proposal, public gatherings are prohibited, subject to exceptions as may be provided under the implementing rules and regulations (IRR), while privately-organized gatherings shall also be highly-regulated.

For the management of public transportation, mandatory safety measures shall be imposed in terminals, interiors of public utility vehicles, mass transportation, and app-based transport network services.

The bill states that passengers shall be seated one seat apart, and the use of contactless payment mechanisms shall be imposed.

The Department of Education (DepEd) and the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) shall be tasked to determine the start of the academic year and to implement alternative platforms of learning, instruction, and evaluation.

The bill promotes a flexible learning program to limit physical contact among the school population.

It requires firms to submit a workplace management plan detailing how many employees are allowed to work in the office and the overall strategy for the reporting of the workforce to minimize the risk of catching the virus. (PNA)

## House panel pushes for Covid-19 testing for vulnerable sectors

MANILA – A special panel at the House of Representatives passed a measure on Thursday to make Covid-19 testing more accessible to vulnerable members of society.

The House Defeat Covid-19 Committee (DCC) approved House Bill 6707 or the "Crush Covid-19 Act", which encourages a baseline polymerase chain reaction (PCR) testing for vulnerable members of society to intercept Covid-19 transmission.

The "vulnerable members of society" include those returning to work with co-morbidities such as diabetes, hypertension, pregnancy, and old age.

The bill also covers persons entering the Philippine territory coming from abroad, including foreign nationals, provided that the cost of testing for foreigners shall be at their own expense.

The bill further provides that priority should be given to the following: health care workers; sales personnel in public markets, groceries, and supermarkets; food handlers; factory workers; construction workers; security guards and

drivers; and banks and transfer fund facilities personnel.

House Majority Leader Martin Romualdez, a co-chair of the DCC, said the measure mandates the Philippine Health Insurance Corp. (PhilHealth) to shoulder the cost of testing for the vulnerable sectors.

"As we create more jobs and try to jumpstart our economy, we also need to work double-time to ensure that health standards and protocols are geared towards protecting the vulnerable sectors of our society," Romualdez said.

The bill states that the testing subsidy shall not exceed PHP1,700 for government institutions and PHP1,800 for private institutions per vulnerable person tested. Iloilo Rep. Janette Garin, the author of the bill, stressed the need to detect and manage Covid-19 early, especially in asymptomatic carriers, as the country gradually enters the new normal with the easing of Covid-19 restrictions.

"We cannot be blind to the actual spread of the virus. We cannot allow our people to work in fear, knowing that only

symptomatic people are tested," Garin said.

"While symptomatic patients need the utmost care and attention, we should not forget the fact that Covid-19 carriers can be deceiving. They appear healthy on the outside but virulent and infectious on the inside," she added.

The DCC also adopted two resolutions to cushion the impact of coronavirus pandemic, including a substitute bill to House Resolution 807, which urges the national government to fast-track the disbursement of the second tranche of the social amelioration program (SAP) emergency cash subsidy by authorizing the barangay to identify the beneficiaries and disburse the allocation fairly, efficiently and responsibly.

Another resolution that was adopted expresses the commitment of the House to enact the proposed PHP 6.6-billion supplemental budget of the Department of Agriculture (DA) to support its programs in addressing the impact of the pandemic, particularly in the areas of food and nutrition, security and price stability. (By Filane Mikee Cervantes/PNA)

### 7.5K OFW . .FR. P.2

"Balik Pilipinas, Balik Hanapbuhay" and approximately 50,000 (for the) first round of beneficiaries. We just have to be mindful of the number of a p p l i c a n t - beneficiary...and then we can further tap into the fund just to provide reintegration packages for the returning OFWs," he said.

He added that they will start accepting

applications for the livelihood program next week.

"Department of Labor and Employment Secretary Silvestre Bello III directed us to use our reintegration livelihood fund the Balik Pilipinas, Balik Hanapbuhay program. Starting next week, we will start receiving applications from returning OFWs in their home local government

units," Cacadac said.

The livelihood support/assistance package aims to provide immediate relief to returning distressed/displaced member-OFWs amounting to a maximum of PHP20,000 as a start-up or additional capital for the livelihood project. (By Ferdinand Patinio/PNA)